INTRODUCTION
The setpiece, and specifically the lineout is an important element of play in the successful performance of a team. The purpose of the lineout is to restart play, quickly, safely and fairly, after the ball has gone into touch, with a throw-in between two lines of players\(^1\).

Teams will use a strong lineout as a weapon to provide an excellent platform to launch effective attacking raids or opportunities to foil opponents and increase potential turnovers in defence.

HOW IMPORTANT IS THE LINEOUT?
Although current trends indicate there are less lineouts being played\(^2\), the importance of possessing a strong lineout is still evident.

At the 2015 World Cup, the winners New Zealand had one of the most successful lineouts winning 22/23 of their own lineouts and 25% of their opposition’s\(^3\). Of the top 4 finishing nations, the performance of their lineouts during the tournament was as follows:

1. New Zealand involved in 175 lineouts (successful 95%, contested 75%, stole 24);
2. Australia involved in 177 lineouts (successful 85%, contested 60%, stole 13);
3. South Africa involved in 188 lineouts (successful 92%, contested 45%, stole 14); and
4. Argentina involved in 168 lineouts (successful 91%, contested 48%, stole 8).

A significant indication of the importance of a strong lineout was that at the tournament 50% of all tries scored by teams originated from their lineout\(^4\). The major source of tries for the top four countries came from the lineout:

1. New Zealand 39 tries, 20 came from their lineout;
2. Australia 28 tries, 19 came from their lineout;
3. South Africa 26 tries, 14 came from their lineout; and
4. Argentina 27 tries, 8 came from their lineout\(^5\).

The significance of a team’s lineout can also be seen during the Super rugby competition over the last 3 years, where the eventual winners of the competitions featured lineouts with success rates over 83%\(^6\).

\(^1\) World Rugby Laws – lineout definitions – Law 19
\(^2\) Over 20-year period between the 1995 and 2015 Rugby World Cups, lineouts per match on average decreased from 37 to 26. Statistics for specific world cups were as follows 1995(37), 1999(31), 2003(33), 2007(31), 2011(24) and 2015(26) – () denotes average lineouts per game – World Rugby statistic report on the 2015 rugby world cup at p13.
\(^3\) World Rugby statistic report on the 2015 rugby world cup at p9
\(^4\) World Rugby statistic report on the 2015 rugby world cup at p30
\(^5\) World Rugby statistic report on the 2015 rugby world cup at p30
WHAT MAKES A STRONG LINEOUT

Common features present in a strong lineout are a team’s ability to master:

1. Space
   (a) Preservation of space
   (b) Creation of space
2. Speed
   (a) Speed across the ground
   (b) Speed into the air
3. Timing
   (a) Pod combinations
   (b) Throwing circuit

While preparing for competition and matches, the above features are considered in the following contexts:

1. The composition of the playing squad, its strengths and weaknesses.
2. The quality of the opposition, their strengths and weaknesses.
3. The standard and length of competition, the standard of review processes by opposition and availability of review technology\(^7\).

SPACE

The lineout format and call selection are key to preserving and creating space. Each of these considerations can be advanced by changing the number of participating players and/or the format split. The amount (3 or 4) and placement of jumpers is an important consideration when looking at the initial format and the space to be preserved or created from that format. For example:

A 7 man: 3-2-2 split\(^8\)

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
T & XXX & space \ XX \ space \ XX \\
T & LJJ & JJ & JL & (4 jumpers) \\
 & 123 & 45 & 67 \\
T & LJJ & LJ & JL & (4 jumpers) \\
T & LJL & JL & JL & (3 jumpers) \\
\end{array}
\]

Or a 5 man: 1-3-1 split

\[
\begin{array}{ccc}
T & X & space \ XXX \ space \ X \\
T & L & JJ & L & (3 jumpers) \\
 & 1 & 234 & 5 \\
T & L & JJ & L & (2 jumpers) \\
T & L & JJ & J & (4 jumpers) \\
\end{array}
\]

Preservation of space

This refers to the space that is presented in the initial format. There would be little ground movement before the jump. When a team looks to take advantage of these spaces, the placement of their main or strike jumpers is important. In the above 7 man format, a team’s

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\(^7\) This goes to the frequency or length of cycles in changing up calls and formats

\(^8\) T denotes thrower, X denotes participating player, L denotes lifter, J denotes jumper
strike jumpers would most likely be at positions 2 and 4 or; 2 and 6. In the 5 man format the strike jumper would most likely be at 3.

**Creation of Space**

This refers to the space that is created through the movement across the ground of the participating players from the initial format. The rationale behind this is to bait the opposition players to move to positions which will create space or a weakened area in the lineout which was not present in the original format and now available for the throwing team to take advantage of. For example:

7 man forward slip on a 3-2-2 split

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TT</th>
<th>LJ</th>
<th>J</th>
<th>L</th>
<th>123</th>
<th>45</th>
<th>67</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>LJ</td>
<td>JJ</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>(5 moves onto 6 to fake lift)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T</td>
<td>LJ</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>JL</td>
<td>J</td>
<td>(6 and 7 slip forward to 4, 6 jumps in space)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>123</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SPEED**

**Speed across the ground**

This refers to the speed of movement by the participating players across the ground out of the initial format to the position just before the jump.

**Speed into the air**

This refers to the speed of the jump by the player receiving the ball (including the assistance given by the lifter to get the jumper into the air) from the thrower.

**TIMING**

Space and speed is maximised by mastering the timing sequences of the lineout. Perfecting these sequences will reduce reaction times of the opposition and increase the chances of success. These timing sequences can be isolated to the combinations of the jumping pods (lifter/jumper relationship) and the throwing circuit (thrower/lifter/jumper relationship)

**Pod combinations**

The ability of the jumpers and the lifters to move as one entity to space with speed. Activities to develop these combinations should be incorporated into every session. Examples of these activities could include pod volleyball, pod cone races, pod relay pop ups.

**Throwing circuit**

(a) **Throw/jump** – This refers to the circuit where the movement of the jumping pod to space is triggered by the throw. This requires the lifters and jumpers understanding the start of the throwing sequence of the thrower, which will allow the participating players time to move into position and receive the ball. This circuit will usually be employed in full formats (6 or 7 man), at the back of the lineout with little movement or into space where there will be heavy attention from the opposition.

(b) **Jump/throw** – This refers to the circuit where the movement of the jumping pod to space is triggered by either movement of the lifter or the jumper. This requires the lifters and jumpers to have an understanding of the movements of the other participating players. This circuit will usually be employed in shorter formats (4 or 5 man), at the front of the lineout or into space where there is little attention from the opposition.

**STRONG FOUNDATIONS BASED ON FUNCTIONAL ROLES AND CORE SKILLS**

A setpiece stripped down is essentially the ability of a player to competently execute a sequence of core skills (throw, movement, jump, catch, delivery). Repeated success of the setpiece shows the development by players of “good habits” and processes in the execution of those core skills.
At every lineout players are assigned distinct functional roles. These roles are determined by the format and call of each lineout. Each role has specific core skills that must be executed in sequence. These roles and skills are as follows:

1. **Thrower**
   (a) **Power** – Ability to comfortably hit jumpers at the front (5m), middle (10m) and back (15m) up to 4m off the ground.
   (b) **Shape** – Ability to either hit the jumper directly with a flat (used when the jumper is in space) or indirectly with a lob (used when the jumper is obstructed by opposition) throw.

2. **Lifter**
   (a) **Form** – Starting position of the player must be exactly the same at every lineout so as not to give away to the opposition any clue of where the ball will be thrown to.
   (b) **Movement** – Refers to foot patterning or the players ability to move across the ground as quickly as possible.
   (c) **Power** – Ability to move the jumper into the air to full extension of the player and hold the jumper in that position until the ball has been secured by the jumper and delivered to the halfback.

3. **Jumper**
   (a) **Form** - Starting position of the player must be exactly the same at every lineout so as not to give away to the opposition any clue of where the ball will be thrown to.
   (b) **Movement** - Refers to foot patterning or the players ability to move across the ground as quickly as possible.
   (c) **Jump** – Ability for the player to generate vertical force and get into the air as quickly as possible
   (d) **Catch** – Ability for the player to catch the ball one/two hands with/without pressure from opposition
   (e) **Delivery** – Ability for the player to hit moving/stationary targets while in the air

It is vital that players consistently practise the skills of their roles in isolation throughout the preseason and season. The activities should be viewed as activation or primer activities and form part of every lineout practice session as well as warmup for games. Examples of activities that can be run as primers is as follows:

1. **Thrower**
   (a) **Power** – seated throw, swiss ball throw
   (b) **Accuracy** – goal post targets, lying bench throw
   (c) **Shape** – bucket target, netball ring target

2. **Lifter**
   (a) **Movement** – foot patterning, cone shuttles
   (b) **Power** – kettle bell lifts, weighted lifts

3. **Jumper**
   (a) **Movement** – foot patterning, cone shuttles
   (b) **Power** – box jumps, two legged bounds
   (c) **Catch** – kneeling grab, swiss ball grab
   (d) **Delivery** – swiss ball targets, moving targets

**TRAINING TO IMPROVE PERFORMANCE**

As mentioned earlier success is be the ability of the player to repeatedly execute their role in the lineout. Therefore, training needs to provide an environment where the players are given as many opportunities as possible to perform those functions and skills successfully under varying scenarios and pressures.
The closer we can replicate conditions players will experience during a game at training the higher the chances the players will have of consistently performing well under those game pressures.

**Improvement through game management**

Players need to be clear when and where to play specific lineouts during matches. Players need to understand what lineouts are most likely to work when presented with certain conditions during a game (eg: weather, personnel, opposition). To do this the coach can direct the players to run a lineout at different areas of the playing field (eg: attacking 22m, defending 10m, halfway) and provide the players with a scenario (eg: 10mins left, trailing by 10 points). Have the players consider the best lineout to run based on the parameters provided.

**Improvement through competition and games**

In terms of player problem solving, nothing is better at training than running live activities with opposition. Particularly if the opposition can be manipulated to present a scenario which addresses an issue which the coach would like resolved or the opposition present as close as possible the defensive/attacking structures the opponents in an upcoming match will use.

**Improvement through constraints manipulation**

Pressure to perform can be manipulated by varying constraints around the lineout. These constraints may include the following:

1. **Time** - The time the players have to form and execute the lineout after given a specific scenario (game management focus) or opposition defensive setup (competition and games focus).
2. **Personnel** – Limiting the number (4, 5 or 6) or type (jumpers or lifters) or ability (the thrower can only throw to 2 or 4, one of the players does not know their role at the back of the lineout) of the participating players in the lineout.
3. **Environment** – The weather (wind, rain), quality of the ball (weight, size) which can affect the quality of execution (throw, jump, catch)

**TYPICAL TRAINING PLAN/FOCUS**

1. **Example 1**
   - **Length** - 20 minutes
   - **Timing** - At the end of a 90min training session: week 2 of pre season
   - 5 mins Activation exercises (functional roles)
   - 5 mins Skill/Functional role games
   - 10 mins Unopposed lineout format/movement practise

2. **Example 2**
   - **Length** - 30 minutes
   - **Timing** - Midway (45mins) into 2hr training session: last rounds before finals
   - 5 mins Activation exercises (functional roles)
   - 15 minutes Constraint focus lineout format/movement practise
     - Performed under fatigue (eg: short shuttles, live scrums, ruck (eg:pick & drive) activities performed between lineout repetitions)
   - 10 mins Opposed game management practise
     - Walk through format and call options on different parts of the field