

# DEFENSIVE LINEOUT ORGANISATION

## BY

### SIMON MORGAN

*The author is Director of Rugby at Havant R.F.C. and he is also Head Coach of the London and South East Divisional U18 team. This article is taken from a presentation that he gave at the National & Divisional Age Group Coaches Conference on July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2007.*

#### A. PRIORITIES

1. 'Show stopper!' Stop the opposition winning their ball.
  - This will generate the all-important turnover possession.
  - It will prevent the opponents from developing their attacking play.
  - It can be performed legally (though often illegally as well).
  - Success boosts team morale.
2. 'Momentum wrecker.' Stop the opposition using what should become their ball
  - Prevent clean/quick 'off the top' ball.
  - Capitalise on the disruption that this causes.
3. 'Turf protection.' Defend your own lineout ball as they will be trying to do to you what you will be trying to do to them.
4. Roles of individuals need to be certain when
  - Competing for the opposition ball,
  - Defending once the ball has left the lineout and
  - Defending own ball at the lineout.

#### B. TACTICAL FACTORS

- Communication chain – 'What we're going to do', which must be a decision made by a specific lineout captain.
- Assess their strengths and weaknesses in their ball-winning ability and weigh this up against our own strengths and weaknesses.
- Decide. Make decisions regarding where on the pitch the lineout takes place and, often overlooked, how much time is left to play.
- Execute the plan, taking into account frequency and possible predictability.
- The number of players in the lineout is of tactical importance.

#### C. PLANNING THAT CAN BE CARRIED OUT.

1. Pre-match video analysis (e.g. of the game when opponents were last played against).
2. Pre-match information from scouting.
3. Memory of players/coaches from previous encounters.
4. Confidence in formations practised in training.

#### **D. PRACTICE AND PREPARATION.**

1. Key factors.
  - Quick feet (footwork).
  - Quick hands (good hand/eye coordination).
  - Athletic jumping/agility in the air.
  - Good core strength to allow aggressive competition in the air.
  - Effective trigger call(s).
2. Spend as much time practising defensive systems as you do on offensive lineouts.
3. Keep the same lifting techniques at all times. They apply to defensive *and* offensive lineouts.
4. In practice, make players watch closely to try to guess what the opposition will do.
5. Each individual must have a specific response based on the information received.
6. Individual roles and capabilities must be understood.
7. Avoid predictability.

#### **E. ENSURE A COMPETITIVE MINDSET IN PRACTICE.**

1. Always get the jumper as high as possible.
2. Practise all defensive strategies against live offensive lineouts.
3. Practise lifting, in isolation from the full lineout if necessary, till all concerned are comfortable with the skill.
4. Allocate a lineout captain and encourage him to make decisions in practices so that he is comfortable with the role in matches.

#### **F. OPTIONS.**

1. In the red zone – own 20m area.
  - Compete in the air?
  - Blitz – defend the drive aggressively or
  - Sack - simply start your own drive against their jumper as he lands.
2. Blue/green zone – outside own 20m area.
  - Compete in the air.
  - Blitz/sack.
  - No competition at all then pressurise their possession.

#### **G. COMPETITION IN THE AIR – FULL LINEOUT.**

1. One or two jumpers can be ready for aerial competition.
  - Use the hooker to lift from the 5m area with jumper standing at 1 in the lineout.
  - Throw up the second jumper as high as possible as early as is legally possible. This can distract their hooker throwing in.
  - Encourage (and practise) lifters and jumpers (especially at 4) to watch opposing jumper's feet. Always try to get defending jumper in front of opponent and slightly ahead of him in time.
  - Try to 'read' the thrower-in, which puts pressure on his skills and timing.
  - Think of the possibility of having three pods, but skills of personnel need to be checked in practice!
2. Adaptability.
  - What is the plan if the opposition start to throw to the tail of the lineout?

- How do you react if their jumper starts in the 9 position then steps into the lineout?

#### **H. COMPETITION IN THE AIR – SHORTENED LINEOUT.**

1. Put the 2 jumper up every time.
2. Mark man-for-man to match their pods.
3. Be on the lookout for very short or very long throws.

#### **I. COUNTERACTING THE CATCH AND DRIVE.**

1. Be vigilant and prepared for variations such as
  - Dummy drive and feed to player coming round to the front or back of the lineout,
  - Short pop to the hooker in the 5m channel.
2. Sack their jumper as he lands and try to turn the lineout into a ruck.
3. Counter their maul/drive with either a

- Blitz

Or

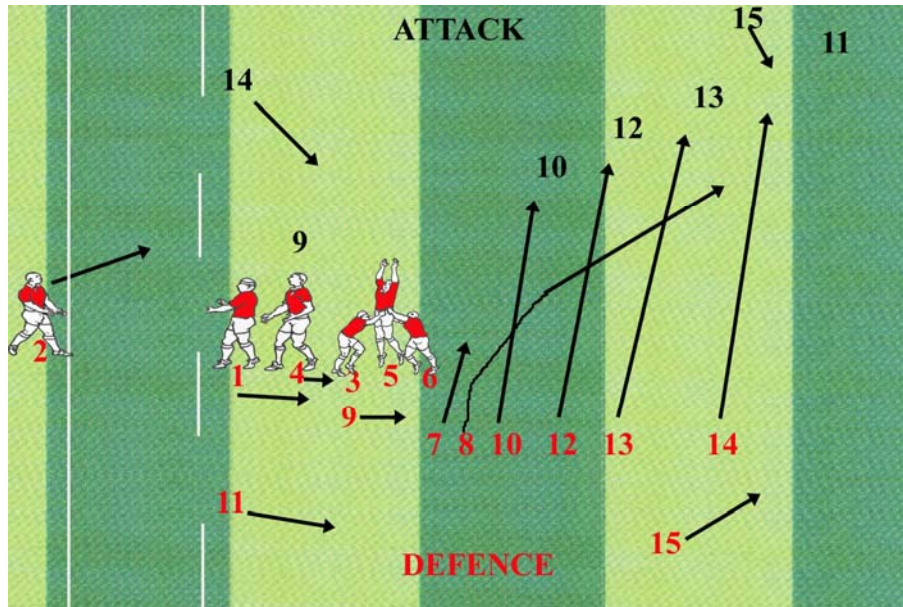
- One up then blitz.
4. Target individual players at the front of their driving maul. Try to open up their formation at the front, which will counter some of their effectiveness of the player with the ball at the back.

#### **J. COUNTERACTING BALL MOVED AWAY FROM THE LINEOUT.**

1. Be specific about the roles of players not involved in the lineout, especially 7, 10 and open-side winger.
2. In red zone, use the blind-side winger to defend the 10/12 channel.
3. Be prepared for variations –
  - Ball back against the flow.
  - Short pop to hooker rather than 9.
  - Recognise the limitations that occur because of where the ball was thrown. (e.g. ball at 2 is usually not good ball for the backs.)
4. Make sure that all players understand when the lineout is over. This can be helped by having a referee at practice sessions.
5. Develop a mindset in the team that wants to nullify the opposition advantage of possession as soon as possible.

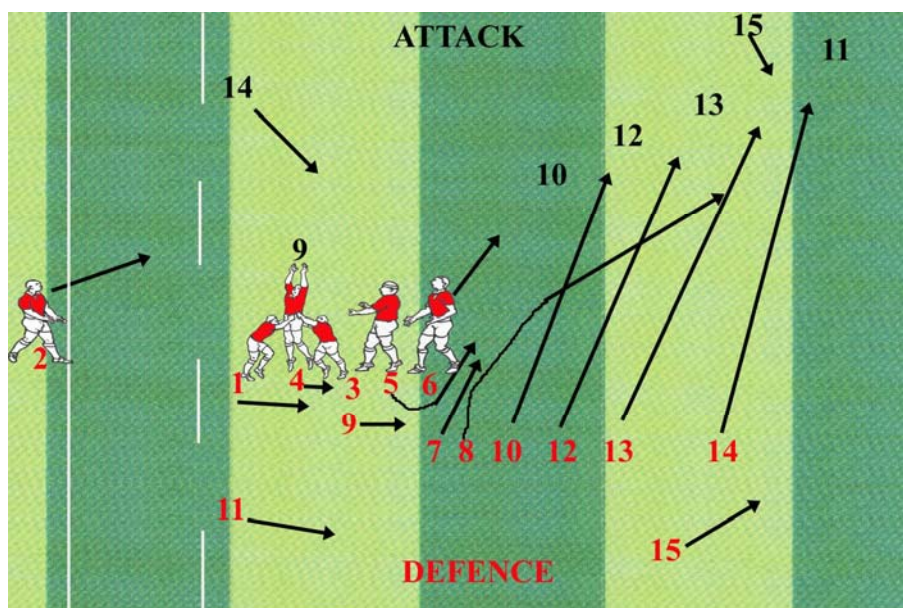
## K. EXAMPLES OF DEFENCE FROM A SHORTENED LINEOUT.

### 1. DESCRIPTION OF THIS DEFENSIVE PATTERN FROM A THROW TO THE BACK OF THE LINE.



- The defending players at the back of this lineout are tied down to guard the lineout so they have limited use in defence away from the line.
- Use one-on-one defending in channels, with 10 going for 10 etc.
- The cover defenders are 9 and 8 and they must target the open-side wing, especially if their 15 joins the line and the drift defenders can not get to him.
- Defenders 7, 1 and 4 must closely watch their 9 and blind-side wing (14) before falling back into any other defensive role.

### 2. DESCRIPTION OF THE DEFENSIVE PATTERN FROM A THROW TO THE FRONT OF THE LINE.



- The players at the back of the lineout pressurise the fly-half (10) whilst scanning the actions of the blind-side wing (14) and 9.
- The drift defence is used here, with each back defender moving out one channel (i.e. 10 goes for 12 etc) once their 10 has passed and/or our 7 (or acting 7) has signalled that he has their 10 covered.
- 9 and 8 must become the cover defence.

#### L. SUMMARY.

- Decide on which strategy best suits your players and practise as often as possible.
- Compete aggressively for the primary possession when appropriate.
- Practise choosing the appropriate defensive configuration, depending on the position on the pitch and the state of the game.
- Ensure that the opposition gain as little advantage as possible if they do secure possession
- Defend their drive.
- Defend the space if they move the ball wide and ensure that defensive roles are fully understood.
- Always defend so that the cutback can be dealt with.