

# Building a Lineout Menu: Speed, Efficiency, and Variation

A well-constructed lineout menu is one of the most potent attacking and control-of-possession weapons available to a rugby team. The design of that menu becomes especially important to coaches when trying to optimise clarity, repeatability, and adaptability without overwhelming players. When built correctly, a lineout system can become a spine of the team's strategy, giving them clean possession, launching platforms for structured attacks, and enabling try scoring opportunities when entering oppositions attacking zones.

Three core themes serve as the foundation for a high-performing lineout menu in this context: speed, efficiency, and variation. Each plays a distinctive but interconnected role in shaping players' decision-making, movement patterns, and the strategic architecture that underpins the team's identity.

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## 1. Speed: Accelerating Decision-Making, Movement, and Execution

Speed can refer to many elements in the lineout itself. Setting the line early to catch opposition off guard or unprepared. Speed of calling to limit defensive understanding. Speed of movement throughout the lineout to lift and jump. All of these elements are critical components to acknowledge when building a lineout menu, particularly where opposition analysis is increasingly in depth, it proves as a significant foundation to the success of a well-functioning lineout.

A fast lineout can prevent the defence from:

- correctly matching numbers,
- identifying likely jumpers,
- reading the caller's cues,
- adjusting defensive pods or lifters,
- and setting up a contest or maul defence.

Utilizing speed may be individual areas of the above or used in conjunction with one and other.

To embed speed into the lineout system, the menu must be structured around pre-set frameworks that accelerate decision-making. This doesn't mean reducing choice—it means organising options into intuitive patterns so players can execute rapidly.

Condensed call structures that focus on the ability to execute within split seconds. Simple, short calls (e.g., single-word or two-digit/letter sequences) reduce cognitive load & if executed correctly give your team the upper hand in securing clean ball at lineout time

Examples of speed in action include (but not limited to):

- Immediate throw options – Non jumping options
- Walk In Jump Options – Hitting the lineout and Jumping
- Relay Calls – Sending players out of the lineout to message hookers, when in fact they are acting as a trigger.
- Overthrow – Throwing beyond the 15m

Speed as a theme, therefore, includes the strategic use of tempos and triggers to keep defences guessing.

## 2. Efficiency: Minimising Waste and Maximising Output

Efficiency refers to the clarity and reliability of execution. A lineout menu overloaded with countless, overly complicated options often becomes inefficient, leading to:

- miscommunication,
- slower setups,
- higher overthrow or mis-lift error rates,
- movement patterns that break down under pressure.

For teams in an amateur (Schoolboys, Subbies/Club Rugby) or even semi-professional environment (Shute Shield, John Dent Cup, Hospital Cup) where time is limited for training, traditionally split over a few hours in a week, this is a critical component of maximising output and minimising wasted learning.

When building a menu, there should be elements of Communication & Standardised Movements. This allows the team to drill the core calls deeply while retaining enough tools to remain unpredictable.

Standardised movements within the menu allows for greater efficiency because it reduces learning load, increases repeatability as well as provides foundational structures to build further options on. These should have elements of modularity, meaning the same footwork patterns, formations & actions or movements, repeatable across multiple calls. To reduce learning load, increase player efficiencies in executing the correct action in the lineout, and ultimately increasing the chance for successful lineout outcomes.

Efficient lineout systems use subtle but efficient communication systems within the process of calling the lineout with elements of the below:

- Consistent voice or hand signals,
- Minimalist call structures
- Triggers/Cues (Caller + hooker + lifters/jumpers actions).

This feature of a lineout menu is particularly important, as efficient communication is critical to the ability for all players to succeed in the lineout.

### 3. Variation: Unpredictability and Adaptive Threat

Lineouts without variation become predictable, making them easy for opponents to contest. A defence that knows:

- when the team jumps,
- where they jump,
- and how they move,

can shut down even technically well-executed lineout within the first few moments present in a game.

Variation keeps opponents guessing by offering a range of options. The aim is to create unpredictability without sacrificing efficiency.

When building variation into a menu these elements should be considered:

- Positional Variation
- Movement Variation
- Numbers Variation
- Throw Variation

Examples of positional variation include, front pod throws, mid pod throws, back pod throws. When used in conjunction with efficiency & speed, lineouts become unpredictable therefore making them harder to defend.

If the team favours only one jumper or one area, opponents quickly adapt. A balanced distribution of target areas helps prevent targeted defensive contests.

Movement variations such as straight up jumps, shifts, returns, sweeps, dummy movements & re-entries all provide differing options and unpredictability for a defence. However importantly providing slight changes in the foundational options, they should create greater options to win clean lineout ball.

Numbers variation can include the amount of players put into the lineout. By changing the numbers in a lineout before setting on a regular basis, teams have to spend time reacting to how many players they may need to put in to defend, particularly in differing parts of the field.

Numbers variation can also be the ability to shift numbers in certain areas of the lineout by changing the “Halfback” in the line. When moving a player at the front of the lineout, say in a jumping role, out of the line, whilst simultaneously moving the original “halfback” into the lineout, teams can open up areas of the their lineout that weren’t previous options.

Throw variation is more specifically linked to the hooker who can change the shape, speed, timing & height of the throw. Examples of this include:

- Quicker “dart” like throws, typically to the front of lineout
- More curved or arching throws that take longer to get there but can typically beat challenging defences in front of intended pods
- Longer arcing throws to the back of lineout or over 15m line.

Throw variation can put stress on defenders, who must choose between contesting aggressively or spreading their coverage too thin.

## Building Three Themes into One Cohesive System

The true challenge is not treating speed, efficiency, and variation as separate goals but integrating them into a coherent menu that players can learn, trust, and execute.

Clear communication channels must include verbal and non-verbal traits, this allows players to breed confidence. Leadership within the forwards is crucial; decision-makers must remain composed even when facing strong defensive pressure or after previous mistakes.

## Conclusion

Building a lineout menu for a rugby team is an exercise in balancing structure with adaptability. By organising the system around the themes of speed, efficiency, and variation, coaches create a high-performing, sustainable, and versatile lineout capable of standing up under match pressure.

- Speed gives the team initiative and disrupts defensive organisation.
- Efficiency ensures reliability and clarity, particularly with limited training time.
- Variation keeps the attack unpredictable and multidimensional.

Together, these elements form a menu that maximises the team’s skillset, stretches opposing defences, and provides a consistent platform for attack. A well-built lineout is more than a set of plays—it is a strategic asset woven into the team’s identity. A well-functioning lineout can help teams control territory, possession, and momentum through successful execution of their lineout through the integration of speed, efficiency, and variation.