



# **The Rugby League Coach Education Programme**

## **The Think Coaching E-Link**

### **Issue 02**

## Welcome

This issue looks at **kicking** and its importance to the game of Rugby League. It's very much a hot topic at the moment especially with the superiority that was shown by the Australians in the recent Tri-series.

Notwithstanding that the Rugby League Coach Education had already produced a new STEPs module for delivery to coaches at all levels. In addition kicking had already been given a much more prominent position in the revised structure for the Performance department's camp structure. While the UKCC has also allowed us to look again at how we deliver this important section of material to our coaches.

One of the driving forces behind this was research carried out comparing the kicking games in Rugby League and Rugby Union. The results of that research were very surprising.

Rugby Union has always been considered "the kicking game" and Rugby League "the handling game". That is no longer the case as the statistics below indicate.

| <b>Kick Type</b>          | <b>Rugby Union</b> | <b>Outcome (%)</b> | <b>Rugby League</b> | <b>Outcome (%)</b> |
|---------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Place (Restart)</b>    | <b>0</b>           | <b>0%</b>          | <b>11</b>           | <b>91%</b>         |
| <b>Place (Conversion)</b> | <b>12</b>          | <b>50%</b>         | <b>9</b>            | <b>77%</b>         |
| <b>Punt (Penalty)</b>     | <b>5</b>           | <b>86%</b>         | <b>16</b>           | <b>87%</b>         |
| <b>Punt (General)</b>     | <b>23</b>          | <b>61%</b>         | <b>14</b>           | <b>86%</b>         |
| <b>Chip</b>               | <b>6</b>           | <b>33%</b>         | <b>4</b>            | <b>75%</b>         |
| <b>Grubber</b>            | <b>1</b>           | <b>100%</b>        | <b>5</b>            | <b>40%</b>         |
| <b>Drop (Goal)</b>        | <b>3</b>           | <b>0%</b>          | <b>0</b>            | <b>0%</b>          |
| <b>Drop (Restart)</b>     | <b>15</b>          | <b>33%</b>         | <b>5</b>            | <b>100%</b>        |
| <b>Bomb</b>               | <b>6</b>           | <b>50%</b>         | <b>8</b>            | <b>50%</b>         |
| <b>TOTAL</b>              | <b>81</b>          | <b>54%</b>         | <b>74</b>           | <b>77%</b>         |

These statistics are typical of those in the Tetleys Super League and Zurich Premiership. They show clearly that there is now nearly as much kicking in a game of Rugby League as there is in a game of Rugby Union. More significantly perhaps is the fact that League kickers are far more successful in achieving their desired outcome from their kicks.

Rugby League "the handling AND kicking game?"

*Haydn Walker*  
*National Link Manager*

### ARTICLE 3

# Benefits of Kick Play

*Kurt Wrigley is the former Assistant Coach at the Sharks, one of his roles is the kicking and catching coach. To generate new ideas for kicking drills he has looked at Australian Rules Football and modified them suit Rugby League.*

Kicking, like most components of the game, is commanding more specific training time and specialist coaching in most NRL programs. And its little wonder, especially considering the benefits a strong, smart kicking game can have for the team.

Those benefits include:

- Field Position – with 40/20 rule and the possible change to the in goal rule
- Exert pressure – via repeat sets
- Line breaking ability – given opposition's good defensive systems
- Try scoring ability – high percentage of tries involve kicks

John Lang (Penrith Head Coach) believes that if you have a number of competent kickers in your team, then it puts the opposing team's defence under constant strain. The Kicking/Catching Coach should work with the halves, hookers, fullbacks, wingers, centres as well wide running forwards.

The most used kick in Rugby league is the distance punt in general play – either drop punt or torpedo (spiral punt). The current NRL footballs are more suited to the drop punt, due to their lightweight and pointy shape. However, the ball used by Rugby Union and Superleague are heavier and rounder and better suited to torpedos.



Regardless, the AFL has shown that the drop punt is the safest and most accurate kick performed quickly under pressure. With practice a player can kick a drop punt just as far as a torpedo. The technical points for the two kicks differ immensely. In the drop punt, the ball is dropped down in a controlled manner by the kicking foot hand to the foot (Hence DROP punt). However in the torpedo, the ball is placed on a pretend shelf approximately waist height and the foot is brought UP to the ball.

The main points and common errors of both kicks are as follows:

**Drop Punt**

- incorrect grip (thumbs should be on top and at the front of the ball with fingers spread down the side).
- start with the ball in front of the kicking leg, not in the middle.
- guide the ball drop keeping it upright pointing down at foot before impact – this will ensure backspin on the ball.
- follow through (toes to fingers).

**Torpedo**

- point the ball towards target, axis horizontal
- good control with kicking side hand
- place ball on the shelf, don't let the ball drop down to foot
- slightly rotate the ball as you impact
- follow through (toes to fingers), don't kick across the ball

The following are some of the kicks to work on:

| <b>KICK</b>    | <b>TECHNIQUE</b>  | <b>TIPS/PRACTICE</b>   |
|----------------|---|--|
| Distance kick  | Drop Punt (lower trajectory)                                    | Quick release<br>Spiral<br>1 Step<br>2 Pass kick<br>Pressured both sides of ruck |
| Bomb           | Conventional<br>Spiral<br>Floater<br>Banana                     | Pressure<br>Contact the ball when still or rising, not descending                |
| Crosskick      | High<br>Flat<br>Reverse (disguised)                             | Target wingers   |
| Grubber        | Top spinner<br>Flat roller<br>Drop Punt (skidder)<br>Reverse    | Look to pass first   |
| Kick Off       | Deep/Hang Time<br>Short/High (Tap Back)<br>Flat/Hard (sideline) | In corner of in goal<br>Into wind<br>Disguised                                   |
| Penalty Kick   | Drop Punt<br>Banana   | Angle and wind<br>Close to sideline  |
| Centering Kick | Drop Punts (low)  | Catch, run & kick in goal and Chase  |
| Catching       | Off the Chest<br>Defending Cross kicks                          | Don't give them a runway   |

Competition is the best teacher, most players who are good kickers at the senior elite level are guys who have spent countless hours as a kid on their own kicking the football. This should be encouraged, and most kids love to kick the ball. Kickers should learn to be competent kicking the ball with both left and right feet.

Progress your kickers from doing repetitive technique work on all types of kicks in the absence of pressure. Once the skill becomes more autonomous, more and more distractions are introduced until the drill becomes competitive and/or game related. Ensure that work on attacking and defending the kick is introduced. This allows for competitive games against left and right side team members.

The book “Drills and Skills in Australian Rules Football” by David Wheadon is a great resource and has generated new ideas. In general, I try to look at all sports for help.



## ARTICLE 4

# Kicking To Attack The Opposition Line

By Bruce Wallace

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The following discourse is focused on kicks in general plays such as "taps" or penalties. The aim of kick plays is to:-

1. Force a better field position by
  - (a) Finding touch
  - (b) Restricting play territorially
2. Applying pressure (chase or challenge)

The aim of kicks in the opposition 20 metres:-

1. As for the above BUT
2. Create the opportunity to regather or score
3. Have the ball returned to your team from the opposition goal line for another set of six
4. Maintain defensive pressure on the opposition close to their own goal line.

When to kick will depend on the following aspects:-

1. Tackle count (i.e. 3rd, 4th, or 5th tackle)
2. Game plan (some coaches may prefer to run the ball rather than kick)
3. State of the game (is the team in front by one point or are they six points behind - by a particular margin? Is there only seconds left in the game?)
4. Field position (in front of the posts or near the touchline)
5. A players assessment of opportunity.

Several types of kicks can be used under such circumstances and include:-

1. "Bombs"
2. "Grubbers"
3. The "Chip"
4. Or a field goal attempt

Which ever kick is executed will depend on the team strategy, the kicking skills of players and should reflect one of the five points mentioned above. This leads to the question who kicks?

All players should be coached to be able to respond with the appropriate kick. However, most teams have designated "kickers". These players tend to be most skilled at kicking and are able

to produce the appropriate kick under pressure and have a keen sense to read play. Obviously circumstances arise where the perfect kick is a reflex action and its success will be a direct result

of the skill of the kicker and the response of the chase by himself or his fellow players. BUT most kicking in the attack part of the field is usually premeditated and thoroughly practiced. Most teams have "a call" which indicates to the team that a particular kick is about to occur and this gives the chasing team a cue to prepare to get in to position and challenge the football.

### **So Who Does Kick?**

Some coaches prefer their acting half to kick as it puts all players on side. Players such as Andrew Farrell have exploited this skill with great success. Will the first receiver change the direction with a pass and a second receiver on the opposite side of the ruck put in a rehearsed kick? Will a receiver run around a pivot player and then kick on the run? This type of play commits the defence to move up and once the kick has been executed defenders must turn and chase, putting them on the "back foot". When kicking in this part of the field the purpose of out-maneuvring the defence is still of paramount importance. Where is the ball landing? The answer to this crucial question will reflect the tactics of the coach and/or the state of the game.

### **"Bombs"**

The height of the "bomb" will determine the extent of the challenge for the football and "bombs" must be challenged.

1. "Bombs" which land in the IN-GOAL necessitate a committed challenge because if the opposition field the ball on the full they have been given "a gift" 20 metre up-field and 6 tackles to play.
2. "Bombs" which land in THE FIELD OF PLAY, near the try line, require the same urgency of challenge. The four possible scenarios which can result are:-
  - i) The opposition field the ball and are under pressure on their own line;
  - ii) The attacking team receive the ball and are prevented from scoring. If the 6th tackle, a hand over occurs near the try line or if an earlier tackle, the opportunity exists to exert more pressure;
  - iii) The attacking team successfully challenges for the ball and scores;
  - iv) The opposition contacts the ball and the kicking side regains possession with an ensuing six tackles.

### **Positioning of the "Bomb"**

Field position and pre-planning will often determine the placement of the "bomb" i.e. is the kick directed at the goal posts or towards the side line? In recent times certain teams are having great success with the cross-field bomb i.e. kicking to the wingers on the fringes of the field near the try-line. Others prefer to kick the ball so that it might hit the goal posts or cross bar causing difficulty and distraction for defenders. It is useful for challengers to play behind the main defender and attempt to knock the ball back toward following players. Bombs should also be placed so that defenders are required to run backwards or sideways to gather - preferably not forward to the ball where balance and vision are likely to be better. Good in very wet or windy conditions and against the sun. Whatever the tactic, any kick is only as good as the challenge.

### **Grubbers**

The grubber kick is usually a short kick along the ground which is placed such that it rolls in behind the defensive line and the chasers have a better than average chance of retrieval.

Scenarios 1,2 and 3 as mentioned in the "bomb" section are common outcomes if the ball is recovered in the field of play. BUT, other than number 3, the outcome of tackling the opposition within their own in-goal is a preferred option as the opposition must now return the ball to the attacking team via a goal-line drop out. Best when you need the ball back (e.g., line drop out).

Very heavy conditions where chasers have momentum to run on. Kicks should always be for “others” i.e. have numbers of close chasers. Easily “soccered”. Best place, in behind the line at about the fringes of the ruck, length around 5-7 metres.

### **Chips**

The chip kick is usually a short kick over the heads of the opposition and in behind the defensive line so that it gives the chasers a better than average chance of fielding the ball either on the full or on the bounce, at speed. Definitely to land in the field of play, best on dry days. Requires numbers for close support. Best time-tackles 1 to 3 or when the defensive line is still up. More

difficult when the defensive line is uneven. With grubbers or chips, the further the kicker is from

the defensive line, the more he can be over the ball when he kicks and is running forward. The kick is for the kicker as well as others. He is therefore more able to be a “chaser”. Conversely, if

the kicker wants to get really close to the defence and draw the man forward, the kicker needs to lay back - putting his upper body away from the defence and “laying” the ball on his foot. He is less likely to be a “chaser” in this instance and the kick is for others.

### **Drop Goals**

The field goal is a drop-kick that scores one point when successful. It can be carefully and deliberately set up with progressive plays towards the goal posts or be spontaneous. If unsuccessful, the opposition usually end up in possession and often with a 20 metre tap kick.

The field goal creates the score “buffer”. It can take the score from a six point to a seven point lead, creating the circumstances where the opposing teams needs to score twice. It can break a dead locked, tied score.

Whatever the circumstances it is a low score option, so it needs to be determined mindfully whether the one point is what is required in relation to the other kick options and the state of the game.

### **Protection**

For kicks in general play many coaches set up players to hinder opposition players who attempt to spoil or charge down the kick. This protection gives the designated kicker time to attempt the appropriate kick with limited harassment. This is very common for the execution of field goals and bombs.

### **Cover**

Carefully rehearsed, pre-mediated kicks usually have a safety net in case something goes wrong. A player or players may be given specifically defined roles in order to cover up a possible break down in the plan which may result from such things as a charge down or a miss-kick. For this reason planned kicks are better taken before the final tackle.

### **Out-Manoeuvring The Defence**

Many coaches believe that the most effective kicks in this part of the field, are those which are executed after the opposition defensive line begins to move up. To force the defence to move up the attacking team can either, kick after the ball has been passed by two or more players, put on a runaround then apply the kick or move forward to the line and kick on the run.

These tactics cause the opposition to move up and creates space in behind the defensive line, giving the attacking players following the ball, the “jump” on the defensive line, which now needs to turn, chase, cover and recover, if possible. Also, the first receiver from the ruck can switch the ball across the ruck, to the “blind” hoping to catch the opposition on the “wrong foot” and kick in behind them before they become aware. Kicking across field to the extremities, where the defence is “thinnest” is also a popular manoeuvre BUT, this is also where the attack is “thinnest”. Having an alternate kicker can also deceive the defensive strategy of the opposition when a player they don’t expect executes the kick. It can cause the chasers to be wrong-footed and create time for the kicker to get set. Particularly useful with field goal attempts. A kicker on either side of the ruck is an advantage worth working toward.

### **Conclusion**

These are some of the kicking options which are presently being used in this part of the field but new options are being developed all of the time through experimentation and astute coaching. Kicking in the opponents 20m is a basic play where the final outcome is a product of the quality of the kick (and kicker) and the commitment of the chase.

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What are your thoughts about the articles in this issue?  
Do you have a view on kicking?

Forthcoming issues

Issue 3 - Conditioning

Issue 4 - Defence

Issue 5 – Conditioning for Junior Players

If you would like to contribute to any of these issues then why not drop us a line at

[haydn.walker@rfl.uk.com](mailto:haydn.walker@rfl.uk.com)

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