

Glasgow Rugby Development Officers
Kenny Murray – Technical Paper
POSITIVE RUGBY AND COUNTER ATTACK

Attitude and Methods

Counter-attack from:

1. A Kick
2. An intercepted pass
3. A dropped pass or inaccurate pass that goes loose
4. A turnover from a ruck or maul
5. A turnover from a tackle
6. Winning the opponents lineout
7. Winning a tighthead in the scrum
8. A turnover from a kick-off
9. Your Penalty

Attitude:

Many coaches tend to be of the safety-first variety and would strongly advise that you consider your position in the field of play before you counter-attack. Most would not want you to counter from within your own 22 for any error made here is not easily recovered. However, some coaches feel that an unexpected counter from your own 22 can be very successful indeed because it is unexpected and the opponents are relying on you to play the safety-first way and have thus not positioned themselves well in defence.

The key point here is that if the coach has inculcated upon his side a general safety-first policy, then it is unlikely that he will be able to persuade them to counter-attack from anywhere within their own half – if at all. The player's attitude must be a positive one and he must be confident.

We hear many coaches nowadays calling for patience – that generally means keeping calm and controlled so that you can recycle the ball for 6 or 7 times and not lose it. The re-cycling is done by means of making a metre or two before going to ground, winning the ball back, making a few metres, going to ground etc, etc... This is rugby's wound and it is also about the only way these coaches will accept counter attack.

It is for much the same reason that we see so much less of the ball going to the wings presently – the coaches and indeed, the players, believe the farther away you get from your set and semi-set pieces the farther away you are from the safety of a ruck or a maul – keep the ball in the fly half channel, play inside, play to your strength, play safely.

However there are some coaches and many players who prefer the positive approach – they will go for attack not the dour “safe” way, particularly the expansive way, moving the ball around the way it should be done. The Brumbies in their last super 12 season did just that – they moved the ball around expansively but not carelessly. Their skills were supreme. They do not do it because it is pretty rugby nor to please the crowd but they do it because it is one certain way of winning a game.

They believe in that sort of game absolutely. And that is the key thing about counter attack “*the attacking way*” – you must believe in it absolutely. One man doubting can destroy everything.

So, as a coach be positive. Do not enforce negative patterns. Learn to say “do” and stop saying “don’t”. Begin to shout “run” and “pass” and stop shouting “kick” and “go to ground”.

Speed the game up. Tap the penalty and run – it is a counter attack ball. Get the ball quickly into the scrum and lineout. Insist that none of your rucks or mauls lasts more than two to two and a half seconds. Get the ball wide quickly. View a ruck or maul as a symbol of failure – failure to penetrate from clear, first-phase ball and do not be proud when the stats show that your side won 140 rucks – it says something about the way you play the game. You run into contact and you go to ground. Run at gaps, create gaps and move through them.

Some general methods of counter attack

Earlier we mentioned the patient pick-up and ruck method of counter attacking. There is also a counter-attack by kicking; the kick will depend on the situation. Sometimes all you need is little stab through a flat defence, flat because it has been up in attack, and you have reacted quickly, not giving that attacking line time to form sound defence lines. Generally speaking you will kick for position – to get down to the opponents line where they will be vulnerable. You can also kick to put the enemy into a position where its counter-kick must be taken close to the touchline so that the angle is small; the response kick is therefore short and you have the ball if they go for touch. Last of all, you can kick merely to put the ball in front of your forwards so that they are moving towards play and not back to it.

How would you counter from a won tighthead scrum? The old fashioned way was for the No8 to pick up and go – and it still works. Whatever you do though, do it quickly. How about a quick ball picked up by No8 fed open to scrum-half who skips to inside-centre who plays to his outside where the full-back has come in the line at an angle? Or whatever, as long as it is done quickly. The opposing backs are deep, the opposing loose forwards are not expecting to defend and will possibly be slow out their blocks; their scrumhalf is out of position defensively, because he was expecting the ball at the base of the scrum. Get far away from the rucking forwards, play wide. The quick scrum-half or No8 break from the base of the scrum is also extremely effective from a quick ball and then you are through nearly all the defence in a very short distance. The entire side must know that when you win a tighthead scrum, it must be won quickly, do not hold the ball in the scrum. They all know if its is quick, the ball is either going wide at speed or that there is going to be a break close to the scrum so that the loose forwards, particularly, can get into the game.

It is difficult to set down the rules for counter attack...it is better to play it off the cuff, but you cannot do that if your players are not highly skilled and if they cannot read a game. A quick ruck or maul turnover gives a lovely ball because the opponents are usually very flat and are committed to attack. I suppose what we should say to our players in such situations is: cross the advantage line as quickly as possible and take the shortest route, but this may not be the best option in all situations. We could easily say: you will be flat because you have been defending. From a quick turnover you

have no time to get back deeper. Therefore play to the most convenient flat lying player and then he must skip the next player, getting the ball wide quickly to where the defence is probably thin. You could also say when you win such a turnover ball kick behind your opponents because they are all up in attack except maybe the fullback.

The variations are numerous and that is why it is important that players play the turnover ball by ear, according to the circumstances peculiar to that situation, but it makes sense to talk to your players about the various choices they have and then to practise them.

A turned over lineout to be effective must also be quick if we are going to benefit immediately from it. If it is slow it is really just like any other lineout and you would play accordingly. If you get good quick ball think about going wide using maybe a dummy scissors to bring in the full-back on the outside. Again, attacking the area which is less well defended.

The quicker you can make use of turned-over ball the better the counter will be.

Is it better to do the wrong thing quickly or the right thing slowly?

COUNTER ATTACK FROM A KICK

This counter-attack nearly always involves the back three, the two wings and the fullback. It is a good idea to let them practise unopposed counter attack over and over again. Get someone to kick to them and let them run their way out of it using switches, dummy switches, run arounds and so on.

It is important to clear on what is good counter attack ball and what is not – a kick into the box is often not good counter ball, for example, because the opposition forwards will be directly in front of the catcher but if it is too deep the opportunity is there. Almost any bad kick should offer counter-attack possibilities.

When Should You Counter-Attack?

1. If you have space, you can counter because there is no pressure. How many times have we seen French full-backs running from their own line in counter-attack with devastating effect?
2. If you have immediate support, you can counter.
3. If the opponents are not deployed correctly in defence, you can counter. If their kick was a planned one, you will probably find defences well organized.

Who apart from the fullback and the wings should be involved in countering the long kick?

The outside centre should be the first there to support them followed by the three loose forwards. You cannot wait where you are on the field for the back three to come up and pass you – all must try to get back and assist with the attack. Obviously those

on the tackle line when the kick is made will not get back very far but the attempt must be made.

Where Do You attack?

Wherever the gaps are, but the danger is that by running at the gaps you draw the defence across and thus close the gaps. So you must pin the defence by running at it and then pass the ball away from it by means of a scissor, miss pass or maybe both.

Simply put, fix the opponents by running at them then, at the right time, switch the play. You want to keep the space that you have on the open side of the field and not fill it full of traffic by moving across field too early thus drawing your opponents across.

“FEINT AT THE STRENGTH AND STRIKE AT THE WEAKNESS”