SELECTION OF YOUR BACK ROW PLAYERS

LEVEL III
ARU COACHING COURSE

FRANK CONDI
Selection of the back row.
Firstly what are we looking for when selecting a back row? Let’s say our tight five can hold their own so ideally what do we want from our players 6, 7, 8. Ideally a good back row player can play in any position, he should have the ability to be able to pop up anywhere in attack and be a better than average in defence, they should also have good skills in catch pass, have the ability to join up with a backline and not look out of place.

The ideal back row player would be tall so that he is a jumping option in a lineout, be fast and explosive, and have skills to fill a hole in the backline, be ruthless in defence and one of the strongest in the team. This would be ideal with our entire back row but I feel that these attributes would be hard to find especially in one man. So our selection of a back row must incorporate all these if possible and each player can compliment each other as well as others on the team.

The other attribute is fitness; the levels of these players must be second to none. Fitness can be measured by a beep test or by a three kilometre run, however many players in these positions should be measured by how match fit they are.

Finally a back row player must have is the ability to read a game!

These are the basis of what you need in a back row player now all we need to do is select them.

The open side flanker NO 7: scavenger
There are two types of open side flankers and sometimes selection may warrant you to choose both players to cause absolute havoc on the football field.

The first is a scavenger, the player who just wants to chase a ball and destroy anyone that has it. He is a player that is rarely used as a jumping option in a lineout, and is utilised from the back of the lineout as a defender or a supporter, he is a player that doesn’t have the greatest skills set in the team. He can be used as a running option as he enjoys the battle and confrontation. This player has great core strength and his ability to stay on his feet is one of his strongest features.
Defence is something he prides himself on and will normally have the highest tackle count of any other in the side. This player must be explosive from the scrum and lineout and have excellent pace, as his main aim is to disrupt the opponent half back and fly half from set piece. He also must have great timing as to be the first or second to a breakdown and have the ability to steel the ball and regain possession.

Their ability to read a game and fill holes defensively is important, as well as their support lines. The support lines should be short and precise, if at all something breaks down they are there to secure and act as a safety at the breakdown to regain possession. They are the chaser of the team…

**Open side flanker, number 7: ball player**

This player has the attributes as the previous number 7 although they are a player that at times is a little unpredictable; they have a good passing game and can easily fill a hole in a backline as another back. Preference from this player is to run a good line, put a player into a hole; they at times can pull little tricks out of his bag like kicks and flick passes.

They enjoy ball in hand and have the ability to take it hard to the line or throw a pass to put the defence in two minds. They are a thinker and can read a game even before it happens. They can be in places where you think no one would be, with their ability to put themselves into a position to either make a tackle or receive a pass.

If a team has one of these players or even both, selection of your number seven can make a coaches life a little easier.

Australian Rugby Union has seen a development of number sevens in 2005/2006. In 2005 they played with very much a ball player at number 7 and now we are seeing a change where the number 7 is very much a ball scavenger. Since the game is becoming so much more physical we need that 7 on the ball to be ruthless and so competitive to create problems for opposing teams at the breakdown and to regain possession for the attacking team

Now that we have determined what we need from out 7 we now need to fill two more position in our back row; the blindside flanker and our number 8 both have large rolls and both bring a lot to a side and a good back row.

**Blind side flanker number 6**
Firstly our blindside flanker or number 6 is probably the aggressor of the back row, a player that is used in attack as a battering ram. He must have the ability to run good line and is a ‘go forward’ man. In simple terms is a straight up and down player, stand in front of me and I will run over you!

Off set piece they are usually used for the second phase hit up. Their skill levels are limited although the skill levels of all modern day professional sports people are becoming of an extremely high standard. He normally is used as a runner and not a ball player, this player is normally bigger both in weight and height than your number seven (unless you as a coach choose to run with two number 7’s).

This back row player is normally a good jumper and is used both in attacking and defending line outs. Their ability in the air is as good as a lock and in some cases was a lock forward before they moved to the side of the scrum. Therefore also giving you an option if you loose a second rower to injury.

The Blindside flanker is aggressive in both ball running and defence, their ability to tie up two or three players when running with the ball must also be the case when an opposing team needs to get him off the ball. Strength and explosiveness in this player must be exploited to its full potential to have a quality blindside flanker. This player in most cases is there to give you that ‘go forward’. Your blindside flanker needs to be dynamic and explosive when receiving the ball and must have an ability to read a hole in a defensive line and the go forward to break it. They must understand backline plays so that he can put himself into pockets of support and make themselves a running option or a quality support player.

Now finally we need one more ingredient to fill our back row, a player that is the link between our scrum and our backs. A player that needs to be both a combination of your other two back rowers.

**The lock or the number 8**
The number 8 must control the ball at the base of the scrum so that your half back can serve quality ball to your backs, provide protection for half back and have the ability to take the ball from the base with explosive power and pace. The ability to do this when the scrum under pressure and is vital to maintaining quality possession.
Their attributes should also include quality footwork, speed, strength, and at times a ball player as well as a definite ball runner. He can more often than not be a line out option both offensively and defensively. Extra qualities to look for in your number 8 selection are his ability to read a game, be in good position to make that last tackle or catch that kick return. Which raises more questions, Can he kick? How is his run return?

Your number 8 must have good knowledge of backline plays as to should your entire back row; if they are to support them then they must understand where they are going.

Your entire back row all must be aggressive, cause havoc to opposition, be clever and be where opponents least want them to be and knowledgeable to where you want them. The number 8 must be a tower of strength in defence as to should all your back row players; additionally they should have an insight to where opposition is going to attack based on their backline set up. Like your blindside your number 8 is a running forward and must give you that running power to make the advantage line, his ability to react quickly on his feet and be able to sniff out a hole and put themselves into it under pressure.

**Back row balance** (points from Australian under 21 selection)

- be sure you have one genuine jumper, 3 is always better if possible
- 6/8 who can play with the inside backs
- 6/8 can carry ball over advantage line
- high effective work rate
- strong scrummagers, 4 second rowers on the props
- 8 who can deliver quality channel 1 ball to 9
- players who can compete for ball on the ground
- ability to play lock
- not concede unnecessary penalties at ruck
- aggressive defenders

These players are crucial in your selection process and if your combinations of your back row can compliment each other you will have players that want to cause havoc both in defence and attack, giving your team that extra edge that we all need when coming up against opposition. Choose your back row carefully and if they don’t give you what you need and want then find players that will give you the edge!