

Learning & Development Task #8 Peter Breen.

ATTACK Shapes - What the top teams are doing well.

Intro: During 2022 Super Rugby Pacific my key focus for this task while watching is looking at what some of the best teams are doing within their attack shapes. Not the attack shape itself, which is important but more so how each player, teams and coaches are using individual skill sets to manipulate defenders.

Whenever a team decides to organize themselves with an attack shape strategy 1331, 242, 222 or round the corner is just the starting point from which attack can start. One of the best quotes I have heard is “we have a structure to get to unstructured as soon as possible.”

Once the general team shape and structure has been established, players and coaches need to shift the attention to now creating attacking opportunities. When reviewing shape I have been comparing teams in these areas.

Team/Individual Attack Review:

1. Speed & Timing.
2. Deception & Motion.
3. Defenders Beaten & Offload Culture.

Intro, Creating Space vs Reading Space.

“Where is the gap/overlap vs creating the gap/overlap?”

In most sessions and warm up drills we tend to set up the attack to have a 2v1, 3v2 of and an overlap. The drill is weighted towards the attack being successful and gaining confidence. However is this doing a disservice to individuals being able to create their own opportunities, gaps, space and offloads. When looking at some of the best in the game when faced with a 1v1, 2v2 or brick wall defense they are still able to find a way to expose the opposition or manipulate the defense or break the line.

A Lot of my coaching ideas come from a basketball background during highschool. Hours of time spent playing one on one lead to having to develop tactics and techniques to create an opportunity to score. Over time footwork to get a defender off balance improved, ball and head fakes to sell a movement or shot to then set up another player, tempo hesitations and body language to sell a play could free space to get a shot off.

Giving players drills and coaching in these areas will increase the amount of line breaks, defenders beaten per game and lead to more points scored. Developing each player in reading the defensive patterns, gaining more awareness and improving decision making areas can create a strong attacking culture.

01 Attack Speed & Timing

A few factors come into play when measuring ruck speed. The most common measure used is a ruck speed of less than 3 seconds or more than 3 seconds. Teams that can string phases together with a ruck speed of less than 3 seconds can keep defenses on the back foot, unstructured and allowing for more opportunities and weaknesses to attack.

Who is responsible for creating a FAST RUCK?

60% Responsibility is with the Ball Carrier.

20% Second Arriving Player.

20% Third Arriving Player.

60% responsibility of producing a fast ruck is with the ball carrier. A player being tackled should first create space for themselves to then produce aggressive fast ground skill movements presenting the ball is where the majority of fast ball comes from. Time at training and attention to detail to this skill is a must for all teams wanting to play with speed as a weapon.

At times it can benefit a team to actually give up some of the meters gained for a faster ruck. *Example: A midfielder makes a break of 30m through the middle of the field and is being tackled by the opposition fullback. Yes the ball carrier could fight with leg drive and upper body movements to gain another 2-3m taking time but this also gives the defense more time to recover and get set. If this ball carrier decides to prioritize creating a fast ruck to keep the attack fast and playing on top of the defense his or her actions can then match that with getting to ground and produce a ruck of less than 3 seconds to play from.*

The second arriving players cleanout/action makes up the next 20% of producing a less than 3 second ruck. Where a cleanout is required this needs to be made with force and speed shifting the defending players and their own body away from the ruck area. This will lead to a halfback having a clear path to pass the ball. If the cleanout is inefficient, slow and stays over the ball area this will delay the speed. An example of tracking this is putting a key term on this role. For example labeling this style of cleanout as a "Kill" and coaching it in fastbreak drills makes the role and execution clear for all players. A team policy from there could be that anytime the team has breached or made a break with go forward ball our first cleanout needs to be a kill style cleanout to ensure fast ball.

The third arriving player now has a quick decision to make based on what picture they are seeing. A second Kill clean out if needed, take space past the ball to secure the ruck, or if the ball is presented act as a halfback and move the ball to space or a calling game driver.

Teams that have clear detail around playing with speed and how they can achieve this end up with an advantage on attack producing more breaks, offloads and defenders beaten from the pressure the defense is under based on how fast the ruck speed is happening.

Fast Ball Ruck Example England vs All Blacks.

Here is a [video example](#) of England buying into the fast ball mentality and you can see in the video why it is so hard to defend when a team is getting rolling.

02 Deception & Motion

Deception is an under coached skill in rugby. Some players naturally have it and use it to their advantage. We often see 9's and 10's along with a sprinkling of other creative players using their eyes, body and the rugby ball to move and deceive defenders and create attacking opportunities. A simple ball fake (dummy pass) can shift a defender and create a break, hole or offload that wasn't there originally. A great example of deception used well is in a lineout, lifters and jumpers in motion selling and using deception and motion to win the ball off the top.

Dynamic footwork with and without the ball along with body shape and selling a running line is a great way to draw the defense's attention to bite in and create space for a backdoor/front door play. Having your hands up as if to receive a pass with the ball flying by your face to the next player will give that player the best chance to do their job, beat defenders and create space.

As players we can probably all remember being in a drill, marking up on someone who has amazing feet and making us feel uneasy trying to defend them and make the tackle. Small movements, looks, speed changes and good footwork giving them the upper hand.



Giving every player 1-15 coaching to develop their attacking game and becoming more of a threat is crucial if the goal is to play a high tempo style of play. Too often players are told “just

carry hard' in the middle of the field which leads to easy reads on defensive and creates slow ball. I

A way to also increase confidence across the board is to increase the overall skill set of the squad. Accurate passes, clean catching and the ability to execute any type of pass or offload builds more confidence and equips players to deal with line speed and pressure. Players that look like they have all the time in the world look like that because they have the skill set to play with no time.

03 Defenders Beaten & Offloads Culture.

Tracking how many defenders each player on your team is beating in training and games can spark a culture within an attack. It can also show where some players are lacking in a skill set in being able to beat defenders with their own unique strength, size, power and speed.

Not every player has to have a jumping sidestep in their toolkit but even the less agile players can find ways to beat a defender. Running over the top of someone with strength and power, a small step with a fend brushing off a player or a show of the ball dummy pass creating a gap all count as a defender beaten. If players know that this will show up on the stat sheet I have found they are more likely to bring more energy and care to each carry.

Look for **Arrow Offloads**.



In the image above SBW is making an offload from the tip of the arrow. He went forward in contact, got his body and nose through the point of both tacklers shoulders and found space at the front of an offload. This makes it an "arrow offload." The reason this is such an important coaching point is so that players look for positive offloads in positive positions. If we look for bail out options when under pressure all we do is pass the problem on to the next player.

In summary, I believe the teams having the most success across competitions have a great balance between being able to play fast with deception, motion and offloads. Couple that with being strong in scrum,lineout and mauls and teams attacks become relentless. If teams only have the DNA of one or the other over the course of a season and different playing conditions can become vulnerable and predictable.

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