THE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONING OF A WINNING LINEOUT.

BY

ROB NOWLAN

What are the aims of the lineout?

To win the ball in a protected position
To deliver quality ball to players in a position to go forward or going forward

A winning lineout has several key ingredients

An accurate call and throw
A well timed jump and lift into a non contested position
A secure catch and then delivery to the players waiting to receive the ball.

After reading Todd Coles' level three assignment on "Controlling the Eccentric Forces of a Lineout Throw” one of the basic principles to be gleaned from his research was; to maintain an accurate throw the body parts must be kept in line without rotation which tends to pull the ball one way or the other.

A simple acronym widely used to maintain most of these basics is

R. Relax, this is very important especially for players in pressure situations
E. Eyes on your target
E. Elbows up and do not let the fall below 90 degrees to the throw
F. Follow through. Follow through with your hands and keep your shoulders and hips straight.

KPIs of a team: Lineout.

The Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of a team's lineout depend heavily on the personnel available to a coach.

The coach must set realistic goals for his team and once this has been broken down to units, reflected in the expectations of his teams lineout. If a coach has John Eales and Justin Harrison at his disposal his statistics on his lineouts are going to be expected to be in the VHA level, however if he does not have the tall timber then you would expect that the success rate would not be as high, and would be thus reflected in the statistics.

What an individual coach sets his KPI goals at, depends on his team and his tactics, basically it is up to him. Suffice to say as long as the coach has set a unit KPI for lineouts and the team are working towards that goal (%), then that should be adequate.

Lineout Calls.

Below are some simple diagrams on lineout positioning and jumper spacing

Fig 1: General full lineout jumping positions.

Number sets line out and letter or number sets jumper and jump type.

When constructing lineout calls the most important thing to remember is that players fatigue in game situations the KIS (Keep It Simple) method is generally very apt in the formulation of game day calls and the use of triggers is a useful tool to get players to register calls in fatigue situations.

The following are some examples of useful triggers that may be used on game day situations

Any Planet has the jumper going to the space Pluto, Neptune, Mars etc
Any Truck denotes a driving lineout Kenworth, Louisville, Mack

Any famous halfback denotes the halfback (who is a jumper coming into the line and jumping) Slats, George, Nick

Once you get players used to these calls they basically become automatic and in the high pressure, heavily fatigued situations a players remote control, might just be what saves a team from disaster.
Setting the space in the lineout.

When a jumper jumps he must not be impeded by his blockers. This is especially so if he is coming forward to try and get in front of another jumper.

Jumpers must also jump in space ie jump to the opposition weakness.

If our throwers are not throwing well or a being impeded, we then go back to stock ball at the 2 and 4 positions as seen at the top of the page in Fig 1.

The jumpers at 2 and 4 must be given every opportunity to jump into space, therefore we want the front five players to spread out and the back two to cramp right up on the 15 metre line.

Some useful rules of thumb, can be applied to most jumping situations.

1. Stay out of the traffic in a close congested lineout.
2. Have the hooker and the jumpers step off the lineout on all throws to allow space
3. Throw to 2 and 4 if throwers are having trouble or the lineout under pressure "Money Ball Calls"
4. Jump to the opposition weakness and if necessary run around to that position
5. Jump up and across at two to take the space, out muscle the opposition if you can or have to.
6. Get to space at four and be quicker than the opposition.
7. Try not to have too much movement and generally jump in the same position so that the hooker can get a general aim, and always have someone marking the overthrow.
8. If all else fails go back to 2 man lineouts with the jumper coming in from the half back position (1/2 in the backline) coming in and the hooker coming around to receive the ball off the top or black ball and passes to the 1/2 standing 10 m back behind the 15 M mark running in.
9. Lineouts are about deception and ballistic speed.
10. On defensive lineouts: Pressure the opposition lineout on all throws

To do this it is imperative that the defensive team get two pods working to get two jumpers in the air if the situation allows.

One pod stays at two and the other follows the best jumper, then the ball.
11. A defensive lineout must compete or at least put pressure on in every defensive lineout. This means take the space instead of giving it (as on our lineout), making sure to stay within what the referee and the laws require.

Put two pods up to try and steal ball.

**Fig 5: Podding Up**

If they only have five in the lineout we can use our hooker to lift. We can also use our 1/2 if necessary. So the lifters all drop back one. Instead of 5 coming to the front and lifting the 4 jumper. Take the space across to the line of touch to put more pressure on.
The 3 Man Lineout.

The classic 3 man lineout is still a valuable tool in the lineout arsenal as it serves some very useful purposes.

1. It is very easy to get to space and win the ball if the jumpers and blockers are quick enough.
2. It allows a lot of players outside the 15m line so you can set up an attacking play using forwards at the first phase. (Set phase = Lineout, scrum, kickoff. First phase = first phase after the set phase ie: the first ruck or maul after the set phase).
3. If you have a weaker lineout than the opposition you can make space and win quick ball rather than having to compete against stronger jumpers.

![Fig 6: A three man lineout.](image)

1-5-3 Could be a possible combination. 3 and 5 could rush quickly to 1 and have a quick ball at the 2 jumping position. The 1/2 would have to mark the overthrow and the hooker would then have to come around for the pop ball after the lineout win. The variations on this with dummy jumps using the 9 as the jumper etc become endless.

The 4 Man Lineout.

The 4 man lineout has all the advantages of the 3 man lineout plus the variations you can use with your extra man. The lineout can start spread as in the 3 man above or you can put a pod in to test what the opposition might do defensively.

The beauty of this action being, if the Opposition Do Not Mark Up, THROW THE BALL STRAIGHT TO THE POD WITHOUT DELAY.

![Fig 7: A four man lineout.](image)

1-5-3-4 Could be a possible combination. In this scenario the opposition have not marked up to the throw, therefore the players would automatically go straight to the number 5 in the lineout. Catching the opposition out with the speed of the throw.

The pod, of course, can start anywhere and also move to anywhere in the lineout to catch the opposition out with a dummy jump etc.

The use of the halfback also creates a myriad of possibilities for the lineout. These become especially effective if the lineout starts with a spread or a split formation such as in the scenario below.

![Fig 8: A four man lineout variation](image)
The Five Man Lineout.

The five man lineout once again creates endless possibilities for attack. This lineout, because of its very nature, allows us as a lineout, to test the opposition tactically, for example by putting in a 3 - 2 formation a team can test to see if the opposition are going to mark up. If they do not throw a flat ball straight to the pod of three, easy ball. If they do mark up you might fake to the pod, allow the blocker to get to the other pod to make it a 3 and then jump. If the opposition chase with a blocker you will usually be able to win the ball with timing and a quick jump. Make sure the pod at its jumping stage is in front of the opposition and coming forward. If their blocker stays and the halfback comes into the lineout to mark the pod……… its going to be a tough day at the office.

Once this happens the way to get back on top is to get the pod to space usually by bringing the halfback into the front or the middle.

Fig 9: A five man lineout
Opposition have not marked up.
Money ball at the two position
Remembering that this formation can start at any position in the lineout

Fig 10: A five man lineout variation
Opposition did mark up, quick dummy by the 5 and get 3 back to 4 as quickly as possible.
His speed determines how much time you will have and most teams will find that the 4 and 8 need to be coming forward to beat the opposition

Fig 11: A five man lineout variation
In this case the opposition have marked up and the halfback has covered the back ball.
This then forces us to use the halfback usually in the middle with 5 and another lifter coming from the back to lift 6 in the middle of the lineout.
**How the ball is delivered to the halfback.**

There are basically three ways in which the ball can be delivered from the lineout.

1. Off the top
2. Brought down and popped
3. Brought down and driven and then delivered.

**The advantages of the first option are**

The ball is very quick and a pack can deliver very quick ball from the lineout to outside backs. This is especially so, from the back of the lineout. It enables a team to get over the advantage line quickly with running plays.

**Disadvantages:**

The backrow get a running start from the ball coming straight off the top. The ball has further to travel so it has increasing chance of error.

**The second option advantages are**

The ball can be used to sucker the backrow of the opposition into a hold position while the hooker comes around for the pass or the half back delivers. It gives a little more time for the halfback to deliver to options as the backrow are held in the lineout so they do not get a running start.

**Disadvantages:**

The only real disadvantage of this is that the team needs a stable platform on which to

1. Secure and pop the ball
2. Stop the opposition from having a chance to disrupt your ball.

**The third option advantages are**

The ball can be driven and then the play (if winning the drive) immediately crosses the advantage line. The ball becomes a lot slower and much more controlled especially if you have a dominant pack.

**Disadvantages:**

It allows the backs to come up to the offside line (of the last mans feet) once the lineout has been completed; this loss of space in which the backs can work may preclude attacking options. Ball can be disrupted by opposition forwards.
Use of the ball from set play to the first phase and beyond.

The lineout itself creates an excellent opportunity to attack defensive teams’ weaknesses.

The first issue to address of course is analysing a team and working out who is a defensive weakness.

The next step is to design plays that attack that defensive weakness. "To break down a brick wall you first find where the mortar is weakest and then continually hit that area until it crumbles, the rest will follow". "Identify weakness horizontally and attack vertically”.

In making all these points it is relevant at this point to say that the Lineout itself by its very nature and structure creates natural weaknesses in a teams defence that can be exploited. Figure 12 below shows some areas that, off a full lineout are defensively weak.

**Fig 12: Defensively weak areas off a full lineout.**

Once a team has won the ball from a contested full lineout the options available to hit space are set out above.

What if, however the Right Winger for the defensive side was a defensive weakness? How could you get players in motion running at him? Or perhaps the teams first phase defence on the open side set up a formation that was defensively unsound and could be exploited.

To attack these types of weaknesses it is probably wise for a coach to give the players (after analysis of the opposition) the tools to break down the opposition and set up plays that will allow exploitation of the oppositions problem.

An example is set out below in Fig 13.

The team in red defending below continually fail to set up an adequate 1, 2, 3 defence on the open side of a crash ball. The coach should instruct the tight five especially the players involved in the lineout to run short inside balls off nine. He should also instruct his loose forwards not involved in the ruck to run off 10 into the weakened defensive zone.
From this example it would be advisable for the attacking teams coach to get as much play through the channel left by the opposition as it is a defensive weakness.
**Conclusions.**

In conclusion it would be anticipated that after reading this paper a coach could take on board some of the ideas and techniques discussed on formulating a winning lineout. In doing this, then showing his or her team how their lineouts specific advantages can be used as an attacking weapon as well as a defensive strength. The key elements to the lineout however, must be the basis on which a team builds those strengths, once they are in place the rest becomes very easy.

An accurate call and throw
A well timed jump and lift into a non contested position
A secure catch and then delivery to the players waiting to receive the ball.

The phrase "repetition reigns" is basically the premise on which to practice the lineout, making sure though that the process is technically and tactically correct, and as such this function should be an assigned role within the team structure.

In making these points it must always be remembered to adopt the phrase "Use what works for your team and its players" there is no right and wrong way in rugby coaching, some ideas will work for your team and others will be completely foreign to your players for years to come.

A coaches main role in the team is not to find out how much he can get into his team but how much he can get out of his players.

When dealing directly with the lineout; If you have a weakness, make it work for you as strength--- and if you have a strength, don't abuse it into a weakness.

Good Coaching.

**References**


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