

REGAINING MOMENTUM IN ATTACK AFTER CONTACT BY DAVE LAVENTURE

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What exactly is **momentum**? It is generally understood to be the force of the speed of movement of either a physical object or of a course of events. To all rugby intents and purposes it is *drive, energy, propulsion and thrust*.

To **attack** something is to set about it, go to work on it and/or to do so in a forceful, violent manner. It is an aggressive move in a performance or contest.

These two definitions raise the question of how we can use the terms to help players to set goals, targets and objectives. Precise terminology, I suggest, is the key. Once the concepts have been explained, bearing in mind the age and experience of the players we are dealing with, do we, as coaches, spend too much time on regaining momentum rather than on starting it?

Momentum all too easily breaks down at the tackle/contact and we need to be clear about why it has occurred. An individual player may suffer from some or all of the following when he has the ball.

- Poor decision making (e.g. has gone to ground too early or has attacked without any numerical advantage).
- Contact skills may be poor and the opponents easily slow down possession or prevent continuity/offload opportunities.
- Poor execution of skills at or just before contact.
- Poor coaching – the player has been conditioned and is playing by numbers rather than by a developed instinct.

When individual players do not have the ball, they can still be responsible for momentum breaking down. There could be any combination of:

- The situation has been interpreted incorrectly.
- Poor body position at the breakdown.
- Poor lines of support coming towards the ball.
- Poor communication.
- Poor coaching – a conditioned response from the player rather than a considered one.

All of the above generally lead to a breakdown in momentum, which in turn leads to slow ball, which then allows the defenders the luxury of extra time to organise the structure of their defence. The attackers then struggle to know quite what to do with the hard-earned possession and the defenders start to dominate

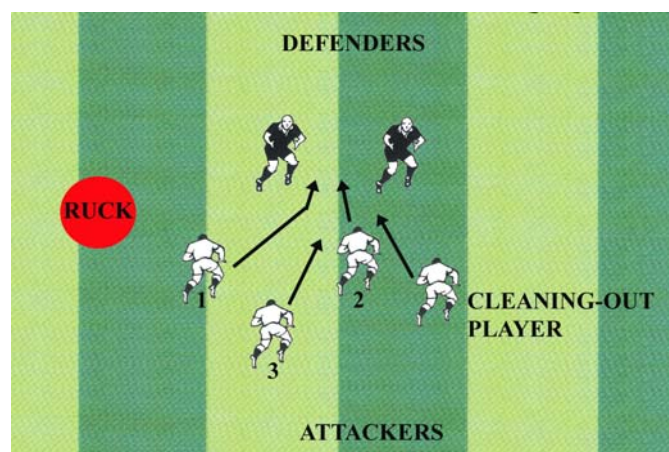
Before we deal with the problem of momentum breaking down, we all need to be clear in knowing what we are trying to achieve with the ball in our possession. The most important outcome is to score, but before that happens we need to work on gaining advantage through

- Territory.
- Adding pace, speed and thrust to the movement of possession.
- Disorganisation/manipulation of the defence.

POSSIBLE STRATEGIES.

1. LIFT AND SMASH.

This is a very physical play and it is trying to create space, move the opponents' back feet, gain territory and advance the ball beyond the gain line. It is most definitely not an excuse to bang into opponents, simply keep possession or 'stop and flop.'



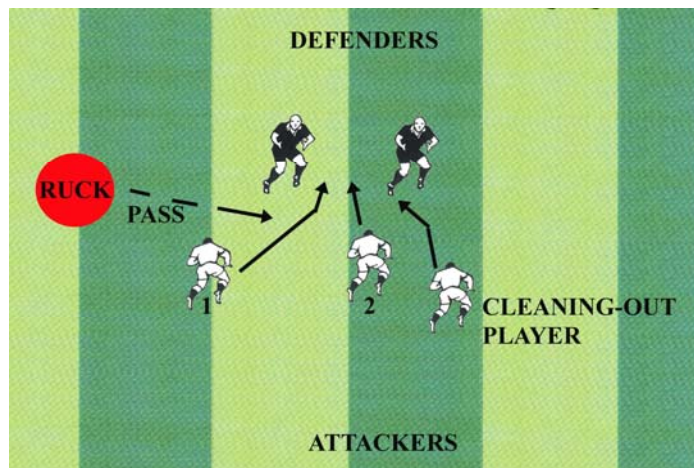
Coaching points:

- Practise the play(s) so that players recognise the opportunity in a game.
- Communicate at all times.
- Get the ball in the correct position.
- Attack in numbers.
- Explode into the situation with dynamic movement – change the pace of the game.
- Adopt a strong body position, which will be easier if players have good isometric core strength to hold such a position. Drive the legs.
- Get the support there quickly.
- If the support is from the outside, bind behind and work ahead of the ball. Arrowhead into the ball carrier's hole and explode through the other side.
- Work the contact from out to in to preserve space.

- Go to ground only on the attacking players' terms and fight hard to make the offload an option.
- Ruck from out to in, pulling in the fringe players on the open side to leave space there to be attacked.

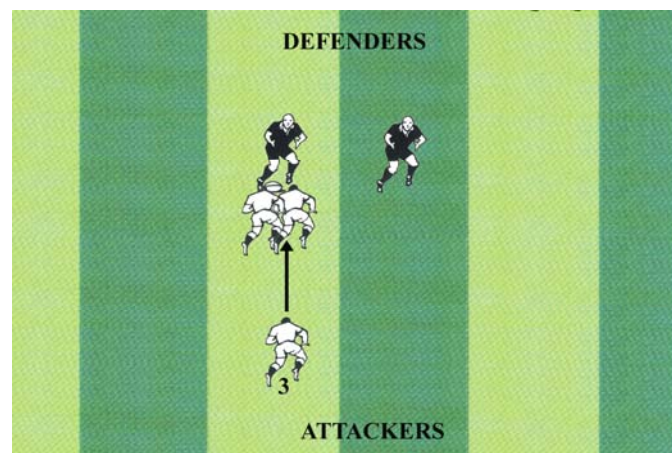
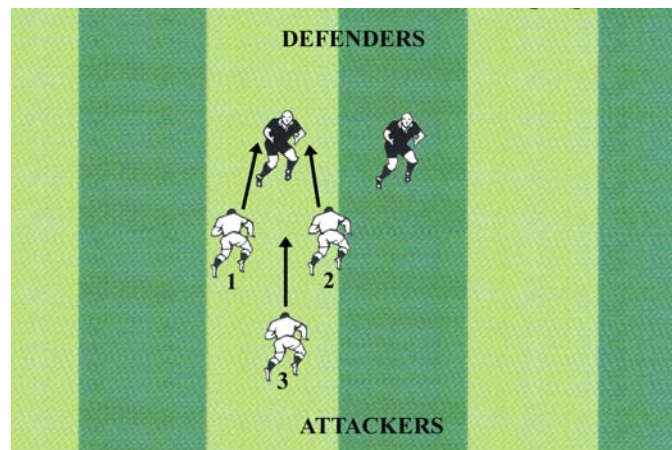
In training, some (or all) of the following can be used to develop players' skills.

- Ball carrier run under net and add footwork, ball position and explosion through the run.
- Add a partner to support.
- Bring in preying mantis (the player who goes over the ball and secures it) and cleaning machines (player who cleans out opponents).
- Develop small-sided games in a confined area without a scrum half. Make the objective 'keep ball.' Make the game competitive with a scoring system, which can be made up to suit the coach. I have used a plus point for keeping the ball at a tackle, three for an offload and minus one for a turnover, going backwards or going alone into contact.
- Work with pads and/or tackle suits. Have more attackers than defenders and build up the numbers on both sides as improvement occurs.
- Throw in a second ball at any time so that players have to be alert to what is happening away from the immediate contact situation.
- A scrum half can be added later and he can pop the ball to another attacker.



2. THE CHARIOT

This is in effect a mini-maul, but in this situation an opponent is targeted and a maul is set up on him as opposed to targeting space. The ball carrier (1) is bound onto by the first support player (2) and these front two players squeeze the ball back to a third player who is in the chariot (driving/steering) position. Additional players can then bind on to the new ball carrier.



Coaching points:

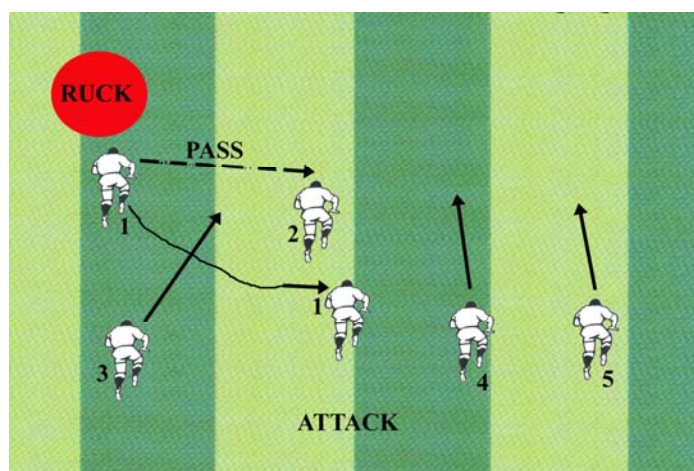
- Practise the play(s) so that players recognise the opportunity in a game.
- Communicate at all times.
- Get the ball in the correct position.
- Attack in numbers.
- Explode into the situation with dynamic movement – change the pace of the game.
- Adopt a strong body position, which will be easier if players have good isometric core strength to hold such a position. Drive the legs.
- First support player binds over the top of the ball carrier with the ball in the middle.

- The third player targets the ball, which is now between the front two players, who have their heads on either side of the defender.
- Players must stay on their feet and maintain control.
- The third player enters the contact between the first two then the front players are squeezed, effectively forming a three-man wedge.
- Develop the play with contact shields and suits and small-sided games.

3. THE POST PLAYER.

After the tackle/contact, one player makes the decision to become the 'post' player and stands almost flat on the open side. The ball is popped to the 'post' from the contact area and the player who pops runs a loop outside the 'post' player.

- The support should then come from behind the initial breakdown on the ball carrier's inside shoulder.
- This allows the support runners to take a ball from the player who is popping the ball (inside or outside) and various options begin to emerge as decoy runners attract tacklers.
- When the ball goes beyond the gain line, the support players are coming from depth.
- If the momentum slows, a mini-maul can be formed on the 'post' player to start the momentum process off again.



The post player has various roles.

- He holds the fringe defence, thus preserving space.
- His presence allows pace to be injected into the attack.
- The attack occurs right on the gain line.

Coaching points.

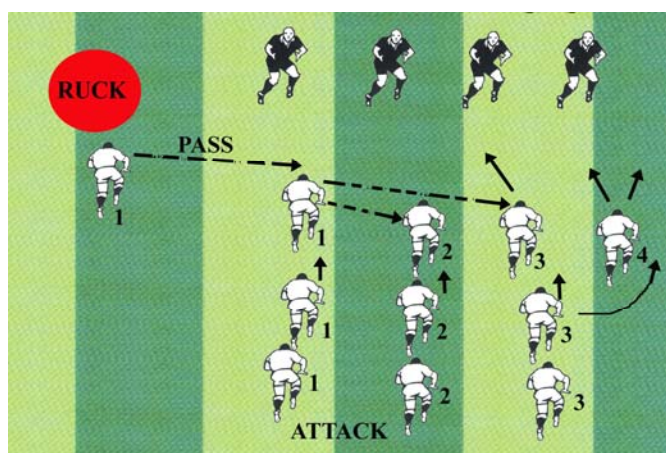
- The post player must develop decision making.
- Good handling skills are essential for all in the play.
- Timing of the pass is very important.
- Any deception plays must be called.
- Lines of running, footwork on the gain line and support have to be stressed.

- Contact skills and ball protection are not to be forgotten as the ball may not be played into free space.
- The offload has to be looked for.

4. TWO FLAT WAVES.

The first part of the shape is a flat line in attack with the outside player slightly up so that he can see what is going on inside him. The role of this line is to preserve the attacking channels and the width of the attack.

The second wave supports the first line by being behind them and between the first line of players. They add depth and potential change of pace if they can pick the best lines of run from a pass or an offload.



Advantages of this shape:

- The ball will stay on or beyond the gain line.
- Runners hit at speed as the first line hold the defence and the second wave ensures support.
- It isolates weak defenders.

Coaching points.

- Depth must be held by the second wave until their run is needed.
- Lines of run from the first wave have to fix defenders to allow effective incursion from the second wave.
- All players must be trying to move opponents.
- Foot movement on the gainline must be a priority.
- The second wave may not break into space, so contact skills still play an important part.
- Decision making has to be practised so that it will work in a game.
- The flat pass will reap rewards, whereas a deep pass may lose any advantage.

In training, it is very important for the following to be given attention and time.

- Individuals on footwork practice.
- Flat passing to a second wave coming through and onto the ball.

- Running effective waves against live defences with fewer numbers than the attack. The width of the attacking zone can be altered and a back row can be introduced to mimic the breakdown on the pitch.
- Add a scramble defence to test the attackers.

Regaining momentum will not just happen – it needs to be practised. Whatever the strategy or the situation, success will be determined by:

- Individual performance of core skills.
- Intensity/motivation of the players.
- Organisation and communication.
- Recognising appropriate cues and effective decision making.
- The physiological characteristics of the players.

In a nutshell, the key points are:

CORRECT TECHNIQUE.

AS MUCH GAME PLAY AS POSSIBLE IN PRACTICE TO EXPOSE POOR TECHNIQUE.

IMPROVEMENT IN RECOGNISING THE CUES FOR PRODUCTIVE DECISION MAKING.