

LEVEL 3 ASSESMENT TASK 9

DOMINANT BALL CARRIERS: AN INTEGRAL ROLE IN HIGH PERFORMING TEAMS

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INTRODUCTION

A consideration for any high level coach is the makeup of his team in regards to skills sets and roles, some coaches hold particular skills sets higher than others for example choosing a tall lineout jumping 6 rather than a smaller breakdown technician or playing two scavenging sevens for added breakdown pressure etc. It is a fine line and often a tough balancing act, however there seems to be a shift in current trends in southern hemisphere rugby, suggesting that teams picking more skilled dominant ball carriers are presently outplaying those who don't.

There are a number of favourable outcomes that derive from a dominant ball carry;

1. An offload post contact to continue play
2. A pop off the ground to a support player
3. A long place and quick ruck ball



Picture 1 - Nathan sharp executing a text book two handed offload

Picture 2 - Conrad smith with a great fend and fighting through contact

STATISTICS

Pos	Team	P	W	D	L	PF	PA	PD	TF	TA	TB	LB	Pts
1	 Hurricanes	16	14	0	2	458	288	+170	58	31	9	1	66
2	 Highlanders	16	11	0	5	450	333	+117	54	40	6	3	53
3	 Waratahs	16	11	0	5	409	313	+96	50	41	5	3	52
4	 Chiefs	16	10	0	6	372	299	+73	40	27	4	4	48
5	 Brumbies	16	9	0	7	369	261	+108	45	21	6	5	47
6	 Crusaders	16	9	0	7	481	338	+143	56	39	8	2	46
7	 Stormers	16	10	1	5	373	323	+50	32	35	2	1	45
8	 Lions	16	9	1	6	342	364	-22	33	41	2	2	42
9	 Bulls	16	7	0	9	397	388	+9	37	39	4	6	38
10	 Rebels	16	7	0	9	319	354	-35	35	42	3	5	36
11	 Sharks	16	7	0	9	338	401	-63	37	43	3	3	34
12	 Cheetahs	16	5	0	11	357	531	-174	44	65	4	2	26
13	 Reds	16	4	0	12	247	434	-187	32	53	3	3	22
14	 Blues	16	3	0	13	282	428	-146	29	50	2	6	20
15	 Force	16	3	0	13	245	384	-139	28	43	3	4	19

The 2015 super rugby finals comprise of 6 teams which are made up as follows:

- a) 3 Conference Winners; the team in each of the AC, NZC and SAC with the highest number of competition points will be the Conference Winner for the respective Conference and will qualify for the Finals Series.
- b) Wildcard Teams: the remaining three Finals Series places will be allocated to the three non-Conference Winning teams with the highest number of Super Rugby table competition points regardless of the Conference in which the team plays.

However, this does not always accurately depict the teams who performed the best, in order to discuss the role of the ball carry it was necessary to investigate the Points table and the top six teams on total points. In this case the Stormers would be replaced by the crusaders in 6th position.

Defenders Beaten

1	 Hurricanes	454
2	 Waratahs	376
3	 Chiefs	342
4	 Blues	339
5	 Highlanders	332
6	 Stormers	326

Offloads

1	 Chiefs	298
2	 Hurricanes	250
3	 Waratahs	234
4	 Highlanders	332
5	 Crusaders	212
6	 Blues	210

Tries

1	 Hurricanes	63
2	 Highlanders	63
3	 Crusaders	56
4	 Brumbies	51
5	 Waratahs	51
6	 Cheetahs	44

There are three standout statistics pertaining to the ball carry which are outlined above. It is important to note that only three teams outside the top 6 feature in any of the statistics in focus, supporting the theory that the teams that carry the ball the best are finishing higher on the ladder. Further evidence is the fact that The Hurricanes who finished first at the end of the regular season were clear standouts with over 75 more broken tackles than any other team.

These statistics also illustrate a clear correlation between the number of dominant carries and subsequent offloads with a team's capacity to score tries. The Brumbies being the only team finishing in the top six to not feature in the top six of ball carrying (defenders beaten & offload) statistics

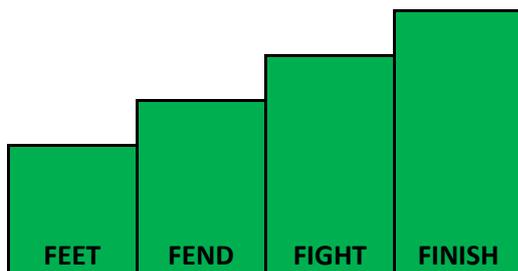
Lineout Success

13	 Reds	91.5%
4	 Brumbies	90.9
9	 Bulls	88.3
12	 Cheetahs	88.2
2	 Highlanders	88.2
11	 Sharks	87.0

In previous years' lineout jumpers and genuine height has been a heavy influence in a team makeup because of the direct correlation between lineout dominance and games won. However, there has been a significant decline in this relationship with only two top six teams managing to make the top six in lineout success in 2015, which further supports the emerging importance of dominant ball carriers.

Coaching a dominant ball carry - The 4 step process

When coaching the ball carry it is important to remember it is a step by step process, it is a building block of skills and if any of the steps are sacrificed or not executed effectively the options available post contact significantly decrease. It is also interesting to note that although coaches and the majority of coaches enjoy the results of a well-executed offload it is curious that the skill of offloading is largely neglected during training, looked over for more low risk options. Man on fire and then long place techniques are trained sometimes at nauseam with high repetition, but are the last options which become available to a dominant ball carrier.



Feet

Revisiting the old face then space adage, when we talk about 'feet' we are getting the player to focus on changing direction to create space between himself and a defender in order to do this effectively it is important to initially go directly at a defender to entice him to square up and stop moving his feet, more commonly known as 'planting'. If the carrier does this effectively it is very hard for a defender to regain his footspeed and close the space on the ball carrier once he has changed direction, therefore giving himself more space.

Fend

After creating space with your footwork (feet) the key focus is to have your inside leg down as you pass the defender, which is designed to only offer 'hard parts' (knee hip back and shoulder for a defender to make contact with, as opposed to if your outside foot is up when passing the defender, you would be offering up legs stomach etc. Transfer the ball away from the oncoming defender and use your free arm to fend and keep the space your feet created with a strong aggressive fend.

Keys to a fend are;

An accurate target zone (chest or shoulder for an upright defender and shoulder or head for a defender who has already dipped for contact)

Fast, punch like action with your fending arm, holding a fend out for too long allows a defender to use it as a lever to grab, a fend should generally be retracted as fast as it was thrown out. A freestyle arm action trying to brush away defender's arms is common in younger players however is a largely ineffective technique.

Fight

The third step in a dominant ball carry is to fight through the point of contact and accelerate through the back end, this allows you to clear any loose arms and creates a clearer picture for not only your finish but also for any support runners looking for an involvement.

Finish

1. Completely break tackle and continue to run
2. Offload
3. Go to ground and pop
4. Go to ground, man on fire and get a long place

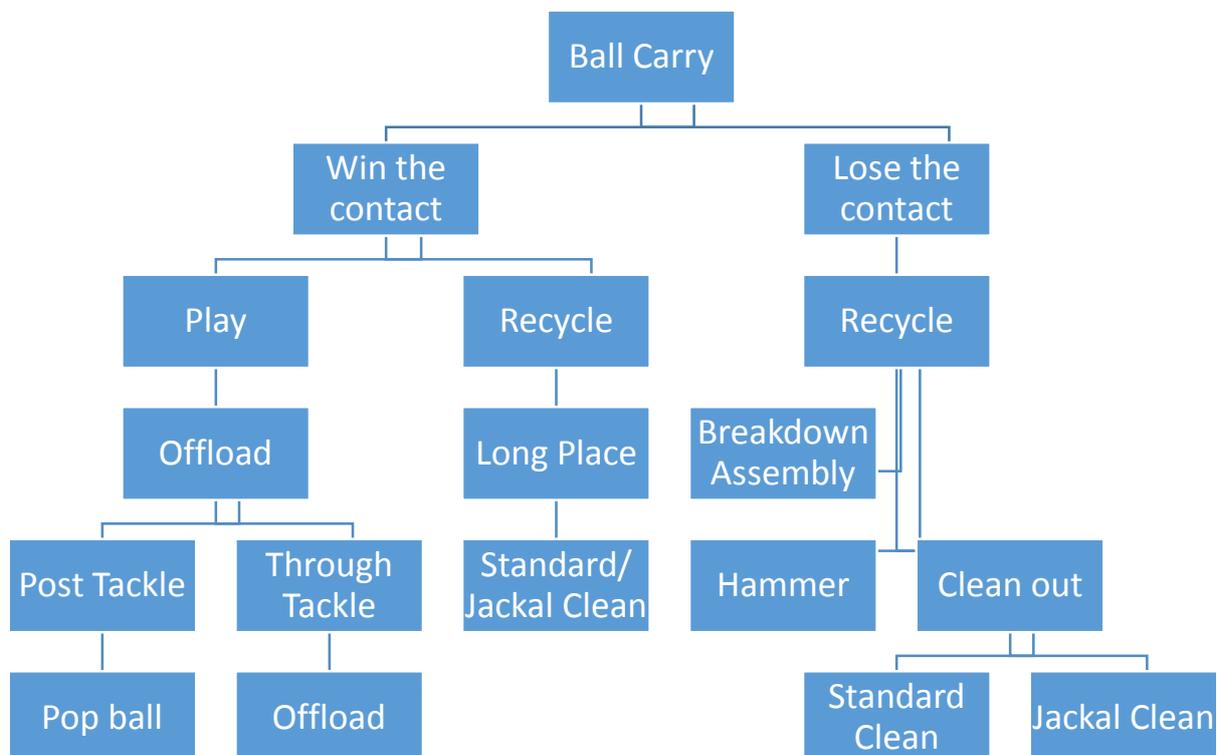
These are all valid options for a ball carrier who has reached the final stage

The finish process depends entirely on the outcome of the first three steps and is a decision making process that needs to be practiced in both live and scenario based drills during training, for example:

If you have executed the three initial steps accurately: You should have completely broken the tackle and can return the ball to two hands to give yourself options whilst continuing to run.

The offload itself is ideally executed with both hands however in most situations only one arm becomes available as the other has been used for a fend or is continuing to fight through contact either way the ball must always be delivered on the way up, a good offload rarely leaves the hands on the way down, in the same motion as a pop pass is delivered if it is given some air it allows the receiver time to collect the pass with relative ease.

A basic decision making flow chart



Conclusion

It is imperative for high performance coaches to keep up with current coaching and statistical trends in order to stay ahead of the game. Although the makeup of your team needs balance to allow success in multiple facets of the game, it is my opinion that the weight at the selection table previously given to areas such as the lineout will continue to turn to more general play aspects and teams with a higher number of dominant ball carriers will continue to gain a significant tactical advantage their opposition.

Activity Card

Ball Carry Decision Making	
<p>Diagram:</p>	<p>Description:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Attacker lines up, standing 2 metres away and facing the Defender 2. Two support players lie on the stomachs behind and to the side of the attacker. 3. On the whistle the attacker attempts to score a try between the opposite markers. 4. On the whistle the support players snap to their feet and enter the contest looking to receive an offload or enter the tackle contest to retain the ball.
<p>Key Coaching Cues:</p> <p>Ball Carrier:</p> <p>Feet – Shift the defender using footwork</p> <p>Fend – Transfer ball away from contact and use your open hand to fend if needed</p> <p>Fight – fight with aggressive leg drive through the contact zone</p> <p>Finish – either</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a) Offload post contact to support player b) work to ground and pop to support player c) work to ground and long place <p>Support Player:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When with contact is taken change your running line to support in behind the ball 2. Offer verbal cues during the contact to help the ball carrier make his decision 	<p>Variations and Progressions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase the width and length of grid 2. Add a second defender another 2 meters behind the first defender 3. Decrease the distance between the ball carrier and 1st defender to add more pressure to the carry