Level 3 Assignment 2007

How to Attack Effectively
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The modern game through the advent of certain rule changes and more recently the ELV’s at Premier Club and MARC level has seen the ball in the field of play for longer periods. To maximise the benefits of having the ball in play longer is to know how to attack effectively with ball in hand. This has seen a shift away from the sequenced/patterned rugby to more playing “what’s in front” of you rugby.

The effectiveness of your attack will be somewhat influenced by the abilities of the players you have available to you. I say somewhat because it is up to coaches to improve the abilities of the players not to be hamstrung by the players inabilities. The one component you cannot control greatly is speed. There is as they say no substitute for speed.

The effectiveness of your attack must start with breaking down the components which provide players with the tools to execute well on the field.

The basics of our game which are fundamental to good attacking teams are as follows;

- Catch and pass
- Support
- Running and evasion
- Decision making

The more you can improve your players abilities in these key areas will be the measure of your attack.

**Catch and Pass**

We see time and time again players at all levels putting themselves in good positions but do not have the ability to effect the catch pass.

How do we achieve good results in this discipline?

As coaches we should be encouraging all players to spend as much time with ball in hand as possible. To do this in training we use grid style activities in smaller groups to maximise the number of times a player touches/uses the ball. This can be done using a passing grid as a warm-up drill, using passing grid as a core skill, having other components of training where a lot of ball movement is prevalent. Time must be used efficiently to maximise outcome. Unfortunately we cannot predict who will be where in general play on a rugby field, so all players must have the ability to catch and pass.

Activities should start with no pressure applied to the catch and pass, but progressing to limiting a players time and space to catch and pass (smaller grids), to opposed drills.

If you do not apply pressure to players through time and space or opposed the effectiveness during the game will be minimised as the player will not have the ability to perform under pressure.

**Support**

Support of the ball carrier is paramount to the continuity and effectiveness of any attack.
From an early age we teach primary and lateral support roles. Players naturally become quite proficient in the lateral support role and are usually fairly effective in the primary support role. The hardest support role to play is the secondary support or jockey role. The importance of the jockey role is paramount to playing “whats in front” rugby. The critical factor in support is to provide options for the ball carrier as he is the most important player on the field. Support players must react off of the ball carrier.

The coaching of the jockey support role can be done through using the 51% funnel 2 v 1 with the support player snaking the ball carrier before receiving a pass and attacking the space created by the ball carrier committing the defender. (as seen in diagram 1.0)

Diagram. 1.0

The next level is to create triangles using ball carrier, lateral support and jockey support. These drills can be done unopposed progressing to opposed 3 v 1 and 3 v 2.

The role of the jockey support now becomes reactionary off of the lateral support and the ball carrier. With the ball carrier taking the ball forward the lateral support can break in (running an unders line diagram 2.0 A) or break out (running an overs line diagram 2.0 B). The jockey support will react off the lateral supports change of direction. This can be pre-called and as you become proficient becomes a reactive action with no call (this takes quite a bit of time). I suggest a call to start with during training progressing to no call to make sure the players are reacting to the action not calls or premeditated.
The object of these actions by the lateral support and the jockey support is that the ball carrier now has options to play depending on how the defence has defended the actions of the support players. The most important thing to remember is for the jockey support to run into the space left or created by the lateral support. These triangles can be built all across the field in general play and all players need to know how to effect each role. It is paramount that the support players step off their running lines in a definitive change of direction to cause a reaction from the defender. The running line of the ball carrier is also important for the support players. The ball carrier must be going forward taking on the line committing defenders. The closer to the line he gets before making a decision to pass the less time the defence has to react/adjust to which runner/support player to commit to.

The other side of support is the save mindset. The retention of ball through phases is essential to breaking down defences. All players ability to effect a ‘cleanout’, ‘pick n go’, secure possession maximises a teams ability to maintain possession and continuity.

### Running and Evasion

Running and evasion can be with and without the ball.

The big thing about running and evasion is to improve the ability of players to change direction in their running lines without losing too much speed. This can be done with the use of poles, cones, ladders or electronic lights. You are trying to improve the reaction time of the player to change direction and accelerate, whilst maintaining good form. Teaching players to run with their hands up to receive a pass. A good tip for support players is to punch their hands up towards the ball carrier, as they change running direction, or clapping as they change direction.

Players can start by making their own decisions about which side they are going to step past a pole/cone, to reacting to a coaches call, to playing 1v1 in a grid environment. As a coach you need to encourage players to shorten their stride as they approach the obstacle to maintain balance in changing direction then
accelerating away. The use of lights as a visual reaction is extremely useful to improving players reaction and acceleration time.

**Decision Making**

**General Play Attack**

Decision making is the responsibility of every player on the field but is usually only carried by 3-4 individuals. The more you encourage alternative players to be in decision making positions on the field the better equipped your team will be to be effective in general play attack. This goes back to our training and the grid environment where all players are encouraged to effect all roles (ball carrier, lateral support, primary support, jockey support). Therefore your attack is not reliant on certain players being in certain positions to achieve an outcome. The more often opposed triangles are used at training the more effective the decision making of the ball carrier will be on who to pass to and the better the running lines of support players will become. The more catch and pass drills involving all players the better your players ability to effect the right decision.

Another part of decision making is made in regards to the shape of the defence. It has been proven that people identify shapes rather than numbers much quicker. Therefore in identifying a defence line it is quicker to identify their shape rather than how many are in the line. This idea has been tried and proven with teams as young as U12- U13’s. Identifying whether a team has a bunched or spread defensive line dictates where and how you should attack. There is also a requirement to recognise individuals in a defensive line where mismatches might occur.

**Tactical Development**

In order to develop the attacking game in a tactical sense some loose parameters are put in place. Start by playing the same way using the width of the field, this does not necessarily mean passing the ball from one side of the field to the other, it means you attack the opposition by using the punch/spread theory i.e. if the opposition defence is bunched you attack by spreading the ball of if the defence is spread you look to punch the spaces in the defensive line. Each element is reliant on the other being that by punching you will cause the defence to spread opening the opportunity to punch. The role of support players is to maintain the continuity of the attack by having a play/save mindset (decision making). The play mindset obviously being continue movement and the save mindset being to make sure possession is maintained if the pass or offload is not possible. The good recycling of possession can be as good as an offload due to the defensive need to contest the breakdown can take numbers out of the defensive line.

The mismatch comes about from say a lineout where the is maintained (through a number of phases using the width of the field) and then brought back. A front rower or second rower often just drop back from the lineout instead of tracking across the field as the attacking team is likely to do. The reforming of the attacking alignment can pit a back against one of these forwards for a mismatch where the backs ability to beat a man is raised significantly. There is certain pattern played obviously by playing the same way especially to start with, but as the defence gets moved around by the attack the ability for players to play what’s in front becomes critical to the effectiveness of your attack. Being able to identify the weakness in the defence line is a responsibility to be shared.
Coaching methods used by Fabrice and Villepreux provided an insight into the fluidity of French rugby. Fabrice would start a game between two teams of equal number (8-10) with very little instruction other than it is two handed push tag- if you get tagged from the side you can offload- if you are tagged from the front on you must stop and create a breakdown with a number of players (2 or 3) from each side joining before play is restarted. As the game went on he would comment on and improve the attacking teams approach. Normally this would involve how about playing same way, set up a second line of attack “jockeys”, late group those involved in the ruck at furtherest part of the field keep working to get across –ie you may not make it to the first or second breakdown but continuing to work across the field you will strengthen the numbers- therefore becoming a threat to the defence.

The complexity of the game is built through the progression of the following principles; punch/spread awareness; early late group awareness; static defensive awareness; secondary attack line creation; punch flooding; stretch alignment for spread attack

Villepreux would start with a loaded attacking team with their backs to the defence randomly spread. He would then manipulate the defence into exaggerated shapes in a bunch, single file, split or widely spread. The only rule he would apply was when the attacking got the ball they had to play away from the direction that the ball came. The ball on the command of play would be thrown from Villepreux to any player. On the command of play the attacking team turned around to be faced with a direct decision of scanning to identify the shape of the defence and making a call as to whether they punch or spread and therefore the responsibility of that decision can be all manner of players who can direct / command the person who receives the ball. Once the ball is in play due to the lack of numbers the defence either becomes bunched or spread, increasing the number of times players react to what is in front of them. To increase the difficulty of the attacking team you add numbers in defence. Alternatively you can stagger the defence around the field so the attack is met with differing numbers in defence as well as different situations.

The principles and complexity of Villepreux is the same as Fabrice.

**Summary**

No defence is going to turn up and defend the way you want them too. Defences must be manipulated, moved around to create opportunities for the attacking team to penetrate and provide scoring opportunities. The shape of your attack must be at odds with the defence because if the defence mirrors your attack there will be limited opportunities.

Training your attack to be effective means up-skilling your players with good basic core skills, improving your players tactical awareness of manipulating defences, training in opposed situations with game like scenarios and making all players decision makers.

There is no limit to attack only what you let the defence dictate to you.

Creating the training environment which is fun and competitive to cultivate your players abilities especially in attack cannot be understated.