



INFORMATION PAGE

Week of May 20th, 2005

This week in the Information Page another excellent offering from Lee Smith, the IRB's Regional Development Manager for Oceania

Common Faults in Rugby Skills

Introduction

To start with I will lay the foundation by starting with the skills of the game and the most common faults that occur when they are performed. This list isn't new and as a result it is something of a condemnation of coaching over the years that we haven't got them right.

Passing

- Passing using the weaker hand. For left-handed players this is to the left and for right-handed players to the right. This applies to all players because from phase play the attacking line is no longer position specific with the forwards committed to winning the ball and the backs to using it.
- Passing too fast, too low and too high. The fast pass creates a collision between the hands and the ball. The speed of the pass should not be a challenge. The challenge is the defence.
- "Drifting" in the direction of the pass. To repeat: "The space that is created is the space the player is moving away from not the space the player is moving into". As a result a player moving left creates space on the right and, moving right creates space on the left. The player drifting with the pass takes away the receiver's space.

Receiving a Pass

- Standing too flat so that pass has to be fast and will be difficult to catch as it will be into the receiver's body or even behind. If they catch the ball it opens their body up to a strong tackle. A deep receiver can be compensated for by the flight of the ball, a flat receiver cannot.
- Catching the ball in front of the chest instead of catching it earlier on the near side of the receiver's body. By "greeting" the ball early the receiver can pass it on in a single movement. In receiving it earlier valuable decision-making time is gained.

- Standing too far away, slowing down the movement of the ball, as it will have to be heaved rather than passed. This often occurs when a “cut-out” pass is made. The ball will take some time to reach the receiver allowing the defence to adjust and inviting the intercept.
- Players reacting to the defence before they have securely caught the ball leaving the ball behind or fumbling it. “Ball first – Run second”.

Catching the Kicked Ball

- Taking the eyes off the ball.
- Standing chest on which results in the ball being fumbled forward and the player being vulnerable to a strong tackle.
- Players catching the ball when they are moving back when there is a team mate who is able to move into the ball and towards the opposition.

Picking up the Ball

- Knocking on because the player may have taken the eyes off the ball or become unstable by bending more at the waist rather than the knees.
- Not stepping past the ball with one leg so that the player’s centre of gravity is directly over it. Both feet will be behind the ball and the player will not be in balance. If possible straddle the ball to provide a strong base that will resist impact. However to be fair this is not always possible at the tackle because, if the ball carrier presents the ball to team-mates correctly the defender, in contesting the ball will have to leave both feet on one side, it is impossible to straddle. The technique seems to be to have a wide base, crouch, place both hands on the opposition’s side of the ball and attempt to claw it back. A number of options emerge. The tackled player may be penalized for not releasing the ball. The re-cycling of the ball will be delayed. If the ball is not won the player may resist the impact of opponents cleaning out. On the other hand the player may get cleaned out. By not resisting the contact the player is driven away and then joins the defensive line.

Running

- Carrying the ball in one hand or under one arm. This reduces options, the fend seems to be the only option left.
- Poor balance so that the player can be easily tackled. Running in anticipation of being tackled is different from sprinting in a race. The reason is that in the game options are increased if the ball carrier is able to resist contact.

Kicking

- Inability to kick with the unfamiliar foot.
- Lifting the head upon impact so that the kicker’s body weight is not projected through the ball.
- Throwing the ball in the air rather than dropping it onto the foot prior to kicking. The time this takes leads to a poor kick if the kicker gets the ball away.
- Not following through by pointing the foot at the target so that the ball loses distance. However for the Garryowen or “up and under” height, to allow the ball

to be contested, is achieved by changing the position of the foot so that it is not pointed.

Tackling

- High tackling or “collaring” opponents. While this is being policed by referees it still happens when the ball carrier side steps. To avoid this players should not have their arms at their side but in the ‘ready’ position so that raising the arms quickly is not necessary.
- Inability to tackle with the less comfortable shoulder, resulting in the player putting the head in front.
- Tackling with the arms only.
- When players intend making a big hit to envelop the player and the ball they are standing too square on to the ball carrier making them easy to beat to the left or right. This is not so important where there is little space between players.
- Ball carriers are now developing a strong leg drive when they are tackled above the waist. While they may be eventually stopped the ground they make allows for greater support and continuity of possession. Maybe we need to add ball recovery to the technique for the low tackle either by the tackler doing it without the need to come through the “gate”, or by a second defender tackling the ball while the first tackler tackles the legs.
- Tackling tentatively which aggravates the force of the impact with the ball carrier.

Falling in the Tackle

- Resisting the impact when falling so that the body gets twisted. When a ball carrier is tackled from the left the body is turned to the left and from the right to the right. The advantage is that the ball carrier is turned to the space the tackler has moved from creating a passing option.
- Going too far before deciding on an escape route for the ball. This results in the ball and the player getting isolated from teammates delaying the re-cycling of the ball. It may result in possession being lost and, at the very least, gives the defensive line time to form.

Halfback/ Scrum-half/#9 Play

- When the ball is delivered from phase play, rucks and mauls, the halfback should not only be there to pass it, but should have decided on the best direction to go, having scanned play before arriving at the source of possession. This ensures that the pass is made quickly in one movement and that there is no adjustment.
- When the ball is delivered, do not reach for the ball, as this will affect the power of passing. Place the foot close to the ball so that all the body levers enable a fast accurate pass to be made.
- Increasingly halfbacks are being interfered with when they are clearing the ball from post tackle and rucks. This is because the player has not organised other players to form a protective screen in both width and depth. Rather than do this the player is trying to both haul the ball out of the ruck as well as pass the ball. The time this takes is too long to avoid interference but the more the player does this the more will team-mates let #9 do it.

Support Play

- When a player is held, support players must go to this player to secure the ball. Too often the pass is forced and possession lost. It is the role of the ball carrier to retain possession and make it available, it is the role of the support player to go to the ball and not stand off expecting a pass.
- Ball carriers not looking for support and going too far so that at the completion of the tackle they are isolated. This may lead to slow ball and a turnover.
- When the ball carrier penetrates support players supporting laterally with defenders standing between the penetrator and them blocking the pass. What is needed is the ability to assess the situation and change their line of running to make themselves available. Linear support following the penetrator down the channel seems to be a good option, the pass is difficult to interfere with and the support player has left and right options.

Line-out

- Do not over complicate the situation by creating too much movement. If things are not going well simplify the situation by reducing the length of the throw, faking back and moving forward to catch the ball and supporting to deny the opposing jumper space to get near the ball.
- Another solution is to be flexible enough to allow the opposition to commit a jumper prematurely and throw elsewhere. This is assisted by arriving later than opponents at the line-out so that their positioning enables a miss-match to be created.
- Finally, the jumper and two support players can be used as a distraction, with the ball being caught by an unmarked player who is not supported

Defence

- When a player is tackled and there is little hope of winning the ball, do not commit to the ruck that follows. It is better to avoid infringements and stand behind the offside line. Once the ball is out, move forward in defence. Because the offside line is very close to the ball, attacks can be defended very close to the source of possession. This particularly applies if the ruck is stationary and there has been delay in the delivery of the ball.
- Do not concede penalties, especially in kicking positions, points are inevitable. A more numerous defensive screen should be able to defend within the law. Patience and discipline are required until the opportunity to recover possession presents itself.

Phase Play

- To prevent the ball becoming available too quickly from a tackle/ruck make sure that at least one opposing player is bound in making sure it is a ruck and has off-side lines. Also make sure that the hind most foot is behind the ball so that the ball is in the ruck. If this does not occur, the ball must be picked up and, avoiding accidental offside, driven forward to re-establish a formation from which the ball can be delivered securely.

- Make sure that the delivery of the ball from a maul occurs when the maul is still moving forward. If the maul becomes stationary, the defence has time to reset and much of the advantage will have been lost.
- If things get disorganised after a number of phases of play there will be a lack of support. To re-establish a formation that gives time and space to get re-organised form a maul and go from there even if the maul itself doesn't go too far down the field. This disorganization is best seen by #9 who should then call the play.
- Patience is needed when setting up a maul. To do this the players may initially have to slow down. When the maul eventually moves forward, the opposition may have compromised their body position, during the delay, wondering what is going on. This will enable the maul to move forward more easily. Remember that the effort is made by the players in front of the ball, which be should in possession of the hindmost player. The players ahead of the ball must keep pushing they should not peel off as the forward momentum will stop and the ball will become available to the opposition.
- The front of the maul should not be wide like the front row of the scrum as this gives the opposition something to drive onto. It should be wedge- shaped so that the opposition can be split off to the side.
- The loss of a balance between the forwards that need to be used to ensure a flow of possession and those with an attacking role in taking the ball forward. If there are not enough at the source of possession the delivery will be slow and the effect of the attack reduced.

Attack

- Don't eliminate an overlap by missing out players allowing the defence to drift with the play and tackle the receiver.
- When forwards join the back-line from phase play, the backs may hesitate when passing to them because the situation is unfamiliar. The forwards may be better to support from behind the ball carrier so that they are able to attack as a second wave down the channel.
- In a numerous attacking line there can be confusion as to who is to be the receiver of a pass resulting in the bounce pass. In addition, with everyone in the line wanting carry the ball the line creeps forward taking away time and space.
- When the ball is won from phase play do not attack on the side in which the defence is more numerous. This will more often be the side the attack has come from especially if the attack has broken the gain line.
- Where numbers are greater use the overlap, where they are the same or less than the defence seek a mismatch. Close to the source of possession this may be a forward running at a back. Further out where there is more space it may be the reverse. In both cases linear support can be used to continue play or set up phase play to continue the attack.
- From scrums look carefully at the formation, left and right, and based on the opposition's defence use the loose forwards and the halfback to create an overlap. Do not let the defence dictate where the attack stands.

- The back line standing so flat so that they are not running quickly when they receive the ball and are no threat to the defence. Receiving the ball flat reduces the time in space the defence has to react, but to be really effective the receiver should be threatening the defence with pace and evasive running. As a general rule standing relatively deep, running onto the pass at a pace that allows the running line to be adjusted and receiving the ball close to the tackle line threatens the defence. Space can be created by the passer close to the defence pulling the ball back in the action of passing re-creating the space that has been taken to commit the defender.

Scrum

- The loose forwards at the scrum have to remain bound until the ball is out. Rather than look over the scrum to see what is happening they should be in a better position to move into play if they stay down, continue to push and watch the ball in its passage through the scrum. When they leave they will be in a low body position from which they can enter play.
- When a scrum is called the combined effort of all 8 forwards will either win good quality possession or restrict the options of opponents. If the loose forwards in particular do not commit to the scrum, then their ability to be effective in the play that follows will be substantially reduced. It is a matter of first things first and living in the present not the future.

Best wishes to all.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Jones". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'T'.

Tom Jones
Regional Development Manager