

## CHAPTER 4

### 4.1 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 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> 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; Walker, 2000; 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.

## **4.2 THE PILLARS OF DEFENCE**

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

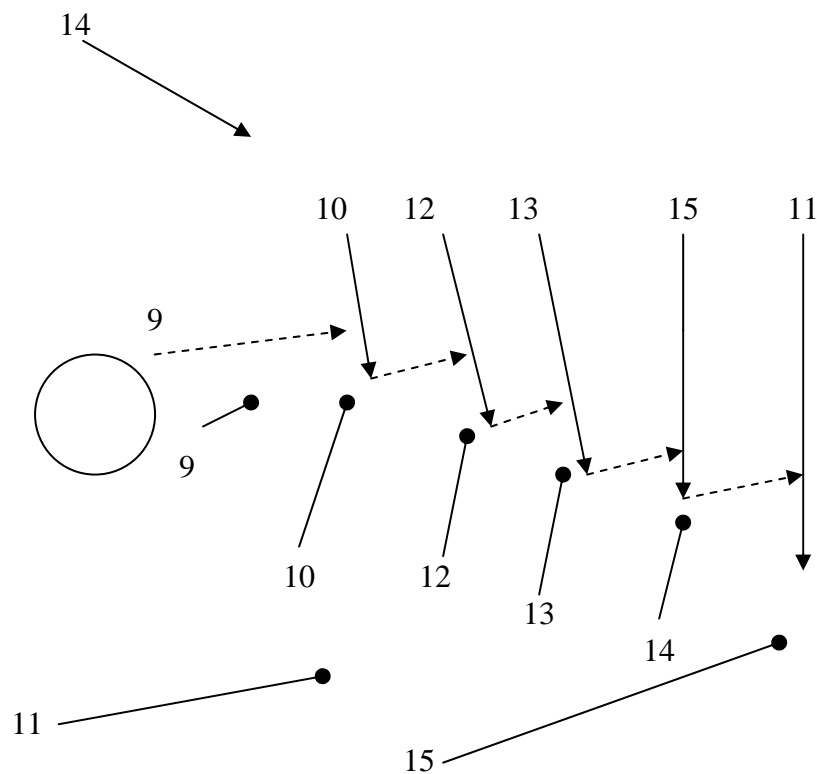
1. defensive organisation;
2. the defensive shape;
3. the defensive zones;
4. defensive spacing;
5. the execution line;
6. attitude (Kiss, 2002);
7. drift defence as a concept;
8. second phase defence; and
9. third and subsequent phase defence (McFarland, 2005a).

### **4.2.1 Defensive Organization**

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

#### 4.2.1.1 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. 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 (Greenwood, 2003). 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 shift across as needed (Pool, 1992; Williams *et al.*, 1994; Robilliard, 1997; Pool, 1997; Marks, 1998; Walker, 2000).

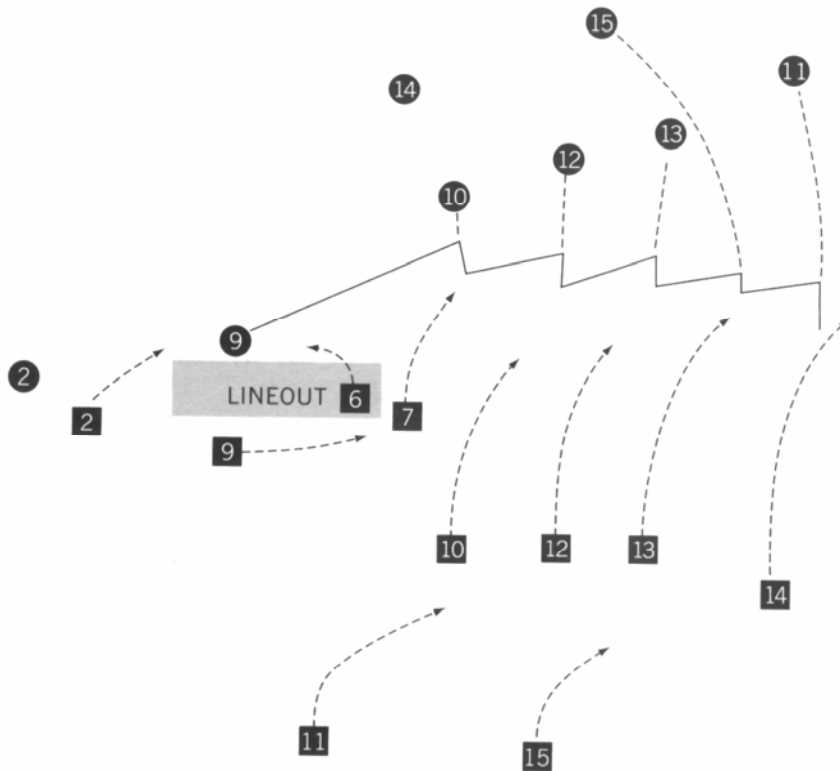


(Adapted from: Robilliard, 1997)

**Figure 4.1:** Man-to-Man overlap defense from a scrum

#### 4.2.1.2 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; Walker, 2000).



(Adapted from: Marks, 1998)

**Figure 4.2:** 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; Barker, 2003).

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; Tranent, 2003).

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; Walker, 2000; Greenwood, 2004).

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 (Greenwood, 2003).

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).

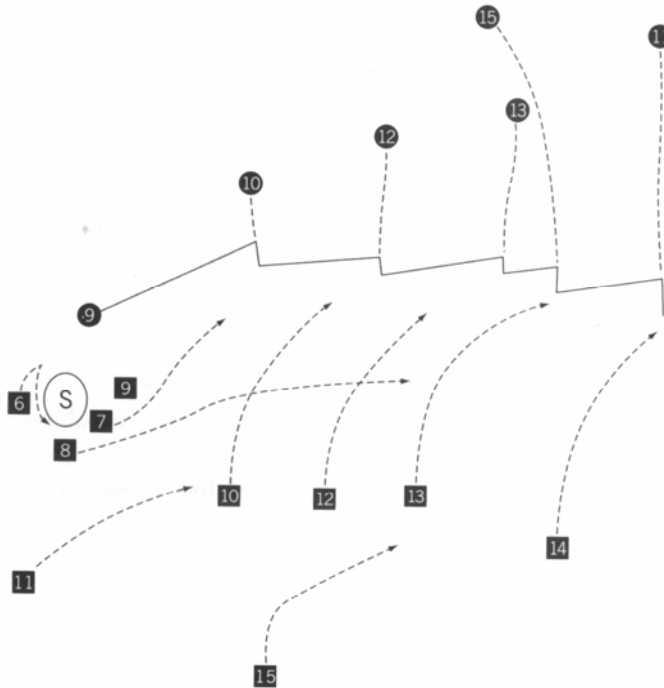
The most important factor in the defender's role is the running path. This can only be optimally executed by anticipating the two versus one situation. If this situation arises it can be managed in the following way:

- 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).

#### **4.2.1.3 One-Out Defense**

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; Walker, 2000; 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; Greenwood, 2004).



(Adapted from: Robilliard, 1997)

**Figure 4.3:** 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; Greenwood, 2003).

- 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.

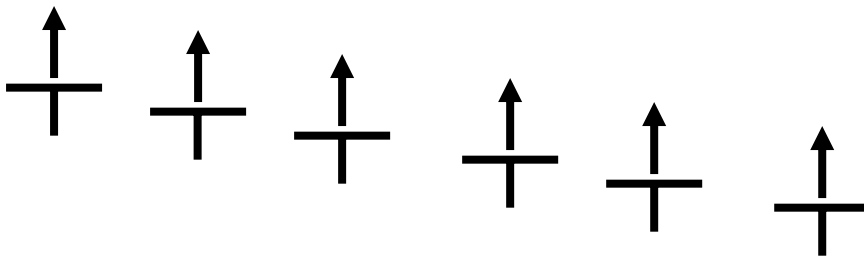
#### **4.2.2 The Defensive Shape**

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, McFarland, 2005a; McFarland, 2005b; Gold, 2005).

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. 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 (Anderson, 2000; McFarland, 2005a; Gold, 2005). 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 line breaks taking place in this fashion, the defensive line must be maintained and there has to be a commitment to keeping the “shape”.



**Figure 4.4:** Defensive shape

### 4.2.3. 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; McFarland, 2005a; Gold, 2005).

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. 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, McFarland, 2005a; Gold, 2005).

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; Hedger, 2002; Kiss, 2002; McFarland, 2005a).

#### **4.2.4. 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, 2005b; Gold, 2005).

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. 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”. 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 (Larder, 1992; Anderson, 2000; Kiss, 2002; Hedger, 2002, McFarland, 2005a; Gold, 2005).

#### **4.2.5. 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. 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” (Barnes & Swain, 2002; Kiss, 2002; Hedger, 2002; Gold, 2005; McFarland, 2005a).

By achieving this 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, McFarland, 2005a; Gold, 2005).

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, 2005b).

#### **4.2.6. 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; Weinberg & Gould 2003; Millard, 2005).

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 2<sup>nd</sup> and subsequent phases. It must be noted that an attacking team will continue probing until either there is a line break or an extra man on the outside has been created.

#### **4.2.7. Drift Defense 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. 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 would 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 team-mates 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, 2005b).

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, Greenwood, 2003).

#### **4.2.8. Second Phase Defense**

The key to defence at 2<sup>nd</sup> 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, 2005b).

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. 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; Muggleton, 2001; Kiss, 2002; McFarland, 2005a; McFarland, 2005b; Gold, 2005).

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. 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. 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; Anderson, 2000; Evert, 2001a; Muggleton, 2001; Kiss, 2002; Hedger, 2002; McFarland, 2005b).

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. 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. 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. 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 2<sup>nd</sup> wave of defenders who are moving across the field (Marks, 1998; Anderson, 2000; Muggleton, 2001; Kiss, 2002; McFarland, 2005a ; McFarland, 2005b).

#### **4.2.9. Third and Subsequent Phase Defense**

When 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 there 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, Greenwood, 2004, McFarland, 2005a).



#### 4.2.10 Rush defence as a concept

Rush defence has been christened “four up”, “rush”, “umbrella”, “press”, “banana”, as well as “up and in” defensive system. Rush defence is an aggressive system, with the whole point being to get the defensive player into a more offensive position than the attacking player. There are four fundamental principles of this defensive system, namely;

1. speed off the line;
2. the alignment of each defender;
3. focus on the ball; and
4. maintenance of effective width. (Gold, 2005, McFarland, 2005a)

The following key will be used for the following diagrams:



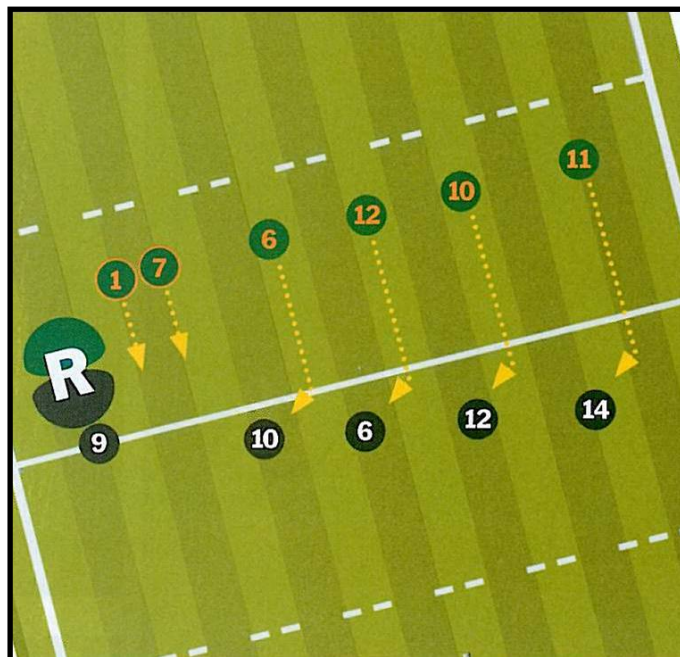
(Adapted from Gold, 2005)

**Figure 4.5:** Key for Drift defence diagrams

#### 4.2.10.1 Speed off the line

Not everyone is familiar with this aspect of defence. The Springboks are very good at this, so much so that many Australian and New Zealand commentators, as well as the coaches, think they are offside. Gold (2005) does not believe this is so, as in his opinion they are just anxious and enthusiastic to make the hit, and work very hard at getting off the line quickly. Their aim is to burst forward at the call of ‘press’ which indicates that the defenders are moving towards the attacking teams ball carriers.

Refer to Figure 4.6 for a basic annotation of the defensive system.



(Adapted from Gold, 2005)

**Figure 4.6:** Basic annotation of the “Rush” defensive system

#### 4.2.10.2 The alignment of each defender

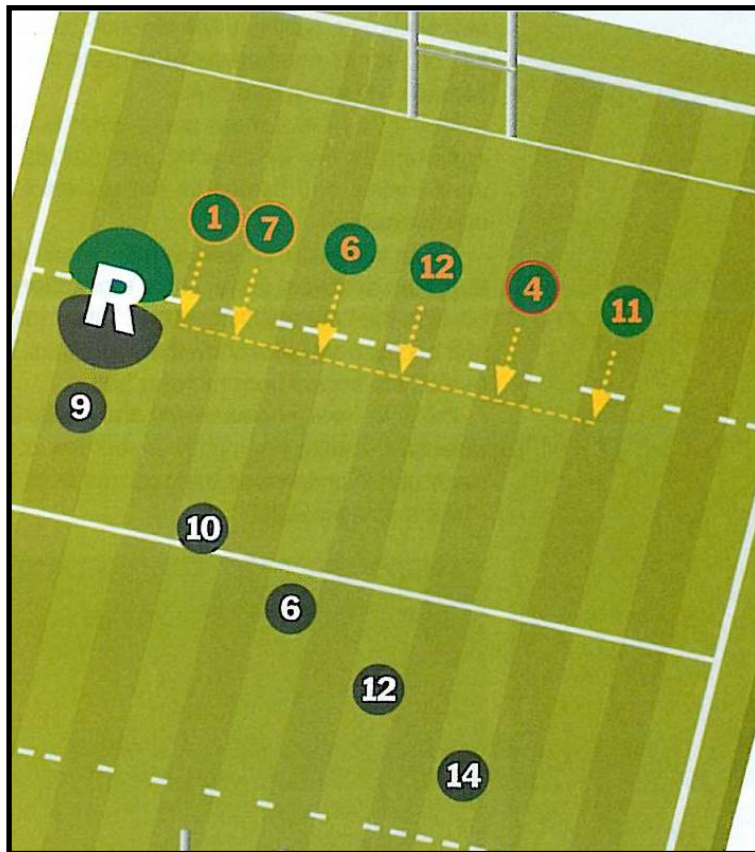
This principle demands that all the defenders keep their alignment when they begin to press off the line as described above. The key here is that the whole defensive line needs to move up in a line, i.e., at the speed of the slowest man see, Figure 4.7. After a number of phases, it is perfectly feasible for; say a prop or a lock to be in the line, and thus an awareness of who the slowest man is, is crucial (Gold, 2005; McFarland, 2005a).

It is completely useless if a defender or a few defenders are ahead in their eagerness to make the tackle, because that creates holes that the attacking team can exploit. All the defenders have to concentrate intensely, because going up slightly out of alignment due to carelessness or fatigue late in the game can undo 70 or 75 minutes of good defensive work.

A player shooting up out of alignment creates a dogleg-type effect, illustrated in Figure 4.7, which can be exploited by an attacker running the correct line. In this scenario, the right wing (14) can take a simple inside ball from the attacking flyhalf (10) and the defending flank (7) cannot reach him because the defending flyhalf (10) has shot out of line and left too big a space for him to cover.

Refer again to Figure 4.6. Note that the defenders (with the exception of the defenders close to the ruck, who can be called guard all position themselves outside of the attacker opposite. This is crucial and is why the defence is sometimes referred to as ‘up and in’. It’s not an entirely accurate description, because the players are not unthinking robots (Gold, 2005, McFarland, 2005a).

When the situation calls for it, see Figure 4.12, the inside defenders drift once the danger to their channel has been eliminated by a pass. On the whole, however, the defenders press up and then in on the attacker opposite. The determining factor as to whether you drift or ‘hit in’ is the depth that the attacking team keep (Gold, 2005, McFarland, 2005a).



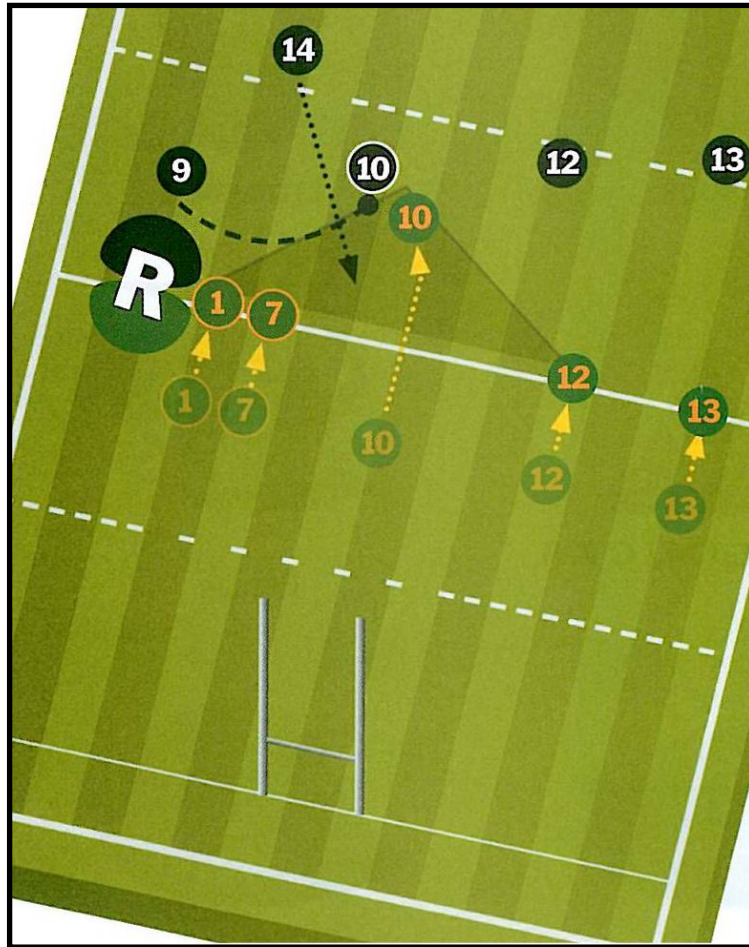
(Adapted from Gold, 2005)

**Figure 4.7:** Basic annotation of the “Rush” defensive system focussing on the effective alignment of each defender

### 4.2.10.3 Focus on the ball

The key to this defence is occupying space and cutting down options. This can be done only if the defence focuses on the ball and not the man. It is important to concentrate on the ball carrier as the key focus area (Gold, 2005, McFarland, 2005a).

Players, who are really adept at this, go in and take an option away from the ball carrier. The opposition looks to make a pass, say 13 to the wing, and often the players with a good “feel” for this type of defensive system will already occupied the space next to the wing to prevent that. Gold (2005) stresses here that the point is not to go for the intercept, but to occupy the space and deny the opponent the option (Gold, 2005, McFarland, 2005a).

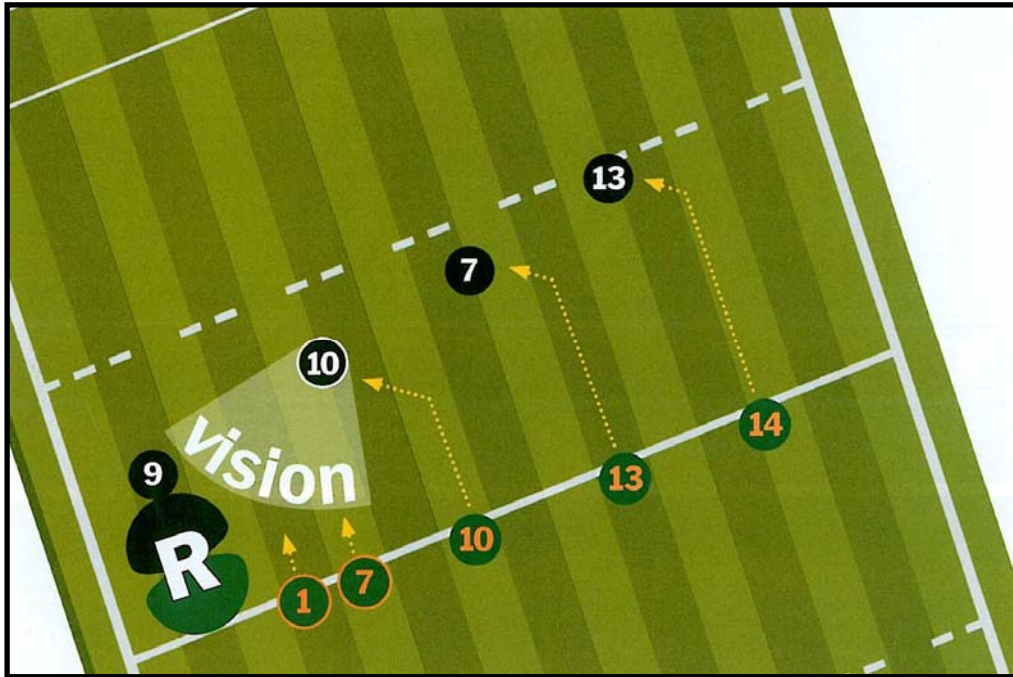


(Adapted from Gold, 2005)

**Figure 4.8:** Basic annotation of the “Rush” defensive system focussing on the ball

#### 4.2.10.4 Maintenance of effective width

The fourth principle demands that each defender keeps his width. This means that he must ensure he remains on his opponent’s outside. If you are attacking the first receiver, for example the flyhalf, the focus is obviously on the ball. Therefore: your focus is on the ball, and your body and direction of sight is directed towards the passer (Gold, 2005, McFarland, 2005a), see Figure 4.9 above.



(Adapted from Gold, 2005)

**Figure 4.9:** Basic annotation of the “Rush” defensive system indicating effective width

The defender now has a blind spot on his outside, and if there is a defender aggressively communicating and the defender can't be seen, it can be unbelievably intimidating for the ball carrier. That's why this defensive system is so successful: the complete focus of the attacking player is on the ball, and when the defender comes from your blind side, you can't play rugby (Gold, 2005).