'Space. The Final Frontier' - A Lineout Perspective.
by
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The words of Captain Kirk ring true nowhere better in rugby than in the lineout battle. The quest is to use space on the ground through footwork, movement and deception with the sole aim of finding space and the unchallenged airtime needed to secure safe ball.

As a long serving scrum half at the grand height of 5'8" (on a good day, early in the morning), I can't profess to have spent too much time 'roughing' it in many lineouts! I have, however, had to field many, many second-rate 'volleyball spikes' as a result of poor lifting, jumping and throwing. Also, standing side-on to lineouts for over thirty years now has given me a reasonable understanding of movement patterns, footwork and variations in throwing trajectory.

As a coach I take great pride in the lineout. It is, for me, a continual source of ways to be creative, yet simple, in winning ball. For me, it is a game within the game. My philosophy is quite simple – place the ball where the opposition aren't, or where they can't get to before you do.

The reality is that simple ideas require a great deal of good communication, technical skill, ability and, most importantly, rehearsal. Rehearsal is the time when I believe players should understand **why** not simply **how**. Take the time to question players and be part of the education process to assess what they know both technically and tactically. If, as coaches, we can become less prescriptive in our style and more long-term in our aims, I am sure we will produce better thinking players with excellent technique. We may lose the game next Saturday, but we may win the championship next year!

I never quite understand why coaches still persist with full lineouts throughout a whole game as it cuts down your own space and gives the opposition multiple chances to steal the ball. Sure, you can set up some pretty 'sexy' drives from ball won, but haven't you got to win the ball first?

The purpose of this article is to highlight some pretty fundamental aspects of lineout movement, tactics, technique and throwing requirements. Whilst I say fundamental, I see and
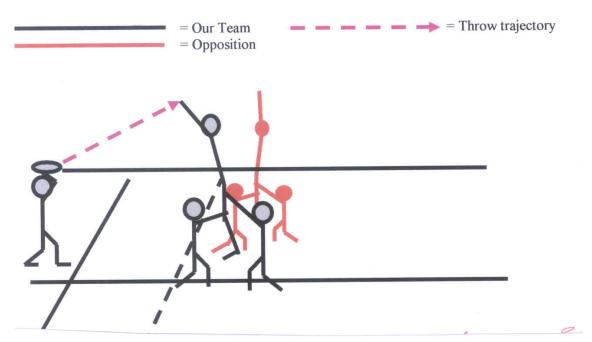
talk to (at all levels of the game) players who don't understand what they are actually trying to do, but just do it simply because, "Coach says so."

Indeed, many hookers I have talked to, played with and coached just don't understand or practise throws of different trajectories, but simply focus on the straightness of throw and its length. Many jumpers, too, only have one jump - usually straight up and quite pedestrian in its execution.

In talking about jumpers, I have referred to the 'traditional' means of 2 jumper, 4 jumper and 6 jumper. In reality for me, though, this refers really to the length of throw rather than the number of the person in the line out. (This means that in a 3 man line out you can still be jumping at 6. i.e. 14-15m away from the throw). I have added distance of throw in each aspect to highlight this.

<div align="center">

Considerations throwing to: <u>2 jumper, going forward (5m)</u> (2F)

</div>

Fig 1.

Key points:

- With our player going forward the key is for him ***to get in front of his opposite man*** (jump right on the 5m line – or less – if you can get away with it!).
- The ball must ***not be thrown so low that it could be reached and stolen by their first man*** in the line out.
- The ***ball must not be lobbed or thrown too high*** as you risk an overthrow or you give their 2 jumper a chance to catch up our 2 jumper and challenge for the ball.
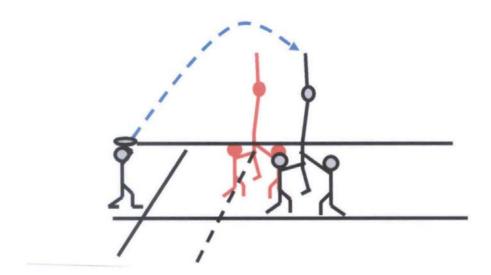- ***Timing and speed of throw are more important than maximum height***.(Fig 1)

Throwing to 2 going forward is probably the simplest ball to win. The throw is short and flat, so it is less vulnerable to variation of throw and allows the opposition very little time or space to combat it. Getting your jumper dynamically in front of theirs (with a strong, high, leading inside shoulder and arms slightly bent to absorb interference), is most of the battle won.

Its disadvantage is that ball off the top becomes difficult and setting up a platform infield becomes harder as the opposition have many defenders infield of the ball already. Setting up a drive can be done, but is more difficult than at 4, as more players have to move further to get into an effective driving position and care needs to be taken not to go in to touch.

The jumper should lean forward to meet the ball. This will require good core strength and stability, as well as lifters with good technique, timing, leg drive strength and upper-body power.

Considerations throwing to: <u>2 jumper, going straight up (6-7m)</u> (2U)

Fig 2.

Key points:

Going straight up at 2 (6-7m from throw) can be risky! It allows the opposition the chance to challenge the ball more easily than a ball to a jumper moving forward. It also allows their jumper to get in front of yours and offers the chance to contest a throw that is too short or flat. The room for margin is relatively fine.
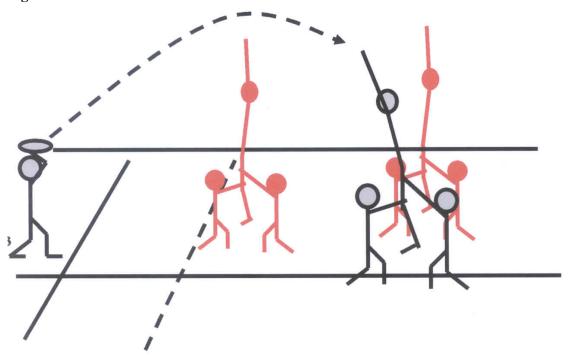It should only be attempted if you have:
      ✓ A good height advantage over your opposite man (and/or lifters).

✓ An accurate thrower.
✓ Very good lifters and good timing of jump *and* throw.

- With our player going straight up, the key is for *him to get up higher than his opposite man and preferably before the opponent jumps to his maximum height.*

- Timing of the throw is important.
    o Too slow and the opposition 2 will be able to catch up our jumper in the air and challenge the ball.
    o Too fast and our jumper will not be there in time and we risk an overthrow (always try to have the man beyond the desired throw target ready **and** have his hands up).

- The *ball must be lobbed and not thrown too low* as you risk giving their 2 jumper a chance to steal in front of our jumper and poach the ball (a Justin Harrison speciality – as we all know!).

- *Timing and speed of throw are important* but so *is hitting our target at maximum height and with the lobbed trajectory if the opposition are trying to get in front of us.* (Fig 2)

- If the opposition are trying to contest shoulder to shoulder (i.e. not getting in front of us), the throw trajectory and jumping principles for a throw to *2 moving forward* should be used. This scenario is only likely to happen with young, inexperienced or less 'street-wise' opponents!

Considerations throwing to: <u>4 jumper, going forward (7-9m)</u> (4F)

Fig 3.

Key points:

Going forward at 4 (7-9m from throw.) The aim is to land the ball between their front jumper at 2 and their middle jumper at 4.

- The margin for error is comparatively small as the hooker not only has to clear their 2 jumper, but has to put enough 'lob' on the ball to land short of their 4. In many respects the trajectory resembles that of a basketball 3 point/free throw. It has to be lobbed enough to clear the front of the basket ring, but not too long/hard to hit the backboard.

- It allows the opposition the chance to challenge the ball at 2 if the throw is too low or too short in its trajectory.

- If the timing between jump and the throw is too slow, the opposition 4 can react and challenge the ball just as he is reaching his dynamic maximum height. Whilst our jumper has stopped moving up towards the ball and is waiting at his maximum height, the opposition 4 can be arriving with the added bonus of momentum to knock us away and claim the ball.

- A fake jump, either straight up or backwards, can often be enough to worry a 'twitchy' opposite man into jumping early and then being unable to react well enough or quickly enough to our movement to the ball. Any movement into the jump must be quick and dynamic to get us airborne before our opposition. Fast, agile footwork combined with dynamic power from both jumper and lifters are vital in gaining the upper hand and ultimate success.

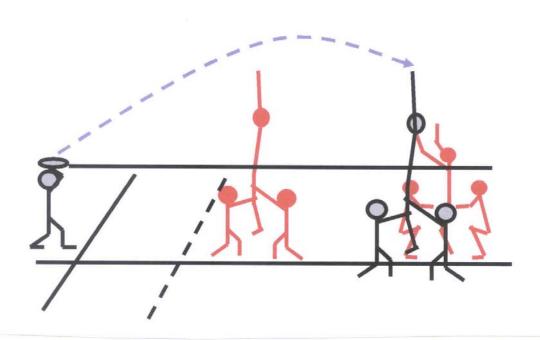It should only be attempted if you have:
- ✓ Good footwork between jumper and lifters and dynamic co-ordinated movements.
- ✓ The opposition concentrating their lifting at other places (usually at 2 and straight up at 4).
- ✓ An accurate thrower who is capable of the lobbed trajectory throw.
- ✓ Rhythm and pace in arriving to and throwing in are vital to success. This can be the most contested and congested area of the lineout, so well rehearsed movement patterns and communication, prior to and on to the throw, are vital to success.

- With our player going forward the key is for him *to get up in front of his opposite man and preferably before the opponent jumps to his maximum height.*

- Timing and trajectory of the throw are important.
    - Too slow and the opposition 4 will be able to catch up our jumper in the air and challenge for the ball.
    - Too fast and our jumper will not be there in time and we risk an overthrow (always try to have the man beyond the desired throw target ready **and** have his hands up).
    - Too low, or a flat trajectory, and the opposition may claim the ball at 2.

- The *ball must be thrown slightly harder and higher than for a lobbed 2 ball (naturally – as it has to travel further).*

- *Timing and speed of throw are important* but so is *hitting our target at maximum height and with the lobbed trajectory.* (Fig 3)

- If the opposition are not contesting the throw at 2 then a flatter trajectory can be used. Hooker and jumpers should gauge their opposition and, ideally, be able to communicate changes in needs during the game (or at least at half time).

Considerations throwing to: <u>4 jumper, going straight up (10-11m)</u> (4SU)

Fig 4.

Key points:

4 jumper going straight up (10-11m from throw). The aim of the jumper is to claim the ball dynamically and at height. Ideally, speed of jump and lift should take the opposition by surprise and lead to an unchallenged or relatively unchallenged catch.

Going straight up at 4 (10-11m from throw) can also be risky!
It allows the opposition the chance to challenge the ball more easily than a ball to a jumper moving forward or backwards.
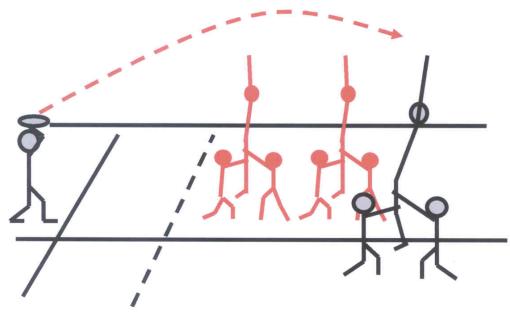It does have the advantage of giving the hooker a set target distance to aim at.

It should only be attempted if you have:
- ✓ A good height advantage over your opposite man (and/or lifters) or,
- ✓ The opposition are concentrating their lifting at other places (usually at 2).
- ✓ An accurate thrower.
- ✓ Very good lifters and good timing of jump and throw.
- ✓ Rhythm and pace in arriving to and throwing in are vital to success. Too much delay between the set up and throw allows time for the opposition to settle, read your body language and guess the throw target, and the 'yips' to begin to develop in your hooker (they are always of a nervous disposition!).

- With our player going straight up, the key is for him *to get up higher than his opposite man and preferably before he jumps to his maximum height*

- Timing of the throw is important.
  - o Too slow and the opposition 4 will be able to catch up our jumper in the air and challenge for the ball.
  - o Too fast and our jumper will not be there in time and we risk an overthrow (always try to have the man beyond the desired throw target ready **and** have his hands up).

- The *ball must be thrown harder than for a lobbed 2 ball (naturally – as it has to travel further) but slightly lobbed and not thrown too low*, as you risk giving their 2 or 4 jumpers a chance to steal in front of our jumper and poach the ball.

- *Timing and speed of throw are important* as is *hitting our target at maximum height and with the lobbed trajectory.* (Fig 4)

- If the opposition are not contesting the throw then a flatter trajectory can be used, so long as it clears their 2 jumper. Hooker and jumpers should gauge their opposition and, ideally, be able to communicate changes in needs during the game (or at least at half time).

Considerations throwing to: <u>4 jumper, going backwards (12-13m)</u> (4B)

Fig 5.

Key points:

- Going backwards at 4 (12-13m from throw) can also be risky as a greater length of throw is required, meaning it may not go straight or could be affected by the elements (wind, rain.).

- The hooker also needs to show some subtlety in the throw. He cannot simply throw it hard, as the opposition, probably at 4, will pick off a flat throw. If he throws it hard but high (to clear their 4) it will probably/possibly go over our jumper.

- The throw must have some 'fizz' to it to go the distance, but also has to be lobbed enough to land **on** the catcher's hands rather than hitting **into** the hands. Again, the idea of a basketball 3-point shot gives a useful idea of distance and trajectory.
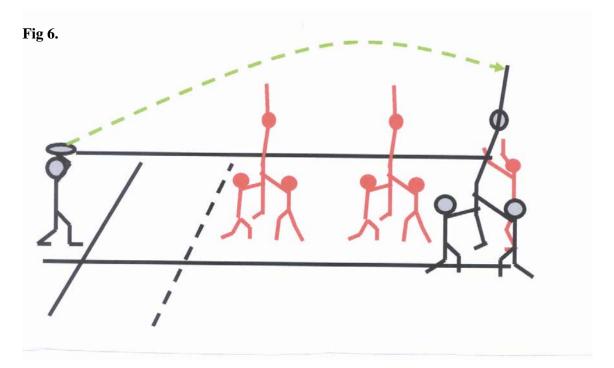
- Its advantage is that ball off the top to set a back attack going is good and effective drives can be started while most of the opposition forwards are still involved in the jump/lift.

- Another advantage is that the catcher is often relatively unchallenged as the ball arrives. If all the pre-throw movement has been effective and dynamic, the opposition are hopefully left up in the air in front of our jumper and watching a ball travel over them!

It should only be attempted if you have:
- ✓ Good movement patterns between jumper and lifters.
- ✓ The opposition are concentrating their lifting at other places (usually at 4 SU)
- ✓ An accurate thrower – distance and lob.
- ✓ Good 'core' strength for the lifter in order to lean back and keep control whilst also taking the ball.
- ✓ Rhythm and pace in arriving to the throw and throwing in are vital to success. Too much delay between the set up and throw allows time for the opposition to settle, read your body language and guess the throw target and the 'yips' to begin to develop in your hooker.

- The *ball must be thrown harder than for a 4SU ball (naturally – as it has to travel further) but slightly lobbed and not thrown too low,* as you risk giving their 4 jumper a chance to steal in front of our jumper and poach the ball.
- *Timing and speed of throw are important* as is *hitting our target with the lobbed trajectory.* (Fig 5)

Considerations throwing to: 6 jumper, going straight up (14-15m) (6U)

Fig 6.

Key points:

6 jumper going straight up (14-15m from throw). The aim of the jumper is to claim the ball dynamically and at height. Ideally, speed of jump and lift should take the opposition by surprise and lead to an unchallenged or relatively unchallenged catch. Movement and decoys in front of the catcher will also help to throw the opposition 'off scent.'

Going straight up at 6 (14-15m from throw) can also be risky!
Whilst challenges from opposition lifters are less common (especially at the lower levels of the game), the problem of accuracy - line of throw - is more of an issue and so too the ability (strength/technique) needed to throw long (especially in junior players).
Weather, especially strong head winds or cross winds, can also be a major factor in deciding whether or not to use the 'tail' of the lineout Advantages are that excellent platform ball for attack can be launched from here, either by peeling, driving, or ball 'off the top' for an attack out wide. The options are endless!
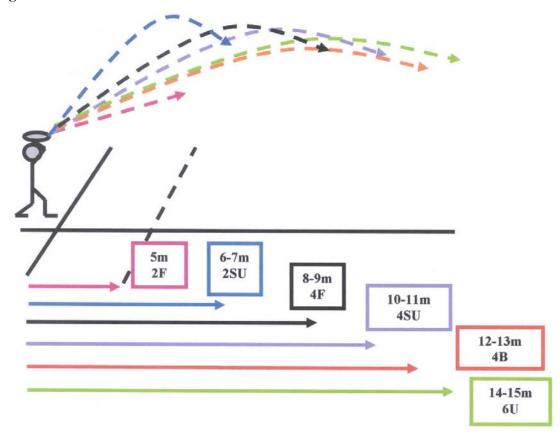
It should only be attempted if you have:
- ✓ Very good lifters and good timing of jump and throw.
- ✓ An accurate line thrower with good strength of throw.
- ✓ Rhythm and pace in arriving to and throwing in are vital to success. Too much delay between the set up and throw allows time for the opposition to settle, read your body language and guess the throw target and the 'yips' to begin to develop in your hooker.

- With the ball spending more time in the air, it is important to throw the opposition 'off scent' through decoy movement, then dynamic footwork and jumping/lifting to claim the ball unimpeded.

- Timing of the throw is important.
  - o Too slow and the opposition 4 or 6 will be able to catch up our jumper in the air and challenge for the ball.
  - o Too fast and our jumper will not be there in time and we risk an overthrow. An overthrow at 6 can allow the opposition to get over the gain line unchallenged and cause great problems for our defence as all of our line out forwards are in front of the ball.

- *The ball must be thrown harder than for a lobbed or flat 4 ball (naturally – as it has to travel further) but must not be thrown too low,* as you risk giving their 4 jumper a chance to steal in front of our jumper and poach the ball.

- *Timing and speed of throw are important* as is *hitting our target at good height and usually with a slightly lobbed trajectory.*(Fig 6)

- If the opposition are not contesting the throw, or they are not ready, then a flatter, faster trajectory can be used as long as it clears their 2 and 4 jumpers. Hooker and jumpers should gauge their opposition and, ideally, be able to communicate changes in needs during the game (or at least at half time.) A flatter throw has the advantage that it is less affected by the elements and usually easier for the hooker as it requires less 'fine' muscle movements.

Variations in throw distances and trajectories

Fig 7.

Conclusion.

I have not tried to cover every throwing option here (just the main ones - by distance of throw) and have not gone overboard in regard to technique or decoy running/jumping ploys or actual examples of lineouts. The aim of this article is to highlight key points and use it as a basis to assess players' technical and tactical understanding and promote subtlety of throw and dynamism of lifters'/jumpers' movement.

Diagrams showing trajectories are a general guideline as to the shape of the throw and small differences can, and will, occur in reality. The idea is to highlight general flight shapes and engender understanding in players as to **why** not just **how**.

The article has deliberately steered clear of decoy patterns, fakes and switches as I believe that many players focus solely on this at the expense of the basics of accurate, varied throws and dynamic timing of lifts.

My aim is to encourage players to become involved in the plans/technical details, to discuss, agree, understand and then implement them.