

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 DEFENSIVE SYSTEMS

Defence starts with the battle for possession – when you have the ball, you do not have to defend (Pool, 1997).

The object of this section is to discuss in detail the workings of defensive patterns and to identify shortcomings in their structure. In order for one to understand running lines and their effectiveness, it is important to first have a fuller understanding of defensive patterns and alignment so that weaknesses in the opposition's defensive systems can be identified and taken advantage of.

For an attacking running line to be effective, it must manipulate the immediate defender as well as the opposition's defensive lines. This scrambling up of the defensive wall will result in a disruption of how the defenders will be able to reorganise their defence and be able to recreate the structure they had at the beginning of the opposition's attack on their defensive wall.

One must take cognisance of the fact that first phase set-up attack is extremely important as it disorganises the opposition's defensive wall. The attacking team wants to create attacking situations where after 2nd and 3rd phase, their backs strike on the opposition's forwards and their forwards attack on the opposition's backs. This will be referred to as a "mismatch".

This "mismatch" is extremely important as it gives the attacking backs an opportunity to beat a forward on the outside or inside in a one-on-one confrontation by using their superior footwork skills. The forwards are also able to run onto the defending backs who, due to their defensive body positioning are mechanically weaker, thus the forwards momentum advantage can be made full use of.

With this in mind it is important to note that defence from first phase is slightly easier to manage, as the defenders know exactly who is defending next to them and this allows for better communication, nomination and execution (Marks, 1998). It is after first phase that the defence becomes more complex due to a greater number of variables being involved.

The term “attacking without the ball” is an extremely apt definition for the mindset needed to be successful in defence as most teams spend about 50 per cent of their time attempting to regain the ball held by the opposition (Robilliard, 1997), and this regaining of possession can be achieved by either:

1. dominating the tackle i.e., the attacker loses the ball in contact, or it is turned over at the subsequent ruck through effective poaching skills by the defensive support players (Pool, 1997; Muggleton, 2001) or,
2. pressurising the defence by forcing them backwards or across the width of the field without getting over the advantage line, until the attacking team is forced into an error or tackled out over the touchline (Evert, 2001a).

With all these aspects as background, the finer intricacies of effective defensive play will be discussed in the light of the following factors.

2.2 THE PILLARS OF DEFENCE

The effectiveness of a team’s defensive abilities is largely reliant on nine important factors namely:

1. defensive organisation;
2. the defensive shape;
3. the defensive zones;
4. defensive spacing;
5. the execution line;
6. attitude (Kiss, 2002);
7. drift defence as a concept;
8. second phase defence; and
9. third and subsequent phase defence (McFarland, 2002).

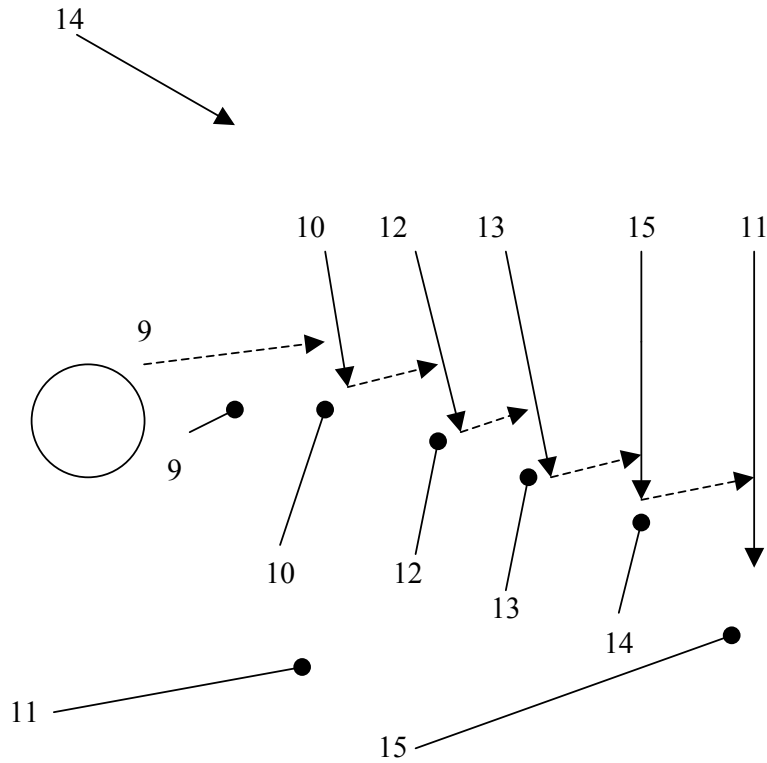
2.2.1 Defensive Organization

Defensive organisation will be discussed in the form of the three basic defensive “techniques” from primary phases of play, the first being:

2.2.1.1 Man-to-Man Overlap Defence

This system of defence identifies the ball carrier. When the attacking team brings in an extra attacking player into the backline it forces the defenders on the outside to adjust (i.e., move in one), allowing the overlap to be created on the wing (Pool, 1992; Williams et al, 1994; Robilliard, 1997; Pool, 1997; Marks, 1998).

In this case the cover would be directed to the touchline and the job of taking the last runner would fall to the fullback. This is not such a difficult task if the extra man comes in outside the outside centre. It does however create problems if the overlap occurs through a run around, because to take the player with the ball, the outside defender then has to turn rather drastically. If they don't make that turn well enough and a linebreak occurs, it makes it difficult for the fullback who is basically set on reaching the touchline to be able to correct himself so to be able to make the tackle on the player coming through in the midfield. It is therefore important that in this situation the fullback as well as the blindside wing who is moving across has to be conscious of trying to stay inside the ball and then shifts across as needed (Johnson, 1993; Marks, 1998).

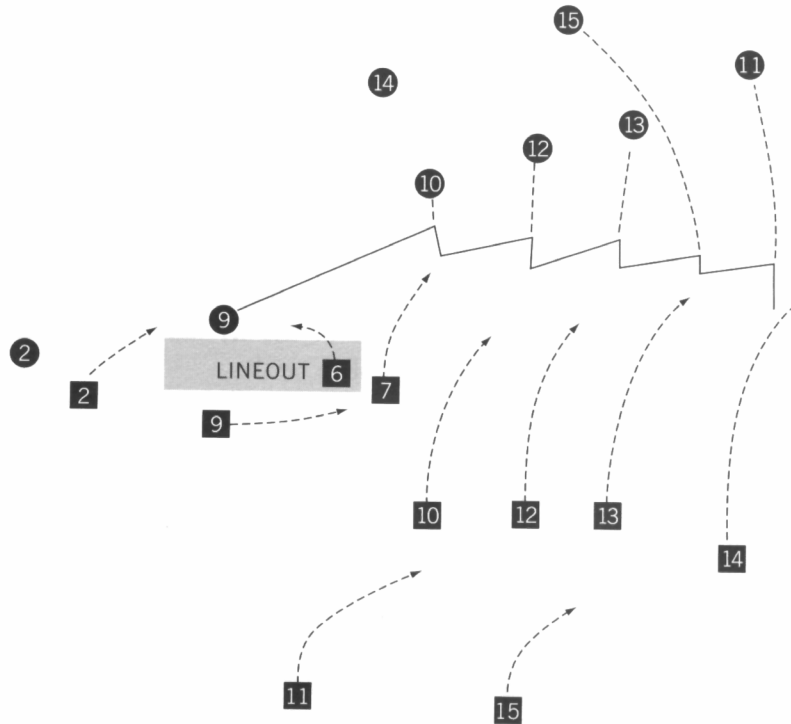


Adapted from: Robilliard (1997).

Figure 2: Man-to-Man overlap defence

2.2.1.2 Man-to-Man Isolation Defence

This pattern identifies the target runner and the defence then isolates the “extra” man with the ball by having the defensive openside wing stay with this attacking player. The main objective is to isolate the ball carrier from his support, both on the inside and the outside (Pool, 1992; Johnson, 1993; Marks, 1998).



Adapted from: Marks (1998).

Figure 3: Man-to-Man isolation defence

It is the responsibility of the designated player (usually the blindside wing or fullback) to tackle any extra man who comes into the line from a lineout. The positioning of the blindside wing is extremely important when using this pattern. From a scrum the same winger or the fullback can accomplish the task. This defender should only be a few metres from the scrum, lineout, ruck and maul situation if it is to be effective (Johnson, 1993; Marks, 1994; Robilliard, 1997).

There are two important concerns when defending in such a manner:

- the defender must isolate and nullify his opposite number, and
- the defender must get between the ball carrier and the inside support which is the attacking teams most valuable weapon (Pool, 1997).

When looking at these two concerns the first takes priority, however, where the ball is shifted quickly, the defenders have to shift quickly onto a lateral run. In this situation, the defenders should anticipate where the attackers should run in support and then try

to beat them to that position. In other words, where a defensive line can anticipate where a space is going to open up, they should lead their opposite numbers to that position rather than following them to it (Marks, 1998).

Once this has been achieved, the attacking options will have been reduced fairly well in the midfield, however, the real danger is likely to occur wider out with the entry of an extra man between the outside centre and the openside wing. It is in this situation that the openside wing should be on his guard. It was mentioned earlier that in this situation the defender should stick to his opposite number. The reason for this being that it makes certain that the opposition wing is shut out so that:

- the fastest opponent is not able to get out into the clear, thus resulting in the cover defence not having to stretch itself to the limit in order to stop this player (Robbiliard, 1997).

This defensive philosophy is effective as, by leaving the directly opposite attacker in that situation rarely results in having to make a tackle or stop a pass. A good defensive wing will however also be able to:

- position himself so that if the pass comes, his opposition winger can be tackled, and the opposition wing is given the impression that there is a threat that he will be caught which will require him to pass the ball. This is a secondary concern as, whether the pass is thrown or not, the support player has to be isolated and covered from being able to break the defensive wall (Kiss, 2002).

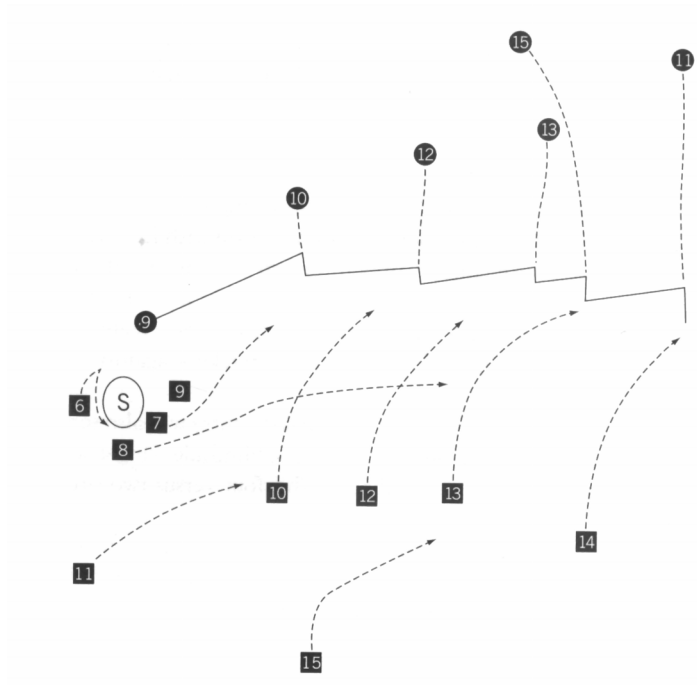
The most important factor in the defender's role is the running path. This can only be optimally executed by anticipating the two versus one situation. If this situation arises it can be managed in the following way:

- a) the defenders must stand narrow in relation to the attackers;
- b) the defender must turn and shift outwards as the inside player receives the pass;
- c) the defender must run across the face of that player to encourage him to concentrate on the retention of the ball, i.e., put him under intense pressure, i.e., the possibility of being tackled by the defender; and

- d) once this has been achieved the defender must aim to and concentrate on his own opposite number with a view to making contact with him just as his hands go out to take the ball (Marks, 1998).

2.2.1.3 One-Out Defence

This pattern requires excellent communication skills between players. It identifies the ball carrier so that the attacking flyhalf is tackled by the defending flank at the scrum or the last man in the lineout (Pool, 1997; Kiss, 2002). The attacking inside centre is covered by the defensive flyhalf, the attacking outside centre is covered by the defensive inside centre, the attacking fullback is covered by the defensive outside centre, and the attacking wing is covered by the defensive wing (Johnson, 1993; Robilliard, 1997).



Adapted from: Robilliard (1996).

Figure 4: One-Out defence

The following points should be noted.

- One-out or drift defence is easier to employ from a lineout as the blindside wing is in a better position to be able to cover a break from that defensive position than from a scrum. This is because there is a bigger area to cover from a scrum than from the lineout.
- It is however most effective from a scrum on the left hand side of a field as:
 - a) from a scrum you are closer to the opposition, making it difficult for the defenders to detect the positioning of the wing; and
 - b) on the left hand side of the field it is easier to cover the attacking flyhalf by the open side flanker (Pool, 1997).
- If drift defence is used on the right hand side of the field, the openside flanker has the difficult job of watching both the scrumhalf and the flyhalf (Robilliard, 1992).
- The blindside wing still takes the “across, up and across” line to cover any break in that big box from their outside centre in. If no extra man comes in from there out, the openside wing takes his opposite attacker, leaving the outside centre free to capture possession after the tackle (Marks, 1998).

If the fullback does enter in this situation, the defending wing still stays with the attacking wing because the slide of the outside centre will cover this option. If the fullback should come in very wide, the centre will slide onto the wing and the wing will slide onto the fullback (Johnson, 1993; Robilliard, 1997).

With this defence it is better to line up inside your opposite number. Standing outside makes the slide easier but it also alerts the opposition. If, however, the attack is spread, this outside option is necessary so to be able to get to the striking attacking player (Marks, 1998).

Once primary phase defensive play has taken place, the following key aspects play an important part in defensive play.

2.2.2 The Defensive Shape

A team's defensive shape is an important key in building a defensive wall that can absorb and nullify various attacking threats. What is important for a defensive line to concentrate on is a commitment to keeping this "shape". The key rule is that a defender must under no circumstances advance ahead of the man inside of him. Each defender should preferably position himself half a meter laterally behind his fellow defender inside of him (Muggleton, 2001; Kiss, 2002).

Once the ball passes the defenders "zone" he should continue to push forward into the space inside the ball. By maintaining this "shape" at least two "zones" inside the ball it is possible to guard against any attempted inside passes or switches which the attacking team may use to strike our defensive wall. The defenders must defend the spaces inside the ball (Anderson, 2000).

The defenders closest to the facet play an important role in leading and developing the "shape". Once they have addressed the immediate threat in front of them their next duty is to lead the defensive line forward in order to develop good "shape" early and to assist the midfield in edging the outside defenders into their specific role in defence.

Attacking systems are continually being developed to create situations that will lure defenders out of their line in order to disrupt and break their defensive "shape" and thus create the holes they then wish to exploit with their strike and support runners. This "lure" is aimed at the ball carrier and also inside and outside the ball carrier through decoys, deceptive plays and exploitive running lines.

In order to prevent linebreaks taking place in this fashion, the defensive line must be maintained and there has to be a commitment to keeping the "shape".

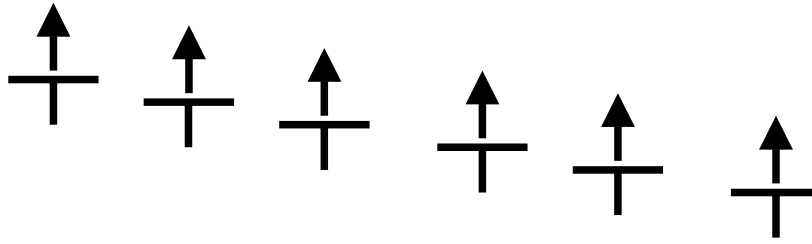


Figure 5: Defensive shape

2.2.3. The Defensive Zones

A “zone” can be described as the space or area a defender is responsible for. The key “zones” are the ball and the two spaces or “zones” on either side of the ball carrier (Marks, 1998; Kiss, 2002).

Defenders at the ball and the outside “zones” must stay strong and square in their “zones”. The rule is that a defender should not slide or drift off their “zone” of responsibility before the ball has passed their defensive “zone”. Only under certain circumstances will an inside defender be able to release the inside defender from his “zone” early, e.g., when the attack shifts the ball wider early, and when the defensive line are using a holding pattern due to the attack having a greater number of players available than the defence has (Kiss, 2002).

While discussing the aspect of defensive “zones”, the concept of tracking needs to be understood. When tracking an attacker, the objective of the defender is to position himself for his own advantage and strength, i.e., this implies that the defender presents himself to the contest with a strong body positioning and a correct shoulder presentation (Muggleton, 2001; Kiss, 2002).

The defender’s positioning should be a body width at least inside the attacking player in your “zone” or on the directly opposite attacker who is about to be tackled. By having this starting position as with the initial tracking position it reduces or prevents a possible opportunity for the ball carrier from being able to change his angle and then

run at a weak shoulder of the defender. The defender also has good vision of his “zone” and of the defensive “zone” of the supporting defensive player on his outside. While the approach is taking place, it is important that the defender stays strong and square in his “zone” (Robilliard, 1992; Muggleton, 2001; Kiss, 2002).

2.2.4. Defensive Spacing

“Spacing” refers to the appropriate distances between defenders in order to attain the ideal field coverage that:

1. will suit the defensive style and pattern of the team;
2. will suit the defensive abilities of the players in the team;
3. is appropriate to the field position; and
4. gives the best awareness and coverage of possible attacking threats and patterns possibly executed by the opposition (Muggleton, 2001; McFarland, 2002).

Maintaining good equal “spacing” is vital particularly when the defensive line is in movement forwards and sideways. Equal “spacing” does not necessarily imply that every space between the defending players is the same. The players nearer to the facet will obviously have a closer more compressed “spacing”. As one moves along the defensive line outwards towards the midfield defenders, the “spacing” will become gradually wider (Larder, 1992; Kiss, 2002; Hedger, 2002).

It is important to note that the important “spacings” are the “zones” inside and outside of the ball carrier. The “spacings” inside the ball carrier should not be closed up too quickly or early, as those “zones” need to be defended. A vital component in effective “spacing” and maintaining good “spacing” is the defensive lines starting position. Being fully prepared in the line with scanning and awareness, talk and urgent “reload” will ensure that the defensive line begins with the appropriate “spacing” (Anderson, 2000).

The most important aspect of “spacing” is communication and for the defenders to work effectively in “3’s”. This implies that a defender should be continually communicating with the defender on either side of him so to ensure the “spacing” is appropriate.

2.2.5. The Execution Line

This refers to the “critical” point or line of pass of the attacking play. When discussing the “execution line” the most important component is awareness and judgement in the defence’s line application. The art is to avoid being pulled out of “shape” while pressing forward and therefore being made redundant in the defensive line especially at the “critical” point where a defensive decision has to be made, e.g., a run-around or looping play.

Awareness and judgement is required here to ensure that the key point of the defensive line does not overextend to the “critical” line. The defence line speed and tempo is determined at this stage, usually by the flyhalf and inside centre as well as the defender inside the flyhalf. It must be noted that the lines speed of advancement is also affected by the “shape” rule, i.e., no player should advance ahead of the defending player on his inside (Kiss, 2002; Hedger, 2002).

In these “critical” points and situations a forward motion, “holding” pattern is to be applied with the intention of letting the play evolve without interference to the defensive structure and “shape” (Kiss, 2002; Hedger, 2002).

By achieving the defending team can “influence” the pass and play to their own terms rather than being dictated to by the attacking team. The defensive team is then able to:

- a) observe;
- b) orientate;
- c) decide; and
- d) act (OODA method) (Kiss, 2002).

This results in the defending team being able to defend the evolving attacking threat with the defensive lines “shape” and structure still in place.

The control of the “execution line” and the application of this method effectively and consistently, can and will frustrate the attacking team and in particular the key ball players and supporters. This is because they are not able to do what they plan to do, i.e., to lure and pull a defender out of shape or make a key defender redundant and ineffective by committing him to a point resulting in him being unable to assist his outside defenders (Anderson, 2000).

This method is very useful when the opposition have more numbers in attack than what the defending team have defenders. By making use of good scanning any possible attacking threats can be overcome by means of thorough analysis of the opposition followed by communication between the defenders. This is essential for successful defence in these situations (Williams et al, 1994; McFarland, 2002).

2.2.6. Attitude

This is by far the most important aspect of defence as without commitment to these factors no amount of technique will be sufficient to stop any form of attacking play!

- There must be a commitment made to these principles irrespective of any interference within the defensive structure or fatigue among the defenders.
- There must be a commitment to maintaining the defensive shape despite possible interference within the defensive structure or fatigue among the defenders.
- There must be a commitment to stay strong and square in each defenders defensive zone irrespective of any interference within the defensive structure or fatigue among the defenders.
- There must be urgency on the “reload” irrespective of any possible situations that may arise or fatigue among the defenders.
- There must be exceptional off the ball work ethic and awareness by all the defenders.

- Any opportunity for presentation of oneself for a defensive contest must be taken advantage of irrespective of any possible circumstance or fatigue.
- Every defensive player must be prepared for / or alert of any possible quick taps, turnovers or any attacking kicks (Larder, 1992; Kiss, 2002).

This explains the alignment and techniques necessary for a team defending and the attempt to turnover the opposition's possession by means of solid well-orchestrated defensive lines and tackling techniques. As mentioned earlier, the challenge presents itself when defensive lines are made up of a combination of forwards and backline players.

The key to any backline attack is based on manipulation of the defence's organisation, and to "strike" in an area perceived as vulnerable in order to breach the defensive line. Alternatively to successfully defend lies in the ability to organise defensive lines from 2nd and subsequent phases. It must be noted that an attacking team will continue probing until either there is a linebreak or an extra man on the outside has been created.

2.2.7. Drift Defence as a Concept

"Drift defence" is not a pattern, but a concept and isn't specific to phases of defence. Drift defence does not identify a definite target for the tackler but works on shepherding the attacking backline across the field. One must note however that the words "drift" or "slide" indicate that something will occur later (Larder, 1992; Johnson, 1993; Williams et al, 1994; Marks, 1998).

Defence occurs now – not later, and this links up with the first rule regarding defence (Robilliard, 1992).

The first basic rule regarding defence is to deny the opposition time and space, which subsequently reduces attacking options. This can only be achieved if the team not in

possession advances forward quickly and pressurises the ball carrier (Robilliard, 1997).

The second basic idea of “drift” or “slide” defence is a concept of “wait and see” which is commonly used in rugby league. The idea is to organise the defensive lines to try and “herd” the attacking team towards the side of the field in order to force them to have to try and beat the defence around the outside. This tends to eliminate the possibility that the attacking team is able to break through the defensive line in the midfield, which could be disastrous (Muggleton, 2001).

In order to achieve these ideas it is important for the defender to align on the opponent’s inside shoulder, thus pushing the attacker towards the sideline. It is important to move forward towards the target quickly, allowing the opponent only an outside opportunity. In moving forward, defensive players should not get ahead of teammates inside them as this will create a crooked defensive shape (Anderson, 2000; Muggleton, 2001; Kiss, 2002; Hedger, 2002).

It is important that while approaching the attacker that the defender slows down slightly and balances himself so that if the player cuts inside, the defender can adjust his line according to what the ball carrier does. It is vital that the defensive line is kept, and that there is a slight “hockey stick” defensive line angled towards the touchline. Once each defender’s attacker has passed the ball, he should move into a position between the ball carrier and his immediate opponent (Robilliard, 1997; McFarland, 2002).

It will become evident that as the opposition are forced across the field, their options become limited and time is “bought” for the second line of defenders to move across the field in defensive support. It is also easier for the defender to tackle the opposition striker as it makes for an easier side-on tackle (Larder, 1992).

2.2.8. Second Phase Defence

The key to defence at 2nd phase is to get as many players as possible to the breakdown first. The reason for this is that there are two possible outcomes that may occur,

- either the ball can be turned over and won, or
- the ball can be slowed sufficiently (without giving away a penalty), so that the defensive lines can reorganise creating a situation where there are more defenders than what there are attackers (Anderson, 2000; McFarland, 2002).

(This is due to the attacking team having to commit more cleaners to a ruck so to ensure that they, the attacking team, recycle their possession)

What is important to understand when defending after the first ruck or maul is that the principle of drift defence is still executed, it is merely the organisation around the contact area which is adapted (Muggleton, 2001; Kiss, 2002).

After a tackle has been made and the subsequent ruck or maul is formed, the players not committed to the ruck should align themselves on either side of the facet. The player closest to the facet is the “marker”. This player must align half a body width overlapping the ruck and behind the last mans feet. The next player next to the “marker” is called “one” (Anderson, 2000; Kiss, 2002; McFarland, 2002).

The “marker” and “one”, known as “guards”, cover the pick and drive around the ruck, a quick break by a fringe player, the inside pass from the flyhalf, the reverse pass from the scrumhalf or a pass with a run-around offloading to a striker in the inside channel. These two “guards” are defending the channel closest to the ruck. It is therefore important that they hold the position until the opposition flyhalf passes the ball outwards (Evert, 2001a; Kiss, 2002; McFarland, 2002).

The “marker” and “one” play an important role in the organisation of the defence. They firstly set the mark as to where the offside line is, and secondly set the position from where the supporting defenders begin their “hockey stick” defensive line shape. This results in the “drift” defensive lines being in place and ready to press forward onto the attackers (Anderson, 2000; McFarland, 2002).

It is also important to note that the backline players marshal the forwards who are present in the backline inwards towards the ruck / maul if there is sufficient time to do so. The fanned players should aim to get the tight forwards nearest the facet, followed by the loose forwards as this will keep the line organised on the outside where possible “strikers” can begin their attacks. It is also necessary due to most of the probes (using the bigger forwards), will be played off the flyhalf. If however the attack is too highly pressured, the defenders should align as they reach the facet and concentrate on keeping their “hockey stick” shape (Marks, 1998; Muggleton, 2001; Kiss, 2002; Hedger, 2002).

The next stage in the defensive system begins as the ball is passed out towards the flyhalf. The term “shoot” and “shift” then becomes apparent. This is explained as where the rate of advance is set (Anderson, 2000; Kiss, 2002; McFarland, 2002).

The “marker” and “one” press hard from the inside i.e., they “shoot” forward cutting down the space available to the opposition before they reach the gain line so that the opposition forwards, or “striker” are caught behind the advantage line. This forces the support runners to move backwards in order to get in the clean that will arise from the tackle situation (Anderson, 2000).

The role of “captain” in defence is vital as he communicates with the rest of the defenders who is being covered and thus sets the rate of advance. This role is fulfilled by the player just out from the “marker” and “one” as he covers the flyhalf and is not focussed on the play on the inside which is being covered by the guards (Muggleton, 2001).

For the defence to be successful it is important that no player gets in front of the next inside player as they advance, this will keep the “hockey stick” defensive line shape and thus the opposition will be shifted outwards. This formation makes it difficult for the attacking team to breach the line as the striking line is towards the defenders and any pass that can possibly send a runner back towards the forwards will be stopped by the 2nd wave of defenders who are moving across the field (Marks, 1998; Anderson, 2000; Muggleton, 2001; Kiss, 2002; McFarland, 2002).

2.2.9. Third and Subsequent Phase Defence

When 3rd phase is set up, the next important aspect of defence becomes apparent. If a team continually attacks in the same direction, a situation will arise where there will be a “pooling” of players on the side from which the attack originally came, and therefore too few defenders on the side where the next wave of attack is to be launched.

In order to guard against such a situation, the term “far side” is brought into the defensive communication. The term refers to a situation where when a ruck or maul is created, two defenders automatically move over to the far side of the facet and fulfil the role of “marker” and “one”. What this does is that it prevents the defenders on the outside from having to commit to the area next to the facet. This allows them to be able to optimally protect the outside space, which would invariably be exposed if they had to move inwards towards the facet area. Another important reason for the “far side” is that if the players on the outside were forced to maintain their defensive width, and did not move in towards the ruck or maul, a short pass to a forward striking in the channel next to the facet would lead to a linebreak which would be a difficult situation to salvage (Anderson, 2000; Kiss, 2002).

2.3 ATTACKING BACKLINE PLAY

An attack by the backline is the culmination of all the running and passing skills that have been developed in the many hours of training. It is what the crowds largely come to watch, and certainly they come alive when a linebreak is successful and a player is on his way towards the try line. The success of a backline attack is achieved by thorough planning, taking the right option at the right time, using decoy ploys and having players running the right lines from the appropriate depth (Williams et al., 1994).

If one were to ask what seems to be the enigma concerning attacking play, the term “breaking the wall” and “achieving a linebreak” would come up as the most highlighted topic of discussion (Townsend, 2000).

Since concentration of effort with the professional development of defensive patterns, coaches have been in search of that aspect of play, which, if mastered, would give their team the greatest edge over the opposition, and the ability to break the opposition’s defensive line at will (Bird, 1998).

Coaches have looked at aspects such as physiological development, strength and conditioning, postural and biomechanical development, nutrition, psychology, game analysis and play networking, vision development and communication skills, decision-making, and stress management, (on and off the field) as a means of individual and team development. What has however become obviously clear is that none of these factors can be seen as individual units. For success each aspect needs to be combined within the “team mix” in order for optimal performance on the rugby field to take place.

The object of this study is to look at newer aspects of coaching and alternative ways of breaking down the defensive wall. This could be viewed as an attempt at stimulating creativity in coaching so to achieve new heights in rugby performance.

“Creative rugby is not a vague concept; it is a concrete concept that is available to every player and coach. Without creativity outstanding success is just no longer possible”

(Neethling & Botha, 1999:10).

There are various schools of thought on this specific subject each having merits, with the common question being, how does the number of phase balls recycled affect the possibility of breaking down the “wall” and the importance of running lines and angles on the quality of attack?

In order to attempt to answer this and many other questions, a study will be made of those aspects that play a part in attacking play so to establish some form of idea of how to achieve optimal attacking backline play.

Running lines are found in three main aspects of the game of rugby namely:

1. attacking play;
2. defensive play; and
3. support play.

2.3.1 Attacking Running Lines

In order for a full and complete understanding of running lines and their workings to be understood, an in depth look at the following aspects is required. This specific section will be looking at all the aspects involved in the build-up and finally the execution of these lines in their entirety.

Later in this section, the different running lines will be evaluated according to these principles ultimately to establish for what reason and in which circumstances they will be most effective.

2.3.2 The Aim of Backline Play

The aim of backline play is:

- a) to create enough space for one of the attacking players to beat his individual opponent (Johnson, 1993; Bayly, 2001); and
- b) to produce superior numbers in attack so that a ball carrier can break the line as an unmarked player (Marks, 1998; Hedger, 2002).

2.3.3 Key Factors

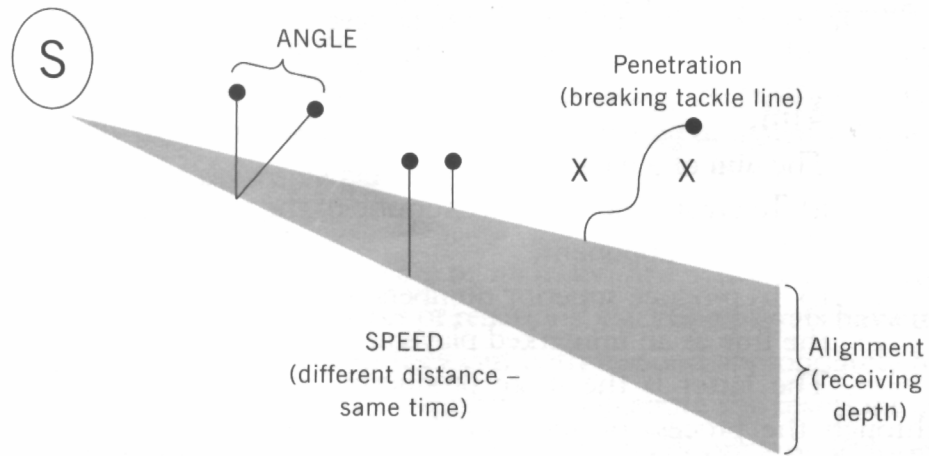
In order for backline play to be effective, it is important for a backline to have some common aim. If individual backline players have different objectives, it makes synchronisation of attack difficult. There is however one universal concept that is imperative for any form of backline attack to be successful and that is that the first priority is to get over the gain line (Macintosh, 1997; Bird, 1998; Shaw, 1998; Townsend, 2000).

With this in mind the next step is to examine the factors that influence our ability to attack with precision and success in order to get over the gain line.

The following factors all play an important role in achieving this goal:

- a. distance. This will vary according to both the attacking backline's receiving position and the angle at which the players choose to run;
- b. speed. This is determined by the player's forward running speed, and ball handling speed across the field; and
- c. obstacles. This will occur when the opposition's tackle line gets between the attacking backline and the gain line through the defenders pressing forward towards the attacking backline. To reach the target in this case will require a "strike" on an individual player by our attacking unit (Marks, 1998; Hedger, 2002).

The four key factors of backline play can thus be shown as follows:



Adapted from: Marks (1998).

Figure 6: Alignment, angle, speed and penetration in attack

None of these factors can be discussed in isolation. Different alignment will allow for different speeds of running and an earlier or later penetration.

What needs to be emphasised is that the ability to create time and space are the qualities we are endeavouring to achieve and it is imperative that all backs are aware of the need to think and act quickly.

2.3.4 Attacking Backline Play Philosophy

When one looks further at important aspects of attacking play the following principles come to the fore:

1. attacking alignment;
2. attacking width;
3. angles of running;
4. timing;

5. manipulation of the opposition through numbers;
6. trailers (support);
7. communication; and
8. decision-making (Greenwood, 1993; Bayly, 2001; Hedger, 2002).

In order for these aspects to have value, a description is necessary in order to highlight the key aspects involved, which will ultimately influence the attacking capabilities of the team.

2.3.4.1 Attacking Alignment

When discussing the major determining factor in deciding how deep an attacking backline should lie, be it at first, second, third or even fourth phase is the level of skill the players possess (Shaw, 1998).

The core skills needed in order to penetrate with the ball in hand and that need to be automatic behaviours are:

- catching the ball at pace;
- passing a variety of passes at pace;
- reading the defence in front; and
- making the appropriate decision (Hedger, 2002).

These key core skill concepts have been widely researched however specifically orientated skill acquisition research in rugby has been lacklustre to say the least.

When one observes the development research regarding skill acquisition by (Gabbard 1992), it seems that there is a large scope for future research in this area. He states the following: “the dynamical systems perspective seeks to provide an understanding of “how” movement and control emerges or unfolds developmentally”.

Based upon highly complex principles from theoretical physics, theoretical mathematics, and ecological psychology. The theory of Bernstein (1967) proposes that qualitative changes in motor behaviour emerge out of the naturally developing

dynamic properties of the motor system and coordinative structures (Kugler et al., 1982).

Using the dynamical systems perspective on motor behaviour, recent enquiries have begun to unfold the developmental picture of “how” interlimb coordination emerges in such early motor tasks as kicking (Thelen, 1985), stepping patterns (Ulrich, 1989), hopping (Robertson & Halverson, 1998), and independent walking (Clark et al., 1998).

“This line of developmental research, which uses biomechanical principles and tools to study the dynamics of motor development, shows great promise for providing a more comprehensive understanding of motor control and performance across the life span”

Gabbard (1992).

With this in mind the development of the necessary skills required in attacking backline play can be nurtured and developed so to give the backline every opportunity to break the defence’s wall at will.

If one was to give a very basic definition of what a backline will try to achieve when attacking this defensive wall it could be summarized as follows.

- An attacking backline will aim to make use of a flat or steep, / shallow or deep line of alignment concept, using angles of running lines with trailers, in order to create gaps in the defensive line, or to force the opposition into making side on tackles, from which the team in possession can offload the ball to a support runner (Bayly, 2001).

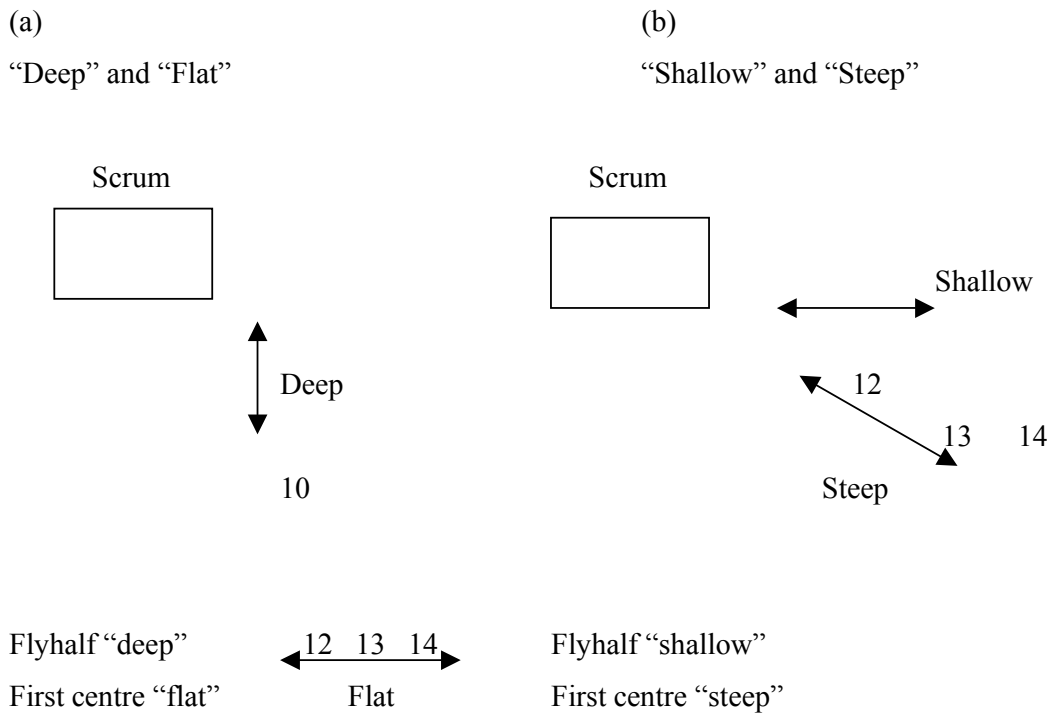
When looking at this definition it is important that one is able to distinguish between the following types of alignment:

- “flat versus steep alignment” ; and
- “shallow versus deep alignment” (Honan, 1999a).

Honan (1999a), widely regarded backline specialist, has been instrumental in his research into the finer intricacies of specialist backline play. In his dissertation “10

Commandments of Attacking Backplay”, he paid close attention to the critical principles and definitions for successful backline play.

Although the emphasis of the study was on how to get over the advantage line as quickly as possible and to have sufficient time and space on the outside so to be able to make use of the extra man, the importance of the two concepts mentioned above also have an influence on the quality of attack and is explained and shown diagrammatically as follows (Honan, 1999a):



Adapted from: Giles (2000).

Figure 7: “Deep” and “Flat” alignment versus “Shallow” and “Steep” alignment

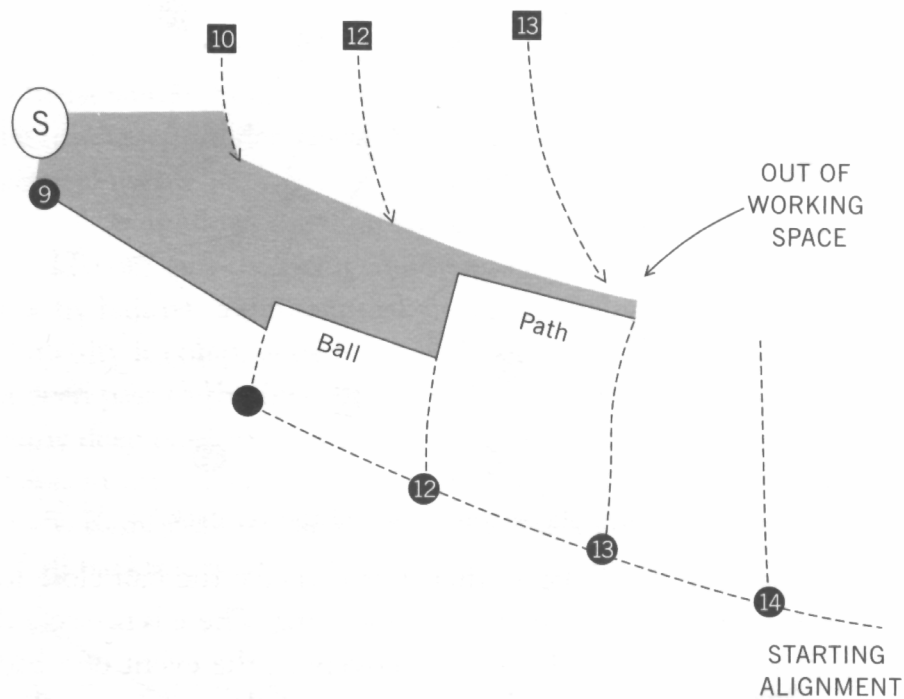
A “steep” alignment will not often be successful due to the attacking backline being further away from the advantage line and that with each pass the attacking team moves further away. There is also the danger that when contact is made it takes place behind the advantage line thereby making it difficult for the forwards of the team in possession to get to the point of breakdown as they will have to run backwards in order to do so (Honan, 1999a).

What will also play an important part in the alignment of the attacking backline is where the striker is going to attack. This responsibility will lie in the hands of the flyhalf who will align in the appropriate position according to the nominated set-up move, this implies that the further out the strike takes place, the steeper the alignment will be, i.e., an attack can take place in zone 1, 2, 3 or wide off the facet. It is also important to realise that this alignment will vary according to whether it is taking place from 1st phase possession or after 2nd or consequent phase possession.

There are two distinct components of alignment:

- a) working space; and
- b) angle of the ball, transfer line (Marks, 1998).

Working space is the decision made by the backline as to how far away it wants to operate from the opposition. This distance is that between the ball path and the defence line. This space will reduce as the ball is transferred along the line, as both backlines will be moving towards each other.



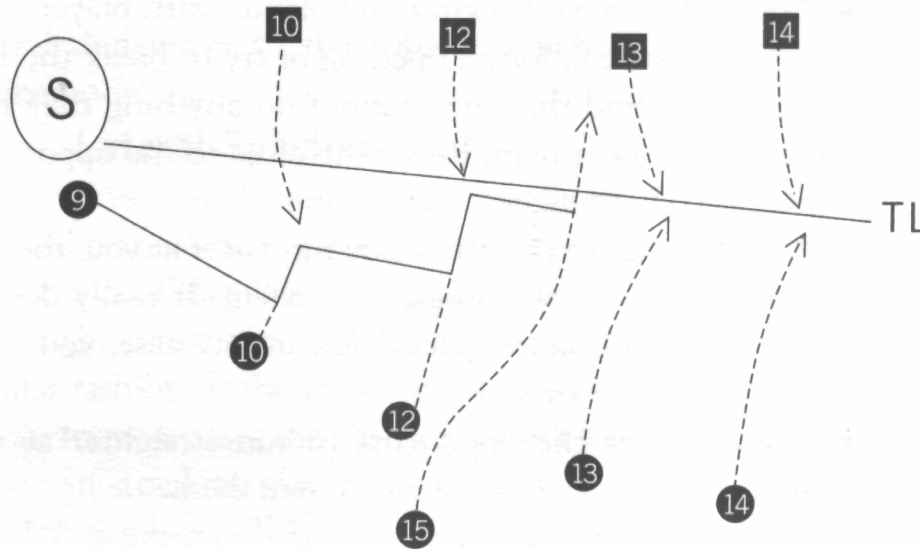
Adapted from: Marks (1998).

Figure 8: Working space in attacking play

The ideal distance is largely dependant on the following:

- a) where the attacking backline wants to attack the defensive line; and
- b) what level of skill the players have (Jevon, 1997).

The more skill the players have and the closer in you want to plan your “strike”, the closer you can stand to the opposition (Levey & Palin, 1993).



Adapted from: Marks (1998).

Figure 9: The way to hit a space in attacking play

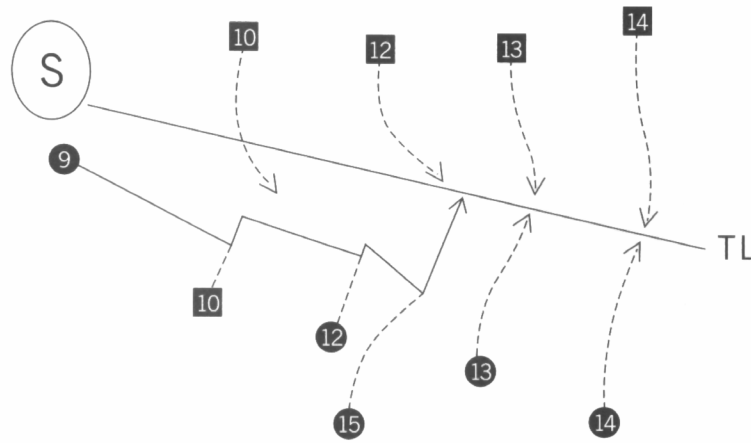
A simple way to determine the working space required and the angle of the ball transference can be to determine the number of passes involved in transferring the ball to the “striking” player in any pre-planned sequence, and then adjust the depth so this can be achieved with the striker receiving the ball almost on the tackle line. If the attack is structured that the receiver receives the pass too far back, any gap that might have existed will disappear (Evert, 2001a).

If the attack is planned close in, the team will need only two or three passes. The attacking line can then confront the opposition by standing up on the defence. If the attack is more complicated and wider out, the final transfer might be the fifth pass, therefore, the backline will require greater working space.

Three facts are vital to understand:

1. you can't pass a defensive line until you meet it;
2. the closer you are to a defender when you receive the ball the quicker and more definite the opposition's response will be (Marks, 1998); and
3. a team must first put themselves under pressure in order to put the opposition under pressure (Dwyer, 1992).

The result of these factors is that it is useless doing switches or bringing in an extra player metres away from the tackle line because the defence will adjust accordingly. These ploys have to be carried out on the tackle line and the flatter the passing alignment is the further forward the tackle line becomes, which will be to the advantage of the attacking backline (Marks, 1998).



Adapted from: Marks (1998).

Figure 10: Pass to an extra player too early and too far back

It can also be observed that if you receive the ball close to an opponent, that player can only do one thing. There is no second chance of recovery in the event of a bad decision. The crux of the matter is that if you receive the ball close to an opponent you absorb, involve and commit his defensive attention. If you are not successful in committing him then the tackler is released from his duty and he can become an extra defender further along the line (McFarland, 2002).

Because backline play is very much a numbers game where you are trying to preserve and improve the ratio of attackers against defenders, a too large a working space will make defence by the opposition easier (Honan, 1992; Marks, 1998).

Here follows a few further advantages that occur if the close attacking policy is followed:

- if a linebreak occurs, it will tend to put you in behind the opposition before their cover defence has had time to make their way across the field and therefore come into play;
- the biggest mistake attacking players make is that they run too far. They first look for an opening or try to break the line and then when they find they cannot do anything they pass the ball on to the next man. By receiving the pass close to the opposition it forces the players to become better decision makers; and
- it tends to induce the defenders to rush onto you thereby disorganising their defensive lines and therefore making them more vulnerable to linebreaks (Smith, 2001).

Finally, it is important to note that alignment is only a starting point; it's where the backs run from, not where they actually get to. It is only important in so far as it enables the backs to carry through their projected manoeuvre successfully. The alignment must enable the attacking backs to make the "telling" pass to the striker runner as he cuts through and beyond the tackle line (Ashton & Meier, 2002).

2.3.4.2 Attacking Width

The preservation and creation of space also has a lot to do with the ball carrier's own spacing i.e., if the attackers line up or run in a tight formation, the defenders will tend to mark them in a similar fashion. If the attack spreads, then so will the defence and so on. In most cases the defence doesn't have a choice because if they leave an attacking player open who can receive the ball unmarked, then the defensive line will be broken (Marks, 1998; Smith, 2001).

When one speaks of width on the attack, Garth Giles, Director of Coaching for the Natal Sharks makes an interesting comment. “If one considers that a rugby field is 70 metres wide and that at a scrum there are 18 players (two packs of forwards and two scrumhalves) that are fixed in a small rectangle, possibly 3m x 5m, there would appear to be acres of width space for four three quarters (flyhalf, two centres and a wing) in which to manoeuvre!” (Giles, 2000).

His belief is that South African teams in general are good at using the length of the field (i.e., “length space”) but are not good at using “width space”, and this is the essence of the “expansive” game (Giles, 2000).

Ashton & Meier (2002), agree and further expand on this idea of players committed in a confined space when they state that a similar situation to the scrum exists at a lineout situation with up to 18 players confined within 15m of the touchline, allowing 55m of lateral space that can be exploited. Added to this the enforced 20m space between the two backlines and one can see the attacking possibilities available.

As mentioned earlier, it remains the flyhalves responsibility to be either “shallow” or “deep” and the first centre to be “steep” or “flat”. The advantage that these alignment systems bring is that depth is created in the midfield and “space” on the outside. The “roving” unmarked players, i.e., the uninvolved wing and the fullback can be brought into play in any area (Giles, 2000).

The vital aspect of playing in expansive channels is that the objective of manipulating the defence as much as possible, in order to create “holes” in the required “strike channels” and thus being able to put players into these spaces becomes possible (Giles, 2000).

The important aspect in terms of success from attacking play is largely reliant on how the space on the field is used. The gaps will become more apparent and the optimal use of them should result in a more successful attack.

Gary Nucifora, makes an interesting comment.

“...Most of the space on the field is to be found outside the open winger, why not place the attackers at the phase at varying distances and depths prior to the balls emergence from the ruck or maul. Defenders will still mark up on their opposing man, but now natural gaps in the defensive wall will occur because of the spacing of the attackers. It could be argued that this will make it less necessary to run intricate angle-changing plays as the gaps will test the defences confidence and allow individual skills of attackers to shine through; either by running and attacking these gaps or there being “areas of concern” for the defenders on which the attackers can capitalise on, if their attack is good enough. Defenders will now position themselves on attackers with less confidence because they cannot adequately cover a defender as well as a 10m space in the line”

(Nucifora, 1999).

Chris Hickman, New South Wales U21 Assistant Coach has some interesting views on wide alignment attack. In his view the flyhalf must be wide and flat, the reason for this is that by aligning in such a position the following is achieved:

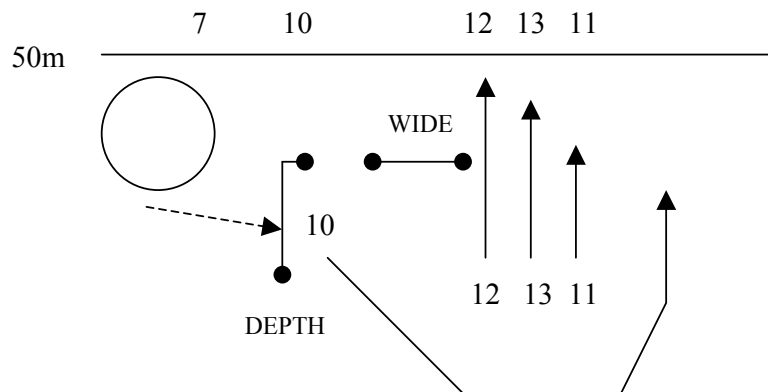
- by aligning wider the flyhalf prevents players who were committed at a ruck or scrum from being able to tackle him on his inside shoulder, this results in him only being able to be tackled by a player in the defensive line; and
- by taking the ball flatter the flyhalf is able to draw a defender so that the defender cannot leave him to drift outwards on his preferred defensive line (Hickman, 1999).

The inside centre must be deeper and wider:

- by being deeper the centre gives himself greater space to work in; and
- with the extra width he is able to take away the inside pressure of players attempting to drift across in defence (Hickman, 1999).

The players outside these two should be able to run straight at the defence in a normal pass position. This alignment can be used in the following situations:

- from rucks and scrums when the defence is close and each defender can be committed, this prevents the defenders from being able to initiate their drift defence option, as they have to assess that which is taking place near to them;
- when you have an overlap. Defenders can be committed man-to-man and running straight at them gives the overlap player on the outside maximum space to work in. It also creates space on either side of the ball carrier – which is an optimal situation; and
- the attacking team are able to achieve quick ruck ball going forward. The defenders are on the back foot and attackers can organise a one-on-one confrontation where they hold the maximum advantage (Hickman, 1999).



Adapted from: Hickman (1999).

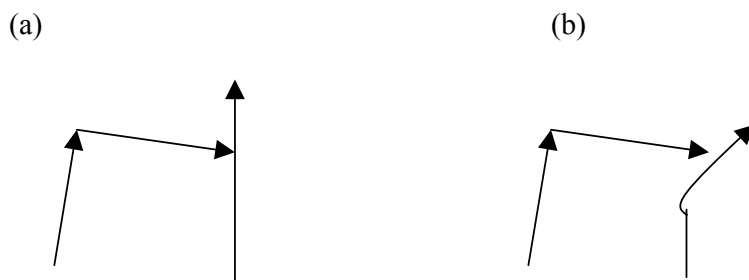
Figure 11: Wide alignment attack

It is important to note that this alignment is not suitable for all situations. It will have advantages in certain situations, however it does have certain limitations. One of the dangers is that if running and passing is too far apart it may encourage across the field movement, i.e., because the passers feel that the pass may just be out of his range, he moves laterally so to shorten the distance he may have to pass. Another danger is that because the time travel of the ball increases with the width of the pass, the receiver may have to either:

1. start the run on to the ball later;
2. approach it more slowly; and
3. stand further behind the receiving point (Marks, 1998).

This is why wide spacing usually produces a steeper starting alignment. The key for successful attack is that spacing is varied and adjusted according to the situation, i.e., if the attacking formation remains close all the time, it can expect the defence to follow, this will result in the holes in the defence to be more difficult to attack and the attacking team will find it more difficult to stretch the cover defence.

The last important aspect of this section is the importance of ensuring that players in the line maintain and use their position's space responsibly, and as such, respects and preserves the space of the players on the outside. This ability to maintain the width in attack is ultimately related to the player's ability to make very long accurate spin passes off both the right and left hands equally well. These passes should be at least 12m preferably between 15m and 18m, travelling as near to horizontal as possible. The accuracy of the pass should be flat, at right angles to the touchline, so that the receiver, running parallel to the touchline does not break pace at all on the receiving of the pass (Ashton & Meier, 2002).



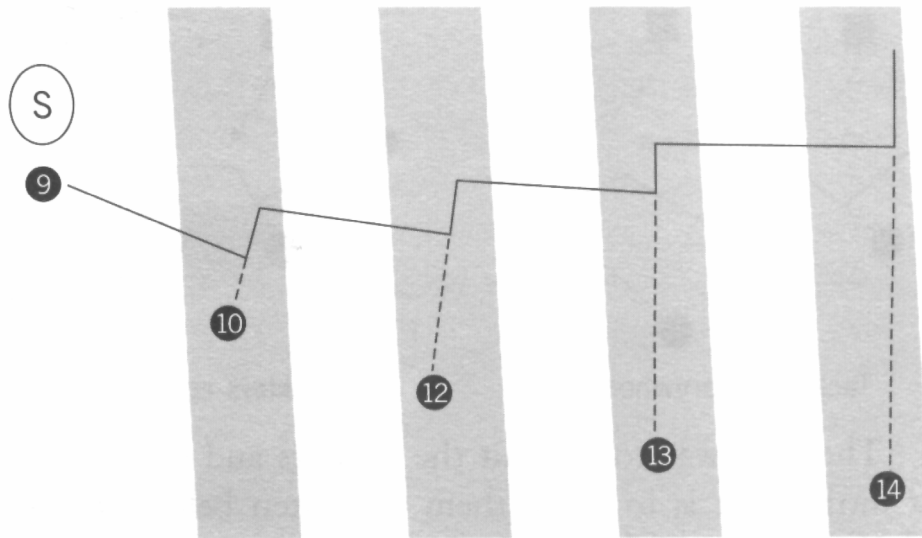
Adapted from: Ashton & Meier (2002).

Figure 12: (a) Necessary accuracy for a wide pass, (b) poor accuracy of a wide pass

This can be explained as a form of channel running i.e., each runner remains in his own territory until he has transferred the ball. After this, that player is responsible to

follow play and “resurface” and enter the line in one of the “space” channels on the outside or further along in play. If this ball carrier leaves his channel and starts running towards his outside players, then it should be a signal for a special action such as a switch pass in order to straighten up the attacking line again (Jevon, 1997; Marks, 1998).

It is important that running serves a purpose and is not merely instinctive. These running channels are not very wide and are fairly straight. This ensures that the defence is committed and creates areas through which the trailers can run.



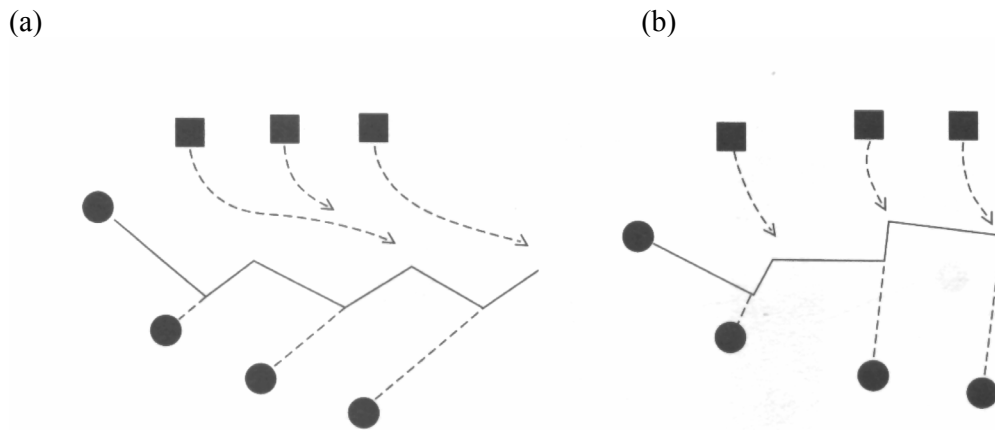
Adapted from: Marks (1998).

Figure 13: Channel running in attacking play

2.3.4.3 Angles of Running

At this stage of the discussion, emphasis has been on the work done before the receiving of the ball. Factors such as working space and lateral spacing are both key factors in “setting up” the defenders so that when the attack is launched, that they are manipulated into a mechanically weak defensive position.

The angle with which a line approaches the defence, followed by the sudden veering off in different directions, (with a multitude of offloading options), and finally the pass made to a player attacking space, is the ultimate objective of an attacking backline. Running and passing angles have the largest influence on the preservation and creation of space. A simple explanation of running angles is that if players with the ball run across the field, the inside defenders can run up to the ball carrier on such a complimentary angle, that they can move onto a good tackling line further out which will result in the backline attack being stopped. The only way to commit the tacklers and to prevent this threat further out is to make them straighten before the ball is passed. Running straight or veering in before the pass is made can achieve this. This straight run will not only “fix” the immediate defender but also to a certain extent those defenders who are moving across the field on their drift as cover (Marks, 1998; Nucifora, 1999; Evert, 2001a).

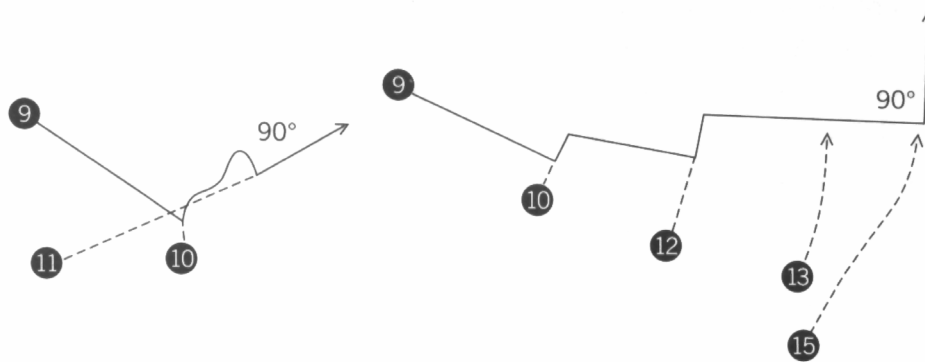


Adapted from: Marks (1998).

Figure 14: (a) Tacklers everywhere and (b) tacklers contained

When discussing the angle of the pass it is important to note the natural 90° angles that exist between the ball path and the receiving line. This relationship helps reduce the pressure on the transfer. In terms of its ability to “fix” the opposition, a deep pass will tend to produce a “following across the field” pass, while a flat pass will require the receiver to take it on a straight run (Honan, 1992; Ashton & Meier, 2002).

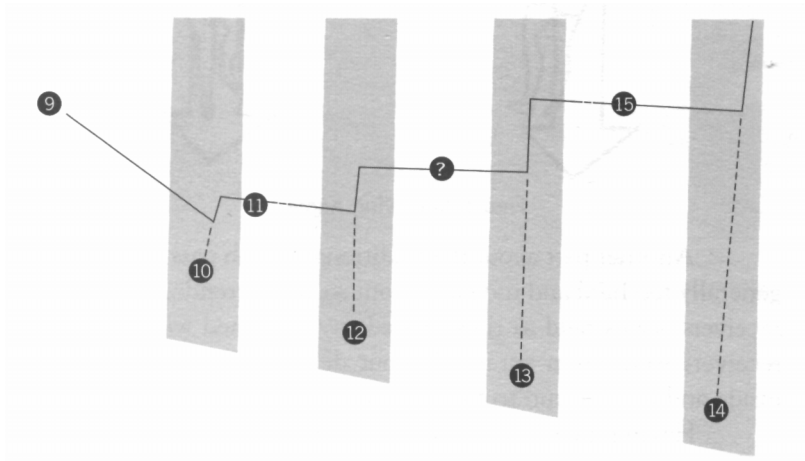
There are two examples of these two options. If a player is entering on a strike from the side of the field, (a blindside wing), he will usually need to receive the ball on a diagonal run. If the entry is more from behind then the player will want to run straight on to the pass to receive the ball and enter the space simultaneously, (i.e., a full back coming in on a cut pass from the inside centre) (Marks, 1998; Robilliard, 1998).



Adapted from: Marks (1998).

Figure 15: The 90° passing rule

It is important to understand the link between the angle of run and the peripheral vision “available” to the ball carrier. If the ball carrier runs across the field in search of space, he diminishes his available options due to him not being able to see them. If however the ball carrier moves in his channel he is able to open up the full 180° of vision of what is in front of him. He is thus able to pass the ball in various directions even back inwards, if necessary, to a support player in depth as a second line of attack (Jevon, 1997).



Adapted from: Marks (1998).

Figure 16: Stair passing showing the full peripheral vision for all the attackers

If one looks at the diagrammatical representation, there is great emphasis on a flat transfer as well as the action of advancing the ball beyond the receiving point. The important aspect of the pass is that the ball doesn't travel backwards to any degree other than to avoid making a forward pass. The reason for this is that it is pointless to pass a ball back in depth to a player who then has to carry the ball forward some distance before he makes any net gain on the initial position (Marks, 1998; Ashton & Meier, 2002).

There are two important benefits from this means of attack. By following this form of running line, the team maintains forward momentum. This results in supporting players being in a better position to support the ball carrier. This aspect of play, namely support will be discussed in depth at a later stage, however in order to understand the reason for its importance, it will be briefly touched upon.

By advancing the ball forward, it makes the supporting players more effective as their path of run is forward. It is very difficult to re-enter play if you're chasing a ball that's going backwards. If a supporter can follow a ball forward and across, you can reach it

on a suitable receiving line and thus a re-entry into play becomes easier (Royall, 2000).

As we near the crux of this paper it is necessary to touch on a few elementary aspects concerned with running lines. If the attacking team are going to be successful in confusing the opposition, then they are not going to merely pass the ball up and down the line, but are going to bring in variations such as having the ball travel back in the opposite direction, around and diagonally along the attacking line.

As mentioned earlier, running and passing angles have a big influence on the preservation and creation of space. When one speaks of angles of running there are five important role players that are directly involved in the execution of these lines. They are:

- a. creators (ball carriers);
- b. decoy runners;
- c. strikers;
- d. supporters; and
- e. cleaners (Hedger, 2002).

The combination of how these players are used plays a major role in whether or not the opposition's line is broken or not.

a. Creators

These are the ball carriers who distribute the ball to the strikers (Pool, 1997; Nucifora, 1999).

b. Decoy Runners

These are support players who are aligned either laterally or behind the creator. They are not intended to receive the pass however are in a position to do so if an open space was to present itself in their line of run. Their objective is to manipulate the defenders and commit or "fix" a defender / or defenders (Robilliard, 1998; Evert, 2001a).

c. Strikers

This player receives the ball from the creator. The decoy runners have “fixed” the opposition in a specific area and the striker thus attempts to break the line where the defensive line is weakest.

It is important to note that with each organised strike there must be more than one option to off-load to, i.e., a decoy runner and striker function as a unit where any of the players involved are able to receive the pass on the strike. This means that decision making by the creator is important, as a change in plan at the last second may be necessary if full advantage is to be taken during a specific attack (Burkett, 1998; Evert, 2001a).

d. Supporters / Trailers

If the attack is efficiently planned the players who performed the role of decoy runners will be able to fulfil this secondary role of being a supporter or trailer. These player’s objective is to receive an off-load in the tackle, or, if the ball carrier goes to ground, to make the clean at that specific facet. Another effective option as a supporter is to make use of the second player outside the decoy runner. This creates a situation where he comes in on an inside run and is best able to support, receive an off-load or clean (Evert, 2001a).

e. Cleaners

If an attack is stopped and a ruck or maul results, then the players in lateral support need to be committed to clean at the resultant ruck or maul. This is an important aspect of play as if this possession is not quickly and efficiently recycled, the advantages of quick recycled ball and disorganised defensive lines cannot be taken advantage of (Hickey, 1998).

All these aspects are vital in the attacking teams armoury to break or slow down the defender’s drifting defence. The most important contributing factor however is how the attackers change the angle of run during the attack. This is a major weapon for the

attackers as the later the change of angle takes place the better, as the defender has less time to take in the information and thus has less time to react accordingly. For this change in angle at the last minute to be of maximum effectiveness the following factors could of value:

- the striker must come from a position outside of the defenders range of vision; and
- the striker must come in at pace and cut the angle as late as possible

2.3.4.4 Timing

This aspect is vital as the timing of the pass to the “striker” largely determines whether the line will be broken or not. What is important to note is that even though the hole has been created through which should be played, if the timing of the pass is poor, the “striker” will be stopped by a defender who has been able to adjust his defensive line. The receiver should be receiving the ball at pace, running in a straight line and receive the ball at the right moment (Marks, 1994; Bayly, 2001).

The timing of the decoy runners is also an important part in determining the success of the attack. A very important aspect of timing has to do with kinaesthetic awareness. Kinesthetic awareness refers to the “feel” associated with the body and its movements as well as the summing up of a situation. It involves sensory input from muscles, joints and the inner ear, and includes our sense of the tension or relaxation in the muscles, joint actions, movement patterns and balance (DigiCricket, 2000), which are all important aspects of timing a strike (Evert, 2001a).

Proprioceptors in the muscles and tendons play a key role in providing the brain with sensory data on pressures, position and stretching within the body. Data passing to the brain from the kinesthetic receptors is analysed and responded to largely at the subconscious level unless it is attended to consciously in order to enhance a player’s ability to perform, react and act on impulse and on “autopilot”. As a player’s kinaesthetic awareness develops so does his ability to “feel” where his body parts are in relation to each other and respond faster and more accurately in pre-contact situations (DigiCricket, 2000).

The key to optimal performance is how the brain interprets these sensory inputs and how they affect the decision-making on the field concerned with the strike taking place. This implies that although every effort is made to create an optimal striking situation, there exists a certain “feel” which is instrumental from rugby players in order to achieve success in rugby (DigiCricket, 2000).

2.3.4.5 Penetration

A backline with superior speed has an enormous advantage over its opponents. It can more easily outflank them, outrun them, out-chase them and out-support them. The faster players can also make changes in pace and in direction and are therefore more equipped for making individual breaks (Hedger, 2002).

In this section the emphasis will be on those aspects of speed, which have a direct influence on the attacking team’s ability to break the defence’s wall.

a. Body Control

This section of the study will be investigating and discussing aspects of movement associated with the lead up towards attacking play. The key factor involved is the physical aspect of running and changes in direction (Burkett, 1998). Incorporated in the discussion will also be aspects such as the relative body positioning and the physical attributes necessary in the execution of these running lines together with giving the ball carrier optimal available tools to launch and complete a successful attack. In order for this to be achieved, the following aspects need to be understood.

b. Speed versus Quickness

Speed is the measure of how fast an athlete can sprint short distances. A high maximum speed by itself doesn’t guarantee athletic success as coaches and athletes are aware that an athlete may be able to run fast however he may lack

the explosive power to accelerate rapidly, change direction rapidly, or get the entire body or a body part moving rapidly (Dintiman et al., 1998).

Quickness refers to the ability of an athlete to perform specific movements in the shortest possible time. It also involves the ability of the nervous system to process and produce rapid contractions and relaxations of the muscle fibres. Fast, explosive movements of the entire body, which occur in the starting and acceleration phases of sprinting, or in the adjusting of a body part to start a new movement or rapidly change direction demonstrates an athletes quickness (Dintiman et al., 1998).

The object of this section is to discuss specific aspects of quickness, which is applicable to the backlines ability to make a strike on the defence. Firstly the ball carrier's ability to accelerate when receiving the ball combined with his ability to change direction just before off-loading the possession needs to be discussed. This soundness of speed, body positioning and control will aid ball carriers in attacking situations to be in a physical position that is mechanically stable, and able to distribute or transfer the ball to a receiver who is also in this optimal state or condition (Evert, 2001a).

c. Speed Concepts Specific to Rugby

There are three broad aspects of speed:

- c1. running speed;
- c2. passing speed; and
- c3. thought Speed (Marks, 1998; Hedger, 2002).

c1. Running Speed

There has long been the notion that backs should receive the ball at top speed. This may be appropriate if the receiver is taking advantage of a gap, however if the aim is to create a gap it is difficult if the ball carrier is at full speed. The key is to have two speeds available with which to manipulate the defence. The following advantages exist:

- If a player has a deceptive turn of speed it can nullify the defender's ability to stop the attack, as the defender is unable to cope with the reserve acceleration the ball carrier has to beat him. If the ball carrier runs at full pace his only strength lies in the momentum he has from that run. By slackening off in speed, strength returns to the legs and then accelerating into a tackle is far more likely to break an arm grip than what would be possible if he was approaching with a constant speed. If the ball carrier can swerve while accelerating just before the tackle line, it makes him extremely difficult to stop (Jenkins et al., 1998).

A player's control of his running speed will aid his attacking ability in the following way:

- accurate passing and kicking is easier to achieve if you are running comfortably;
- when running at three-quarter pace, you have more of the balance and timing required to execute the appropriate line of run and deviation in course necessary for the nominated attack;
- if there is a difference in the pace of running between the ball carrier and supporters, there is always the option of blocking, or sending away the outside support on a burst. This is not possible if both backs are running at full speed; and
- by running fast towards the defence, tacklers are committed, however it also reduces the amount of space available. There are times when a slower approach is more likely to tempt one of the opposition tacklers to lose his alignment and leave a gap (Marks, 1998).

In summary, it is better for conservative running to the area where the break is attempted. Top speed is turned on in the following circumstances which all relate to the final strike at the defence:

- when you are attempting a break;
- when you have made a break;
- when you are supporting a break; and
- when you are about to make contact so that you can gain an extra metre at the contact area (Evert, 2001a).

c2. Passing Speed

Passing is the greatest asset a team can have. In respect of attacking play it is more effective to move the ball quickly through the hands than it is to move it quickly through the air by using cut out or skip passes as this does not “fix” any defenders and it makes it easier for the defenders to drift outwards while still covering the attack (Honan, 1992).

According to Magill (1993), a skill can be defined, as “an action or a task that has a goal and that requires voluntary body and / or limb movement to achieve the goal.” For this reason the execution of a well timed and sympathetic pass is vital in the success of any attacking backplay. A sympathetic pass can be described as a pass that is appropriate to the situation. This implies that if a fast transfer of the ball is required, then it should be executed. If however, a slower looped pass is required then it should be passed in that fashion so that advantage can be taken of the attacking situation.

When talking of passing speed, it is advantageous to be able to transfer the ball as quickly as possible, however in strategic phases the players are trying to deliver the ball into an unguarded hole just as one of their own strikers arrives out of “nowhere” to receive it. This requires a mix of speeds of running, handling and a balance, which is difficult to execute (Johnson, 1993; Marks, 1998; Smith, 2001).

c3. Thought Speed

Visual awareness is the ability to see everything in the visual field. (Greenwood, 1993) A flyhalf who sees all the defensive players as they are positioned and transfers the ball to a striker who receives the ball on the contact line and in the gap is a technique called open focus. This technique is similar to a camera that is able to take a clear picture, the player is then able to process all incoming information and automatically sorts out what he needs at any moment during the game. This technique can be developed by means of skill training with the incorporation of techniques that increase the area of

visual recognition, and, be able to manage other sensory input with improving ability (Greenwood, 1993; Levy & Ponissi, 1993).

Much of backline play is based on decision-making, particularly in the backs where there is a lot of traffic and a lot of options available that can be taken. Almost every time a player receives the ball there is a decision to be made in relation to the action he takes as well as to the subsequent support line he should follow (Marks, 1998).

In conclusion, the following guidelines can be given concerning decisions that players may face during play.

- If a gap opens up, accelerate and go for it.
- If it is to be a straight transfer of the ball, pull the ball across your body quickly towards its target (Honan, 1992).
- If you are to kick, balance and position yourself quickly.
- If there is to be a change in pace, make it dramatic.
- If you are going to take the ball up, set your body position correctly and build up momentum early (Evert, 2001a).

A team can live with decision-making mistakes provided that they are made positively and with urgency. Self-assurance, confidence and assertiveness are the primary requirements of backline option taking – wisdom can come later.

2.3.4.6 Manipulation of the Opposition through Numbers

To breach a defensive line requires both individual and collective skill. Individual breaks depend very much on running skills. Collective skills are directed towards putting a player away who is unmarked. In order to achieve this a team must either add to their own numbers or subtract from the oppositions numbers.

This can be achieved by means of two basic methods:

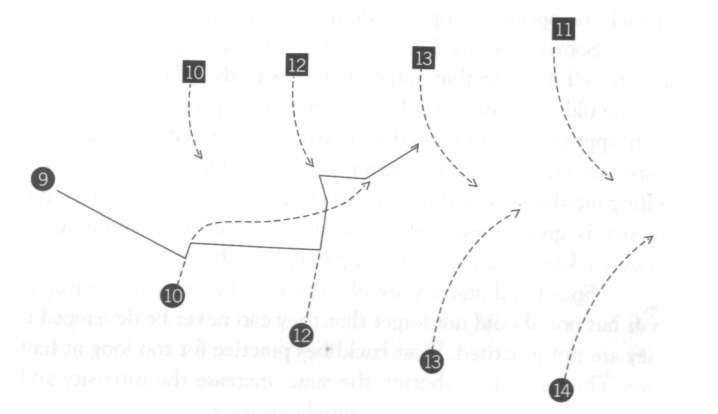
- addition. This comes from support play or bringing in extra runners onto committed defenders; and
- subtraction. This comes from involving or distracting the opposition, thereby taking them out of their defensive shape (Marks, 1998; Evert, 2001a).

a. Addition

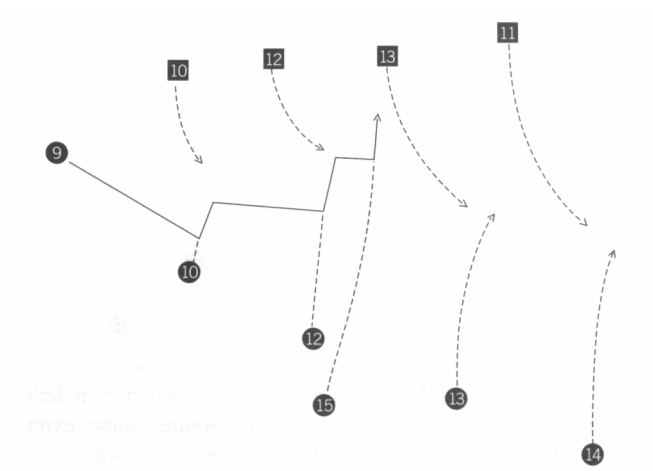
For the principle of addition to be successful the following aspects have to be optimally executed:

1. ball movement: The ball carriers need to be able to move the ball to the possible “space” and in some cases even create the hole with the path of the ball (Honan, 1999a);
2. “fixing” the opposition: If the backline can get the opposition to hold its approach lines and stick to their immediate defender, it can preserve the space between the players, the one on the inside of the ball carrier and the two on the outside being the most effective channels (Robbilliard, 1992; Marks, 1998);
3. first support entry: If the front line backs are committing their opponents, it becomes the responsibility of the support players to put themselves into unmarked spaces. The supporter’s presence or intended presence needs to be communicated to the ball carriers; and
4. final transfer: The passing of the ball to the entering support player is a vital part of the operation and the more accurately and deceptively it is done the more effective the outcome will be. The angle, speed and the timing of this pass are all crucial factors to the success of the attack (Marks, 1998).

(a)



(b)



Adapted from: Marks (1998).

Figure 17: (a) Addition through a circle ball.

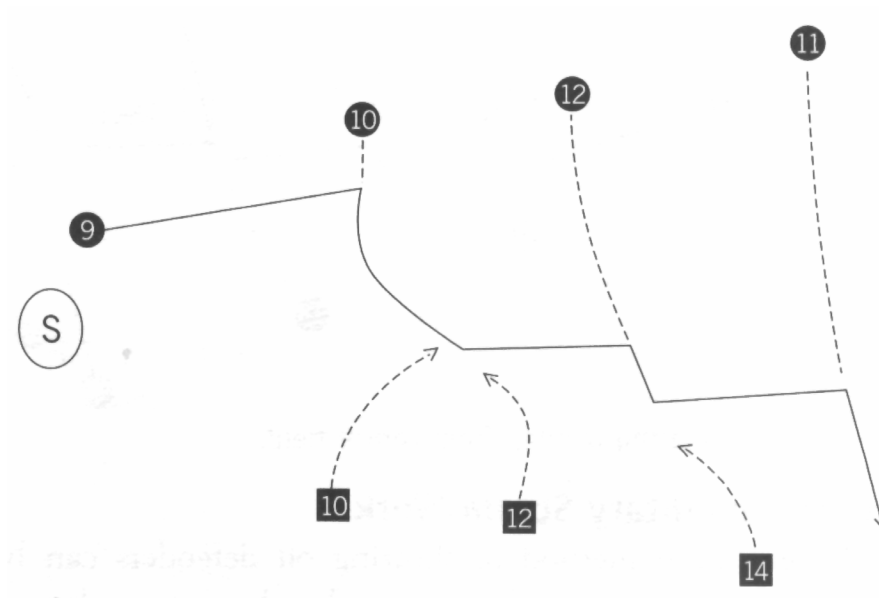
(b) Addition through an extra player entering the line

b. Subtraction

Subtraction is achieved by putting defenders into a position of disadvantage, i.e., they are either taken out of the game or left where they cannot take part in their defensive role any further (Johnson, 1993; Marks, 1998; Evert, 2001a).

To accomplish this the following needs to be achieved:

- the attacking backline must know how to position a key opponent to involve him or isolate him. This is usually achieved on the basis that an opponent will usually mark his opposite opponent directly, i.e., if the inside player wants to involve the outside defender, you need to drag that defender in by standing tight. If you want to keep the defender away from an inside striking area, it helps to stand wide and have the player come across to mark you;
- it is important to run at a defending player with the aim to commit him onto his inside or outside shoulder (Marks, 1998; Hickman, 1999);
- if you want to commit two tacklers, the ball carrier has to run at the defender one out. If the opposition are standing narrow you run at the outside shoulder to shut that defender off. If they are standing wide you run at the "one-out" player's inside shoulder thereby bringing the defender onto you (Evert, 2001a); and
- it is vital to be able to get tacklers to change their direction drastically, thereby momentarily stopping them in their tracks. When confronting your direct opposition, this becomes possible by slowing down and straightening or by stepping inside and then outside (Marks, 1998; Hickman, 1999).



Adapted from: Marks (1998).

Figure 18: Subtraction through committing two tacklers

2.3.4.7 Trailers

It is important to note that for an attack to be successful, the process must be completed through efficient and sufficient support play from the trailers. A trailer can be described as the players that are the 2nd line of support behind the ball carrier. These players are normally the blindside wing, fullback or 2nd phase forwards.

Effective support is based on an awareness that the player should be as committed to work off the ball as to any work that can be done with the ball (Marks, 1998). The emphasis for the trailer is that he is able to run to an unguarded spot and receive the ball before a defender can cover it.

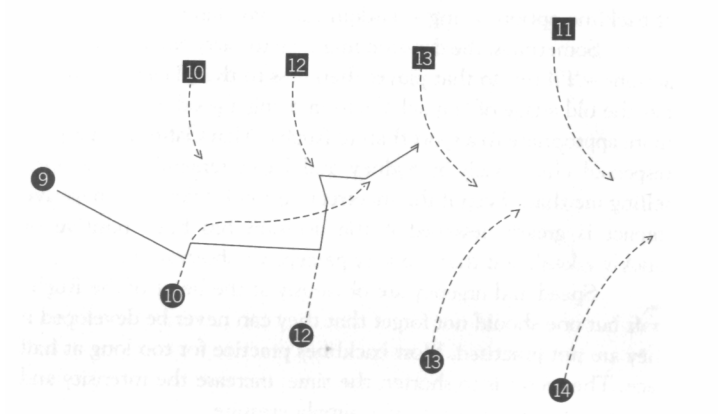
The term “ten man rugby” in backline attack means that there is a secondary use of players in attack, however to organise this properly the team really requires the support in a two wave situation involving starting and finishing trailers, the primary strikers going through the line and secondary supporters beating the cover defence.

This implies that all players should have the awareness of mind to search for any opportunity to run a trailing line. In attacking play there needs to be emphasis on two specific areas of support or trailer running lines:

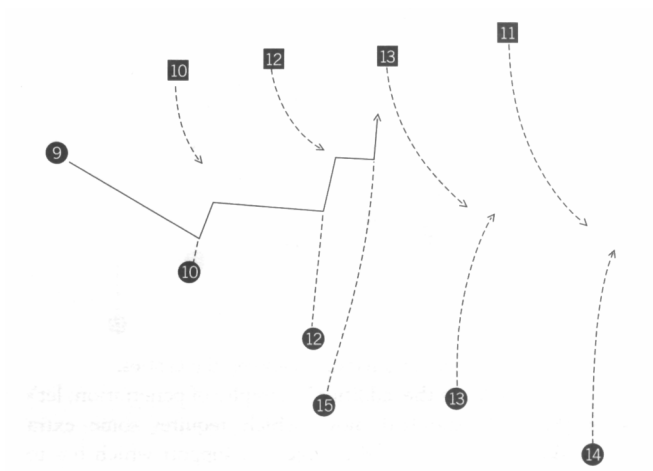
1. pre-possession; and
2. post-possession (Johnson, 1993; Robilliard, 1997; Shaw, 1998; Hickey, 1998; Marks, 1998; Evert, 2001a).

If this is optimally achieved it implies that there are two wave trailing situations involving starting and finishing trailers. Therefore the primary attackers attack through the line in search of a linebreak, and the secondary supporters work through to support the strike and to be in a position to be able to beat the cover defence.

(a)



(b)



Adapted from: Marks (1998).

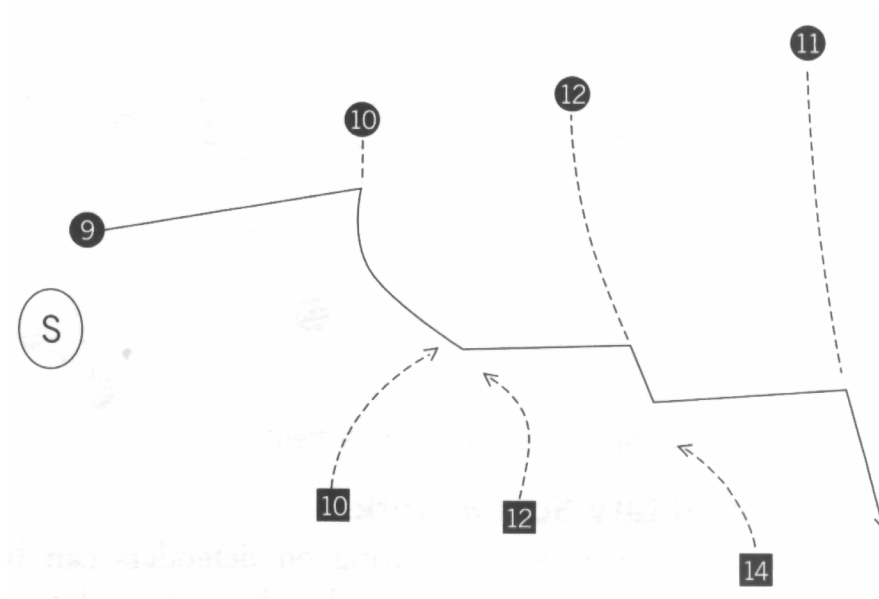
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4. post-possession (Johnson, 1993; Robilliard, 1997; Shaw, 1998; Hickey, 1998; Marks, 1998; Evert, 2001a).

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