CHAPTER 5

5.1 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 line break 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 (Craven, 1966; Craven, 1970; Williams *et al.*, 1994; Bond, 2000; Ross, 2001, Southwell, 2002; Greenwood, 2003).

If one were to ask what seems to be the enigma concerning attacking play, the term "breaking the wall" and "achieving a line break" would come up as the most highlighted topic of discussion (Townsend, 2000; Hale & Collins, 2002).

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; Hill, 2002).

Coaches have looked at aspects such as individual brilliance, 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 (Hale & Collins, 2002).

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.

5.1.1 Attacking Teams 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.

5.1.2 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 (Craven, 1966, Craven, 1970; Johnson, 1993; Bayly, 2001, Greenwood, 2004); 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, Greenwood, 2004).

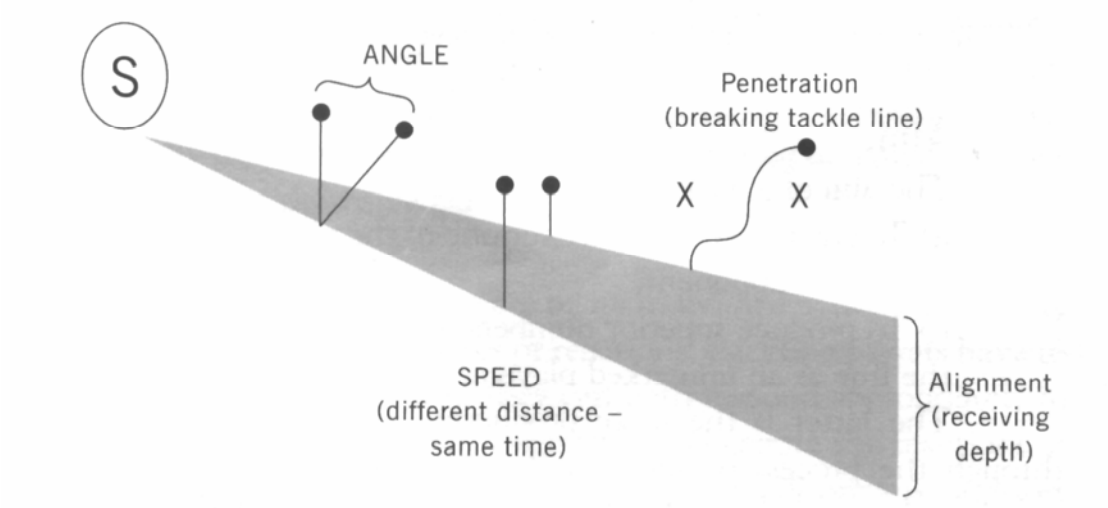
5.1.3 The Key Factors associated with Backline Play

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, Greenwood, 2003).

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; Hunter, 2003).

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



(Adapted from: Marks, 1998)

Figure 5.1: 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.

5.1.4 Attacking Backline Play Philosophy

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

1. The attacking team's creators;
2. the alignment of the attacking backline from the facet;
3. the attacking backline's attacking width;
4. the attacking backline's change in initial starting position;
5. the attacking backline's angles of running;
6. the attacking backline's decoy runners;

7. the attacking backline's manipulation of the opposition through numbers;
8. the attacking backline's manipulation of the opposition through addition;
9. the attacking backline's manipulation of the opposition through subtraction;
10. the attacking backline's striker;
11. the attacking backline's timing of the movement of the attack;
12. the attacking backline's strike on the defensive line;
13. the striker's speed versus quickness;
14. speed concepts specific to rugby;
15. the striker's running speed;
16. the attacking backline's passing speed;
17. the attacking backline's thought speed;
18. the attacking backline's strike area;
19. the attacking backline's trailing support runners;
20. the attacking backline's first wave of support runners;
21. the attacking backline's second wave of support runners;
22. the striker's angle of run after a successful strike has been made;
23. the attacking team's cleaning units;
24. the attacking team's communication; and
25. the attacking team's decision-making (Greenwood, 1993; Bayly, 2001; Hedger, 2002; White, 2003; Greenwood, 2004).

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.

5.2 THE ATTACKING BACKLINE'S CREATORS

These are the ball carriers who distribute the ball to the strikers and can be seen as the initiators of any backline attack thus their importance is highlighted (Pool, 1997; Nucifora, 1999; Greenwood, 2003).

5.3 THE ALIGNMENT OF THE ATTACKING BACKLINE FROM THE FACET

With defence becoming more organised on set and phase play, it often occurs that a defending team will commit limited numbers to the ruck or maul and stack a straight line defence across the field, which often results in the defenders outnumbering the attackers (Townsend, 2000). This makes the transference of the ball very difficult.

As an attacking strategy against an opposition using such a defensive system, the alignment should be set so that the advantage line can be crossed and thus the attack can move up the field longitudinally, i.e., up the channel. This should be done until the lateral defence has been drawn in and has lost its defensive alignment (Hunter, 2003).

Once this has been done then the option can be taken to move the ball laterally to space where the attackers have numbers or continue up the channel if it is not well defended (Bird, 1998; Emtage, 2001).

It is important to note that the channel to strike into may vary and should be directed to areas where the defence is weakest and this is not necessarily close to the ruck or maul. According to where the strike is planned will influence the alignment of the attacking team. For explanation, the attacking channels in which the strike is likely to take place will be defined as follows, thus making further discussion easier:

i. channel 1 - Between the flyhalf and the facet on the inside;
ii. channel 2 - Between the inside centre and the flyhalf;
iii. channel 3 - Between the outside centre and the inside centre; and
iv. channel 4 - The area outside the outside centre.

The question of whether a backline should be aligned “flat or steep” and “shallow or deep” is dependant on the channel the strike is to be executed in. If the strike is to take place in channel 1 or 2, the backline can take the ball flat as the strike is to take place on the contact line and the ball does not need to be passed a long way before the strike will be made (Southwell, 2002).

If an attacking unit attacks a "flat-line" defensive team, it can be assumed that the strike is going to take place in these two channels. When faced with this there are certain options available to the attacking team in order to "outsmart" the defenders. The concept of "overloading the defenders with attackers" is the key to a successful attack when confronted with a "flat-line" defensive line (Hill, 2002).

This is achieved by using the ball carrier and multiple runners to attack a defender one or two out from the ball's current position. The ball carrier and runner needs to put the defender in two minds covering two or three runners. This is done by running at the gap to draw the defender out of position, overloading the situation with two additional runners holding their line or angling in towards another gap (Parore, 1997; Emtage, 2001; Greenwood, 2004).

The key to this approach being successful is the need for the ball carrier to have two optional off-load options and having the ability to decide at or after the point of impact which option is to be taken. The following can be seen as possible examples:

Option 1:

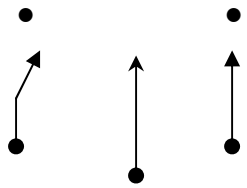


Figure 5.2: Attacker pulling the first defender out of alignment while the second defender marks his opposite attacker running at him

In this example the attacker is pulling the first defender out of alignment while the second defender is being fixed by his opposite attacker who is running straight at him. The second defender is therefore being "attacked" because he has two players to cover, i.e., his own attacker, or the striker who is running in the centre. The ball carrier has thus various offload options available to him depending on the reactions of the defender.

Option 2:

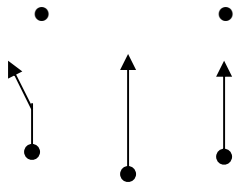


Figure 5.3: Attacker being pulled away from his defensive channel

In this example the attacker is pulling the defender away from his channel. The outside player holds his line to fix the second defender. The ball carrier squares up his defender then goes on the inside path using advantageous foot speed and tempo, executes a hit and spin off, or drive through into the defender before offloading to the striker or the second attacker depending on how the defenders react. There are two further variations, which can be used in order to further "overload" the defenders:

1. the attacking unit can either execute a "block" or "one-out" striker to move the second defender out of their alignment; or
2. the third man out can run at the gap with the striker holding back and striking through a stream.

These two variations give the ball carrier two or three offload options, which make defending an arduous task.

The final option is that of attacking the third man out. This is slightly more complex when viewed in the line of the flat-line defence of the opposition. What is attempted to be achieved is the ball carrier fixing his defender then running hard at the inside shoulder of the next defender out. The two outside attackers hold their line but adjust their rate of attack to change their alignment, e.g., the third receiver comes in faster than the second receiver.

Option 3:

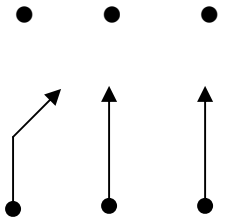


Figure 5.4: Outside attackers hold their line but adjust their rate of advance

The third defender is faced with the decision of which of the two attackers he is going to take which makes his defensive ability extremely difficult. The ball carrier has offload options to either the second or third attackers who are both approaching at different rates. Depending on whether the offload occurs before or after impact, or on how the defender reacts to what is taking place ahead of him, will determine which offload option will be taken. This type of attack close to the facet brings forth the next concept to be explained which is a strike near to the facet. The key to attacks close in is to "overload" the defenders with attacking options. For this to be achieved the attack has to be "compressed". A "compressed attack" implies that there is a concentration of attackers in a condensed area. What this achieves is that the attacking team knows where the strike is to take place and therefore throws all possible attackers into that strike area so to "force" the line break (Muggleton, 2001).

The second aspect of alignment is that of an "expanded attack". This form of attack occurs when strikes take place further down the attacking line. The key to its success is the opening up of a space through which a strike can occur. This is achieved by keeping defenders busy on the inside of the strike zone, and on the outside of the strike zone. The concepts of "one-out" strikers, "one-out" decoys and "one-out" trailers all work together to make this possible. The way that these "attackers" all interlink added to the organised width to create the necessary illusion that will make the line break possible, all play a part in the success of an expanded attacking method.

If the strike is to take place further out in channel 3 or 4, a steeper alignment will be needed as the ball will need more time to reach its destination. The advantage that can

be created by an attacking backline aligning in a "crocodile teeth" manner holds even more advantages when the attack is executed. The reason for this is that it makes nomination of the attacking player to be defended difficult. Added to this, the fact that a backline that is viewed as marked with defenders allocated is all of a sudden different after the defender's attention has been drawn away by the focus being on the preceding facet accompanied by the change in the initial starting position makes the defensive situation difficult to evaluate. We will attempt to incorporate the concepts of "compressed" and "expanded" attacking alignment to our attacking organisation and thereafter evaluate its influence. 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 (Roberton & Halverson, 1998), and independent walking (Clark *et al.*, 1988).

> *"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.

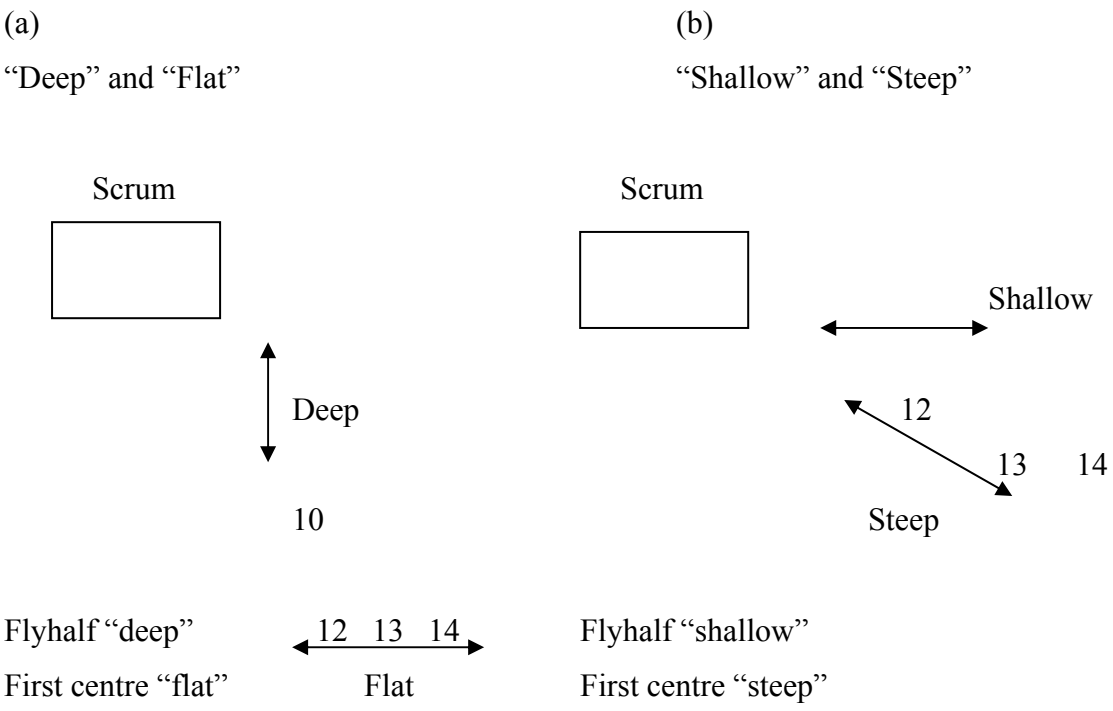
- An attacking backline will aim to make use of a flat or steep, / shallow or deep line of alignment concept, using angles of running lines with trailers, in order to create gaps in the defensive line, or to force the opposition into making side on tackles, from which the team in possession can offload 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, 1999).

Honan (1999), 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 Back play", 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, 1999):



(Adapted from: Giles, 2000)

Figure 5.5: "Deep" and "Flat" alignment versus "Shallow" and "Steep" alignment

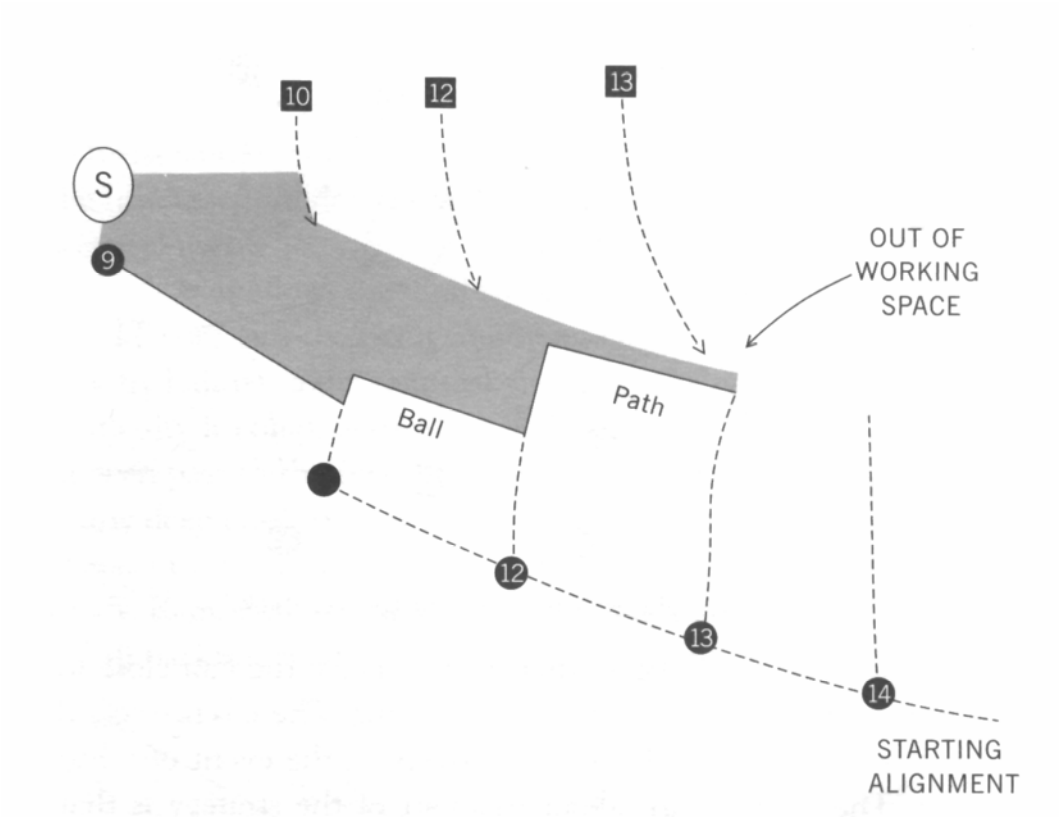
A "steep" alignment will not often be successful due to the attacking backline being further away from the advantage line and that with each pass the attacking team moves further away. There is also the danger that when contact is made it takes place behind the advantage line thereby making it difficult 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, 1999).

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.



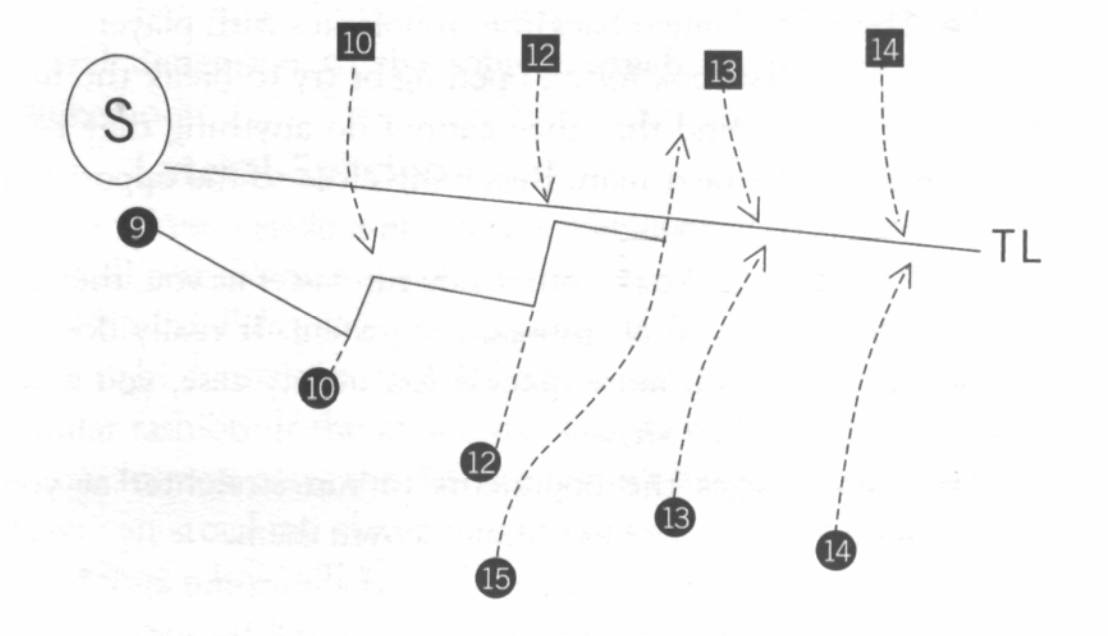
(Adapted from: Marks, 1998)

Figure 5.6: 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 (Levy & Palin, 1993).



(Adapted from: Marks, 1998)

Figure 5.7: The way to hit a space in attacking play

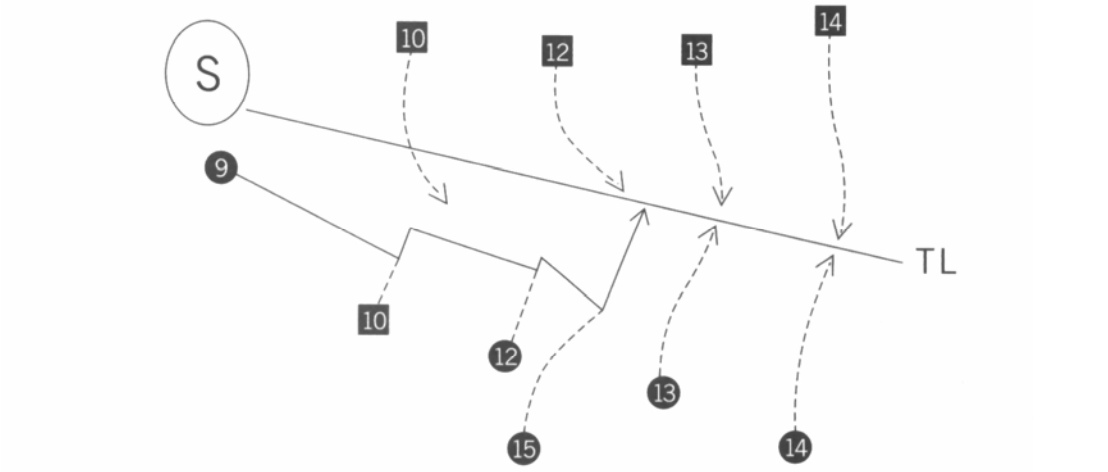
A simple way to determine the working space required and the angle of the ball transference can be to determine the number of passes involved in transferring the ball to the "striking" player in any pre-planned sequence, and then adjust the depth so this can be achieved with the striker receiving the 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; Unknown Author, 2005c).

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 5.8: 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. 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; McFarland, 2005a).

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

- if a line break 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 line breaks (Smith, 2001; Hill, 2002; Greenwood, 2004).

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).

5.4 THE ATTACKING BACKLINE'S 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; Southwell, 2002; Unknown Author, 2005c).

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!". 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 and 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. 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; Hill, 2002).

The inside centre must be deeper and wider:

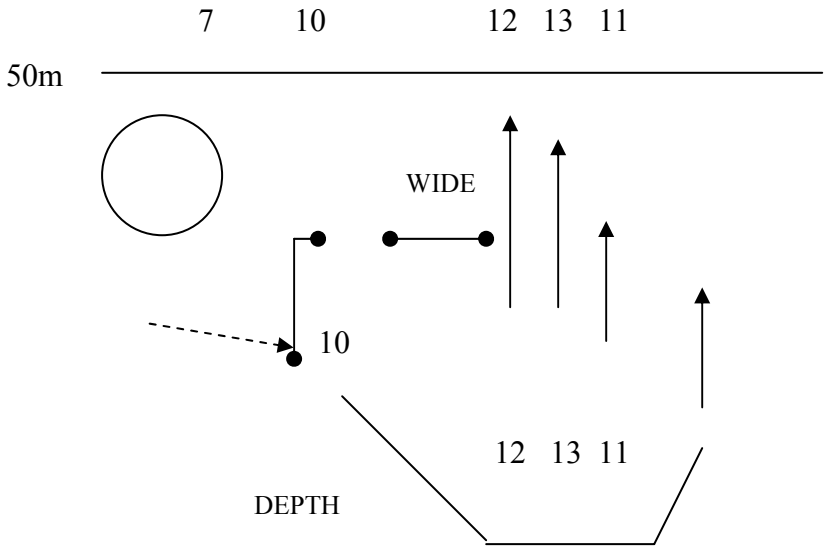
- by being deeper the centre gives himself greater space to work in; and
- with the extra width he is able to take away the inside pressure of players attempting to drift across in defence (Hickman, 1999).

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 5.9: 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).

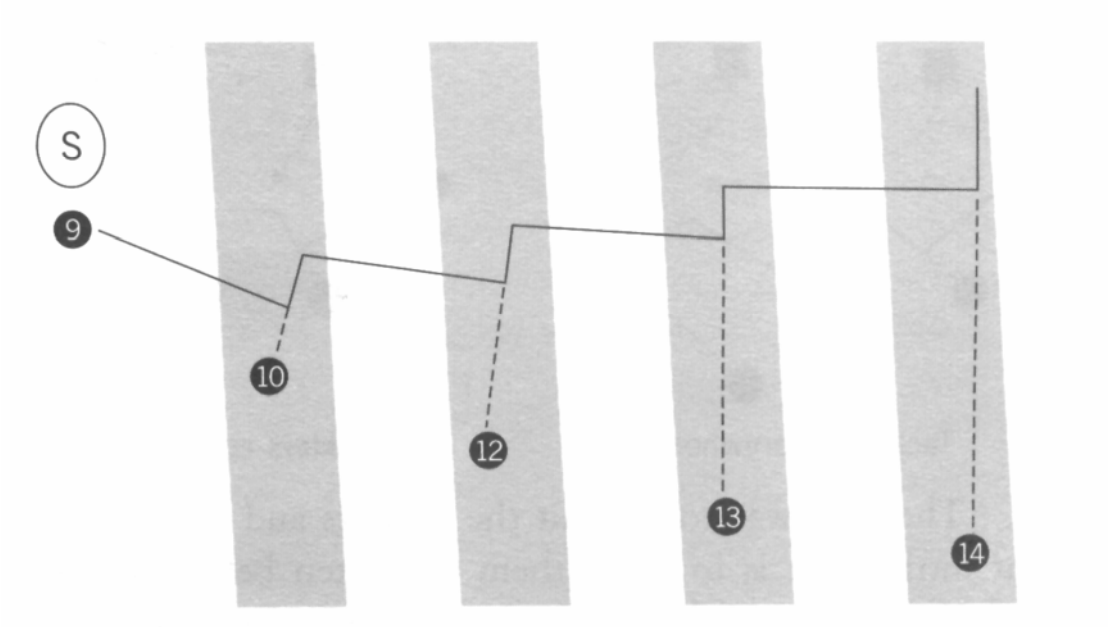
(a) (b)

(Adapted from: Ashton & Meier, 2002)

Figure 5.10: (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 5.11: Channel running in attacking play

5.5 THE ATTACKING BACKLINE'S CHANGE IN INITIAL STARTING POSITION

The key to catching the opposition unaware so that advantage can be taken of their lack of attention on the field can be achieved by the whole attacking backline positioning quickly, and then, as the ball is entered into play, the whole attacking backline positions as a unit in a new position, i.e., either

a. two steps backwards – for a strike in a wider channel
b. two steps forwards – for a strike close to the facet
c. two steps to the left
d. two steps to the right.

} for an expanded or compressed attack

This change in initial starting position creates the following situation for the defending team if they are not at full wit and aware of what is happening in front of them. The opposition's defensive lines align themselves according to what they see in front of them. When the ball is entered into play, their attention focuses on the play that is taking place inside of them at that facet of play, i.e., the defenders attention is drawn to the result of the facet, this implies that if the ball is won by the attacking team, the defenders have to defend, however if the possession is won by the defending team through a turn-over at that facet, then the defenders will change to an attacking mode and react accordingly. The net result is therefore that if the attacking team can take advantage of the opposition's split second lack of concentration, and in this time align differently from their initial position, the opposition's defensive "zones" will be slightly out of sync and the defenders will be faced with an attacking backline that looks "different" to what it did a split second earlier. The following will be achieved:

5.5.1 By moving sideways before receiving the ball, it creates a situation where the defence's alignment is out of sync, due to them being too far inside their immediate defenders.

5.5.2 By being out of sync, there is extra space on the outside and it makes the preservation of this space easier if the attacking backline moves forward and "fixes" their immediate defenders.

5.5.3 Finally, the responsibility of the attacking team is limited to merely preserving and then making use of this space on the outside through optimal transference of the ball along the backline.

5.5.4 Defensively, it makes it increasingly difficult for the defenders, especially further out along the line. The reason for this is that because they are "caught" to close inside, when they press and move towards the attacking players, it is difficult for them to keep their shoulders square to the touchline in order to be in a good position to be able to execute the tackle.

5.5.5 Because the defenders suddenly feel "out of touch" of the attackers due to the extra space that is inside of them, it makes it difficult for the defenders to press, and then shift. He is forced to shift immediately as there is too much ground for him to make up and thus if he does press first, the attackers will move even more out of reach and there will be even more space on the outside. The defender thus becomes a chaser instead of being the one who

attacks the opposition's possession front on which is the optimal mindset of a defender.

5.5.6 This gives the attacking players the following advantages:

5.5.6.1 The defender's shift from the outset of the play, thus if the attacker runs forward "at" the defenders and attacks their defensive line, it is highly likely that the attacking unit will get over the advantage line.

5.5.6.2 It forces the defenders to turn their shoulders towards the touchline thus making them defensively vulnerable behind their back from any attacking scissors, or inside passes.

When defending they are not able to contest at the strike zone by making big hits or out muscling the attackers but are merely able to try and nullify it. The possibility of gaining a turnover or contesting at the resultant ruck is minimal thus the attackers are able to recycle quick possession which will put the defenders under further pressure at later phase play.

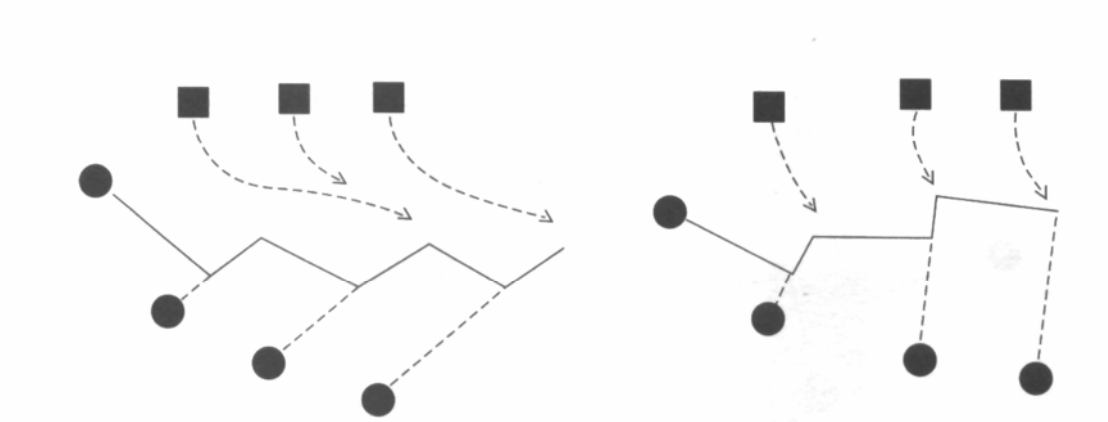
5.6 THE ATTACKING BACKLINE'S ANGLES OF RUNNING

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 (Southwell, 2002; Unknown Authors, 2004a).

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, Greenwood, 2003; Greenwood, 2004).

(a) (b)

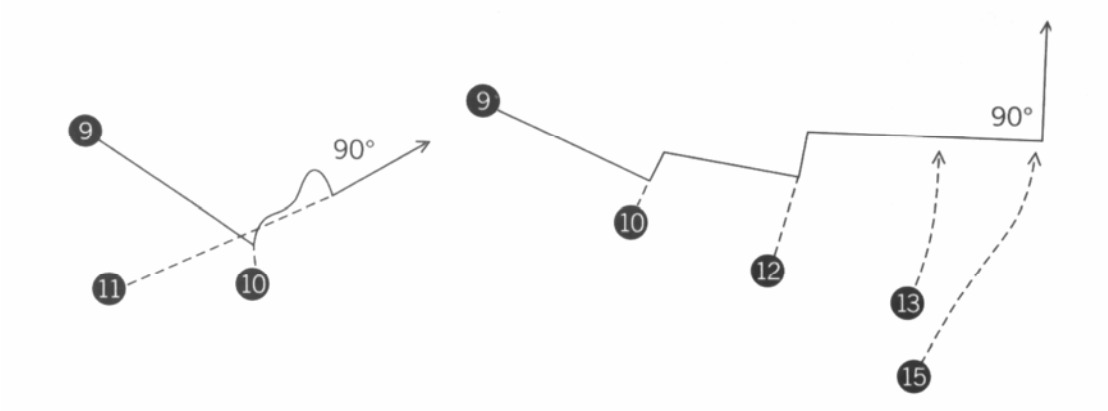


(Adapted from: Marks, 1998)

Figure 5.12: (a) Tacklers everywhere and (b) tacklers contained

When discussing the angle of the pass it is important to note the natural 90º 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).

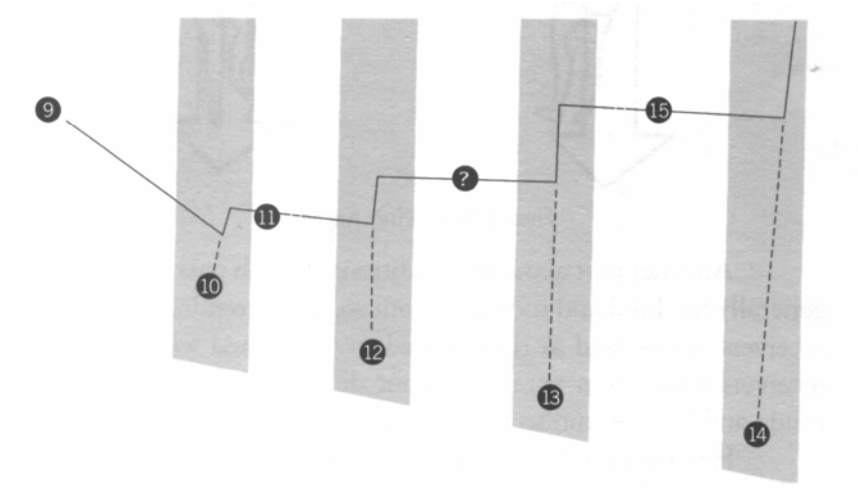
There are two examples of these two options. If a player is entering on a strike from the side of the field, (a blindside wing), he will usually need to receive the ball on a diagonal run. If the entry is more from behind then the player will want to run straight on to the pass to receive the ball and 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 5.13: 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 180º 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; Harrow, 2002).



(Adapted from: Marks, 1998)

Figure 5.14: 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; Harrow, 2002).

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.

5.7 THE ATTACKING BACKLINE'S DECOY RUNNERS

The role of the decoy runners is to create imaginary forces that manipulate the defenders into mechanically weak defensive positions. For this to be possible they should draw attention to themselves as impending "pressure" or "danger" players in order to be effective in committing opponents (Evert, 2001a).

There are two decoy ploys necessary if the play is to take place in the midfield channels. These decoy ploys take place inside and outside the strike zone. The decoy runner who needs to come in on the inside whose responsibility it is to "check" the inside defenders from the preceding facet have to decoy "strike" with absolute conviction. His responsibility is to "fix" the inside defenders and to delay their movement across the field so to "buy" attacking time and space in the midfield where the strike is to take place (Evert, 2001a).

This also fulfils the function of nullifying the defensive system of "one-out" defence which is executed by using a forward at the facet to mark and defend against the flyhalf thus allowing the flyhalf to defend the inside centre and so on.

If this is not achieved then there will be no possible overlap on the outside thus the attack will be difficult due to the attackers equalling the defenders. If the "striking" decoy is convincing enough so to commit the inside defender thus forcing the flyhalf to have to defend against flyhalf then there will be extra attackers on the outside.

The second decoy ploy takes place on the outside of the strike zone and has the following two advantages. The first is that it keeps the hole through which the strike is to go through open by committing the outside defenders in their defensive zones as there always remains the possibility that these decoy runners can receive the ball on an "overs" line thus their immediate defenders cannot afford to tackle in.

Secondly, it facilitates easier supporting running lines. Three situations can result from a strike with decoy ploys on the inside and the outside:

(i) There can be a successful and clean strike. If this occurs, then the supporting running line will create two supporters who are in a position to receive "finishing off" return passes to score the try.

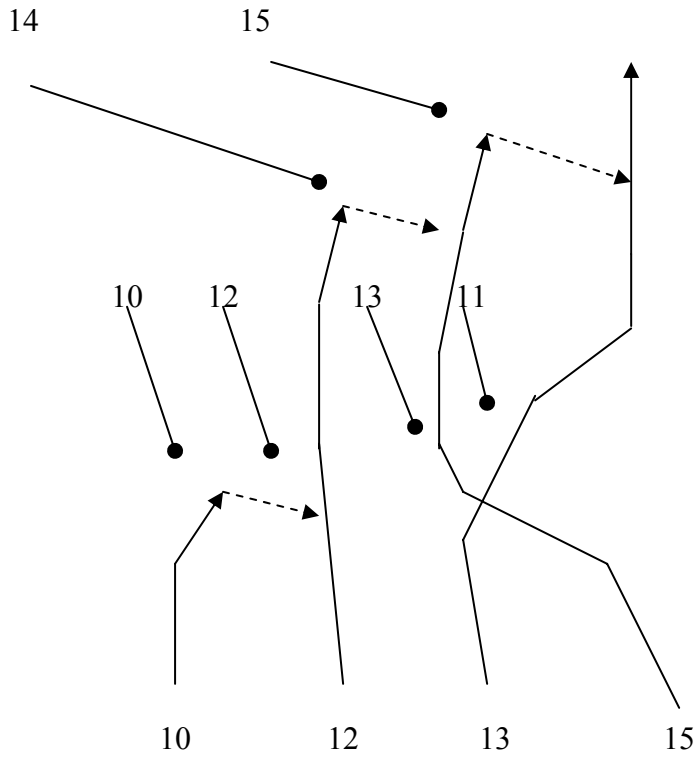


Figure 5.15: Indicating the use of an "O,I" decoy line and the support lines created through its use after a clean break has been achieved

(ii) If the strike takes place and the striker is momentarily stopped in the tackle, the supporting running lines of the decoy runners will result in there being a trailer who will be able to receive an offload and thus be able to continue the play that has been created.

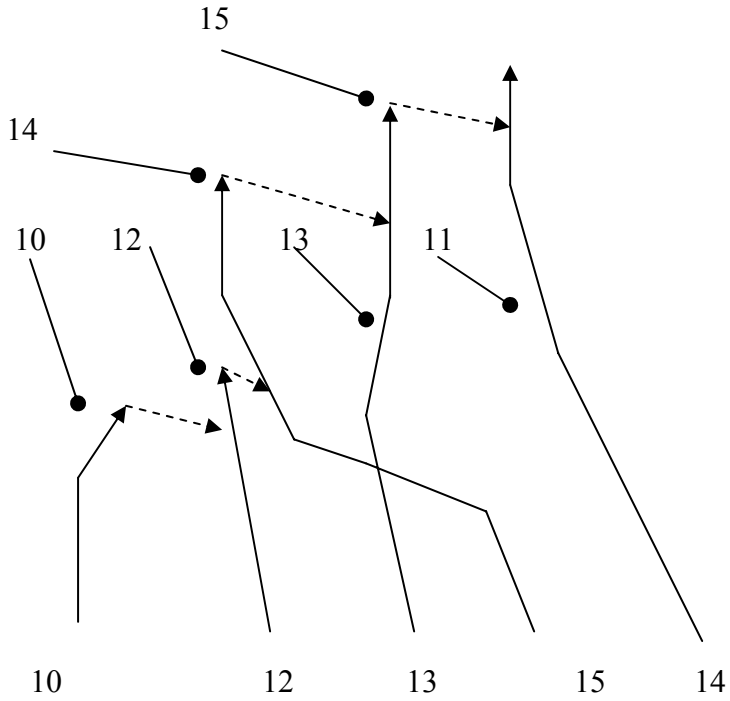


Figure 5.16: Indicating an "O,I" decoy line where the striker offloads to a trailer coming in, and the support lines created after the line break has been achieved.

(iii) There will also be one extra support runner on the outside that will be able to link up with the player who received the offload and be in a position to receive the "finishing off" return pass to score the try. If the attack is smothered and the play is halted, the support runner will be in a position to be the first cleaner, thus recycling the possession and creating another opportunity to launch a further attack on the oppositions defence is created.

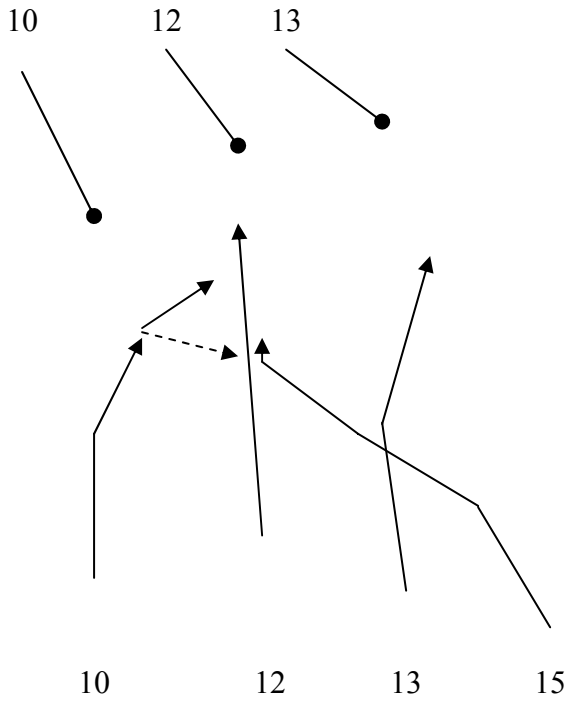


Figure 5.17: Indicating an "O,I" decoy line where the trailer becomes the primary cleaner with the previous ball carrier on the inside after an attempted line break has been unsuccessful**.**

With these examples in mind the fundamental role of force can be defined as the ability to change the state of motion of a body on which the force acts (Young, 1992).

If one was to look at Newton's first law of motion which states that: Every body continues in its own state of rest, or of uniform motion in a straight line, unless it is compelled to change that state by forces impressed on it, then it could be implied that if no net force acts on a body, the body either remains at rest or moves with constant velocity in a straight line (Cajori, 1934; Young, 1992).

In order to understand this link between Newton's first law and rugby, it is necessary to look at contact situations during play. In order for contact to take place, the striker and defender need to meet at the contact area. However, before this contact area develops, the players move towards each other with different velocities and from different angles. The situation preceding contact involves many forces acting on the players before, during and after contact. The use of these varying velocities and running lines creates imaginary forces that are exerted on the defenders in order to manipulate them. It is therefore the decoy runner's responsibility to create these forces, which can be achieved in the following way:

1. when these forces act on the defenders, it changes their state of motion. A player who is initially at rest will start to move. If the player is moving, a force in the opposite direction to the motion will cause the player to slow down or stop; and
2. if the decoy runner and ball carrier are able to exert a force on the defenders and manipulate them accordingly, their defensive line can be changed, thus creating conditions that could be conducive to a line break (Evert, 2001a; White, 2003).

The result is that if a defender has his line of defence, and a decoy runner together with the ball carrier's running line does not manipulate the defender, the defender will not be taken out of his defensive alignment and will be able to maintain his defensive line and will stop the attack. With the understanding that the use of decoy runners is vital to a successful line break the finer details of decoy runners can be explained. The first key aspect for decoy runners is the need to run angles that create an advantage (Honan, 1999). In order to create an advantage it implies that the attacking team is split up into attacking units. These units are:

- the ball carrier;
- the decoy runners accompanied by the trailers;
- the striker; and

- the trailers who become the support runners (Marks, 1998; Evert, 2001a; Hedger, 2002; Greenwood, 2004).

With the importance of the first receiver keeping his immediate defender and the sliding defenders coming across from the inside "fixed" already having been established, the next part of the attacking unit are the decoy runners working in tandem with the ball carrier and the striker. The decoy runner's objective is to keep defenders busy and focussed on them so that advantage can be taken of the space that can be opened up. The ideal is to keep more defenders busy with fewer attackers thus opening up spaces in the channel opposite to where their attention is. This contest of trying to keep more defenders busy with fewer attackers will result in the strikers having more trailers available behind them when they attack. The decoy runner should ensure that his movement is synchronised with the players on his inside (White, 2003).

If the strike is going to take place inside of them, then their aim should be to push and manipulate the defenders to keep their defensive width, i.e., they should stay wide.
This together with sufficient lateral space between the first receiver and the distributor will open up a space behind the distributors back in the second or third channel. The term "one-out decoy" is as appropriate as what "one-out striker" is and implies that the first receiver out from the distributor i.e., the second receiver, runs the line that should take the defenders on the outside of the distributor outwards, while the person outside of him, i.e., the third receiver runs an "unders" line which crosses with the second receiver and becomes the automatic trailer.

What this does is that it pools the defenders on the outside and then the strike takes place where they are not. If the strike is going to be wide in the fourth channel, then the aim of the decoy runners should be manipulate the defenders to "tackle in" so that the striker out wide comes into the strike "against the grain" and behind the defender's back.

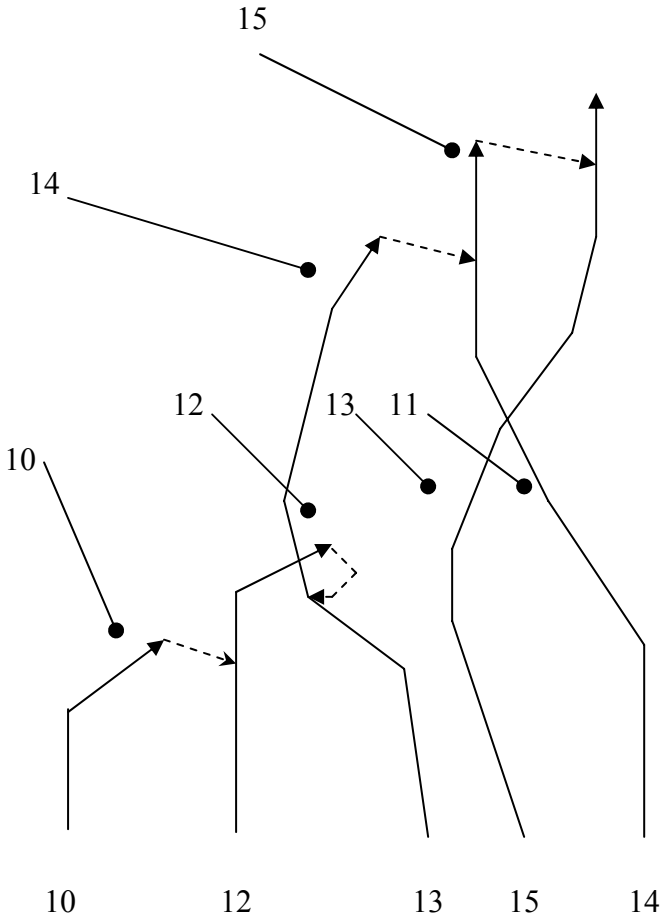


Figure 5.18: Indicating the concept of a "One-out" decoy line ending in a score

The success of the decoy runners is thus dependant on the following:

- the speed of movement of the defender and how this affects the speed of movement of the attackers;
- there has to be a marked acceleration on the part of the decoy runner in order to force the defender to speed up his movement. This must take place just as the striker is to come in on the strike. If this is achieved, the strike is more likely to be successful. If it is not achieved the defender may be able to realign himself and get himself into a position to make the tackle; and
- the centre of mass of the defender, which should be manipulated by the decoy runners to have a mechanical advantage for the striker. This can be achieved by the optimal use of the angle from which the decoy enters the strike zone. The

defender must be taken past the point of no return for the striker to be able to play into an area that is defensively weak (Evert, 2001a, White, 2003).

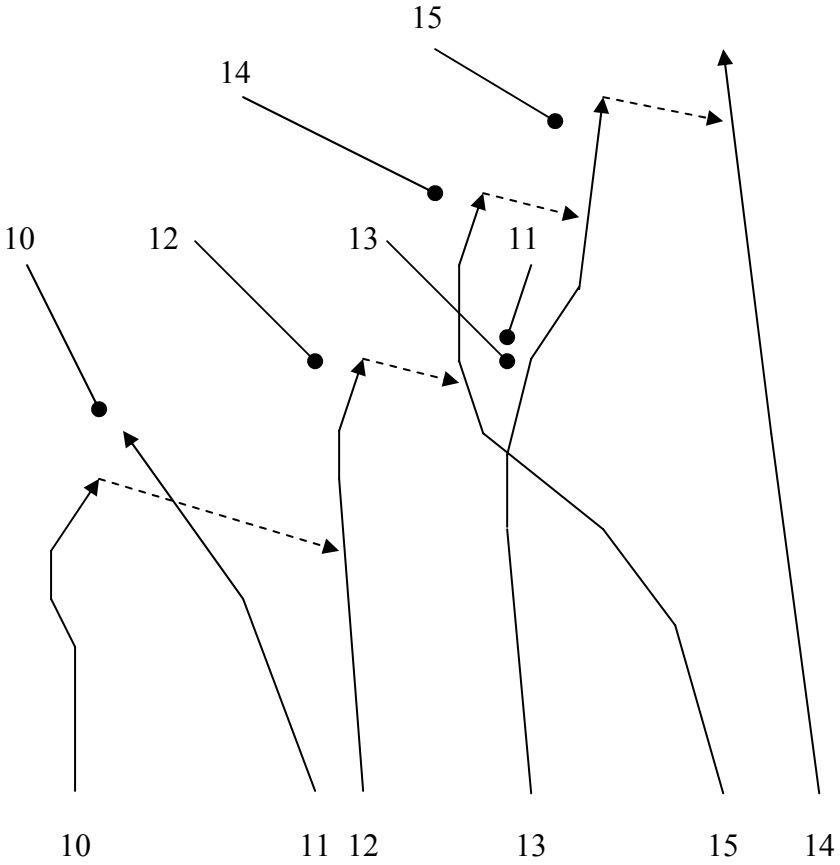


Figure 5.19: Indicating a decoy runner on the inside accompanied by a "One-out" decoy on the outside with the resultant trailing lines that are created

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, White, 2003).

5.8 THE ATTACKING BACKLINE'S 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, Greenwood, 2003).

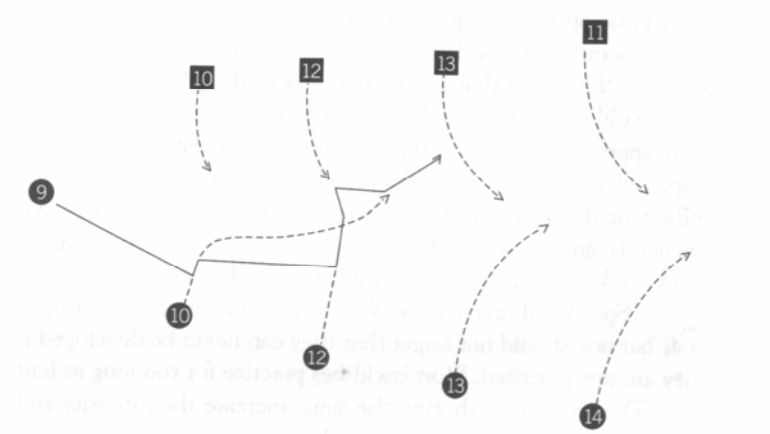
5.9 THE ATTACKING BACKLINE'S MANIPULATION OF THE OPPOSITION THROUGH ADDITION

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, 1999);
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)



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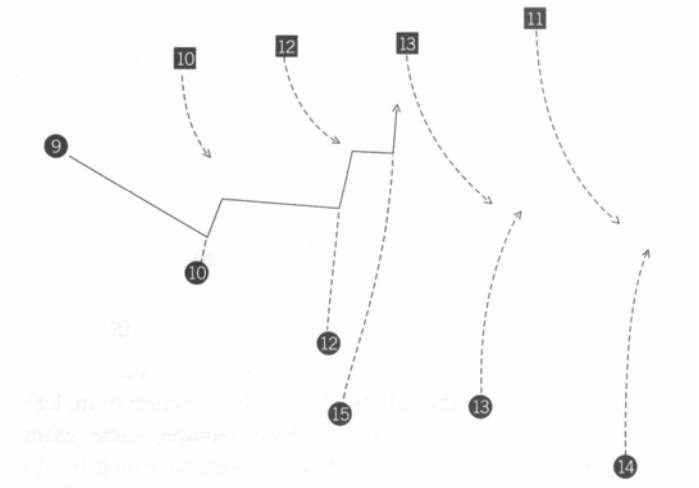


(Adapted from: Marks, 1998)

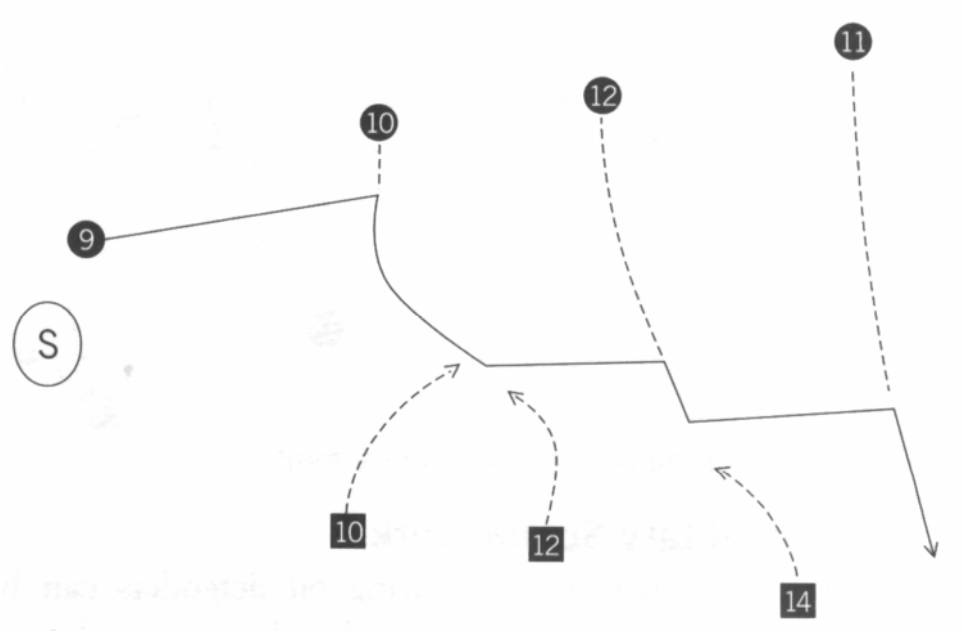
Figure 5.20: (a) Addition through a circle ball.
(b) Addition through an extra player entering the line

5.10 THE ATTACKING BACKLINE'S MANIPULATION OF THE OPPOSITION THROUGH 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 5.21: Subtraction through committing two tacklers

5.11 THE ATTACKING BACKLINE'S STRIKER

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).

All these aspects are vital in the attacking team's 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

5.12 THE ATTACKING BACKLINE'S TIMING OF THE MOVEMENT OF THE ATTACK

The success of any attacking play is dependant on variations in speed and movement through the different phases of the execution of the attacking strike. With the previous aspects in place, the key aspect is that the attacking backline should start moving as the scrumhalf touches the ball (Honan, 1999, Bond, 2000; Greenwood, 2004).

It is not necessary that this movement should be fast, the key is to move comfortably with the ability to be able to accelerate rapidly or decelerate as appropriate when required. This movement before the ball is passed makes the nomination and execution of the tackle by the defenders difficult (Robilliard, 1992) and begins the process of overloading the defenders with defensive options (Evert, 2001a).

It also gives the attacking players the necessary initial forward movement which will keep the defensive team on their toes as they cannot afford to just rush in on the attackers and will need to hold back to see what will transpire in the attack before executing their defensive action. There is the also the added advantage that the attacking team will be able to get over the advantage line with greater ease as the initial movement is always forward (Honan, 1999; Evert, 2001a; Hedger, 2002; Barker, 2003).

The second aspect of the timing of the movement in the attack is the change of pace during the execution of the attacking play. Each player within the unit has the responsibility to vary and adjust his speed of movement during the whole development of the attack as is appropriate in order to either catch the defenders unaware, or to surprise the defenders with unanticipated variations in pace and movement (Evert, 2001a). These variations of movement take place in the following stages of the attack:

5.12.1 The initial starting position of the first receiver.

This involves the sideways movement which needs to be made subtly so as not to draw attention to this movement and thus to catch the defenders unaware (Evert, 2001a).

5.12.2 The alignment of the attacking unit from the facet.

The key to effectively catching the defenders unaware so that they do not know what to expect from the attacking unit can also be instituted in the alignment of the attacking players. This involves the concepts of "compressed" and "expanded" attacking structures. Again the movement needs to be subtle so as not to draw attention to the movement (Evert, 2001a).

5.12.3 The timing of the movement of the attack.

This concept involves the movement and changes in pace and timing prior to the strike being executed. The ball is in play and the execution of the strike is imminent. The reason for these changes in pace is the need to lure the defenders into a sense of comfort and belief that they have the attack covered. While the defenders may feel secure in their defensive abilities at that specific moment if the attackers are able to rapidly explode and totally overpower them by increasing the pace and intensity of the strike then it will result in an increase in the defender's defensive options in such a way that they are not able to cope with nullifying the attack (Evert, 2001a).

The ball carrier who is to transfer the ball to the striker should move with ease and in such a way that he keeps his immediate defender on his inside shoulder if the strike is to take place on the outside. This ensures that the space on the outside is preserved. The first and primary responsibility of the first receiver is to ensure that he commits and "fixes" both his immediate defender, as well as the defenders moving across from the inside facet. The reason for this is that if any advantage is to be taken when striking in the outer channels, it will require space and one-on-one confrontations between attackers and defenders. This can only be achieved if the "sliding" or "drifting" defence is halted as close as possible to the facet that preceded. The first means of achieving this is through the first receiver:

1. positioning himself quickly;
2. as the play is entered into he should realign himself two steps outwards; and
3. as the scrumhalf touches the ball, the first receiver starts moving forwards firstly on a very slight drift, and then as the ball touches his hands he increases his velocity rapidly and steps inside onto his immediate defenders inside shoulder thus forcing him to straighten up his body positioning so that his shoulders are facing inwards.

As soon as his immediate defender's shoulders have been slightly turned, he slackens off on his acceleration and moves outwards with his body positioning being optimal to be able to give a precise pass to his fellow attackers who are outside of him. By shifting his initial alignment outside his defender and running outwards then inwards he forces his immediate defender to change direction twice, first outwards, then inwards to cover his movement inwards. It also makes the inside defenders coming from the preceding facet have to make two alterations to their defensive running lines.

Firstly, they can immediately move across as the first receiver takes the ball on a drift; secondly, they are faced with the next decision as the first receiver immediately steps inside thus opening up the option of an attack in channel 1. They thus have to slow down to ensure that any possible play in that channel is checked before again being able to move across the field to the outside once the first receiver passes the ball outwards. Although the players may not always react in this way, it seems to be a possible way of manipulating the immediate defender as well as the sliding inside defenders as long as possible so to be able to maintain the attacking space on the outside. What is also achieved is that if the opposition team are using the one-out defensive system, which implies that the openside flanker must take the first receiver, then, if the attacking first receiver can by means of his initial run at that specific point commit his immediate defender, i.e., the first receiver as well as the sliding defender from the inside, then the attacking team will have an extra attacker out wide who will be able to play havoc in the outfield when he is able to be unleashed (Evert, 2001a).

Secondly, a 15 vs 7 attack develops i.e., by running at the defender you force him to wait for the attack, as a defensive decision has to be made. This allows the attackers to get in ahead of their own forwards and the supporting running lines that the forwards

run to the next phase of play is forward and not backwards as for the defending forwards (MaCintosh, 1997; MaCintosh, 2000).

If the strike is to take place behind his back, i.e., with an "X", then the ball carrier should lure his immediate defender to follow him across the field so that the attempted strike can take place in optimal conditions. This can be achieved by the attacker suddenly accelerating forward at the last moment towards his immediate defender's inside shoulder so to lure the defender into believing that he may be going for that gap. If the defender follows the ball carrier the space will open up (Evert, 2001a).

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; Greenwood, 2004; Serfontein, 2005).

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. Kinaesthetic awareness refers to the "feel" associated with the body and its movements as well as the summing up of a situation which is achieved through visual acuity. 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 kinaesthetic 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. 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).

5.13 THE ATTACKING BACKLINE'S STRIKE ON THE DEFENSIVE LINE

This is the most important aspect of a successful line break. Before the intricacies and final detail is discussed, the effect of forces and momentum will be explained in order to understand why strikes should be possible under conducive conditions. The first important aspect regarding the strike is that of the force exerted when it is executed. Force gives a quantitative description of the interaction between two bodies or between a body and its environment; therefore during contact situations there is a certain amount of force involved (Young, 1992).

The force of the striker takes place when he hits the tackle line in the attempt to break through the tackle. The key question is how a ball carrier and decoy runner can create a situation where the striker's force is sufficient in that the defensive wall is able to be broken. As the striker moves he has acceleration and it is important to understand the relation of the acceleration to the force and thus an understanding of Newton's 2nd law of motion is needed. It can be stated that the magnitude of the striker's acceleration is proportional to that of the force, and the direction of the acceleration is the same as that of the force, regardless of the direction of the velocity (Cajori, 1934; Young, 1992).

Therefore, when a force involves direct contact between two bodies such as in a striking area, it is equivalent to a contact force. Force is a vector quantity, thus to describe it we need to know the direction in which it acts, as well as its magnitude (Hamill & Knutzen, 1995). The direction of the force applies to:

a) the angle at which the striker comes into the strike at the attempted line break; and
b) the angle with which the defenders enter the contact area i.e., in which direction the defender's shoulders are facing (Evert, 2001a).

The magnitude of the force is determined by:

a) the acceleration of the striker before the ball is received;
b) the acceleration of the striker after the ball is received;
c) the velocity with which the striker enters the striking area together with the ability of the striker to change direction optimally if required;
d) the effect of the decoy ploy to manipulate the defenders, such that their centre of mass is not optimal when attempting to make the tackle; and
e) the mass of the striker (Evert, 2001a).

It is for this reason that running lines and changes in velocity are important in order to give the striker the momentum advantage at the contact area. The result of a collision between two bodies depends on their momentum, which can be described as the product of a body's mass and velocity. When two bodies collide and make contact, their resulting combined motion is in the direction of the body with the larger initial magnitude of momentum. Momentum is determined by speed **x** mass (Young, 1992; Hamill & Knutzen, 1995).

Unfortunately it is highly unlikely that a player's mass can be increased substantially in the course of a rugby season so to give him increased momentum in striking situations. What can however be achieved is that the player's speed or acceleration into a striking situation can be adapted to create a mechanical or momentum advantage for the striker. This can be achieved by manipulating a defender so that they are mechanically weak and cannot re-align to be able to be in a position to make the tackle, i.e., the defender is manipulated into moving in the wrong direction and can't reverse his momentum. If there is a marked increase in acceleration into a strike, if this has been achieved, then the strike is likely to be successful. Secondly, if a situation can be created where the defender is momentarily forced to stand still when

the tackle is to be executed then the striker will have superior momentum as he is moving and attacking spaces, while the defender is stationary and trying to stop the attacking player.

Thirdly, if the defenders are drawn away from the strike zone so that there is a hole through which the striker can move. This can only be achieved if the defenders are overloaded with defensive options

In conclusion, the key to a successful line break is the culmination of all the preceding factors and it is the responsibility of the striker to "finish off" all the hard work that has been done by his fellow attacking players. This "finishing off" is achieved by creating a situation where the striker comes out of a position which is difficult to evaluate and defend against by the defenders.

The concept that will make this possible is called a "one-out" striker. What this implies that the striker will not be the first person out to receive the ball from the distributor. This could mean that he could either coming into the line from:

1. outside the decoy runners; or
2. out of a stream, i.e., the player strikes suddenly coming in on a "blind spot" for the defenders.

All these factors are achieved by the optimal use of advantageous running lines. The strike can be executed using the following types of "running lines":

1. an "angle" running line;
2. an "arc" running line;
3. a "L" running line; and
4. a "stream" running line (Evert, 2001a).

Although these running lines could result in a line break, they often work better as a combination. 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.

5.14 THE STRIKER'S 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 (Zatsiorski, 1995; Dintiman *et al*., 1998; Hedger, 2002).

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. 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 (Dintiman *et al.*, 1998; Evert, 2001a).

5.15 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).

5.16 THE STRIKER'S 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, Hedger, 2002).

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 (Craven, 1966; 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).

5.17 THE ATTACKING BACKLINE'S 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 (1993:7), 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 back play. 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).

5.18 THE ATTACKING BACKLINE'S 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. 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: (Greenwood, 1993; Levy & Ponissi, 1993; Ross, 2001; Greenwood, 2004).

- 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; Harrow, 2002).
- 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.

5.19 THE ATTACKING BACKLINE'S STRIKE AREA

If the tackle is made, then a collision area develops. At the collision area the following should be attempted to be achieved:

- the angle of run and velocity of the ball carrier combined with the angle of run and velocity of the striker should be that the attacking players are at mechanical advantage and have a high kinetic energy while the defenders should be at a momentum disadvantage (Evert, 2001a).

This can be achieved by manipulating the defenders that they:

- are forced into entering the collision area in a stationary body position; and
- their body positioning / centre of mass is such that they are unable to re-check in order to get into position to make the tackle on a striker coming in on an attempted line break (Evert, 2001a).

In collision situations that result from a strike, the following situations can possibly arise. They are primarily determined by the angle at which the striker and defender meet in contact, which can be as follows:

Figure 5.22: A front on tackle situation

This type of collision arises due to the striker coming in on a strike from the same channel in which the defender is. It is very difficult to give an offload in this tackle situation and it will usually result in a ruck. Often a tackle in this type of scenario

comes in the form of a double hit tackle from the opposition. This holds the danger of the striker losing the ball in the tackle or the possibility that the attacking team's striker is tackled backwards which could result in serious negative implications for the supporting players of the striker.

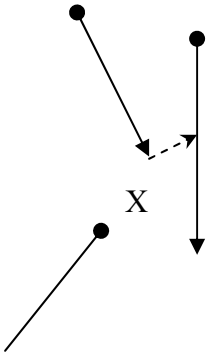


Figure 5.23: From the side tackle situation

There are two reasons why a side on contact situation is preferable:

1. the possibility of a line break is increased as the side on tackle can be stopped or be made more difficult due to:

    1.1 the striker being able to hand off the tackler due to the free arm being available; and

    1.2 the striker has the advantage that his hard body parts, i.e., elbows, hips and knees are the first body parts that make contact with the tackler making the tackler's "tackle strike area" smaller and less comfortable.
    the striker is in a better position to be able to give an off-load to a trailer coming in from behind.

    This will only be possible if the striker can hand-off the tackler and safely keep the ball secure until the off-load option presents itself and then the pass can be given or be able to keep his arms free while he is being tackled thus making an offload possible.

5.20 THE ATTACKING BACKLINE'S TRAILING SUPPORT RUNNERS

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).

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; Tranent, 2003). 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:

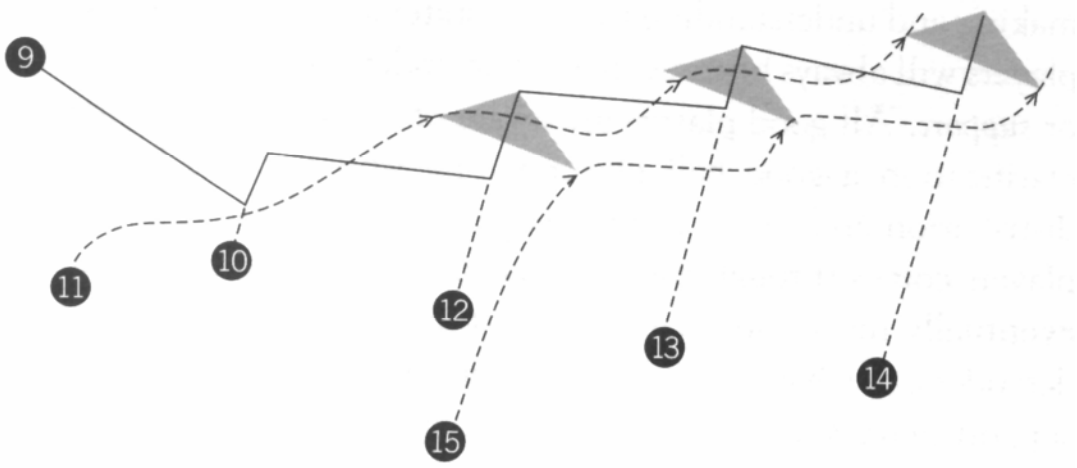
1. pre-possession; and
2. post-possession (Johnson, 1993; Robilliard, 1997; Shaw, 1998; Hickey, 1998; Marks, 1998; Evert, 2001a).

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 line break, and the secondary supporters work through to support the strike and to be in a position to be able to beat the cover defence.

5.21 THE ATTACKING BACKLINE'S FIRST WAVE OF SUPPORT RUNNERS

The first important factor is to realise that this support takes place off a ball carrier giving offload options to an extra player on the inside or on the outside. It can be easily organised from structured play however it does run the risk that because the blindside wing and fullback are directly involved, a player from the forwards needs to be dropped back to cover for the involved fullback. The next step would be the use of "step running" (up and across) around the two centres and the openside wing by the blindside wing and fullback (Marks, 1998).



(Adapted from: Marks, 1998)

Figure 5.24: Inside and outside first wave supporting running lines

By making use of this supporting system, the blindside wing and fullback are more than support players, they are trailers. Even without them the ball carrier in the middle of the line has a player inside and a player outside but it's the option that puts doubt into the defensive lines made (Marks, 1998; Royall, 2000).

For definitional purposes support players are regarded as auxiliary supporters reinforcing the regular supporters, i.e., an inside centre can pass to his outside centre

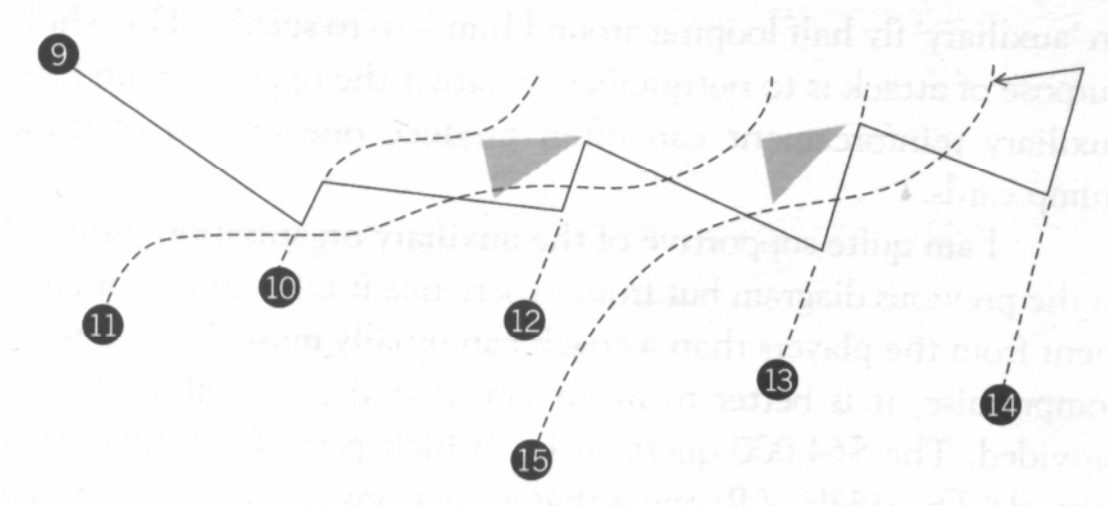
or to an "auxiliary" flyhalf looping around him. The use of these auxiliary supporters can possibly help to outnumber or outwit the opposition thus making the attack more successful. The key to supporting lines is that they need not be stereotyped which implies that players should understand the concept and be able to adapt to situations and thus ensure that there is always inside and outside supporters. Another key aspect of this form of support is that these players often fulfil the role of primary cleaners if a breakdown occurs. This responsibility cannot be overemphasised and needs to be ingrained in the supporting runner's minds as an integral part of their job. If a breakdown occurs and the opposition turnover the possession, all the hard work done in previous phases will be undone and the attacking possibilities will immediately become opportunities to defend (Robilliard, 1992; Marks, 1998; McFarland, 2002).

5.22 THE ATTACKING BACKLINE'S SECOND WAVE OF SUPPORT RUNNERS

This phase of backing up is often neglected even though the possible returns for players who place it as an important part of their play is extremely high. It is for this reason that it is those players who support the breaks that score the tries, however most often a try goes begging because the ball carrier has no one to whom he can pass (Marks, 1998; Honan, 1999a; Evert, 2001a).

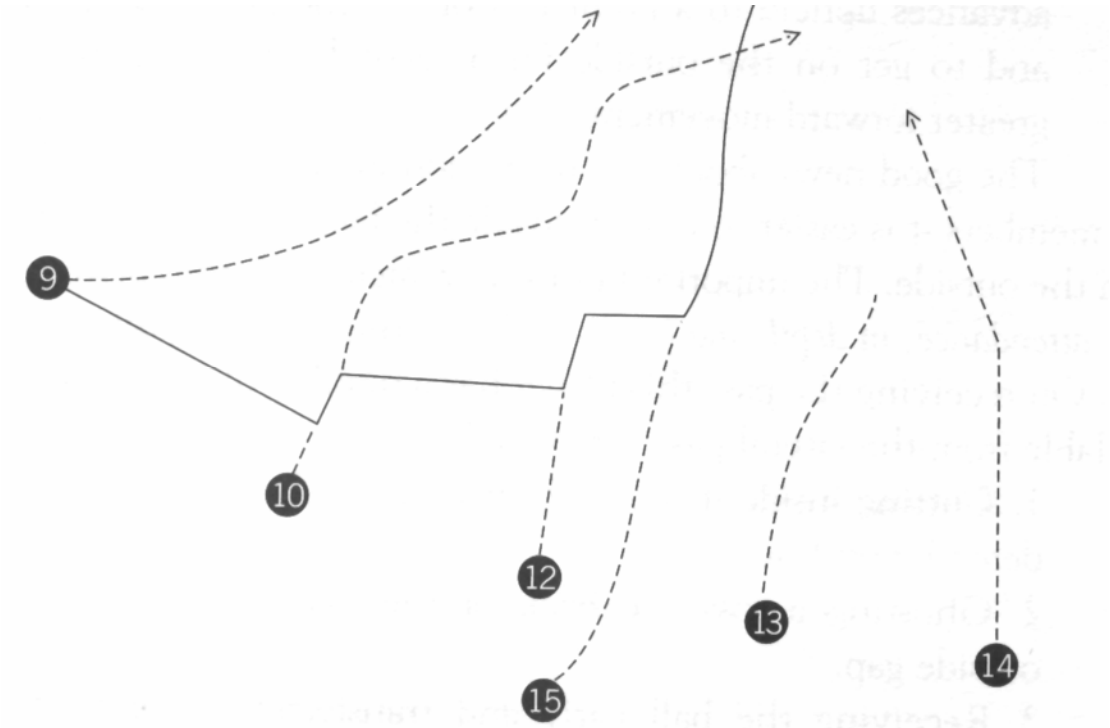
If one looks at any attacking play, there is no reason why the scrumhalf or flank can't be on the inside shoulder as a supporter, the flyhalf in behind and the openside wing up on the outside as supporter. The player in behind would eventually slip into the lateral line on the side that showed the most potential. If a situation arises where there is only one supporter, then his initial run should be aimed at positioning himself behind the ball carrier because this keeps the options on either side open until an opportunity presents itself. It must be noted that it is not feasible for the players on either side of the line breaker to support as surprising extra players as they are needed as decoys to involve key defenders. All the other players involved in the primary line of attack are able to be involved and should continue to move forward even after they have passed the ball (Bird, 1998; Marks, 1998; Honan, 1999).

They might have to move across to find the ball carrier, but their first movement should always be forward. It must be noted that the success of supporting running lines is dependant on a supporting player wanting to involve or reinvolve himself in play some two or three positions away. Often players either pull back during or after a pass or they run across the field behind the backline as they chase the ball. It's because they start doing the secondary thing before completing the primary action that they don't find themselves in a position to receive the try-scoring pass. The only way for this vital link of secondary supporter to operate is to pass while moving forward and to keep moving forward before shifting the line across. Another important aspect to understand is that supporting the receiver is only really possible if that person takes the ball past the passer. From a fairly flat pass that means the receiver only has to carry the ball two or possibly three steps up-field before any transfer to the previous passer can take place. If there is sufficient working space available, this is an option, however if not it may be better to leave it to the trailers coming from behind and to concentrate on either assisting a break or on realigning in support further on in the attack (Marks, 1998).



(Adapted from: Marks, 1998)

Figure 5.25: Concentration on inside supporting running lines



(Adapted from: Marks, 1998)

Figure 5.26: Second wave supporting running lines after a line break

5.23 THE STRIKER'S ANGLE OF RUN AFTER A SUCCESFUL STRIKE HAS BEEN MADE

When a strike is made, there must be a sudden and immediate change in direction away from the inside defenders. This change of direction can be better explained by understanding that the striker always wants to play in behind the person who was originally entrusted to defend him. Because no cover lines are run intentionally, there will be a big space behind the beaten player where-after the successful striker is able to link up with the decoy runner who was moving away from the strike zone but who is able to reappear to support the striker on the outside (Evert, 2001a). It also results in the players coming across having to work harder to reach the successful striker. The common error players make is that they tend to run back towards the defenders thus making the defender's job easier. By running away however, the players coming across will only be able to make a side on tackle, thus off-load options are easier to execute.

5.24 THE ATTACKING TEAM'S CLEANING UNITS

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).

5.25 THE ATTACKING TEAM'S COMMUNICATION

When looking at the principles of attack, this aspect, which surely rates as one of the most important, seems to be the most neglected. The information, which needs to be communicated, is firstly, where the opposition's weak area in defence is, and therefore, where the backline would like to attack and penetrate (Evert, 2001a)?

Secondly, where the receiver is positioned and who will be the striker at the pre-determined defensively weak area (Evert, 2001a)?

Thirdly, who are the first wave supporters? (i.e., the support players on the inside as well as the outside) The key aspect regarding the first wave supporters is that if there is a breakdown in the "striking area" they automatically become the nominated cleaners at that contact point where-after the second wave supporters will follow and come into play (Evert, 2001a).

Fourthly, who are the second wave of supporters who keep the momentum and who will take advantage of the line break (Evert, 2001a)?

There also needs to be distinguished between "man on" and "plus one" situations:

1. "Man on" situations occur when the defence and attack have equal numbers. This is the situation where an attacking team will nominate the identified weak area in defence and apply full striking action in that area. The blindside wing and fullback are vital in communicating this information to the flyhalf and inside centre so that better decision making by them is possible.

2. "Plus one" situations occur when there are more attackers than what there are defenders. In this situation it is not desirable to strike but to rather fix the defenders and to transfer the ball to where the space is on the outside and thus break the line by beating the opposition with speed on the outside (Evert, 2001a).

Communication must take place from the outside in, i.e., fullback and wing to outside centre, to inside centre and finally to the flyhalf. Due to the nature of the game and the intense mental and physical pressure on the players, it is important that these communication skills are ingrained in the players development so that when they find themselves under pressure in match situations, they are still able to maintain their communication channels and thus be able to take full advantage of possible opportunities that may arise during the game (Bracewell, 2001; Evert, 2001a).

5.26 THE ATTACKING TEAM'S DECISION-MAKING

The dictionary defines decisions as "resolutions reached after consideration" (Greenwood, 1993). Consideration of a multitude of factors in an open-skilled game makes this a hugely difficult part of the game to develop. Coaches spend hours improving their player's physical condition and skills. All this will be to no avail if those players do not understand the game and lack the vision to make the correct decisions in ever changing situations (Askew, 2001; Weinberg & Gould 2003; Greenwood, 2004).

Top–level rugby players are, more or less, as fit and skilful as the other; what is likely to separate them is their ability to focus their attention at precisely the right moment and on the most relevant stimuli to allow them to make the correct decisions for themselves and the team (Hodge, 1994; Bracewell, 2001; Weinberg & Gould 2003; Greenwood, 2004).

In the professional game the biggest progress has been in defence; opportunities therefore are fewer and decision-making becomes increasingly more crucial.

A player must consider his own skills, physique, pace as well as other factors in his own decision-making process. Other factors emerge at the same time i.e.,

1. the strengths and weakness of the immediate opponent;
2. the strengths and weaknesses of the opposition as a whole;
3. the conditions at that specific moment; and
4. the strengths of his own team and the immediate support available to him (Evert, 2001a).

The player then has to weigh up the effects of his decision and how it interfaces with his team-mates. The decision making process is taken further when the player is faced with the following multitude of options i.e.,

1. the decision of whether to pass and how to do it, (before or in of contact?);
2. should the contact be evaded or taken (should he stay on his feet or go to ground?); and
3. is a kick an option (if so, what type?) (Marks, 1998).

When so many variations and different decisions are potentially available, this area of skill must have a great deal of time devoted to it. In the first weekend of the Six Nations in 2001 there were a total of 19 tries scored, 17 of which came directly from turnover ball. Does this mean that on 17 occasions the wrong decision was made or did the errors occur in execution?

It probably was both, however, had several players used brain rather than brawn, the total number of turnovers might well have been significantly decreased (Askew, 2001). The art of decision-making ultimately lies in the hands of the quality of communication that takes place within a team. Thinking and decision-making is a split-second process, which usually takes place before the player gets the ball, and communication is a vital part of the process (Bracewell, 2001).

Communication comes from the eyes, ears, voice and body language. The supporting players should consciously hold depth, which allows him to have a wider vision of the

action in front of him. With what his eyes tell him he can then use his voice to inform the ball carrier what he wants from him if the defence is in place (Hodge & McKenzie, 1999). The ball carrier then communicates by listening and this co-operation is crucial in decision-making, which leads to ball retention and more successful rugby. The wider vision of actions in the game is improved with depth and width of support, which will eventually assist the process of better decisions being able to be made (Askew, 2001).

Educating players and developing their rugby intellect are crucial if they are to make better decisions. Coaches should strive to get intelligent players in all positions, as all players on the pitch are decision-makers. All these players, wherever they play, have to make swift judgements then act on them with decisions, it is through these decisions that a team functions or fails (Neethling & Botha 1999).

The higher the level of the game the more subtle the process, so the intelligence factor becomes hugely important. For some players this ability may be innate making them crucial as they can make a team click. The majority however, require education and development through practice. This will allow them to recognise cues and select the best option for their team. To achieve improvement, coaches must ensure that the players work constantly against opposition to replicate the changes in time and space they will face in matches (Askew, 2001).

When play is analysed in general, the following characteristics will come to the fore. Each attack is based on a planned move, which aims to disorganise the opposition's defensive lines. Invariably each set-up move will have various options or variations. The attacking team will have a reasonable idea of where the weaknesses are in the opposition's defence and will aim to take advantage of this. The situation may however arise that that which may have been perceived as a weak area is no longer one, and that is where optimal decision-making in this part of play becomes important. Optimal communication in such a situation will allow the attacking team to adapt and concentrate on other attacking zones.

At this stage decision-making is reasonably simple as the players are organised and there are no disruptions in the make up of the attacking team's backline or in the

defending team's defensive lines. Once a contact situation has occurred there becomes a marked disruption in the make up of the attacking team's backline as well as in the defending team's defensive lines. This situation presents opportunities for backline players to run at and strike on forward defenders, as well as for attacking forwards running at backline defenders. The opportunities for line breaks and yardage are better here and possible opportunities are presented (Evert, 2001a).

Many teams network their play in such a way that players are "programmed" into knowing where play will be "taken" to up to three, four or possibly five phases where they have nominated cleaners and strikers at each phase. The importance of decision-making becomes evident when there comes a breakdown in the networking or where fifth phase has been reached and the team still finds themselves in possession.

This is where communication structures need to be in place so that advantage can be taken of the opportunities that were created from the networked play and from that point the attacking team should maintain their discipline and persistence in order to attack the opposition's weaknesses until a line break occurs or there are extra players on the outside that can be used to finish off the attack by scoring a try (Evert, 2001a).

5.27 THE ATTACKING TEAM'S USE OF FORWARDS AS BALL CARRIERS

As previously mentioned a successful attack is often based on the premise of mismatches. There are various situations where mismatches, in specific forward runners running at backs, can be creatively created. This would be for the reason of gaining greater forward momentum on attack. These forward ball carries do not necessarily need to be against backline players only in order for them to be of value. Often slow ball needs to be taken up by forwards in order to try and "turn" it into quick ball and often teams that play structured patterns have dedicated 2nd phase target runners who try and get to run at the flyhalf on a wide arc in order to get over the advantage line (Meyer, 2005; Du Toit, 2006; Human, 2006; Mitchell, 2006; Van Graan, 2006).

The following forward ball carrying collisions can be identified:

1. Pick and drive forward carries near the fringes of a ruck;
2. "one off runners" one pass off the ruck;
3. forwards running off shortened lineouts or any open phase play situations (similar characteristics to backline attacking play) (Meyer, 2005; Du Toit, 2006; Human, 2006; Mitchell, 2006; Van Graan, 2006).

5.27.1 Pick and drive forward ball carries near the fringes of the ruck

All play is started either from a restart, lineout, scrum, penalty or free kick. It is however between these facets of play that ball carrying collisions take place. Very often during open play, forwards are required to re-enter general play and often carry the ball in order to maintain the continuity that is trying to be created by the team. If however the ball is slowed significantly to such an extent that it is stationery, a method of regenerating the momentum is required. In order to achieve this, is to make use of forwards to pick and drive the ball into the opposition players that are defending around the fringes of the ruck. If this is done and the ball is recycled quicker than what the defenders can fold into the openside, extra attacking numbers can be achieved thus the momentum can be regenerated (Meyer, 2005; Du Toit, 2006; Human, 2006; Mitchell, 2006; Van Graan, 2006).

5.27.2 "One off runner" one pass off the ruck

Very often teams that make use of target runners off scrums and lineouts will make use of a forward to carry the ball a further phase after the 1st phase ruck ball has been recycled. This pass is most often made by the scrumhalf who attempts to give a flat pass on the advantage line to a forward runner who attempts to run at the opposition flyhalf in order to force him to make the difficult tackle. This is a very effective way of getting a team's best ball carriers to take the ball up on their natural running path and to hit either the space with great momentum or to manipulate the flyhalf to make tackles (Meyer, 2005; Du Toit, 2006; Human, 2006; Mitchell, 2006; Van Graan, 2006).

5.27.3 Forwards running off shortened lineouts or any open phase play situations

Because most forwards are bigger and heavier than the more agile backline players and teams often make use of target runners, forwards can be used to run off backline players into spaces that have been created. This is done in order to gain that much sought after momentum. Another factor is the fact that forwards being bigger and more powerful are able to off-load the ball to supporting players more effectively thus resulting in the play being more effective in moving down the length of the field. Most teams identify key ball carriers to run off the distributing playmaker in the backline thus resulting in the specific players playing to their respective strengths and thus helping the team to achieve their attacking play goals (Meyer, 2005; Du Toit, 2006; Human, 2006; Mitchell, 2006; Van Graan, 2006).

5.28 CONCLUSION

As is evident from the various discussions above, ball carries can be executed by both forwards and backs however as is evident, forward players ball carries tend to be more one dimensional in that it takes place with very little space between the attacking team and defending team and opportunities for the use of decoy runners and complex running lines are limited. It is however important to realise that neither backline or forward ball carrying collisions can take place in isolation, and neither can be deemed as more important than the other. Thus the integration and successful execution of the ball carries will ultimately determine the success of the attacking play.