

ATTACKING THE BLIND SIDE BY SIMON EDWARDS, SOUTH WEST U18 DIVISIONAL COACH.

The blind side, sometimes called the narrow or short side, is the narrowest area of the pitch to attack or defend and is one of the least exploited channels in the game. A blind side easily develops from scrum, lineout, contact/tackle and restart. The key players are both half backs, wingers and full back.

Knowing when to attack the blind side depends largely on effective decision making and the half backs' ability to play 'heads-up' rugby will pay dividends. The key players must appreciate how wide the available blind side is and they must decide how many players are needed to exploit the space. A narrow blind side of ten metres or less may only require one or two runners to become effective. Obviously the number of defenders in the blind side is a crucial factor, so quick decision makers are essential so that any imbalance can be exploited.

As in any other area of attack, fast ball is best so that a disorganised defence can be attacked. However, slow ball can be taken into the blind side as long as the attackers understand the defensive pattern and numbers that they are attacking. When the possession is slow, a premium is placed on decision making because the defence will have had longer to adjust and organise.

SCRUM BALL.

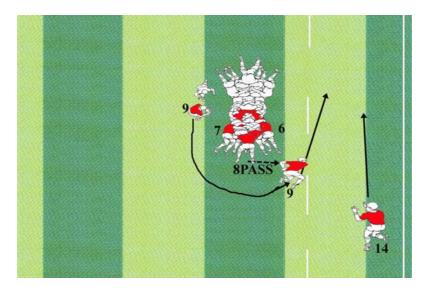
Much depends on the width of the channel but, playing left to right, a basic 8, 9, 10 move can pay dividends with 14 as an extra option. The whole process is made so much easier if the attacking tight-head prop can nudge the scrum in an anti-clockwise direction to wheel away the defending 6 and 8. If the blind side channel is narrow, the ball can go 8 to 9 to 14, giving an option of 14 switching or dummy-switching with 9. An essential part of any ploy is early communication between the team so that everybody knows the intended plan of attack.

1. Right-side scrums.

(a) Scenario with a blind side play might look like this:

- The no 8 packs between the left flanker and left lock. Backs stand in standard alignment.
- The first phase is an 8 to 9 pass; 9 switches or links with 14, depending on available space and 15 supports from depth.

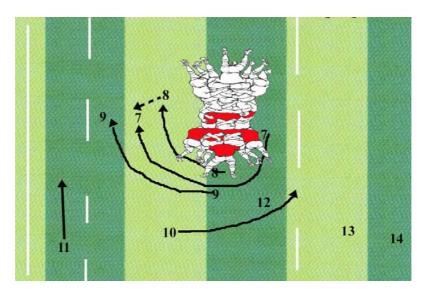




- The scrum tries to wheel slightly anti-clockwise to take away some of the opponents' 6 and 8 threat.
- If/when the move is tackled, 5,6, 7 and 8 secure possession in what is now the second phase.
- 4 picks and drives.
- The third phase would occur with 1, 2 and 3 securing possession as 4 is tackled.
- 9 and 10 then link with the backs on the open side and the loose forwards from the second phase are available as support.

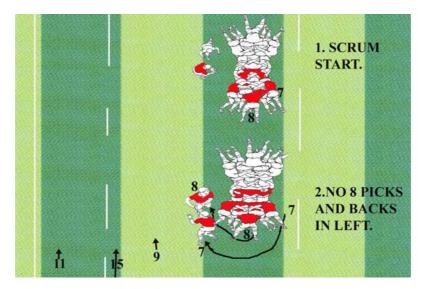
2. Left-side scrums.

(a) The 8 packs normally, the backs split as in the diagram below and the tight-head attempts to step up to take the scrum slightly anti-clockwise. 1^{st} Phase:



• 10 takes a decoy run to the open side right, hopefully taking the opposing 10 with him.





- 8 picks up, backs into the defending 9 and gives an in-to-out pass to 7 in the blind side.
- 9 supports 7 on the outside.
- 9 links with 11, possibly switching if they run out of space, with 15 available.

2nd Phase.

- 7, 6 (and 11if he did not get the ball) secure possession.
- 4 picks up and drives.
- 9 and 15 support 4.

3rd Phase.

- 1, 2 and 5 secure possession.
- 9 feeds 10.
- 10 picks up a runner.

LINEOUT.

At the simplest level there are two very basic ploys to get into the blind side from the lineout.

- 1. If the opponents are not aware of the throw and/or they are not prepared for their defensive jump/lift, the throw can go **straight to the front player** who attacks the blind side with the hooker and 9 in support.
- 2. The **middle ball** can be driven slightly infield towards the posts then the newly-created blind side can be attacked.

3. Full lineout.

• Ball thrown to back of line.



- 9 takes ball off the top and hits 12 with a flat pass on the gain line.
- Tackle ball is rucked quickly and ball is then passed into the blind side to 15.
- 14 and 12 remain out wide as support runners.
- The forwards who did not lift/jump at the lineout work at the ruck.
- The three forwards who did lift/jump stay as runners/dummy runners at the ruck.

MAUL/RUCK BALL.

Maul. This phase demands heads-up play so that the defensive organisation can be appreciated and acted upon. The slower the ball, the more organised the defence will be. The big decisions will be taken by 9 as he has to weigh up the numbers game – how many have they committed to the maul and how many/few defenders are in the blindside? Communication between 9, 10 and the blindside wing is crucial but it can give a distinct advantage if the timing of 9's run into the blind side is effective.

Ruck. The earlier/faster the possession from the ruck, the better. Quick ball allows the gain line to be attacked before the defence reorganises and a flat pass pays dividends as it takes to attack even more quickly into the retreating/disorganised defence.

In both ruck and maul ball into the blind side, players must not look for contact. They have to hold defenders in to retain the outside blind-side space so that attackers can exploit this.

RESTARTS.

Unless the ball is kicked to the midfield, there is always a blind side from a restart kick. The 9 must attack with a quick pass or break and his target will probably be the blindside winger. If the possession is slow, a pop pass to a forward can regain momentum then the blind side can be attacked.

The box kick is always an option into the blind side as long as the team kicking sees the ploy as a method of regaining possession as their prime objective. It also needs to be practised often so that each player knows his role.

CONCLUSIONS.

The blind side is not used often enough. Few teams attack this space and they probably spend little or no time organising their attacks there; equally, they probably do not work on defending that area if the opponents do try to attack it.



Positives of attacking the blind side.

- The strategy tests the effectiveness of the pod system to the limit.
- It creates more width when you do finally attack back into the open.
- It puts massive pressure on the defence in an area that is generally least defended.
- It makes opposing big forwards work hard to cover the full width of the pitch.

Negatives.

- Players can get forced into touch.
- Narrow blind sides can become congested, which can lead to errors and turnover ball.
- It demands good decision making at all times and heads have to be up for the strategy to work.
- The players in the open need to be working hard at the same time to create a diversion.

FINALLY! We coaches must be prepared to watch more games from behind the posts as this is the only place that can show if blind sides are being exploited or ignored. Then, videos are the only way to get the point across to players who have not seen the blind-side opportunity(ies) in the game. They might be surprised at how many scoring opportunities went begging through not appreciating the potency of the blind side in attack.