

## HOW TO ACHIEVE HANG TIME AT RESTARTS

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When I was asked about this topic my immediate thoughts were concerned with at what level I should direct my thoughts. Should it be Premiership, National, Divisional or junior league rugby? The simple answer is that this article is directed at everyone, whatever the level of rugby played. At whatever age group or level you coach or play, the same principles and practices apply.

I am often asked, “What is the perfect re-start and how is that achieved?” One overriding factor when deciding what, where and how, should always be to *kick to your strengths*. A lot depends on weather and ground conditions but, all things being equal, the restart situation is a ball-winning opportunity and you should, therefore, build your strategy to achieve your goal - which is to maximise your chances of regaining possession from all of your own restarts.

As a player you should be prepared for lots of hard work and many hours of practice. Top-class kickers do not gain success by just turning up and kicking every restart on the button. The dedication that is required to achieve your goal remains the same at whatever level you play.

There are lots of theories on how hang time can best be achieved. Throughout my playing career I have always advocated that there is no substitute for practice and hard work. The following principles will assist you in both practice and match situations. Some people talk about the physics, velocity, trajectory and angles. For me it is much simpler than this. The most important factor is *foot-to-ball speed*. Kick the ball at the wrong time and your kick will not be successful.

So, when does the foot make connection with the ball and at what speed? What angle should both foot and body be at connection? Everyone who plays rugby knows when you bounce a ball on end it could go anywhere. Unless the connection of foot to ball is timed correctly, you will fail.

### Practice No1.

#### Dropping the ball and getting a consistent bounce. (Photograph 1)



- Look for hard ground. (You could even start your practice on a hard surface such as the dressing room floor.)
- Practise dropping the ball on end. Have both hands on the ball to ensure that optimum control is maintained.
- How you hold the ball is important and this will differ from player to player. My own preference would be to cup the ball near the bottom and hold it at about knee height as you are standing in a slightly crouched position.
- Get used to the bounce and, once you are happy that you are consistently getting the same bounce each time, try the same exercise outside on firm ground, preferably grass.

Once you are completely happy with the bounce technique, start to work on bringing the foot into the skill and make connection with the ball. Foot and body position is vital for the next phase. When coaching kickers I make parallels to playing golf, where timing is particularly vital. Rugby and golf are two very different sports, yet there are many similarities when we consider restart kicking. Your head should be down while you keep your eyes on the ball and follow through. If a golfer wants the ball to rise higher, he tends to stand a little further behind the ball so that he hits the ball on the upward stroke. If the desired trajectory is low and hard, he will move his feet forward of the ball so that he hits on the downward swing and drives through the ball.

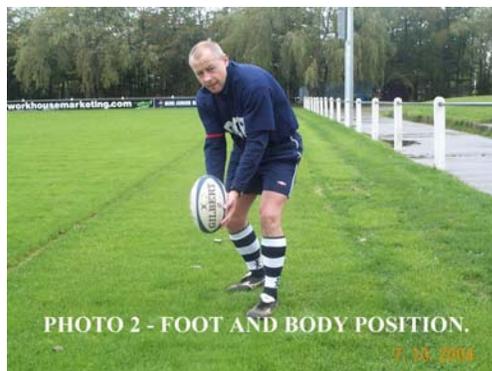
This principle also applies to kicking a rugby ball when we are interested in hang time to enable the chasers to place themselves under the ball before it lands. The kicker's foot position is vital for kicking the ball high enough for success. Individually we are all quite different in how we address the ball in terms of foot connection; some players connect on the top of the foot, some on the side and others on the front. As a coach you must decide if the chosen player can make the kick without changing from one style to another – he must aim for a consistent pattern. In my view the best way to make the kick which will give height is to build in the *flick method* to your foot action.

The best way to describe the flick method is this: point your foot outwards like a ballerina (obviously most backs can do this) then point the foot upwards towards the shin. A good practice for this, especially if the movement is slow, is to point the foot out, place a £1 coin on the tip of the boot and flick the foot backwards so that the coin comes up off the boot at a height between about six to twelve inches.

Body position is also an individual thing. Some kickers seem to stoop over the ball and have a more pronounced bend in the planted foot, while other kickers use an upright stance. It is very much down to individual preference and what the kicker is most comfortable with.

## Practice No 2.

Foot and body position. (Photograph 2 and 3)



- Start with dropping the ball as in the previous practice and bring the foot forward to kick the ball.
- Practise the flick of the foot so that the ball rises high. Do not worry about direction at this point.
- The body position should be slightly stooped with a bend in the knee of the planted foot.
- Start your practice by trying to get the ball over the rails by the side of your pitch. If you don't have these and your coach is helping you, try to kick the ball into his hands. Start off by standing about five feet from your coach or bar. After successful kicks, move further away from the bar or your coach.
- You must control your kick. At this stage we are only looking to flick the ball over the bar or into your coach's hands. Power and distance are not important.

We are now starting to build up the components of the kick. Next we need to develop this into kicking with height and distance, but what is the distance and how long is the hang time? Measure the distance in a direct line from the centre spot to a standard kick-off landing area, which should be about twenty two strides; this needs to be no more scientific than stepping out the distance. Ask your best chaser to run the distance as fast as he can and time his effort. Once you have this time and the paced-out twenty two steps, you are able to calculate hang time and distance.

### Practice No 3.

Direction and hang time practice (Photograph 4 and 5)



- Place the kicker behind the posts and measure out the distance you have just calculated to a point straight ahead, which will be on the 22. Mark a box with cones about 2x2 metres in size.
- Then measure 5m back from the goal line and place a cone at that point.
- Ask the kicker to kick the ball over the crossbar to land the ball in the coned area. The ball *must* be kicked over the bar and land as close to the coned area as possible or, better still, in it.
- Once the kicker is comfortable in being able to kick the ball over the crossbar, move him forward about a metre towards the try line, making it harder to get the ball over the bar. Concentrate initially on getting the ball up and over the bar. Once he is happy and is consistently getting the ball up and over, once again move the kicker closer to the try line. Once you get to 3m away from the goal line, do not move any closer as the exercise becomes too difficult and will not achieve its goal.

### Full kick to target on 10m line

When your kicker is comfortable with both hanging the ball and direction, move to centre field where you can do practice sessions with the forwards chasing the ball. For 22m restarts, just alter your kicking distance to what the team/chasers require. Having said that, however, there is hardly any difference in hang time and distance required, whichever line is being kicked from.

A successful restart strategy is at the worst a 50/50 ball winning opportunity. If your kick is right and placed to the best chasers, you will have a far better than 50/50 chance of regaining possession; the better the kick and the chase become, the greater the chance of your team's success. There is no great science to hang time. Follow these principles and practices and you and your team should come up with the perfect restart, which in turn should lead to greater ball-winning opportunity in the game.

