



Dorset & Wilts RFU  
**Coaching Development**

Coaching Games To Develop  
**Decision Making**  
(strategic & tactical)

# Coaching Through Small-sided Games

Traditionally, technique has often been over-emphasised within practice sessions. While technique is an important part of the overall skill, it has often been taught in isolation using a drill, without requiring players to think and apply the techniques to the situations required in the game. This is like giving a person the pieces from a puzzle without showing them the picture on the lid. Where does this isolated practice fit the game?

By using a game approach, players are challenged to think about what they are actually doing and why. Players are taught to use the appropriate technique at the right time and place, while under the pressure situations created by a game.

Coaching through small-sided games has been shown to result in improved learning outcomes for players and coaches. Using games as the predominant coaching tool, places an emphasis on the play where tactical and strategic problems are posed in a modified game environment, ultimately drawing upon players to make decisions. It places the focus of the practice on the player in a game situation where cognitive skills such as tactics, decision-making and problem solving are critical. The isolated technique development is utilised, only when the player recognises the need for it.

The skilled coach creates and manipulates the game, specifically to develop the skill that is the primary focus.

## **Coaching through small-sided games is a tool to:**

- Guide players to discover and develop the game
- Increase motivation and enjoyment
- Develop tactical awareness
- Improve individual skills
- Challenge players to think about what they are doing and why
- Encourage creative solution finding.

The games in this resource are starter games and the coach should have the observation and analysis skills to identify an area to develop, through either a progression of the game, or a specific skill development drill or activity. The coach then returns to the game and sees if their coaching intervention has assisted the players to play the game better. The emphasis is always on the coach to create a learning environment.

The coach should observe and allow the players to problem solve before intervention.

Do not stigmatise error, as error allows learning to take place and develops decision making in players.

## **When Coaching through Games, consider the following:**

- What is the main objective/purpose for the activity?
- What skills and tactics do you want to develop?
- What will be the main problem/challenge for the players?
- What are the boundaries and safety laws?
- What questions may you ask to help the players achieve the technical and tactical goals for the session?
- What progression can be used to support each individual?

In order to achieve the above, consider the following:

1. Varying the Playing Area
2. Changing the Starting Space between Attack and Defence
3. Varying the Shape or Positioning of the Attack or Defence
4. Different Starting Positions
5. Introduction of the Ball in Differing Ways
6. Applying Pressure in Different Ways

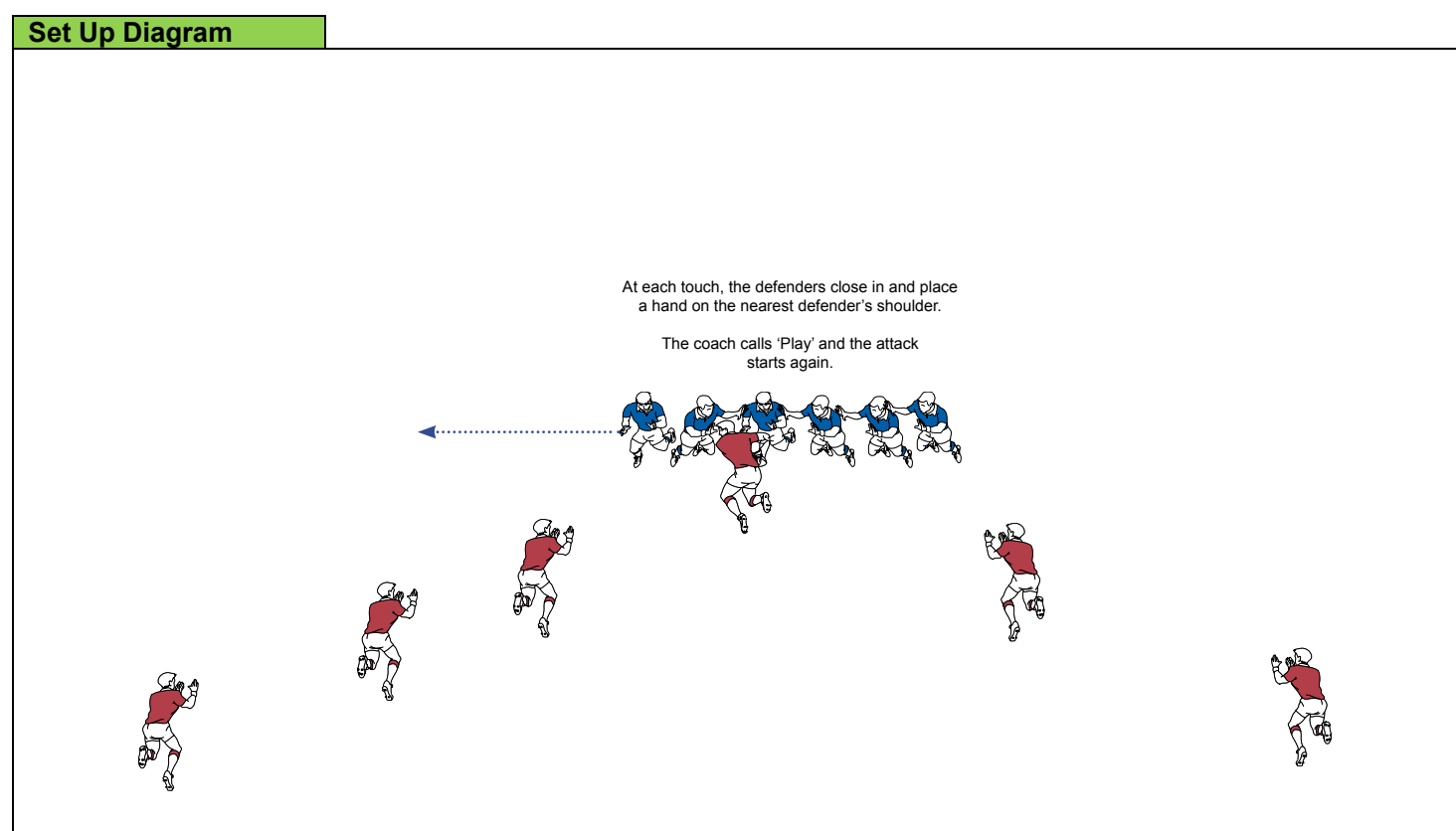
# What is Strategic and Tactical Decision Making?

This is the analytical type of decision where a player has time to weigh up the situation, consider the various options and then make the decision and act. An example might be the players identifying a weaker defender to attack. Or the original game plan needs to change because of circumstances on the field.

The games in this resource encourage the attacking players to gather a degree of knowledge in relation to the defence. There are cues the player can detect and these games develop the ability to sense and respond to those cues. The ability to detect the cues depend on the strength of the signal and the game provides a greater variety of scenarios than a drill.



<b>Practice</b>	<b>Attacking a Condensed Defence</b>				
<b>Objective</b>	To develop the ability to attack a condensed defence				
<b>Equipment</b>			<b>Skill Practice Requirements</b>		
<b>Balls</b>	1	<b>Bags</b>	0	<b>Area</b>	30 x 30
<b>Cones</b>	0	<b>Suits</b>	0	<b>Players</b>	All
<b>Shields</b>	0	<b>Bibs</b>	x3	<b>Time</b>	20 minutes
<b>Skill Practice Description</b>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two teams play normal touch rules.</li> <li>5 touch turnover.</li> <li>When a touch is made, the game pauses and all defenders need to close in and place an hand on the shoulder of another defender. So all the defenders are bunched and in contact with each other.</li> <li>The coach calls 'play' and the attack restarts.</li> <li>The progression may be to leave one defender out of the bunch, which may provide a different challenge to the attack.</li> <li>Then leave two defenders out of the bunch and slowly release the conditions to see if the attack can consistently identify opportunities to outflank or penetrate the defence.</li> </ul>					



<b>Key Coaching Points</b>	<b>Relevance to the Game</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Peripheral vision and general awareness.</li> <li>Communication.</li> <li>Intuitive decision making.</li> <li>Support and team work.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This game is designed to challenge the observation and decision making ability of the attack.</li> <li>For the defence, it challenges the ability to cover vulnerable quickly with both drift and sweeping defenders.</li> </ul>

<b>Practice</b>	<b>Identifying Space to Attack</b>				
<b>Objective</b>	Develop scanning in attack and use of support to beat a line defence				
<b>Equipment</b>			<b>Skill Practice Requirements</b>		
<b>Balls</b>	1	<b>Bags</b>	0	<b>Area</b>	Pitch A -1 x 40m and Pitch B -1 x 20m wide
<b>Cones</b>	20	<b>Suits</b>	0	<b>Players</b>	5 - 8 players each team
<b>Shields</b>	0	<b>Bibs</b>	20	<b>Time</b>	15 minutes

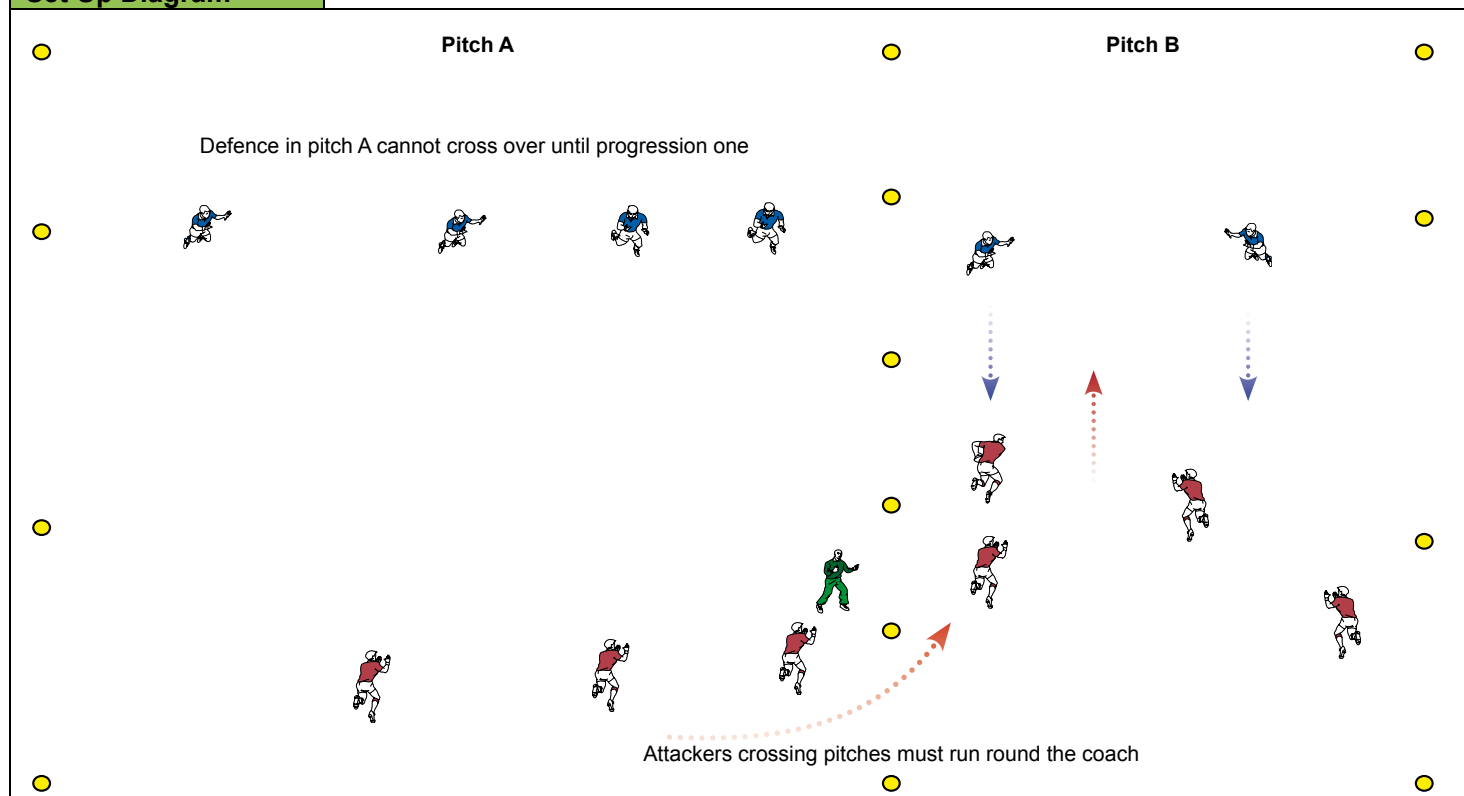
### Skill Practice Description

- Attacking team face away from defenders before play commences.
- Attackers spread or grouped in any formation.
- Defenders split (unseen by attack) between pitch A & B.
- Coach calls "turn" and introduces the ball to the attack who turn to scan the distribution of the defence and attack whichever pitch they choose.
- Defenders on the pitch not being attacked cannot cross over to help defend.
- If the attack breaks down, the defence gain bonus point.
- If attackers choose to attack the area with the most defenders and still score – gain a bonus point.

### Progression:

- Allow the defenders in the area not being attacked to move across to support the other defence. Perhaps make the secondary defence go deeper around a cone.
- Vary the space before game starts between attack and defence – more or less time for the attackers.
- Allow defence to recover the ball to counter attack.

### Set Up Diagram



### Key Coaching Points

- Reward close and immediate support of the ball carrier in and around contact area.
- Defenders deny space and time to the numerically superior attack.
- Attack ensure both width and depth in the attack.
- Attack to make effective use of numerical superiority through passing and support skills.

### Relevance to the Game

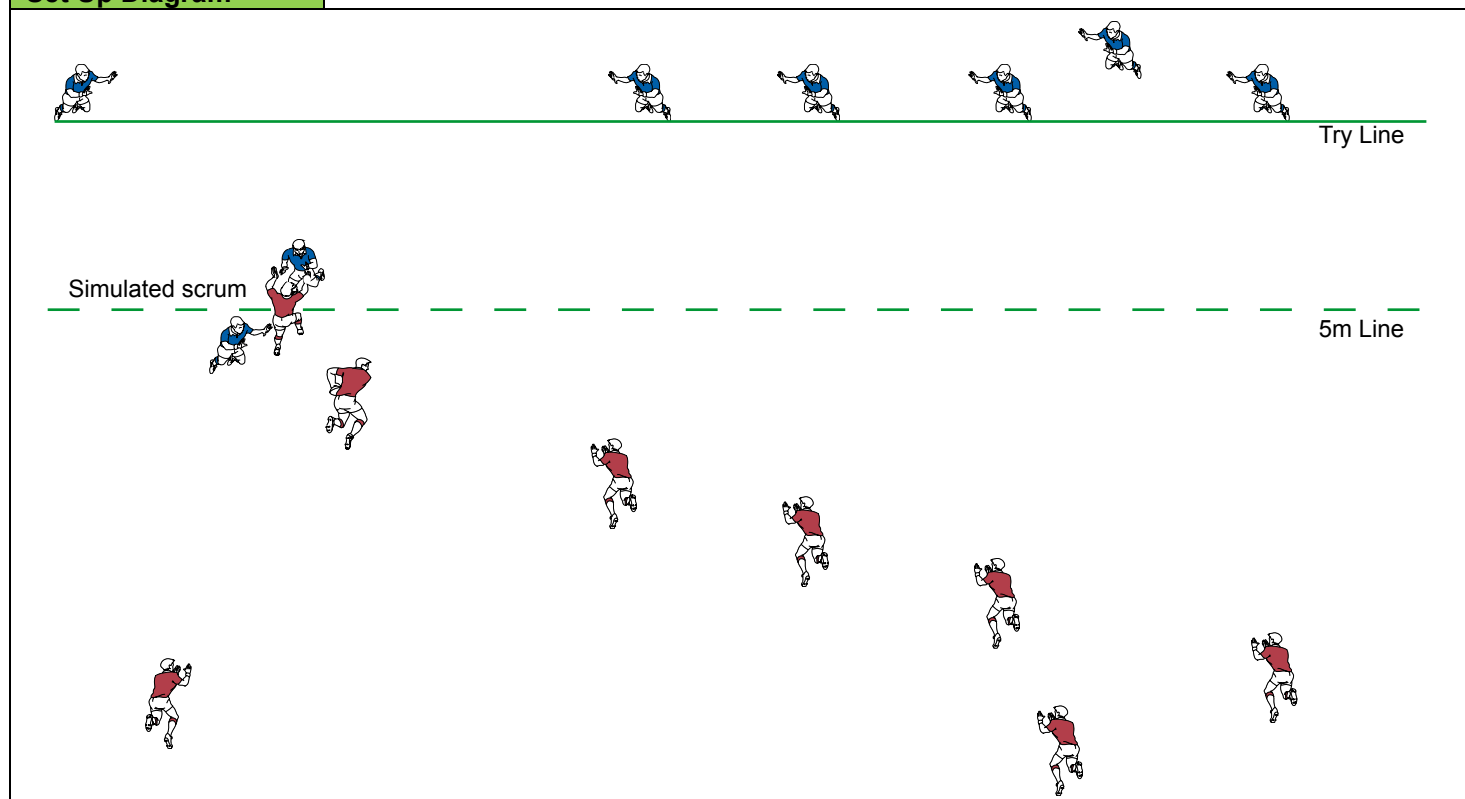
- To help attackers to look at defence and organise support before moving
- Defenders to employ principles of line discipline and effective verbal skills to counter greater numbers in attack
- Attackers to use their superiority in numbers to beat the defence

<b>Practice</b>	<b>Back Line Attack from Set Piece</b>				
<b>Objective</b>	Clinical Decision Making, Execution, Passing and Running Skills				
<b>Equipment</b>			<b>Skill Practice Requirements</b>		
<b>Balls</b>	1	<b>Bags</b>	0	<b>Area</b>	Try line to 10 metre line
<b>Cones</b>	20	<b>Suits</b>	0	<b>Players</b>	All Back line players and one
<b>Shields</b>	0	<b>Bibs</b>	20	<b>Time</b>	20-30 minutes

### Skill Practice Description

- The objective of this game is to score from first phase.
- The defence start on the try line and can only advance to the five metre line (gain line).
- The attack must start from the 5 metre line if simulating a scrum and vary the starting points i.e. centre field.
- If simulating a line out start, use the 10 metre line to half way.
- If the attack can score from the set piece they are awarded five points.
- If they score after one phase they are awarded four points
- If they score after two phases they get awarded three points and so on.
- If the attack fails to score after four phases they turn around and defend.
- Kicking options may be introduced.
- Five attacks each team.

### Set Up Diagram



### Key Coaching Points

- Decision making skills (strike move, defensive alignment).
- Appropriate passing (short, long, flat, deep etc.)
- Appropriate running lines; decoy / option / creating spaces / accelerating into space.
- Support and reaction.
- Look-Think –Do Process
- Allow the players to self correct before intervention from the coach.

### Relevance to the Game

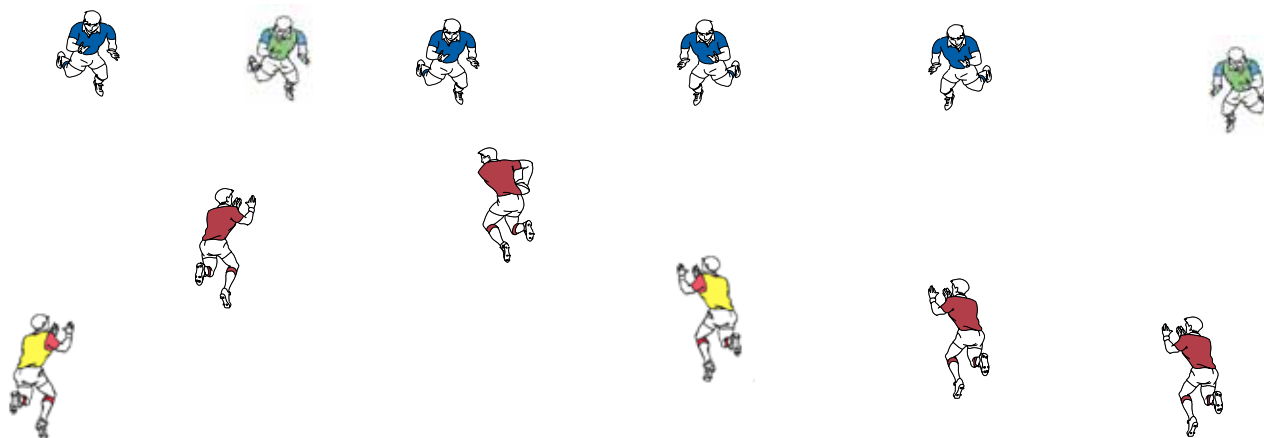
- This game calls for clinical and decisive call making and execution.
- High levels of pace in running and passing.
- Accuracy in decision making scanning and decoy / option running lines.
- Important for teams that may rely on less than 50% possession.

<b>Practice</b>	<b>Mismatch Touch</b>				
<b>Objective</b>	Scanning to pick out weaker areas of a defence.				
<b>Equipment</b>			<b>Skill Practice Requirements</b>		
<b>Balls</b>	1	<b>Bags</b>	0	<b>Area</b>	30 x 30
<b>Cones</b>	0	<b>Suits</b>	0	<b>Players</b>	All
<b>Shields</b>	0	<b>Bibs</b>	x 3	<b>Time</b>	20 minutes

### Skill Practice Description

- Two teams play touch rugby to standard rules.
- Two or three players (depending on numbers in each team) wear bibs of a different colour to the others.
- The players in bibs can participate in every way except their tackles do not count.
- The objective is for the team in possession to attack the areas these players defend.
- If other defenders move to cover the players in bibs, that will open space elsewhere.
- The defence may position the bibbed players in order to protect them or limit the spatial options.
- Any strategic thinking is to be encouraged.
- A progression may be to remove the bibs and nominate players to role play as non tackles or loose tackles if playing full contact.
- It is the job of the attack to identify and find these weaker areas in the defence and take advantage.
- It is the job of the defence not to leave these players exposed in too much space.

### Set Up Diagram



### Key Coaching Points

- The attacking team are to scan for weaker defenders.
- Once identified, keep working the attack to these areas.
- If the defence cover the weaker defenders the attack should scan to seek out alternative opportunity as a result.
- The defence to be aware of the positioning of the weaker defenders in order to strategically maximise their defensive line.

### Relevance to the Game

- All teams have diverse levels of defensive strength.
- A quick player v a slower defender guarding a wide space may be a mismatch in terms of speed into the available space.
- A quick player v a slower defender guarding a small space may not be a mismatch as the space can be defended.

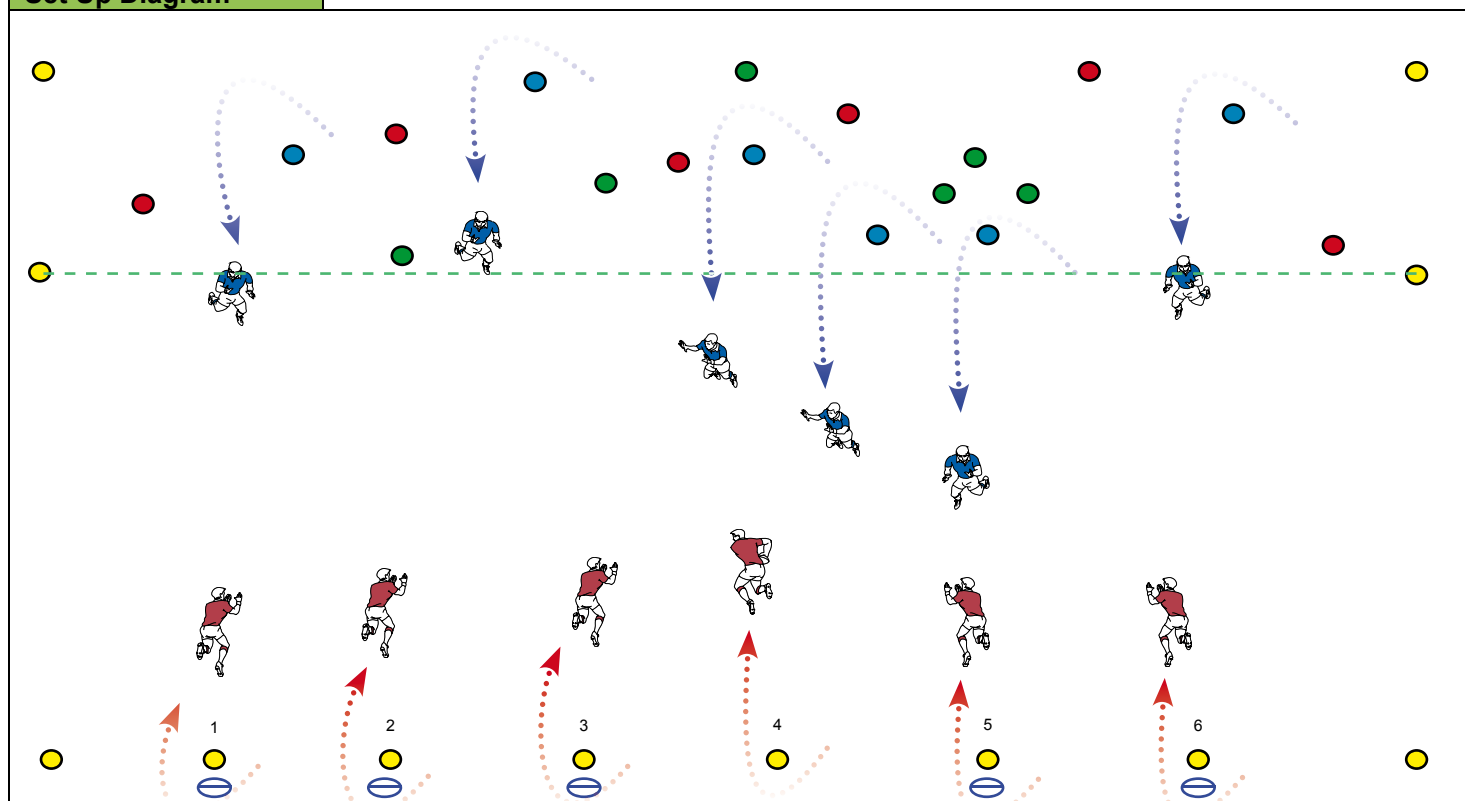


<b>Practice</b>	<b>Scatter Defence Game</b>				
<b>Objective</b>	Attacking defensive shapes.				
<b>Equipment</b>					
<b>Balls</b>	1	<b>Bags</b>	0	<b>Skill Practice Requirements</b>	
<b>Cones</b>	50	<b>Suits</b>	0	<b>Area</b>	30 x 30
<b>Shields</b>	0	<b>Bibs</b>	20	<b>Players</b>	All
				<b>Time</b>	15 minutes

### Skill Practice Description

- Ideal practice for when defences break up later in games or with counter attack decision making.
- Attackers stand in front of a numbered cone and ball.
- The coach calls a number and all attackers must run around their own numbered cone but whichever number was called, that ball becomes active.
- At the same time a colour is called for the defenders and all defenders must turn and run around cone of that colour. They must however choose different cones.
- If a touch is made, the teams swap over roles.
- If a try is scored, the attackers stay the same.
- First to five tries wins.

### Set Up Diagram



### Key Coaching Points

- Spatial awareness
- Communication
- Quickness of attack at a disorganised defence
- Skills to attack space
- Footwork and evasion skills
- Scanning skills
- Decision making
- Importance of getting behind defenders

### Relevance to the Game

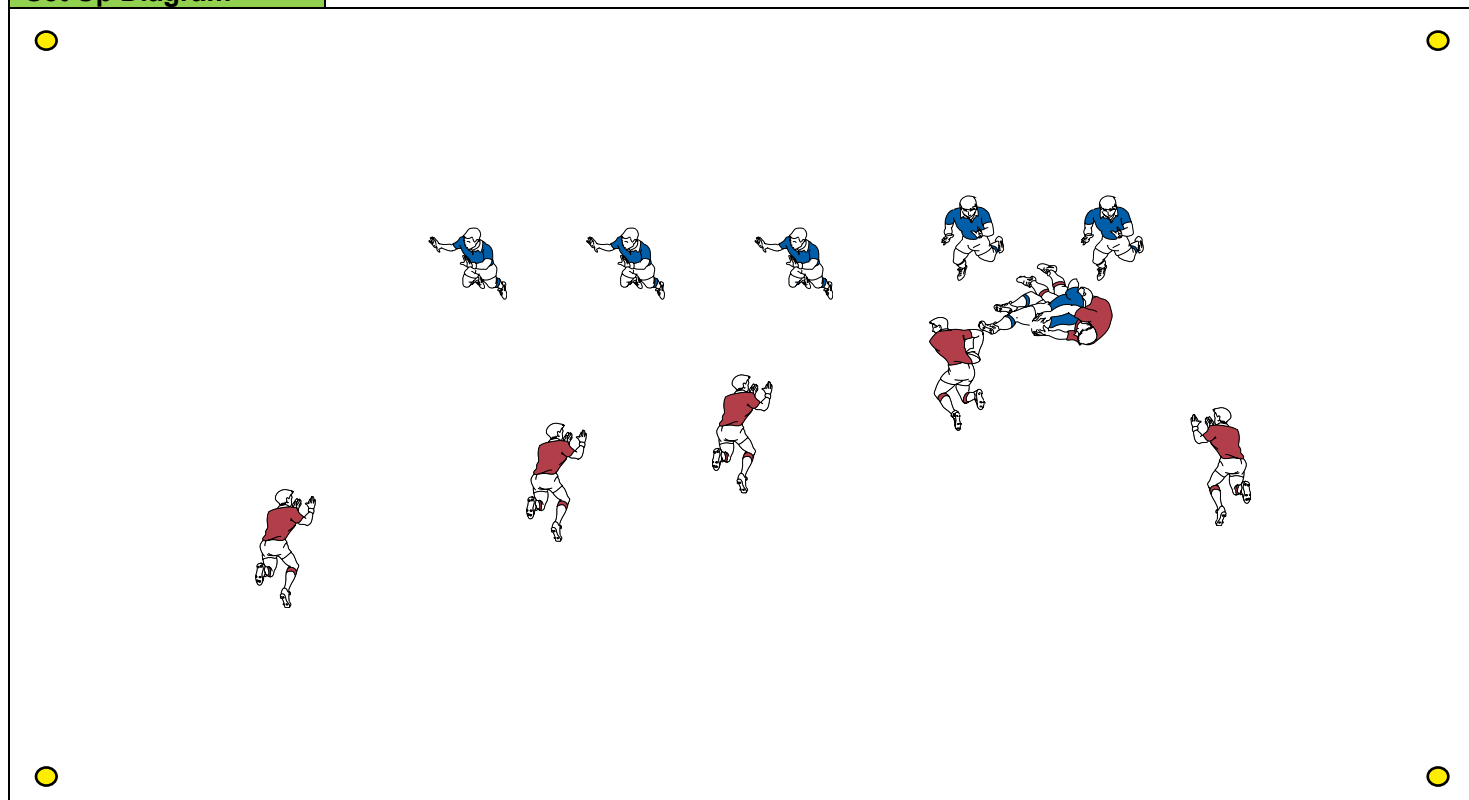
- Great for coaching counter attacking disorganised defences from different angles.
- Any player can be ball carrier and communication is vital as is decision making in identifying space and the best way to attack it successfully
- Cones can be placed to shape different types of defence. Organised or scattered.



<b>Practice</b>	<b>Ruck Touch</b>				
<b>Objective</b>	To break the habits of robotic rucking and develop appropriate decision making				
<b>Equipment</b>			<b>Skill Practice Requirements</b>		
<b>Balls</b>	1	<b>Bags</b>	0	<b>Area</b>	30 x 30
<b>Cones</b>	0	<b>Suits</b>	10	<b>Players</b>	All
<b>Shields</b>	0	<b>Bibs</b>	20	<b>Time</b>	20 Minutes
<b>Skill Practice Description</b>					

- When a player is touched or gripped, the ball carrier and defender go to the floor to simulate a ruck.
- The next attacking support player picks up the ball and passes it away from the ruck.
- The progression is for a second defender to stand over the tackled player.
- The next attacking support player should assess if they can pick up the ball. If the pressure is too great from the defender to do so, the decision may be to ruck the defender away from the ball.
- The subsequent attaker should then pick up the ball and play accordingly.
- Build the pressure with more defenders and supporting attack players who should assess the needs of the breakdown.
- At some stage take a team away who will defend only. Condition the defenders to stand in guard positions only, leaving the middle open and see how long it takes before the attack realise they can pick up and go through the middle of the tackle.

### Set Up Diagram



### Key Coaching Points

- Attacking support should not just ruck but assess if the ball can be pick up and played.
- If the ruck is required, the body shape is important to coach.
- Positives and negatives of ruck ball.
- Depth of support
- Angle of running and movement on to the ball

### Relevance to the Game

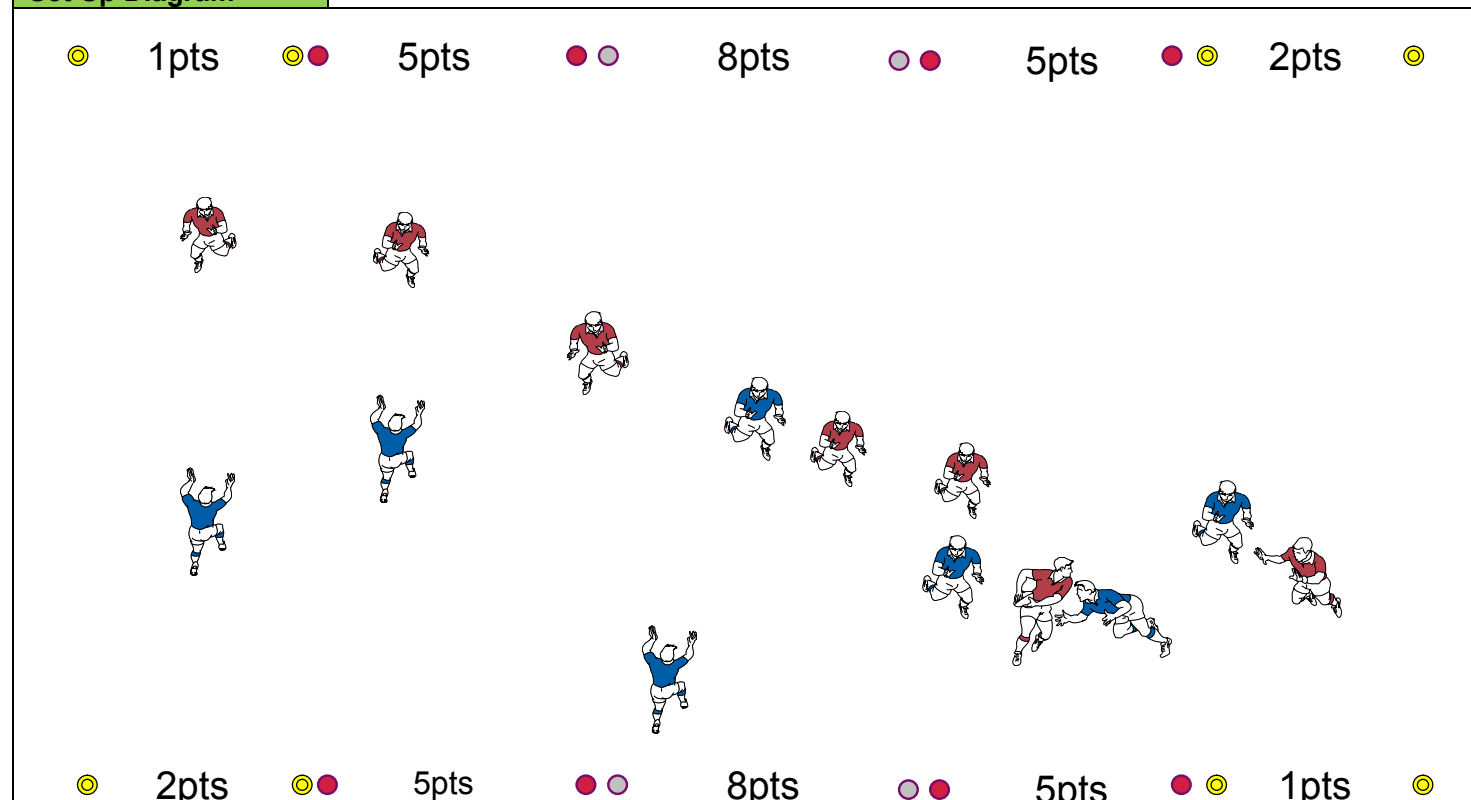
- Highlights the importance of the supporting players to the ball carrier in contact situations in order to maintain possession and produce quick ball for continuity.
- Body positions for rucking must also be coached for attack and defence.
- Counter rucking may also be introduced.

<b>Practice</b>	<b>Tactical Scoring Game</b>				
<b>Objective</b>	<b>This game is designed to develop leadership and tactical decision making</b>				
<b>Equipment</b>			<b>Skill Practice Requirements</b>		
<b>Balls</b>	1	<b>Bags</b>	0	<b>Area</b>	25 x 20m
<b>Cones</b>	50	<b>Suits</b>	0	<b>Players</b>	Small groups say 7 v 7
<b>Shields</b>	0	<b>Bibs</b>	14	<b>Time</b>	15 minutes

### Skill Practice Description

- Play small sided teams (7 v 7) in the game area but mark different scoring zones along the try lines (use coloured cones).
- Mark 5 metres in from each try line with red markers and if a try is scored in either of these areas then it will be worth 1 point from right handed passes and 2 points from left hand passes.
- The next two 5 metre zones moving inwards would be worth 5 pts and 8pts for a centre score.
- This should challenge the ability to outflank or penetrate in order to build a score.
- It may be that the defenders primarily defend in the centre side leaving the wide space to cover.
- A progression may be to reverse the score values and have the higher scoring reward on the flanks.
- How might this alter the defence shape

### Set Up Diagram



### Key Coaching Points

- Spatial awareness
- Communication
- Quickness of attack at a disorganised defence
- Skills to attack space
- Footwork and evasion skills
- Scanning skills
- Decision making

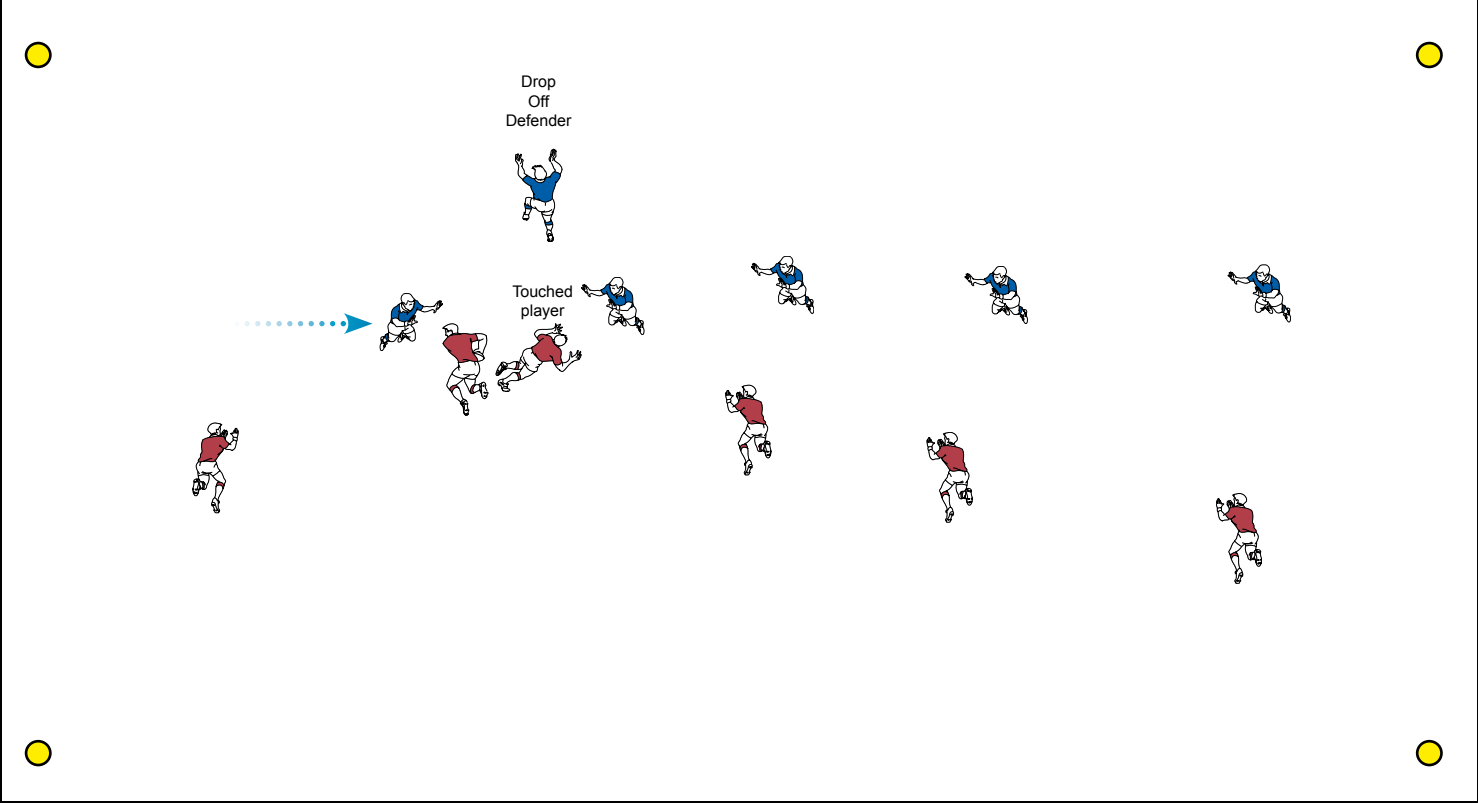
### Relevance to the Game

- This game challenges the decision making of both attack and defence.
- If for example a turn over occurs, which score area does the attack target?
- Which area does the defence cover and defend first?

<b>Practice</b>	<b>Drop Off Touch</b>				
<b>Objective</b>	Spatial Awareness Conditioning Game				
<b>Equipment</b>			<b>Skill Practice Requirements</b>		
<b>Balls</b>	1	<b>Bags</b>	0	<b>Area</b>	30 x 60 metres as appropriate
<b>Cones</b>	20	<b>Suits</b>	0	<b>Players</b>	All
<b>Shields</b>	0	<b>Bibs</b>	20	<b>Time</b>	Coach Discretion - short intense periods
<b>Skill Practice Description</b>					

- The teams play touch with the ball being passed back through the legs when touched.
- The defender/s who make the touch, turn (drop off) immediately and run to their own try line.
- These drop off defenders need to realign with the defence as soon as possible.
- The attack should seek to take advantage of the space created by the drop off defender/s.
- To get maximum effort from the players, it is advised the pitch is not so long that players do not make the effort to realign in defence.
- The coach may observe the attacking players moving the ball away from the space opportunity left by the drop off player. It may be that the defence close the space left by the drop off, however this will create space elsewhere. Can the attack find the appropriate space to utilise?

### Set Up Diagram



### Key Coaching Points

- Speed in scanning and communicating the spatial opportunity.
- Development of foundation skills, passing and running.
- Defensive effort to drop off a realign so the defence can cover the primary threat.
- Develop team work and commitment to each other.

### Relevance to the Game

- Develop the understanding of inviting multiple defenders into a tackle area in order to create space elsewhere.
- Making best use of space before the defence cover.

