

# PHILOSOPHY OF PHASES OF RUGBY P.THORBURN May

2008

Some "food for thought"- to encourage coaches to be innovative and pro active with their coaching

To provoke lateral, and imaginative thinking and actions and encourage more Coaches to become leaders AGAIN and not FOLLOWERS.

To help validate much of what you do as coaches??

## SOME POINTS TO INITIATE DISCUSSION

### KICK OFF

#### 50 M

#### OURS

- Use **variations**—splits—Mid Field—High—along ground(hard)etc.(esp in wet windy conditions)
- **Organised chasers**—fast players(wing??) in behind opposition.
- **Attack the ball**,in the air.
- **Shut the gate**(mid field) to prevent spread /run out of ball.
- **Be imaginative**—place players to manipulate the defence.

#### THEIRS

- **Attack the ball in air**(Can't be taken out-legally,---security.)
- **Organise and cover all options**-Judicious placement of players can limit options,on their ball.
- **Come forward to ball**(Back man overcalls)
- **Set maul(take time)**build drive as many of their chasers will overrun catcher.
- **If receipt is DEEP,don't become predictable**..Create options.eg catcher to 9 or stand in for 9,then 1 or 2 passes to clear chasers—creates time and space to go wide-counter attack- or kick long.Good reason for having left and right foot kickers in backline.(2 clearance options.)
- **DEEP KICK OFF RECEIPTS ARE ONE OF THE FEW 100% CERTAIN BALL RETENTION OPPORTUNITIES**\_\_along with PENALTY and FREE KICK—all others have a potential immediate Risk of turnover ball.

#### 22 M

#### OURS

- Ideal opportunity to **SPEED up** or **SLOW down** game.
- Allow players to **be inventive** and look for options.
- **Long kick option BUT** ensure organized 2 waves of chasers to reduce option of counterattack.

#### THEIRS

- **BE ALERT**—cover all spaces esp midfield for shortish mid field chip(center field.)
- **An ideal place to manipulate** where they are able to kick the ball to with confidence.of retrieval.
- **Face up quickly**,get back into position facing opposition ALL time.

### PENALTY and FREE KICKS

- **100% ball retention opportunity**—be imaginative and inventive.
- **Ability to "group the defence"** by manipulation, use deception etc
- Opportunity to bring many of the **forwards"into play"**
- **Use walls, split groups, Decoys etc.**—don't just give the ball up to risk of regaining possession phases-- eg to lineout as 1<sup>st</sup> option..
- **Think outside the square.**
- **WITH THE ABILITY TO RETAIN POSSESSION FROM FREE and PENALTY KICKS I RATE THEM AS SET PHASE BALL and SHOULD PRACTISED AS SUCH.**

## LINEOUT --- OURS

- **CALLS are Vital**—They MUST be simple enough to comprehend under pressure BUT difficult for the opposition to interpret.
- **Word and number association** calls are worthwhile to accomplish this.
- **Our ball must be treated as a way of getting OUR hands on the ball (first objective)** with certainty and control.-whatever happens after that should have an element of creating uncertainty in the defensive thinking..
- **Use subtle variations** to break up their thinking and patterns.
- **Mix drives and Willy Away type moves(Front and Back),with feeds,**whether off the top or eg straight back to thrower,especially as most teams use their hooker to lift at the front.
- **Lineouts** are a great time to really **manipulate and confuse the opposition thinking.**
- **Too much shuffling of position** prior to the ball being thrown in usually unsettles us more than them.
- **When driving or setting a maul** from lineout **use a 1 or 2 position” shift”** to drive thru/ away from their strong grouping around our jumpers.Esp effective when they commit 2 lifters to their competing jumpers.
- **DON'T use the tail man of lineout(usually no 7) to lift a back jumper,** as this removes him from his main job as *the first support player to our phase ball and is our Insurance policy against deflects, and turnovers etc. and he sets many of the attack and defensive support patterns.He is also key to being first to breakdown when they move ball.*
- **Use FULL lineouts to unclutter the mid field defence—reduced numbers in lineouts used inside our defensive area—goaline to 10 m or at times out to 22 and elsewhere,sparingly.**
- **Have confidence and certainty that our OWN ball is OURS.**

## THEIRS

- **Have a clear established pattern. and policy** of competing on their ball— **WHO\_\_WHERE\_\_WHEN and WHY.**Often depends on where on the field  
**The only time a “MAUL” can be legitimately dragged down is sacking as the catcher** comes back to ground .**As they often use 2 lifters,** a way to negate the setting of the maul is for a **jumper to compete and his 2 support players drive into the catchers lifters and shear them off him as he lands—makes it very hard for them to then develop a driving maul.**
- **Try to work out their calls.**
- **Often a “Guess” can be close enough** to throw them into confusion—dedicate a couple of forwards to this task early in a game.

## SCRUM

### OURS

- **Another phase of restarting play with virtual 100% certainty of retention of ball..**
- **Don't try to make a “game within a game” of all scrums—it is more important to get a steady and controlled even platform on our ball, to execute best options.**
- Be sure that **the forwards know the direction of the next phase, long before the scrum engages.**  
**see calls moves and options’The Pull Thru” of move calls in The Challenge to Coaches, document.( up to 20 seconds from whistle-- to ball put in.)**
- **Don't be too bothered by the inordinate amount of B/S around scrummaging—**Those people who lived in those dark places(scrum) try to keep it more mysterious than it is.
- **THE FOLLOWING ARE SOME IDEAS FROM QUESTIONS I HAVE BEEN ASKED OVER TIME re SCRUMS**
- **Q. How is strength expressed in scrums??**
- **A By results and observation of the pressure being exerted,maintained and the ability to prevent manipulation by the opposition.**As long as the basic mechanics and more importantly,the requirements are achieved,it is not paramount if the loose head has a convex rather than concave back,providing his position is not preventing our hooker from sighting the ball and the oppos hooker not given an advantage at taking a tight head. **The control and platform we have is the crux.**
- **Q Is the Hit Vital.**

- **A It is vital for stability,that it is strong,tight and aggressive**—however some teams will allow the opp pack to hit into them,at impact,thus having them at full leg extension(an uncoiled spring)and thus having nothing left when the pressure is applied.
- **Q Is the Hit of secondary importance to the second shove.**
- **A If you don't get stability at the hit,it is virtually impossible to get the second shove in**(especially against Quality scrums).**The ideal is to hit hard, and Hold the pressure** as long as it takes.This is the reason a number of teams are calling"Hit,2,3,4,5 etc at put in.This a good way to achieve continued pressure **but is better to be called in the head(not aloud)** as it can be disrupted by oppo calling random numbers.
- **Q How vital is the power input of the loosies at scrum time.**
- **A The penchant for modern loosies to loosen and slide up to look around at scrum is a technique problem.**Loosies in a good pressure position should look into the scrum,get their eyes on the ball in the ½ backs hands and follow it thru the scrum to enable timing his release from the scrum.**By sliding up the scrum is vulnerable to pressure and disruption.**
- **Q How do/did the worlds best scrummagers apply force?**
- **A Look at the Argies,at their best**—it has as much to do with the **judicious utilization of the weight and power**,Channeled,Arrowed,Directed through the best means,into the opposition scrum. **Much of the power/weight is wasted by misdirected energy,lack of cohesion(Cohesion is the Key).COLLECTIVE POWER OF THE WHOLE PACK IS KEY.**
- **Q Do strength Requirements change throughout the various positions in the scrum.**
- **A Props and hookers are a lot to do with Strength and Flexibility,**wheras **Locks in particular require strength BUT with leverage power**(Transmitting power,without waste) thru from ground,to legs,hips,torso and into the front row.**Loosies are similar in requirement to locks,but many are clumsy in feet and leg positioning(goofy footed)** Whereas locks need to **have inside leg up to potentiate power an tightness/co-ordination,flankers need to be in their most comfortable,power position** to exert full pressure on scrum—**EYES on ball** with feet in postion to get off scrum—a **sprint start position??**
- **Very important to get spines in line.**
- **TO SUMMARISE -As body types of players in the same scrum positions VARIES,**eg Big ,tall props and short hookers,or the other way round and/or one tall and one short prop etc etc,and the 2 locks also varying widely in height and weight,**there is NO set method of uniformity**—they must be in their **most powerful and beneficial body position and compensate.**
- **Perhaps it is time to look at why the the thru the leg grip came in for Locks??and would there be any benefits in reverting to round the props hips??**
- **Would it be beneficial to have grip handles on props shorts or on the locks backs(for flankers??Would it lift the outside shoulder of the locks, generating a more effective push??**
- **The locks handle would help prevent the flanker sliding up the props back???**
- **Do your ½ backs and/ or loosies call the ball release from the scrum to assist rest of forwards??**
- **Are the weight room excersizes your forwards practice-game specific.**
- **Do you train for scrums when players are tired?**
- **Do your forwards know how to correct the opposition wheeling the scrum.,on our ball??**
- **Eg shuffle left a foot or so,then on a call drive forward and shear or split their hooker and tighthead.**

#### **MAULS and MINI MAULS**

- **Since"use it or lose it" was introduced** we have developed a generation of rugby players whose **FIRST option at,or before impact is go to ground** to guarantee continuity of possession.
- From this has come **the predominance of STATIC on ground mucks**,where all the defence need to do is **commit 2-3 players to the muck and the rest "flatline"**behind the hindmost feet"Etc Etc Our game had been likened to "League"

- At least in league the defence line has to be back 10 metres. We were seeing up to 400 tackles per game ..
- From a coaching perspective the greatest difficulty is to convert the auto reflex of players “TO GO TO GROUND” at or before impact.—into” FIGHT to stay up”,keep the ball off the ground and create DYNAMIC front foot ball to utilize. \_\_A basic of effective winning rugby.
- The 5 second rule has created the environment to claim our game back from the league type monster we evolved.
- We are beginning to utilize the Big Mauls,set from lineout and kickoff situations,even if the techniques of,getting the drive going,and getting the ball to the back for use while the forward momentum is retained,--are well short of satisfactory.
- The VERY effective Mini-Mauls set away from the set phases,often by backs and 1 or 2 support players are virtually ignored and yet if the principles of mauling are applied,great front foot ball and breaking thru the defensive line is a ready reward

#### • SOME KEY POINTS OF MAULS

- Change the “Mind Set” from ground to “FIGHT to stay up” (VITAL)
- Front foot ball , go forward ball commits/draws in defence—THEY HAVE TO MAKE A CHOICE. \_\_Stay out and Defend or Join and defend—A WIN WIN for side with ball.
- Has, by law ,the defenders”Back pedaling “and thus at a disadvantage.
- Creates lateral space-what you do with the space is your choice.

#### • WHERE AND WHEN DO MAULS AND MINIMAULS DEVELOP??

- (a) From kick Receipts
- (b) From Line out.
- (c ) From Tackel/Impact situations
- (d)Other eg Free/Penalty kick opportunities.
- FROM (a) Kick receipts-- As many opposition players arrive at velocity,and on a wide front,best method is to pull ball down and set,with catcher,lifter and nearest support player(s) creating a narrow arrowhead formation and IMMEDIATELY drive forward and fight to stay on feet(Crucial) This is esp effective from medium depth kick receipts.From deeper kicks the ball should be cleared away from confrontation.(see under Kick Off )
- Setting a maul from deep receipts is less desirable as lateral space is already available and risks penalty at breakdown in kicking range. Many teams take a deep kickoff,feed the same player(usually an 8)and he takes it up into impact,predictably,and risking penalty,turn over etc. Variation is the key.
- FROM (b)) At Line out—To Create uncertainty and confuse defensive thinking,a ratio of lineouts Must be driven.
- To turn STATIC lineout ball into DYNAMIC maul ball,the FORMATION is not the Crucial component,but the INITIAL CONTROLLED thrust/drive/momentum,thru and/or past the oppo “D” line is PARAMOUNT Teams have now become very good at “MUSCLING UP”at lineout drives.
- Once thru the “D” line,the lazy runners/Defenders MUST come round in behind the last feet to be legal AND effective.(through the gate)
- The Immediate “PUNCH” can be achieved in various ways.
  - (1) Catcher,lifters and 1-2 drivers create the punch as// or just before the Catchers feet come back to ground.
  - (2) The ball is transferred from catcher,1 or 2 places either side,and support players punch in immediately to create drive thru a weaker “D” area (Switch ball)
  - (3) Willy away moves,front or back to create drive in behind—uncertainty in the “D” by variation—to open up a blind side or create more midfield space.

- **MANY of the mauls from these situations CAN and ARE turned into TRUE ruck opportunities, and to keep the momentum and front foot ball going by using DESIGNATED runners, cleanout etc and/or then go wide etc.**
- **FROM (c) at the impact/tackle area to create Mauls and Mini Mauls it is IMPERATIVE that ALL the backs are practised, and perfect in their understanding of the ROLES in the Maul. Many backs (esp mid fielders/ wings) require and have the ability to Set Up and support/Drive mauls. We are not using the opportunities to set Mini Mauls from back play to create Dynamic Ball. REMEMBER --The team with the BALL Determines WHERE the defence should go.!!! If they don't go to the area of the ball, it creates opportunities, as it does if they DO. Another WIN/WIN situation.**
- **The team with the ball CONTROLS THE GAME.**
- **FROM (d) With the Intro of the 5 sec rule, the ability to keep the ball off the ground and players on their feet IS worth the practise, to Manipulate the Defence and create space to attack.**
- **All players should regularly be trained to maul by special techniques to understand all players roles wherever they find themselves in a maul (Use of Grass banks and, ruck machines etc are excellent ways to simulate the dynamics of a moving maul.)**
- **SOME KEY COMPONENTS OF SUCCESSFUL MAULING**
- **Once the momentum starts—do ANYTHING to keep it moving forward, to staying on feet and driving.**
- **WHILE driving forward, move the ball to the back to enable the player in the 9 role to use it while maul is STILL MOVING forward. This is difficult to achieve and requires much practice to perfect—it is worth it AND essential to grow our game.**
- **Designate players in the body of the Maul to “CALL” drive it (or whatever) move it green etc to “Trigger” the lazy minds that are telling the player to rest as I cannot be seen!!!!**
- **Develop a short stepping, leg pumping, bent over driving style (Mauling up Hills replicates this style)**
- **ANY players who find themselves in FRONT of the ball, Stay in and MUST keep pulling, dragging, pushing, whatever to keep the value of their input up—HOLD any opposition players in—STAY and KEEP WORKING>--If spat out side or left on ground get back in behind and assess.**
- **½ Back is KEY driver/director. but all other backs MUST be aware of the principles and timing to enable effective “running on to passes”**
- **Ball at back of maul MUST be KEPT UP—DON’T place it on ground for ½ back or as happens, the player with the ball flops to ground which immediately gives the “D” a flying start (FIGHT TO STAY UP)**
- **The best analogy of the DYNAMIC MAUL is that of a 10 ton truck, standing in neutral on level ground (motor not running) It requires a huge amount of energy/push to get the initial momentum, but once moving, just a nudge here and there keeps it going--BUT if it stops—it then requires that huge initial energy burst to get it “moving” again.**

## RUCKS

- **Rucks are almost always the result of DYNAMIC movement. TRUE RUCKING is virtually impossible to be generated from the preponderance of static phases that we have in the game.**
- **Contrary to popular belief, the rucks of “OLD” had as much to do with muddy grounds, Heavy wet balls, the ability in law to screw the scrum and dribble the ball away, of having to play the ball with the foot at the tackle (Law until the 60's) the lack of handling skills by many forwards (lack of handling opportunities for forwards) etc etc as it was to the belief that rucking was a constructive (and Constructed) phase of play.**

- **TRUE RUCKING IS A BYPRODUCT of DYNAMIC/GO FORWARD ball .**
- **Over the past 5-6 years with the development of static phase ball,the art and skill of taking the ball into and setting correctly,for rucking has been lost generally speaking.To ruck successfully,the player who takes the ball to ground is the Key—He must put his body ahead of the ball—he cannot afford to get caught in a weak position on the ground—the support players arrival(Immediate) the ir roles of,clear out,bind and drive and then the next players decisions –pick’ngo,clear the ball,feed designated runners etc,require much practice to achieve.**
- **IT ALL STARTS with the basic STAY ON FEET at least until thru the “D”Line.**
- **TRUE RUCKING is not the answer to the problems that STATIC play has engendered—it is part of it and complementary with the development of GO FORWARD BALL.**

#### **OPEN PLAY**

- **As a result of the static game that developed and the difficulty to “break” the FLAT LINE. Defence systems Teams(eg Brumbies) developed a very structured series of PRACTISED SEQUENCES as a method of Retaining the ball thru large numbers of phases with often no gain in forward progress**
- **THE WORLD FOLLOWED>--Now with the opportunity to re-capture the DYNAMIC phases by the USE of on FEET, MAUL TYPE PHASES<the need to pre plan long sequences should reduce.**
- **ENCOURAGE YOUR PLAYERS TO GO 2 to 3 set sequences,THEN SCAN AND react to oppositions actions.**
- **THE TEAM WITH THE BALL DECIDES WHERE THE BALL GOES—HOW MANY PLAYERS WE SEND THERE-TO DO OR ACHIEVE WHAT---TO BREAK THE ADVANTAGE LINE WITH THE BALL UNDER OUR CONTROL???.TO SCORE POINTS.,Is in our hands.**
- **IF—THE OPPOSITION ELECT NOT TO SEND THE NUMBERS-IS NOT THE WHOLE OBJECTIVE OF USE OF THE BALL., TO CREATE AND UTILISE AREAS OF WEAKNESS IN THE OPPOSITIONS DEFENCE??**
- **EG From a scrum ,when players have to stay on, till ball release, and we know we are going to utilize the ball in midfield ,WE SEND ENOUGH PLAYERS to the area to determine the success of the “MOVE”—This is rather simplistic—BUT makes my point about forcing the Opposition to make choices.**
- **If the mid field phase is kept on feet and driven,the moment we are even a metre in behind them,we have a huge advantage—our players are going forward to the phase and theirs by law have to come in from behind.(Value of backs becoming very good “SNAKES”**
- **I use this one example to explain the potential untapped possibilities available from set phase ball.**
- **Especially now we can be rewarded for staying on feet and keeping ball off ground.**
- **Sequencing too far ahead is contradictory to many of Rugby’s strengths Unpredictability because of the Shape of the Ball, the ability for players to Roam from fixed positions, the Laws of the Game etc.**
- **REMEMBER again THAT RUGBY is the ULTIMATE BALL GAME OF CAUSE \_EFFECT\_ and MANIPULATION.**

#### **THE FINAL PHASE I WOULD LIKE TO ADDRESS IS COUNTER ATTACK**

- **POSSESSION is the name of the game.**
- **If the opposition wish to kick the ball to us(ESP LONG or Mid RANGE Kicks )Treat it as a Bonus—It is one of those 100% retention of the ball opportunities.**

## **BUT CERTAIN PRINCIPLES AND ACTIONS HAVE TO OCCUR>**

### **FROM DEEP KICKS**

- The receiver must think as a ½ back
- He must look to take the ball up a way to start the chasers committing to a target area.
- As many support players as capable **MUST** get back into position with much urgency to create pressure release opportunities—rather like formation of a backline—1<sup>st</sup> player back thinks and positions as a 1<sup>st</sup> 5/8 to take pressure off the 1<sup>st</sup> receiver—who then has more than one option eg Double and receive pass(or act as decoy,and change angles )and ball to next support player etc etc. Attack the SPACES.
- Support players **MUST** go the extra 2 m back behind the Receiver(no lazy options) to create depth and width.(Very similar to Sevens)
- The more players back in support—the more options to counter attack.
  - **FROM BOX KICKS**
    - Two wide passes before deciding on options
  - **FROM WIPERS KICKS**
- Bring ball back into midfield—then switch,going out either way(Choose)

### **FROM PRESSURE KICK POSITIONS**

- Find support,stay up longer and allow us to reform

### **SOME GENERAL POINTS ON COUNTER ATTACK**

- Anywhere up to 15-20 opportunities in a game—esp with the predominance of kicking , often because of **PERCEIVED** limited options(imagination)\
- If support does not get back—usually the receiver(Most often F/back or wing) will get open space fever—They see all this open space and start to run—usually on an arc.
- The further they run the more”EXOCETS”in the opposition are closing the angles to make the tackle most often behind many of the runners team.
- When the runner receives the ball deep and alone—usually many of the opposition are onside and up to 14 of the runners team mates are in front of him or offside.
- When caught or being limited head for support players and **FIGHT to STAY ON FEET**—time to regroup.
- When passing to support players be **SURE to SCAN** for opponents coming from wide angles—many players look to where their support is and often pass to a player in a weaker position—**SCAN and COMMUNICATE.** ---.Draw and spread..
- Beware of “**FLAT**” passes—they often get pulled up by officials—**GO THE EXTRA METRE BACK** in support.
- Many very fine Counter attackers after a season or two become very readable as they run too far too often—Then teams Kick to them,and shut them down often causing them to “**GO back Into their Shells**” and remove a potent attacking force from the teams armoury.
- Be careful of double switches etc where the ball changes direction but the end receiver is still in the zone of the tackler(also as in sevens)
- **BUT BE ADVENTUROUS** as it will create more uncertainty in your oppositions reading of your Style and Patterns of play and make your team more difficult to defend against.

