The Logic of the Move

Preamble

Given the limitations of this paper I will narrow the point of discussion down to the attacking options and specifically the use of backline moves. The rationale of the “logic of the move” is applicable to all sequenced interplays in Rugby.

For the purposes of this discussion I will provide the following approximate definitions.

A “move” is a pre-determined sequence of interplays performed by players of the attacking team to gain an advantage.

An advantage may be scoring a try, making a break, securing territory or shifting the defence into a formation that allows for future exploitation.
The Logic of the Move

The purpose of this paper is to examine key aspects of when, where, why and how to make “moves” more effective in the game of Rugby Union.

From my many years of observation I believe insufficient thought is put into the purpose of moves and how to maximize their impact.

Defensive strategies have now become a prevalent and often determining factor in Rugby games. Across the board, today’s rugby player is a far better one on one defender than at any time in the history of the game. To add further to this, the defensive systems that are utilized today are more organized, aggressive and results driven than ever before.

These significant advances in Rugby defensive systems has challenged Coaches to rethink their attacking tactics and strategies.

The premise of this paper is that too often moves [as a means of breaking defences] are created, practised and performed in games with little or no consideration for their purpose outside of their singular impact. That being a should have some “moves” in order to unlock the defence.

Most of the time, moves tend to be done in isolation of one another, when to have maximum impact they should be done as variations on a theme. Put another way moves should be appropriately sequenced and applied as an “Attacking system”
Too often there is haphazard logic within the moves themselves as an attacking option instead of a defined strategy that attacks systematically.

There is rarely a logical progression using a sequence of moves based on the same initial interplays.

There is rarely logic applied as to how the teams moves serve as a component part of the game plan.

The rationale of the logic of the move requires that in order for a move to work to it’s optimum effect, a “move series” should be instituted.

A move series is where an initial move pattern is always used but where the final interplays of the move are variations on a theme thereby creating systematic subterfuges against the defence.

A number of counter intuitive questions can be posed relative to this theme;

In modern Rugby does attack determine defence or does defence determine attack?

Should attack be reactive to the defensive structures they are confronted with or proactive in determining how the defence will respond to their attack?

These are crucial questions in determining the tactical and strategic direction of a teams attacking culture. In the dynamic chaos that is Rugby there will be situations where either alternative can be a correct path.

It is however far more empowering and self-determining to be proactive in determining how the defence will respond to your
attack, because that is something that you can then control, alter and manipulate as required.

Further to this, sometimes the greatest weakness a system can have is it’s predictability. The predictability of defensive systems in Rugby are open to manipulation and exploitation. There are times when the weakness of a system is the over reliance on the system itself and it’s inherent lack of flexibility in coping with alternate data.

It follows that if you are armed with the knowledge of the opposition defensive structure you should be aware of it’s weaknesses.

As well as a system’s weaknesses, if you have been proactive in providing the opposition with a prescriptive set of defensive cues to your attack, then you will be able to exploit these weaknesses.

A more considered clinical approach can put more certainty in a team’s attacking approach and more certainty in the success of it’s moves by using the *logic of the move* philosophy.

So, in order to give the *logic of the move* a more practical perspective. Let us consider a common backline move.

The standard 9 to 10, 10 to 12, 10 raps 12 and receives the ball back and delivers a face ball across the 13 to the 15 entering the line at pace. [see illustration 1]
ILLUSTRATION 1 "RED FUNNEL"

Rugby GamePlanner "SECOND EXTENSION"

Phase 1 - Scrum

Notes:
This move has many names. Red Funnel is the one that I am familiar with and this move has been a staple at all of the clubs I have been involved with over the last 28 years. The greater Rugby community is familiar with it and understands the mechanics of the move. Therefore when it is executed it is a familiar question we are posing the defence and they are aware of how best to close it down.

For the purposes of clarity later in the discussion; I am suggesting that the attack presents a familiar cue to the defence and the defence respond according to their recognition and familiarity with that particular cue.

This discussion on the logic of the move is built on the premise that it is harder to respond to a question accurately or respond to a cue purposefully if you are not sure which attacking question is being asked or what the cue really means given that you have been educated that the cue has up to seven variations.

In the instance of Red Funnel, the success of this move is predicated on the logic that the attacking 12 running hard and straight at his opposite number narrows the defence by attracting the attention of his opposite number as well as the 10 and 7 and potentially the 13. If done successfully he contracts the defence into a narrower corridor, the delivery of the ball to the 10 creates an overlap. When the 12 successfully attracts these defenders and then releases the pass to the rapping 10 it creates an overlap of 3[attacking 10,13 and 15] on 2[defensive 13 and 11] to be exploited.

This is good in theory, but rarely happens in practice. The defence see the cue, read the play early, make the appropriate calls and alter alignments and responsibilities and the play is shut down or it’s effectiveness compromised.
This move is so familiar it is virtually telegraphed from inception.

Now consider Red Funnel as a move within a move sequence as part of an attacking system.

**The basic requirement for a move sequence to be successful is as follows:**

The alignment and positioning of all players must be nearly exactly the same with variation allowed only for the wingers depending on field position. Our attacking intentions must be masked in the same initial set-up and revealed only when the defence has no time to react to the subterfuge.

We will be working off the practise that a successful defensive system must work from the inside moving out as the ball moves across the backline. In other words from the scrumbase/lineout/tackle contest to the flanks of the attack.

The first move in this particular logic of the move sequence is a standard first phase move of 9 to 10 to 12 for a hit-up off first phase.

Let us examine the implications for attack and defence of this initial move. [see illustration 2, marked 12 hit-up]

Attack. If this move is executed correctly it attracts mid field defenders and loose forwards. Quick recycle at the breakdown allows for efficient 2nd phase attack. Because the attacking thrust was from midfield there are options either side of the breakdown so the next phase can go left or right. This is a very simple two pass play and can be repeated over and over. If the execution of the move is correct this can be an effective foundation play as a starter move in isolation or as the first component.
of a sequence play. Most importantly it is the base move in a sequence of logic of the move plays.

Defence. The defending 10, 12 and 7 need to be aware and ready for this move. The defending 12 to stop the progress of the runner, the 10 to assist in the tackle if necessary and the 7 to assist in the tackle and compete for possession or be active in slowing the recycle down.

Let’s now add an additional component to the move sequence and look at the additional dimensions that are added. Note the move starts the same way and has every appearance of being the same play until the subterfuge is played.

So 9 to 10 to 12. This time however the attacking 12 runs a shallow overs line to both attract and block the 12 defender. [See Illustration 3, Rap 1] After passing, the attacking 10 has stayed in
the primary support position and then accelerated along from the primary support position across the line of the outside shoulder of his attacking 12. Just as the attacking 12 is about to reach the defending 12 he straightens sufficiently to square the defending 12 up and releases a short pop ball to the 10 who is accelerating into the space in between the defending 12 and 13. He does this by crossing from the primary support line to the tertiary support line. This move is also predicated on the attacking 13 running his normal support line on the outside of his own 12 and thereby keeps the defending 13 attracted and maintains the space between the defending 12 and 13. This is crucial as it is this space we are going to exploit.

Rugby GamePlanner

rum
Attack; If this play is executed correctly, the 10 will go through a clean space between the defending 12 and 13. The attacking 10 will have 13, 15 and the open winger as support. This move has started in the same manner as the starter move. As an attack we have educated the defence to concentrate on our 12 and we have then expanded on that cue as a variation to exploit the defence’s over reading of the play.

Defence: Having been fooled by this play and it’s single variation, the defence now understands that while this play starts the same way there are two variations to it and they need to be wary of defending the attacking 12 as well as the space between the 12 and 13. A possible response to this is for the defending 13 to take a position closer to his 12 to effectively close or narrow the space. There are repercussions of course to this as it now provides more space for the attacking 13 and 15 to exploit.

Logically we can now start to expand the initial move in response to the defence’s attempts to shut our attack down using a variation on a theme strategy.
Second Extension. Red Funnel

Again the move starts exactly the same way, 9 to 10 to 12. 12 takes the ball to the line and 10 has stayed in a primary support line. This time the 12 still runs straight to attract the midfield defence of the defensive 12 but before he physically confronts this defender he turns and releases the ball in a circle ball pass to the 10 who has run a line parallel to the try line [across the face of the defence]. The 10 has the option to drift wide and find the 15 in the wider space provided by the defending 13 or in the event the defensive 13 drifts, the 10 can find his attacking 13 on a sharp straight running line.

Please note, the 12 hit up and 13 hit-up can be used as 1st phase hit-ups for quick recycle in a pre-determined sequence plays so that now there is a second hit up variation.
Attack; The attacking side now have 4 variations to use from the initial starter play. Each play is effective and can be used over and over. They have the same initial appearance yet each variation on a theme attacks a different area of the mid field defence. We have educated the defence on how we can attack them, and now by using the same initial interplays we can exploit that knowledge against them. Any change in defensive alignment as a counter measure only weakens another area for us to exploit.

Defence; The defence will be hard pressed to defend the variations.

In a logic of the move sequence, these moves [Red Funnel, Green Funnel] should be played after Hit-up 12 and Rap 1 as both of these moves are designed to attract or exploit the defensive line defending man on man between the defensive 12 and 13. Both of these moves contract the defensive line and are an effective counter to drift defence. When Red Funnel/Green Funnel are played after the defence has been educated or given cues to contract and to defend man on man from the two initial moves, this is when there will be legitimate space to exploit wide of the 13.

By sequencing moves in this manner the attacking team is orchestrating the defensive response.
Third Extension, [see illustration Injector] Once again starts 9 to 10 to 12. 12 charges at his opposite to concentrate and attract midfield defence. 10 stays in primary support role and as in red funnel drifts across the face of the defensive line. 12 straightens to attract his opposite, dummies to 10 and finds blind side winger [11] on the appropriate overs line running through the space between the 12 and 13.
Fourth Extension. [see Illustration Injector plus] 9 to 10 to 12. 12 back to 10 as in Red Funnel. 13 and 15 are running hard, straight and flat to receive ball from 10 on attacking line. 10 throws long angled pass back to blind side winger coming from blind to open outside the defending open side winger.
Fifth Extension [see illustration The Chaser] 9 to 10 to 12. 12 back to 10 as in Red Funnel. 10 kicks to far corner for territory or a strategic challenge of possession with 13, 15 and 14 careful to stay onside and travelling at full flight to mount pressure and chase the kick.

This is particularly effective if the defence has decided to use greater line speed to limit attacking options of the logic of the move.
This is ideal for when the mid-field defensive line has started to rush in speed to deny time & space.
There are now 7 attacking variations from one core starter move.

Over the course a season I a club competition you can educate an opposition as to the core aspects of your attack, providing these set up moves work consistently and serve the overall structure of your game plan. If they consistently provide an appropriate advantage there is no reason to change them. The advantage of this is that you can lull a defence into believing that your attack lacks more dimension or is limited in it’s variety. At crucial times in a game or in a season you can use the more expansive variations to full effect because the core starter moves dictate that the defense will respond in a prescribed manner and within that prescribed manner there are weaknesses to exploit. This should then guarantee the success of your moves as you will be dictating the way a defence responds to your attack as well as dictating the form your attack will take. This is a far more controllable environment than the random selection of unrelated moves that might work depending on how the opposition respond to them.