

INTRODUCING BASIC KICKING TACTICS

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An effective kicking game can be a major weapon in a team's attacking potential, particularly with the improvements made in teams' defences in recent years.

A good kicking strategy can:

- Help relieve pressure when your team is in a deep defensive position under sustained pressure.
- Gain territory, maintain possession and score tries when there are accurately placed kicks with a good chase to put pressure on the opposition.

Remember, the kick is only as good as the chase you put on it.

The flip side to this is that indiscriminate kicking can have negative results such as:

- Giving the ball easily to the opposition.
- Losing territory from kick returns.
- It can also undermine a team's confidence if you have players just kicking the ball because they don't know what to do with it.

But also note that a poor kick can be made good by a good chase.

If you have players in your team kicking indiscriminately, it is the job of the coach to explain the positive aspects of kicking and point out the problems a poor kick can cause. Players should be able to see that the kick is just one of a number of options available to a player in both attack and defence.

For example, from a turn over in the team's own 22m, the attacking team will suddenly be defending and will have a disorganised defence. Is this always the best time to kick? Players, even at a young age, should be able to understand that kicking to touch (in theory) gives the opposition control of the ball. A good kick – close to the touch line – will force the opposition to either kick or run the ball back. A good chase will reduce the amount of territory they can gain from this. A bad kick can become a good kick if the chase is right.

The key points to remember are that a poor kick can be made good by a good chase, and a good kick can be made poor by a poor chase! Drill this into your team and develop a team mentality that they must work hard after a kick is made, whether the player kicking made the right decision or not.

When to kick?

In attack, this will very much depend on the defence and where there is 'space' on the pitch. If the defence is up quickly, particularly the backs from set piece plays, there will be space behind them where an accurate chip or grubber kick could be used. After a number of phases, if the defence have managed to concentrate the defence, then a 'wiper' kick to the open-side wing might be an option, as long as they are standing wide (right on the touch line) or there is an obvious mismatch, e.g. Lote Tuqiri v Jason Robinson in the World Cup Final.

Box kicks and 'up and unders' can be introduced once player's skills are up to it and they have a better understanding of the game.

To keep things simple, a kicking strategy could be introduced to players indoors in a 'chalk and talk' session, with the coach getting input and ideas from the players so that they feel that they have ownership of the strategy and a better understanding of the aims. The coach should be able to direct their thoughts to help them understand what is needed; ask them what they think, don't just tell them what to do!

What will affect whether the team achieves success from their kicking strategy is down to their understanding *and* their ability to kick accurately and consistently.

Try to get players to practice their skills in a conditioned games environment. Make up your own games, where players can only pass by kicking, and score by performing a certain type of kick into a marked out area or at the posts – something akin to Aussie Rules. Perhaps play conditioned rugby games where a kick must be made after 2/3 passes, or after 2/3 phases of play. Player will have to spot space and place the ball there accurately. The coach can dictate to the defending team their structure to leave space in certain areas of the field, then see how the attacking team reacts.

In addition to this, you can always get players to work on their skills in a 'closed' environment, but there is no substitute for ensuring that *players* make decisions under pressure in a game situation. Such a situation might be working on the chip kick in a 1v1 activity.

The usual 'pre-training muck about', where players are grabbing balls and kicking them all over the place, can easily be replaced by a structured game which will actually develop understanding and will work on decision-making and improve kicking skills.

DIFFERENT KICKS.

Goal kicks.

Awarded either after scoring a try or the opposition has given away a penalty and the recipients have opted for a kick at goal.

Aim: To kick the ball, usually placed on a kicking tee, over the bar and between the posts.

Tips: Ball presentation: Use a kicking tee, place the ball, aiming the ball straight towards the intended direction. Line up the seam of the ball with the centre of the posts. Players might prefer to lean the ball forwards slightly to expose the 'sweet spot'. This is the area of the ball from which you will get the best distance - about a third of the way up the ball is usually most productive..

Preparation: The goal kick is one of the only times in the game when the player will have plenty of time to make the kick. This can be an advantage or a disadvantage, and each player must develop his own routine. Before pacing out your run-up, stand over the ball in the kicking position to make sure it is in the right place to strike. Measure out a run-up and concentrate on the sweet spot. The length of the run up is entirely down to you, just as long as you feel comfortable. Relax and focus on the job at hand, think positively and think only of the ball going straight through the posts.

Contact: Run up to the ball in an arc with your body turned 45 degrees. Turn your non-kicking shoulder side-on to the target. Place your supporting foot as near to the ball as possible for stability. Keep your body weight forward and over the ball. Concentrate on hitting the 'sweet spot' with the foot, with the toes pointed and ankle rigid.

Follow through: Swing through the strike zone, making contact with the instep of your foot. Make sure you follow through with your toes pointing in the direction of the target.

Drop goal.

Taken during open play, the ball needs to hit the ground before being kicked.

Aim: To kick the ball over the bar and between the posts on the 'half volley'.

Tips: Ball presentation: The player must keep his eyes on the ball throughout the kick. Hold the ball along its side with fingers forward and down. The ball should be held vertically at waist height. **Drop** the ball so that it falls vertically, upright and angled slightly towards the kicker. Make sure the player does not throw the ball upwards before it drops.

Contact: Keep the head down and, as the ball lands, use the instep to connect with the ball on the half volley.

Follow through: Follow through high, directly through the ball in the desired direction, with the non-kicking leg bearing the body weight. Throughout the kick, keep the eyes on the ball and on the point on the ground where it lands.

Spiral kick.

Used while kicking for touch or to gain maximum distance. Good balance and timing are essential to get the most out of this kick.

Tips: Ball presentation: The kicker must hold the ball at waist height, an arm's length from the body. If the player is kicking on the run, he will need to slow down and steady himself to gain good balance. Angle the ball at 45° to the axis of the foot. See below for a right footed kicker.



Contact: Point toes, release the ball (don't throw it upwards). Contact the centre of the ball, just to the outside of the boot laces; this will create the spin of the ball. If the kick flies end over end it means the kicker has struck the ball too close to its end.

Follow through: The player should remain balanced after the kick on a steady 'non-kicking' leg. The kicking leg accelerates at impact in a fluid motion. Keep the head down, body over the ball, with a high follow through. Keep the leg straight and toes pointing in direction you want the ball to travel.

NB: Encourage the players to kick off both feet, even from an early age.

End over end.

A kick used for accuracy and windy conditions (taken from Rugby League).

Tips: Ball presentation: Hold the ball by the sides at waist height, with the top of the ball pointing slightly away from the body.

Contact: Drop the ball onto the foot (don't throw it upwards). Contact with the end of the ball, with the top of the foot. The ball should fly end over end, spinning backwards.

Follow through: The player should remain balanced after the kick on a steady 'non-kicking' leg. The leg accelerates at impact in a fluid motion, keeping the ankle solid. Keep the head

down, body over the ball, with a high follow through. Keep the leg straight and toes pointed in the direction you want the ball to travel.

NB: Encourage the players to kick off both feet, even from an early age.

Chip kick.

A kick used to counter rushing defences. A delicate chip of the ball, lofting it over a defender whilst kicking the ball end over end, increases the chances of a favourable bounce.

Tips: Ball presentation: Similar to the end over end kick. Hold the ball by the sides at waist height, with the top of the ball pointing slightly away from the body.

Contact: Drop the ball onto the foot (don't throw it upwards). Contact with the end of the ball, with the top of the foot, but with the toes pulled up to make the ball fly up at a steeper angle. The ball should fly end over end, spinning backwards.

Follow through: The 'chip' will not need the same amount of follow through as the end over end kick. The player may have to slow from full pace to execute the kick, but this will draw more players onto him. The trick is to put enough power on the kick for it to pass over a player, but for the kicker to be able to catch the chip as well. Keep leg straight and toes pointed in the direction you want the ball to travel.

NB: Encourage the players to kick off both feet, even from an early age.

Up & Under / Bomb / Garryowen.

Used to put the full-back under pressure. Ideally, it should be an end over end kick with a lot of height.

Aim: To put the full back under pressure to force him either to knock on or spill the ball. Also, if positioning is correct (just outside the 22), to give chasing players the chance to compete.

Tips: This is the same kick as above, with the toes pulled up, but with a much greater follow through to gain maximum height.

Crossfield kick.

Used to spread the play quickly to the opposite side of the field to an awaiting winger. Usually used when either the defence has stepped in-field or when there is an overlap out wide.

Aim: To create a scoring chance for the player out wide.

Tips: Once again, this is similar to the end over end kick, in that the bottom of the ball is stuck by the foot. The trick here is getting the right amount of height on the kick to make sure that the player out wide can get there, but not too much so that defenders also have time to react. The kick must also be accurate if the attackers are to stand a chance of scoring.

Grubber Kick.

Similar to the chip, this kick is used to break through rushing defences. The ball is dropped onto the boot and then stabbed through a gap and the ball runs along the ground.

Tips: Ball presentation: Similar to the end over end kick. Hold the ball by the sides at waist height, but this time hold with the top of the ball pointing towards the body.

Contact: Drop the ball and make contact with it just before it hits the floor (don't throw it upwards). Contact with the upper end of the ball with the top of the foot (laces), with the toes pointed towards the ground, keeping the knee bent slightly ahead of the ball. Lean over the ball and it should roll forwards and run on end over end.

Follow through: The 'grubber' will not need a lot of follow through, but do so with a low, straight leg so the ball runs along the ground and does not fly up. Remember to lean over the ball, keeping the toes pointed to get the ball to run in the correct way.

Box Kick.

Primarily a scrum-half kick and usually used from the base of the scrum.

Aim: In attack, to kick the ball over the blind-side winger for attacking winger and back row to chase. In defence, to take the pressure off the fly-half and clear for touch.

Tips: Ball presentation: Hold the ball by the sides at waist height. The kick will probably be made with the body at right angles to the direction the ball need to travel in. When dropping the ball, make sure it stays upright as if falls.

Contact: Strike the ball with the top of the foot at the end of the ball.

Follow through: The aim of the kick, will determine the follow through. If the kick is to go over a winger, the ball will need more height to ensure the chaser get under the kick. To achieve this, toes should be pulled up on contact and have a good follow through that carries on above shoulder height. Remember that the player will not have time to turn to face the direction they wish the ball to travel in and must, therefore, execute this kick 'over their shoulder'.