



Keep it simple

IMPROVING BACK PLAY



Photographs by Colin Eisey of Colorsport

THE FIRST DUTIES OF

- A Scrum** is to get the ball
- A Scrum Half** is to pass
- An Outside Half** is to get his 3/4s on the move
- A Centre** is to make openings for his Wing
- A Wing** is to run
- A Full Back** is to be in the right position



You ONLY produce rugby players who can RUN and HANDLE if they do so EVERY Saturday

ATTITUDE

Be **POSITIVE** – This is the key to success.

Players who are negative, defensive, only too ready to kick away possession and poor readers of the game will never make for exciting or successful back play.

Too many **CAPTAINS** and **COACHES** at Club level hide behind the excuse that they have no backs. They never will have until they use them and use them regularly. At least two-thirds of the fixture list should be played in such a positive manner that all fifteen players are involved. This approach takes into account such factors as adverse weather conditions, particularly difficult opponents etc, when choosing the style of rugby. If the attitude that is advocated was adopted by all top clubs, then international rugby would benefit even further, for it must be remembered that international players do not produce rugby football in the Five Nation's Championship that they have been unable to produce for the other two-thirds of the season

APPROACH

THE PROBLEM FOR A BACK IS TO OPERATE EFFECTIVELY AT SPEED AGAINST OPPOSITION.

Unopposed practices may polish up the handling skills but will never improve the **DECISION** making faculty.

- i) **ATTACKERS** must
 - a) Recognise the quality of the *possession* they are given
 - b) Be able to retain *possession* of the ball in contact
 - c) Take up a *position* which allows them to move the ball
(Am I in the correct position?)
 - d) Take up a *position* which makes the opposition unsure as to their true intentions
 - e) Have the ability to
 - move the ball quickly
 - run fast
 - think quickly
- ii) **DEFENDERS** should work as a unit eg outside half and two centres should come up together keeping on the inside of their opposite number or the man they are marking (eg in 'drift' defence).

ACTION

The Coach should create match situations for the backs to discover what they can do. Nos 9 – 15 inclusive must be mentally and physically challenged so that they and NOT the coach produce the answers.

NO COACH CAN PLAY THE GAME FOR HIS PLAYERS.

ALIGNMENT FROM SET PLAY – moving the ball wide

The argument as to whether a **STEEP** or a **FLAT** alignment is preferable becomes irrelevant if you are playing against lesser opponents. In fact you could probably stand on your hands and still be successful. What follows pre-supposes you are playing against opponents as good as, if not better than, yourself and you can:

- 1) carry out the **BASIC PASS** with unerring accuracy (P.4)
- 2) **RUN STRAIGHT . . .** and have the discipline to (P.5)
- 3) **DELAY YOUR RUNNING** (see below)

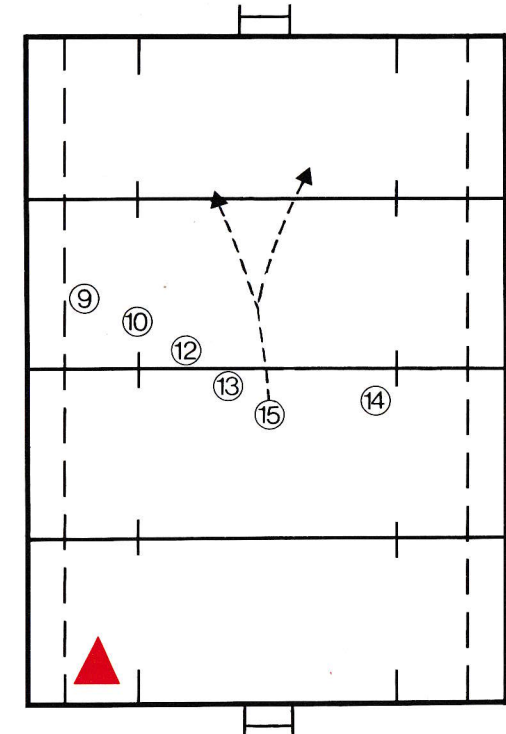
If you can do these three things then exciting and successful back play is on.

Unfortunately most three-quarter lines tend

- i) only to use half of the field in attack
- ii) to align very steep
- iii) to run as soon as their scrum half is about to put his hands on the ball.

The last point puts your centres under needless pressure because you can safely assume that your opponents are coming in the opposite direction at great speed, thus closing down the space between you and them.

To *delay your running* or to run in echelon is to run only after the man on your inside has moved. This takes great self discipline. Therefore, if you are playing a wide game *ie moving the ball quickly to your wings*, the outside half should not move until the ball has left his scrum half's hands; the inside centre should not move until the ball is almost in the hands of his outside half etc.

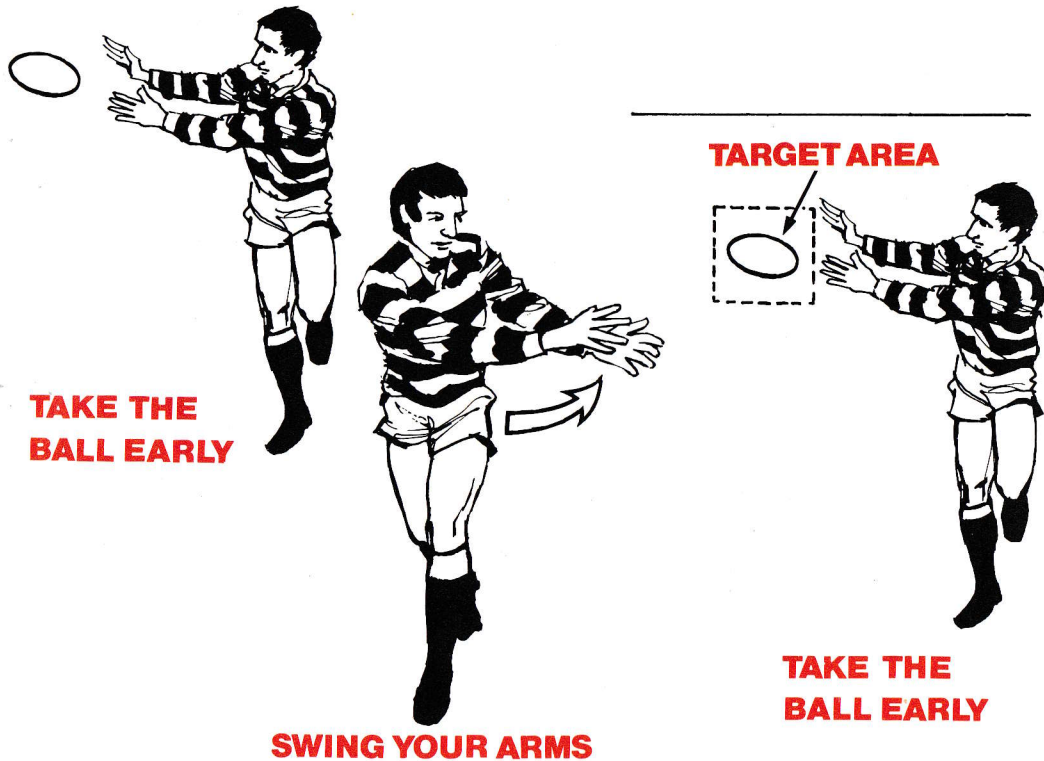


A flattish and wide alignment showing Full Back coming in straight (see p.7)

THE BASIC PASS

The teaching of the basic pass up to the mid 1960s had been based on the Adrian Stoop method pioneered during the period 1910–1920, with slight modifications. In Rugby Football Union's "A Guide for Coaches" produced in 1966, the simple instructions of "take the ball early", put the ball "out in front of the receiver" were introduced and, overnight, players found that passing the ball became infinitely easier.

The pass should be delivered at a consistent height and at a pace which allows the receiver to take it and move it on immediately. If it is at knee height or head height or delivered like a bullet, you can kiss goodbye to three-quarter play.

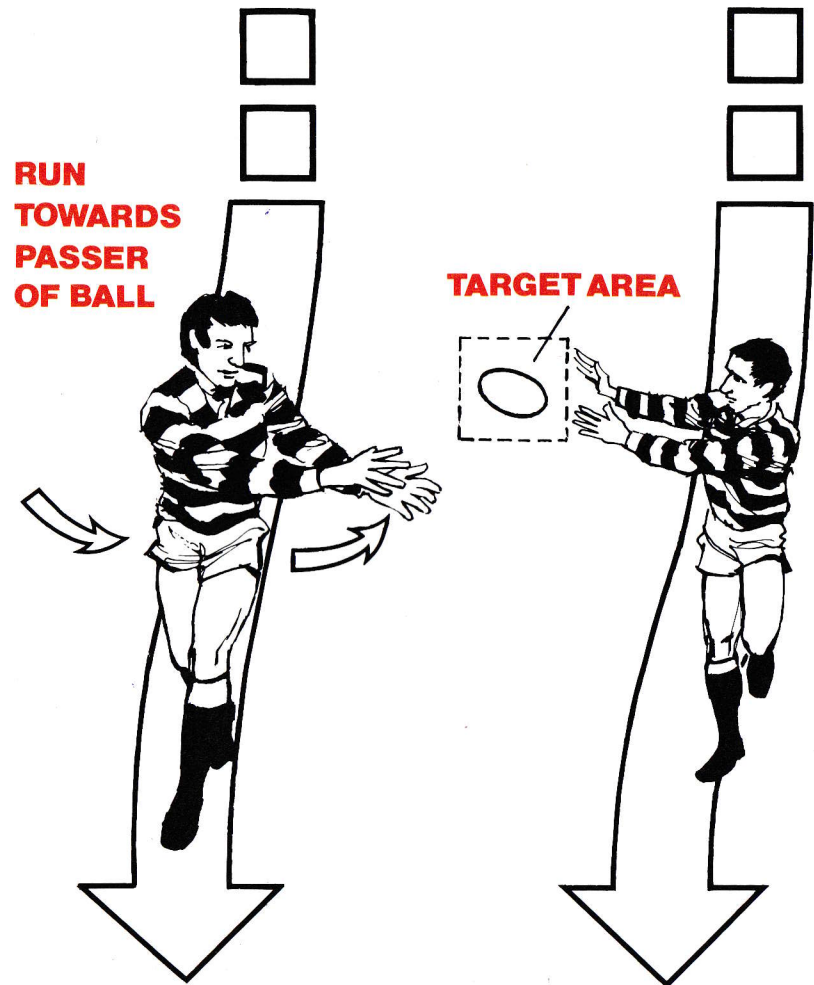


These key factors are universally accepted . . . BUT . . . what is just as important is knowing *when to pass* and how to run straight.

STRAIGHT RUNNING

Most three-quarters receive a pass and drift away from the passer. As a result, the three-quarters are seen to be scurrying diagonally across the field intent on shaking hands with touch line spectators. Against better players this is USELESS.

The receiver of a pass should *MOVE TOWARDS* the ball carrier as the latter is *ABOUT* to pass.



Trying to run straight *after* having received the pass is usually too late. The above method not only keeps the three-quarters on lines which are much more parallel to the touch-line, but it forces the defender to check or hesitate in his approach.

Checklist

SCRUM HALF

1. Make sure you develop the skill of getting into the correct position quickly, ie base of the scrum or touch-line side of the man who is feeding the ball from the line so that . . .
2. You can put your hands on the ball and, without any back swing, sweep it away instantly.
3. Aim the ball at the outside half, **not** metres in front of him. If the ball is put metres out in front of him he will be forced to run on to the ball thus bringing the rest of the three-quarters with him . . . If, of course, the outside half intends to take on the opposition himself then do by all means put the ball out in front of him!
4. Don't make decisions after having received the ball; make them a split second *before*. An experienced scrum half lifts his head whilst the ball is in the scrum to see where the opposition is and thus has a chance of making the correct decisions.

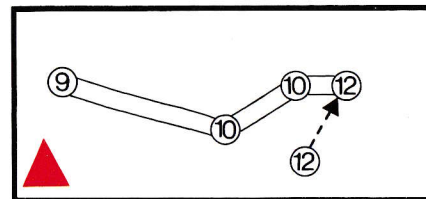
A GOOD SCRUM HALF USES HIS EYES!!

CENTRES

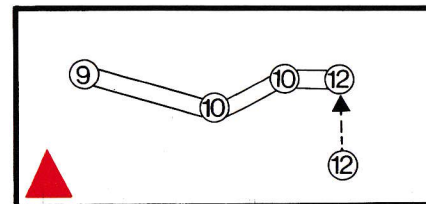
1. Not too steep.
2. Delay your running; outside leg forward.
3. Do not stand too close to the outside half. Check the number of strides the latter takes with the ball (they all run slightly across the field!) and adjust your position accordingly.
4. Outside centre in particular — turn towards your inside centre as the latter is about to pass the ball, unless you intend to break on the outside of your opposite number.
5. You should do everything you can as an outside centre to make your opposite number take you on so that when you release the ball to your full back (assuming the latter is in the line) the full back can go through the gap that you have created.
6. If the opposition is using the drift defence, try the simple switch — outside centre aim to go between their outside half and inside centre.

OUTSIDE HALF

1. Resist the temptation to run as the scrum half is about to put his hands on the ball — unless of course you are having a go yourself.
2. Check that the inside centre is not standing too close to you.
3. Make sure the centres are not too steep.
4. Encourage your open side wing to go wide by occasionally screw-kicking a ball into the far corner for him. This is an excellent ploy if the defending open side wing has not spotted his opposite number wideout.
5. Encourage the blind side wing to come into the three-quarter line outside you or between the centres — anywhere, anytime to create doubt in the minds of the defence.
6. Don't call moves and then carry them out regardless of how the opposition are defending. If, for example from a line-out ball they are employing a drift defence, then you might attempt to stop them by running yourself; using your blind side wing, chip (kick) over the top as the opposition advance etc.



Centre (12) too close to Outside Half (10)



Centre (12) correct

Note on defence for Outside Half and Centres
They must work hard in practice so that they come up as one line — avoid dog-legging.

WING

1. Don't wait for the ball — go looking for it.
2. You can be just as useful to your team without the ball as with it, particularly as a blind side wing.
3. Develop the confidence to leave your outside centre if you are the open side wing and wander right across to the far touch line. You will create all sorts of mental and physical problems for your opposite number if you do. Remember the best time to change positions is when all eyes are watching the scrum or line-out.
4. As an openside wing, develop running in and out again on arcs, ie come from a wide position, run in but keeping just on the outside of your opposite number.
5. Watch your own outside half and anticipate the latter's long diagonal screw-kick. With luck all you will then have to do is touch down for a try!
6. Watch their outside half to see what he has done with the ball before moving in to take the extra man (if that is the defensive system being adopted).

FULL BACK

1. Watch carefully their half backs and read the options open to them. If you do this then you will be in the correct position and the ball will never bounce. All else follows from this ability to read the game. The most brilliant tackler is useless unless he is in the correct position!
2. Develop, as a matter of urgency, the ability to kick with either foot.
3. In attack, from scrum or line-out, use as a guide the goal posts, with the far post behind you. You should aim for the near post. (See diagram P.3).

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Extracts from: 'INTERNATIONAL RUGBY for Players, Coaches and Spectators'
by Don Rutherford.