INTRODUCTION

Law 20:
The purpose of the scrum is to restart play quickly, safely and fairly, after a minor infringement or a stoppage.

The scrum is a launching platform for attack (on your own feed and providing you win the contest) and a chance for the non feeding team to challenge the contest which will give them the opportunity to regain the ball if they are successful (the good old Tight Head).

In recent years the scrum has become a negative in our game due to the number of resets there were per game. The major contributors to the collapsing of scrums are. The front rows falling into each other, failure of the front row to get an affective bind on the opposition, over extension of the front rowers and the inconsistency of the referee’s calls.

To achieve an effective scrum on your own feed there are a number of technical and safety aspects that require careful consideration when coaching scrummaging, including:

SAFETY, TECHNIQUE, ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES, PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS, MENTAL TOUGHNESS.
TECHNIQUE:

➢ **Body shape:**

Body shape is the most important ingredient in the scrum pre and post engagement but cannot be obtained without all of the above mentioned points. Body shape is directly related to efficient and effective scrumming so attention to detail in this area is a must.

Coaching points in this area are:

- ✓ Strong stable base, feet approximately shoulder width apart, toes pointing forward.
- ✓ Bend at hips first then knees.
- ✓ Weight forward with hips and knees slightly in front of the vertical line of the feet. Weight on the balls of feet with heels still in contact with the ground for balance.
- Head in neutral position, chin off chest, looking over the sunglasses.
  
  (Pre engagement front row)
- ✓ Low body height.
- ✓ Toes knees, hips and spine all in line.
- ✓ Big chest, flat back, core on.
- ✓ Control breathing, don’t hold your breath.

All players involved in the scrum must be able to maintain their body shape for the duration of the contest this will maximise the teams ability to win set piece and set a good platform in which to attack from.

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**Foot placement front row.**

- ✓ The front row is built around the hooker (2), and the Hooker takes control of the referee’s mark with the strike foot (right) and does not move from that point during set up.

The Hooker has a narrow stance with the left foot slightly behind the strike foot, because of the narrow stance the Hookers hips will be slightly rotated thus leaving a little more room for the locks heads.
When the Hooker is ready he will indicate to the Props by way of a per determined call i.e. “SET” and the Props can start their set up.

Next in is the Loose Head (L/H) Prop (1) approaches from slightly behind and to the left side of the Hooker (2). The L/H Prop’s right foot is then placed beside the Hookers back foot (left). The L/H Props feet must be pointing straight forward with toes on the same plane as the Hookers back foot, in other words in line. Any Adjustments must be minimal and before the back five bind on, so as to keep a stable base.

Then comes the Tight Head (T/H) Prop (3), approaches from slightly behind and to the right of the Hooker (2). The T/H Prop’s left foot is then placed beside the hooker’s front foot (right). The T/H props feet must be set the same as the L/H but will be slightly ahead. This set up is so the tight head Prop can lead the hit.

Example: Foot placement.
Foot placement in the front row can differ slightly depending the outcome you are wanting to achieve. For example which way you want the scrum to turn to open up the attack.
➢ **Front row binding.**
When binding on in the front row consideration must be given to the body shape you are trying to achieve and level of player you are coaching.
The Hooker can be in an upright position or a crouch position either way his/her arms need to be raised ready for the Props to enter from behind and side. The L/H Prop will then bind around the Hookers waist then the T/H Prop also around the waist. The Hooker can then bind under the arm pits of both Props, or on the back as shown in the example above (again depending on the level of player). Both Props must have their shoulders out from under the Hookers arm pit. (Promoting the inside shoulder) The binds at this stage should be firm but not so tight the locks can’t enter.

➢ **Assembly of back five on props.**
Locks 4 & 5:
Once the front row is set the call for Locks or seconds will come. The primary objective of the Locks is to bind on to the props (crouch bind for open grades and around the hips for under 19 law) and supply a solid base for the front row to help generate force. The second objective is to bind together. The locks shoulders must be in contact with the backside of the Prop in front of them with the head between the Prop and Hookers backside. Shoulders should be in contact just below the props buttocks. The locks may wish to rest one knee on the ground during the set up but whatever one lock does the other must mirror, this will keep symmetry in the scrum, then they need to be on both feet prior to engagement, toes in line and pointing forward, knees hips shoulders square, spine in line, flat back.
Flankers 6 & 7:
Although they only have one shoulder on the props backside their roll and body shape is the same as the locks for the duration of the contest. Foot position of the flankers at set up is more of a comfort thing (one foot forward or both feet side by side) more importantly making sure the backsides of the flankers are not higher than their shoulders. Same as locks toes in line and pointing forward, knees hips shoulders square, spine in line, flat back.
Number 8:
Provides the same support to locks as the locks do for the props. It is important that the #8 has shoulders on the locks backside just below the buttocks and bound to the locks prior to engagement. This will assist with all eight players in generating force simultaneously.

**ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES:**

➢ **1 through to 8 knowing what their duty is at scrum time.**
When building a scrum it is essential that everyone from number one to eight is clear on their roll and responsibilities at scrum time. All too often coaches assume their players understand why and how things are done and who should do them, when in actual fact they may not fully understand. For instance the Tight Head Prop and Lock are the power side of the scrum and the Loose Head Prop and Lock is the ball winning side of the scrum.
SAFETY:

➢ **Pre & Post engagement**
Due to changes in the modern game and the physical change in the players (much stronger) scrums have gone from being almost self managed in the old days, to total control today by the referee.

CROUCH ------ TOUCH ------ PAUSE ------- ENGAGE.

It is imperative when coaching scrumming that safety for the players is first and foremost on the minds of everyone involved.

Prior to engagement the front row must be comfortable with their set up, if for any reason they aren’t then they must step out and reset.

When engaged, and the scrum has collapsed and a player has found them self in a dangerous or potentially dangerous position they must call “**MAYDAY**”. THIS MEANS THAT EVERYONE MUST STAY STILL AND LISTEN TO THE REFEEER’S INTRUTIONS.

PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS:

➢ **Flexibility.**
Flexibility is required so the player can achieve maximum use of their body without restriction to the joints and muscle groups. This will also help minimise the risk of injury.

➢ **Strength & Power.**
Strength is a performance characteristic of a muscle or muscle group, and is defined as the maximal force which a muscle or muscle group can generate in a single contraction. This will enable the player to produce power.

➢ **Stability.**
Flexibility and strength combined will give the player stability and the ability to hold body shape, core stability being the most important.

Scrum Mechanics are the forces generated in the scrum and determined by the attitude of all eight, the efficiency and capacity of the front row to generate force along with the back five doing the same thing at the same time, everyone holding body shape and body height throughout duration of the contest, sixteen feet on the ground.

MENTAL TOUGHNESS:

➢ **Players today focus a lot on the physical aspect of their game and very little if anything on the mental. Earlier in the paper I spoke about the importance of body shape at scrum time, mental toughness is no less important.**

Mental toughness is the willingness to work harder in any situation, push yourself to your perceived limits and beyond.

Some of skills required for players to reach their limits and beyond are attitude, concentration and application.

If all eight bring the correct attitude and concentration required for the 4 to 8 seconds that a scrum lasts they will go a long way to winning the mental battle and possibly the physical battle of scrumming.
SUMMARY:

➢ Scrummaging is a highly technical aspect of our game. Having the ability to scrum well can have a psychological impact on the opposition and could be the difference between the winning and losing of a game.
If coaches can build an effective scrum it will increase the ability of their teams to win possession from set piece and build continuity, create confidence, therefore score tries.