

THE PROBLEM OF ATTACK – PART 4

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SOME GUIDELINES ON ATTACK

The Influence of Field Position

The closer a team is to its skill level relative to the skill level of the defence of the opposition the more likely they are to make a mistake. The safe guard if a mistake is made is in having field position as close to their opponent's goal-line as possible.

When they are on their own goal line gaining field position further down the field takes precedence over retaining possession using a run/pass option. This is achieved by kicking and performing a good chase pattern. When the ball is kicked into touch this usually results in a line-out that puts all your team in a practiced defensive position behind the ball. If the ball doesn't find touch the chasing players must make a tackle as soon as possible. They do this by chasing to a pattern that defends across the field to defend the pass/run option and down the field.

If the opposition kick the ball there must be a group of players positioned to receive the ball and choose the best option following the kick receipt..

It is important not to lose patience and concede field position and possession by playing beyond the team's skill set in this part of the field especially.

Set Piece Attack Line from Scrum and Line-out

Whatever the move or the option taken it is the initial role of the attack from set piece when they use a run/pass option to get beyond the gain line, the imaginary line down the centre of the scrum or line-out, and to retain possession of the ball.

This line provides a worthwhile measurement of how much territory a team has gained in attack. It has the added benefit of enabling support players in attack to go forward in support of the ball carrier whereas the defence has to go back before they can re-enter play. This delay enables the attack to build momentum and speed. At best the re-cycling of the ball enables the attack to run onto the ball while the defence, in order to remain on side, may still be retreating with the attack running at them. When this occurs momentum will build even more.

The Alignment and Positioning of the Attack Line

Alignment refers to the positioning of players in the line relative to each other across the field and their positioning relative to the opposition down the field. So alignment is in two directions across the field relative to team mates and down the field relative to opponents. This alignment sets the scene prior to the ball being delivered and the attack and defence being in motion.

As a guide, that still is a good standby for alignment across the field, players need to be able to see the number on the back of the team mate immediately inside them. This creates depth so that passes can be moved onto. Down the field each attacking player should be aligned square on or even inside their designated defender. If the running line between the two is maintained by the attack the defence is held and prevented from drifting to support further along the attack line.

Attack at scrum and line-out offers the attack a one-on-one situation once the ball has been delivered from the source of possession. In the static, risk-free situation that exists prior to delivery the attack is in a position to stress the defence by their positioning.

Attack Unit Formations Before the Ball is Delivered

1. Amongst the options are to spread the players across the full width of the field from line-out and on both sides of the scrum. The aim is to isolate each defender in a one-on-one situation with each attacker. By spreading the situation exists in which a skilled attacker is able to evade a defender because the defender has considerable space to the players left and right.
2. A second option is to create space not individually but as a unit with the first three attacking players standing flatter and closer to the defence and closer to each other. The aim is to attract the attention of the defence and to be close enough to make a quick pass that outflanks the committed defender. For example from line-out #'s 10, 12 and 13 align inside the near goal post, so the passes can be made quickly. This is essential because they are aligned close to the defence giving the attack less time and space to make a pass. The remaining backs can now play in at least half the width of the field with the defence be attracted by the inside three. Should the defence not be held and drift to the outside space the inside three, with at least one of the outside three trailing them, attack into the space the defence has drifted away from.
3. A third option is to overload a channel with more attackers than the defence. A pattern that allows this is when #'s 11, 15 and 14 stand behind #'s 10, 12 and 13 respectively so that they can enter the space to their left or right. The lines of running of the front three create space for this to happen.
4. Overload from scrums is an interesting option. It depends on the width available on both sides of the scrum. The initial set up is to put the greater number of players on the narrow side and to base the side that is attacked on the position of the defending #15. If #15 positions on the narrow side play to the open using #'s 8,9,15 and the wing. If #15 positions on the wide side attack down the narrow side. The recoverable kick becomes an option so long as the attack draws the defence forward. The chip kick is made in front of the defence while the grubber kick is made in space between defenders so there is not a rebound off the "picket fence" of defending players legs.

There are other options but in all, even though there is little risk, the insecurity of players is the greatest problem as they will be reluctant to try anything new and, under pressure, they will revert to what they have always done. This is very obvious in Super 15 rugby in which attacking lines are positioning with little variation.

Saturation in opposed practices would seem to be a way of combating this.