

LEVEL III REFEREE MAJOR PROJECT - 2002

Systematic Observation of Elite Rugby Referees'

"BEST PRACTICE COMMUNICATION AT THE TACKLE / RUCK"

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GAME OBSERVATIONS

Stuart Dickinson

- Hurricanes v Stormers
- Bulls v Highlanders
- Crusaders v Stormers
- Blues v Bulls
- Blues v Stormers

Scott Young

- Stormers v Highlanders
- Sharks v Blues
- Cats v Blues
- Chiefs v Bulls

Wayne Erickson

- Bulls v Cats
- Hurricanes v Sharks
- Hurricanes v Cats
- Crusaders v Bulls
- Chiefs v Stormers

Peter Marshall

- Cats v Crusaders
- Highlanders v Sharks
- Highlanders v Cats
- Sharks v Crusaders

George Ayoub

- Bulls v Hurricanes
- Cats Chiefs
- Sharks v Chiefs

Summary of Outcomes

Communication at the Tackle / Ruck

Systematic observations of refereeing, provides a referee coach with quantitative information that can be used to evaluate a referees performance.

Event recording is a type of systematic observation. Event recording identifies and records the number of specified refereeing actions, which occur during the observation period. Coaches can apply event-recording tools to taped games of a referees performance. Basic review of this data can indicate to a coach, identified areas in need of improvement and re-evaluations can be done objectively.

Systematic observation can also be used to analyze the behavior of successful referees in a particular area of the game. It can also be used to identify changes in referee behavior according to different game phases.

David Kahan (University of New Mexico) in the <u>Coaching Behavior Review – Volume 14, 1999</u> states that: "Systematic study of behavior using descriptive-analytic systems and direct observation has been a prominent research methodology in the field of sport peculiarities for over 20 years. Prior to the inception of this research methodology, it was typically measured indirectly using self-reports of behavior or perceptions of behavior garnered through high inference interview schedules and questionnaires. The development of valid and reliable observation instruments ushered sport peculiarities into an era of legitimacy, innovation and unparalleled activity."

Objectives of the Study

This study evaluated the behaviors of five (5) referees, Stuart Dickinson, Scott Young, Peter Marshall, Wayne Erickson and George Ayoub during the 2002 Super 12 Competition. All referees are part of the National Referees Panel and have refereed at an elite level for numerous years.

The aims of this study were to:

- observe the communications from these elite referees in a match context; and
- identify existing trends.

It is thought that from these results we can put in place, a "Best Practice Communication" dialogue that can then be distributed to the community rugby level in Australia for implementation.

There will be unquestionable communication comparisons between each referee and the comparisons between each referees verbal communication parameters (Direct v Indirect) and the penalties given at the Tackle / Ruck phase. A more effective method of communication at the tackle – ruck phase needs to be found if we are to decrease the number of stoppages at this breakdown, which is the ultimate goal.

Data was collected for this study after viewing video taped games of all available Australian Referees involved in the SANZAR Super 12 competition. The method was to then construct a Systematic Observation tool and apply it to these tapes. The data was then extrapolated to compare results and identify trends. It must be known that the data collected was only during the Tackle / Ruck phase and no other areas where considered during the study.

It was quite obvious that elite rugby referees do display certain common communication characteristics at the Tackle / Ruck phase. These characteristics undoubtedly reduce the amount of penalties when compared against less experienced referees.

- For all intensive purposes, foul play will not be a parameter given at this phase. It is believed that there could not have been verbal communication before the offence occurred.
- Communication will be observed at the:

Tackle

- as it is occurring
- once it has happened
- as players arrive
- when it is over

Ruck

- as it forms
- during the phase
- as players arrive
- when it is over
- The verbal communication that is being observed will be listed as either:
 - Direct
 - A player that is clearly defined
 - Eg. Black #7 release and roll away
 - Indirect
 - Non specific communication
 - Eg. Hands away
- Non verbal communication will be monitored during both phases
 - Communications used without voice, (eg. Use of hand signals)

All of the communication displayed during this study was plotted on a personal basis, with no interference coming from any outside parties. What was deemed 'Direct' or 'Indirect' was based on the situation at the time and the communication utilized.

Results from Observations

Table 1

Referee	Games	Tackles / Rucks	Penalties	Direct Communication	In-Direct Communication	Non-Verbal
Stuart Dickinson	5	734	82 (11.2%)	87 (11.9%)	155 (21.1%)	492 (67%)
Scott Young	3.5	432	39 (9.0%)	44 (10.2%)	135 (31.2%)	253 (58.6%)
Peter Marshall	4	494	36 (7.3%)	67 (13.6%)	158 (32%)	269 (54.4%)
Wayne Erickson	5	702	76 (10.8%)	121 (17.2%)	217 (30.9%)	364 (51.9%)
George Ayoub	3	344	48 (14%)	82 (23.8%)	119 (34.6%)	143 (41.6%)

Stuart Dickinson

- On 55 occasions (67%), there was no communication given before a penalty was awarded.
- On 19 occasions (23.2%), a penalty was awarded after 'in-direct' communication was given.
- On 8 occasions (9.7%), a penalty was awarded after 'direct' communication was given.
- The most common and successful 'direct' communication that was used:
 - Hands off tackler
 - Roll away tackler
 - Hands away (colour)
 - Away tackler
- The most unsuccessful communication used:
 - No hands, no hands
 - Play it

It was evident at times that if 'direct' communication was used, a penalty could have been prevented instead of no verbal communication and penalizing the infringing player. There where instances throughout SD's games that he would not communicate at the Tackle/Ruck phase for extended periods of time. An example was the 2nd half of the Crusaders v Stormers game on April 12, 2002. During this half it was observed that there was no need for communication to be delivered, as the ball was available and being played with little infringements occurring. The six (6) penalties however could possibly have been prevented if 'direct' communication was used.

On fifty-six (56) occasions throughout SD's 5 games, either; "Hands Away or Hands Off", was used as 'indirect' communication. Along with the other ninety-nine (99) occasions 'indirect' communication was observed, a colour or player specific (tackler) could have been used to make this a 'direct' communication. This could then result in decreasing the percentage of penalties after 'in-direct' communication was used.

Eg. "Hands Away – Red", "Hands Off – Tackler"

Scott Young

- On 24 occasions (61.5%), there was no communication given before a penalty was awarded.
- On 14 occasions (35.9%), a penalty was awarded after 'in-direct' communication was given.
- On 1 occasions (2.6%), a penalty was awarded after 'direct' communication was given.
- The most common and successful 'direct' communication that was used:
 - It's a ruck, hands out (colour)
 - Ruck, hands off it
- The most unsuccessful communication used:
 - Hands off it
 - Ruck ball, it's a ruck

The reason for only 3.5 games observed of SY, the audio was non-existent throughout the 1st half of the Stormers v Highlanders game on March 16, 2002.

SY was also observed having very high hits of 'non-verbal' communication throughout the Tackle/Ruck phase of his games. The only exception was the game between the Cats v Blues on April 12, 2002. During this game, the percentage of 'non-verbal' communication was only 36.2% compared to his average over the 3.5 games of 58.6%. The area that was increased was 'in-direct' communication, reaching 47.8% throughout the game. Almost half the communication observed during this game was 'in-direct', there was no correlation between penalties awarded, as the percentage of penalties awarded was only 7.4%, down from the average 9% over all his games.

During SY's games, it was observed that either; "It's a Ruck" or "That's a Ruck" was used 47 times! It was not clear during the observation whether this was being communicated for the benefit of the players or for himself to cue his checklists. In either case, adding a colour may deliver far better results for adherence to his communication and increase the percentage of 'direct' communication used.

Eg. "It's a Ruck – Blue"

Peter Marshall

- On 21 occasions (58.3%), there was no communication given before a penalty was awarded.
- On 10 occasions (27.8%), a penalty was awarded after 'in-direct' communication was given.
- On 5 occasions (13.9%), a penalty was awarded after 'direct' communication was given.
- The most common and successful 'direct' communication that was used:
 - Tackler away, play on
 - Roll away tackler
 - Off him tackler
 - Play it, leave it (colour)
- The most unsuccessful communication used:
 - Let it come, let it come
 - Hands off
 - Leave it

Excluding PM's 1st game between the Cats v Crusaders on April 26, 2002 where his 'direct' communication was low (7.7%) and his 'non-verbal' communication at a high level (63.1%). PM's results over 4 games were very good!

There were however, times that his communication was hard to distinguish, even after hearing it a number of times. Each of these times it was monitored as being 'in-direct' communication!

It was observed that at times, anything up to nineteen (19) words where being communicated at a single phase. Examples heard during the 2nd half of the Highlanders v Cats game on March 8, 2002.

- "Let it come, let it come, there it is! Your players, your players are stopping it! Waiting, waiting, waiting!"
- "Play it, release it, there it is! He's right, let it come, let it come!"

On thirty-seven (37) occasions it was observed that either; "Play It" or "Play On" was used as an 'indirect' form of communication. It was also observed that on one hundred and twenty five (125) occasions, either; "Leave It" or "Waiting" was used as some form of communication during all four (4) of PM's games.

Eg. "Play it – Green 7"

Wayne Erickson

- On 24 occasions (31.6%), there was no communication given before a penalty was awarded.
- On 38 occasions (50%), a penalty was awarded after 'in-direct' communication was given.
- On 14 occasions (18.4%), a penalty was awarded after 'direct' communication was given.
- The most common and successful 'direct' communication that was used:
 - Away tackler, away
 - Back feet please (colour)
 - Let it go now, no hands (colour)
 - Play it now, away tackler
- The most unsuccessful communication used:
 - Play it
 - It's a ruck
 - Away

Wayne's results where very similar to Peter's with the exception again of one game, Bulls v Cats on February 23, 2002. 'Non-verbal' communication reached 70.6% while 'direct' communication only attained 4.9% of use. Apart from this game, Wayne's overall percentage across all five (5) games where excellent.

On eighty-seven (87) occasions, Wayne repeated the same communication at the same phase of play. It was clear through the observations that it was not a case of players not adhering to Wayne's instructions, but simply a trend of Wayne's communication style. This style has been quite successful for Wayne, as most of the communication – even though repeated, is 'direct' communication.

Eg. "It's a ruck, away White, away White"

"Let him go now Tackler, ruck formed, ruck formed"

George Ayoub

- On 23 occasions (47.9%), there was no communication given before a penalty was awarded.
- On 15 occasions (31.3%), a penalty was awarded after 'in-direct' communication was given.
- On 10 occasions (20.8%), a penalty was awarded after 'direct' communication was given.
- The most common and successful 'direct' communication that was used:
 - Let him go tackler
 - Roll away tackler
 - Let it go (colour), let it go
 - It's a ruck, let it go (colour)
- The most unsuccessful communication used:
 - Let it come
 - Stay back
 - Let it go

George had the highest average of 'direct' communication portrayed (23.8%) in his three (3) games compared to the other four (4) referees. The lowest percentage of 'non-verbal' communication of 41.6% was also seen in George's games. This would account for the amount of extra talk observed in George's games compared to all other Referees.

The highest average of penalties (14%) were also attained by George in comparison to all other referees, 19.6% coming from the Bulls v Hurricanes game on March 2, 2002. In the same match, 'non-verbal' communication was observed at only reaching 32% and 'in-direct' communication at 44%!

What was observed in George's games was, immediately after George had given communication at the Tackle / Ruck phase, a penalty would follow:

- 11 of the 19 penalties (Bulls v Hurricanes 02.03.02)
- 9 of the 16 penalties (Cats v Chiefs 06.04.02)
- 5 of the 13 penalties (Sharks v Chiefs 13.04.02)

A conclusion could be drawn that the communication was being delivered to late to have an effect on deterring a player from infringing or to achieve any kind of continuity out of the phase.

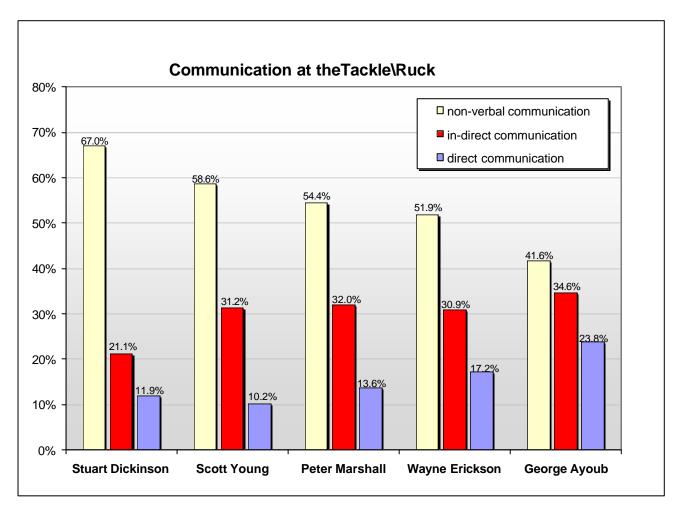


Table 2

This table represents all communication observed during the performances of each of the referees.

With the evolving trends of communication at the present time, it is not surprising that 'non-verbal' communication is the highest percentage in all five referees observed. If this study had been taken up to only 3 years ago, you would have seen a huge decrease in 'non-verbal' communication.

It is now the trend for talk to only be used when it is needed! If the ball has clearly been won, or about to alight on one side, is there really a need for anything to be said? It is observed that four of the five referees' have 'non-verbal' communication 50% of every tackle / ruck taking place!

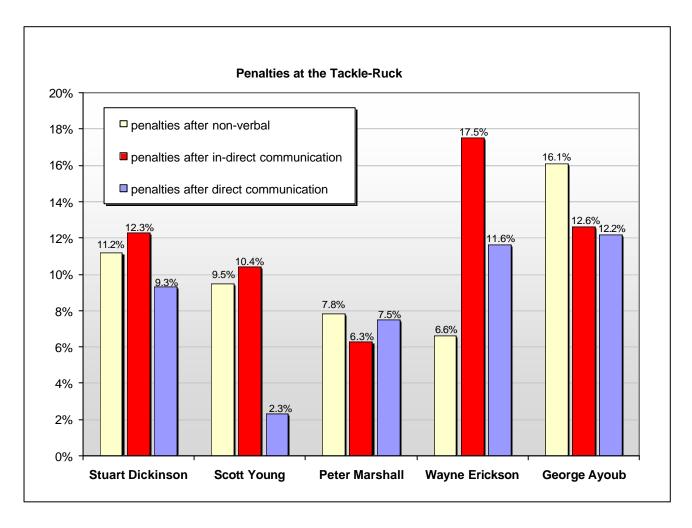


Table 3

You would expect to have a lower percentage of penalties after 'direct' communication was given during the tackle/ruck phase. For percentages above 10%, it must be thought – when was the communication given, and if it had any effect at all? Observations from coaches would need to accompany penalties given after 'direct' communication, including running lines and positioning as the tackle/ruck was developing.

The goal here would be to change the 'in-direct' communication to 'direct' communication. Three (3) out of the five (5) referees had higher percentages of penalties after 'in-direct' communication was used at the tackle. If our purpose is to decrease the amount of penalties at the tackle / ruck phase – it should be looked upon as dealing with the biggest problem first and in this instance it is the low success rate of our 'in-direct' communication at the tackle.

Conclusion

It has been demonstrated by Australia's leading referees that your communication as varied as it comes, could determine your ultimate success or your downfall.

From the results of this analysis we can start to adopt the following communication strategies to help you manage the tackle / ruck in a more effective manner.

BEST PRACTICE COMMUNICATION

Tackle:

"HANDS AWAY TACKLER, - ROLL AWAY!" or "HANDS OFF RED!"

- Specifics here are <u>TACKLER</u> & <u>RED</u>, used in a 5 & 3 word direction making it a very clear and specific demand in a time frame for the tackler to oblige your request.
- This is only used if it is needed! If the tackler is already in the process of releasing the ball-carrier, do not use your "Power of Words" if you don't need them.

Ruck:

- The most contentious facet of our game both on and off the field!
- Communication will be paramount at this breakdown, your knowledge and interpretation will be your ultimate success.

1. "IT'S A RUCK – HANDS OUT RED!"

2. "STAY ON YOUR FEET - BLUE"

- It's not just the specifics that are communicated during this phase but when it is said!
 - Too early
 - You will back yourself into a corner! Let it progress and then talk when it is needed
 - On the occasions that you do talk to early, stick with your convictions!
 - Too late
 - There is more chance that you will lose control at the breakdown if your talk comes too late! Better to blow the whistle immediately rather than try and talk the players out of a situation that has got out of your control.
 - If you find that your communication is coming too late, it could mean your positioning or running lines too the breakdown needs to be adjusted for it to be effective.. There is more chance that you are actually seeing the 2nd Infringement, which will lead to player frustration.

Trends at the Tackle:

- There is now a more aggressive attack of possession **at the ball** once a tackle is made. The tackle is now an offensive weapon!
 - The first players arriving are ball focused rather than cleaning out opposition players
 - The contest for the ball is happening immediately resulting in a need for you to be there much earlier
 - The first two players are going to come into contact much earlier at the tackle, as both try to secure the ball on the ground.
 - Communication and being there will determine continuity!
- Because of this ball focus, you are going to see a lower drive (clean-out) and players leaving their feet after the contact. What should be observed is a clean-out action similar to a "plane taking off!"
 - This has to be considered as positive play, compared to the player that is just sealing off the ball from the opposition and flopping to the ground.
- The demand for referee's to be faster, fitter & more agile will help promote play at the "Tackle"!
- If referee's can combine best practice positioning/running lines with specific communication they will have limited problems.

Things To Highlight On Your Checklists!

TACKLE	RUCK
1. Actions of Tackler/Tacklers	1. Be – Positive
2. Actions of Ball carrier	- Specific
3. Arriving Players	- Preventative
4. Joined from an on-side	2. The cleanout
position	- must use arms
	 close proximity
	3. When its over
	- player's in an offside position.