

Ruck Defence

Defensive Setup

Ruck or Breakdown defence should be looked at as a sequential elimination of threats.

All players must look to **move forward and take the space in their channel before moving laterally.**

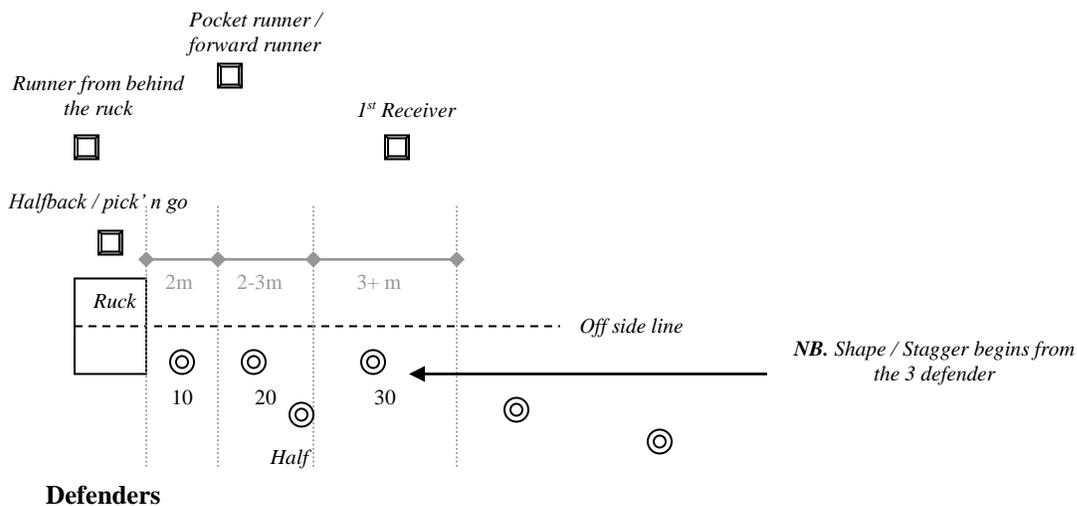
Start with a split stance, not flat on your heels, Outside foot up and hands up, not on your thighs. (As players become fatigued they will rest their hands on their thighs and this does not enable a quick take off from the defensive line.)

AT 10 & 20 YOU ARE ALWAYS RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR CHANNEL FIRST

The 10, 20 and 30 defenders **must not let attack get over the advantage line** through this area, they should aim to make a tackle on behind the attacking teams gain line.

Defenders must call their defence position i.e. 10, 20, 30 or half.

Attackers



The “10” Defender

The first threat is the pick and go, the second is an 8 Ball (Gregan Ball). The 10 defender must take the inside runner and not the halfback. The 10 defender is responsible for this and any other attack in their channel. This threat must be covered first. So first arriving is locked in as the 10 defender.

10 and 20 defender calls the line up.

On a pick and drive the 10 defender must attack the ball carrier, they are not to passively “sack” or pull down the ball carrier as this often results in quick ball. The first choice of tackle is always low if possible.

Common Errors - Moving laterally rather than forward, however the main problem is fatigue. Fatigue is a common cause of error in this area as players have little excuse for not performing their role.

The “20” Defender

The 20 defender is the next to lock in. **10 and 20 defender calls the line up**

The next threat is the halfback scoot, a forward runner or an inside ball to a pocket runner. The 20 Defender is responsible for these and is focused on the halfback. His eyes must be focused on the halfback and then the runners in his channel. **AS SOON AS THE HALFBACK RUNS THE 20 DEFENDER MUST ATTACK HIM AND CALL “JAM”** to let the 30 defender know to come in. The 20 defender is the next to lock in. **10 and 20 defender calls the line up**

NB. On extremely slow ball the defence may shuffle big forwards in from 30 or wider to 20, but this must be done so from behind and the current 20 must not move until the new 20 is in place

Common Errors – same as 10 defender + letting the halfback run and holding off, the 20 defender must attack the halfback if he begins to run incisively i.e. to ball play, as opposed to just make a long pass.

The “30” Defender

The next threat is generally the ball distributor. The 30 defender must take up a position on the inside shoulder of the 1st receiver / ball distributor. The 30 is responsible for the 1st receiver. If the halfback runs then the 30 must react to the 20 calling “JAM” and move in to cut off an offload from the halfback who has committed the 20 defender.

Common Errors – Coming up too quickly or slowly and opening a gap behind or in front or around 20. Not staying inside shoulder of opposition ball distributor and getting drawn laterally and stepped inside. Not continuing to shut the gate after 10 has passed the ball.

The “Half” Defender

The last threats are offloads or failure in the defensive system. For this reason the half defender must take a position behind the 20 and 30 defender on the likely side of attack. From here the half defender is responsible for ensuring the positioning of the 10, 20 and 30 are correct (i.e width and positioning) and to move into these roles if there is no one already in position. It is called the half defender because this role is traditionally performed by the halfback at most rucks.

From each ruck the half defender is then responsible to cover chip kicks and grubbers through the line.

Common Errors – Standing behind the ruck, this effectively means the “half” defender is behind the strongest part of the defence (10 and 20) where there is little chance of a clean linebreak and also means they are further away from covering a chip or grubber kick. Another common error is constantly becoming involved at 10, 20 or 30 when it is unnecessary, it is the “half” defenders role to fill a gap at the last moment if necessary, not immediately go to that position, there is no excuse for being caught at 10, 20 or 30 on slow ball

Variation

When an opposition attack a lot through the 20, 30 and 40 channels, they have a particularly good running halfback or they play with an extremely long halfback pass it is worth considering adding a “22” defender. This defender stands in between the 20 and 30 defenders and slightly behind (1m). This defender is responsible for the space outside 20 and inside 30. The reason the defender is positioned 1m back is so that if they are not needed they can make a decision to assist the 20 or 30 defenders tackle and hopefully slow down or steal the oppositions ball

While this forms the simple basis of a ruck defence system. It is important to then look at some key decision making factors that will ensure the success of this system.

Decision Making around the Ruck (hold or fold)

Generally the hardest area to defend when the opposition manage to get quick ball is the far side of the ruck (i.e. when an opposition play a same way pattern). For this reason it is important to eliminate this threat. The short side will be covered by the arriving players from the inside as they move towards the ball. In this situation many players immediately take a 10 or 20 position on the near side of the ruck (lazy option), forcing players arriving later to go to the far side (ultimately arriving late and giving the opposition an advantage around the ruck). Each individual coach will have their own preference for the amount of people to fold (go to the far side), and this varies between 2 and 3. It is important that at least the 2 players fold to cover the 10 and 20 defender, so the ruck defence sequence should resemble something like far side 10, far side 20, near side 10, etc or another such variant.

Once this issue has been resolved it is important to look at another **common error** when going to the far side of the ruck. This is that players often won't square up, with their hips facing forward & outside foot up. This often results in lateral movement at 10 and 20, opening holes in the ruck defence for a 'Gregan' style pass or inside ball.

Decision Making wide of the Ruck (information outside in)

It is important to note that the players at 10, 20 and 30 are focused on their immediate defensive roles and do not have the time, or the vision to make defensive decisions about defensive systems and whether their side of the ruck is under or overstaffed. For this reason, players wider of the ruck (50, 60 etc the fifth and sixth defenders from the ruck) are responsible for controlling and organising the defence so that the attack cannot create an advantage / overlap.

This means that these players (and particularly the fullback and wingers) need to be feeding 'quality' information to others. This information needs to be specific about the system (i.e. jockey, blitz etc) it is also these players roles to ensure that there aren't overlaps developing. This means that the information often needs to be directed at specific players i.e. "James fold left" rather than a general "come left" type call. This is necessary as when players are fatigued they often do not react to non-direct communication.

To be able to be accurate in this decision making process, players must be taught to look to the sideline, then up the field to the posts then to the other sideline, whenever they are wider of the ruck.

Ultimately the success of ruck defence is based around the notion that everyone performs specific roles. It is important that the whole team understands these roles and that they are able to perform them under fatigue. The two major failings in most defensive systems are: not understanding the specific roles and fatigue.

When Understaffed in defence play with a PASSIVE defence i.e. "JOCKEY"

When understaffed in defence you need to buy time to cover the opposition and to re-organise the defence. For this reason you need to employ a PASSIVE Defence. A passive defence is where you aim to ride out the attack until you can re-organise. In a Passive defence:

- **Stay further inside the attacker than normal**
- **Do not push up hard, you may even back peddle to buy time.**
- **You need to have a larger than normal shape / stagger to buy time.**
- **You will aim not to commit tackles and hope to push the attack wide and continue to cover**
- **When making a tackle you will aim to slow the ball down as much as possible**

In a passive defence you are aiming to get back to a situation where numbers are equal again. Often when playing with a passive defence teams continue to defend in this way to the point that they are giving up yards (still defending passively) when the numbers become even. It is important that players continue to read the situation and when necessary change from a passive shape (lots of depth, little or no linespeed, trying to buy time) to a more aggressive man on man defence (less shape, more linespeed, trying to shut the play down).

When Overstaffed in defence or numbers are even play with an AGGRESSIVE DEFENCE i.e. “BLITZ”

This is an opportunity to apply as much pressure to the opposition attack as possible, aiming to hit attackers behind the gain line. In an Aggressive defence:

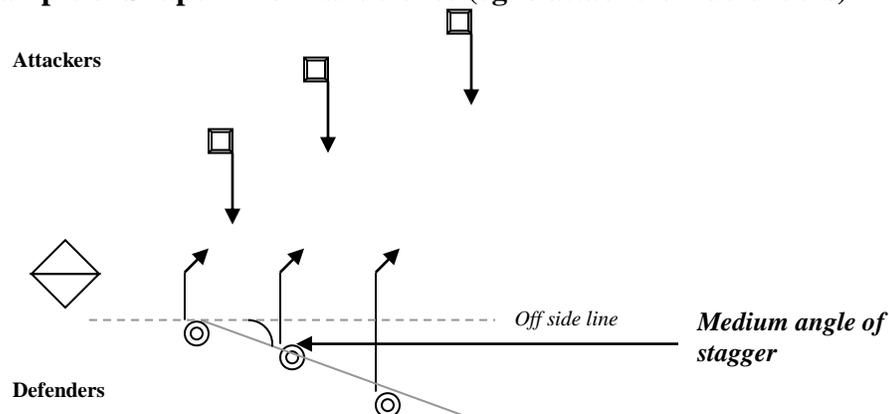
- **Stay closer to the midline of the attacker than normal (not so far inside)**
- **Push up very hard (still maintain a line)**
- **Aim to make dominant tackles as the attack catches the ball**
- **If a dominant tackle is made, then heavily contest the breakdown**

In an aggressive defence it is important that when an attacker takes the ball to the line that the defence outside hold the defensive line and wait to attack the pass at the line rather than move forward past the inside defence and opening gaps for the short ball at the line.

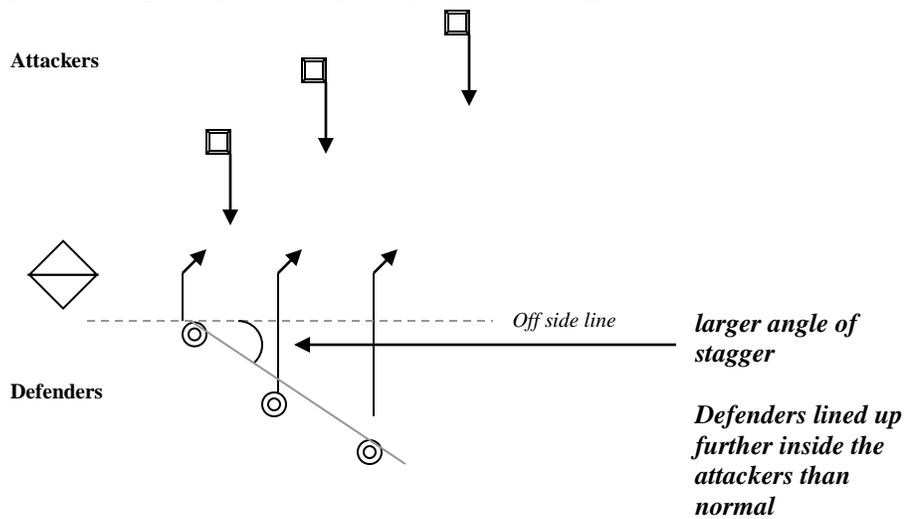
It is important to note that fatigue is also a limiting factor for the ability to have an aggressive defence everytime it is possible in a game

Adding more pressure – by having players shoot out of the line from 60 or 70 (6th or 7th defender from ruck) often the attack can be deterred from spreading the ball wide or can result in very big tackles as the attack catch the ball

Example of Shape in normal defence (eg. 6 attackers 4 defenders)



Example of Shape in passive “jockey” defence (eg. 6 attackers 3 defenders)



Example of Shape in an aggressive “blitz” defence (eg. 6 attackers 6 defenders)

