

Level 3 Major Assignment

Nathan Holman

Lineouts

With the introduction of professionalism in 1996 the game of Rugby has gone through a transformation in not only the way the game is played and administered but also in its laws.

At the end of each year the SANZAR (Super 12) conference looks at the relevant laws and approaches the IRB for a change in the administering of these laws or a law change to allow for the ethos of the game to continue.

This process is also done at the end of each World Cup and with the 2003 competition just around the corner it may be an ideal time to focus on the lineout and the relevant laws and tactics surrounding these laws.

With these changes in the laws, the tactics or when, where and why we now try to capitalise on these changes have also under-gone a transformation.

My major assignment will focus on the objective view of the lineout and its relative strategies to achieve the preconceived view that is the “major source of primary possession” in the game.

It will also detail the statistics from the Super12 competition and the ARU National 16's championships, in the use of the lineout including the variety, options and the tactics coaches use surrounding the laws of Rugby.

I will also endeavour to supply coaches with an overview of the benefits / disadvantages of applying some of the tactics or accepted norms or traditional beliefs in the lineout options.

This will be covered by supplying the statistics on the:

- Benefits of jumper and supporter movement in the lineout
- The next 3 phases after the lineout and the outcomes

1. Benefits of jumper and supporter movement in the lineout

For a pure statistic, the lineout success can traditionally be marked on whether the team has won the ball on their throw, or the opposition has spoiled the quality of the ball delivery for the next usage. While the benefits of coaches applying the tactic of moving the opposition to a space not being used in the lineout can be easily quantified, the disadvantage of this movement and the slight confusion it causes in the throwing team is often overlooked.

Any movement in position by the jumper and supporters where you don't win the ball can be registered or listed as a non effective lineout. The traditional response from coaches is that the throw wasn't on target or the jumper didn't get into position, therefore we lost the lineout.

The main reason for the turnover in possession, is however because the opposition may have read or moved into the space where the ball has been directed to go to because of the time spent in the movement of the jumper and supporters.

To achieve the benefit of the jumper / supporters movement in the lineout, coaches must spend a considerable amount of time educating the players on the technique of fast feet or effective foot speed. To be able to get into the jumping position early and have the ability to be able to react and change positions if needed.

The most overlooked aspect is however for coaches to be able to train their players to recognise the space in the lineout and how to get into this position.

Players need to be able to get to this position with the least amount of movement to be able to win the ball without worrying about the opposition contesting.

If the lineout is then not effective (i.e. you didn't win the ball on your throw) coaches will then be able to work on the individual skills of the thrower, jumper or supporters. This can be done because you will then be able to highlight the skill deficiencies of the individuals in why you lost the lineout.

The following statistics were compiled from all 2002 Super 12 lineouts and details the teams that had the throw and if they had;

- jumper / supporter movement in the lineout prior to the ball in play
- jumper / supporter movement in the lineout after the ball has left the throwers hand

From the Super 12 statistics where movement has been initiated prior to the ball leaving the throwers hands (i.e the jumper at 6 steps out of the line and moves to position 4) only 53% of lineouts were won by the team having the throw when the opposition contested.

This would indicate that teams now contest lineouts because;

- a) the amount of movement can give an indication as to where the ball is going
- b) by contesting you put the throwing team under greater pressure for a precise throw and jump
- c) teams don't spend enough time in practising or don't have an another option if the opposition read the movement

The statistics from Super 12 will also show that to be able to continually win the ball on your throw, the ball needs to leave the throwers hand before any movement in the jumper and supporters.

This is because the opposition are still waiting for their jumper to move before contesting, often causing them to be too late in the air to contest for the ball.

The Super 12 statistics will also show that the majority of the throws won by the team throwing the ball in (when the ball is in the air before the jumper has any movement) are directed to the jumper at position two in the lineout.

Although coaches may argue that by throwing to number two in the lineout won't give you the best options for the next usage of the ball, the result you gain is possession of the ball!

From there you can utilise whatever passage of play or direction you may want, depending on the coaches and teams philosophy.

2. The next 3 phases after the lineout and the outcomes

The following statistics from Super 12 (when the jumper / supporter moves before the ball is in play), actually shows that for the three phases after the throwing team has won the ball the attacking team options results in;

- 14% - try (attacking team within 20 metres from the opposition try line)
- 7% - scrum (attacking team to feed)
- 17% - penalty (attacking team)
- 11% - attacking team kicks the ball
- 23% - continue for one or more phases
- 28% - scrum (non attacking team feed)

Although only 67% of jumps are contested when movement is started before the ball is in play, the opposition win a high percentage of the ball at 53%.

This is compared to the statistic that 80% of jumps are contested when the ball is in play before the jumper / supporter make any movement. The result for the throwing team though, is that the opposition only win 13% of the lineouts that are contested.

For all of the positions in the lineout when the ball is in the air before the jumper / supporters make any movement the following statistics for the next three phases show the results as;

- 33% - continue for three or more phases
- 22% - penalty (attacking team)
- 11% - try (attacking team 20 metres from opposition try line)
- 26% - scrum (attacking team to feed)
- 8% - scrum (non attacking team to feed)

The following statistics are from the ARU National 16's championships and are of all of the lineouts throughout the tournament.

With the majority of coaches adding more variety into their teams lineout play, it was noticeable that over 60% of lineouts in the National 16's were less than the standard 7 players.

By having the acting halfback enter into the lineout and become a jumper it was difficult to quantify whether movement was started prior to the ball being in play, so I have concentrated on the ball usage after the lineout is completed.

Again the most successful jumping position in all the lineout options was position two. This can be shown because the opposition were not as effective in beating their opposition into the air because they were unable to determine where the ball was being directed to.

For all of the positions in the following statistics for the next three phases show the results for the attacking team as;

- 6% - Try
- 9% - Continue for three or more phases
- 5% - Scrum (attacking team)
- 10% - Penalty (attacking team)

Considering this is the first chance to win possession of the ball and the chance to start the continuity and the throwing team have an slight advantage the following results show that when the opposition contest it results in;

- 14% - turnover by winning the ball at the lineout
- 9% - turnover by the throwing team by not throwing straight
- 7% - turnover within the next three phases
- 10% - turnover by the throwing team overthrowing the jumper
- 7% - attacking team kicks possession away
- 14% - attacking team knocks on within the next three phases
- 6% - scrum (defending team)

For each of the jumping positions it is advised that the listed statistics only show the end results. They could however be the desired outcome the team wanted because of their pattern or style of play, the data is only a reflection on the results that occurred from the player's decisions.

It could also be argued that by electing to form a lineout by kicking for field position (from a penalty) outweighs the turnover in possession that you may lose from the lineout.

Scrum statistics may or may not show that by electing to form the scrum because you can then have an advantage in attacking numbers may be more beneficial than kicking for touch to form a lineout.

All of these decisions will be made based upon the player's skill and decision making.

The common thought within rugby coaches is to play a specific style or pattern of play that sets up structure for a minimum of phases because of the Wallabies recent success.

Within the elite end of players and coaching personnel, this may or may not be effective depending on the teams expected outcome's, but all the statistics shown indicate that this team tactic isn't the most successful for continual ball usage and retention.

There is then a need for continued work on the player's ability to be able to effectively retain and continue to use the ball in whatever environments they find themselves in.

The purpose of the assignment however, was to show the statistics of the lineouts and the ball usage that occurred in 2002.

From the statistics detailed, choosing the lineout as a team tactic may or may not be the best option depending on your coaching / team philosophy.

In summary it is incumbent on coaches to be able to effectively train their players to be able to recognise where space is and how to take advantage of it in all lineouts.

Players can be taught to recognise where space is in a lineout through training and by asking open ended questioning which will force them to be able to understand and also how to take advantage of this space.

Once players have this understanding, the coach can then utilise all available resources in their game plan. This way you are not limiting your team options to be able to win the ball and then start the platform of continuity.