Australian Rugby Union Level 3 Paper

Clearance Pass

Introduction

In an era when specialisation in coaching is becoming more and more prevalent and there is a heavier focus on every player across the park maintaining a high level of core skills; Attack (catch, pass, support), Attack (kicking), Defence (one on one tackle and being a member of a defensive line) and Contact (tackle contest in attack and defence). I believe the clearance pass is also becoming a specialised skill not only for halfbacks. Yes it is the bread and butter of any halfback who wants to be of their worth to a team, but with an increase in the speed the game is played at, added focus from the referee to reward attacking teams and improved laws in regards to the tackle contest there should be a focus on players such as back rowers, props and outside backs to practice and perfect this skill also. This skill is not only increasing in importance in the 15 a side game but immensely important in the 7’s players’ skill attributes. The seven-a-side game is a game that is on a rapid rise in participation in this country.

Players of the modern day era such as Phil Waugh, Richie McCaw, Benn Robinson and Ben Alexander to name a few have added to their teams ability to play fast, attacking rugby through; i) having the vision and decision making to see an opportunity to act ii) having the ability and confidence in their ability to execute the clearance pass when desired.

In essence the clearance pass that John Hipwell would execute perfectly time and time again is no different to the clearance pass of Ken Catchpole, Nick Farr-Jones and on the current stage, Will Genia. With the only real change to the skill and its execution being the ball - the material it is made of and some changes to the laws. Then in theory the practice of this skill should not need changing?

Whilst researching for this paper I was lucky enough to spend some time with the current Wallabies halfback, Will Genia and his halfback skills coach, Chris Lane who is also the Australian Rugby Union NGS Brisbane based coach. From watching the session Chris put Will through prior to the Super 15 Grand Final, it was purely about executing the basic techniques of the clearance pass consistently under no matter what pressure or delivery of the ball to him ( it’s that easy............!). The other key element of Will’s training was his ability to self-assess and correct whilst passing.

With the assistance and research from a number of different resources, I aim to outline the key characteristics of the clearance pass and hopefully provide a more informative and understandable approach to practising and delivering the clearance pass. This in turn will hopefully encourage players and coaches to make it a core skill of all players.
**Content**

The clearance pass has been broken into; Non-negotiables for the clearance pass, Clearance passing from a tackle contest, clearance passing from lineouts and clearance passing from a scrum. Hope fully you will easily see a pattern in the positioning of the ball in relation to the passers body. This has a major impact on the speed, accuracy and force the ball is passed with.

**Non-negotiable for the Clearing Pass**

- Plant foot close to the ball (to promote sweeping from ground rather than picking up of the ground)
- Point lead foot aimed at receiver – with the lead foot pointing at the receiver it assists in getting the ball to travel on the one plane from starting position to receiver’s hands
- Position ball in finger tips – not palm of hand
- Ball swept from ground/ or inside hip with hands going right through to target (finish with elbows and hands fully extended to target and palms down. Do not cross hands over)
- Weight shift through feet (from plant foot to point foot) this will generate power and speed of delivery

*(Adapted from: Junior Gold Program Newsletter – Vol. 1 issue 3)*

**Clearing pass from Tackle Contest**

- Eyes up – scan for attacking options on the way to the ball
- Direct players to ensure quality ball is produced from the tackle contest
- Position body inside the ball with inside leg forward – feet first then hands (Fig.1)
- Eyes on the detail of the ball to position your hands correctly on the ball 1st time (avoid reloading)
- Dig hands into ruck and rip the ball out to your inside hip if the ball is stuck – this motion needs to be dynamic and power should come from bent knees and legs (Fig.2)
- Position ball in finger tips – not palm of hand (Fig.3)
- Fire wrists and ball on one plane through to receiver’s target (hands)- don’t cross hands over each other (Fig.5)
- Hold strong finish position, fully extended till receiver has the ball in hands (Fig.6)

*(Adapted from: Junior Gold Program Newsletter – Vol. 1 issue 3)*
Succession of tackle contest clearance passing still images: (Fig.1- 6) plus video

Fig.1  

Fig.2  

Fig.3  

Fig.4  

Fig.5  

Fig. 6  

pass from tackle contest.MOV

Clearing pass from Lineout

- Position body inside the ball with inside leg forward – lead with feet first then hands (Fig.7)
- Lineout jumper delivers ball directly straight down from catching position – firm and to the space
- Position ball in finger tips – not palm of hand (Fig.8)
- Move feet to the line of the ball so the ball is positioned on inside hip and hands to the ball simultaneously – this motion needs to be dynamic and power should come from bent knees and legs (Fig. 9)
- Fire wrists and pass ball on one plane through to receiver’s target (hands)- don’t cross hands over each other (Fig.10)
- Hold strong, finish position, fully extended till receiver has the ball in hands (Fig.11)
Succession of Lineout clearance passing still images: (Fig.7 – 11) plus video

Clearing pass from Scrum

- Follow fed ball around staying behind the ball and keeping eyes on the ball – this assists in reaction time if ball spills out the side of scrum
- Get number 8 to position ball on outside of his/ her right foot with control
- Plant foot close to the ball (to promote sweeping from ground rather than picking up of the ground) – this aids speed of delivery (Fig.12)
- Point lead foot aimed at receiver – with the lead foot pointing at the receiver - this assists in getting the ball to travel on the one plane from starting position to receiver’s hands (Fig.13)
- Position ball in finger tips - not palm of the hand
- Ball swept from ground with hands going right through to target (finish with elbows and hands fully extended to target and palms down. Do not cross hands over) (Fig.14)
- Weight shift through feet (from plant foot to point foot) this will generate power and speed of delivery (Fig.16)
Succession of scrum clearance passing still images: (Fig.12 – 16) plus video

Fig.12                                Fig.13                                Fig.14

Fig.15                                Fig.16

Skill Development Drills (Each drill can be used for any of the clearance pass types except for the Shazaam passing which is used to strengthen and isolate the power hand)

i) Shazaam passing – 2 players stand opposite each other at varying distances – 2m, 5m, 10m, 15m. Player positions the ball on hip with back hand finger tips only (power hand) on the ball. Fire wrist so the ball is locked in position and push the ball directly through to partners chest. Wrist and fingers flick off ball to stick the finish position with arm out stretched, hand pointing to chest, palm down and eyes only on target. Repeat with both hands. Alternating this action between partners.

ii) Soccer ball passing – By passing a soccer ball in clearance passing situations (scrum, tackle contest, lineout) the action encourages player to use weight transfer from back foot to pointer foot, extend through arms and wrists and stick the finishing position with palms facing downwards and hands parallel to each other (not crossed over).

iii) Straight line quick fire – Place 6 footballs in a straight line half a metre – 1 metre apart. The player passes all footballs to a partner who is standing still for all 6 passes. The emphasis is on the passer delivering consistent, flat passes to his catcher with limited time in between balls to readdress, evaluate and gather thoughts. The passer passes all footballs to one direction then turns around and comes back all the other side.

iv) 3 Way pass – from all starting points (off deck/ lineout/ tackle contest) – The passer stands directly behind six balls. There are 3 catchers in position; left, right and directly behind. On
notification from varied catchers the passer must dynamically react, present to the ball and pass to the calling player. Emphasis is on; quick reaction and consistent service.

v) Partnered game simulation – A passer and catcher pair up. The passer starts with 2 balls in front on the ground. The passer must react to the varied calling from catcher as they move up the field. On catching the ball, the catcher roles the ball anywhere forward and the passer must react and prepare to pass from the new positions. The drill continues up the field till the passer has passed ten footballs. Once complete. Swap positions and return down the field. Emphasis is on: Realistic communication, varied delivery. ( good warm up drill for games).

vi) Slalom – A passer and catcher pair up. Four balls are placed in random positions. The passer moves through passing the footballs left to right/ right to left or varied positions. The delivery of the football can also vary at each point. Emphasis is on; scanning, feet presentation to the football and consistent technique through fatigue.

Conclusion

After reading the information I have provided from my own personal knowledge and experiences along with the knowledge from the people who have been willing to assist in me producing this paper as mentioned below in my bibliography, hopefully the clearance pass has been made easier to learn, understand and coach to others.

Looking back on the information provided in the body of the paper, the key elements that repeat whether it be passing from scrum, lineout or tackle contest are;

- Feet must lead firstly to the ball followed by the hands
- Ball always needs to start at the inside of the body. If off the ground – back foot to the ball. If from lineout or tackle contest – ball to inside hip
- Player needs to be dynamic in the transfer of weight from back foot through to point foot
- Hips need to open up to receiver and point foot needs to point to receiver
- Ball in finger tips
- Finish with hands pointing at receiver and palms facing down (do not cross over arms)

I honestly believe that the more all players practice this skill and have it ingrained into our coaching practices so it becomes a core skill, the quicker our attacking ball will come and more threatening to the defensive line as in limits the time for the opposition to get themselves set. This ability to take decision making time away from the opposition is hugely important in 15 a side rugby, rugby 7’s and all levels of our great game.
Bibliography

Australian Rugby Union Junior Gold Squad Newsletter Volume 1 issue 3

Chris Lane – Australian Rugby Union National Gold Squad Coach - Queensland

Will Genia – QLD Reds and Australian Wallabies half back

Waldo Wessels – National Gold Squad Athlete used in demonstration pictures and video