

THE SECOND ROW **SPECIFIC TECHNICAL AND TACTICAL** **REQUIREMENTS**

By
Corin Palmer,
Academy Manager at London Irish (England) Academy.

Forwards in the modern game have to be able to perform all the game's open skills alongside their tight role requirements. The execution of these skills is dependent upon an early decision being made, often under extreme pressure.

Despite this, each position necessitates a number of key-specific technical and tactical requirements at first phase and in broken-field play. These decisions and skills, once practised and coached under pressure, combine to produce an effective unit.

The second row is no exception to this; a number of specific key functions need to be performed under pressure, when fatigued and as effectively in the eighty sixth minute (as games last for this period of time these days) as in the first.

SECOND ROW - A PROFILE.

1. Has the ability to win own line-out ball.
2. Has the ability to win opposition line-out ball.
3. Adopts the correct body position to generate maximum push in scrums.
4. Has the ability to win ball at restarts by being able to jump and catch it above the head.
5. Has effective individual tackling techniques.
6. Has effective team defence techniques.
7. Understands loose play, i.e. when to go to a ruck, or when to be a runner.
8. Is a creative strike runner, who has power, creativity and strike potential.
9. Is comfortable with ball in hand and can catch and pass with either hand.
10. Is able to deliver quick ball in contact.
11. Has a physical presence at the contact area.
12. Is mentally tough and competes and trains at 95-100% of ability at all times.
13. Has world-class fitness standards.
14. Has a ruthless edge in the pursuit of winning.

FIRST PHASE

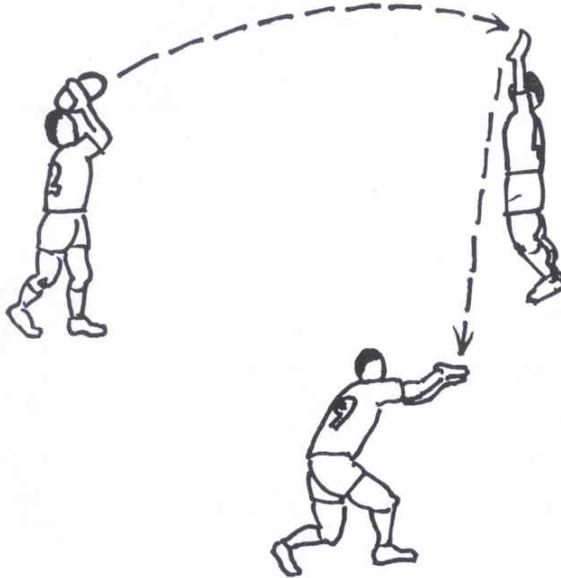
A. ROLE AT THE LINE-OUT.

Has the ability to win own ball.

The second row is used in the line-out as a key ball provider. Whether it is in a conventional full line-out or in a shortened version, a number of key skills is needed to ensure that, once the ball has been thrown in, it is fielded and delivered cleanly.

The ball can be delivered in 3 ways:

- **Off the top**-desirable when the ball is needed quickly by the scrum half. The second row must have used 'soft hands' in both taking and giving the ball.



- **Caught and driven** - this ball produces a good platform for the kicking game and can also tie in the opposition. The opposition has to work to stop the drive and this can create space to attack elsewhere. It is safer and, therefore, is useful both in defence *and* in attack, as the start of a drive to score.
- **Caught and given** - because the second row comes to ground before the ball is released to the scrum half (or the player acting as scrum half), the opposition back-row is held, providing time and space for attacks to be launched.

To execute the methods of ball delivery outlined, a number of key components must be executed effectively:

- An accurate call.
- An accurate throw.
- A dynamic jump.
- A powerful lift.
- Soft hands.
- Effective blocking and driving.

Specifically, the second row must possess proficiency in the following:

A Dynamic Jump

- Even though the second row (as a principal ball winner at the line-out) has supporters to assist, a powerful leap and, more importantly, leaving the ground at speed are important components that need to be executed.

- Second rows must practise the full range of jumps that can involve the directly vertical, going forward to the ball and going backwards. Some locks can lose rhythm and balance when they have to move, particularly backwards, before they jump.
- They need, therefore, to practise the movement pattern involved *without* the ball. The effective jump is always fast and, regardless of the foot movements which have preceded it, the jump should always be vertical.
- The jumper moves and the supporters move towards and with him. The second row has to be able to adjust his upper body action in order to stretch for the throw that may be slightly off-line or trajectory. This too must be practised.

Soft Hands

The second row has to be able to manipulate the ball delicately. The contrast between the aggressive power of the jump and the deflection which takes the ball to the scrum half's hand is marked. The second row needs to practise by:

- Giving and taking passes above the head, using the fingertips, not palms
- Executing this moving backwards and forwards
- Executing single-handed and with both hands, practising equally with left and right.
- Executing the skill when held up by supporters.

The ability to win opposition line-out ball.

To win, or at least disrupt opposition ball, the following must be combined:

- An intelligent call.
- A dynamic jump.
- Powerful support.
- Timing.

Specifically, the second row must possess skill execution in a dynamic jump and powerful support. The component parts are identical to those in the offensive lineout.

- Best use of personnel.
- Quick hands and feet.
- Strong stance and leg drive.
- Practice with jumpers/supporters.
- Practice as a complete unit.

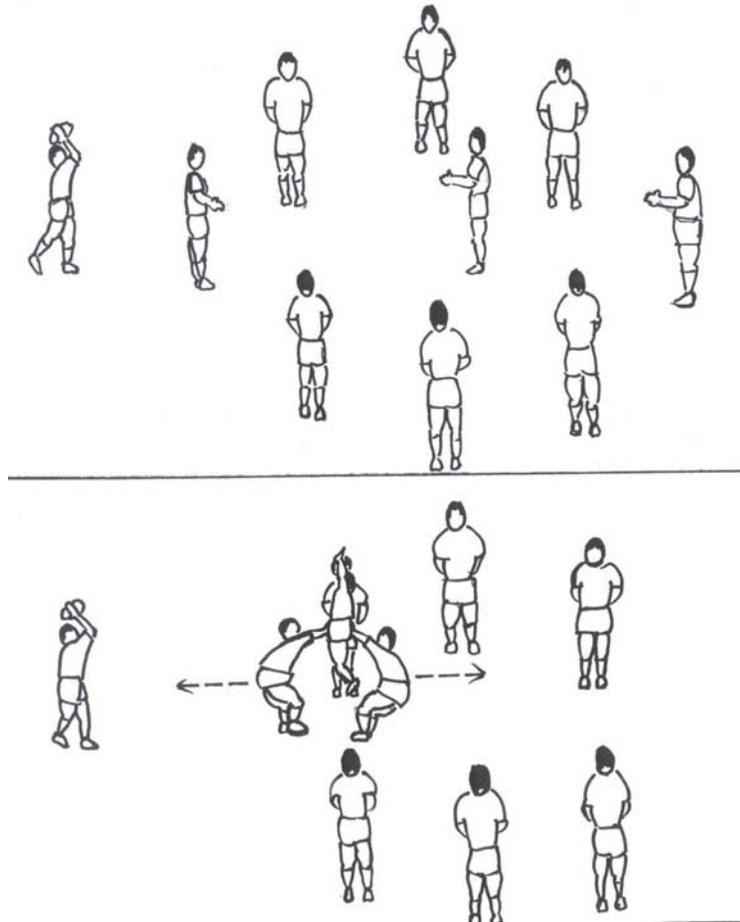
Timing

- The timing of the agreed defensive play with a single jump, a double jump or a drive immediately against the opposition catch is essential. The defensive second row must appreciate that the opposition thrower will delay the throw if the jump is too soon.
- The team, especially the defensive line-out 'pods', must try to read their throw and anticipate the timing.
- Practice, involving the second row with supporters as a defensive 'pod', should work on communication going forwards, backwards and on the speed of jump with support.

DRILLS

Decision - Making 'Pod' Work.

1. The jumper stands in the middle of the circle.
2. Players in the circle are numbered off.
3. The hooker's position is outside the circle.
4. The coach calls two numbers. The two numbers called become the support for the jumper. They must communicate quickly who will support at the front and back respectively.
5. The jumper communicates either forward or back, and 'set' or 'lift'.
6. The hooker throws into the jumper.
7. The supporters return to the circle, and the coach calls out two new numbers. The process continues.

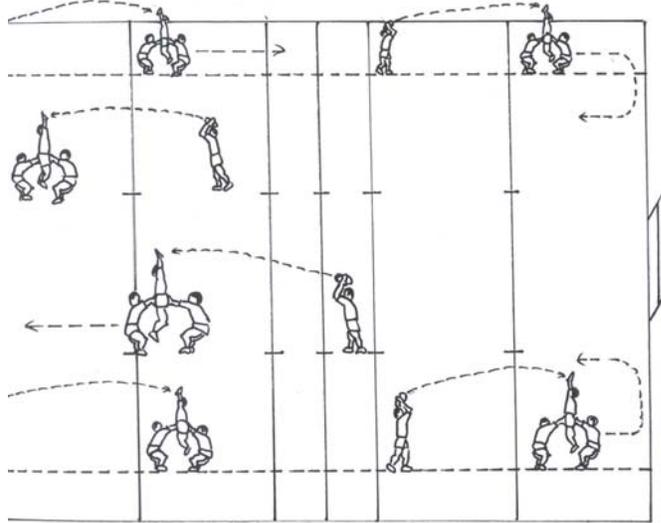


'Pod' Relay.

1. Two pods of three (jumper and two supports) are lined up on the goal line with a hooker each. On the coach's whistle, both pods run as far as they can, then set and lift.
2. The hooker throws to the elevated jumper. The hooker follows his own throw and the jumper delivers the ball to him.
3. If the throw does not go to hand, then the ball is returned to the hooker and the throw from that position is repeated.

4. If the throw does go to hand, the hooker collects the ball and the pod advances further down the pitch.
5. Both pods are racing against each other and the first pod to go up the pitch and back wins.

It is important that the coach watches the technique of both 'pods' carefully. This drill is putting the techniques under pressure, so that technique should not be compromised.



B. ROLE AT THE SCRUMMAGE

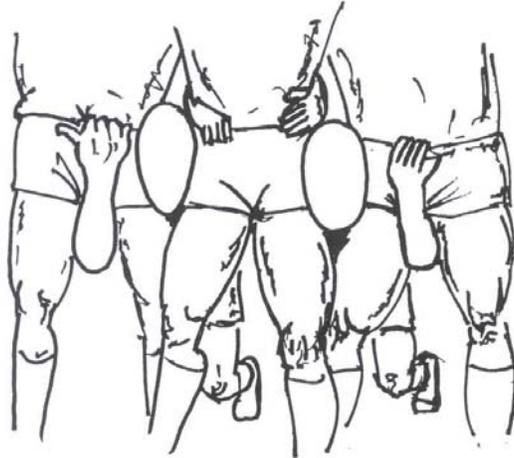
The second row is an integral part of the scrummaging unit. The technical effectiveness to generate maximum individual push possible is governed by:

- Binding.
- Body position.

Binding

The second row must ensure that an effective bind on both prop and partner is a priority.

- On the prop, the second row must get the shoulder into the niche where the prop's buttock meets the thigh. The bind must then come through the prop's legs, around the inner leg, to take an absolute firm grip on the waistband without strain.



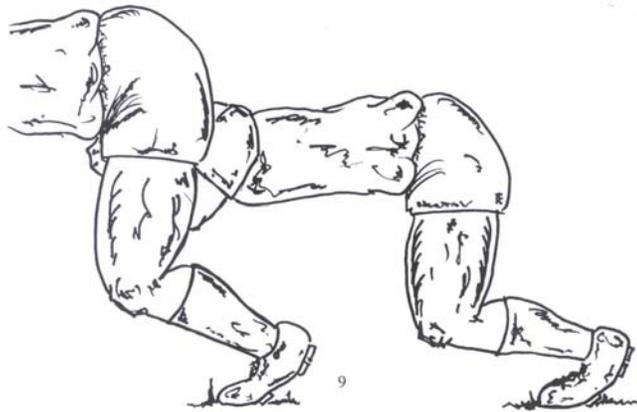
- Second rows will generally work out with each other (in terms of comfort), whose arm will bind over and whose under. But one second row should bind at armpit level with the other on the waistband of the shorts.



- It is imperative that the fist is clenched tightly and the inside arm locked by both second rows to ensure that the unit is tight and square. Guard against reaching around the front of the shirt (a common fault for the lock who binds over) as this will stop the unit from becoming square.

Body Position

- The lock's shoulders start at the prop's mid thigh and, when the scrum moves to engage, the shoulders slide up underneath the buttock at the top of the hamstring. The point of the shoulder pushes through the base of the prop's spine.



- The second rows' heads are between the props and hooker before engagement. They should be looking up and ahead through the eyebrows, which has the desirable effect of hollowing the back.
- At engagement the second rows' feet are shoulder-width apart, with the knees bent at 90 degrees to produce as much drive as possible.

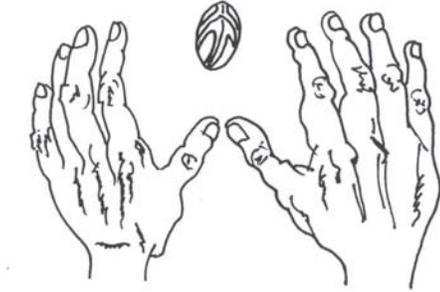
C. ROLE AT RESTARTS

The second row must have the ability to win the ball at restarts. With kickers able to deliver high kicks with significant hang time, it is vital that the second row is able to:

- Dominate the space in front of him.
- Communicate early, loudly and effectively to claim the ball which is moving into his specific area of responsibility.
- React quickly to an overcall from a player behind him and get back to provide a supporting role.
- Have the ability to field kicks above the head (usually against contesting opposition), bring the ball down safely and react quickly to the communication of supporting players. This will usually involve adopting a driving body position, ready to take the impact of oncoming opposition.

The lock must look to practise restarts with supporting players (props) in a pod system. The supporters must get to the fielding second row, assist in the jump for the ball and provide safe blocking once he is returned to the ground.

Concentrating totally on the catch is vital. The catch must be made with both hands, with palms to the ball. Sight the ball through the gate made by the thumbs and forefingers.



Specific Drills to Develop Fielding the Ball at Restart

1. Catching the ball above the head.

- Second row stands 10 metres away from another player who is holding a ball.
- Player with the ball throws the ball high any distance between 1 and 10 metres.
- The second row advances to the ball and catches it above his head.
- This is repeated 10 times.

Key Factors

- Advance forward into area of responsibility.
- Clear call to claim ball.
- Arms raised above the head with the catch made with both hands, palms to the ball and with the thumbs touching.
- Sight the ball through the gate made by the thumbs and forefingers. (See diagram above).
- Return the ball to the thrower.

Progression One - working as a pod.

- Drill same as above but second row works with two supporters.

Key Factors

- Second row dictates where the pod of 3 moves to.
- Supporters have to work hard to get to the jumper.
- Once the ball has been caught, the jumper must be returned under control to the ground.

Progression Two - the kick-off receipt under pressure.

- The pod is positioned for a kick-off receipt behind the 10 metre line.
- The ball is punted or thrown high.
- The second row fields the ball in the pod.
- Three chasers are placed to pressurise the catch. The chasers pincer the pod, compete for the ball in the air and go past for deflections.

Key Factors-as above.

BROKEN PLAY

Irrespective of the number on the shirt, the modern rugby player has to be able to execute all core skills effectively under pressure. This is certainly true of the second row, who has to (in addition to the primary possession specifics outlined above) handle, defend and manage contact as well as any other player.

Broken play, more so than the tight-play role, involves the second row making decisions constantly. The alignment of the opposition in defence and/or attack should be scanned and decisions made accordingly. The second row will then execute a number of core skills in assisting with the momentum of attack or, just as importantly, stopping that momentum in defence.

HANDLING

The second row must be as proficient as any three-quarter in catching and delivering a pass off either hand. In addition to having handling ability he has to:

- Pass under pressure.
- Understand his role in support.
- Possess good communication skills.
- Understand the importance of preserving and creating space and how to hold defenders to achieve this.

DEFENCE.

It is a fact that the opposition, whoever they are, will spend periods in a game in possession. It is vital, therefore, that the second row understands the team defensive strategy, how to execute the key components of it and is able to make effective, aggressive tackles.

From a team perspective the following key factors must be understood, irrespective of which system a team employs, be it drift/slide or 'out to in'.

- The importance of keeping behind the hindmost foot once a ruck or maul is formed.
- The importance of 'speed off the line' to close down the attack's space once the ball has left a contact area.
- The importance of alignment, with no 'dog legs' for quick-footed backs to exploit.
- The need for effective communication.
- The importance of equating numbers at either side of a tackle.
- The importance of filling fringe ('Guard') space as a first priority.
- The importance of not being caught on the wide outside (to push in towards the fringes) to avoid mismatches between fast outside backs and not so fast second rows.
- Never moving a guard or allowing a guard to drift unless the ball has moved outside the second receiver (to avoid cutbacks or inside passes).

Once the strategy and key factors of team defence are understood, the second row must be able to execute all individual tackling techniques, whether tackling from the front, side or rear.

CONTACT

Contact is inevitable in rugby and collisions are high impact as defenders do their utmost to try and stop ball-carriers continuing and sustaining an attack. It is imperative, therefore, that the second row understands the role in contact (as a ball carrier and in a supporting role) before, during and after contact.

Ball Carrier -The second row needs to be a creative strike runner with the ball in hand. If contact is taken by the second row as a ball carrier or support runner, then quick ball needs to be delivered so that the attack can be sustained.

Specifically, the second row must be able to make the initial decision on whether to run or pass. If the pass is not able to be executed and contact has to be taken, the following decisions apply.

- React to communication from his support on whether to stay up or go down.
- Take contact on your terms when body position is dynamic (low to high); look to hit and spin, using powerful leg drive. Avoid flopping to ground too early. A simple rule of engagement is that when the body is managed, the ball will be looked after.
- What about offloads? The straightforward and simple rule of thumb is this - always look to get the ball away in contact, but only do so if the pass is absolutely certain of going to hand; there must be no fifty-fifty passes. Always manage the ball and, if in any doubt, keep hold of it before the decision is made on the next play.
- Ball presentation is key. If you go to ground or stay on your feet, the quality of how the ball is presented to your support is vital. If you are going to ground, aim for a shoulder hit and spin and a ‘snap’ to free up the arms of the defender before going down. Once on the ground, hold the ball close to the body and delay before presenting it. When it is presented, position the ball away from the body with both hands.

Support Role

- Early communication to the ball carrier is essential. Direction and distance from the ball carrier (i.e. where you are and how far away, left/right, short/long) need to be known.
- The ball carrier should not be told which way to fix defenders. That is his decision.
- If the pass is possible, the lock should offer an offload option. Communication is again the key.
- If the success of the intended pass is not certain, early communication is vital on whether to ‘stay up’ or to ‘go down’.
- The early decision is now vital –is it a clean, pass or pick-and-go? The proximity of the nearest defender will determine this.
- If the second row cleans, a low driving body position needs to be adopted. The defender is targeted and an aggressive collision is managed with a strong leg drive to maintain momentum.

Drills to develop and practise good body positions.

1. 5m x 5m grid.

- Four players stand on each corner of the grid, facing inwards, each with a ball in front of them on the floor.
- On the coach's whistle, each player picks up the ball and makes his way (diagonally) across the grid to the opposite corner.
- This process is continued for sets of five.

Key Factors

- Body must be kept low.
- Ball carried in both hands and close to chest.

2. Six players stand in file holding tackle shields.

- One second row holding the ball works through the file.
- At first, players holding the pads provide light resistance; this is increased after each repetition. The second row completes five journeys down the file before resting for two minutes.
- This process is repeated five times.

Key Factors.

- The ball must be carried in both hands and held close to the body.
- The second row must adopt a low driving body position.
- The legs must be pumped hard throughout.
- As successive sets are completed, the body position may become higher through fatigue. Coaches must fault-check this closely.

3. Game Related Body Position Practice - 10m x 10m grid.

- Eight players move freely around the grid
- On coach's whistle, second row enters grid and aims to drive all of the players out of the grid.
- Second row has one minute to get the players out.
If all players are ejected, note the time taken to complete and compare it against the next competing second row.
- The second row who takes the quickest time to eject all players from the grid is the winner.

SPECIFIC PSYCHOLOGICAL REQUIREMENTS

The second row, like all other players, needs to be mentally, as well as physically, conditioned. Specifically he needs to be:

- Mentally tough, competing 95%-100% of his ability at all times.
- Able to produce a ruthless edge in the pursuit of winning.

Coaches are advised to seek specific advice from sports psychologists to enhance and improve mental skills. But a general professional approach will maintain motivation, focus and confidence. Preparation for matches and training is

imperative. *Players need to believe that everything is being done off the field to give them the best odds on it.*

There is however a number of specific techniques which can be applied to assist in reducing negative psychological factors.

ANTECEDENTS - EVENTS AND ACTIONS THAT OCCUR PRIOR TO PERFORMANCE

- How do you prepare when you play your best?
- How much have you managed to keep under control?
- How well have you prepared immediately prior to the game - with individuals and with the team?

BEHAVIOUR - THE CONTROL OF ANXIETY

- Do players know what you want?
- Do they know what each other is expected to do?
- Do they communicate
 - positively
 - encouraging correct factors
 - while playing to the team pattern?

CONSEQUENCES -THE ACCEPTANCE THAT BEHAVIOUR HAS OUTCOMES AND THE ACKNOWLEDGEMENT BY PLAYERS OF THAT FACT.

- Do you use rewards and/or sanctions?
- Are these really effective?
- How effective is the match analysis?
- Do you give specific feedback which can change behaviour?