

No 7 - OPENSIDE FLANKER

By

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(While the authors were producing this article, the Academy structure was developing a method of tackling that will be unusual to many coaches. The ‘new’ method is to have the right foot forward for a right shoulder tackle and the left foot up for the left shoulder. The Editor and authors felt that this will be better explained in a later piece and the subject will be covered.)

*“It should never be in the nature of No7 ever to **give in, give up or settle for second best** and this mental strength gives him a definite advantage.”*

Role Description:

The role of the No 7 within the modern game covers a variety of responsibilities both in attack (gamekeeper) and defence (poacher). This has been summarised in this diagram.

POACHER	turn	GAME KEEPER
Defensive Qualities.	Individual Qualities.	Offensive Qualities.
Confidence & determination.		
Relentless & destructive.	Focussed & single-minded.	‘Link man’ - preserves continuity. Ability of a No 9 /10.
In your face.	A ‘nose’ for the ball.	On your shoulder.
Anticipates opponents’ moves.	Reads the game well.	Excellent lines of running & support play.
Delaying tactics.	Understands the laws.	Acute awareness of the offside line.
Ruthless edge & mentally tough.		
Scavenges possession. Putting their bodies on the line.	Power, pace and presence along with Endurance.	First to secure possession. Putting their bodies on the line.
Effective rucking & mauling.	Controlled aggression.	Effective rucking & mauling.
Hunts & destroys.	Anticipation.	Quickest route to the ball.
Left shoulder (**generally) tackles from scrum and line-out.	Awareness and reaction time.	Supports the inside shoulder & be ready for any offloads.
7 -10 channel hits (centres) or open play big hits gain ground & possession.	Excellent eye for an opportunity.	Line breaks. Gains ground & retains possession.
Decision making.		

Competes at the Breakdown.	Awareness & peripheral vision.	Retains possession at the breakdown.
Competes for the ball 'hands on', ruck, or stays out and defends.	All-round fitness and experience. Understanding of the laws.	Wipes, secures, picks & drives, picks and feeds, picks and scrum-half pass.
Set piece.(Especially related to position on the field whilst scanning/evaluating opposition.)		
Pride in the job & unquenchable thirst for work.		
Up on your feet quickly, looks for the next tackle.	Excellent all-round fitness.	Up on your feet quickly, looks to support.
Rarely misses tackles.	Attention to detail.	Rarely loses possession.
Interceptions & turnovers.	Flair.	Kicks & difficult passing.

(** There is a definite left-side preponderance for most 7s in the tackle when the right side (from scrums on the left-hand side of the pitch) is often defended first by the scrum-half. He is closest to the opposing fly-half and can get to him quicker than the defending 7.)

Skills Contents.

Game Keeper.

1) Ball winning.

- Specific role at set piece.
- Fall on loose ball and get to feet quickly.
- Catch high ball under pressure.

2) Ball usage.

a) Handling (2v1, 3v2, 4v3)

- Lateral pass off both hands under pressure (short/long).
- Pop pass, scrum-half pass.
- Offloads & pop ups.

3) Ball retention.

Evasive running (1v1).

- Side step.
- Bump & spin.
- Dummy.
- Effective support running lines.
- Ball presentation skills – produce quick ball.

b) Contact /breakdown skills.

i) Rucking.

- Clearing technique.
- Secure possession.
- Pick & drive.
- Pop pass.

ii) Mauling.

- Latching before contact.
- Hit & rip.
- Hit & offer.
- Hit & pop.
- Hit & roll.
- Decision-making at the breakdown.

Poacher Skills

- Effective defensive lines of run – ‘shortest route.’
- Tackling & defensive organisation.
- 1V1, 2v1, 3v2, 4v3.
- Front, side & rear tackles - general and from specific situations.
- Turnover tackles.
- Left sided tackles from scrums & line-outs.
- Midfield cover tackles.
- Tackle endurance.
- Big hits.
- Turnover ball.

Other:

- Interceptions.
- Charge downs.
- Falling on the ball.

IN ATTACK – ‘GAME KEEPER’ – Keeping the ball alive.

1) BALL WINNING (understanding individual and team role).

General points:

Line-outs and scrums –

- To understand his role in back-row moves and link up as part of a loose forward trio.
- Have a close relationship with the half-backs (awareness of game plan and backs’ moves) to form an effective attacking unit.

Specific points:

Scrum.

- He should communicate effectively with his forwards before the engagement. For example, when there is quick ball, he must be aware of why he needs to channel the ball effectively to No 8’s feet from a channel 1 strike. He also needs to understand when a wheel is to occur and adapt accordingly.
- Protect his own side’s put-in.
- At all times must be able to see the ball in the scrum. Must know precisely when the ball leaves the scrum.

Line-out

- Does not get tied up in mauls unnecessarily.
- Always be alert and quick to react to the fact that the ball may not be won cleanly.
- (i) **Ball is overthrown to the back:** options – (a) catch the ball and drive or, if lost, (b) attempt to isolate the catcher and turn him.
- (ii) **Ball not gathered properly:** quick to fall or gather loose ball. Options – (a) pass the ball immediately or (b) look for support.
- (iii) **Thrown to the tail:** understand your dual role as a potential lifter and a cover for the over throw.
- 4) **Shepherding:** understand the need to run lines from line-out which allow you to support your backs quickly while slowing opposite number and preserving space for backs to possible attack (between tail of line-out and opposite No10).

Restarts.

Receiving own team’s restart:

- Generally he will need to anticipate direction and length of kick to support effectively.
- Awareness of the short and high 10m kick-off to isolate and pressurise the opposition No 7.
- Understand his role as part of the chasing group. (e.g. you could attempt to run past the catcher in case the ball is tapped or not taken cleanly.)

2) BALL RETENTION & USAGE

(i) **Off 1st phase ball – the shortest route to the point of attack is vital.** To be effective at this you **MUST** communicate with both your forwards (No 8 for back row moves) and backs, especially with your 9 & 10. **MUST** talk to No10 for a set call **before** the line-out or scrum.

Anticipation also plays a crucial part with No 7 having an appreciation of what the backs may be thinking by looking at aspects such as field position and its relation to the game plan, time within the game, strength and weaknesses of the opposition and the score. This will allow the player to estimate where the likely attack will occur.

ii) Breakdown & open play situations.

Decision making at the breakdown is crucial for a No7. He is often one of the first three players there and so his decision could make or break whether the ball is:

- Retained or lost.
- Quick ball or slow ball.

To assist in this decision making, consider these points:

Without the ball - No 7s should always strive to be in possession of or be near to the ball at all times. This will require a real **‘nose for the ball’** to ensure close support. The above comments from set piece will help, but this unique skill often is instinctive. It can, however, be improved through hard work and experience.

a) Open Play – close support is crucial. Try to focus on running lines which allow you to support the inside shoulder of ball carrier and from depth to allow time to react and provide options. Try hard not to over-run or to get too flat on the ball carrier.

b) Breakdown situations. Ask the following questions:

- 1) **What is the situation?** Is it ruck, maul, tackle or loose ball?
- 2) **Where has it occurred?** What is the position on the pitch? Is it out wide or close in?
- 3) **When did it happen?** Are you 1st, 2nd or 3rd man there?
- 4) **Who else is there?** Do the opposition have hands on the ball?
- 5) **How can you help best?** Is it with the wipe, secure, pick and drive, pop, pass or stay out? **No 7s must not get tied up unnecessarily.**

With the ball. No7s are often required to carry the ball in open play. The dilemma is whether to pass or to take contact to maintain continuity. The focus is on becoming a creative strike runner by being able to take the ball forward effectively whilst keeping the

ball alive and making decisions quickly. Often the No 7 is exposed to making crucial decisions under pressure in congested areas such as around ruck and maul. Open play also brings its own set of problems by presenting the No 7 with a large array of possible options to decide upon. Whether it is in open play or in congested areas, you must **play with your head up**, looking at and weighing up options.

Key points to consider:

- 1) **Do I have support?**
- 2) **Is there someone in a better position than me to attack?**
- 3) **Can I keep the ball alive and off the floor?**

i) **In congested areas.** Often you are forced to make decisions almost instinctively due to the lack of time because of pressure from the opposition. By considering the key questions, you can enhance the speed of thought and your effectiveness. ‘Do I pass?’ and, ‘If so, will I do it before, or out of contact?’ are key. Before deciding, the No 7 must be aware that his decision can reap high rewards (line break) but can also end in loss of possession. So choose wisely!

If you decide to pass, what do you consider?

- **How much time & space available?**
- **Where is my support?**
- **What do I do afterwards – ‘pass and follow?’**

If you decide to take contact what do you consider?

- 1) **Do I have support?**
- 2) **Can I deliver quick ball?**
- 3) **Can I stay on my feet to continue to support?**
- 4) **Can I get in a position to offload?**

Taking contact. The modern game considers taking contact as a temporary failure of the attack but sometimes you have no other choice. The key is to **take contact on your terms** (e.g. **run at branches not tree trunks!**) and minimise the damage by attempting to stay on your feet as long as possible and focus on delivery of quick ball.

ii) **Open play.** The same questions apply here but you may have more options and time to make these decisions **so play with your head up** and focus on where the space is. If it is outside your ‘*area of influence*’ (approx 5-10m), move the ball quickly to this area; ‘pass and follow’ is often your best bet. If it’s in front of you, use your speed and evasive skills to ‘press’ and take the ball forward at pace. However, always be focused on *keeping the ball alive and not getting isolated.*

GENERAL TIPS.

- Don’t get caught – you are not looking for contact.
- Attack space (branches not the tree trunks).

- Be positive.
- Stick to your first thought.
- Look for the early pass and support.
- Fix forwards and look for the mismatches.

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

IN ATTACK – ‘GAME KEEPER’ skills

1) BALL WINNING

Scrum

- Proper scrummaging is a priority.
- Tight bind and correct position to generate maximum push in the scrum.
- In on the ‘engage’ call from the referee.

Line-out

- Effective supporting technique required.
- May be required to jump.
- Sweeping and peeling from tapped ball.
- Effective communicator and ball carrier in the maul when required (Neil Back driving line-outs is an excellent example).
- Focus of developing the ability to fall on the ball and regain your feet quickly.

Restarts

- Receiving the ball - to be able to take a high ball under pressure.
- Taking the restart – ready to fall on loose ball or tackle first receiver.

2) BALL RETENTION & USAGE

HANDLING (speed, accuracy, variety, depth and width).

All main passes used off either hand under pressure.

Acquisition of key skills with a full range of lateral, short, long (10m+), pop, scrum- half and offload passes.

Application of key skills – 2v1, 3v2, 4v3.

OFFENSIVE RUNNING SKILLS

1) EVASIVE skills – need to be a creative strike runner with power.

General points –

- Isolate defenders and run at their inside/ weak shoulder.
- Stay on your feet and use footwork to off balance opponent.

- Creative strike runner – Acquisition of key skills such as sidestep, bounce & spin etc.
- Application of those key skills in for example, 1v1 with effective running angles.

2) LINES OF RUN:

1) **Off line-outs and scrums** – skill of **shepherding**. Understand the need to run lines off line-out which allow you to support your backs quickly while slowing opposite number and preserving space for backs to attack.

2) **Close support is crucial** – try to focus on running lines which allow you to support the inside shoulder of the ball carrier whilst coming from depth to allow time to react and provide options. Try hard not to over-run or get to flat with the ball carrier.

SUPPORT PLAY AT THE BREAKDOWN

General technique - Go forward with hips below low shoulders, effective body angles and leg-drive through contact.

Effective support at a breakdown. No 7s need to be multi-skilled and will be required to perform all the following with excellent technique:

Application of skill at rucking platform:

Key skills:

- Wipe:** Think of an aeroplane taking off – come in low, ruck over and beyond the ball.
- Pick and drive.** As above, then step past the ball whilst staying low and adopting a vigorous leg drive.
- Pop or pass.** As above, following good passing technique.
- Secure.** Stay over the ball in a low body position with hips below shoulders. Latch onto the player on the ground.

Application of skill at the maul:

Acquisition of key skills:

- Hit and latch on the ball carrier before contact with an opponent. Rip the ball, keeping square with legs driving.

Options:

- Hit & rip, c) hit & offer and d) hit & pop.

Carrying the ball into contact- keep the ball alive.

- *Before contact* – focus on generating pace, then slow down to offset defender before accelerating again into the space/target. Support runners dictate areas to attack.
- *If contact is required* - early step /preparation. Control the contact and use continuous feet movement through contact whilst allowing for the option to offload with control.
- Contact awareness/decisions – whether to stay on feet or go to ground.

<h2>TACTICAL REQUIREMENTS</h2>

IN DEFENCE – ‘POACHER’ – hunt & destroy.

General principles of defence to consider:

Pressurise – Get ‘into the face’ of the opposition.

Observe & anticipate – Head up and be aware of what is going on.

Aggression – Physical tackling.

Communication – Talk to own back row & half backs. The 7/10 relationship is vital for effective team defence.

Hunt the ball - Stay on the inside of the ball and get **width** quickly, while offering **depth of cover** for cover tackles.

Enthusiasm and mobility – Working to get to the ball first with the quickest route to ball.

Regain possession – Ultimate defensive aim must be turnovers or ‘smash & grab.’

As a number 7 you have a vital part to play in all these areas by:

- Ability to apply pressure.
- Ability to regain possession.
- Fulfilling a specific defensive role from scrum and line-out.
- Ability to link with other players as a defensive unit – 7/10 communication.
- Being leader of defence systems.
- Understanding the role at set-piece and open play.

From 1st phase ball

Before the play has started:

Scan the field -Anticipate the moves of the opposition before they occur. Need a good appreciation of principles of play.

Be able to pick up cues from body language and situations. For example, from a line-out:

- Look at position of opposition 10** – The opposite 10 may be standing deep and well behind his own forwards from a line-out (or behind a scrum ‘in the pocket’). This will most likely signal a kicking option. However, if he stands flat and wide, he may be looking to run or put runners back inside.
- Hip and foot position of centres** – If angled towards you, opposition may be looking to take an angled run back to their forwards on a switch play.
- Position on the field** – Inside your own 22, opponents may look to take a line-out off the tail and drive; inside your own half, opposition may look to take the ball off the top but hit up the mid field.

Overall, looking and interpreting correctly what is going on and what may happen next is the key to being in the right place at the right time – developing a ‘nose for the ball.’

During the play: - focus on **disrupting & disputing** primary possession by:

1) **Close in:**

- Key responsibility is the initial ball carrier mainly number 9, 8 or 10, depending on the option taken.
- **Isolating the catcher or ball carrier** e.g. turning the man in the tackle.
- **Scavenging for the ball** – Compete for everything, e.g. falling on loose ball or attempting a turnover.
- **Compete for opponents' ball** – Getting hands on.
- **Anticipate passes or mistakes e.g. at restarts** – At your kick, focus on running beyond the ball catcher to secure any tap down or loose ball.

2) **Wider out:**

- No 7 generally leads up the defence line, especially from line-outs and right side scrums.
- The **exception** may be when the scrum-half will lead up the defensive line from left side scrums. The 7 then acts as 9's 'wing man' and defends his inside shoulder.
- **Communication** with halfbacks is vital, especially on how the defence will operate. Is it to be 'man for man' or 'drift' etc?
- **Don't fly up** – Work together as a defensive line or you will leave gaps for opponents to attack.
- **Hunt and destroy** – Once the ball has moved on from your primary targets (no9/8/10), don't give up. Hunt that ball and remain in the face of your opponents.
- **Keep between the ball and the try line** – This will ensure effective lines and allow for the shortest route to the ball.
- Remain on the inside shoulder of the ball carrier so you are pushing the attack wide and reducing the chance of your over-running the ball or being wrong-footed.

3) **Other circumstances:** Through a combination of anticipation, courage and determination, always try to be alert to opportunities to regain possession.

- a) **Interception** – A combination of a good understanding of the Laws of the game, intuitive tactical appreciation (option taking) and excellent speed, you could provide a golden opportunity for your team to score via an interception. However, this can be high risk and you could equally open up your defensive line for opponents to score.
- b) **Charge down** - Is a great way to get the ball behind your opponents and offer a scoring/attacking opportunity. It is also a great team morale booster!
Before the game, when you may be able to use video analysis of the opponents, or early in the game, ask these questions.
 - i) Has the principle kicker (normally No10) got a preferred kicking foot?
 - ii) Where does he stand to kick (in the pocket)?
 - iii) Has the No 9 got a quick and accurate service?

Knowing answers to these questions may pay dividends when the knowledge can give you the edge of even a split second.

Overall:

Focus on:

- 1) **Shut down the space** – Get in the face of opponents.
- 2) **Offensive tackle** – Trying to create an error or turnover.
- 3) **Get to your feet quickly** – Attempt to regain possession.

Developing Defensive lines of run for the back row

Drill one: ‘semi circle’.

Objectives:

- 1) Develop defensive lines of run of the back row.
- 2) Improve communication and co-ordination of the back row unit.
- 3) Encourage their roles as the primary as well as the secondary defence from set pieces.

Equipment:

Cones.

Grid – 15m x 20m.

Shields – 4.

Suits – 4.

Balls – 2.

Progressions:

- a) No opponents – Just working on spacing and communication.
- b) Opponents with shields – Back row v 4 attackers (backs).
- c) Introduce the ball – Only wide passing.
- d) Attacking options – Backs attempt their moves against the back row.
- e) Remove the cones – Develop own lines.
- f) Increase the area – Game related. Defend from the posts left & right.

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

IN DEFENCE – ‘POACHER’ – hunt & destroy

GENERAL

- Effective lines of run and showing speed to the breakdowns.
- Ability to be effective at the breakdowns.
- Choosing the correct option.
- Applying weight in the scrums.

TACKLING – (Effective individual defence technique).

Key focus must be on creating turnovers or spilled ball.

- 1) **Close** – Left and right side tackles from scrum and line-out, big hits around the ruck or maul and sticking to back-row defence systems.
 - From **right side scrums** - Left shoulder tackles on opposition back-row.
 - From **right side line-outs** – Left shoulder tackle on 10 or right sided tackle on centre (cutting back) or blindside wing.
 - From **left hand scrums** – Left shoulder tackles on centres (cutting back) or blindside wing.
 - From **left line-outs** – Left shoulder tackles on centres (cutting back) and blindside wing or right sided tackle on fly half.
- 2) **Turnover tackles** – Isolating the ball carrier, turning the opponent and the ball to your side with a judo type action.
- 3) **Wide** – Midfield cover tackles, especially after a line break by opposition

General:

- 4) **Big hits** - Offensive tackles.
- 5) **Tackle and compete for the ball** – Smother, hit and turnover.
- 6) **Rear tackling** – Cover defence.

WINNING THE BALL

- Nose for the ball!
- **On the floor** – Able to slow down opposition ball, falling on the ball.
- **Turnover ball** – Able to steal the ball.
- **In hand** – Mauling, high ball catches and interceptions.

DEFENSIVE RUNNING SKILLS (speed, acceleration, evasion).

- **Lines off scrum and line-out** – Stay between the ball and the try line.
- **Hunt and destroy** – ‘In your face’ defence.
- 1v1 and 2v2 skills.

FOCUS

- 1) Shut down the space.
- 2) Tackle – Trying to create an error or turnover.
- 3) Get to your feet quickly – Attempt to regain possession.

The 'big hit' or offensive tackling

Openside flankers need to be destructive in their tackling as well as being highly effective at the side, rear and front tackle. The importance of stepping in vigorously, not just soaking up their pressure, *must* apply and often a 'big hit' is the result.

Examples.

1. Set piece scrum and the opposition No 8 picks up. Driving the player back will disrupt the attack and may generate a turnover. Just providing a soak-up tackle merely leads to the defending No 7 being out of the game, which was probably what the opposition intended, to allow more space for their backs to attack.
2. Line-out with a back peel. The No 7 can defend effectively by isolating the ball-carrier through driving him back.
3. Open play when a centre comes back from a switch. A big hit will prevent early support and will make it ideal for a turnover opportunity.

AIM

- **Anticipate** the line of run.
- Crouch and look up into the target's lower ribs.
- Keep your head to one side.

FIRE!

- **Drive** your shoulder up into the lower rib area.
- Keep driving forward.

Drills to develop the strength and skills.

- 1) **Punching shields.** The objective is to warm up the shoulders and encourage the coordinated effort of leg, hip and shoulder into the tackle.
. Key points:
 - Crouch into a small lunge stance.
 - Right arm punch with left leg forward. Left arm punch with right leg forward.
 - Punch through the bag and chase up with the legs.
- 2) **1v1 – 'Drive the shields'**. The objective is to experience the use of the shoulder and to drive from low to high up into the ribs and through tackle in a forward direction. This can be developed further with the same action that is carried out closer to the

shield so that the tackler has to generate power quickly. A further progression can be tried with the tackler keeping his hands behind his back.

- 3) **1v1 - Walking tackles.** Work in repetitions of 3-5 tackles off each shoulder. The opponent, who is holding a shield, **must** be knocked back.

Progressions:

- Jogging, with no evasion allowed for the shield holder, in a 5m by 5m space.
- Full speed in a small area with evasion by the shield holder.

- 4) **Saturation tackling** – 1 tackler v 5 shield holders in a timed tackle endurance in a confined 5m by 10m grid.

Objective - To encourage a quick return to the feet and to highlight the need for sustained determination and efficiency after repeated tackling.

Progressions.

- 1) One tackler and the shield carriers walk around the grid. Tackler must clear the grid by tackling each player out of the grid as quickly as possible.
- 2) Attackers can now run and be evasive in the same space and exercise.

FITNESS TRAINING

PACE – POWER - PRESENCE

Pre-season (July to August)

Running programme

On each session you should include at least 20mins dyno flex and SAQ continuum, then dyno flex to cool down at the end.

July

Session 1 & 3 – (Interval runs).

Reps – 4.

Sets - 4.

Distance - 150m.

Intensity - 90% effort.

Recovery – walk backs between reps with 3mins between sets.

Session 2 – (10 to 20m shuttles).

Sprint – 20 seconds.

Rest – 40 seconds.

Sets - 8.

Recovery – 5mins between sets.

1 – plyometric circuit.

Session 4 -Multi directional interval runs with up/downs and other circuit type activities.

August

Session 1 & 3 – (Interval runs).

Acceleration sprints.

100%.

Reps – 12.

Set – 1.

Distance - 50m.

Recovery – wait until heart-rate is back to 120 bpm. (Beats per minute).

Session 2 – (10 to 20m shuttles).

Sprint – 20 seconds.

Rest – 40 seconds.

Sets - 8.

Recovery – 5mins between sets.

1 – plyometric circuit.

Session 5 -Multi directional interval runs with up/downs and other circuit type activities.

POWER & PRESENCE

INTENSITY – 70-80% 1RM.

Reps – 8-10 reps.

Sets – 4.

Focus on explosive but controlled movements.

Need to use an Olympic bar for lifts.

No	Basic	Advanced
Warm up using dyno flex movements, followed by core stability		
1	One legged squats.	Snatch squat (light).
2	Back squats.	High pulls or cleans.
3	Bench press.	Fit ball flys.
4	Front squats.	Lunges
5	Seated pulls (machine)	Bent-over rows.
6	Dead lifts.	Dead lifts & fit ball leg curls.
7	Barbell shoulder press.	Push press.
8	Core stability work.	Core stability work.

Psychological Positional Requirements

Handles pressure well. The wide-ranging role of this position places specific psychological pressures on the player. The player in this position will be required to be in the front-line defence and you will offer last-line defence while making offensive decisions in tight situations.

Attentive. Being observant is a vital part of a successful No 7. Being able to notice things like certain body language of opponents, and their strengths and weaknesses, will improve your chances on getting to the ball quickly.

Resilient. Often No7s are required to be brave and to put their body on the line or where in may get hurt - and then they are expected to get up and do it all over again.

Determined and decisive. No 7s have to want the ball and want to be near the ball whenever possible. This requires determination. Being decisive will increase the likelihood of success at crucial times.

Ever present. Team mates need to be reassured that help is always at hand. Displaying a willingness to do whatever you can to be there when needed often makes you a very valuable player.

Self confident. Not being confident in what you can do will lead to indecision and you may never show your true ability.

Tenacious. Being terrier-like and making a nuisance of yourself in defence will also win you respect from opponents.

Physical Positional Requirements

Over 5'10". Stereotypes are dangerous and there will always be exceptions. However, on analysis of the top No7s in the world, all are 5'10" or above.

Power & strength. These are vital for the combat part of your role, especially when scrapping for possession in defence and securing it in offence. Contact skills require immense strength and power to be effective.

Endurance. Run-ability - having the engine to complete the massive amount of work and cover the ground that a good open-side will cover in a game.

Ninety kg body weight + presence. Size matters to No 7. Again, stereotyping is dangerous but after analysing the top No7s in the world, the average body weight was

found to be 90kg or above. This allows for a balance of speed to the breakdown and effectiveness on arrival.

Speed and speed endurance. Pace is a vital ingredient to a successful No 7. Without it, you always come off second best.

Intant reactions. Due to the nature of your role, often making split-second decisions, it makes sense to suggest that you will also need excellent reactions to exploit those decisions.

Dynamic. Whatever you need to do, be positive and explosive. Half-hearted clears or tackles are not characteristic of a successful No7.

Endless Energy and thirst for work. A combination of both psychological and physiological factors mentioned above is important. This is linked to the 'gold at the end of the rainbow' – developing a nose for the ball.

Suppleness. No7s are asked to get into all sorts of positions and good flexibility increases the chance of success.