

★★★ AMERICAN  FLAG RUGBY ★★★



SKILLS & PRACTICES

CONTENTS

Dealing with the Total Beginner **3**

Introduction 3

Teaching the Skills for Tag Rugby **7**

Handling Skills **8**

The Basic Lateral (Underarm) Pass 8

The Dummy Pass 16

The Spin Pass 19

The Pass & Loop 22

The Scissors or Switch 25

Passing Behind Defenders 28

Running Skills **30**

The Side-Step 33

The Swerve 37

DEALING WITH THE TOTAL BEGINNER

- Introduction
- Getting to grips with the passing rule
- Initial games for beginners
- Common mistakes made by beginners
- The general principles of play
- Advice for the total beginner

Introduction

Isn't Tag Rugby a strange game? You play with an odd shaped ball, which you are only allowed to pass backwards, and the 'goal' is the width of the whole pitch! Comparing this to other invasion games traditionally taught in this country, it is no wonder young players can easily become confused when first introduced to Tag Rugby. In football, hockey, and basketball and to a degree netball, players are actively encouraged to pass forward and then move forward to receive a pass, 'give & go'.

In Tag Rugby it appears we want them to do just the opposite! The size of the 'goal' is also very different with players being able to score across the whole width of the backline. Compare this to football, hockey, basketball and netball where the goals are very small in relation to the size of the playing area. This is probably one of the reasons why young players tend to spread out much more when playing Tag Rugby than they usually do when playing other team games.

Tag Rugby can therefore offer players, teachers and coaches a whole different range of strategies for attack and defense. This may at first be confusing to youngsters but experience has shown that, properly introduced, young players can soon overcome these new challenges and get real enjoyment out of the freedom and excitement this simple and safe form of rugby has to offer.

Getting to grips with the passing rule

Initially, it is this rule that young players tend to have most difficulty with. To avoid any confusion, teachers and coaches need to be very careful with their choice of language when first explaining it to youngsters.

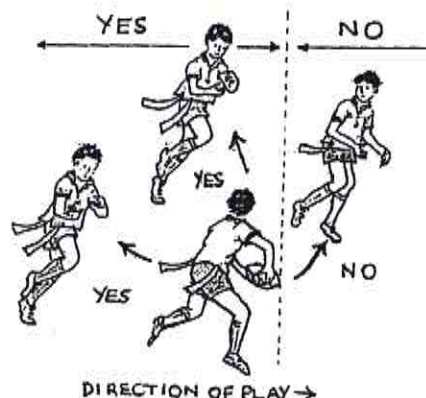
Contrary to popular belief, you do not have to pass the ball backwards in rugby, but instead the rule states you cannot pass it forward to the opposition's goal line (the goal line your team is trying to score at). The two statements sound quite similar but can send two very different messages to young players. The no forward pass rule means that the ball can be passed sideways. (In fact this type of pass should be encouraged, as it is a very effective pass in rugby as no ground is lost with this type of pass.) It is also worth emphasizing with young players that it is the direction the ball travels in that is significant and not any direction the passer gets themselves in, or finishes in, when

☆☆☆ AMERICAN RUGBY FLAG RUGBY ☆☆☆

executing a pass. If you wrongly tell youngsters they have to pass the ball backwards, they can sometimes believe they will avoid being penalized by twisting around and passing the ball forward over their shoulder, or between their legs. However, as you should explain to them, this is still an illegal pass as the ball itself has traveled forward in the direction of the opposition's goal line.

The no forward pass rule

In rugby you do not have to pass the ball backwards. The rule states you cannot pass the ball forwards to the goal line your team is trying to score at. Sideways (lateral passes) are fine and should be encouraged, as no ground is lost with this type of pass.



Initial games for beginners

Experience has shown that as soon as the players have warmed up and the basic rules and safety issues have been covered, the best way forward can often be to get the players involved in some small sided games. Inevitably, lots of mistakes will be made but it will help players to experience a general feel for the game. The teacher/coach must be wary at this point of not stopping the game too often in an attempt to correct all these mistakes. Obviously ones involving safety, and the no contact rule in particular, need to be established early on, but otherwise try and let the games flow as much as possible.

When dealing with young players, it is important to ensure success and enjoyment early on, which usually means lots of tries are being scored. By playing these games on short, wide pitches, it will provide plenty of space and opportunities for this to happen. Players should also be encouraged to referee their own games allowing the teacher/coach to divide the group into a number of small sided games, resulting in maximum activity and participation.

These games could initially be games of attack versus defense, with the advantage being with the attacking team. 5 attackers versus 2 defenders have proved to be successful with beginners, developing into 5 versus 3 and 5 versus 4, as players gain in experience. At the discretion of the teacher/coach, these activities can then lead into games of 5 versus 5, 6 versus 6 and eventually 7 versus 7.

To help achieve some flow and movement to these early games, we need to encourage the ball carrier to make a good pass when they get tagged. (Beginners do not usually think of passing until after they have been tagged). To help this to happen, make sure the ball carrier has plenty of time and space after they are tagged. Therefore, initially ignore the 3-second rule and stress to defenders that they must back off the ball carrier once a tag is made. Relieving the pressure off the ball carrier means it is more likely a good pass will be made and some continuity and flow to the game can be

☆☆☆ AMERICAN FLAG RUGBY ☆☆☆

established early on. (See rule 3 'The Tackle' (Tag) in the 'Rules for Tag Rugby' section).

If, at a tag situation, you find defenders start marking up all the ball carrier's teammates (they are encouraged to do this in netball and basketball) then this will severely restrict the flow to the game. It will therefore be necessary to explain the basic offside rule that applies in Tag Rugby.

(See rule B, 'Offside'). Implementing this rule will result in the freeing up of these support players and allow the tagged player to get their pass away and the game to flow.

Common mistakes made by beginners

These tend to consist of the following: When given the ball, the player stands still and seems to become frozen to the spot. (This is especially true for those who have played a lot of netball where they are conditioned not to run with the ball). The support players position themselves in front of the ball carrier, tempting that player to make an illegal forward pass. (You can appreciate why this can be almost instinctive, when in all other invasion games the tactic of 'give & go' (forward) is taught as a way of beating a defense.)

The ball carrier panics when they are tagged, the ball suddenly becoming a 'hot potato' and is thrown away anyway or just dropped on the ground without apparent reason. Due to poor support by teammates, or a lack of understanding of the passing rule, the ball is passed a long way backwards when a player is tagged resulting in a lot of ground being lost with the pass. Ball carriers run backward towards their own goal line in an attempt to avoid being tagged by a defender.

To help overcome these common errors, it is useful if players, coaches and teachers become familiar with the following basic principles of play for Tag Rugby.

The general principles of play

Successful play in Tag Rugby relies not only on acquiring the basic skill and techniques of the game, but also in gaining an understanding of the three basic principles of play for Tag Rugby. As stated, these are general principles and there may be certain circumstances in a game where they may not strictly apply.

Go Forward In Attack and Defense

In Attack: Those in possession of the ball should normally look to run forwards to the opposition's goal line and not backwards, or sideways to the touchlines.

Remember: If nobody in your team ever goes forward with the ball, then your team will never score.

In Defense: When defending, try to deny your opponents time and space by moving forwards and tagging the opposition as close to their own goal line as possible.

Support the ball carrier at all times

Close support of the ball carrier allows more options in attack and means possession can be maintained. Close support also means no ground needs to be lost by having to pass the ball a long way backwards to a teammate. Think of the Red Arrows air display team where the lead pilot (ball carrier) has supporting teammates on either flank (shoulder).

Remember: A pass directly sideways is allowed and is often the most effective pass.

Run at spaces not faces

Run at spaces not defenders. However, if the ball carrier has no space in front of them, they should look for a teammate who is in space and attempt to move the ball quickly to that player so they can exploit it.

Advice for the total beginner

Teachers and coaches should initially concentrate on improving the attacking team's ability to score tries. In this way, beginners will feel they are being successful and are more likely to enjoy their first experiences of playing Tag Rugby. This is not to say defense is unimportant but this can be developed later, once players have become more competent in attack.

Initially playing small sides games on short, wide pitches will help ensure there is more time and space for tries to be scored. The teacher/coach should also be encouraging players in possession of the ball to run forwards with the ball. If this can be achieved, then many of the common mistakes already described can be overcome and a pattern and flow to the game will start to emerge.

I have found that the following comments to young beginners have been particularly helpful in these early sessions: How quickly can your team score when you get the ball?

This can have a dramatic effect on encouraging players to run forwards with the ball. However, care must be taken that they don't panic and give poor passes when this target is set.

TEACHING THE SKILLS FOR TAG RUGBY

Handling skills

- The basic lateral (underarm) pass
- The dummy pass
- The spin pass
- The pass & loop
- The scissors or switch
- Passing behind defenders

Running Skills

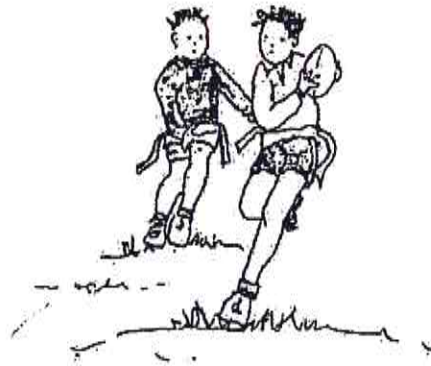
- Change of pace
- The side-step
- The swerve

HANDLING SKILLS

The Basic Lateral (Underarm) Pass

Good passing is essential for success in Tag Rugby and a team that contains players that have the ability to pass the ball quickly and accurately will create many more problems for their opponents. Not only will they be able to maintain continuity in attack but also have the capability to suddenly change the point of attack and exploit any weaknesses in the defense elsewhere.

A good pass is one that is both accurate and arrives at a pace that the receiver can catch. The target should be chest height and out in front of the receiver. This allows the receiver to run on to the ball and keep their head up so they can view the options available in front of them.



How players should hold the ball

Young players should be encouraged to carry the ball in two hands. In this position, players can easily make a quick pass, or dummy a pass, and will keep defenders guessing about what they intend doing – are they going to try to take the defender on, pass the ball, or both? Tucking the ball under one arm can only signal to the defender you intend to run with it and makes defending easier.

Often young players will first find it difficult to run with the ball in two hands as they feel their running is being restricted. However, if you encourage the ball carrier to bend their arms at the elbow and relax, letting the ball swing naturally with their hands when they run, then their running should feel more free and comfortable.

Key factors for carrying the ball

- » Hold the ball at chest height with the nose of the ball facing almost straight up.
- » “Dirty fingers, clean palms”. Spread your fingers around the body of the ball with your thumbs pointing to the sky. The ball should be held in the ten finger pads not in the palms of the hand. (Discourage players carrying the ball by the ‘points’ as this makes passing more difficult).
- » Keep your arms relaxed and elbows bent at about 90 degrees. Let the ball swing naturally in front of you when you run. The ball should not be touching your body.

Note: If you look through rugby magazines, you will often see photos of top class rugby players with the ball tucked under one arm and held in closely to the chest. However, they usually do this to protect the ball when going into contact and have the skill level to transfer the ball very quickly into two hands to offload

☆☆☆ AMERICAN FLAG RUGBY ☆☆☆

a pass, or are even skillful enough to be able to slip a one handed pass away. With young, inexperienced players, it is very different. Once they tuck the ball under one arm they often don't think about the passing option at all, or take far too long to transfer it into two hands to get a pass away.

Personally, I only encourage young Tag Rugby players to carry the ball under one arm once they have broken a defense and are sprinting clear for the try line. The free arm is now helping the player to run at full speed.

The Pass

You should aim to pass the ball out in front of the receiver at about chest height.

Key factors for passing

- » Look at the receiver first (concentrate on a point in front of the receiver's chest). Head and eyes lead movement. Swing the ball down from chest height through a near vertical arc by initially letting your hands fall naturally with gravity.
- » Keep your fingers spread and your hand furthest from the target, behind the ball. Use this hand to push the ball to the receiver, flicking your fingers to give it a final push as it leaves your hands.
- » Keep both your hands in contact with the ball as long as you can.
- » Fingers 'follow' the ball as it leaves your hands and point towards the spot you want the ball to go.
- » Generally, aim for a straight ('flat') pass, not one that is lobbed in the air.
- » Pass well in front of the receiver if they are running at pace.
- » Pass with sympathy. You obviously want your teammate to catch your pass don't pass the ball so hard that they are liable to drop it.
- » For longer passes, you will need to swing your arms more and if not running too fast at the time, take a step towards the receiver as you pass. (Further distance can be gained by imparting spin on the ball (see later notes on "The spin pass").

In a game situation, total beginners may not feel comfortable passing if they stop completely still and turn their whole body around to face the receiver. This is especially true if the support players are a long way behind them. This is fine in the early stages but, as support play improves and the pace of the game speeds up, players will have to learn to pass accurately whilst on the move. This will prove a much more difficult skill to perform, as the passer will now need to be able to rotate their upper body at the waist as they pass. Here the head, shoulders and hips all rotate, whilst the lower body remains facing relatively forward as they continue running.

Note: It is the hand furthest away from the target that dominates the pass and is the reason why a right hander will usually find passing to the left easier, and a left hander easier to the right. Teachers/coaches should be conscious of this in early passing practices.

The Catch

Watch the ball very carefully right into your hands. Be confident that you will catch the ball, even those passes that are traveling too fast or are not that accurate. Think positive: too often some players convince themselves they are going to drop a pass long before it gets to them and, as a result usually end up fulfilling this 'prophecy'.

Key factors for catching

- » Make a target with 'big hands', thumbs facing upwards to the sky with the white of your palms facing the oncoming ball.
- » Always attempt to catch the ball in two hands, even the bad passes.
- » Think of your hands being 'soft', 'rubbery' and 'very sticky'. Keep them relaxed.
- » Concentrate on the ball the whole time, right into your hands.
- » Aim for a 'silent' catch into 'soft hands'. In other words, try to catch the ball without it making a sound in your hands.
- » Try to catch the ball in your hands only. Avoid bringing it into your chest as this stops you having the option of making an immediate pass to another player who may be in a better position. (It is important to stress the role the passer has here of passing the ball with sympathy and not too hard to a teammate.)

Basic passing practices

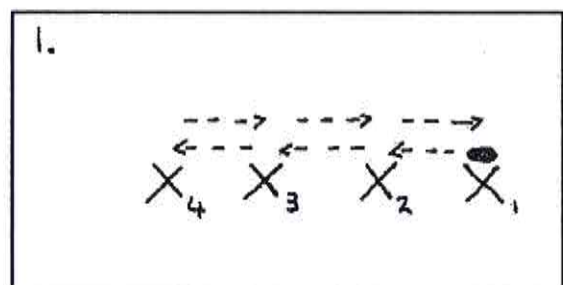
When dealing with young beginners, it is suggested that you use balls that are slightly deflated. This will make passing and catching easier and will not hurt them so much if they get hit with the ball or misjudge a catch. It is also suggested you use the recommended size ball for the age group you are taking. Youngsters will find passing and catching an adult size ball more difficult because of its extra size and weight.

In 4's or 5's, one ball (See Diagram 1)

Players position themselves along a straight line, just less than two arm lengths apart. Remaining stationary, the ball is not passed but simply handed on to the next player, along the line and back again.

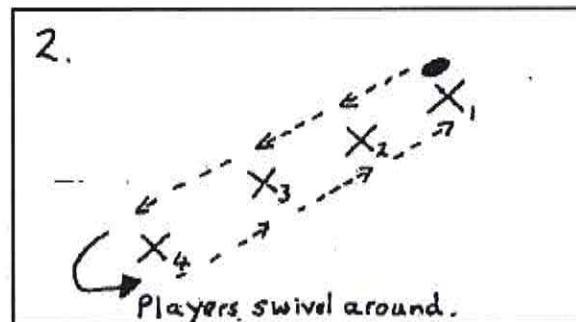
Encourage players to keep their toes facing forwards and rotate their upper body at the hips when they pass. All passes are underarm ones. Discourage any netball/basketball style chest passes at this stage, as these are more difficult to perform in rugby when players are passing on the move.

Players should be far enough apart so the receiver has to reach out to take the ball from the passer, who has swung the ball to finish in an extended arm position. Every so often, change the players on the ends.



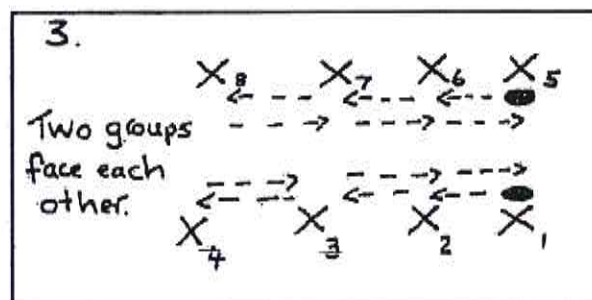
☆☆☆ AMERICAN FLAG RUGBY ☆☆☆

Note: By having the players stand in a straight line, these 'passes' will be slightly forward as the ball moves along the line. Don't be over concerned with this at this stage as the aim of these early practices is just to get players to experience the basic passing movement. At the discretion of the teacher/coach, you could later introduce having the line of players set at an angle, so all the passes are slightly backwards. When the ball gets to the end of the line, all the players twist around and face the opposite way before the ball is then passed back along the line. In this way, none of the passes are forward ones. (See Diagram 2.)



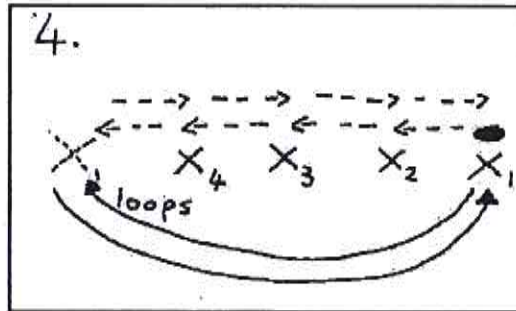
Progressions

1. Race teams against each other, the winner being the team that can pass the ball all the way along and back again the fastest. The player on the end holds up the ball when they have finished. Underarm passes only.
2. Repeat, but this time the ball goes along and back twice (or a stipulated number of times) before finishing.
Note: More able groups could be further challenged by making them perform an extra pass or two at the end, or allow less able groups to do fewer passes.
3. To add further pressure and to get players used too passing the ball with opposition players in front of them, these competitions can be repeated with two groups facing each other (See Diagram 3). Initially, they can be some distance apart but as confidence improves, they can move to within a meter of each other. Encourage players to concentrate on the ball and not be distracted by the 'defender' in front of them.
4. Pass and run around the back (loop) (See Diagram 4)



☆☆☆ AMERICAN FLAG RUGBY ☆☆☆

As in practice 1., but now the player at the start of the line gives a pass then runs around the back of their group to receive a pass on the other end. This player then passes the ball again before running back to their original position to eventually receive the final pass. Can the ball beat the player along the line? This can be developed into a race with the other groups.

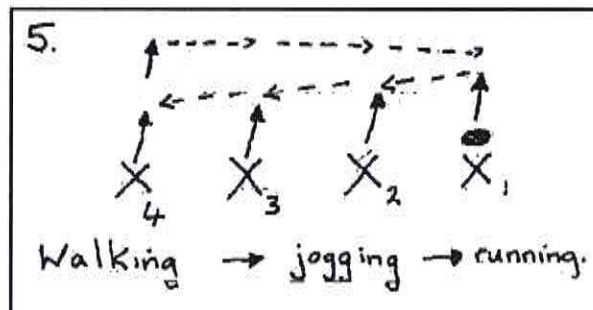


For the more able, further progression of this practice could be getting not just the first player passing and running around the back, but for two or three players to do the same.

Note: This activity is a good introduction to the basic loop in rugby, a method by which an attacking team can create an 'extra' player in attack (See 'The Pass and Loop'). It also encourages young players to pass and then follow their pass to support the new ball carrier. Remember, players should always pass and then run behind their teammates. If they run in front, they are not only momentarily out of the game, but risk being penalized for obstructing a defender.

5. Walking, jogging & running (See Diagram 5)

Practice 1 can now progress to jogging and running. Although not actually passing the ball at this stage, players will start to develop the ability to rotate the upper body with the pass whilst moving forward.



★ ★ ★ AMERICAN RUGBY FLAG RUGBY ★ ★ ★

6. Passing

The players go back to being stationary, but this time they spread out more so they have to release the ball and pass it over about a meter to the next player. Again, emphasize underarm passes only. All the above progressions can now be done but this time with the players actually passing and catching the ball. As skill levels improve, gradually increase the spacing between players.

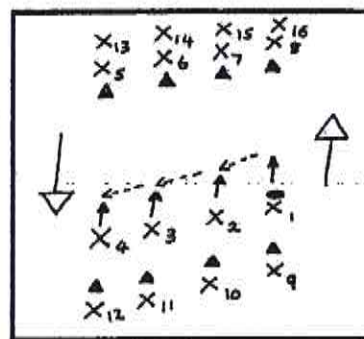
Note: Players will often find the progression from static passing to passing whilst jogging or running a difficult one. Encouraging each player to move forward with the ball some five meters or so before passing it will help, along with reminding support players not to get themselves in front of the ball. The general rule is – pass sideways and run forward.

Further passing practices

Continuous passing in groups of 4 or 5 (See Diagram 6).

I find this is a good practice when dealing with large groups with limited resources and space. Players are in lines consisting of around 4 to 5 players but, in effect, the whole group is working together. The lines are positioned facing each other about 20 meters apart, as in the diagram below. Marker discs are placed in a diagonal line and indicate from where players start when it is their turn to run and pass.

6. Pass, pass, pass, handover to next group.



The ball begins on the right hand side and X1 starts off by running approximately 5 meters with the ball before passing. The ball is then passed along the line to player X4, who by this time has reached the other group. They then hand the ball over to player X5. Players X1-X4 now go and stand at the back of the group and wait for their turn to come back.

Players X5-X8 then repeat the activity on the way back, with player X8 handing the ball over to player X9, and so on.

Note: It is very important you get the first player to run some distance first before passing to get the whole line moving as they pass. I tend to lay a marker disc about 5 meters to mark the spot this first player must run to before they are allowed to pass. As skill levels improve, you can gradually move this marker disc closer and closer to the other group and see if the line of players can still all get their passes in before arriving at the other side.

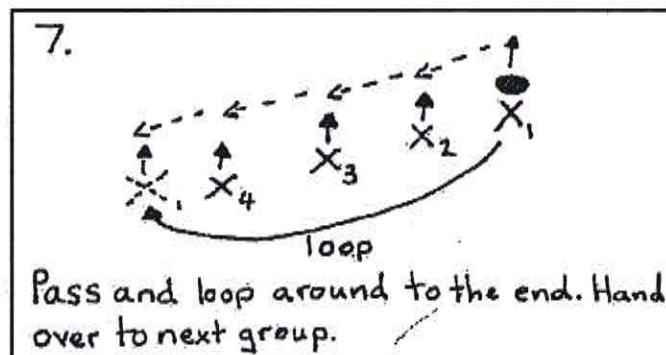
Get players to keep swapping with those on the ends of the line so all can experience receiving and give a pass on the move.

☆☆ AMERICAN FLAG RUGBY ☆☆☆

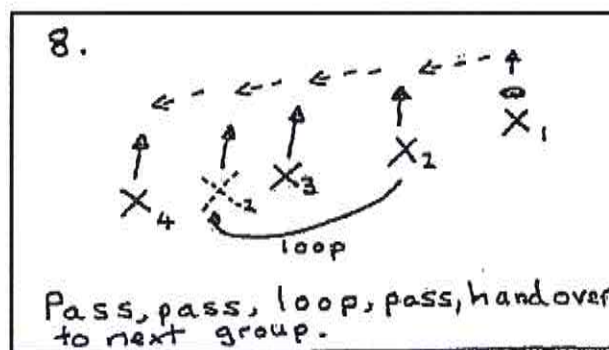
With beginners, it may save time if all the groups have their own ball; as it is often when the ball is being handed over to the next group that it is dropped and time is wasted.

Progressions

1. Start with the ball on the left hand side and repeat the activity with players now passing the other way. Unless they are left handed, most players will find this way more difficult. (If using the marker discs, you will need to reposition them to create an angle the other way.)
2. Time the whole group to see how long it takes to do ten runs in total. Five seconds are added for any forward passes, but if the ball is dropped, the players retrieve it and carry on. Can they beat their previous time?
3. Player X1 passes it to X2 and then loops around the back to receive a pass of X4. Can the ball beat the player? The ball must go through everyone's hands. (See Diagram 7).



4. Repeat, but this time rather than have a player looping all the way to the end, X1 passes to X2 who then passes to X3 and loops around this player to reappear in between X3 & X4, receiving a pass from X3 before passing the ball on to X4. (See Diagram 8).

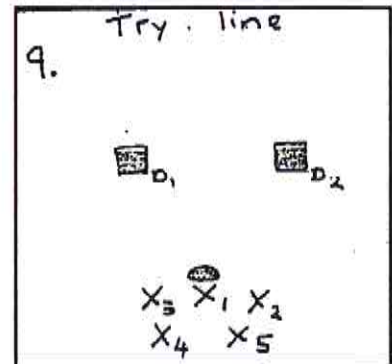


☆☆☆ AMERICAN RUGBY FLAG RUGBY ☆☆☆



Decision making practices

If in Tag Rugby attacker can pass the ball before they get tagged, then it means they remain in the game and can continue to support the new ball carrier. In this practice, the aim is for the attackers to score a try without getting tagged whilst in possession of the ball. Depending on the ability of the players, these games can be 4 attackers versus 1 defender, 3 versus 1 or 2 versus 1; or combinations such as 5 versus 2, 4 versus 2 or 5 versus 3. (See Diagram 9).



Rules for this practice

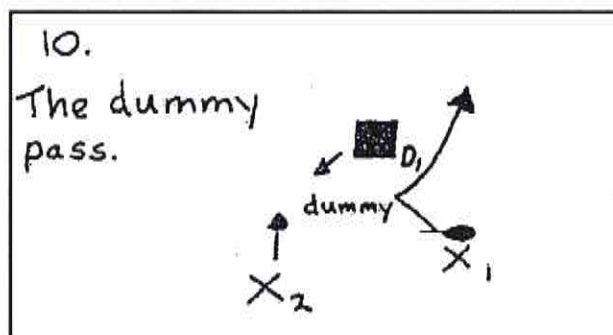
- » Only the ball carrier can be tagged.
- » The defenders must initially start at least 7 meters back from the attackers and the 'game' starts by one of the attackers making a free pass to a teammate.
- » If an attacker is tagged whilst in possession of the ball, then the defenders win (or the attacking team are given a set number of tags to score a try, e.g. can they score before they get tagged 3 times?)
- » If a defender picks up a loose pass, then the ball becomes dead and the defenders win.
- » First team to 5 points is the winner, defenders are then changed.

Progressions

1. Number of attackers is decreased, or defenders increased.
2. Attacking team only has a set period of time to score, e.g. 10 seconds (a spare person on the side can count out loud "1000, 2000, 3000..." once the ball is in play).
3. If playing the rule that the attacking team is allowed a stipulated number of tags before scoring, then reduce this number to say 2, 1 or even none!

The Dummy Pass

If you watch young players playing both Tag Rugby and full contact rugby, it soon becomes apparent that there is a natural instinct for them to focus on the ball and then follow it around the pitch. This is also probably true for many other team games they play involving a ball. Knowing this, you will find teaching young players how to execute a good dummy pass is often a very effective way for them to beat defenders.



For a dummy pass to be really effective, it must first and foremost look like you are going to give a pass in the first place. In fact, if anything, players should imagine they are acting in a 'rugby pantomime', where their actions need to become more exaggerated than normal to clearly show the audience what they are doing. When executing a dummy pass in a game of Tag Rugby, the defenders become your 'audience'. Far too often ball carriers will fail to convince defenders with their dummy pass because it never looked like they were about to give a pass in the first place! The dummy is done far too quickly and executed with only a short jabbing movement of the ball. The defender is not even given time to register what this sudden movement was all about before they move on to responding to the attacker's true intentions.

Key factors for teaching the dummy pass

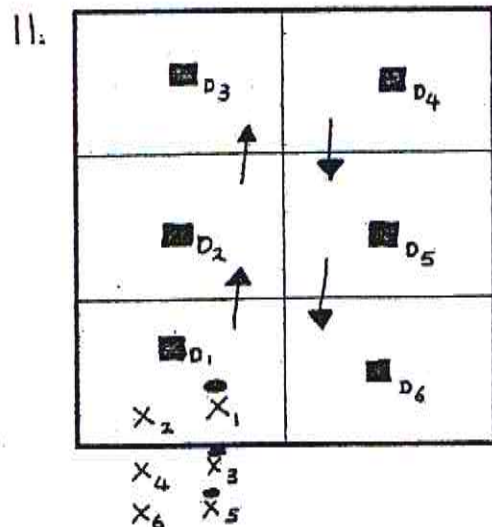
- » Angle your run slightly across the defender first, in the direction of your 'receiver'. This will already set the defender moving in the direction of your 'pass'.
- » Don't carry out your dummy pass too close to the defender – a common problem; you need some space to get away.
- » 'It's all in your eyes'. 'Look' first at the person to whom you are pretending to pass to. In fact, just turn your head in that direction and keep 'half an eye' on where the defender is. It's a 'pantomime pass'. Make an exaggerated, long, smooth swing out with the ball. The further you get the ball away from your body the better. (Remember that defenders tend to be watching the ball and not the ball carrier.) From this extended position, bring the ball back in quickly to your chest in an upward looping movement.
- » Fall away from the 'pass' and sprint off in the space the defender has left.

Practices for the dummy pass

Unopposed practice

Initially, the dummy pass should be practiced without the pressure of 'live' defenders. Even without defenders, it is still worthwhile having a support runner alongside as the 'receiver' of this pass. This will encourage players to get used to turning their head to 'look' at the 'receiver' before carrying out their dummy passing.

In this practice (see Diagram 11) the defenders are static and passive, large cones or corner flags could be used instead. In two's, the players' work up one channel and down the other, practicing the dummy pass against each defender. Encourage defenders to give some feedback about how convincing the dummy passes looked and the reasons why.



Progressions

1. Defenders are still passive but this time walk/jog towards the ball carrier, on each occasion simulating game conditions and allowing the ball carriers to practice the timing of their dummy pass.
2. To ensure ball carriers are not getting too close to defenders, get defenders to spread their arms out to the side.
3. The ball carrier must still avoid making any contact with the defender.

☆☆☆ AMERICAN RUGBY FLAG RUGBY ☆☆☆



Guess who? (See Diagram 12)

In four's, using one ball.

This practice proves very popular with youngsters as the ball carrier attempts to outwit the defender with a pass or dummy pass.

X1 has the ball and X2 as their support player, to whom they can pass to if they wish.

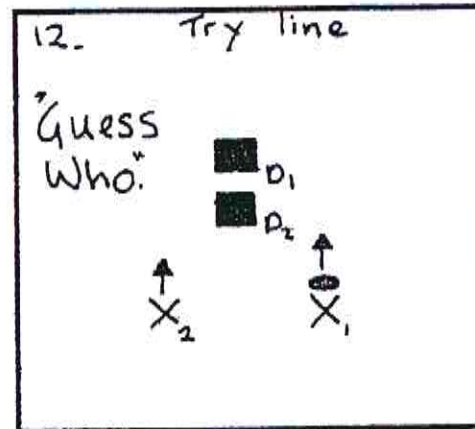
Defender D1 stands directly behind defender D2 with their hands placed on D2's back.

D2 remains stationary and is only really acting as a screen to restrict the vision and movement of D1. This gives a slight advantage to the attackers, therefore allowing greater success early on.

X1 and X2 attack and, when almost in line with the defenders, X1 can either choose to pass to X2 or dummy pass and score themselves.

Defender D1 has to try and guess who has the ball and tag that player before they score. After a few turns, players then change roles.

Note: Defender D1 must remain with their hands on D2s back until the attackers are almost in line with them.



The Spin Pass

Here spin is imparted on the ball when it is passed, making it spiral through the air more aerodynamically. Applying spin means passes can be made over long distances.

Rugby coaching manuals will often tell you not to encourage your players to spin pass the ball and this was something that was installed in me as a young PE teacher. I can remember on many occasions chastising young players in the past for spinning the ball during one of my rugby lessons. The argument behind this apparent oppression of one of rugby's most widely used skills is that it takes extra time to spin a pass, as the ball often needs readjustment in the hand before passing, resulting in it taking longer for a ball to be passed along a line of attacking players. It was many years later, after watching my first ever independent prep schools seven's festival, that I changed my thoughts on this. For what I witnessed that day was young 10 and 11 year olds having the ability to spin pass the ball over distances far further than I had seen young players pass before. This resulted in the players having many more options in attack by allowing them to move the ball quickly to another part of the pitch, where defenses were thin, or to find support players who would usually be out of reach with a normal pass.

Top senior players may have the ability to flick a pass over these distances but young players do not have the strength in their fingers or wrist to do the same. I now, therefore, tend to introduce the spin pass very early on in a player's development and at the same time educate them to know when and when not it is appropriate to use in a game.

Besides, young players get a great deal of enjoyment and satisfaction from being able to spin pass a ball and I am usually pleasantly surprised how many acquire the skill with minimum practice. It took me years, but then nobody taught me!

I believe that the best way of learning the spin pass is by teaching it with one hand first as it is the hand underneath the ball that imparts most of the spin. Young players will often be successful spinning the ball in this way, and it is only when the second hand is introduced that the skill appears to break down. This is because, rather than using this other hand mainly to give the pass control and guidance, beginners will put too much emphasis on trying to spin the ball with it.

Steps to success for the spin pass

I appreciate that I have gone to some lengths here to describe this skill and the relevant progressions, but I make no excuses for this as I believe that players can improve their game enormously by being able to spin pass.

Before attempting the following progressions with young players, try to ensure you have balls that are of the recommended size for the age group you are working with. Too small will be better than too big. Balls that are also slightly deflated will also help beginners to spin the ball more easily.

Note: The following progressions have been described for passing to the left, where the right hand dominates the pass. Most players are right handed and will find this an easier pass. Initially these practices should be done with the players standing still.

1. “Have a go”

Firstly, try showing your players a spin pass and let them have a go. You may be pleasantly surprised to find that some will be able to spin the ball already. If this is the case, they can work on their accuracy, distance, spin passing of their weaker hand, spin passing on the move or help teach others in the group.

2. One hand only

Stand still and about five meters apart and sideways on to the receiver of your pass. Take a step towards them with your left foot so the toes of your left foot are pointing at them. Spread your right hand under the body of the ball, with your fingers pointing back towards you (remember dirty fingers, clean palms). The nose of the ball should be pointing towards the receiver. Now swing the ball gently backwards and forwards a few times to gather momentum before you pass the ball to your partner. As you pass, impart spin on the ball by rolling your right hand over the ball, from underneath to over the top, so your palm finishes facing downwards. Just as ball leaves your hand, add further spin using your fingertips.

Do not worry about distance but instead try to impart as much spin as possible in these early practices. Keep the nose of the ball pointing to your target as it travels through the air. Once you are achieving this, try to gradually increase the distance whilst still maintaining maximum spin and the nose of the ball traveling in the right direction. Increased distance can be achieved by swinging back the arm more.

3. Two hands

Once players have become successful with one hand, they can try two.

Note: It is often when introducing the second hand that the skill breaks down. However, if you emphasize the backward swing of the arms prior to passing and that it is still the bottom, right hand, which dominates the pass, they should still be successful.

Now keeping your right hand underneath the ball, slide it back a fraction towards the back of the ball. Your left hand is placed on top, towards the front of the ball. Fingers should be pointing downwards and thumb upward. Remember, dirty fingers, clean palm, so ensure it is your ten finger pads in contact with the ball and not the palm of your hand. Squeeze the ball in and swing your arms back before passing the ball. Again, initially aim for a short pass with maximum spin. It is the thumb of the left hand only that assists the right with the spin. This it does by squeezing the ball in and rolling down the ball as it leaves the hands. The fingers of the left hand act only as a way of controlling the position and flight of the ball.

Note: When spin passing to the right, the hand positions reverse and it is the left hand that should start underneath and dominate the pass. If done correctly, the ball should now spin the other way around. However, you will find some players will ‘cheat’ and have it spinning the same way as when passing with their right hand. Closer observation of the pass will reveal that the player is in fact still using their right hand to

☆☆☆ AMERICAN FLAG RUGBY ☆☆☆

spin the ball for a pass to their right. This should be corrected, as it is not a technique that can be effectively used in game conditions when players are passing on the move.

Progressions

1. In groups of 2's, 3's or 4's, try spin passing whilst walking. Develop to jogging and running. Gradually increase the distance as accuracy improves and avoid making forward passes.
2. See also previous practices described under the lateral (underarm) pass, but this time involving a longer pass spin.

Note: Remember, most players will find passing to the left easier, where the right hand dominates.

Summary of the key factors for teaching the spin pass.

- » Turn sideways to your partner.
 - » Start using one hand.
 - » Bottom hand dominates pass.
 - » Initially practice standing still over short distances but aim to impart maximum spin.
 - » Swing the ball back first.
 - » Roll your bottom hand over to the top of the ball, so your palm finishes facing downwards.
 - » When using both hands, squeeze the ball in and roll the thumb of your top hand down the side of the ball.
 - » Remember, 'dirty fingers, clean palm'.
 - » Use a bigger backswing, and step towards the receiver, for longer passes.
-

The Pass & Loop

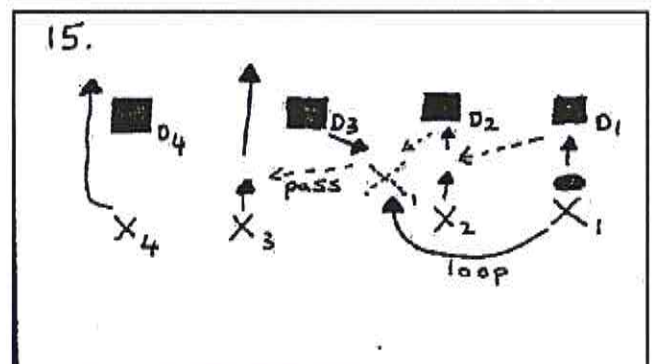
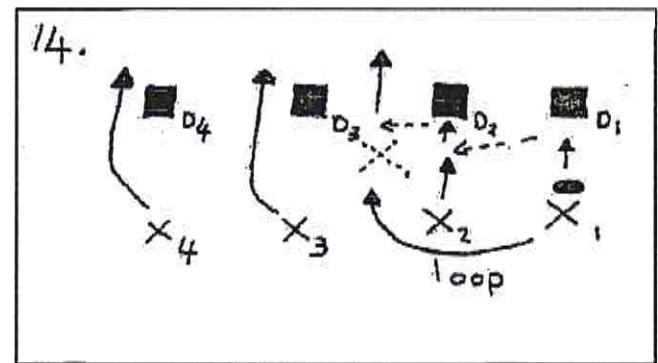
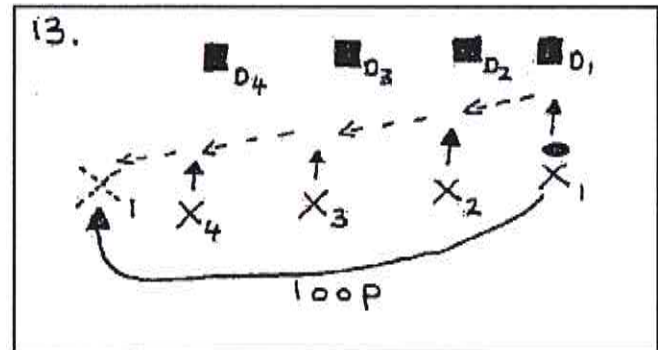
This is a technique used to create an 'extra player' in attack and therefore increases the chances of a team breaking through a defense.

For example, in this situation of 4 versus 4 (see diagram 13), the attacking team can create an 'extra player' out wide if X1 passes the ball and then runs (loops) around the back to receive a pass off X4.

Or in this situation, X1 passes the ball to X2 and then loops around the back of this player to receive a pass and exploit the gap between defenders D2 & D3. (see diagram 14)

If the defender D3 steps in to tag X1, then a quick pass on to X3 could now give this player space to break through. (see diagram 15)

Note: Players naturally tend to want to continue running once they have passed the ball. The problem with Tag Rugby is that beginners soon find themselves in front of the ball carrier and in effect out of the game. I have found that by teaching the loop, it allows players to fulfill their natural urge to continue their running after giving a pass but are now in a much better position to support the new all carrier.



Key factors in teaching the pass & loop

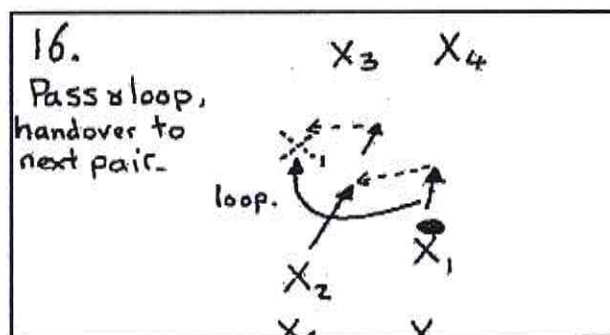
- » Pass first then loop.
Don't start running towards the receiver before passing, as this will encourage defenders to start moving across the pitch making it harder to retain space for the looping player to run into.
- » The receiver on the pass from the looping player should run forwards at the defense and, ideally, slightly back in the direction from which they received the pass from (run into the pass). This will attract defenders towards them and help to create space for the looping player.
- » The looping player should try and time their run so they burst onto the pass at pace allowing them to get in behind the defense before the defense has time to react to what is happening.
- » The pass to the looping player should be as lateral (sideways) as possible so the looping player is very soon in behind the line of defenders and gaining ground forward.

Note: Often the looping player can act as a decoy runner, allowing the ball carrier to dummy the pass and break through themselves.

Practices for the pass and loop

Pass & Loop

In pairs, (see diagram 16) X1 passes to X2 and loops around the back to receive a pass back. X1 hands the ball over to X3 who repeats the same thing on the way back with X4. X3 hands the ball over to X5, and so on.



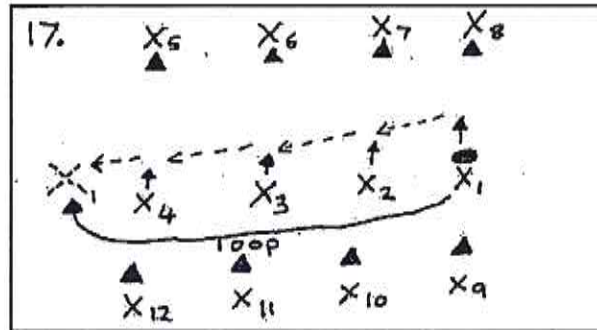
Progressions

1. Introduce a static defender; could initially even be just a cone or corner flag. Defenders walk/jog towards the attackers but still only defend the initial ball carrier.
2. 4 versus 2. Can four attackers score past two defenders? The pass and loop, or dummy pass, being just some methods attackers can use to score. Progress to 4 versus 3 and 4 versus 4.

☆☆☆ AMERICAN RUGBY FLAG RUGBY ☆☆☆

Continuous passing practice in 4's or 5's (see diagram 17).

Use the same practice as previously described for 'The Basic Underarm (lateral) Pass', shown in Progressions.

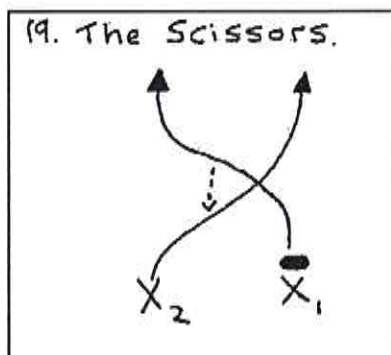


Progressions

1. X1 passes to X2 who passes to X3 then loops around this player to receive a pass back.
2. They then pass the ball to X4. "Pass, pass & loop, pass".

The Scissors or Switch

Called the scissors because the two players involved in this move basically run on lines that are similar to that of an open pair of scissors. It is used in Tag Rugby to either outwit the defense by a sudden switch of direction in attack, or as a method of keeping the ball away from the touch lines and in play. It is for this second reason that teaching the scissors can be most useful for young players. This is because youngsters have a tendency to run across the pitch with the ball towards the touchlines in an effort to avoid being tagged by defenders. This has the disadvantage of denying space for the players outside the ball carrier and also risks the ball being run into touch and possession being lost. Teaching players how to scissors can therefore be a very useful way to keep the ball in play and maintain continuity in attack.



Key factor for teaching the scissors, or switch pass

Ball Carrier

- » Carry the ball in both hands.
- » Keep an eye on the receiver at all times and always turn in their direction when giving your pass.

Note: By turning this way the defenders momentarily lose sight of the ball as it is hidden by the ball carrier's body when they twist around. This gives the ball carrier the option of dummying the pass and continuing running with the ball himself, a 'dummy scissors'.

- » The ball carrier is sometimes forced to turn the wrong way to give their pass, losing sight of the receiver and exposing the opposition. This is often the fault of the receiver, not the passer, who has not delayed their run long enough, rushing the ball carrier and giving them no time to turn the correct way.
- » Pass the ball to a point out in front of the receiver, not into their body. Give a soft gentle pass with 'long' arms. Twist the shoulders around only, keeping your hips facing forward as much as possible.

☆☆ AMERICAN RUGBY FLAG RUGBY ☆☆☆

Note: Turning your whole body around may feel more comfortable, but will limit your options as now you will be unable to perform an effective dummy scissors on the move.

Receiver of the Pass

- » Delay your run and always run behind the ball carrier.
- » Try to burst on to the ball so the defense has little time to readjust to this new angle of attack.

Both

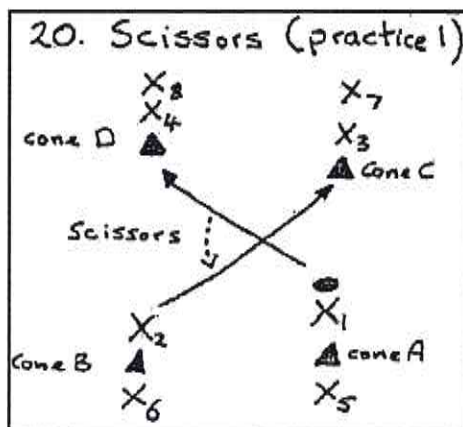
- » Don't get too close together; there should be a meter or two between the ball carrier and the receiver.

Note: The scissors can either be done as a planned move, from say a free pass, or is something that is done instinctively, say when players recognize the ball is about to be run into touch. It will depend on the circumstances who initiates the move but it is usually accompanied by a call of 'scissors' or 'switch' by either the ball carrier or the receiver.

Practices for the scissors

Continuous scissors (Practice 1) (See diagram 20)

Working with a partner, in groups of about 8 to 10, using one ball.



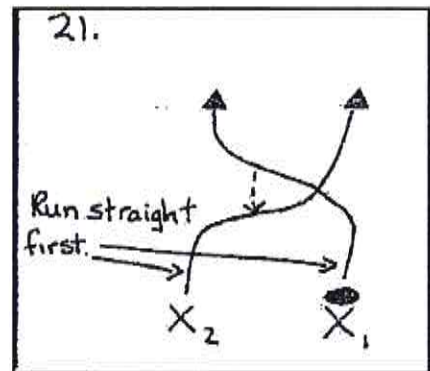
In this practice a number of players, working in pairs, can continuously rehearse the scissors in a confined space of a 10 x 10 meter grid. X1 has the ball and walks/jogs towards marker disc D. Once he gets to the middle, he gives a gentle pass to X2 who is coming across from the other corner. X2 then takes the ball over and hands it to X3. X1 and X2 now join the back of their respective lines. X3 repeats the same thing on the way back with their partner X4. X4 receiving the pass and carrying the ball over to X5, and so on. Initially marker discs A & C are deliberately

☆☆☆ AMERICAN FLAG RUGBY ☆☆☆

positioned slightly in front of their opposite discs, B & D. This ensures that the support runner learns to run behind the ball carrier and avoids any collisions early on.

Progressions

1. Develop to jogging and then running pace.
2. Players swap positions with their partner so they experience the scissors from the other way.
3. Move marker discs B & D so they are in line respectively with discs A & C, forming a square. The receiver now must learn to be able to delay their run so they still run behind the ball carrier.
4. Rather than the ball carrier and receiver running purely diagonally across, both players initially start by running straight first before changing their running angle and executing a scissors (see diagram 21). By running these angles in a game, attackers are less likely to reveal to the opposition their true intentions, making this sudden change of angle in attack more effective in penetrating the defense.

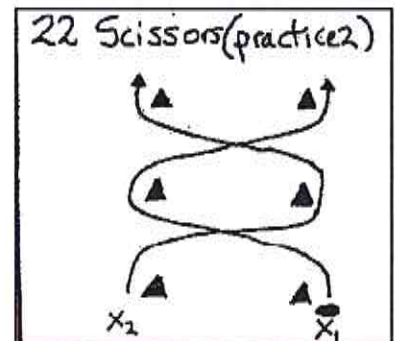


'The Snake Run' (Practice 2) (See Diagram 22)

Set up two lines of disc markers/cones as in the diagram below. Players work in pairs and continuously scissors with each other as they go around each pair of discs. Ensure there is enough distance between each set of discs so both players are given time and space to run straight first before starting their diagonal runs.

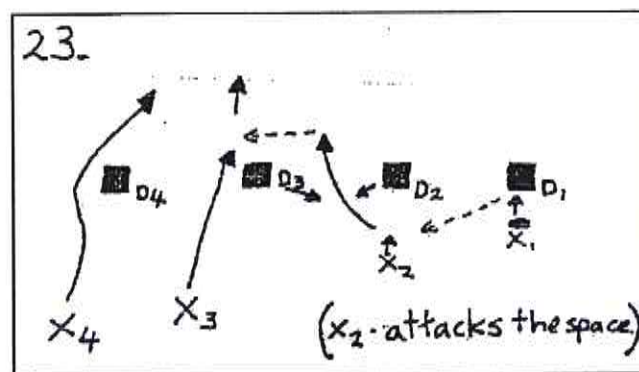
Scissors Guess Who

This is a similar practice to the dummy pass practice, 'Guess Who' the difference being the attacking pair attempt to outwit the defender and score with either a scissors or dummy scissors.



Passing Behind Defenders

This is a technique used to break through a well organized wall of defenders, where it appears there are no gaps to exploit. Here, the ball carrier deliberately attacks the space between two defenders D2 and D3 (see diagram 23), drawing them both on to him, he then attempts to offload a short pass in behind the defense to a support runner, X3, who is bursting onto this pass at pace. The aim of the ball carrier is to try to get tagged by both defenders simultaneously, taking both these defenders out of the game and creating space nearby for the support runner.



Key factors for teaching the pass behind defenders.

- » The ball carrier must run hard at the gap between two defenders.
- » Try and get as far forward as possible behind the defense.
- » Reach behind the back of the defenders with 'long straight arms' and give a soft pass. As the defenders close in to tag you, lift the ball up and away from the hands of the defenders.
This is to avoid the ball being accidentally knocked out of your hands as you attempt to run through the 'tackle'.
- » The support player should try and delay your run and burst onto the pass at pace. Try also to run close to the passer, as this tends to be where the space is in the defense.

Practices for passing behind the defense

4 versus 4 (See diagram 23).

Each of the four defenders here should initially be passive, and they should allow the play to eventually get behind them. The ball starts in the hands of X1, with the defense flat approximately 3 meters away.

X1 passes to X2 who then runs hard at the gap between defenders D2 and D3. These defenders then close in to make the tag, allowing a pass to be made behind them to X3, who has delayed his run to burst onto the pass at pace. D4 must initially remain passive, allowing X3 to burst through and receive the pass. X3 then has the option of passing to the support player X4.

Progressions

1. Defenders, D1 and D4, must allow X3 five meters head start after receiving the pass. They then give chase and attempt to tag attackers X3 or X4 before they score over a try line some 15 to 20 meters on.
2. 4 versus 4 can the team in possession of the ball use this technique to break through the defense?

RUNNING SKILLS

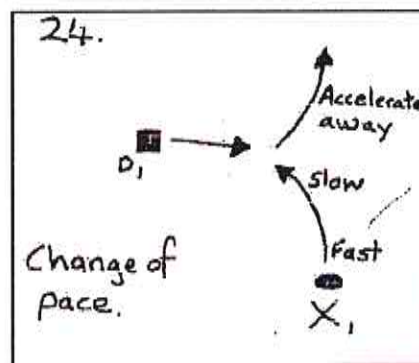
Ball carriers can beat an opponent one on one by speed, a swerve or a side-step. Speed includes: speed off the mark and acceleration, speed over a distance and, change of pace.

Speed off mark and acceleration and speed over a distance are to a large degree natural attributes and can only be improved through a proper speed training program. However, change of pace, side-step and swerve are skills that players can be taught just as we can teach them other skills of the game. Some young players will be able to do these quite naturally, especially if they play other team games. Others will struggle to perform them to any real standard. However, it is wrong to believe that these skills are the preserve of only a few naturally gifted players. I believe there is a large group of players in the middle who can be taught these skills just as easily as we can teach them other skills of the game.

Note: These skills are easier to perform against opponents who are running across the pitch at an angle to intercept the ball carrier, rather than those who are stationary and directly head on. The teacher/coach should be conscious of this in early practices.

Change of Pace

Imagine an attacker has broken through the defense and is heading for the goal line. A defender, with similar speed, is coming across the pitch and is aiming to intercept this attacker and tag him before they score (see diagram 24). If, when a few meters away from the defender, the attacker now slackens pace a little, the defender will instinctively do the same in order to prevent being beaten on the inside. As the defender slows down, the attacker should then accelerate hard towards the outside gap. Although the defender will probably do the same, it will almost certainly be a split second later. This should give the attacker just enough time and space to get away.



Note: The attacker can have an even more dramatic effect on slowing down the defender, or even be able to stop him altogether, if they also angle their run in towards the defender before accelerating away on the outside, as shown in the previous diagram. Also, see 'The Swerve'.

☆☆☆ AMERICAN RUGBY FLAG RUGBY ☆☆☆

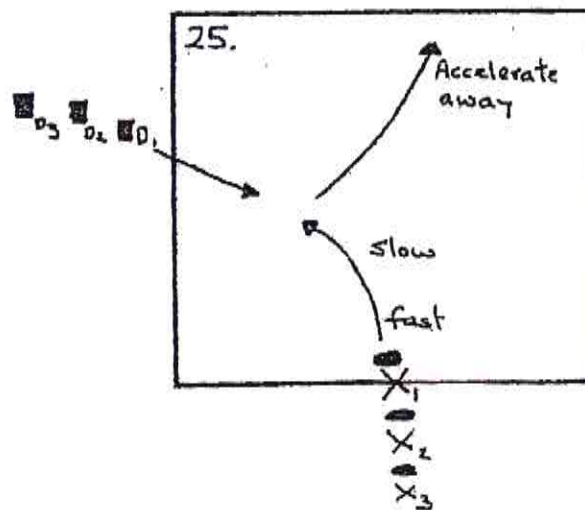
Key factors for teaching the change of pace

- » The ball carrier should slow down by using shorter strides and not pushing off so hard, but try and keep the same leg cadence. This will help give the impression to the defender that they are still running flat out.
- » Help check the defender by initially running towards him.
- » Don't get too close to the defender. When you feel the defender has also slowed down, accelerate hard away on the outside.
- » Don't look back at the defender, as this will slow you down.

Practices for the change of pace

In pairs, with somebody of similar pace (see diagram 25).

X1 has the ball and beats the defender coming from the side with a change of pace. Initially defenders are passive and must allow the attacker to slow them down and beat them on the outside.



★★★ AMERICAN FLAG RUGBY ★★★

Progression

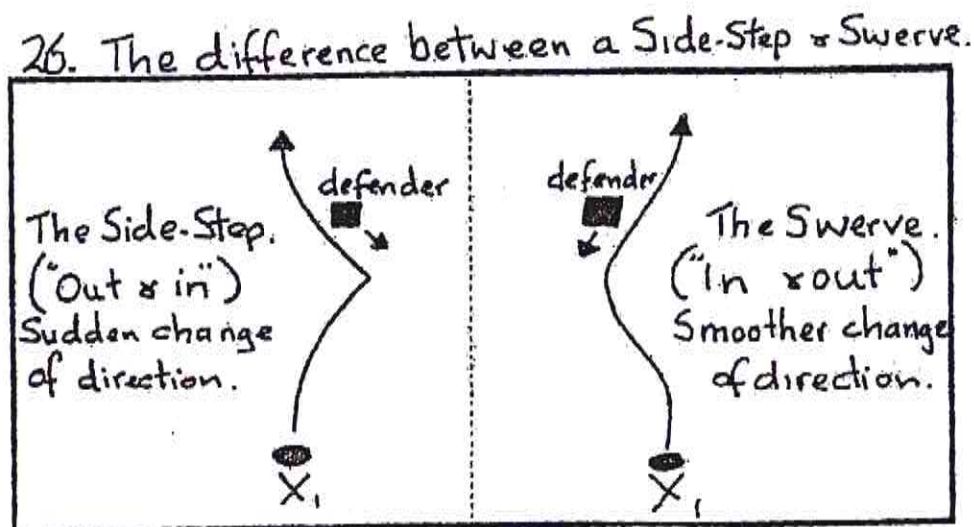
1. Defender now approaches from the other side so the attacker can practice swerving the other way.
2. 1 versus 1 'live' situation.
3. Once you feel players have gained a general feeling of the correct lines of running, change of pace and timing of this activity, then the practice can become 'live'. In other words the defender now has to try and tag the attacker before they score. The attacker can, if they wish, step back inside the defender to score, especially if they feel the defender has anticipated the change of pace and is running an angle to intercept them.

Note: Try to ensure defenders start far enough away so that they have to run flat out if they are to intercept the attacker. This will make the task of the attacker easier and allow for greater success early on.

The Side-Step

The difference between a side-step and a swerve.

The main difference is a side-step is 'out & in' and a swerve is 'in & out' (see diagram 26). What I mean by that is, in a side-step the ball carrier will try and trick the defender into thinking they are going to run out side of the defender and instead they cut back and run inside. In a swerve they are attempting to do the opposite. Other differences are that a swerve is much easier to perform at high speed, but requires more time and space than a side-step. A side-step is a much more sudden change of direction requiring more nimble footwork.



The Basic Side-Step (See Diagram 27).

For a side-step to the left, i.e. off your right foot, the ball carrier should initially run slightly to the right of their opponent. Control your running and take short little steps. With the ball in two hands, and your upper body leaning forward and slightly to your right, plant your right foot down hard to the right. Drop your head down over this foot before pushing hard off it and changing direction. Accelerate off the left, wrong footing your opponent and stepping inside him.

☆☆☆ AMERICAN FLAG RUGBY ☆☆☆

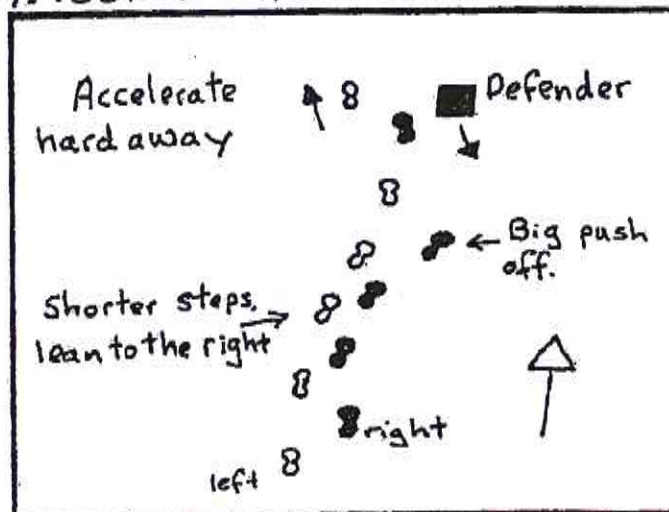
Key factors for teaching the basic side-step.

(For a side-step to the left, off the right foot).

- » Run slightly to the right of your opponent, away from your eventual line of attack.
- » 'Look' where you are pretending to run.
- » Take short little steps.
- » Lean your head over to the right.
- » Plant your right foot down hard.
- » Push hard off this foot and accelerate off to the left.
- » Be decisive and don't hesitate when changing direction.
- » Don't look back.

Note: For a side-step to the right, off the left foot, do the opposite.

27. Footwork for the basic side-step.



For the more advanced side-step using a half step, (See Diagram 28).

★★★ AMERICAN FLAG RUGBY ★★★

This requires nimble footwork and good balance but is more effective than the basic side-step in confined spaces and at slower speeds as it results in a more dramatic change of direction.

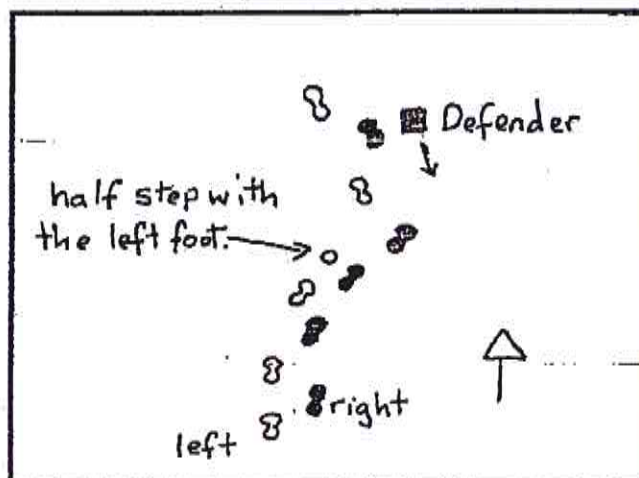
Here, the same technique is used as for the basic side-step but a greater change of direction can be achieved by making a half step with the left foot just prior to planting the right foot down (see diagram 28). In other words, as you approach your side-step, the left foot takes only half a step and is brought up in line with the instep of the right foot. All your body weight is now transferred onto the ball of your left foot. This foot is used as a launching pad to make a bigger step out to your right, with your right foot. This results in a much more dramatic change of direction to the left and back inside of the defender.

Key factors for teaching the advanced side-step.

- » As for the 'Basic side-step', but this time a half step is made with the left foot just prior to the step out with the right.
- » Transfer all of your weight onto the ball of your left foot.
- » Use this left foot as a launching pad to make a big step out to your right with your right foot.

Note: For very advanced players, I also teach what I call the 'double side-step'. Here, a player immediately after side-stepping off their right foot, pushes off hard from their left foot and beats the defender on the outside. This is not unlike what you are trying to achieve with a swerve but it can be done in more confined spaces against defenders who are fairly static. Needless to say, it does require players to have very nimble footwork and good acceleration.

28. Foot work for the advanced side-step



☆☆☆ AMERICAN FLAG RUGBY ☆☆☆

Practices for the side-step

1. Unopposed practice

To become familiar with the footwork, side-steps can first be practiced at slow speed, against a line of cones, flag posts or even the goal posts. If possible, it should be done carrying a ball.

Note: Make sure there is enough distance between these objects so players can gather their thoughts before the next side-step.

2. In pairs of equal pace and agility

To develop the timing of the side-step, one partner now acts as a passive defender and jogs/runs towards the ball carrier from an angle, allowing their partner to execute a side-step and beat them on the inside.

The Swerve

The swerve is a great way of beating a defender who is close to making a tackle. It is not as extreme as the sidestep, but it is just as effective. Fast footwork and perfect timing are the key skills to pull off the swerve. It is very simple to learn and, done in the right situations, can open massive gaps in the opposition's defence.

1. Run towards the defender with the ball held firmly in two hands and look as though you are going to run straight into the defender. This way they will start to commit to the tag.
2. Holding the ball in both hands also means the defender does not know which way you are going to move.
3. Start to change your line of running, arcing away from the tackler into the outside space.
4. Hold the ball on the opposite side to the tackler and sway your hips to that side.
5. Use the edges of your feet to lean away from the tackler towards the space you want to attack. This makes it even more difficult for the defender to grab hold of the ball.
6. Keep watching the defender as you are doing all this.
7. Sprint as fast as you can to make most of your off-balance opponent.
8. Remember to look around for supporting team-mates in a better position than you.

Key factors for teaching the swerve

Note: By 'looking' at the inside gap it will help to deceive the defender into thinking this is where you are about to attack.

- » Swerve by doing a cross-over step, with the right foot crossing over the left.
- » As you swerve, push your belly button over to the right as far as you can, leaning your hips as far away as possible from the defender to avoid being tagged (keep your body relaxed).
- » Push hard off the outside edge of your right foot and accelerate away.
- » Don't look back, this will slow you down.
- » Don't get too close to the defender.

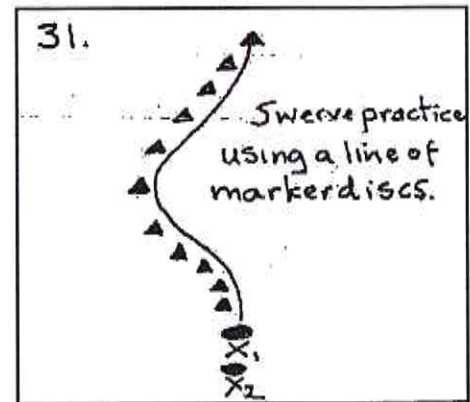
Practices for the serve

Learning to run the snake pattern (see diagram 31).

Lay a line of marker discs on the floor in the pattern players will need to run to swerve to the right. You could use a person, large cone or corner flag as a passive defender. Get players to experience running this pattern, encouraging them to swerve and accelerate hard away when reaching the 'defender'.

Progression

1. Remove the marker discs.
2. Get 'defenders' to move towards the attacker each time so players can experience the timing of the swerve.
3. Practice the swerve to the left.



1 versus 1 'live' situation (see diagram 32).

Players are matched with somebody of similar pace and ability. The aim is for the ball carrier to beat the defender and score without being tagged. They can do this using a swerve, side-step, or any other method.

Note: Insist on the defender entering the playing area at an angle similar to that shown in the diagram and encourage them to go forward and meet the attacker. This will make the practice more realistic and the job of beating the defender easier.

