**A Pyramid attacking formation from slow ball.**

In the last few years we have seen a large change in the rules associated with the breakdown and the level of contest at the tackle has increased significantly. Teams are targeting the ball runner and possession at the tackle in order to either steal the ball or significantly slow it’s recycling. As a result of this we have seen an increase in slow ball situations where the attacking team is forced to attempt the re-ignition of momentum against a set defence.

Most teams have resorted to the bash and barge method where the ball is passed to either a forward running at the defender with other players immediately behind ready to pack on and drive or forming a maul originating from the side of the ruck with 3 or more players. This often results in further slow ball or even lost ball with the opposition in a better position to steal the ball as a result of a more aggressive tackle (a great example of this was the NZ v Australia Semi Final in the world cup where NZ were continually stopped at the advantage line and were unable to create momentum from slow ball). This has been a result of the ability of the defenders to have two man tackles, which attack the ball and drive the runner sideways or backwards. The other option taken by the less adventurous is to kick possession away and work to better field position.

Neither of these tactics has worked well enough to consistently give positive results. It is a result of this that there needs to be a system for attacking from slow ball that targets a specific area and utilises the weaknesses of stationary, set defenders. The advantage of having a set stationary defence from slow ball can also be a weakness as the attack is able to identify and attack particular defenders and reasonably well predict their response to certain attacking plays.

My suggestion to reignite the attack from slow ball is a Pyramid type attacking formation, which is easy enough to form quickly, but flexible enough to attack with multiple options.

*Pyramid attack set – up.*

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  9
  1   BP   2
  3    4    5
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The attacking formation is a simple Pyramid shape with the Ball player (BP) setting himself wide of the ruck to create more space between the defenders. He has a straight runner positioned both inside (No 1) and outside (No 2) ready to take the ball forward. Positioned near them are Option / Support runners (Nos 3, 4 + 5) who can either receive the ball, run a decoy or follow the runner into contact to punch him through the tackle or secure the possession at the resulting breakdown.

Note: Players 1 + 2 would need to be the better Ball runners in the team who have good contact leg speed, safe hands and ball security.

**Normal Defensive line and calling positions.**

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    10  15  20  25  30  35  40  45  50
   *   *   *   *   *   *   *   *
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Each player from the edge of the maul will have a number as would the gaps between them..
Players will have digit numbers counting from the edge of the maul outwards with a 0 attached. E.g. the second player from the ruck would be called as 20. The gap outside them will have a 2 digit number which is the number of the player from the ruck with a 5 attached. E.g. the gap outside the second player would be called as 25 (in essence it stands for 2 ½ but it is simpler to call it 25)

**Calling Structure.**

1. Players would nominate a target and call the appropriate number. The target would be a gap or a player where the play is aimed. (See above)
2. Support players should align themselves in good position to assist the runner.
3. The ball player would relay the ball to that alley after taking 2 steps forward first.
4. The ball player should resist taking the ball to the line himself as he is a definite pressure target for the opposition and always heavily marked with slow ball one or two steps forward to fix the defender would be sufficient.
5. The runner will hit the target area with support being aware of players hitting the holes either side of him.
6. The support players are not only positioned to draw defenders and stop 2 man tackles but must adjust their lines to support any breakdown and secure possession.
7. Once the defensive line is forced to go backwards quick ball must be presented.
8. If possible the Ball player would occupy the position opposite 30 and another direct play would follow creating more momentum and pressure on the defensive line.
Attack set – up.

Optimum moves - Ball player opposite 3.

15 direct. – BP takes steps directly at 30 with runners hitting at player 20 (1) and gap 25 (4). Cut pass to runner at 20 or short pass to player in 25. Player 20 under pressure – Player 30 is committed to the BP. BP hits the unmarked option. If player 20 moves to tackle 4 then he leaves a hole for 1 to run into. If player 20 moves to tackle 4 he leaves the cut pass open to 1 who is now in a gap. Player 3 goes to the breakdown first. Player 1 must be slightly in front of Player 4 to allow the Ball Player to hit either option.
**15 Blocker** – 1 runs at gap 25 with 4 running at player 20 on a Blocker line. Player 20 is under pressure – Player 30 is committed to BP. BP hits the unmarked option. If player 20 moves to tackle 1 then he leaves a hole for 4 to run into. If player 20 stays to tackle 4 he leaves the short pass open to 1 who is in a gap. Player 3 goes to the breakdown first.

**45 direct** – The BP takes the ball directly at 30 with runners hitting into area 35 (4) and at Player 40 (2). Cut pass to runner at 40 or short pass to runner in 35. Player 40 is under pressure – Player 30 is committed to the BP. BP hits the unmarked option. If player 40 moves to tackle 4 then he leaves a hole for 2 to run into. If player 40 moves to tackle 4 he leaves the cut pass open to 2 who is now in a gap. Player 5 goes to the breakdown first. Player 2 must be slightly in front of Player 4 to allow the Ball Player to hit either option.
**45 Blocker** – 2 runs at gap 35 with 4 running at player 40 on a Blocker line. Player 40 is under pressure – Player 30 is committed to BP. BP hits the unmarked option. If player 40 moves to tackle 2 then he leaves a hole for 4 to run into. If player 40 stays to tackle 4 he leaves the short pass open to 2 who is in a gap. Player 5 goes to the breakdown first.

**40 Drift** – BP runs at 30 and gives a short pass to player 2 who runs at Player 40’s outside shoulder. Support players run at 35 (4) and 50 (5). If Player 40 at player 2 on the angle then he passes to 4 running the trail line on the inside. If Player 50 stays out and Player 40 waits for the runner on the inside then 2 keeps going. If Player 50 comes in on 2 he gives a short ball to 5 on the outside.
**20 Cut** – This is the mirror version of 40. Player 1 attacks the inside shoulder or 20 with 4 trailing and 3 running a straight hole on the inside.

**Drive Variation.**

**20 or 40 Drive called**

BP passes to No 2, who then runs at target 20 or 40. The support players on that side of the Pyramid join in on him and drive him as far as possible then quick ball.

**Conclusion**

Although this system would require some work to organise and practice in order to make sure that the players are skilled enough to execute the positioning and moves required, to be able to reignite the momentum lost with slow ball consistently would be reward for this effort.

We need to provide structure for the players to work from but we also need them to be encouraged to make the appropriate decision based on the defence’s action.

In essence then this system could well be used in general play as a basis for a phase attacking system which has many options from a simple set up. The players would be provided with a positional target, a call and an option on each play that would challenge a set defence and fracture a disorganised one.