

SPEEDING THE GAME UP BY TAKING THE BEST OPTIONS IN CONTACT BY JOHN SCHROPFER.

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To enable young players to take the best option, we need to teach/coach the options in such a way that the players will try to perform the best option first; if that is not possible they will, with coaching and teaching, automatically try the next best option that will cause the defence the biggest problems, and so on.

Attackers cause the defence the greatest problems when they get behind the defenders. In order to get behind defenders, players need to attack a 'SPACE' not a 'FACE'. To be able to do this, young players need to develop their evasive skills. Too often players run in straight lines, making life easy for defenders. They set up rucks and mauls as their first option and, therefore, allow the defence time to re-organise.

“ATTACK A SPACE NOT A FACE”

The use of agility poles, hurdles, ladders, tackle bags and defenders can help to develop evasive skills.

The best option in 'contact' is to **evade it!** This will cause the defence the greatest problems as the defence is given little time to take counter measures.

'Best Options'

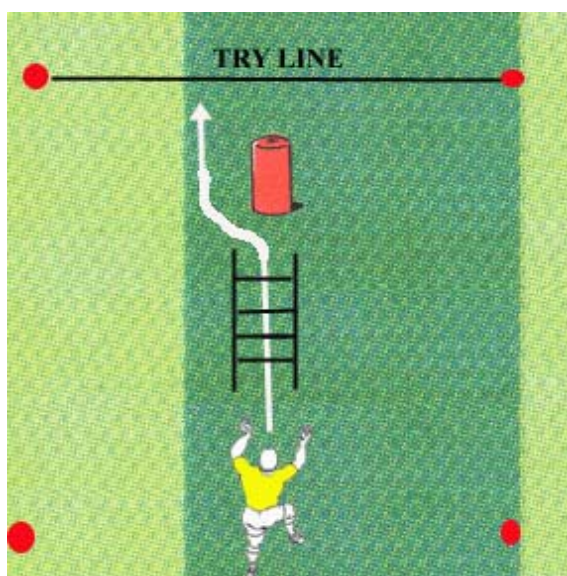
1. Evade opponents.
2. Try to evade; if tackled, try to pop ball off to a runner.
3. Try to evade, but if held (waist height) try to offload behind defenders' backs.
4. Try to evade, but if held, open the gate for support players (i.e. rip and spin or gut pass).
5. Try to evade, but if tackled and unable to pop the ball off immediately to a support player, then place the ball for a supporting player to pick up and go forwards.
6. When a ball is placed after a tackle, the player picking up the ball passes to a team member who is travelling faster and who is in a better position to go forward.
7. Set up a mini-ruck or mini-maul.

DEVELOPING EVASIVE SKILLS - ATTACKING 'SPACES NOT FACES'

ACTIVITY 1:

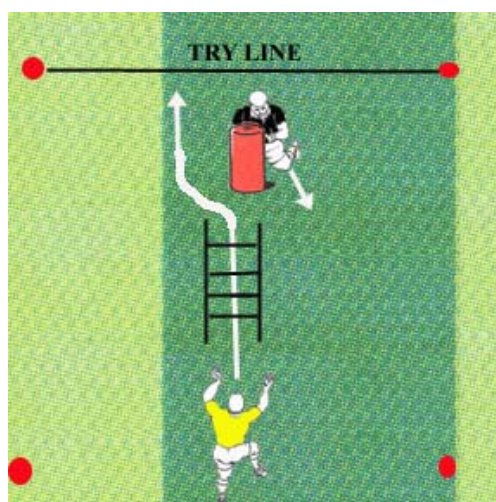
DEVELOPING INDIVIDUAL EVASIVE SKILLS

Equipment: - free standing tackle bag, ladder, ball, cones.



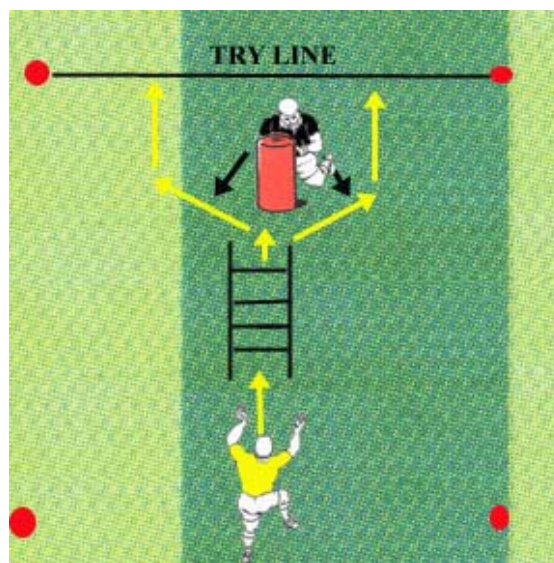
- Attacker (yellow) carries the ball in both hands.
- He performs any fast-feet exercise through the ladder.
- At the end of the ladder he swerves past the tackle bag (defender)
- Then accelerates and finishes with a try.

PROGRESSION 1(a).



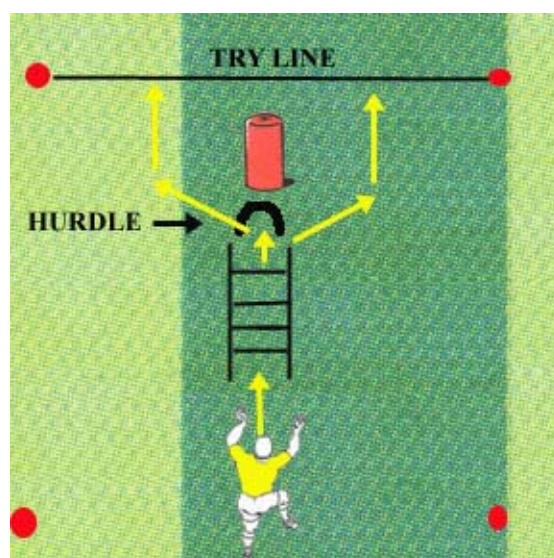
- This progression (1a) is virtually the same as Progression 1.
- This time, a defender is placed behind the tackle bag.
- As the attacker reaches the end of the ladder, the defender steps to one side of the tackle bag.
- The attacker then attacks the undefended side of the bag (biggest space) and accelerates to score.

PROGRESSION 1(b).



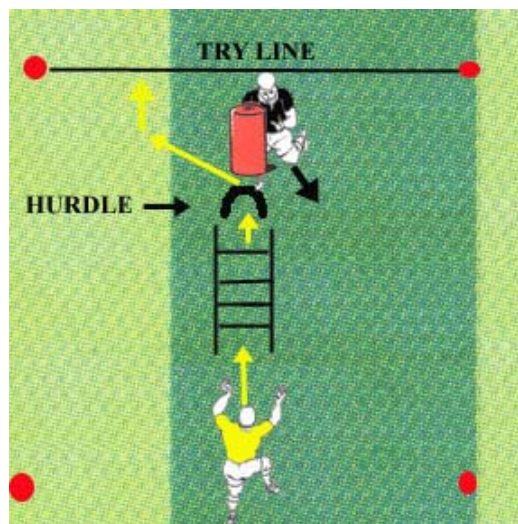
- The defender can move from behind the bag on either side.
- The attacker has to read the situation and must take evasive action – possibly using a swerve to the outside or a sidestep back inside.

ACTIVITY 2.



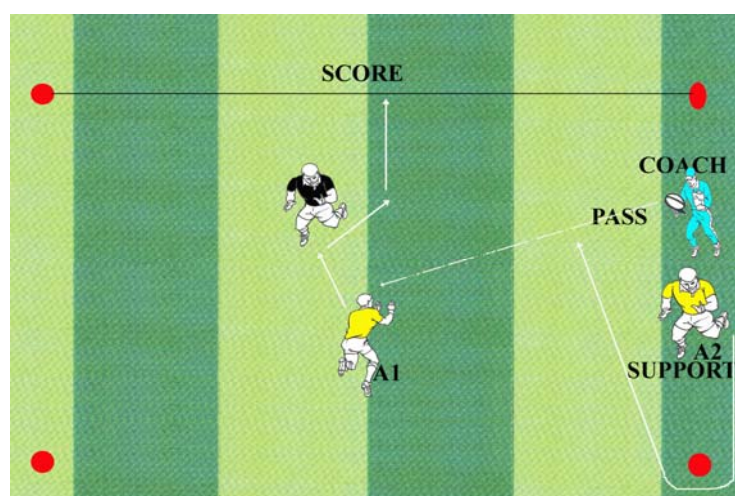
- Introduce a hurdle just after the ladder.
- The attacker jumps over the hurdle, decides which side to attack and lands on both feet, which should be shoulder-width apart.
- This action simulates 'squaring-up' an opponent.
- The attacker then accelerates to score.

PROGRESSION 2(a).



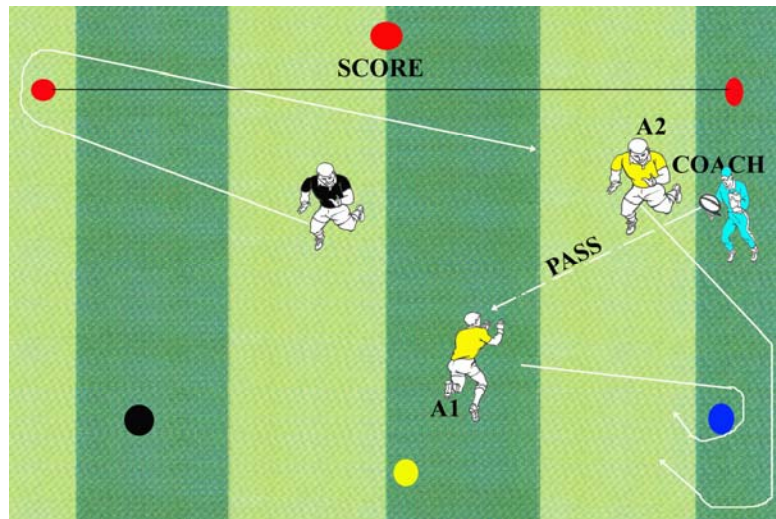
- Introduce a defender to come from behind the bag again, forcing the attacker to react to what he sees in front of him.
- Always encourage the attacker(s) to accelerate away once they have evaded the defender.

ACTIVITY 3.



- Coach passes, rolls or throws a high ball to the attacker (A1) and he plays 1v1 against the defender.
- A2 comes in as a support role to take a pass or assist if A1 can not beat the defender.

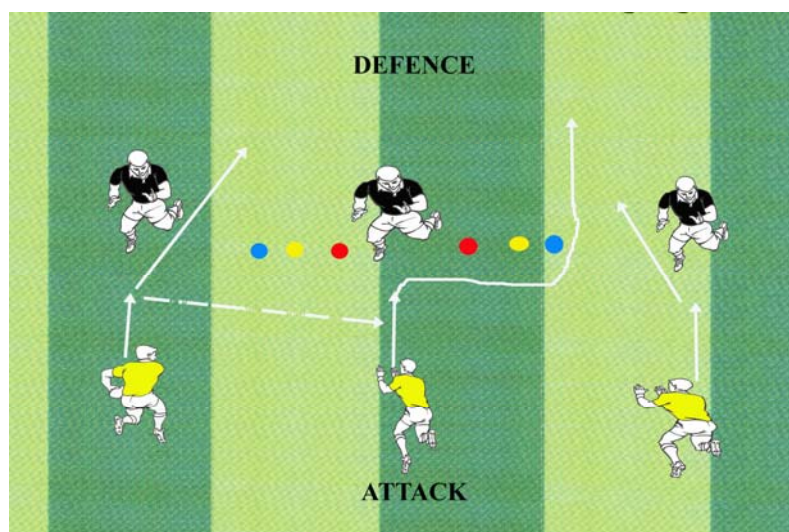
PROGRESSION 3(a).



- Coach calls one colour from black, yellow or blue.
- The main attacker (A1) must run around that cone before getting back into position.
- The defender (in black) has to run around any of the red cones before he can defend.
- A1 then attacks the defender 1v1 and tries to score.
- A2 supports after running around the blue cone.

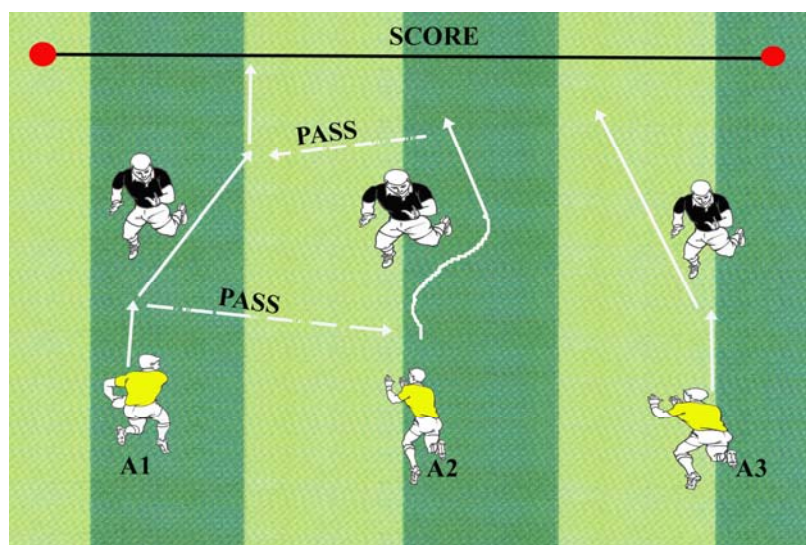
‘BEST OPTIONS’

Once the players have learned how to evade an opponent, it opens up numerous options in attack. If a player tries to evade an opponent but is not quite successful, he may be tackled around the legs. If this happens, he should try to offload or pop the ball to a support player who is travelling at pace (i.e. evades as wide as the blue cone). If a player tries to evade an opponent but is held around the waist, he should try to offload two-handed or one-handed around the back of his opponent to a support runner who should be running hard. (i.e. evades as wide as the yellow cone). If a player tries to evade an opponent but is held (i.e. as wide as the red cone), then he still has options like gut pass, rip or spin, which will cause bigger problems for the defence than a ruck or maul.



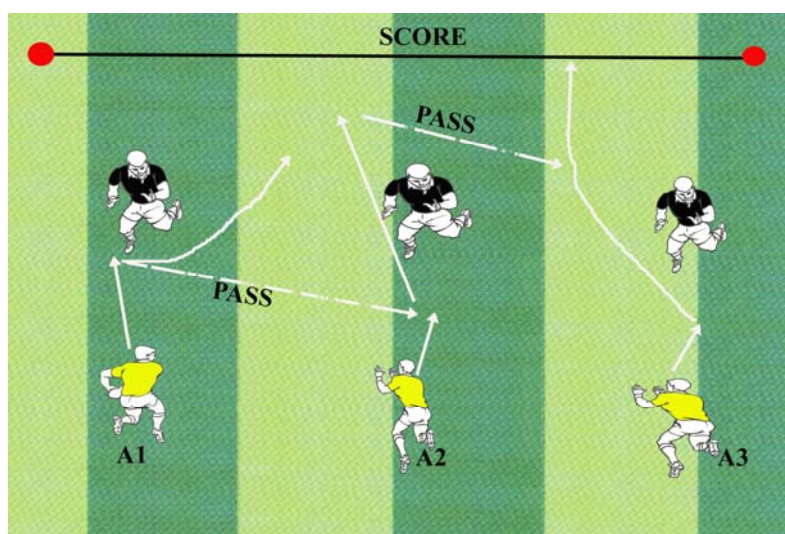
The supporting player needs to lose his opponent (by using a quick evasive action) and run towards the tackled player.

Example 1.



A2 tries to evade defender by swerving to the right (creating a bigger space on the left) gets behind the defender and off loads to A1. (A1 tries to lose his/her opponent before starting his support run). A2 looks for A1 in this attacking situation.

Example 2.



A2 attacks the inside of D2 and looks to offload to A3, who tries to lose his opponent by sidestepping him before he starts his support run. (By attacking the left side of D2, A2 he has created the biggest gap between the defender on the right hand side).

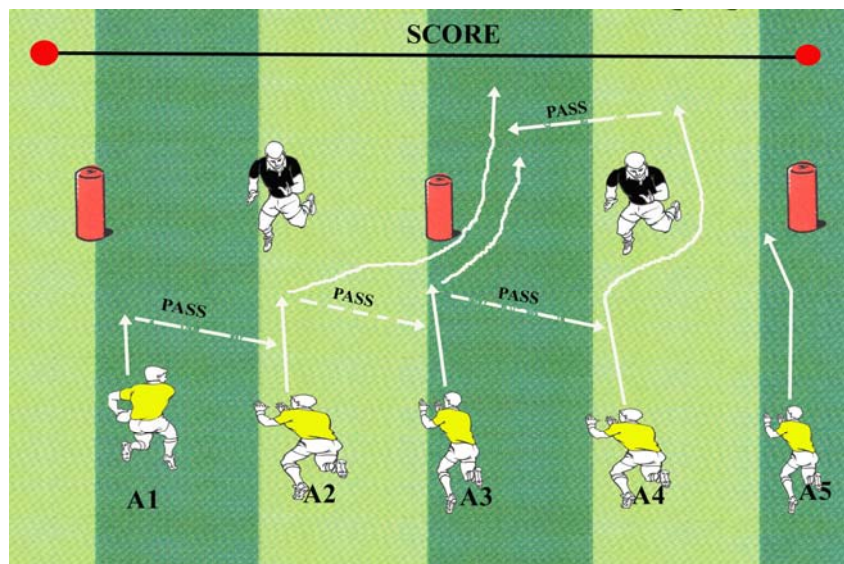
Even if you evade at the last minute and you manage to get to the red cone zone (for position, see first diagram in 'Best Options' on page 6) you have options to gut pass to a support runner, support to rip and spin into the gap.

All of the above mentioned options are only available if we coach how to attack 'space not face.' If you attack the opponents' spaces and can continue the attack without rucks and mauls, you can delay your opponents' time to re-organise their defence.

Rugby is not played in a small grid with small numbers, so coaches and teachers must try to develop small grid activities into larger grids with greater numbers until finally the practice fits into the full game.

ACTIVITY 2.

Example 1.

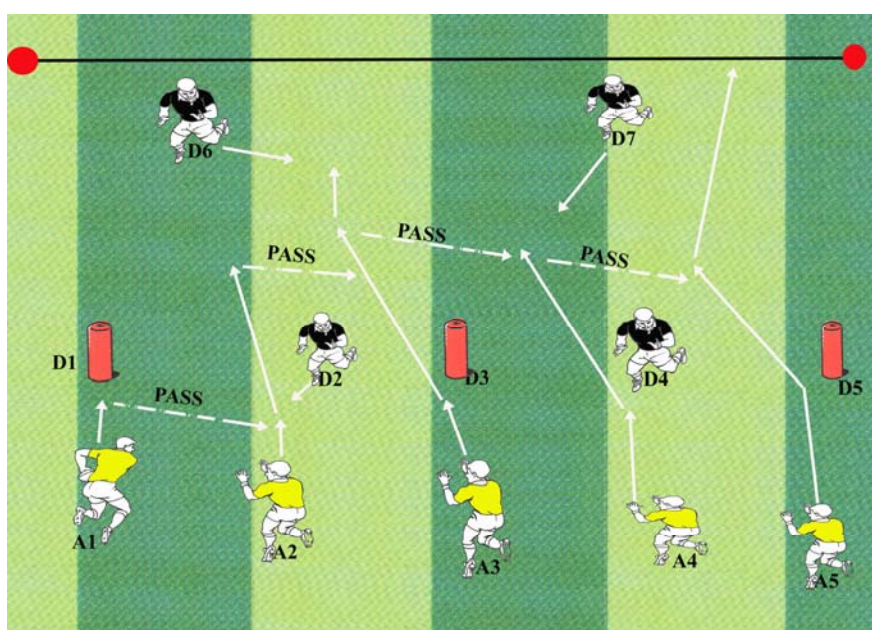


In this example we could use either A2 or A4 to practise ‘best options.’ If we cannot off load behind the defence and we have to take the tackle, we still have options for the supporting player.

Again, practising these options are better than ruck and maul as they give less time for the defenders to re-organise their defence.

Activities should always be taken to a score and 20m grids must be extended to half or full length of the field activities.

Example 2.



N.B. These activities work better when the attackers really put same pace into it. Nobody stops until the try is score.

A1 fixes D1 and passes to A2.

A2 realises that all the players outside him are marked up man-for-man so he takes on D2 on the inside (steps at pace). This creates a bigger gap for A3 to attack.

A3 sidesteps D3 and then supports A2 by moving in behind the tackle made by D2.

Defenders D6 and D7 cannot move until A3 receives the ball from A2.

A3 and all the other attackers try to keep the ball alive without taking contact again and always finish with a try.

The next progression could be that D4 can turn and chase and D2 can get up to chase back as well.

The number of ways activities can be changed in order to challenge both the attackers and the defenders are infinite. If we teach/coach 'best options in contact' I am sure that we will speed up the game and make it even more enjoyable for all concerned.

Remember - rucks and mauls 'buy time' for the defending team to reorganise their defence!