

PLACE KICKING

“An integral component of the game today”

The key to success with all types of kicking is undoubtedly correct technique and consistent practice. It is extremely important that the athlete applies him/herself in practice sessions so that the practice scenario replicates the game scenario as closely as possible. The closer the influence of practice on the competition scenario the better the athlete's ability to recall the practiced movements during the game. (Magill, 1993)

All forms of kicking are a complex skill and should be coached and practiced with this in mind and be treated with high importance when planning practice sessions.

Place kicking for goal whether it be a conversion or a penalty attempt has become one of the most important aspects of the game. A high percentage success rate for a goal kicker is invaluable to any team. A goal kicker who converts at 80% or higher can place unwanted extra pressure on an opposition, consequently forcing them to play an extremely high disciplined defence structure.

There has been a rise in the quality of place kicking from Super 14 2007 season to the recently completed Super 15 2013 season. This may be due to coaches expecting a higher standard of place kicking so therefore more time is spent practicing specifically on place kicking.

The table below reflects the averages taken from the entire competition from all team conversions and penalty attempts for that particular season. The statistics were taken from each of the competing teams leading goal kickers who attempted the most kicks for their team during the season.

Competition	Year	Success Average for season
Super 14	2007	71.60%
Super 14	2008	70.60%
Super 14	2009	71.50%
Super 14	2010	76.70%
Super 15	2011	75.40%
Super 15	2012	80.95%
Super 15	2013	77.60%

As mentioned above, an 80 percent or higher goal kicker would be of great advantage to any team. When looking at the most successful teams of the past decade in Super Rugby or International Rugby, the teams who have won championships have had a world class goal kicker.

Provided in the tables below are the “all time” percentages of some leading goal kickers over the past decade who have all made significant contributions to their provinces or countries winning championships. It is evident the northern hemisphere kickers are kicking with a far superior place kicking percentage than their southern hemisphere counterparts. This of course would be up for

discussion as to why the northern hemisphere players have a higher successful percentage. Northern hemisphere rugby seem to place more of an emphasis on trusting their goal kickers to take shots at goal rather than kicking to the corner in search of a try. This may then force the coaching staff to incorporate more kicking practice sessions into their training schedules which will in turn improve the performance of the goal kicker.

SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE

NAME OF KICKER	ORIGIN	ALL TIME KICKING PERCENTAGE
Morne Steyn	South Africa	81.12%
Peter Grant	South Africa	80.78%
Dan Carter	New Zealand	79.17%
Christian Lealiifano	Australia	78.65%
Mike Harris	New Zealand/Australia	76.30%

Note: "All time" kicking percentages are taken from when the individual first played for their respective countries at an Under 20 level, to their professional club/state/province level through to Internationals.

NORTHERN HEMISPHERE

NAME OF KICKER	ORIGIN	ALL TIME KICKING PERCENTAGE
Jonathon Sexton	Ireland	90.50%
Leigh Halfpenny	Wales	89.96%
Ronan O'Gara	Ireland	89.90%
Freddie Michalak	France	87.50%
Jonny Wilkinson	England	85.60%

Note: "All time" kicking percentages are taken from when the individual first played for their respective countries at an Under 20 level, to their professional club/state/province level through to Internationals.

During the 2013 Spring tours undertaken by Australia, New Zealand and South Africa a total of 129 shots at goal were attempted by all competing teams which consisted of England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, France, Italy, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. (The New Zealand vs Japan game has been excluded from the data provided) It clearly demonstrates the southern hemispheres ability and willingness to score tries as opposed to the northern hemispheres high total of penalties attempted.

- There were a total of 11 matches played between the southern hemisphere and northern hemisphere nations.
- There was an average of just under 12 shots at goal (conversions and penalties) per match.
- The southern hemisphere teams combined scored 33 tries compared to the northern hemispheres combined of just 13 tries scored.
- The southern hemisphere teams combined attempted 37 penalties compared to the northern hemispheres combined attempts of 46.
- The southern hemisphere teams combined kicked 30/33 conversions and 24/37 penalties.
- The northern hemisphere teams combined kicked 10/13 conversions and 33/46 penalties.

Whilst there are some basic guidelines for successful place kicking, the majority of players need to develop their own routine that they are comfortable with and that will enable them to get a consistent strike of the ball. There are a range of factors that will determine the outcome of a kick, however if the kicker follows what has been practiced and outlined, then the chances of poor execution will decrease.

See below some key factors which are crucial for successful place kicking.

Key factors:

- Train players to practice positive visualisations. When lining up the ball get the kicker to visualise the ball going through the posts, visualise previous successful kicks in an important situation during a match or some successful kicks the kicker practised during training leading into the match.
- The kicker must get “into the zone” as soon as a try is scored in preparation for the kick. From this moment, all thoughts must be positive.
- When placing the ball on the tee aim a seam towards the target.
- Once the ball is placed on the kicking tee, kicker to focus on the contact point at all times.
- Kicker to use the same routine when lining up to kick the ball and when approaching the ball.
- When approaching the ball, accelerate without rushing into the ball.
- Non kicking foot pointing to the target and should be planted approx one foot away from the ball at the point of contact.
- Non kicking foot’s back heel should be in line with the point of the ball.
- On contact, shoulders should be facing the target.
- The point of contact is with the bone on the top of the instep.
- On the non kicking foot side, the kicker should try and keep his arm as horizontal as possible for balance.
- After the ball has been kicked, the kicker should transfer body weight through the ball, aiming to end up on the toes of the non kicking leg, and making sure the chest is strong and square to the target. “Chest to the Target”!

When practicing goal kicking, it is extremely important to practice as close to real game situations as possible. Some examples of this are listed below.

- Practice taking shots at goal under fatigue. Ask the player to nominate an exercise to fatigue them and then get them to kick 2 or 3 shots at goal while their heart rate is high. Some examples of this might be shuttle runs, passing at pace with another player, hitting hit shields, tackling tackle bags or boxing on pads
- When possible, practice in adverse weather conditions. E.g. Rain and wind.
- Practice with a defensive chaser putting pressure on the kicker, or with a goal post pad standing upright in the line of the kicker.
- Practice with some recorded crowd noise.

Communicating with individual kickers to find out how they like to practice is crucial. Some kickers might like to kick many balls and be on the field for long periods while others may prefer to have short and sharp sessions. It is vital that kickers receive feedback during a practice session however frequent feedback during a session might lead to a decline in performance.

When kicking to the posts record every kick at every session to identify if there are any trends when the kicker misses. This would include whether the kick had fallen short, hooked or sliced when

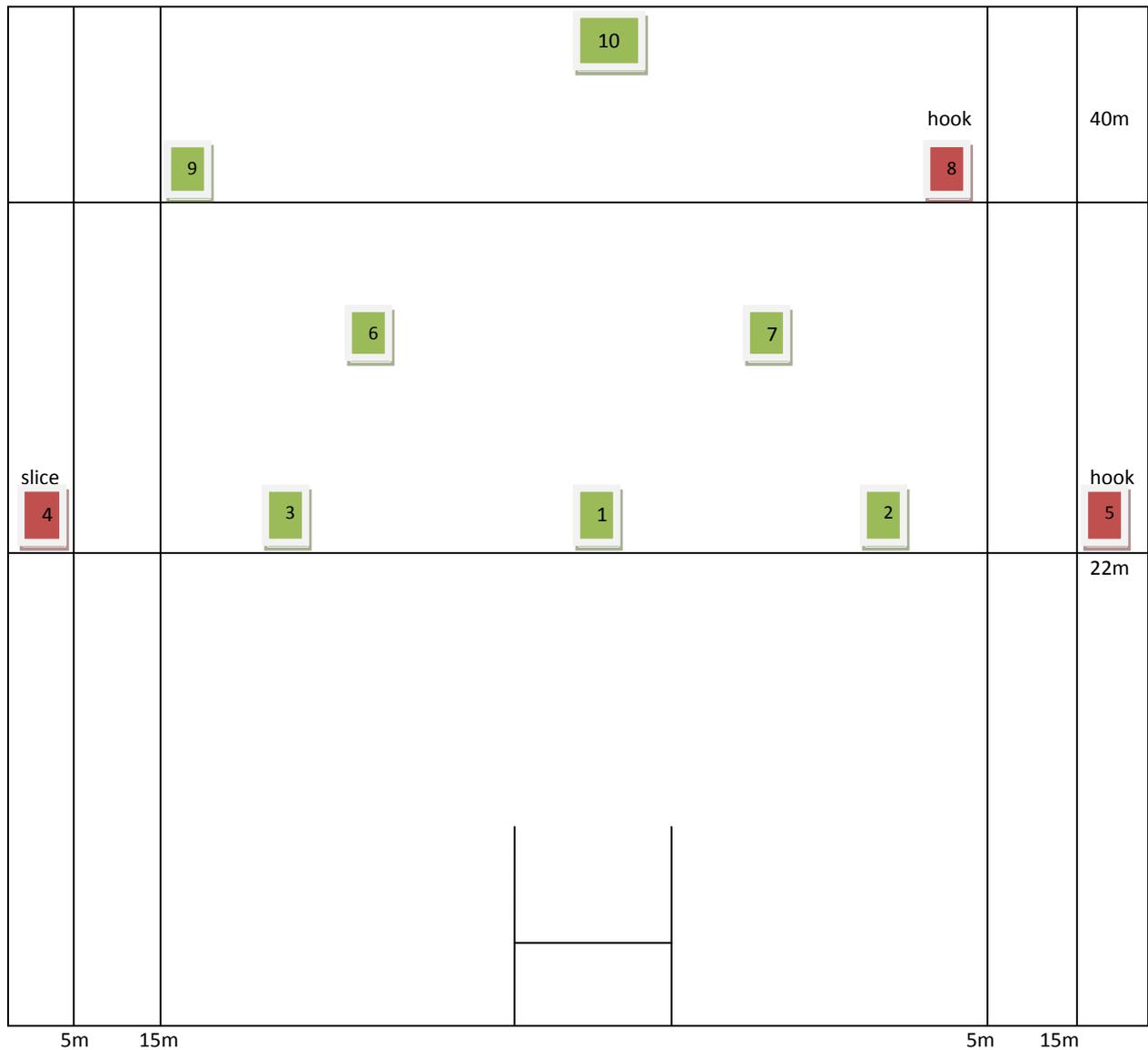
missed. If a kicker is consistently missing kicks from a particular section of the field, analysing video footage of the kicker would be necessary to rectify technique issues.

Below is an example of a kicking chart which could be used to record a place kickers practice session.

NAME: John Smith

Position	No. of Kicks	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date	Date
		1/11/13							
		Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score	Score
1	3	3/3							
2	2	2/2							
3	2	2/2							
4	1	X slice							
5	1	X hook							
6	2	2/2							
7	2	2/2							
8	1	X hook							
9	1	1/1							
10	1	1/1							
Total	16	13							
%		81.25%							

50m



References:

Magill, R. (1993). Motor learning: Concepts and applications (4th Edition). Madison, WI: WM. C. Brown.