

December09/January 10 issue 102

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1. SEVENS: Summary Coaching Points

editor's comments

Dear All,

For most is time to get on the go again after a break. I wish you all every success on the field of play in 2010. Not long to the RWC now.

With Sevens now becoming more important the IRB has developed a 3 tier coaches' pathway and a match officials course for Sevens. The coaching courses have been trialled already with good results and they are now available for delivery by licensed trainers and educators.

I observed the NZRU Inter-Provincial Sevens over the weekend. This inspired the content for this newsletter.

I have been trying to complete an article on focus and vision for refereeing based on some work I did for Graeme Harrison at those years ago. The time it is taking is the reason for nothing going out in December. I hope to have it completed for February

Yours in Rugby,

Lee Smith



1. SEVENS: Summary coaching points

Summary of Coaching Points from the New Zealand Inter-Provincial Sevens 2010

It is especially important in Sevens to profile your team based on the squad's strengths and weaknesses in relation to the principles of play. This will optimise performance by allowing you to identify the style of Sevens along the continuum from a wide passing style to a style that plays more directly following one or two passes. Ideally in the squad you will have catered for both options and will adjust your style based on the profile of your immediate opponents. This is seldom the case for most teams and they are best to define their optimum style and become very good at imposing it.

PRINCIPLES OF ATTACK

In all rugby, but more so in Sevens, depth creates time and space allowing adjustments to be made to the constantly changing mode of play. The ball carrier can adjust to a player coming from depth while this player can accelerate at the right time if their view of play is as broad as possible. Too often flat support players overshoot the play as they cannot stop as quickly as the ball carrier does upon contact.

While it is natural to focus on the ball it is the work of players off the ball that creates opportunities especially their work to re-establish depth, spacing and numbers.

1. Gaining Possession

- By far the most common set pieces are kick offs. There is no problem for the receiving team in gaining possession from long kicks however the receiving team must be aware of defensive patterns channelling the attack towards the near touch line.
- When the kick off is contestable the most vulnerable receiver is the player standing directly under the ball. As a result it is a sound strategy to position so that there is an obvious, unoccupied position for the kicking team to kick into so that players can move into it. Further to this players contesting the ball should move into the ball so that they have momentum when they leap to catch it. If they are moving back they concede momentum to the kicking team.
- One last point, because the aerial collision leads to deflections rather than clean catches, support needs to be on both sides of the ball.
- At line-out the best method seems to be for the half back to enter the line-out in space as the jumper and the thrower to become the half back.

SEVENS: Summary coaching points? (contd)

2. Retaining Possession

- Only go into contact if you really need to and even then have a well practiced pattern so that this occurs on your own terms either by attacking an inferior opponent or by attacking the opposition with greater numbers and a collective technique to continue play.
- In some circumstances isolation may be avoided by the ball carrier retreating. When this occurs team mates must retreat faster and form with greater depth so that they are in a position to move forward.
- While it is essential that the ball carrier avoids isolation, there comes a time in which the ball carrier needs to go forward into contact. This most frequently occurs when the defence has forced the ball carrier, should he want to pass the ball, to pass to a player in a worse position than himself. When this situation occurs, the support must adjust immediately with the player going to ball carrier, because the inevitable result is either a standing tackle or a tackle to ground, and by being bound to a ball carrier the support player can make the ball immediately available.
- When there is over commitment in contact to retain possession play to depth and stall play so that the over committed players can rejoin the attacking line.
- It is important to have 2 distinct roles as part of the pattern around contact, the player for immediate support and the outlet player in the pocket back from play in space to re-start play. Confusion will result if these are 2 options for a single player.

3. Creating Space

- Always remember that the space that is created is the space that has been moved away from. When this applies to the ball carrier the implied skill is the ability to pass to a player entering this space. In congestion, when this is most difficult, this pass may be just a hand off with the support player coming off the ball carrier's shoulder.
- The spread attack creates space around each defender. In most circumstances this may be all that is needed in the initial set up. Bear in mind that there is an on-going contest between the attack and the defence to force the opponent, by their positioning, to stand where they want them to. This may be spread but other formations do come to mind. By grouping and overloading a single channel the defence will be forced to group creating space elsewhere.
- I still feel that the first step in evasion is to hold the defender. It seems that current practice is to run at the space between 2 defenders either with the intension of being able to run around the ball carriers defender or causing the next players defender to turn in. Should the ball carrier be able to make a pass to the next attacker this

SEVENS: Summary coaching points? (contd)

player will be in space. Too often what happens is the ball carrier is exposed to an easy side on tackle. In this situation the ball carrier will have taken away the next attacker's space but will have created space on the inside. The next attacker must change the running line and move into the space to receive a pass.

- Long passes that stay in the air for a considerable period of time, allow the defence time to adjust. This is compounded by missing out players, so that if the defence is numerically as great as the attack the defender whose attacker has been left out can drift with the pass and overload the defence at the next receiver. This creates a turnover opportunity for the defence.
- I call it reverse drift defence. It occurs when an attack has moved the ball from one touch line to the other and the lack of space forces the attack to reverse the attack. As no phase play has been formed it is general play and there are no offside lines. This means that the defence can play ahead of the ball. This can be solved by going into contact and creating offside lines. However, also realise that the formation of the defence creates space behind them and, by playing linear support within 1-2 passes of the reverse attack the defence can be outflanked. While it may risk losing possession, if there is no sweeper, kick and chase can also defeat this defence.

4. Penetrating

- Penetration is created by the build up of pressure on the defence. Current practice with the spread attack creates team pressure by playing to the side where an overlap exists. While the initial overlap may not lead to a try it stresses the defence causing a loss of alignment and grouping. These can then be exploited as they will create yet another overlap when the attack is reversed or an opportunity the individual evasion.
- The basis of most penetrations is the ability to profile your team and the opposition to create one-on-one miss matches. The spread attack achieves this as it isolates each defender. The penetration may be just evasion it is however important to play for the defensive reaction to the initial penetration. Good defence will turn with the penetrator filling the gap between the ball carrier and the lateral support. Their aim is to prevent the pass and channel the player so that the sweeper can make the tackle. As a result linear support from directly behind the ball carrier is the most effective. An immediate reaction to this situation is essential. The support player must be running onto the ball before the ball carrier has made any contact that may interfere with the offload.
- The sweeper is better to be either inside or outside the penetrator and not square on so that the players options are reduced.

SEVENS: Summary coaching points? (contd)

5. Supporting

- There seems to be confusion as to the best way of supporting the ball carrier. This is because of the uncertainty as to what the ball carrier is going to do. As a general rule, the ball carrier shall avoid isolation. However, if this is going to result in the ball carrier passing to a teammate in a worse position than himself then, the only option may be to go forward. So if there is a passing option the support can remain passing distance away but if there is not then the nearest support player should, without hesitation, go to the ball carrier and assist in driving forward and retaining the ball once a tackle is completed.

PRINCIPLES OF DEFENCE

As in “The Art of War”, only commit when you are at your strongest and they are at their weakest.

1. Contesting Possession

- No comments

2. Denying Space

- Penetration often comes from a loss of alignment when the drifting defender loses vision of the defensive situation on the inside. This is because the player gets too far ahead and/or on too much of an angle so he is back on to the ball. This also means that the player is arriving at the tackle situation before the ball and becomes flat footed making evasion easier. This can be solved by retaining staggered alignment so that the defender has peripheral vision and is always in a position to move into a ball carrier. It is important to realise that in Sevens space can be conceded to the attack if, in the process, the defence has not been penetrated and is using the time and space to manipulate the attack to a less advantageous situation.
- Because of the speed of the game a defender who goes ball chasing from the defensive line creates space for penetration should the attack move the ball to where the defender came from. The solution is to play a defensive pattern in which each defender defends a channel and, as play develops they shuffle across but do not cross making sure they retain positioning and alignment relative to each other. The channel that the current ball carrier is in is the point of a slightly staggered defence line enabling all players to have vision of the ball and what is going on in their channel.
- If the defence is using reverse drift defence it is still important that each defender is in a position to see what is happening around the ball and what is happening in that player's defensive channel. This probably means that the defenders should position outside the shoulder of the attacker in their channel. Frequently the players' bunch and they can be defeated by a long pass or a cross field kick.

SEVENS: Summary coaching points? (contd)

- When a team kicks and chases they will be defeated in the counter attack if the whole line doesn't chase as a unit – flat to a slight stagger with the point being the player closest to the position of the ball – as the opposition will clear the ball to space and, with support, they will be able to go the length of the field.

3. Tackling the Ball Carrier

- It is best to always be in a position in which the tackler can move into the ball carrier. Should the tackle be made from behind use the outer arm to try and dislodge the ball.
- Don't get square on otherwise the tackler can be held and both left and right sides are available to the ball carrier.
- It is better to concede space, within reason, than lose contact with others in the defensive line and be in an inferior position to make a tackle.
- While the most celebrated tackle is the standing tackle especially when it leads to a turnover. These occur relatively infrequently. In general observation, the most frequently occurring tackle is the low tackle, which has the advantage of allowing either the tackler, should he be good enough to regain his feet and take advantage of not having to enter through the “gate”, or the second defender to contest the ball immediately.
- By turning into the drifting ball carrier the next defender in the line can make a very strong inside shoulder tackle however the next defender must quickly occupy the space the tackler has moved away from on the outside.
- Communicate with the players on the inside so that the weaker, inside shoulder is not exposed. This tends to happen when the angle of running in the drifting defence becomes very acute.

4. Regaining Possession

- Once you have a turnover move the ball to space before you go forward.
- If there is loose ball dive on it so that they must allow the player to get to their feet before they can make a tackle.