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Legal Notices

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Rugby Attack! A Playbook of 27 Core Offensive Moves
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The objectives of the **Rugby Attack!** are to provide you with a range of attacking moves and plays you can use from scrums, lineouts and penalties, as well as in open play, so you can score more tries. In fact for all but the most senior teams, and perhaps a few ambitious junior sides, this Manual contains the only 27 rugby moves you should ever need.

So, what are the advantages of having a range of pre-prepared moves?

To breakdown an organised defence you need to shift defenders and create gaps for your strike runners. One-on-one a player can use a change of pace or a sidestep. But when there are two or more attackers facing a similar number of defenders, a more coordinated attacking pattern is needed.

Your team therefore needs to practise a number of moves which suit its strengths. You can then identify particular moves to exploit a specific weakness in the opposition. For instance, you may have an advantage on the left wing with your number 11 faster than their 14. In which case you might choose to use moves that get the ball out wide and to the left.

However, using plays and moves has it disadvantages. There is always a danger that a move is implemented without looking at the defence in front of you. For example, let’s say you’re faced with a defensive line in open play including their slow prop in an outside position. You don’t want your fly half (number 10) ignoring the opportunity to exploit this mismatch by instead completing a predetermined call.

Consequently you must make sure that your team cannot only execute a move, but also have the knowledge and ability to choose the appropriate moment to implement it.

Your players should always be looking at ways to adapt the moves to suit the team, the opposition, the conditions and their position on the pitch. To help you with this, each move comes with a checklist of advantages and disadvantages, so you can easily match the move to your team’s strengths and your opponent’s weaknesses.

And, of course, every time you practise an attacking move you should also be looking to adapt and develop your defensive systems.

Ultimately, however, the whole point of running moves is to probe defences and pull opponents out of position, so your players can get into positions from which to break into space and score tries.

Dan Cottrell
How to Use this Manual

More than half the moves in *Rugby Attack!* are backs moves. However, it takes a combination of back row, ruck and penalty moves, as well as “sequences” for your team to play through the phases to get into a position to score tries. Think of it this way – a move aims to disorganise the defence to allow your players to express themselves, use their one-on-one skills and score tries. Use the Moves Finder on page 8 to choose which moves suit your strengths and where on the field you might be.

**Backs moves**

The backs moves section of *Rugby Attack!* contains moves I have used to score tries with all the teams I have played with and coached, from teams of under 8s to those containing senior international players. Most of these moves are relatively simple. However, from my experience even basic moves, like a miss pass or switch, need careful consideration and coaching. Why do I think this?

Well first your players need to understand the purpose of the move in the context of when you are going to use it. Second they need to know that the move does not just finish after the execution. In this regard you should always be asking yourself and the players “what happens next?”. Third there are crucial variations that you can suggest to your players to add value to their execution and create further openings for the team.

Most of the backs moves can be run from second phase ball. Whilst key players need to be in position to execute the move effectively, during practice it’s best to ensure that your players frequently swap roles. Not only does this allow the team to run moves from a variety of line ups, but it also helps if there are injuries or substitutions in the game, requiring players to play out of position.

**Back row moves**

Back row moves develop play from the back of a scrummage. To be effective they therefore require a solid scrum – well, most of the time!

Back row moves are advantageous for a couple of key reasons. First because the ball is picked up from the base of the scrum the action happens closer to the gain line. Second since the opposition pack should still be bound on, if only momentarily, it allows your quicker players to exploit the space between the edge of the scrum and the opposition’s backs.

If your team is going to run a back row move to the right, the most common direction, then it is better if your scrum can wheel right, up on the tighthead side. If your scrum is wheeled the other way, then the ball is further from the gain line and your team might have to “cancel” the call.

You may have to cancel a call for a variety of reasons, so it’s always sensible to have a back-up plan. In the case of a left wheel scrum on a right wheel scrum move, your number 8 might call the new move, pick the ball up and drive left, with the right hand flanker (number 7) following in behind.
But don’t worry if your team struggles at scrum time, because even a poor scrummaging side can utilise back row moves to their advantage. For instance, with the opposition scrum pushing, a quick ball to the back and nifty work by your number 8 can produce a quick ruck close to the scrum. Providing your team ruck over and protect the ball this ruck should be “immovable”, giving you a much better platform from which to launch an attack than the scrum.

**Penalty moves**

With the introduction of more free kick situations into the game, there is a good case for teams to use more “penalty moves”, where the ball is tapped and played, rather than hoofed away. I suggest, however, that teams don’t spend too much time developing elaborate penalty moves at the expense of other facets of their play.

I have included two simple examples of penalty moves in this Manual. I particularly like the “pivot” because it’s a move that can be easily expanded.

**Ruck moves**

Ruck moves have the forwards attacking 10 metres or so around the edge of the ruck. Frequently they’re used simply to restart the momentum of an attack if the ball has been slowed down. However, they can also be used as part of a “sequence”, to attack close to the ruck time and again and so pull in defenders.

For instance, a back play might tie in a fly half (number 10), a centre (either number 12 or 13) and one or two of the opposition back row (numbers 6, 7 or 8). Running a quick ruck move straight off this situation can then tie in another of the opposition back row players. You may now be faced with a 10 v 10 situation, where three or four of the opposition’s most mobile defenders are tied up in the debris of the previous two rucks.

**Sequences**

In order to break down an organised team, you may need to use a series of moves in combination to probe and pull the defence around. This is known as a “sequence”. I have described the three basic sequences in *Rugby Attack!* and have listed the preferred moves to use with each.

By calling a single sequence, with a number of pre-set plays rather than a series of calls for individual moves, all your players will be forewarned about what they have to do and where they have to be. You might, for example, have your inside centre (number 12) driving into contact in the first part of the sequence, but then arriving from deep to accelerate into space during the third part.

It might be that the first or second move of the sequence breaks down the defence. If not, your players must be prepared to run and support through successive sequences.
Before practising and using a move, you need to consider a few things.

**At the training ground**

- Practise only those moves that play to your players’ and the team’s strengths.
- Know which moves work for you in different parts of the pitch and in different conditions.
- Practise moves under pressure and against different types of defence, such as the drift and blitz, and against various mixes of backs and forwards in defence.
- In case of injuries, make sure that many of your players can play the various parts of your best moves.

**On match day**

- Make sure all your players know who is calling the moves.
- Consider the sort of defensive system (blitz, drift) your opponent is using.
- Pick out their defensive weaknesses and the moves you can use to exploit these.
- Make sure all you players know the “cancel” calls and the alternative moves you’ll use if the initial play is compromised.
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1. Unders and Overs

**Best from**
- Anywhere on the pitch and with any two players, not just 10 and 12.
- Second phase because it is easy to set up.

**Why it works**
- The angles of running by the receiver draw the marker one way before his sharp turn puts him into the space left by the defender.
- If the opposition drift in defence, then there is more chance that the changes in angle create wider gaps between defenders.

**Good if you have**
- Players able to change their running angles to exploit spaces.
- Players who prefer to break the line rather than fix inside defenders and spread the ball wide.
- Players able to time the pass to maximise the angle of the receiver’s run.

**What players should do**
- 10 needs to interest his marker and then turn towards 12. He delivers either a short pass (“unders”) or a long pass (“overs”) in front of 12.
- **Unders**: 12 runs out at half pace and then turns in quickly at full pace to receive a short pass from 10.
- **Overs**: 12 runs in at half pace and then turns out quickly at full pace to receive a long pass from 10.

**Common mistakes**
- 12 is not far enough away from 10. 10 needs to run towards 12 a little and also allow a gap for 12 to run through.
- 12 sprints before the turn, leaving himself unbalanced and less able to accelerate after the turn.

**Think about**
- On the “overs” ball, 11 coming through the gap between 10 and 12.
- 10 dummying a long pass on an “unders” ball and a short pass on an “overs” ball.
Best from
- Anywhere on the pitch.
- Mainly from second phase ball.

Why it works
- It moves the ball further from the cover defence, so if 13 makes a break he is less likely to be hauled down by an opposition back row player.
- Executed well it puts 13 into space to either run at his opposite number or go through a gap using one pass not two.

Good if you have
- A good passing 10. The longer the pass the more variety.
- A strong running 13 who might be better than his opposite marker.

What players should do
- 10 runs forwards to interest the defenders, turns his hips to see 13, and passes to 13 in front of 12.
- 12 must look to receive the ball by angling slightly in towards 10 and by calling for the pass.
- 13 needs to choose his line to maximise his threat. He could run “in and out” or vice versa (see “unders and overs”). He needs to accelerate as the pass is thrown.

Common mistakes
- It is a simple move, but can suffer from wayward passing and/or poor timing by 12 and 13.
- 10 does not interest the defence and throws the pass immediately. He must over-emphasise the up and then across movement if necessary.
- 10 passes without looking. The execution requires good eye contact by 10, who should pull out of the pass if players are not in position.
- A very common mistake is to assume that all 10s can pass long off both hands.

Think about
- 10 passing the ball behind 12 on to 13 who is standing deeper.
- 13 taking the pass, drifting out a little and then passing back in to 12, or even to 11.
- 12 looping around 13 to take the next pass outside 13.
3. **10-12 Switch (S1)**

### Best from
- Anywhere on the pitch.
- Second phase ball because the set up does not need much organisation and can be easily communicated.
- A scrum but especially a lineout as it attacks the space at the back of the lineout.

### Why it works
- The switch attacks inside the opposition’s 10 (or whoever is standing at first receiver). This is a weak area because different players cover inside the 10, so there is not always a uniform defence.
- It causes problems against a drift defence or teams who tend to ball watch.

### Good if you have
- A quick footed 10 who can change angles quickly.
- A strong running 12 who can bust tackles and offload the ball.

### What players should do
- 10 needs to first engage the defender in front of him and then attack the next defender on the outside. He must therefore aim at the gap between the defenders. 10 switch passes with 12. The ball must be passed softly and hidden from the view of the defenders behind 10’s body.
- 12 starts his run as late as possible and runs out slightly before straightening. He then takes a switch pass from 10.

### Common mistakes
- 10 runs sideways immediately and so does not interest the defenders.
- The switch happens too early and so does not fool anyone.
- 12 runs back into the forwards.

### Think about
- The back row should be aware of this move so they can support the 12.
- A “wrap” switch. Here 12, on receiving the ball, immediately turns out to run away from the cover and attack the space behind the defender who was marking 10.

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**Rugby Attack! A Playbook of 27 Core Offensive Moves**
4. Dummy Switch Pop (DSP)

Best from
- Anywhere on the pitch.
- Both scrums and lineouts. The move is also easy to set up with a variety of players (backs and forwards) and from second phase.

Why it works
- The dummy switch between the 10 and 12 holds the inside defence. This causes enough uncertainty to create a 2 v 1 for your 10 and 13 against an opposition centre.

Good if you have
- Already performed a switch with your 10 and 12.
- A 13 who is strong ball carrier and can bust through defences.

What players should do
- 10 runs forwards with the ball and then turns out. He dummy switch passes to 12 and attacks the inside shoulder of the defender in front of him. He then pops a pass to 13.
- 12 runs a dummy switch with 10.
- 13 holds his run and picks a line to take a pop pass from 10.

Common mistakes
- 10 must interest two defenders, so he needs to attack two players’ inside shoulders, his opposite number and the defender next to him.
- 12 and 13 run too early. Consequently 12 does not interest the defence and 13 arrives too early to see the gap.
- 13 must run with conviction, so even if he takes a pass close to contact, he may be able to bust through.

Think about
- 10 passing the ball immediately after the dummy switch to allow 13 more time to adjust his run and line, whilst giving the defence less time.
- 10 chip kicking for 13.
- 13 running in and then cutting out to take a long pass from 10.
5. **12-13 Switch (S2)**

### Best from
- Anywhere outside your 22.
- Either a scrum or lineout. It’s easy to set up from a second phase but is not good against tight defence.

### Why it works
- Defences tend to drift out more after a pass from 10. This attacks “against the grain” even more than a “10-12 switch”.
- It straightens the attack, thus keeping the opposition defensive line “honest” for future moves. They are less likely to drift as fast after this move.
- A quick back row can link well off this type of move, so it’s a good move for setting up a second phase move in a sequence of plays.

### Good if you have
- A quick footed 12 who can attack the gap between the opposition 12 and 13.
- A strong running 13 who can bust through tackles.
- A good 7 who can pick up the running line of 13.

### What players should do
- 10 passes early to allow 12 some running space and time. He must also support the switch once it has been made.
- 12 attacks the space between the opposing 12 and 13, and then runs at the opposition 13, thus drawing both players towards him.
- 13 delays his run as long as possible. He runs straight before cutting back in to take a pass from 12 on the switch.

### Common mistakes
- 12 runs sideways immediately. He needs to interest the defence by running forwards to start with.
- 13, on receiving the ball, runs towards the cover defence. He should straighten up.

### Think about
- 13 should be looking to bust through the defence and offload to either 10 or a forward. Therefore loose forwards need to be aware of the play to make sure they pick their best running lines.
- 15 should be prepared to offer 12 a “get out” pass if 13 runs incorrectly.
Best from

- In the opposition’s half, but at least 15 metres out from opposition’s try line.
- First phase ball particularly a scrum.

Why it works

- 12 holds up the midfield as he carries the ball forwards. His pass releases 15 into the “uncertain” defensive channel between the opposition 13 and the openside wing (in this example their 11).
- It should create either a gap for 15 to run through or a 2 v 1 for your 14 and 15 against their 11 (or your 11 and 15 against their 14).

Good if you have

- A good long pass from 12. (It’s great if he can also pass well off both hands.)
- Quick wingers and 15 who like to operate in the wide channels.

What players should do

- 10 passes early to 12 to give him the chance to draw in the midfield.
- 12 needs to “sight” 15 early and pass into his running path, not to him.

Common mistakes

- 12 drifts out with his run, allowing the defence to drift more easily into the target channel for the run.
- 13 gets in the way. He must be a credible threat without interfering with the move.
- 15 starts in the line and drifts away from the pass, often leading to the ball dipping and making it more difficult to catch.

Think about

- 12 passing the ball either behind 13 to a deep 15, or late to a very flat running 15.
- 15 starting his run outside their 11, and angling in towards the pass.
7. Miss Miss (M3)

Best from
- Anywhere on the pitch.
- Any phase, a scrum or a lineout. It works well if you want to break out of your 22 and surprise the opposition defence.

Why it works
- The first miss pass cuts out at least one defender. The second miss pass often means a chance for a one-on-one for your winger (14 in this example). If the opposition winger tends to step in to tackle, then your winger has space to run and take on their covering 15.

Good if you have
- Good passers at 10 and 13. (Can they spin pass off both hands?)
- Quick wingers who need open spaces to run.
- Noted their defence rushes up.

What players should do
- 10 passes early to 13 to take on his opposite number.
- 13 needs to take the ball up to the defence, and enough for them to focus on him and 15, before releasing the wide pass.
- 14 (or 11 if you’re going left) must stay in rather than drift out, to give himself the maximum outside space.

Common mistakes
- 10 passes too late, giving 13 no chance to gather, run and set himself for the pass.
- 12 and 15 do not offer credible alternatives. They need to make lots of noise and angle themselves into the defence to create decoy runners.
- Miss timing the passes. 10 should pass just in front of 13, but 13 needs to pass well in front of 14 to draw him onto the pass at pace.

Think about
- 10 passing to 13 behind 12, allowing 13 more time to move the ball wide. This is good against either a blitz or rush defence if you want to move the ball wide quickly.
Best from
- The opposition’s half. It can also be run from your own 22.
- Inside the 15m lines at the side of the pitch.
- First and second phase ball.

Why it works
- The first dummy switch holds the defenders.
- 15 runs outside the opposition 13 and into space.
- This creates a 2 v 1 for your winger (in this example 14) and 15 against the opposition winger.

Good if you have
- A good ball handling 10.
- A strong running 15.

What players should do
- 10 takes the ball going forwards and then cuts out. He dummy switches with 12 and misses 13 with a long pass to 15.
- 12 runs towards 10 faking a switch pass.
- 13 runs towards 10 slightly and then turns on a straight run to look as if he is going to receive a pass from 10.
- 15 lingers in the backfield before accelerating into the line to take a long pass from 10 as he arcs away into a gap. He can then choose to run or pass on to 14.

Common mistakes
- 12 runs too early and does not interest the defence.
- 13 gets in the way.
- 15 starts in the line, thus signalling what is going to happen.
- 10 does not pass far enough in front of 15, so 15 has to slow down or stop to take the pass.

Think about
- Starting 15 behind 13 and running him out at an angle.
- Pulling 14 right out to the touchline to draw over their winger, leaving a bigger gap for 15 to run into.
9. Slice

Best from
- Outside your 22.
- All phases, but better from a scrum than a lineout.

Why it works
- With 12 drifting out before 10 makes a pass, it can pull 12’s marker across, thus leaving a gap for 13 to run in between 10 and 13.
- It provides options as well. 10 can pass to 12 as he drifts out, because 12 might be able to get outside either his or even 13’s marker who has been halted because of the dummy run.

Good if you have
- A 10 who can see where there is space for his players.
- Good runners at either or both 12 and 13, who can change angles and burst through tackles.

What players should do
- 10 attacks his opposite number, turns slightly to “sight” 12 and 13 in relation to their markers. He needs to then push a firm pass to 12 or a soft pass to 13.
- 12 starts up the field and then turns out to run an arc at 13’s marker.
- 13 also starts up the field but then turns in towards the gap where 12 used to be. He then runs behind 12, before straightening.
- Both 12 and 13 need to expect the pass.

Common mistakes
- 12 runs too late not allowing enough space for 13.
- 13 runs too early and gets stuck behind 12. He needs to change angles so he is running up the pitch, not back into the forwards.

Think about
- Having 11 arriving on 13’s outside shoulder, in the space left by 12.
- Using a “slice” wider out. In this instance 10 passes to 12, to allow 13 and 15 to perform the “slice”.

10 receives the ball and interests the defence. 12 and 13 swap places.

10 makes a long pass to 12 on the arc.

10 makes a short pass to 13 as he attacks the gap between 10’s and 12’s markers.
10. **Split Hit / Split Miss**

**Best from**
- Inside the opposition’s half.
- Both first and second phase, but it’s much easier from first phase.
- A scrum rather than a lineout.

**Why it works**
- 12 straightens as 13 drifts out. This produces a gap for 15 to run through, because 13’s marker should have drifted out with him.

**Good if you have**
- A skilful 12 who can pass accurately.
- A hard running 15 who can bust through tackles and time his run.
- Already run the alternative play.

**What players should do**
- 10 passes early to 12.
- 12 runs straight at his marker and then either passes short to 15 or firmly to 13.
- 13 starts running straight and then drifts out quickly expecting a pass from 12.
- 15 starts outside 13 and then runs into the gap left by 13. He straightens to expect a short pass from 12.

**Common mistakes**
- 12 does not straighten. If he doesn’t then it is easier for his marker to drift onto 15’s running line.
- 15 runs too early so removing the element of surprise.
- 13 does not draw his man out. He needs to run at his marker and then drift out, and not drift out straight away.

**Think about**
- Bringing in your blindside winger outside 13, if the ball is going to be passed to 13. This creates an extra man in the line.
- Using your openside winger instead of 15 as the “hit” runner. This is especially good if you have a strong running winger who wants to get into the game.
11. **Rangy**

**Best from**
- Outside your 22.
- All phases but not a lineout.

**Why it works**
- 10 and 12, because they run together, draw their two defenders together. Since 10 is drifting out as well, it increases the gap between the edge of the forwards and the inside edge of the back line – ideal for a strong running 13 to race through.

**Good if you have**
- A 10 and 12 who work well together.
- Run a move beforehand where 12 is passed the ball to run at the defence.
- A 13 who runs straight lines and likes running through traffic.

**What players should do**
- 10 and 12 work in unison, moving forward initially before running across the pitch.
- 12 needs to be no more than a few metres from 10, and keen to get his hands on the ball.
- 13 waits until 10 and 12 move sideways before starting his run in behind them to take the switch pass from 10.
- The pass from 10 can be long or short, but 10 must sight 13 earlier than he would a normal switch pass to allow for the angles involved.

**Common mistakes**
- 10 and 12 run sideways straight away.
- 13 starts too early, so 10 cannot pass to him because he has overrun.

**Think about**
- 10 passing to 12 after dummy passing to 13.
- 10 dummying to 13 and passing across 12 to 15.
- 10 dummying to 13 and popping the ball to 11, arriving in between 10 and 12.
12. **10 Loop (L1)**

**Best from**
- The opposition’s half.
- A scrum but it can be used from a lineout.
- Inside the 15m lines at the side of the pitch.

**Why it works**
- The short pass to 12 who then stops, draws in defenders. As the focus is now on 12, when 10 takes the ball he can pass wide to 15 who should have more space to run in.
- If 12 has already taken a crash ball, the effect is even greater.
- The “turnaround loop” means 12 can see 10 all the time and 10 can scan his own receivers, as well as the opposition, without worrying about the pass.

**Good if you have**
- A good passing 10 who can identify gaps.
- A strong running 13 but especially 15.

**What players should do**
- 10 passes early to a flat, almost static 12. He then loops behind 12, taking a return pass and then looking to pass to 15 or possibly 13.
- 12, standing quite close to 10, moves forwards as he receives the pass. He turns towards 10 and passes as 10 goes behind him.
- 13 starts deep and wide. He runs in towards 12 so he can take a short pass from 10.
- 15 starts deep and drifts wide so he can take a wide pass from 10.

**Common mistakes**
- 12 stands too deep and makes 10 run too far backwards. 10 should follow the pass and receive the return without having to change direction.
- 10 passes behind 13 or 15. Because 10 is running sideways more than normal, he has to almost pass forwards to put the ball in front of 13 or 15.

**Think about**
- 12 or 10 dummying their passes and going for a gap themselves.
- 15 running inside 13 (see “slice”) to either take a pop ball or a switch with 10.
Best from

- The opposition’s half.
- Off scrums or quick second phase ball with no forwards in the way.

Why it works

- A dummy switch between 10 and 12 holds the defender covering 10. With 10 now moving onto 12’s original marker, no one will be marking the winger.
- If 10 can pass just before contact, then the angle of the run from the winger (11 in this example) should take the winger behind the defence.

Good if you have

- A 12 who has already run a successful “switch”.
- A winger you want to get into the game.
- A quick footed, subtle passing 10. The second pass is quite difficult to perform without signalling the move to the opposition.

What players should do

- 10 runs forwards and then sideways to perform a dummy switch with 12. Straight after the dummy 10 attacks 12’s original marker and then turns from outside to in to pass back inside to 11.
- 12 runs as if he is to take a switch pass from 10.
- 11 waits until 12 has run behind 10 before accelerating into the gap on the inside of 10 to take the pass. He has to be quite close to 10.

Common mistakes

- 12 does not interest the defence.
- 11 mistimes his run. Too early and he bumps into 12. Too late and he is too far away so 10 finds it difficult to make the pass.

Think about

- 10 flicking the ball out of the back of his hand.
- 12 taking a switch from 10 and then switching with 11 who goes through the same gap.
**Best from**
- A scrum in the middle of the pitch. Normally this happens when an opposition kick off goes straight out or does not go 10 metres.

**Why it works**
- The play goes right. Since the opposition 9 normally stands on the left of your scrum, he is taken out of the game.
- Since there is plenty of room either side of the scrum, stacking the backs on one side forces the opposition to match up.
- If it is well executed, even if the opposition spreads their defence evenly, a strong running 15 can cause a lot of damage.

**Good if you have**
- A good scrum.
- A 12 or 13 with a good long pass from left to right.
- A strong running 15 who likes to attack from deep.

**What players should do**
- 10 takes the ball standing still and runs sideways towards 12. He passes to 12 who is running the other way.
- 12 runs in the opposite direction to 10 to take the switch pass. He then passes across to 15.
- 15 starts behind the scrum and runs on a wide angle to his right to take the pass from 12.
- 14 stays wide to keep his opposite man occupied.

**Common mistakes**
- 10 takes the ball up too far, allowing the opposition 9 to intercept the pass.
- 10 and 12 don’t switch early enough, allowing time for the opposition back row to get in between the passes.
- 12 does not pass the ball far enough in front of 15. He needs to draw the receiver onto the pass.

**Think about**
- 12 cross kicking for 14.
- 15 and 14 performing a switch pass.