Task 12
Lateral and Linear Support
Prepared by Sam Chan – Singapore Rugby Union 2005

A lot of rugby team that I came across do not actually understand how to create and identify space for the team to break through to score or minimum creates chaos in opposition defence. The team must have the ability to threaten defence by breaking through the defence line. This can be done by having good understanding of support play to create space to put one of his attacking players to break through the defence line.

‘ The space that is created is the space that the player is moving away from not the space the player is moving in to’

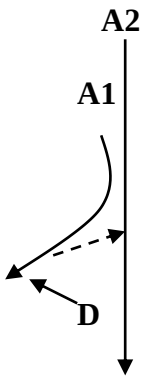


Fig. 1

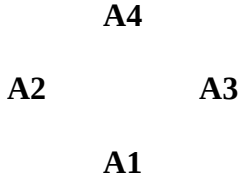
The principles of support play:

1. Support in depth

By supporting in depth, the receiver will not stop suddenly by tackle and also it allows him to change direction. Support players who do not make this allowance may run past the ball and be out of play.

2. Support on both sides of the ball carrier

Teammates should ensure that the ball carrier could pass to teammates on the both sides of the ball carrier. This provides both passing options and to distract defenders away from the ball carrier. The best is to adopt a diamond support formation as shown in Fig. 2.



A1- Ball carrier
A2, A3 & A4 – Support players that provide options for A1

Fig. 2

3. Pass to the support so that possession is retained
4. Use support to keep the ball in play

Upon receiving the ball the ball carrier should attack the space between two defenders. At least one defender will be drawn out of position to tackle the ball carrier. The ball carrier in accepting the tackle will turn to towards the space that created by him. The support player will then run into to the space to receive the ball so that the attack can continue.

Lateral Support

Lateral support is used when there is a player/s in the better position than the ball carrier in space across the field. For this situation, the attackers is outnumbers defenders across the field. A pass can then be made to the outside players to take advantage of the greater space, mismatch or creating an overlap.

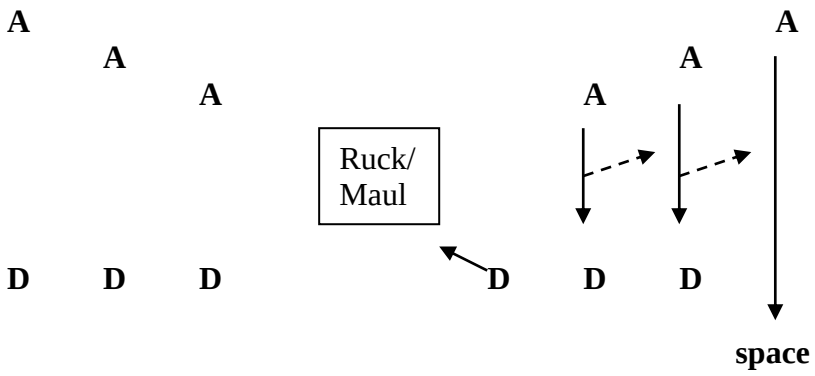


Fig. 3

Creating space for lateral support

The attacking team try to break through the lateral outnumbers defenders line and get the ball carrier behinds the defenders. This will force the defenders who initially stacked out to rush to defend the break through and this might result more stacked defenders commit in tackle or tackle situation and create space across the field as shown in Fig. 3.

The break through can be happened by using linear support (passing the ball to space), ruck (hammer and pick and go off the ruck) and driving or rolling maul.

It is important to have backs capable of forming rucks and mauls, and forwards able evade and pass, allow the ball to be used to do more work and economises on the distance the forwards are expected to run to maintain continuity as shown in Fig. 4..

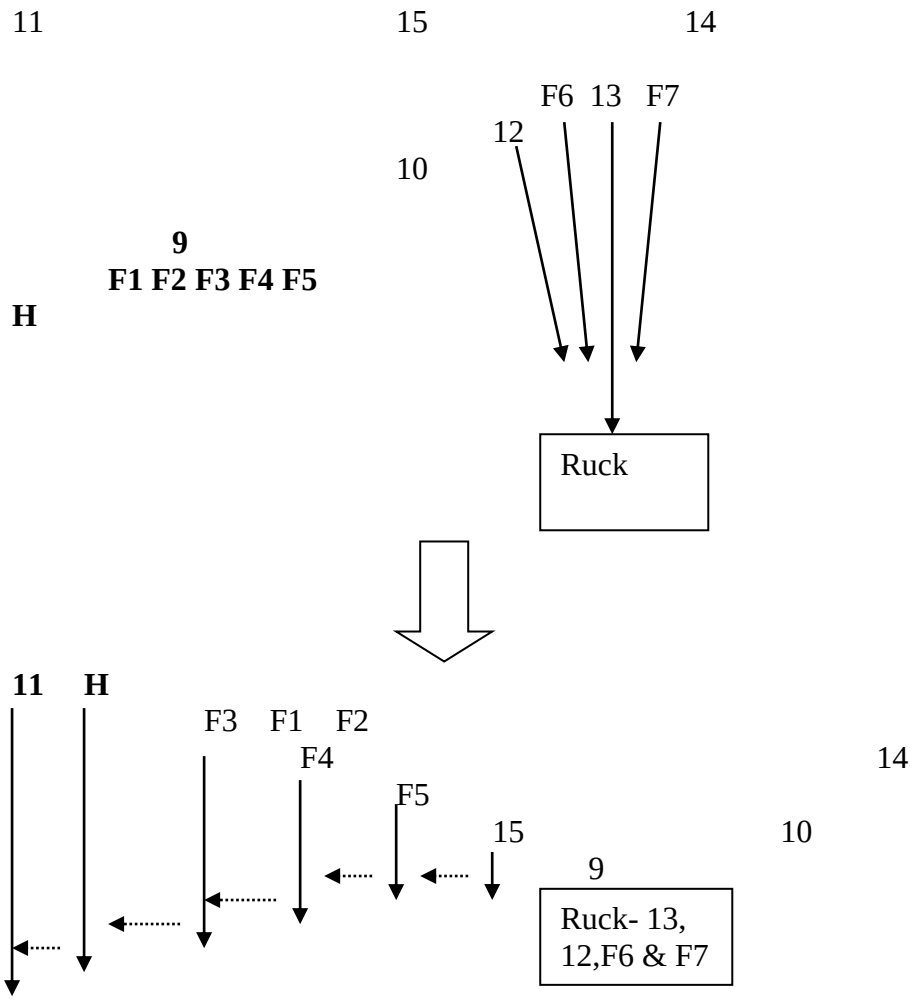


Fig. 4

Linear Support

If the lateral space is not available due to good-stacked defence and defence outnumbers attack, there is no point in moving the ball laterally across the field. Then linear attack will be a good option. In this situation, the ball carrier evades the defender to left or right, creating space for the support players (Diamond formation) either left or right. Therefore the skills require by the ball carrier are sidestepping and offloading ball in tackle.

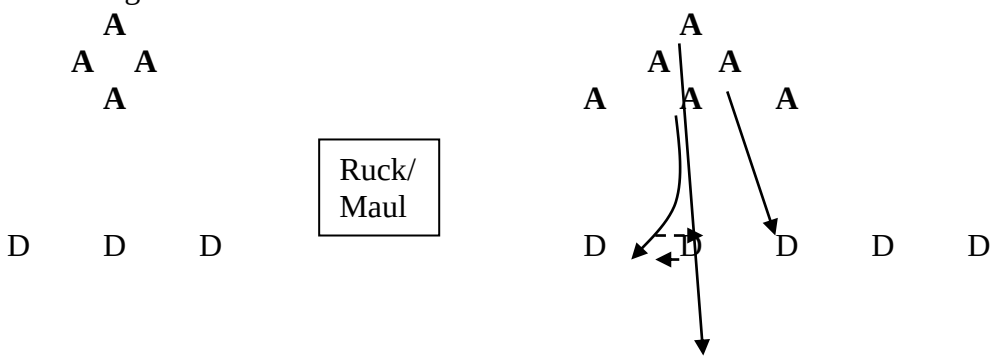


Fig. 5

Creating space for linear support

A player from directly behind the ball carrier and in sufficient depth to allow for the change in the ball carrier's running line, will accelerate towards the space the ball is passed into, and continue play. If the pass is made back towards the support player, it is unlikely that it can be defended, as seldom do defender position themselves behind an opposition ball carrier.

When space is created by the ball carrier's evasive running, it is best exploited by the support player entering the space late and unexpectedly from behind the ball carrier. The support player should stand in the space ready for the ball, as this will make them easy target.

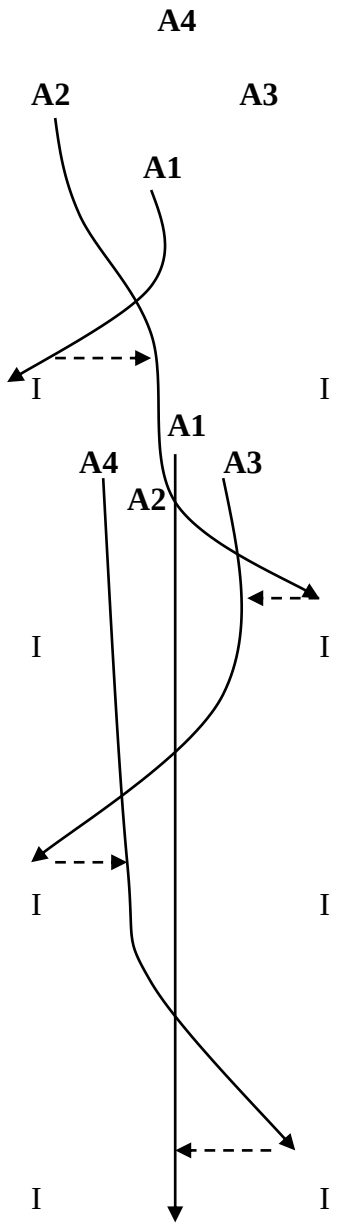
The receiver may wish to receive the ball flat to reduce the defender's space and time to react. This player can only challenge the defender significantly if he stands deep and receives flat, running at pace but with enough stability to evade the tackler.

Make sure that the receiver support in depth if not when the ball carrier does the unexpected, or stopped prematurely, the support player will be overshoot and out of play.

If the ball carrier is tackled then a ruck or maul will be formed and it might create space laterally and then the team can use lateral support lateral Support

Drills to enhance linear support.

Drill 1 :



I = Agility pole (Distance between 2 poles (gate) is 1 metre)

Fig. 6

The drill involves a group of 4 running forward and passing the ball just before and infront of the gate and the next supporting player receiving the ball and running through the gate. The objective is the ball carrier initially running straight and suddenly evade toward one side to create a space (the space that the ball carrier moving away) and the support player supporting in depth and hit the space. Make sure that the 4 players are always at a diamond formation.

Drill 2

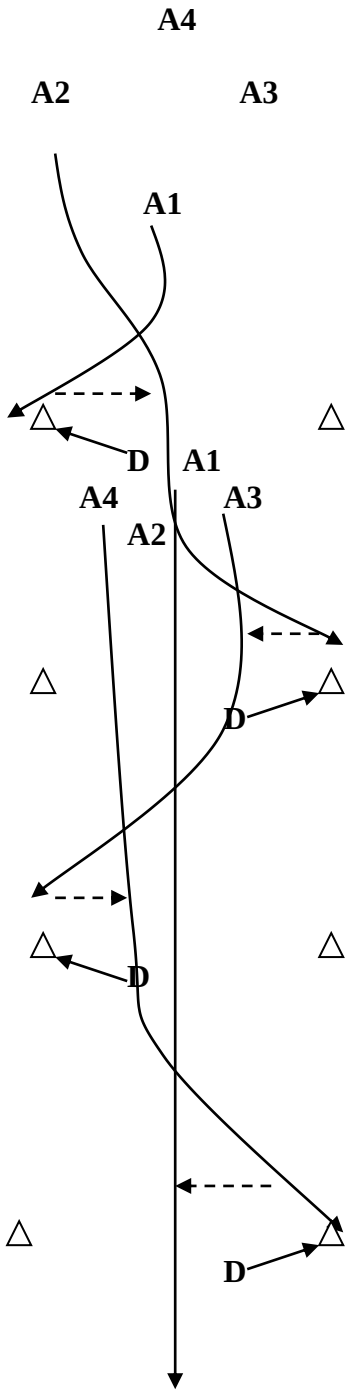


Fig. 7

The drill involves a group of 4 players running forward in Diamond formation. The ball carrier evades the defender by going outside the channel. The ball will pass the ball into the channel and receive by a supporting players coming from depth. At all time the attacking team should try to maintain the Diamond Support formation.

Variation 1: Defender only allows to move between the two cones.
Variation 2: Defender is allows to move forward and tackle the ball carrier
Variation 3: Ball carrier forces the defender to tackle him low so that he passes the ball behind the defender

Drills to create space across the field

Ruck and picks and goes off the ruck

The defending group line up in a single file down the field at spacing 10-15m between each defender. The attacking group consists of 8 players facing the group. Player A1 takes the ball; runs into the first defender and player A2 dose a hammer on A1 and drive forward. Player A3 clears the defender away. Player A4 picks up the ball runs into the second defender and A5 dose a hammer on A6. Player A7 clears the defender away and Player A8 picks the ball and runs into 3rd defender and so on.

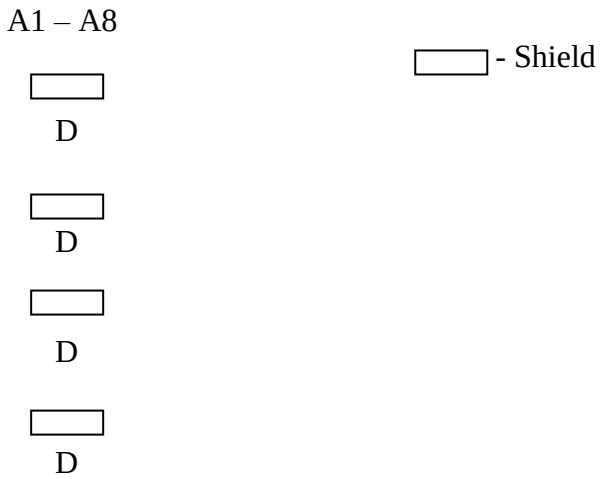


Fig. 8

Rolling Maul (8 attackers vs 4 Defenders)

The diagram 1 shows the completed driving maul with the direction of the ball transfer being shown with an arrow.

The 4 defenders carrying shields will try to stop the rolling maul in area of 20m by 30m. The first 7 attackers will form a maul as shown in diagram 1 and drive forward. When they heard the whistle blow, the attackers will stop driving (indicate that the maul has slow down). The 8th attacker will call a roll to left or right. The 8th attacker will then grab the driver with one arm. They would then roll off to left or right with their backs to the defenders. The 8th attacker taking the driver around the corner would really try and generate a lot of speed as they turned the corner. They must stay close to the edge of the maul, as a wide turn would result easy target by defenders.

Once they rolled all players would be moving at the same time and the left and right blockers would get on quickly. Players would add on until a driving maul is formed. Repeat the sequence until the attacking score a try.

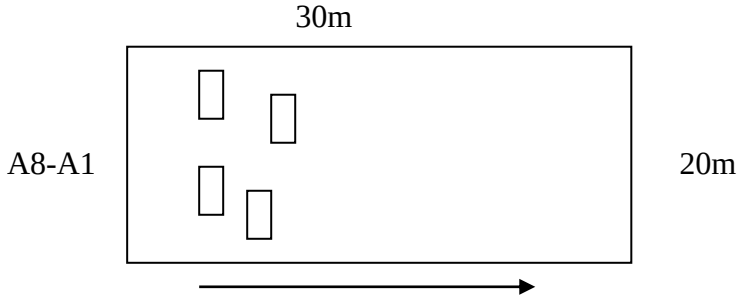
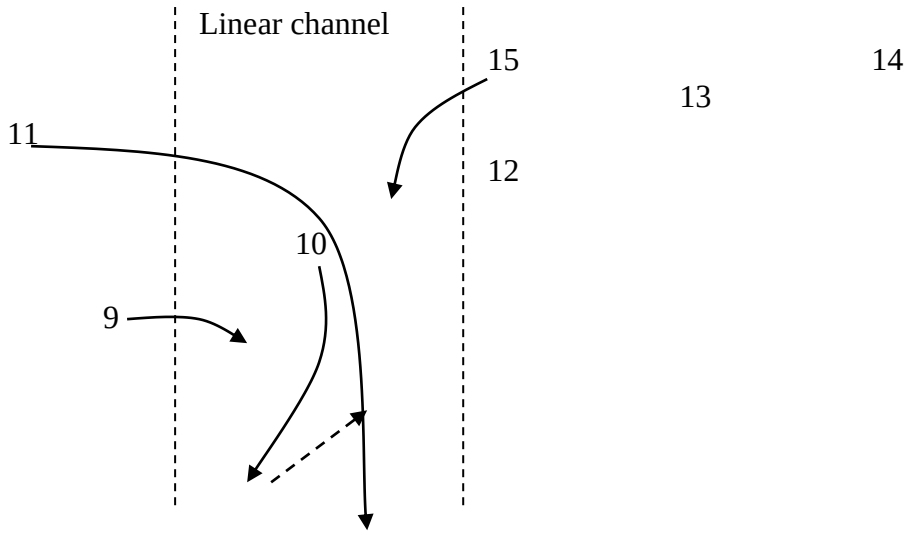
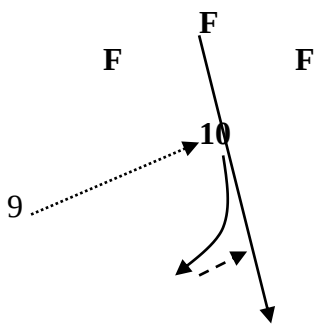


Fig. 9

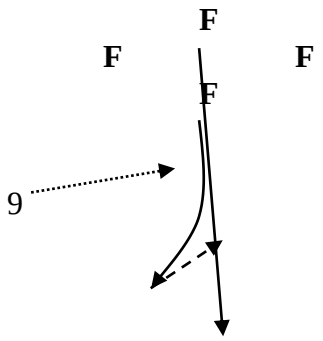
Example of Linear attack by Backs



Example of Linear attack by Backs and forwards



Example of Linear attack by forwards



The key strategy in all support is to read the situation, to recognise where the space has been created, and to probe the space to cause a continual adjustment in the defence. With each attack the pressure on the opposition increases, creating an increased opportunity to finished things off and score. In addition to the retention of possession and playing to space, pace must be added. If the speed of the attack slows or stationary, the opposition will be able to re-establish their defensive pattern.