

TIGHT FIVE SCRUMMAGING IT'S ALL ABOUT BODY SHAPE.

INTRODUCTION

In recent times, the role of the 'specialist positional player' has altered. We now see wingers who are the same size as yester-years front rowers, we now see scrum halves who are 180 centimetres tall, and we see flankers who are less than 180cms tall. Roles and player sizes have gone through a significant transition over recent years. The role of the scrum in all levels of rugby has also gone through a number of significant transitions and changes. No longer can the local rugby coach be selecting his front row based on who is the biggest and strongest. Front rowers are now expected to run as fast as a flanker, have the ball handling skills of a Number 10 and in some recent examples, have the ability to cover open space and make effective tackles. There is then an expectation that the same player will scrummage effectively, lift and support line-out jumpers, and participate in the ongoing ruck and maul encounters.

During a recent Super 12 competition, one study showed that on average, there were approximately 18 stoppages per game requiring the formation of a scrum. From that, almost 30 scrums were packed, the anomaly in the statistics being caused by the number of scrum re-packs. Front rowers attack each formation of a scrum with a sense that there will be a successful uniting of the two packs and as such, the level of effort applied to the engagement is whole-hearted and aggressive.

All this use of energy can only result in the rapid onset of ongoing and significant fatigue in not only the front row but in all of the tight five. Once the natural ability of these players is reduced by the fatigue factor, opposition teams can exploit defensive weaknesses and threaten their opponent's goal line. A critical factor in maintaining a team's ability to win games can be directly related to the coach's ability to reduce the ongoing levels of fatigue in the team's tight five.

This discussion paper will address the role of the tight five and identify how good body shape and correct scrummaging structure can significantly reduce the fatigue caused to players by scrummaging.

So what is good body shape and why is it important?

BODY SHAPE

The term 'Body shape' relates to a number of physical, technical and psychological techniques that put the player in a position that allows them to fully participate in their role as a scrummager whilst effectively conserving their energy. Effective body shape is about knowing the basic positioning of the shoulders, hips, knees and feet prior to and during the scrum engagement.

IMPLEMENTING BODY SHAPE

It is important for the development of rugby that coaches and players have a benchmark or set of standards to strive to achieve effective scrummaging through body shape. To simplify the process of identifying standards, I have chosen to break body shape down into stages that can be used dependant on the age, experience and ability of the player being coached. As players achieve the standards set for a particular level, their proficiency in scrummaging should increase. As that proficiency increases, the impact on the scrum as a unit will increase proportionately. A better, tighter, more efficient scrum equates to less required exertion of energy from the player.

Less energy used during scrummaging will increase the durability and efficiency of the player which in turn increases the overall performance of the player for the duration of the game.

Level 1

Level 1 is the origin of the process and addresses the basics of building the scrum from scratch. Coaches need to be aware that before a player progresses to the next level, the player must be not only aware of the requirements of the level but also capable of implementing the requirements effectively. The basic requirements for every member of the scrum are as follows:-

- Feet Shoulder width apart, toes pointing directly forward
- Knees bent directly beneath the hips
- Straight Back, parallel to the ground
- Chin up off the chest and focused ahead.

The basic requirements for individual positions are as follows:-

Hooker

To take effective Body Shape the hooker must at every scrum achieve these competencies;

- Must be a half step backward of the mark prior to binding
- Hips square to the mark
- Upper body bent forward and arms out parallel to ground to allow approach of props
- Bind FIRST with loosehead prop, then tighthead
- Bind to high on shoulder of props
- Use a bicep curl to get the tightness of the scrum.
- Hooker to take control of formation of own scrum

Props

- Must approach from behind the hooker
- Plant their inside foot near the hooker for stability,
- Square up and not disturb the hooker's hip position
- Use a bicep curl to bind as this will reduce any twisting of the hooker
- All hips are square
- Loosehead feet square on
- Must be able to use a short or long bind
- Must be able to offset on engagement
- Must get their weight forward and not lean back on the second row
- Must be able to change body angle to benefit the scrum.
- Must be able to use foot position to transfer scrum weight in various direction
- Use shoulder position to de-power and dominate opponent's scrum
- Use abdominals to transfer weight
- Approach each scrum engagement with controlled aggression
- Tighthead prop to keep outside shoulder down during engagement (not swimming)
- Loosehead prop to pop inside shoulder from behind own hooker and adopt square on stance to opposition scrum

Second rowers

- Must approach from behind the front rowers.
- Must bind to the front row correctly using bicep curl
- Must use a bicep curl to bind to the front rowers so as not to effect the body shape of the front rower
- Tighthead second rower's arm to bind under the loosehead second rower's arm
- Shoulders square and under the front rower's buttocks
- Must be able to adjust if required
- Must bind to the other second rower using the bicep curl.
- Hips must be in line with each other and the same height after the engagement.
- Outside foot must be up and under the front rower
- Must be on toes with feet pointing forward
- Ensure no knee contact with ground prior to engagement

- No forward weight transfer onto front rowers prior to engagement
- Use core body strength to maintain body shape on contact
- Weight firmly on two feet before body drive
- Straight weight transfer – not up or down

Backrowers

- Must approach from behind
- Must grip the second rowers using bicep curl
- Must get their shoulder under the front rowers buttocks
- Must be square and weight going forward
- Must have inside foot up to direct power through inside shoulder before engagement and during contesting of the scrum
- Must have their feet back and transferring weight forward

This level is the basics of effective scrummaging and the techniques must be completed correctly before the scrum can become effective. Further player improvements can be achieved by refining and developing further technical ability as per the following levels;

Level 2

- Player capable of completing level competently with ease.
- Engage opposition in controlled aggressive manner at every scrum formation
- Maintain preset body shape on engagement of scrum
- Transfer weight forward on engagement (chase the weight)
- Balanced and controlled foot movement to maintain constant forward weight transfer
- Ability to change scrum direction using controlled foot movement (i.e. Weight transfer to/from inside foot)
- Control hip movement into half squat position, using legs to accelerate the forward scrum movement.
- Keep weight low, square and controlled prior to feeding of ball into scrum
- On feeding of ball, all weight transfer to be forward and coordinated
- Once scrum is moving forward, keep the body shape and utilise small stepping motion to keep forward pressure
- Grips must be firm using a bicep curl.
- Front row must be able to change their angle in the scrum AFTER initial forward movement

Before commencing Level 3, players must be proficient in Levels 1 and 2.

Level 3

- Must be able to wheel the scrum e.g. wheel the scrum to the side line and give our back row the advantage of getting to the ball quicker.
- Keep the scrum square to cut down the oppositions options
- Offset in the scrum
- Change direction of the weight transfer to put the opposition scrum under more pressure
- Perform a second shove.
- Perform a delayed shove

Before commencing Level 4, players must be proficient in Levels 1, 2 and 3.

Level 4

- Constantly put the opposition under pressure in the scrum.
- Complete a 'half wheel' with a delayed shove to stop opposition back row performing a back row move.
- To 'shear' across the opposition front row and scrum.
- Must be able to use a delayed shove when inside feet are up.

Level 5

- Be able to use timing rather than strength to push the opposition around
- Able to push the opposition off the ball
- Able to wheel the scrum in any direction
- Able to attack the opposition ball, keeping their backrow committed to the scrum
- No 8 can stand behind the scrum and receive a quick ball.
- Use engagement of the scrum to move scrum but not to be re packed
- Delayed 'shearing'
- Perform the 'shear' in both directions - loose head and tight head

CONCLUSION

Rugby as a game is becoming faster, more dynamic and more demanding upon rugby players. Players are enhancing their game durability by controlling their dietary intake, by utilising stamina enhancing supplements, and by adhering to on-field rest and recovery techniques.

The scrum is perhaps one of the most physically demanding and energy sapping phases of the game of rugby union. Effective Body Shape can and will reduce the drain on player energy and increase the longevity of player stamina if correctly coached and utilised. Whilst Body Shape may be considered by some as playing a small role in the overall game, a fresher, faster and less fatigued forward pack will directly equate to an increase in a quality tight five involvement in the game.