

POSITION-SPECIFIC RUGBY SKILLS HANDBOOK



ABOUT THIS HANDBOOK

Thank you for downloading the Ruck Science position-specific rugby skills handbook. This handbook is designed for amateur rugby players, coaches and parents as a guide to creating tailored training programs that meet the needs of each individual position on a rugby team. The handbook will take readers through the specific physical and technical demands of each position as well as the training associated with building the requisite skill set.

We would like to use this opportunity to thank several organizations without whom this handbook would not have been possible. Firstly, the Canadian Rugby Union who created a similar guide in 2009. This version has drawn a lot of inspiration from that original work which was itself a derivative of a manual set up by the English Rugby Union. Secondly, the writing team of Tudor Bompa & Frederick Claro whose transformative work *Periodization in Rugby* was also published in 2009. “*Periodization in Rugby*” is, without a doubt, the most complete analysis of periodized training for amateur rugby players and should be essential reading for all rugby coaches who are working with young players.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T Howard', written in a cursive style.

Tim Howard
Founder
Ruck Science

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PHYSICAL PREPARATION FOR RUGBY

Rugby is a physically demanding sport with contact being at the center of almost every event on the field. Players should spend significant time preparing their bodies for this contact to prevent injury and maximize playing time. Before setting foot on a rugby field, all players are encouraged to improve their:

- **Strength** (including muscular bulk);
- **Speed** (both straight-line and multi-directional);
- **Flexibility** (particularly the hamstrings and shoulders);
- **Stamina** (ability to output work for extended periods of time);
- **Power** (explosive strength of muscles).

While athletic trainers with experience in these areas will work with you for a cost, there are several other ways to develop these physical characteristics using low-cost instruction. If you're a high-school aged player or the parent of a high-school aged player, your local school likely has staff in the physical education and athletics departments who can assist with direction and programming.

If you're a more mature player, consider joining and training with a local rugby club. To be recognized by national organizations, rugby clubs must have qualified coaches who will be able to take you through pre-season, in-season and off-season strength and conditioning programs.

WARMING UP

Preparing the body for rugby training requires proper time to warm up muscles and joints. Any rugby training you attend should include an extended warm-up period of at least 20 minutes. During this time, the heart rate is forced to rise along with core body temperature both of which help you acclimate for athletic competition.

Rugby training warm-ups should consist of three distinct modules:

General Mobility - squats, twists, push-ups and shoulder rolls

Transit Mobility - dynamic stretches e.g. lunges, quad stretches

Skill Preparation - small groups, position-specific movements

COOLING DOWN

Cooling down your body at the end of rugby training is as important as warming it up beforehand. Cooling down has two key benefits; it prevents muscle soreness in the hours and days after training, and it helps you retain flexibility and prevent stiffness. While stretching at other times is advised, stretching at the end of rugby training when your muscles are warm can yield impressive gains in flexibility. We recommend holding your stretches during your cool down for 20 and 30 seconds so that you become more flexible and less prone to injury.

KEY RUGBY SKILLS

Since rugby became a professional sport in 1995, positional play has become increasingly specialized with specific physical attributes becoming essential for many positions around the field. However, during that same time, a core skill set has emerged for all players, whatever their position.

These skills include:

- Passing
- Catching
- Tackling
- Rucking
- Evasion

HEALTHY EATING

A healthy approach to nutrition is essential for all rugby players, irrespective of age, gender or experience. But the meaning of the word “healthy” in this context seems to change fairly regularly. As recently as 2007, the All Blacks ate a diet that was largely based on carbohydrates. In 2015, however, the All Blacks diet had shifted to being LCHF during the weeks with an increased carbohydrate intake the day before and the day of a rugby match. Rather than specifying exactly what to eat, it may be more useful to suggest what food should be avoided. Those being; soda, HFCS, processed meats, meats containing antibiotics and heavily refined flour. For more information on nutrition for rugby players, please visit our blog and product information pages.

POSITION-REQUIREMENTS

PROP

PLAYING PROP

SCRUMS

Loose Head

Tight Head

Process

Practice

LINEOUTS

Process

Practice

GENERAL

TRAINING

RESTARTS

CONDITIONING



PLAYING PROP

Modern rugby requires that Props be versatile, physically strong players. Focus areas will be strength around the neck, shoulder and upper legs. But beyond the physical, Props need to enjoy the tough stuff. In general play, they should relish contact situations, carrying the ball and clearing rucks. The game has moved beyond a time where Props could hide out on the field waiting for the next scrum or lineout. With that said, winning set-piece possession of their team is still the Prop's #1 priority.

SCRUMS

It was once the case that the majority of Props could play on either side of the scrum. That is, either Loose Head or Tight Head interchangeably. But with changes to the replacement Laws, teams are now required to carry an entire fresh front row on the bench, meaning that Props are able to specialize on one side of the scrum or the other.

Prop is one position on the rugby field where physical dominance is absolutely essential. Props who can physically dominate their opponent in scrums will increase the quality of their team's possession and similarly decrease the quality of the opposition's ball. A smaller Prop can achieve physical dominance with better technique, but raw strength is perhaps the most crucial physical quality for a Prop.

SCRUMS

Loose Head – The player who wears the #1 jersey and packs on the left hand side of his/her team’s scrum. The Loose Head’s job is to put pressure on the opposition’s Tight Head to provide cover for the Hooker to strike for the ball. This Prop’s stance will be dictated by the halfback’s feeding lane. Since a scrum naturally wheels to the left, it’s the Loose Head’s responsibility to keep the scrum straight despite this natural turning inclination. The LH must drive through their opponent, not around them.

Tight Head – The player who wears the #3 jersey and packs down on the right hand side of their team’s scrum. The Tight Head is the lynch-pin of the scrum. They are responsible for scrummaging against two opponents, both the Hooker and the Loose Head Prop. Their primary task on attack is to prevent any backwards progress. On defense, they’re attempting to get “inside” the opposition’s Loose Head and pressure the Hooker.

Process - The process for setting up a scrum has evolved over time. The reason is safety. Playing Prop is one of the more dangerous positions on the field with a particular risk to the head and spine. Recent changes in the engagement cadence have attempted to eliminate or at least reduce these risks. The timing for the engagement is now; Crouch, Bind, Set.

Practice - There is no substitute for scrummaging. Getting together with your front row and going against an opposition is the best way to improve. If you’re working solo, practice your body position for the scrum by pushing a sled or simply walking forwards and backwards in a scrumming position with your back straight and head up. Increase the difficulty by putting a plate on your back in either situation.

LINEOUTS

Unlike a Loose Forward or Lock, Props have a singular responsibility in the Lineout, to lift other players as they contest the ball. A Prop needs two abilities to be effective in this role; explosive power to lift the player into the air, explosive speed to get into position for the lift. The modern lineout is all about speed on the ground. Defensive lineouts especially can be highly effective if players are able to move quickly in response to the opposition. [Click here for a good example.](#) The average Prop is used as either the first or the last lifter in the lineout. This is done to cover up for their lack of speed to the lift. However, a Prop who works hard on their speed on the ground is much more valuable given their ability to lift at any position in the lineout.

Process - Props need to get to the lineout quickly. Speed to the lineout is one of the greatest limiting factors for the average rugby team in winning their own possession. The team that gets to the lineout first has a significant advantage. On attack, Props who can get set early can put their team in a position to win the ball unopposed. On defense, Props who win the race to the lineout can put pressure on the opposition without actually doing anything more than being present.

Practice - the best way to get better at lineouts is to practice them with your jumpers. Combination at lineout time is very important. But practice needs to be at-pace. As a Prop, there is no point practicing at half speed getting into position and lifting slowly. Remember your two tasks, get to position quickly and get your jumper up fast. These things should be your focus when you're practicing lineouts. In the gym, the clean and press should be your go-to olympic lift. Focus on speed, not on maximizing the weight you can throw around. After a certain point, strength is not as important as speed for lifting in lineouts.

GENERAL PLAY

In modern rugby, Props are essential components of both attacking and defensive structures. They are responsible for supporting ball carriers all over the field, running effective lines as attacking options and bringing the defensive line forward. They're a little dated now, but according to 2003 IRB statistics (cited by Luger & Pook in 2004), Props will individually hit some 40 rucks and mauls during a game and perform an average of 15 tackles.

Speed over about 10m is vital. This provides for strength in contact. A 2015 study of rugby league players showed that acceleration over the first 10m was positively correlated with tackling ability. Good Props make a lot of tackles and clean out a lot of rucks, so they should focus on their 10m speed as much as possible in training. Once they arrive at a contact area, technique becomes very important. In particular, getting the correct body height at the ruck and tackle will make you more effective in these situations. In defense, Props need to put opposition players on the ground quickly to deny them the chance to get to the gain line.



RESTARTS

Restarts in rugby are especially important for the scoring team. You've just put points on the board, now you need to secure possession and exit your danger zone. Props are crucial to this process when the kicking team elects to kick short and make the kick contestable. In this situation, Props will be responsible for lifting the nearest Lock or Flanker and bringing them down in possession of the ball. They will sometimes get help from the Hooker, but often will be responsible for a 1-man lift behind the jumping player. As you can imagine, this is one of the more physically demanding tasks for a Prop and requires a good deal of communication and rapport with the jumping forward.

Practice - Restarts are one of the most under-practiced areas of amateur rugby especially. But they need not be. A lot can be achieved in this area during a team run towards the end of training. Or get the starting pack together with a reserve halfback and have them kick-off to your team repeatedly. There is nothing you can do in the gym to make you better at Restarts, it's just a matter of reps, timing and muscle memory.

See our video "Best Takes / Catches of RWC 2015" for more on this.

TRAINING DRILLS

Drill #1 (1 v 1 in groups of 4)

Equipment: 1 ball

Aim: to practice driving and mauling

A (Prop), passes the ball to B, who catches and holds the ball into their chest. A drives into B and attempts to wrestle the ball free. This is repeated on players C and D. Ensure B, C and D stay high enough to allow the A to adopt a lower position. The resistance provided by the opposition in the wrestling should be such that the Prop has to work hard to win the ball but is able to secure it in a few seconds. Repeat around the square with a new player each time. Complete 3 rounds per player.

Drill #2 (opposed 1 v 1)

Equipment: none

Aim: to develop neck and shoulder strength

Player A should adopt a press-up position but on their knees. Player B should position themselves in the fully extended press-up position with arms bound around A. B tries to lift A by driving from his feet and lifting from his head

Drill #3 (unopposed)

Equipment: none

Aim: to accelerate over a short distance.

The player should start on the Try Line, sprint out 10m, stop, shuffle left 5m, sprint out 10m, shuffle right 5m, sprint out 10m. Perform 4 reps in each set with a minimum of 4 sets.

CONDITIONING

In preparation for playing rugby, Props must develop:

Core and specific strength and power endurance with the emphasis on trunk, neck, arms and legs

Starting speed, short sprint speed max 10-15 m

Work involves: Push in scrum, lift in lineout, tackling, wrestling and gripping, short sprints

Ergogenesis: Anaerobic alactic-lactic 60-40

Limiting factors: Strength, power endurance, acceleration power



POSITION-REQUIREMENTS

HOOKER

PLAYING HOOKER

SCRUMS

Process

Practice

Drills

LINEOUTS

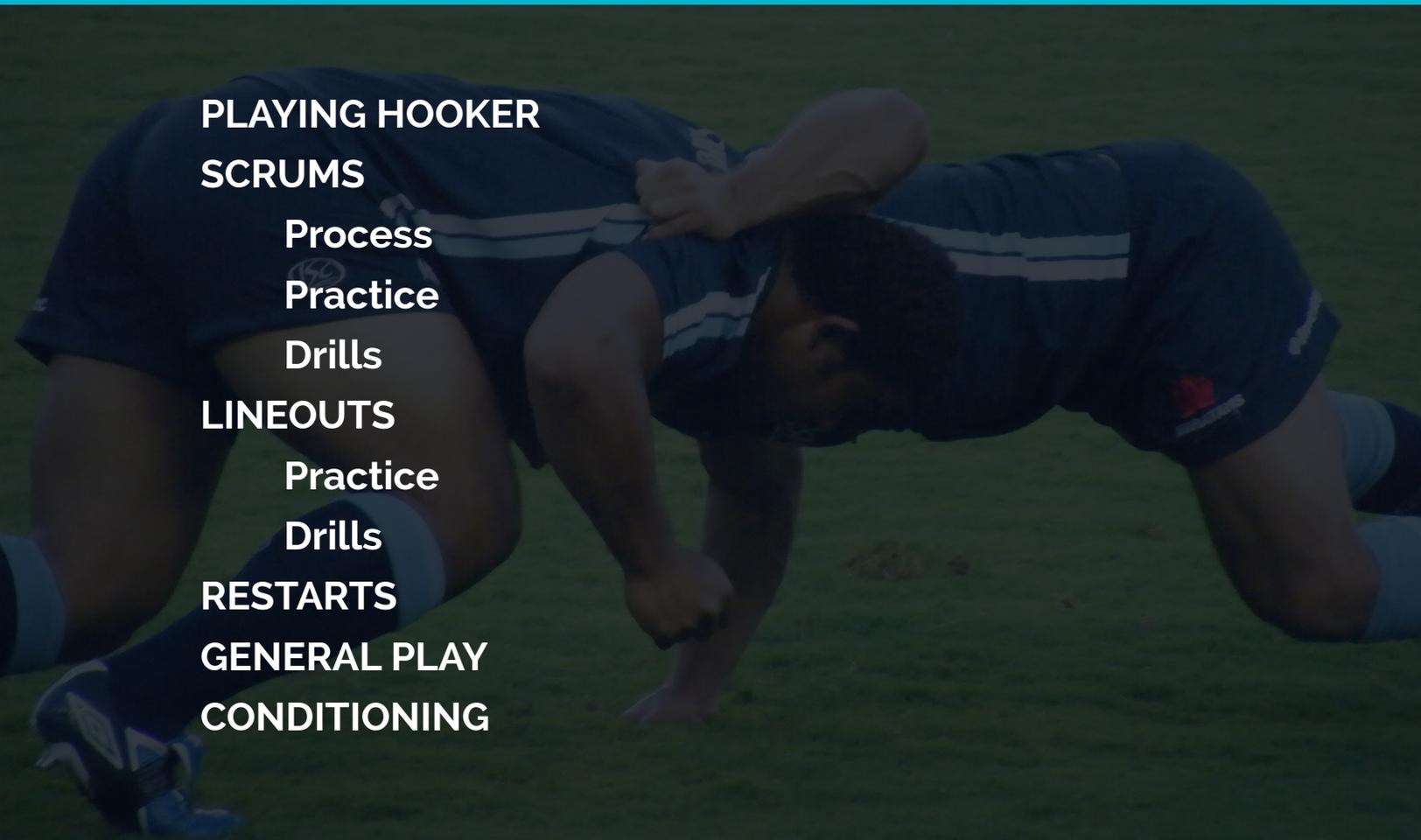
Practice

Drills

RESTARTS

GENERAL PLAY

CONDITIONING



PLAYING HOOKER

Hooker is one of the most challenging positions in the game of rugby. Not for the faint of heart or those that want to hide on the field. You're at the center of everything as the Hooker, with highly-specialized skills at the scrum and many of the same responsibilities as a loose forward in general play. But the lineout is where the Hooker stands alone. They are responsible for throwing the ball into the lineout. This one single skill can be an Achilles heel of entire teams. Get it right, and you're supposed to get it right. Get it wrong and your side might well be gifting possession and the chances of winning the game away.

But the game doesn't end there. Hookers have added to this already impressive workload by becoming mobile around the field. Nowadays, you'll often find Hookers supporting second phase possession from the set piece. In defense, they can be asked to get in tight against other tight 5 ball runners, or to defend out wide against agile wingers. They will hit as many rucks and mauls as a Prop, having a tackle count even higher than their front-row counterparts.

'You don't like to see hookers going down on players like that.'

- Unknown

SCRUMS

The hooker is the organizer of the scrum, they are expected to coordinate with teammates, promote a solid platform for quality ball, pressure physically and technically the opposition to deny them quality ball. They must analyze, correct, adapt and talk with teammates.

Process - The hooker grips the Props under the armpits and pulls them tight; the Props should bind around the hooker to ensure they act as a solid unit. The Hooker strikes for the ball and propels it between the Loose Head Prop's legs towards the #8. The Hooker may also try to put pressure on the opponent when it is the opposition's put in; they do this by either driving in tandem with their Tight Head Prop, or striking for the ball – sometimes called 'a strike against the head'.

Practice - There is no substitute for live scrummaging if you want to get better in this area. Always practice scrums (on a machine and against opposition) while supervised by coaching staff. For the Hooker, scrum practices should include individual work, work with the Props, and work with the Scrumhalf on the timing and speed of the strike for the ball.

Drill #1 - with the scrumhalf

Equipment: a support for the right arm

Aim: to practice striking quickly with the right leg and strike timing.

From a supported sitting position, with the right arm taking the weight of the body, the hooker should strike, on a given signal, towards the left. With the Scrumhalf putting the ball in as required, the Hooker should vary his strike to channel the ball.

LINEOUTS

Lineouts are a Hooker's bread and butter. This is the area of rugby that you will be most responsible for. That can be a positive or a negative depending on how well prepared you are for the task. Hookers are responsible for getting the ball quickly and accurately to the team's lineout jumpers. This is one of the most difficult skills in the game. There's no way around it. You need to throw hundreds of lineouts to get good at them.

Practice - Practice accurate lineout throwing (e.g. a torpedo throw) Always practice using a target (e.g. a rugby post, a mark on a wall, a player). Try and work under match conditions (e.g. three short shuttle runs, and throw the ball in and repeat)

There are various types of throws, but one of the basic ways to carry out a throw is as follows:

- Hold ball in front of chest in two hands in a flat position
- The throwing hand supports the ball underneath on right-hand side of the ball (if thrower is right-handed)
- Spread the fingers along the seam of the ball
- The non-throwing hand rests on top
- Take the ball back over the head, with the right hand now at the back of the ball, and the left hand at the front
- Keep the eyes focused on the intended target
- Throw 'soccer style' with power derived from a quick action

[Click here for a lineout throwing warm-up drill](#)

RESTARTS

When your team is receiving a Restart, the Hooker is responsible for supporting the catcher. This is especially true for short kickoffs. In this instance, the Hooker may even help the catcher by working with the Prop to get the catcher in the air underneath the ball. Unlike a lineout, where the jumper can only move on a 2D plane, at kick off time, the jumper may need to move anywhere on a 3D plane. That is; right, left, forwards or backward. Effective lifting a kick off time requires the Hooker to be exceptionally quick on the ground. To move to the lifter as fast as possible and support them in the air. The Hooker does less lifting in this situation than the Prop but is responsible for supporting the player in the air and preventing a defender from making contact with them.

GENERAL PLAY

A Hooker is known for their physicality around the field. They have a high mobility rate and can apply pressure to the opposition both on attack and defense. High mobility, applies physical pressure to opposition, sets a good platform for won balls, and destroys the quality of opposition balls.

Due to their smaller stature and more explosive ability, the Hooker will usually carry the ball more often than the Props. Understand the move, support efficiently to implement the move accurately. When on defense, the Hooker is aggressive on the defensive line, comes forward, makes tackles and is only member of the Tight 5 with free reign to compete with their hands at the breakdown.

CONDITIONING

In preparation for playing rugby, Hookers must develop:

Core and specific strength, and power endurance with emphasis on trunk, neck, arms and legs

Starting speed, short sprint speed max 10-15 m

Hook the ball in scrum hence not pushing as strongly as the props, throw in lineout, tackling, wrestling and gripping, short sprints.

Ergogenesis: Anaerobic alactic-lactic 50-50

Limiting factors: Power endurance, acceleration power



POSITION-REQUIREMENTS

LOCK

PLAYING LOCK

SCRUMS

Practice

LINEOUTS

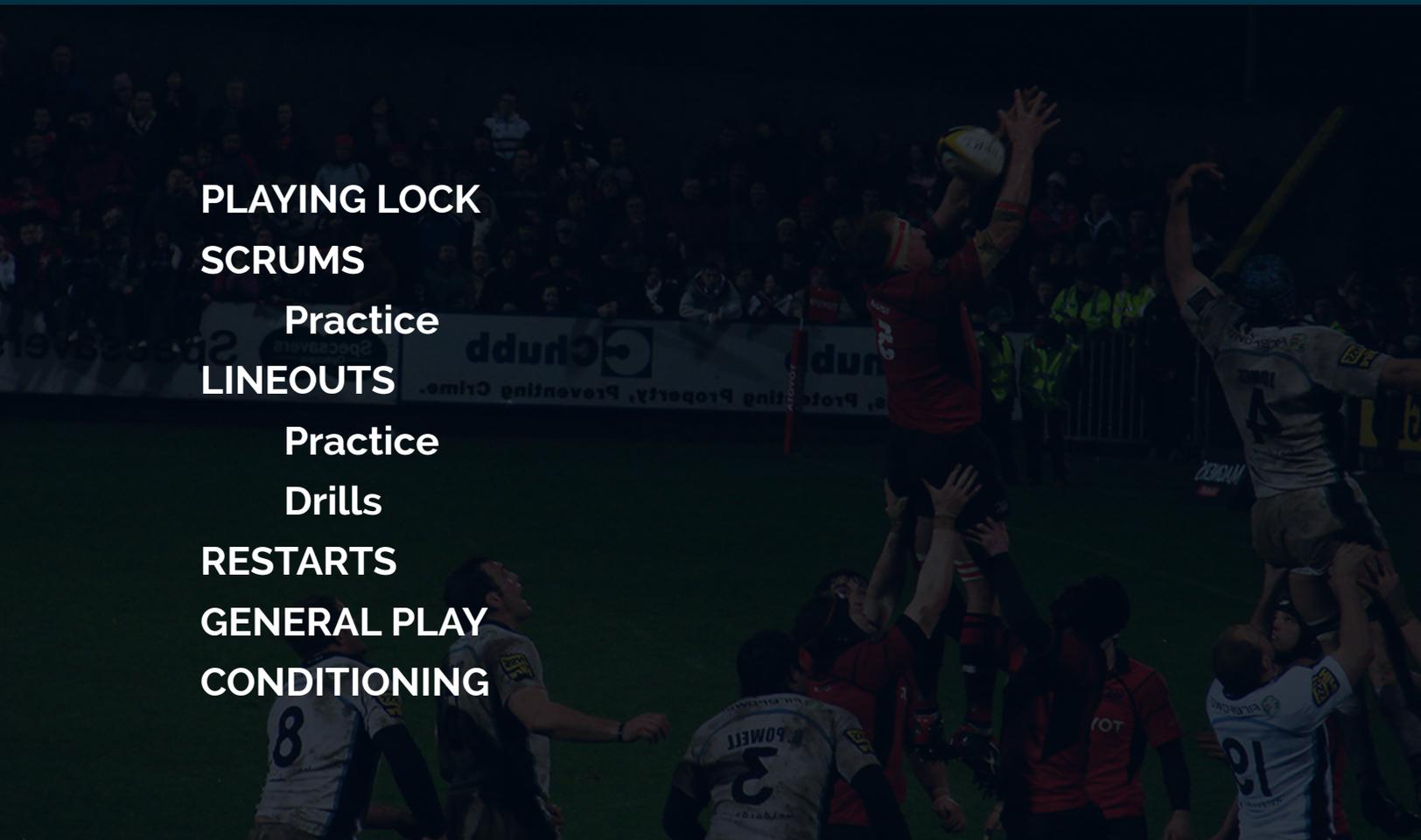
Practice

Drills

RESTARTS

GENERAL PLAY

CONDITIONING



PLAYING LOCK

As a Lock in rugby, you are the team's key ball winner at both the lineout and restarts (kickoffs). It's for this reason that Locks tend to be taller and more ectomorphic than the front row. But this additional height doesn't make them scrawny. On the contrary, modern Locks are tall, solid and explosive, difficult to tackle and a solid wall on defense.

Locks are the heart and soul of the set piece, responsible for both lifting and jumping in lineouts and providing the base of strength at scrum time. In this role, they're often referred to as the 'engine room'. Locks are very active players around the field. In defense, they're likely to be found tight to the ruck or making covering tackles on outside backs. To be successful, their mindset must be to physically dominate their opposite number and provide a good "Go Forward" in tight cooperation with the front row.

"Lock forwards seem doomed to toil in obscurity. Many years ago, in the seasons when one lock held the 2-3-2 scrum together, Leo Fanning, a wise and witty Rugby writer, said that the mission of the forward was to be always to the fore in the field and to enjoy a back seat in the newspapers. He also said that the lock forward was frequently, with good warrant, the most profane man in a team."

- Gordon Slatter

SCRUMS

As the engine room at scrum time, it's the Locks who provide much of the power. But as much as raw strength is a prerequisite, so is flexibility. At the starting position in the scrum, the Lock needs to be able to support their own body weight and still retain enough explosive power to throw themselves into the hit. This requires a very strict body position that is only possible with flexible hamstrings and ankles.

The team scrums best when the Locks are in sync with their respective Props. While the Hooker is largely left alone at scrum time, each Lock will bind firmly on their Prop. The Prop is responsible for providing the base through which the Lock can push. Perfect alignment is essential here. Every few degrees off these two are on their shoulder and hip alignment means valuable power being lost in the push.

Practice - as with anything, doing it makes you better. But while you can't beat the experience of packing dozens of scrums against a full core of opponents, you can train for cohesion with your Prop. The best drill for this is 2v2 scrummaging with one Prop and one Lock on each side. Stay straight. Focus on alignment. Drive down with your hips towards the ground in front of you NOT up towards the sky. Backs flat, knees almost touching the ground. Hold that position and learn to like it.

LINEOUTS

Since lifting became legal at lineout time, it's now necessary for teams to have tall timber that can compete for the ball in the air. Of all the responsibilities that Locks have, the lineout is their primary focus. But it's not simply a matter of being lifted by your Props. Locks need to have mad ups, to be able to explode into their air with little support and bend from the waist in any direction to compete for the ball. Coming down with the pill also requires substantial upper body strength as there will almost always be an opposition player attempting to spoil possession or wrap you up in the air despite the fact that this is technically illegal.

With Flankers and #8s becoming jumping options, it's crucial for Locks to be able to both jump and lift in lineouts. This combination of skills and physical abilities gives your team more lineout options and variation.

Practice -The key thing for a Lock to work on is the ability to be explosive off the ground. That means jumping from a stationary position. Practice jumping going forwards, backwards and straight up, leading with the left foot and right foot. Practice catching the ball with one hand and two. Basketball is an excellent game to develop handling and jumping skills.

Drill #1 - jumping (grounds of 8)

Equipment: 3 corner flags

Aim: to develop jumping height.

Three corner flags should be held as hurdles, at an appropriate height off the ground to suit the jumpers. The corner flags are held parallel to the ground on top of open, upturned palms and 1m apart. The two jumpers, working as a pair, jump sideways off both feet over the hurdles, extending their arms fully, moving along the three hurdles and back again.

RESTARTS

Given their height, strength, and skills in the air, Locks should make every effort to field kicks when there is a restart in play. This can happen either from a kickoff or from a 22m restart. This is one of the most difficult skills that a Lock will attempt to master given that they need to move on a 360-degree plane to field kicks. Not to mention the fact that once you make the catch, you're likely to be swamped by defenders.

Practice - Focus on catching with two hands and bring the ball into your chest before you arrive back on the ground. Work with your lifters at training to practice getting up in the air and back down safely. On the opposition ball, Locks should attack the ball and disrupt clean possession for the opposition.

GENERAL PLAY

Around the field, the Locks provide a huge work rate. They make tackles, clean rucks and carry the ball as many times as any player on the field. Locks do not compete for possession at the breakdown with their hands. Height is a limiting factor for this. Locks are more inclined to “take the space” above the ball by counter-rucking to win breakdown possession.

Because Locks are so useful at the breakdown, it's important that they be mobile. This means being able to cover 60m quickly while running the correct line. Locks don't have the same top speed as Flankers, but they can maintain their top speed for extended periods. This means a more rounded kind of aerobic ability than that of the front row and training for these distances in pre-season to develop the necessary Vo2 Max. You can test your Vo2 Max using this series of beep test variations.

CONDITIONING

In preparation for playing rugby, Locks must develop:

Core and specific strength, power, power-endurance with emphasis on legs power.

Short sprints and high speed running for support play.

Coordination for jump/catch/ball release actions.

Jump at lineouts, push in scrums, short sprints, gripping and binding, wrestling the ball and tackling.

Ergogenesis: Anaerobic lactic-alactic: 60-40.

Limiting factors: Power endurance, reacting power, acceleration / deceleration power.



POSITION-REQUIREMENTS

FLANKER

(Blind-Side & Open-Side)

PLAYING BLIND-SIDE FLANKER

SCRUMS

Practice

LINEOUTS

Practice

ATTACK

DEFENSE

CONDITIONING

PLAYING OPEN-SIDE FLANKER

SCRUMS

Practice

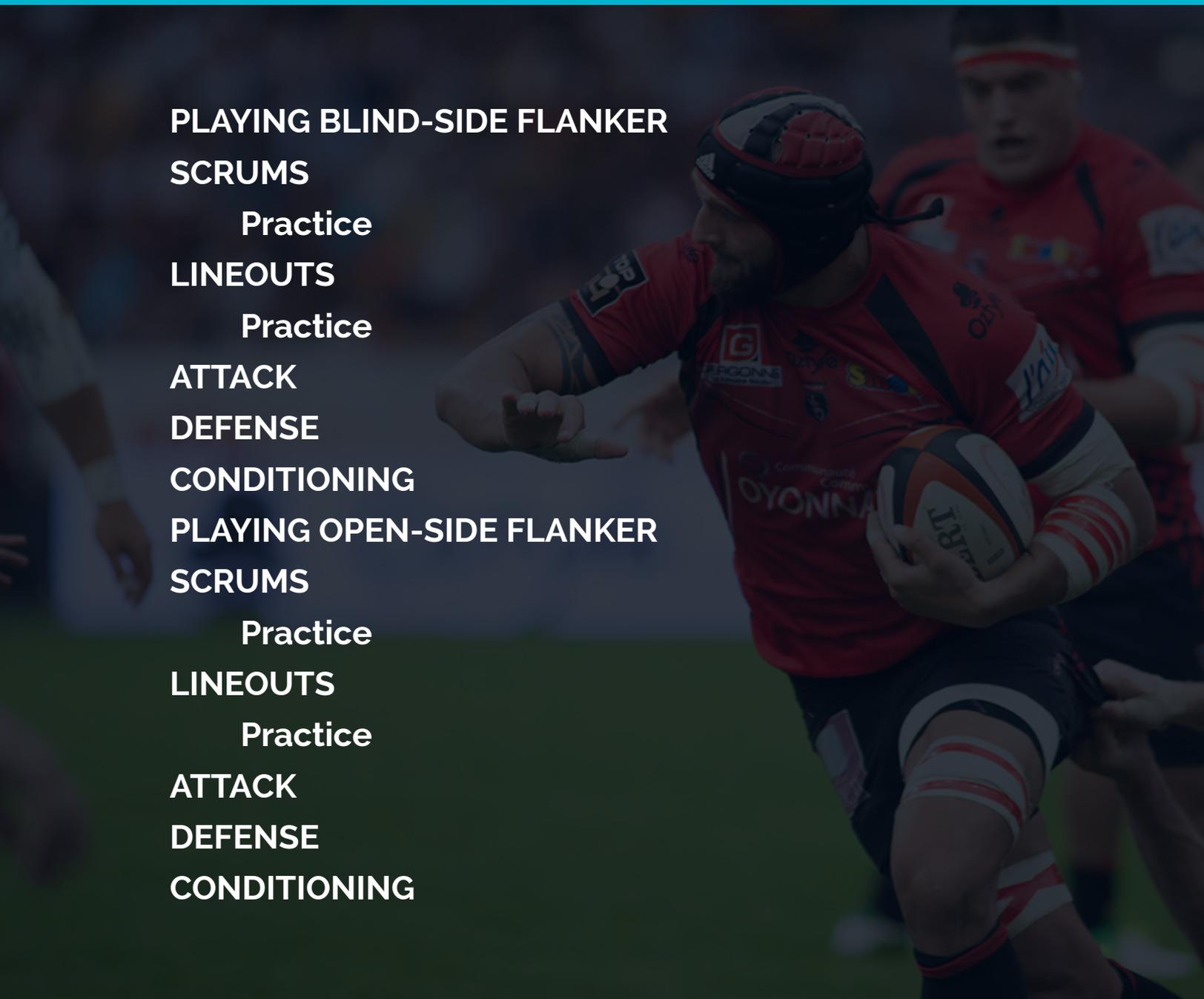
LINEOUTS

Practice

ATTACK

DEFENSE

CONDITIONING



PLAYING BLIND-SIDE FLANKER

The Blind Side Flanker is like the Swiss army knife of the rugby team, they should be able to perform almost any function they need to depend on the situation. As a #6, you'll need to have great hands, vision, strength, and power, be dominant in the air and on the ground. No other position on the rugby field provides the kind of range that Blind-Side does. Coaches will often choose a Blind-Side whose playing style suits the team's needs. If they're short on jumpers in the lineout, the Blind-Side will often be taller. If they're short on ball carriers, the coach may choose a powerful ball runner at #6.

In recent years, several teams have experimented with Blind Side flankers who were an exact mirror image of their open-side counterparts. The Wallabies have experimented with this strategy since the early 2000s in an attempt to put more pressure on the opposition's breakdown. Other sides, like the ACT Brumbies and NSW Waratahs, have used Locks interchangeably at Blind-Side to provide additional bulk and increase their lineout options.

The Blind-Side Flanker has one of the highest work rates in the team. They will spend most time running in support, sprinting short distances, they will perform 25 over tackles and hit some 45 or 50 rucks and mauls in a game, jump in lineouts, push in scrums, and still be essential in pivotal positions for creating attacking options. If you want a taste of everything rugby has to offer, Blind-Side Flanker may well be your spot!

SCRUMS

The Blind-Side Flanker is responsible for supporting and adding strength to the Prop on their side of the scrum. Rugby scrums have an enormous amount of force going through the front row forwards. This power is provided by the Locks and Flankers. This is particularly the case when packing behind the Tight-Head Prop since they're competing against the opposition's Hooker and Prop. On defense, the Blind-Side Flanker is responsible for tackling the #8 if they make a move down the short-side.

Practice - scrumming (on a machine or Vs opposition) while supervised. Practices should include individual work, and work with the front five and back row on body position, dynamic driving position – flat back, legs in driving position as well as supporting back row moves and plays.

LINEOUTS

The Blind-Side's role at the lineout is varied depending on their size and strength in the air. A taller player will almost always be a jumping option. Whilst smaller #6s will be lifters towards the back of the lineout. On defensive lineouts, the Blind-Side may be asked to put pressure on the opposition's scrumhalf or flyhalf. Getting from the lineout into a cohesive defensive line is crucial. As jumping options, they add diversity in calls and relieve pressure from the Locks.

Practice - correct supporting technique for lineout jumpers. Work on blocking and binding techniques to protect the ball and jumper in the air. Speed to the lifting position is crucial. Always practice at full speed on the ground to replicate a game situation.

ATTACK

The Blind-Side Flanker is essential to maintaining possession on attack, both with the ball in hand and as a supporting player. They must be able to assess situations quickly. If they're needed at the breakdown, they should anticipate and move quickly. But they also need to recognize when they're not necessary and make themselves available as a ball carrier in the next phase. This process of decision-making is something that can really only be learned by doing it. As a ball runner, the Blind-Side should aim to be running at smaller players, preferably the flyhalf and inside center to draw them into a contact situation. They should, therefore, try to run outside their own flyhalf where possible rather than close to the breakdown where they may be swamped by front row forwards and Locks.

Practice - Run with backs and Number 8 to learn the backline's timing and alignment. Practice your support play and the decision to enter the contact area. Work your skills on the ground, learn how to fight on the ground to retain possession.

DEFENSE

A #6 should absolutely love defending. This is one of the areas in which they can have the most impact and provide the most benefit to their team. Ideally, the Blind-Side Flanker will be able to get off the line quickly, make low tackles, contest at the breakdown with their hands and win turnovers. Along with their open-side counterpart, they will usually defend on the inside shoulder of the Flyhalf to prevent this player from making tackles. This function allows the Flyhalf to save their energy for attacking play. It means more work for both flankers, but it's time and effort well-spent.

CONDITIONING

In preparation for playing rugby, Blind-Side Flankers must develop:

Core and specific strength, power, speed, agility, power-endurance, emphasis on legs and arms

Starting power, acceleration/deceleration power

Coordination

Sprint, jumping, running in support at high speed, pushing, gripping, wrestling the ball and tackling

Ergogenesis: Anaerobic lactic-alactic: 70-30

Limiting factors: Power endurance, acceleration/deceleration power



PLAYING OPEN-SIDE FLANKER

The Open-Side Flanker is a breakdown and first-phase specialist. They are responsible for their team retaining possession on the first of play following a scrum or lineout. On defense, their role is to slow down the first phase possession of the opposition, either with a dominant tackle or by applying pressure at the breakdown.

The Open-Side Flanker has a nose for the ball. In general play, they shadow the opposition's scrumhalf and are quick to pounce on a tackle situation if they sense a lack of support for the ball carrier. The Open-Side Flanker is usually smaller than their Blind-Side counterpart, not by necessity but because a shorter stature provides a lower center of gravity at the breakdown.

The best #7s know the Law Book backwards and forwards and will be able to quickly recognize how the referee is applying the law at the breakdown. Learning how the referee is calling the breakdown is a skill in and of itself.

“Can't sleep. Flankers will get me.”

- Every Flyhalf Ever

SCRUMS

The Open-Side Flanker has become more of a scrummager in recent years. This is especially true when they're supporting their own Tight-Head Prop as their weight helps keep the scrum straight. But the primary role of the Open-Side Flanker is put pressure on the opposition's flyhalf and make a first up tackle. If the scrum is on the right hand side of the field, they may be required to tackle a #8 who picks and runs from the back of the scrum, but this is seldom a first-choice attacking option.

Practice - Scrummaging (on a machine and against opposition) whilst supervised. Practices should include individual work, work with the front five and back row. Practice with the #8 and Blind-Side on who will take the ball carrier and supporting players on defense. Work hard on getting to the first-phase before your opposite number in scrimmages.

LINEOUTS

The Open-Side Flanker has a limited role at the lineout. They can be used as lifter or jumper on the 15m line if they're particularly tall and the Hooker has an accurate long throw. On Defense, they will be used as a scrumhalf at the lineout, standing on the 15m line ready to pressure the opposition's flyhalf. On Attack, their job is to get to the breakdown first and be accurate in order to secure possession for their team.

Practice - getting to the first breakdown early by beating your opposite number in scrimmages. When lifting, be dynamic and hold your jumper in the air until they've released the ball. Lifting at the back of the lineout is quite difficult as the ball takes longer to arrive, so be sure to keep your jumper in the air an extra second at least!

ATTACK

The Open-Side Flanker is the most adept support player on the field. They're able to reach breakdowns quickly, secure the ball without support and be available for offloads when half line-breaks occur. They occupy the center of the field and spend an enormous amount of the game going from ruck to ruck supporting the ball carrier. Some #7s are skillful with the ball, but this is not typically a deciding factor for coaches.

Efficiency around the field is a major advantage for the Open-Side Flanker and for their team. A #7 who can get to 40 Rucks / game as opposed to 30 allows other more adept playmakers to remain in the attacking line. The Open-Side typically does not seek the spotlight in Attack, preferring to play a supporting role in winning possession.

DEFENSE

The #7 forms part of the inside defensive unit between the flyhalf and the breakdown. They're known as strong tacklers, with some making as many as 30 tackles per game. But they're more likely to be the second tackler in a contact situation, known as the "tackle assist" under the new laws.

Being a tackle-assist as opposed to a tackler allows the #7 to remain on their feet and contest the ball at the breakdown with their hands. Even though they may not win possession, being able to do this repeatedly throughout the game puts pressure on the attacking team who must commit players to the breakdown to secure possession.

CONDITIONING

In preparation for playing rugby, Open-Side Flankers must develop:

Core and specific strength, power, speed, agility, power-endurance, emphasis on legs and arms

Starting power, acceleration/deceleration power

Coordination

Sprint, jumping, running in support at high speed, pushing, gripping, wrestling the ball and tackling

Ergogenesis: Anaerobic lactic-alactic: 70-30

Limiting factors: Power endurance, acceleration/deceleration power



POSITION-REQUIREMENTS

NUMBER 8.

PLAYING NUMBER 8

SCRUMS

Practice

LINEOUTS

Practice

DEFENSE

ATTACK

Practice

CONDITIONING

PLAYING NUMBER 8.

The Number 8 position is one of the most versatile on the field. Most 8s are given free reign to roam the field plugging gaps anywhere on the defensive line and to pop up anywhere in the attack. They're powerful and skillful ball carriers who should be able to pass off either hand both before and in contact.

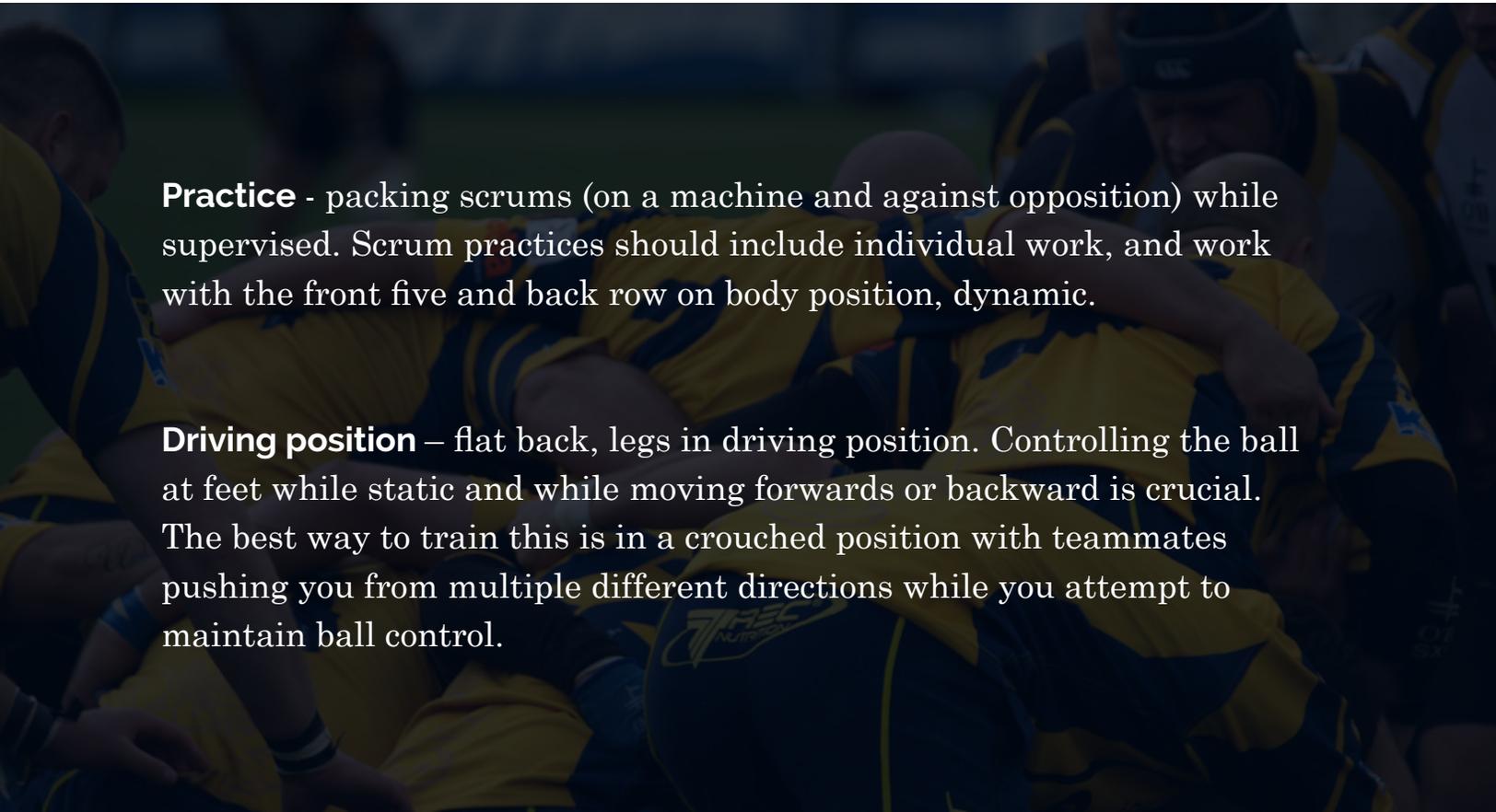
The best Number 8s will be talented communicators as well as solid athletes. At the set piece, they're often responsible for calling plays and reading the opposition. They are the organizer of the team at the set piece, communicating between the forwards and the backs to ensure everyone is on the same page.

Much like the Blind-Side Flanker, the Number 8 can perform any function needed of them during a game, from jumping in lineouts to fielding restarts and running lines with the backs. Playing Number 8 gives you a great taste of every aspect of rugby, with slightly more responsibility than Blind-Side Flanker and slightly less first-phase focus than Open-Side Flanker. As loose forwards become more experienced, they will tend to move towards the Number 8 position.

SCRUMS

At scrum time, the Number 8 is responsible for binding the Locks together at the back of the scrum. The force they exert is passed directly through the Locks and into the Props. The Number 8 will often control the timing of the push at scrum time. On attack, they're responsible for controlling the ball before the scrumhalf clears it, this allows them to coordinate the push from the back. Control of the ball in the scrum is much easier than it looks.

The Number 8 will need to develop several different methods for getting the ball out of the scrum, including popping to the scrumhalf, running and opening up to allow the scrumhalf access. Since no two scrums are the same, this task needs to be trained extensively.



Practice - packing scrums (on a machine and against opposition) while supervised. Scrum practices should include individual work, and work with the front five and back row on body position, dynamic.

Driving position – flat back, legs in driving position. Controlling the ball at feet while static and while moving forwards or backward is crucial. The best way to train this is in a crouched position with teammates pushing you from multiple different directions while you attempt to maintain ball control.

LINEOUT

Traditionally, the Number 8 has been used as a lineout jumper due to their size. Having both a Blind-Side Flanker and a Number 8 who can jump and lift provides for an enormous amount of variation in the lineout. On short lineouts especially, the speed of the Number 8 can be particularly useful. They're able to get to the mark quickly and shift within the lineout to create space and hopefully win an uncontested ball.

Practice - Aside from standard lineout training with the team, the Number 8 should focus on correct supporting technique when lifting. It's also useful for them to understand blocking and binding techniques to protect the ball and jumper. If they're practicing alone, 10m sprint-to-squat-jumps can be helpful in training explosive power across the ground.

DEFENSE

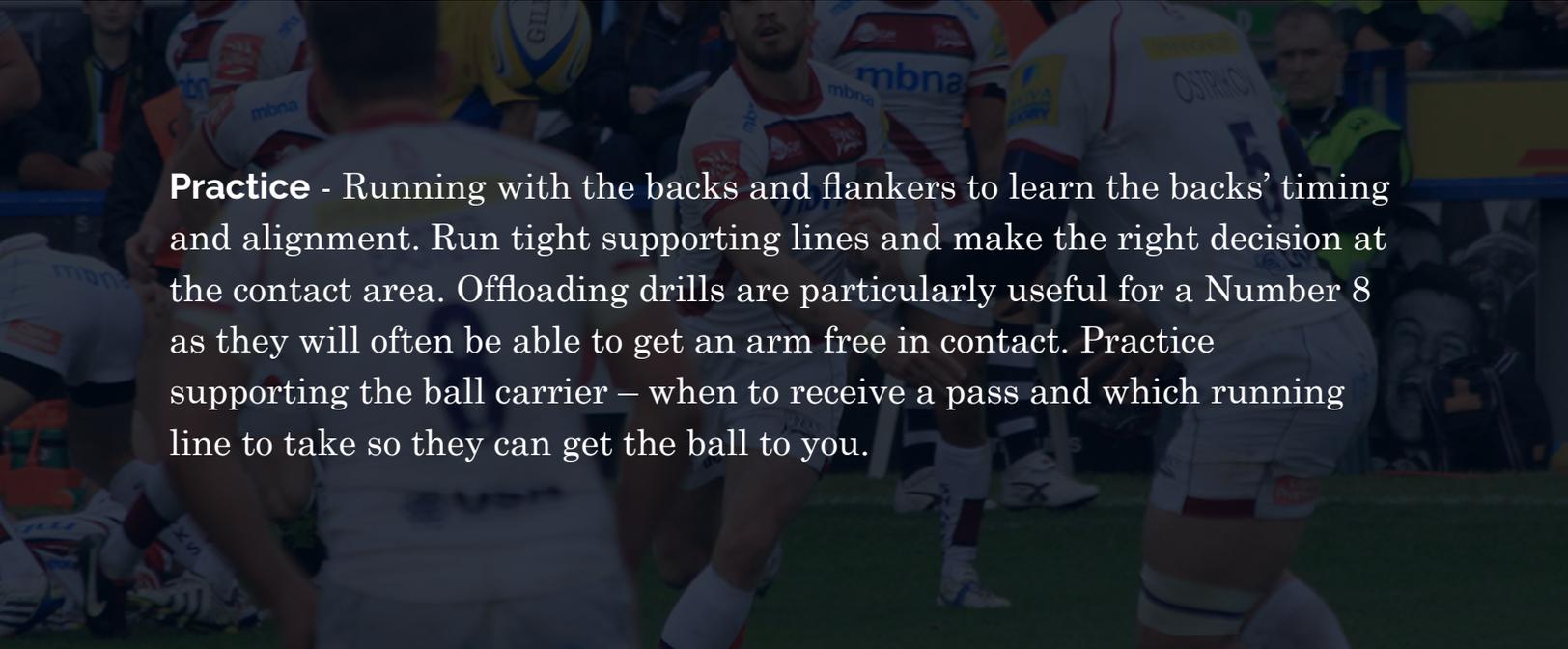
The Number 8 should work with the flankers to provide a link between the backs and forwards in the defensive line. They're seldom required to be immediately next to the breakdown, instead, they should be looking to match up against the fly-half or a forward in the first-receiver position. Their speed off the mark and agility allow them to close quickly over distances of 10-15m which makes them effective against inside backs, other loose forwards and the blind-side winger.

At the breakdown, the Number 8 will be one of only a handful of players who are allowed to contest the ball with their hands prior to a ruck is formed. This is a direct result of the Number 8's level of experience and ability to read the game. Few other players will make as many tackles or be as involved in the defensive structure of the team as the Number 8.

ATTACK

The Number 8 is an attacking weapon, used by most teams for their ability to get across the gain line, break tackles, provide offloads and produce quick ruck ball. While the #7 often spends their day going side to side supporting rucks, the Number 8 is getting set for another hit-up. They often choose to play the open side of the field. That is, after a scrum on the left-hand side of the field, they will gradually move to the right-hand side and occupy that third of the field while the #7 shifts to the center and the Blind-Side holds the... well... blind side.

The #8 provides options at the base of the scrum, executes moves, and is a decision maker with a strong tactical involvement. He is a very effective lineout player both as a jumper and a lifter. He has a strong speed, good running lines and ball skill when running off the scrum. With the evolution of modern game, the tendency is now for #7 to be able to cover as #8 position, #8 to play blind side (as they are similar in size and bulk), and blind side to cover possibly for a lock position.



Practice - Running with the backs and flankers to learn the backs' timing and alignment. Run tight supporting lines and make the right decision at the contact area. Offloading drills are particularly useful for a Number 8 as they will often be able to get an arm free in contact. Practice supporting the ball carrier – when to receive a pass and which running line to take so they can get the ball to you.

CONDITIONING

In preparation for playing rugby, Number 8s must develop:

Core and specific strength, power, speed, agility, power endurance, emphasis on legs and arms

Starting power, acceleration/deceleration power

Coordination and sound ball skills

Work involves: Sprint, jumping, running in support at high speed, pushing, gripping, wrestling the ball and tackling

Ergogenesis: Anaerobic lactic-alactic: 70-30

Limiting factors: Power-endurance, acceleration/deceleration power, reacting power



POSITION-REQUIREMENTS

SCRUMHALF

PLAYING SCRUMHALF

SET PIECE

SKILLS

Passing

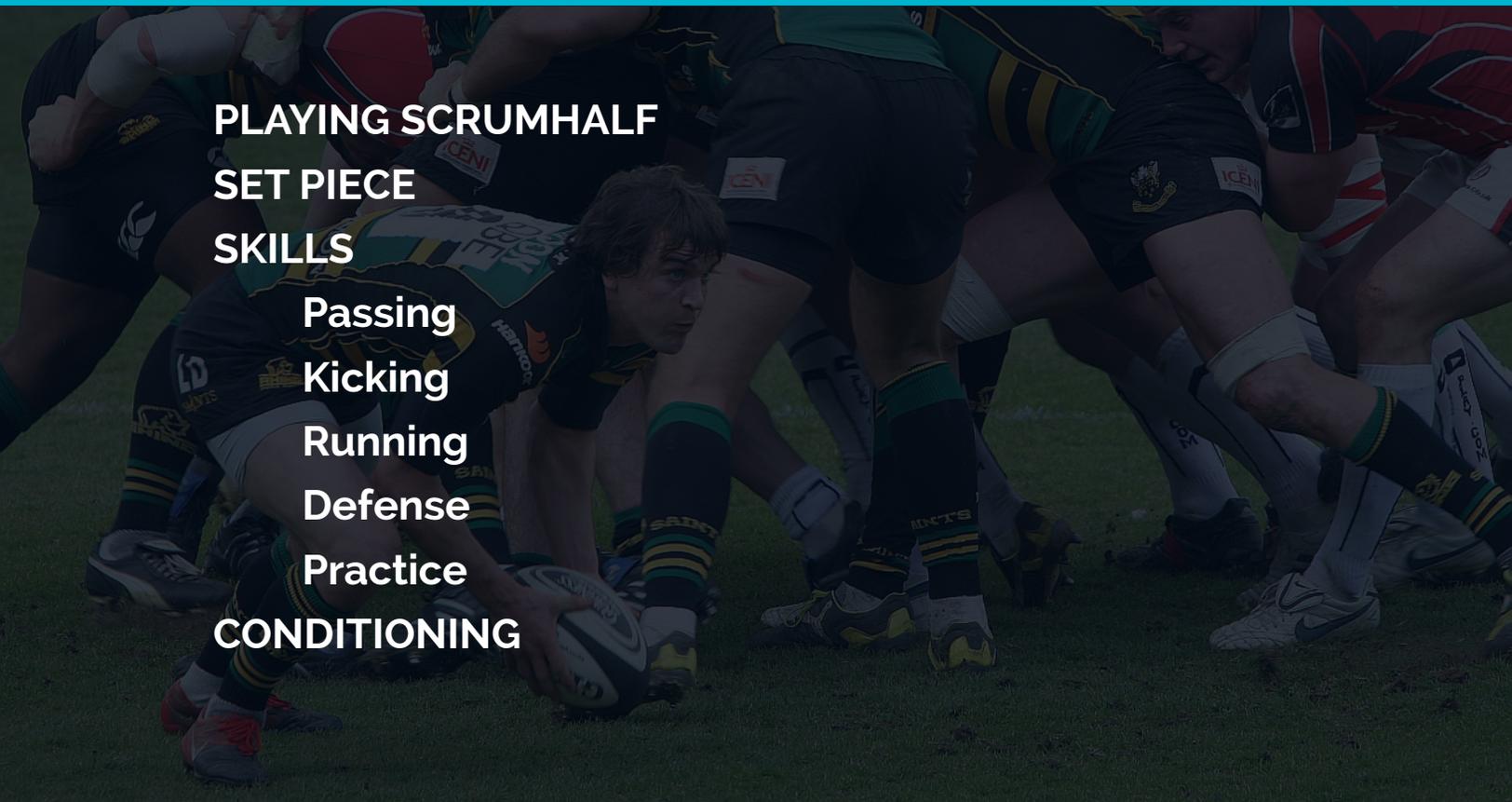
Kicking

Running

Defense

Practice

CONDITIONING



PLAYING SCRUMHALF

The scrumhalf is a key strategic piece on the rugby field. They are responsible for linking the backs and forwards together, ensuring that both groups communicate and execute according to the team's plan. If the flyhalf is calling out broad strategic goals, it's the scrumhalf who decides how to get these done. The scrumhalf should be the team's most accurate passer of the ball, an excellent cover tackler, quick off the mark, an evasive runner and a motivated tactician.

The scrumhalf, irrespective of their age and level of experience needs to take control of the game through communication. They are the only player on the field who is both up-close and personal with forward play and yet has enough space to see how this fits into the overall strategic picture. Virtually every possession will go through the Scrumhalf's hands. It's critical that they make the correct decision with the ball (and that they do this quickly, even before they are in possession).

In modern rugby, some teams have chosen to use the scrumhalf as an additional loose forward on defense, making tackles in close and on the blind side. But the best side in the world prefers to use the scrumhalf as a second layer of defense between the advantage line and the fullbacks and wingers when they're playing back.

On the physical side, the Scrumhalf needs to be the fittest player on the field aerobically. They're not going to be involved in as much physical contact as the loose forwards, but they need to cover a LOT of ground around the field. A lagging Scrumhalf on the attack can mean slow breakdown ball and a chance for the opposition to get set.

SET PIECE

The Scrumhalf is responsible for delivering clean first-phase possession from the forwards to the backs. This means working with the forwards to decide what lineout or scrums calls have the highest chance of securing possession. It also requires the scrumhalf to know exactly what the backline will do with said possession so they can communicate this into the pack.

At the defensive set piece, the Scrumhalf's role is to fill the gap between forwards and backs. This is the weakest point on the field for the attack to exploit given that it is less cohesive and structured. The Scrumhalf should work with the flankers and flyhalf at the defensive set piece to ensure there are no gaps appear in the line.



SCRUMHALF SKILLS

Passing - The Scrumhalf must be able to pass the ball quickly, without delay, off either left or right hand accurately, to the receiver anywhere up to 30m away.

Kicking - Ideally, the scrum half should be able to kick with either foot and should be able to effect high 'box' kicks over scrums, lineout, rucks, or mauls. To execute box kicks successfully, they should position the forwards to as a barrier on the open side of the breakdown.

Running - A Scrumhalf with explosive acceleration can be a real threat on the field. This is especially true late in the game with tiring defenders. 'Snipes' from quick breakdown possession can be highly effective.

Defense - The Scrumhalf is a defensive organizer. Their position behind the defensive line allows them to see enough of the field to then move individual forwards into the correct position.

Practice - should be performed with varying levels of pressure to the left and right

- The standing pass
- The pivot pass
- The drive pass
- The reverse pass

Practice should also include passing the ball when receiving it from a lineout, scrum, ruck, or maul, high hanging kicks off his right and left feet to land in a marked area for accuracy.

CONDITIONING

In preparation for playing rugby, the Scrumhalf must develop:

Core and specific strength, power, agility, quick reaction time, high mobility and flexibility of upper and lower body, specifically trunk and hips

Starting power, acceleration/deceleration, change of directions

Coordination, peripheral vision

Work involves: Sprinting, running at high speed in support or cover, tackling, wrestling the ball, high speed passing off the ground, kicking

Ergogenesis: Anaerobic lactic-alactic: 70-30

Limiting factors: Power endurance, acceleration/deceleration power, flexibility, reacting power



POSITION-REQUIREMENTS

FLYHALF

PLAYING FLYHALF

ATTACK

DEFENSE

KICKING

PRACTICE

CONDITIONING



PLAYING FLYHALF

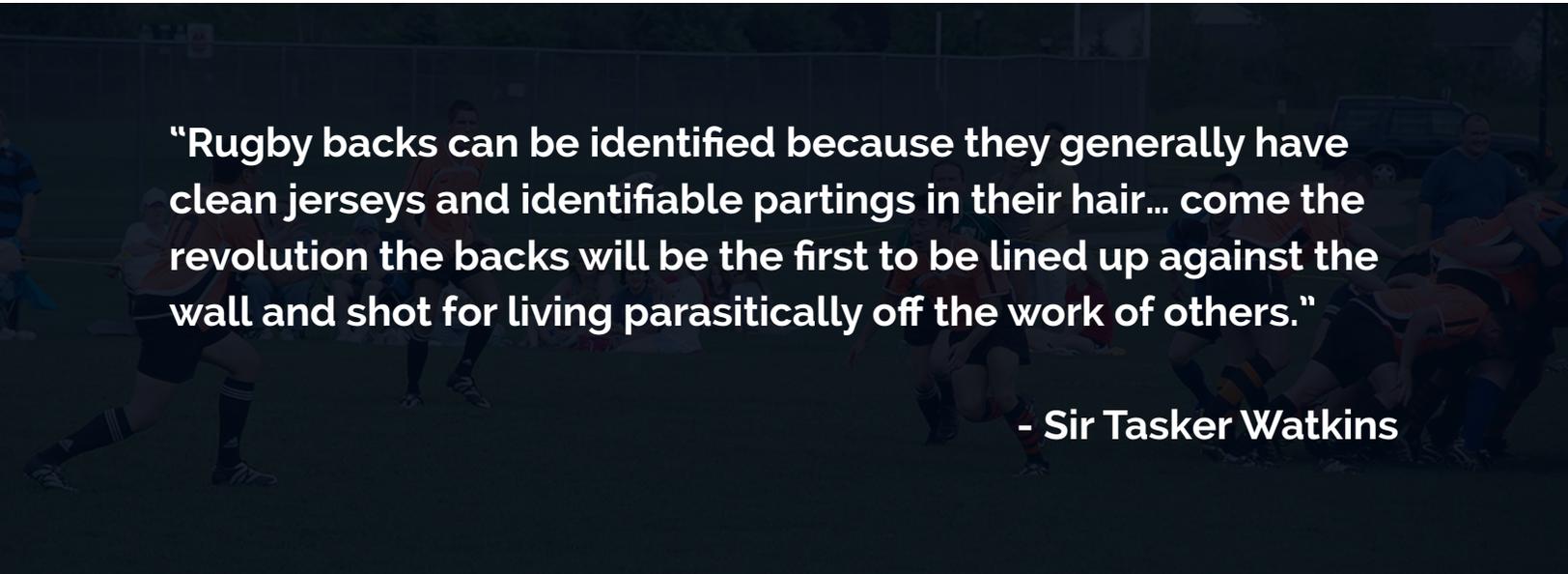
The number 10 is the pivotal position in the team. If you come to rugby from an American Football background, think of the flyhalf as both the Quarterback on attack and the Middle Linebacker on defense. They are the key decision-maker on the rugby field. In possession, they decide whether to pass, kick or run depending on the strategic position of the team. On defense, they control the speed of the line and count numbers constantly to match the attack.

The Flyhalf is the kind of player who wants to be in control of the game. They can win matches for their team using either temperament of a leader or the skills of a superstar. Their major function is to read the game and make strategic decisions for the players around them. The Flyhalf constantly takes and centralizes information to adjust the team's game appropriately to the opposition.

The Flyhalf is exceptionally skilled with the ball. They should aim for fast and accurate delivery from either hand under pressure from the defense. According to IRB 2003 statistics for international games cited by Luger & Pook, 2004, the Flyhalf had the highest "high speed running" ratio of all evaluated players, made 15 tackles and hit 22 rucks and mauls per game played.

ATTACK

The Flyhalf sets the depth of the attacking line. How far they're able to stand away from the breakdown will depend on the skill of the Scrumhalf. How far they're able to stand away from the defensive line will depend on their own skill. The closer the Flyhalf can play to the defensive line, the more skilled they are. Playing close to the defensive line is desirable as it forces the defense to hold still rather than moving forward in unison.



“Rugby backs can be identified because they generally have clean jerseys and identifiable partings in their hair... come the revolution the backs will be the first to be lined up against the wall and shot for living parasitically off the work of others.”

- Sir Tasker Watkins

DEFENSE

The defensive line gets their speed and spacing from the flyhalf. Too narrow or wide and the attack will have gaps to exploit. Too slow and the defenders will be caught flat footed in contact. The Flyhalf doesn't usually have to make a lot of tackles. But the team's defensive structure at the breakdown means that through the Flyhalf is almost always the most direct route to the tryline. Therefore, their tackles are highly important.

KICKING

The Flyhalf should have the confidence and skill to kick comfortably off either foot in multiple different ways. The modern game has seen the advent of skills coaches whose only role is to work with playmakers like the flyhalf to give them a range of kicking options. These include chips, grubbers, drop goals and bombs. Having this “bag of tricks” forces the defense to respect these attacking options and can create space for the attack to maneuver.

PRACTICE

A key limiting factor for the Flyhalf is the ability to catch and pass the ball without using the body. That is, to receive and deliver a pass using only the hands. It sounds easier than it is. In the time required to catch the ball with the chest, reset with the hands and then deliver a pass, the defensive line can cut out many of the options that would have been available had the Flyhalf caught with their hands and delivered in one motion.

- Practice receiving the ball from his Scrumhalf from both sides and at varying lengths of pass
- Practice receiving a ball and making a break using explosive acceleration
- Practice evasive running skills to avoid contact and beat defenses
- All kicks should be practiced with either foot under varying pressure – using a series of targets
- Practice kicking towards touch but keeping the ball in play to force the opposition to concede a lineout

CONDITIONING

In preparation for playing rugby, the Flyhalf must develop:

Good core and specific strength, power, starting power, acceleration and deceleration, quick changes of direction, powerful and precise kicking preferably with both feet, good quick passing from both hands

Coordination, peripheral vision

Work involves: Sprinting, high speed running in support or cover, kicking (both tactical and goal kicking), tackling, wrestling the ball

Ergogenesis: Anaerobic alactic-lactic: 60-40

Limiting factors: Power endurance, reactive power, acceleration/ deceleration power



POSITION-REQUIREMENTS

CENTER

PLAYING CENTER

SET PIECE

Attack

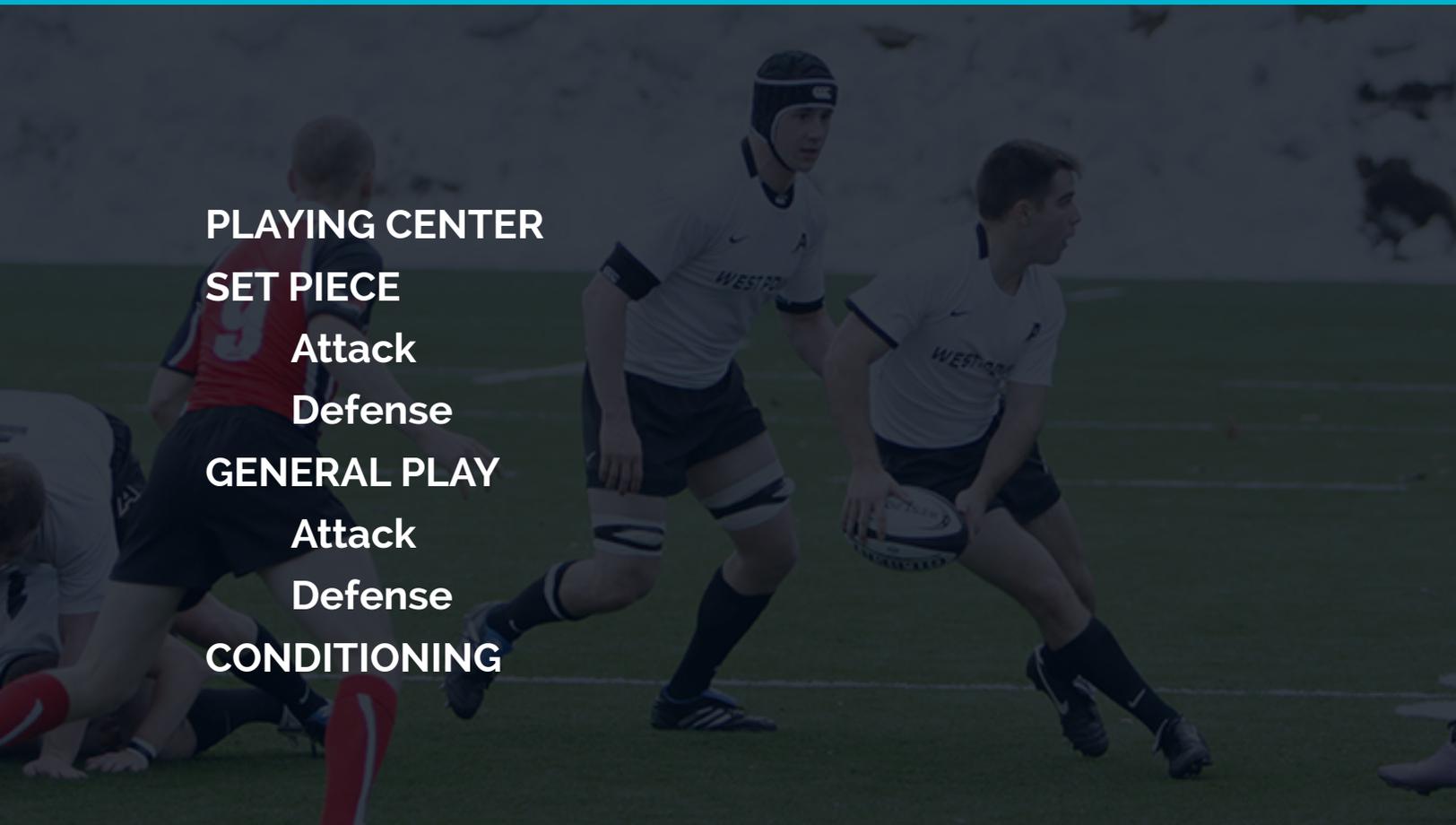
Defense

GENERAL PLAY

Attack

Defense

CONDITIONING



PLAYING CENTER

A Center's role is to carry the attack forward and provide an impenetrable defense in the midfield. Both the inside #12 and outside #13 center should be attacking threats, able to break tackles and run through gaps while catching and passing at pace to set up the outside backs. It's these two who provide the real go-forward for the team. If they're able to get across the advantage line on the first phase, the team is immediately on the front-foot and the loose forwards will be able to exploit this advantage on the second and third phases.

As defenders, they need to prevent the opposition from doing the same thing. This means coming forward quickly in the face of the attackers, making 1on1 tackles against equally big, fast ball carriers and then being able to re-align quickly for the next phase. Because most rugby teams defend with fewer players in the line than the attacking team, this requires the 12 and 13 to slide from covering one attacker to covering another. This is far from easy. In fact, it's this responsibility for covering multiple attackers that make defending at 13 the toughest job on the field.

Both Centers need to have excellent contact skills. They are often the first tacklers in defense. They should be able to retain the ball in contact and support the new ball carrier after a pass. While they won't compete for the ball as often as the loose forwards, they are often able to slow down the attack's breakdown using their strength in contact.

SET PIECE

Attack - since few teams aim to score from 1st phase possession, the center's role from is to get the team across the advantage line. This is done by running a line that puts a defender off-balance and gives the center a favorable chance of crossing the gain line. As a decoy, running a similar line will draw defenders, giving the Flyhalf or Fullback the option to run or pass to a player in space.

Defense - the shortest distance to the try line is a direct one. The role of the Flyhalf and Centers is to force the attacking team to go around them. This means coming forward gap-free cohesive unit, thereby forcing the attack to go wide to gain ground. While the first steps are always forward, forcing the attack wide may mean shifting and sliding on defense and in some cases even moving backward to keep the defensive line intact.

GENERAL PLAY

Attack - centers need to be highly-alert attacking players. Standing wider, away from the breakdown gives them vision of the field and ability to spot opportunities. They should be on the lookout for gaps, mismatches and overlaps. As opportunities appear, they organize the correct attacking option to exploit it. E.g if a Winger is up, they may tell the halfback to box kick. If a Prop is standing in the backline, they may encourage the Flyhalf to attack the line at that point to isolate the Prop.

Defense - on defense, the centers should look to cover their opposite numbers where possible. This can be difficult on second, third and fourth phase possession as players get caught in the breakdown and pop up at different places in the attacking line. It's the responsibility of the centers never to let their opposite numbers have a gap or mismatch to exploit.

CONDITIONING

In preparation for playing rugby, the Centers must develop:

Core and specific strength, power, starting power, running speed and speed endurance

Acceleration/deceleration power, quick changes of direction, ball skills, kicking Coordination and peripheral vision

Work involves: Sprint, high speed support running, tackling, kicking, wrestling the ball Ergogenesis:

Anaerobic alactic-lactic: 70-30

Limiting factors: Power and speed endurance, reactive power, acceleration/deceleration power



POSITION-REQUIREMENTS

WING

PLAYING WING
ATTACK

Practice

DEFENSE

Practice

KICKING + RECEIVING

Practice

CONDITIONING

Photo by David Molloy

PLAYING WING

The Winger in modern rugby is most adept in open space. They're fast, powerful strike weapons who finish the hard work of the other members of the team. The best Wingers have a high work rate and go looking for the ball if it is not coming to their side of the field. They should be able to read the game and anticipate what happens next. It's the team's responsibility to get the ball to the wingers in open space and let them do their thing.

A Winger will cover a huge amount of ground during a game of rugby. Depending on the opposition's shape in defense and the player with the ball, the Winger may need to play up in the defensive line or back to field a kick. This change can happen instantaneously. So just staying in position requires Wingers to be moving a high-speed most of the game.

ATTACK

The Winger should have excellent handling skills, be able to beat opponents using speed, evasion, and a fend. They can keep the ball alive by either taking a tackle and passing to a supporting player, or staying on their feet and initiating a counter attack. A Winger needs to recognize when they're not going to score and make the correct decision that guarantees their team stays in possession. This is a difficult skill to learn but one that 7s rugby can be very effective at teaching.

Practice - Catching and running with the ball at full speed! Evading the opposition using pace, change of direction, sidestep and swerve. Passing to support the next ball carrier. Chipping and chasing. Making the ball available in a tackle using correct body position on the ground.

DEFENSE

Wingers have a really tough job on defense. Because the Fullback almost always stays back to receive a kick and the blind winger stays on their side of the field for the same reason, the Open-Side Winger is part of a 4-man defensive line covering 6 attackers. What do to? That's the question that the Winger needs to constantly be asking, should I be back for a kick? Should I be up if they run the ball? It's a question that doesn't have any one answer, and the answer can change at any moment.

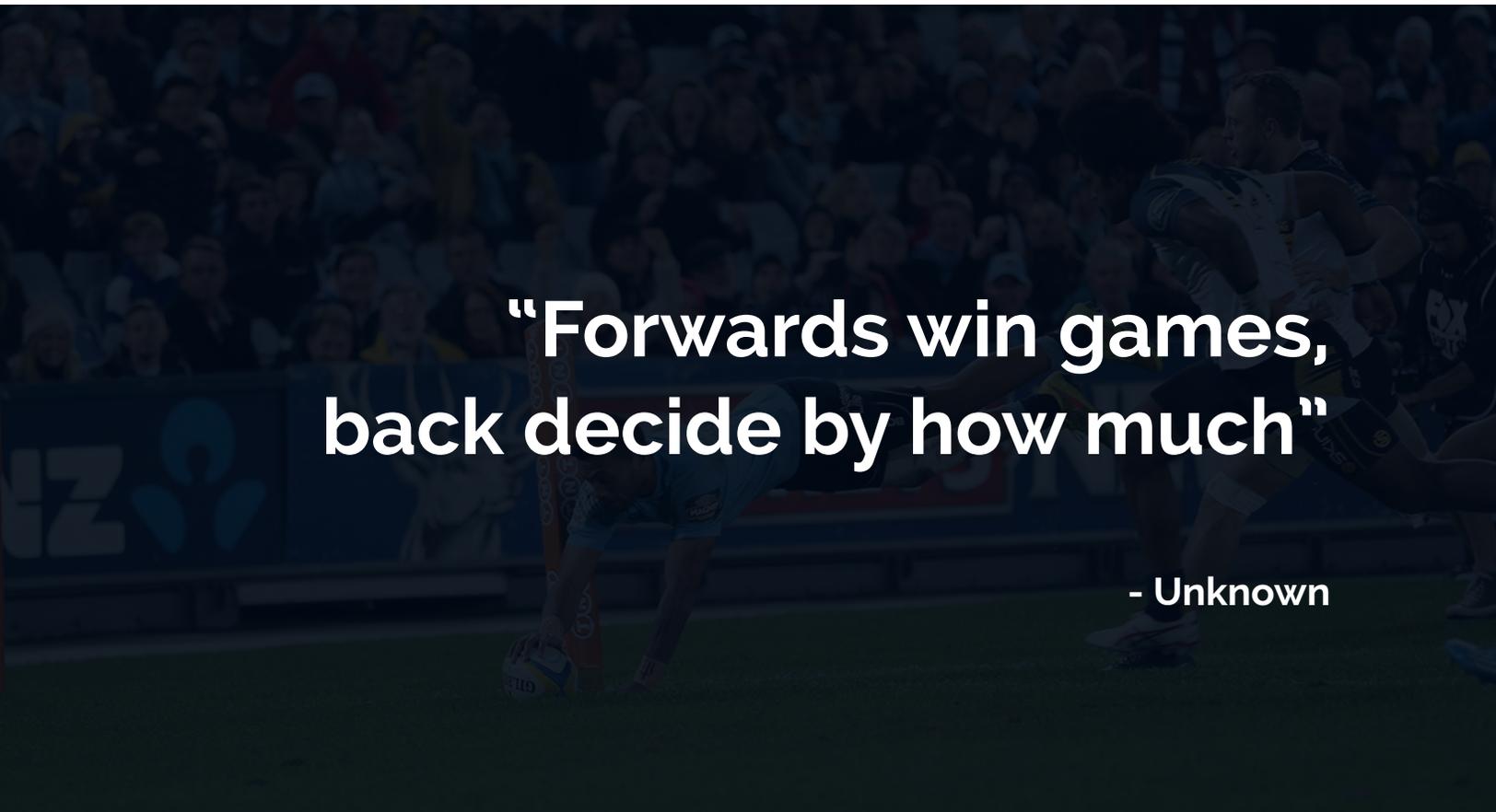
Depending on the defensive structure your team uses, the Open-Side Winger might be given instructions to "bite" in on the attack's Fullback, OR they could be asked to stay back. In the second case, the team is vulnerable to fast, ball movement through the hands to the attack's Winger. Either way, once the Winger realizes they're out of position, they need to adjust as fast as possible to prevent disaster. And therein lies the skill.

Practice - the general rule is that the further away from your own try-line you are, the further back the Winger can play. But as the attacking team gets into the red zone (see coaching rugby using a zone system for more on this) the winger must come up and into the defensive line in order to protect the most direct scoring lane. You can practice this during team runs as well as with the Fullback and Scrumhalf by utilizing a "shift" across the field depending on the position of the ball.

KICKING + RECEIVING

Numbers 14 and 11 should be able to field a variety of diagonal, high, or grubber kicks. To deal with opposition kicks by kicking clear to touch, by kicking long into opposition territory or by initiating a counter attack with the Fullback and/or other Wing/Centers.

Practice - against opposition under varying pressure, taking a pass and then dropping the ball onto your foot quickly. Practice, under varying pressure, both moving towards and away from your own line, fielding high balls into a box. Catch with your hands and with your chest in different drills to compete for different kinds of kicks.



“Forwards win games,
back decide by how much”

- Unknown

CONDITIONING

In preparation for playing rugby, the Wingers must develop:

Core and specific strength, power, speed and power endurance
Acceleration/deceleration, quick changes of direction, kicking

Coordination, peripheral vision

Work involves: Sprinting, high speed running in support, tackling, wrestling the ball, and kicking

Ergogenesis: Anaerobic alactic-lactic: 70-30

Limiting factors: Speed and power endurance, reactive power, acceleration/deceleration power



Photo by David Molloy

POSITION-REQUIREMENTS

FULLBACK

PLAYING FULLBACK

ATTACK

DEFENSE

KICKING

SKILLS & PRACTICE

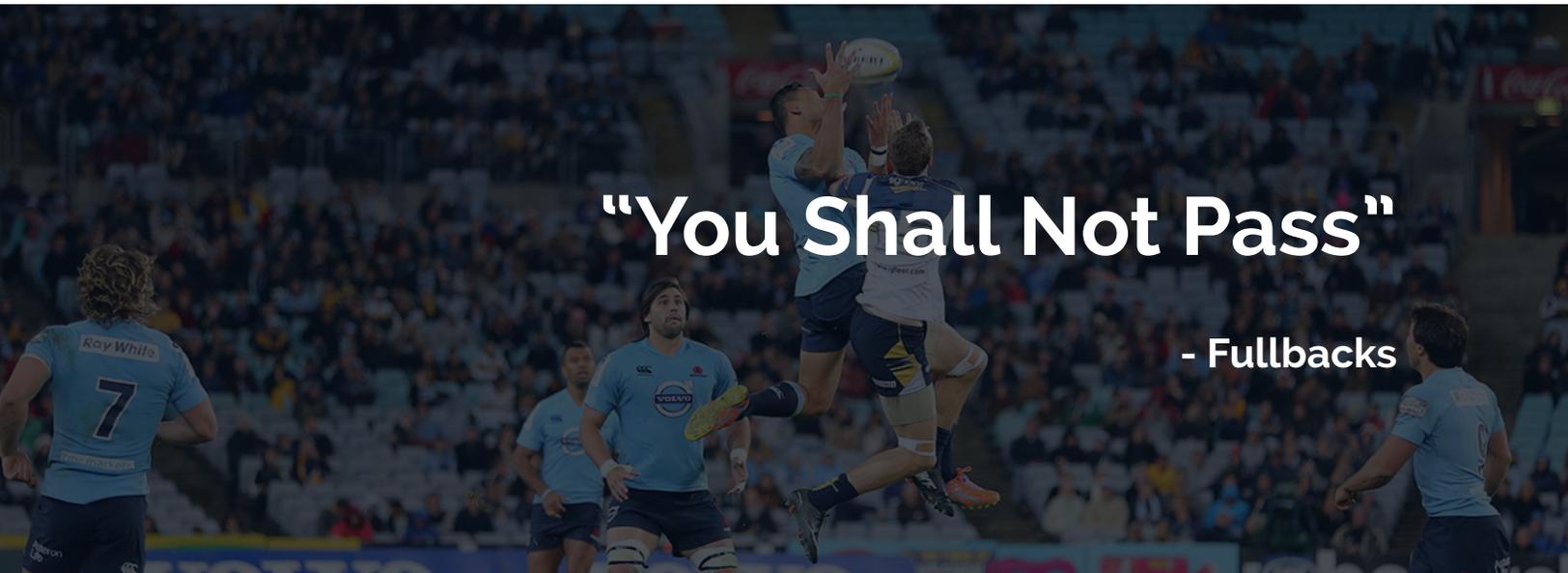
CONDITIONING



PLAYING FULLBACK

Just like the Wingers, the Fullback on a rugby team is a finisher and a space creator. In modern rugby, the Wingers and Fullback specifically 14 and 15 are often interchangeable, with the best Fullbacks being able to play at outside center as well. The Fullback has a unique ability in the air since they're typically in a position to come forward at the ball when the opposition puts up a high kick. The Fullback often has greater opportunity, time and space to read the game as it unfolds than the Flyhalf. The ability to read the game and to anticipate what happens next is a key quality in a Fullback.

To play Fullback, you need to have exceptional top-end speed, acceleration, and agility. This is one position on the field where physical deficits can be on display. That means, if you're not super-fast, you'll need to really work on your turn of pace and ability to run with, catch and pass the ball at top-speed. Some of the best Fullbacks have all the same ball skills as a Flyhalf but perhaps lack the temperament to be directing other players around the field. Instead, they move to Fullback where they can play a more ad-hoc style, inserting themselves where opportunities appear.



“You Shall Not Pass”

- Fullbacks

ATTACK

The main duties of the Fullback are to come as an extra man in the backline, penetrate and create space and options for the outside players. From the set piece, this will usually be on the open-side to create an overlap. However, in general play, the Fullback is often given free reign to promote and exploit space on the blind side by communicating the opportunity to the Scrumhalf and Flyhalf. When play is tight, and few opportunities appear out wide, the Fullback can take on an inside supporting role, running tight lines off the inside shoulder of the ball carrier in the hopes of getting an offload.

DEFENSE

The Fullback is by definition the last line of defense. In this role, they become the organizer of the backline on defense by communicating with the Wingers, Centers, and Scrumhalf. Their position on the field gives them a unique perspective on the game and the strategic position of the team. From this vantage point, the Fullback shifts players around on the defensive line and provides “intel” for the other organizers who are on the defensive line.

When the Fullback is called on to make tackles, there is nowhere to hide, they have to be made. This is a tough ask because they’re not usually very easy tackles. Learn to like the spotlight. The only respite you might get is when the opposition puts up a high-ball. In this instance, the Fullback is usually the player in the best position to come forward and make a play at the ball in the air.

KICKING

The Fullback often has to execute a range of kicks, some to relieve pressure, some to counter attack. In general, though, kicking for touch off either foot either standing still or while moving forward is essential. If you can't do this off both feet, think about switching to the Wing or getting out there and practicing.

SKILLS & PRACTICE

Here are just some of the drills and skills you'll need to work on to be a quality (or even a reasonable) Fullback:

- Practice under varying pressure, both moving towards and away from their own line
- Fielding high balls into the box
- High balls under the post
- Diagonal rolling balls to the wing
- Grubber kicks through the center
- Chip kicks
- Screw kicks
- Bouncing the ball into touch when outside the 22-metre line
- Running in counter attack, evading the tackle
- Kicking into effective areas (e.g. 'up and under', diagonal rolling ball to the wing, including kicks that stay on the field and put pressure on opponents.
- Practice, with a partner, kicking towards a target/target area.

CONDITIONING

In preparation for playing rugby, the Fullbacks must develop:

Core and specific strength, power, speed and power-endurance

Acceleration, deceleration, and reactive power

Timing in runs, passing, kicking, coordination

Vertical jump and twist

Sprinting, high speed running for support, kicking, tackling, wrestling the ball, high jumps to compete for the ball in the air

Ergogenesis: Anaerobic alactic-lactic: 70-30

Limiting factors: Speed and power endurance, acceleration/
deceleration power



Photo by David Molloy



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