

Constructing Backline Attack

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Introduction

In recent years rugby has turned its attention to the defensive components of the game and more specifically defending from ruck & maul situations. This has allowed the game to rotate off the axis of belief that the longer you have the ball in possession (the more phases) the better your chance of scoring will be. As a result of the strong defensive focus teams now have on average 3 phases to break the tackle line before it becomes stronger than that of the attack that is to threaten it.

It is for this reason that there must be a higher emphasis placed on set play attack.

Advantages of attacking off set piece:

- Increased space between & around defenders in the defensive line.
- Awareness of where the defenders will be situated – thus you are able to isolate weak defenders and apply pressure.
- Time to set appropriate alignment depth, width and special configurations.

Disadvantages of attacking off set piece:

- Defence will be very structured
- Defence has time to align with the correct width and shape
- As the ball is coming from a 'true contest', the quality of possession may vary.

It is important to consider the following questions before we can successfully attack from set piece.

1. What are we trying to achieve?
2. Where and with whom are we going to achieve this?
3. Who is going to assist to make this happen? &
4. Who is accountable for retaining possession if this is not achieved?

1. What are we trying to achieve?
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The **Objectives** of a backline attacking movement can vary depending on the position on the field or the strengths and weakness for both the attacking & defending team. It would be fair to say that the general objectives of all backline attack would be to take the ball forward, however in doing this there is room for further variation. For example, is the objective to simply take the ball forward or is the objective to create space between or around defenders in the hope of breaking the tackle line, thus gaining large amounts of territory.

While both objectives focus on taking the ball forward and over the gain line, there are high degrees of differences in the use of the attacking key factors that will need to be applied to achieve the desired outcome.

The key factors of backline attack include:

- Alignment
- Speed
- Angle
- Support
- Communication

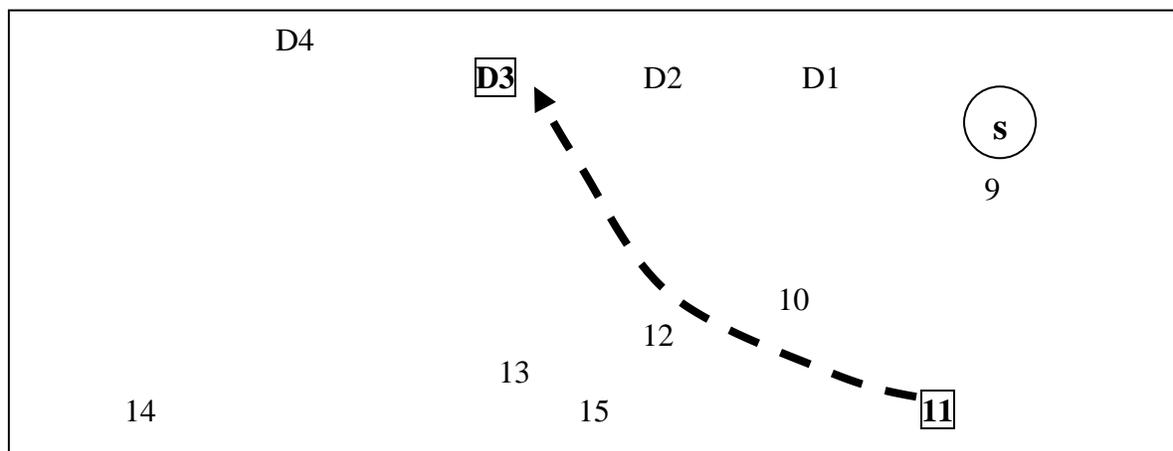
To simply take the ball forward, the best *alignment* would be shallow, thus eliminating the high degree of *speed* and *angles* that could be applied. While if the aim of the backline attack was to break the tackle line then the elements of *speed* and *angles* would need to be applied, thus the importance of a deeper / wider *alignment*. The role of the *support* players would also vary depending on the width and speed of the attack. The support systems will be outlined in section 4.

2. Where and with whom are we going to achieve this?

The '*where*' should be decided by analysing your opponents and finding a weakness in their defence. The identified weakness could be a mis-match in size, speed, experience (decision-making) or skill. This is referred to as the desired penetration channel (DPC).

The '*whom*' will be that person in your attack that has the most dynamic attacking qualities to exploit the defensive weakness identified in the desired penetration channel. This does not have to be your best attacker but the one that has the attacking qualities that best suit to exploit the weaker defender i.e. 120kg centre to attack the 75kg fly-half.

It is also important to be aware of your opponent's strengths and your own weakness to ensure that they do not become a focus in the attacking movement.



Example: Desired Penetration Channel is through D3 who is slow in moving lateral in the defensive line. Attacking player 11 has very quick footwork and shows great speed, agility and evasion skills in traffic and thus is identified to attack D3 for the outcome of a line break.

4. Who is accountable for retaining possession if this is not achieved?

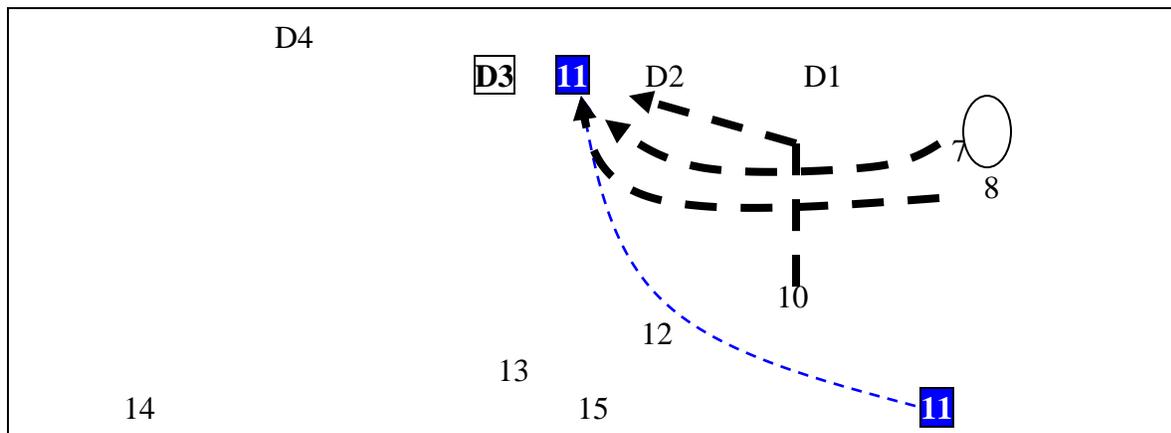
Our game is extremely unpredictable and thus even the best designed attacking plays may not have the impact we expect every time. It is for this reason that we need to ensure that we have an effective support network 'behind' the ball.

On every attacking movement we need to allocate support roles for those players around the ball in the event that the ball carrier is stopped (tackled). This includes a 'primary' & 'secondary' supporters.

Due to the nature of most back line attacking movements with the use of speed & width; it is hard to rely solely on the back row to secure position if the play breaks down. It is for this reason that back line players must be responsible for the ball if it goes into contact.

A back line support philosophy may be as follows:

Desired Penetration Channel (DPC)	Allocated supporters
10 & 12 Channel	1 x Backs & 2 x Forwards
13 Channel	2 x Backs & 1 x Forwards
11 & 14 Channel	3 x Backs



Example: If Attacking 11 is tackled in the PDC then it is the responsibility of the open side breakaway (7), the Number 8 (8) and the Fly-half (10) to secure possession at the tackle contest. The 12 & 13 are not responsible because if they are running the correct lines they are both running away from the DPC.