

# INTRODUCING YOUNG PLAYERS TO CONTACT BY JEREMIE SPENCER, C.T.D., F.F.R.

The author represented England at scrum half in 1966 and played for Harlequins for seven years between spells at Bath and Northampton. He had cricket trials for Surrey and had been 'spotted', as a schoolboy, as a potential Tottenham Hotspur footballer. His professional activities in England saw work as a sports teacher in a variety of secondary and preparatory schools. After that he had a full coaching involvement in France as a county coach with the Basque-Landes FFR, as U16 and U19 coach to St Jean de Luz then as U21 coach to Avignon Bayonne. Since that work in France he has been heavily involved in Spanish rugby development with Catalan selection, club courses, Basque Country coaching, running U19 and senior representative sides and introducing the game to beginners in Spanish primary schools.

There are contact elements in the article that may not be allowed with certain age groups in England. Coaches must be aware that they are responsible for adhering to the continuum whenever it is appropriate. This may mean that certain aspects of the coaching information and coaching method in this piece would not be allowed at some specific age groups.

The previous article written by the author has much relevant material on the introduction of contact. It can be found in the Archive as 'Introducing Rugby to Children in France', Spring 2004.

The first things to remember for any contact exercise are

- to ensure that the players are dressed properly and
- the more contact that is being done, the narrower/smaller the pitch.

Once those two matters have been sorted out, get the young players to make contact with the ground. This may seem not to be contact in the usual meaning of the term, but it is very important for the players and their confidence.

I have tried to keep away from exercises that resemble rugby the most. I see this as a 'side-door' philosophy that leads to richness later on in the players' careers.

## **Contact with the ground.**

- 1. Start with a forward roll and remember that the players need to be reminded that the head should be tucked into the chest and hands are best if slightly in front of the body.
- 2. Side roll on the ground.
- 3. Shoulder roll (parachute landing).



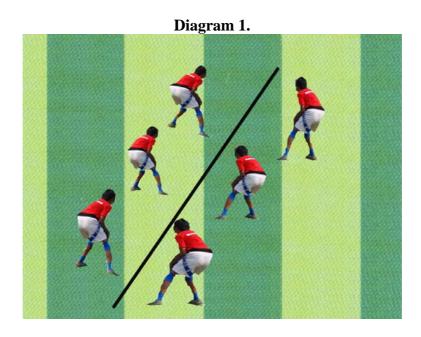
- 4. Then add a ball and work on variations of roll then pass, pass then roll etc. Start in pairs then in threes.
- 5. Introduce relay races with the sequences in 4.

The idea of a relay race appeals to young players, who are usually quite natural competitors. Once they have got used to contact with the ground, the competition will probably overcome any previous reluctance or fear.

#### **Contact between themselves.**

Different types of contact with each other can be introduced now that the players are warm and they have worked on ground contact. There are many activities that can be one-on-one, but do remember the importance of mirroring – pair off in the same height, weight and sex.

### One-on-one work.



- 1. Find the best way to push your partner so that you cross the line. Little by little, let them lock their heads together. (Each win is a point in all little activities/competitions.)
- 2. Find the best way to pull your partner over the line.
- 3. Stand side-by-side (left shoulders touching) and push with that shoulder.
- 4. Use the right shoulder.
- 5. Push and, at the same time, try to grab your partner's ankle.
- 6. Push backwards, back to back.
- 7. Lift your partner so that you cross the line without being lifted yourself.
- 8. Chinese wrestling. Hold each other's wrists and try to slap your partner's face with an open hand without getting slapped yourself.



- 9. Cock fighting. Squat and bounce with hands in front. Try to push your partner so that you cross the line.
- 10. Side-by-side wrestling. Lock right elbows together then wrestle your partner to the ground.
- 11. Same again with left elbows locked.
- 12. Face each other and try to pull your partner to your right.
- 13. Face each other and try to pull your partner to your left.
- 14. Stand up and face each other. Try to lift your partner without being lifted yourself.
- 15. Kneel and face your partner. Try to push your partner over backwards.
- 16. One lies down on his front and the partner kneels behind. The front person tries to advance and the rear one holds his ankles (not clothes) to try to stop progress.
- 17. One lies on the ground and the other tries to roll him over and over. The person on the ground resists.
- 18. Two players wrestle with a ball between them.
- 19. One player throws the ball in the air. When the other catches it, they begin to wrestle for the ball.
- 20. One player gets onto his hands and knees. The other tries to turn him onto the ground.
- 21. Repeat 20, but place a ball under the player on the ground. The other player tries to turn him over then claim the ball. (In 20 and 21, the 'victim' is allowed to let himself fall on his own terms to protect himself.
- 22. One player on hands and knees. His partner tries to pull him over the line by pulling his wrist(s) or ankle(s).

#### **Group work**

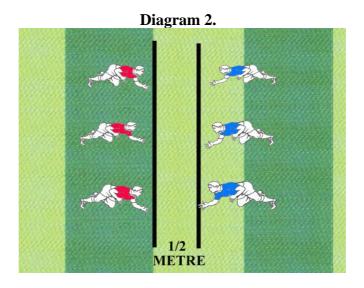
1. One team (not too many players to make the exercise too complex) binds to each other and stands in a square that can be marked with cones. They can stand, sit or lie down as long as they remain bound together.

The other team, individually or collectively, must pull to try to separate them (one by one or in groups), then pull and/or push the formerly bound players out of the square.

The team that keeps a player in the square the longest (stop watch) wins. There should be no pulling on the head or the clothes – referee strictly so that the players who are pulling grasp the body. This activity is fun and also takes the worry out of contact. It also encourages co-operation as both the bound team and the 'tacklers' will work best if they communicate with the rest of their team.



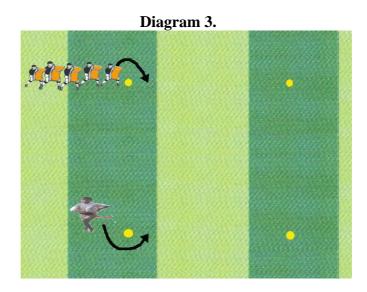
2. All players are on their knees and half a metre apart.



- Without a ball, all the Reds try to cross the Blues' line, who in turn try to stop them (5-10 seconds duration).
- Start to introduce a few balls to the players who are trying to cross the line.
- Gradually increase the number of balls until each attacker has one.
- Keep changing the format so that competitions can be 1v1, 2v1, 2v2 etc.
- Place a ball(s) in the middle and one team is the attack and the other the defence. Again this can be varied with 1v1. 2v1. 2v2 and all v all. Always use a stopwatch so that winners can be announced and points awarded.

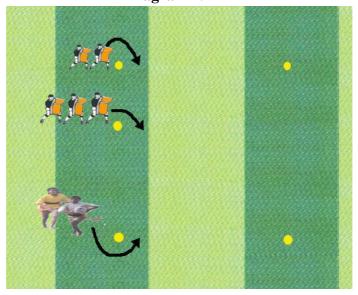


**3.** 



- One player with a ball against five defenders with shields.
- This can be progressed to two, three and four attackers.
- The first stage is where the 'pass' has to be hands directly to hands to encourage the support player to come in to find the ball.
- Then proper passes can be encouraged.
- All sorts of variations can be added and more defenders with shields can be brought in from different starting points.(Diagram 4.)

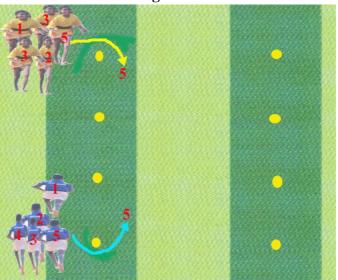
Diagram 4.





4.





- Each player has a number and each number is used twice so that the Blues and Yellows have an opponent. Players trot and intermingle on one side of the square.
- The coach rolls a ball into the square and calls a number. Two players (one from each team) enter the square around their cone and the quicker player onto the ball becomes the attacker and tries to score at either end. The defender tries to stop the score.
- This can progress to several attackers and defenders without passes the support has to come in to take the ball.
- Introduce passes.
- A further progression can go thus: when the number is called, the players have to run through the opponents before coming into the square around 'their' cone. This adds a further challenge of having to re-orientate through a crowded area. (Diagram 5b)



Diagram 5b

