

KICK TO SCORE
BY
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I wouldn't normally advocate kicking the ball away in opponents' 22, but in the modern game, kicking to score has become almost the preferred option now of teams trying to break down defences. Never has it been quite so prominent than when France played New Zealand in the 1999 Rugby World Cup semi-final. New Zealand were the outstanding team of the tournament, not only in attack but even more impressively in defence. Teams just couldn't break down the All Black defence – that is until the risk taking, run the ball at all cost French played them. How were they to break down this defence? Simple really - if you can't go through a team with ball in hand, the alternative is to run through them without the ball, but only when the ball has already gone past them. This can be achieved by a chip over, grubber through or kick high to the corner. Since that, World Cup international teams have used this method to great effect.

Top club sides have recently introduced defence coaches, because as we all know defence wins championships, attack wins hearts. These coaches now have really tied up defensive systems and have created a 'stop scores at all cost' attitude. We recently saw the All Blacks using this 'strangling' method against England in the Autumn internationals and its effectiveness seemed to surprise England.

Rugby League is a great exponent of the kick to score. As they only have six tackles and would have to give the ball up voluntarily, they might as well kick it and usually do. Various types of kick, such as the high bomb to the wingers, have had plenty of success as have the angled grubber kick and finally the kick to the post protectors. The last one is a cheeky little kick which causes much confusion in any defence.

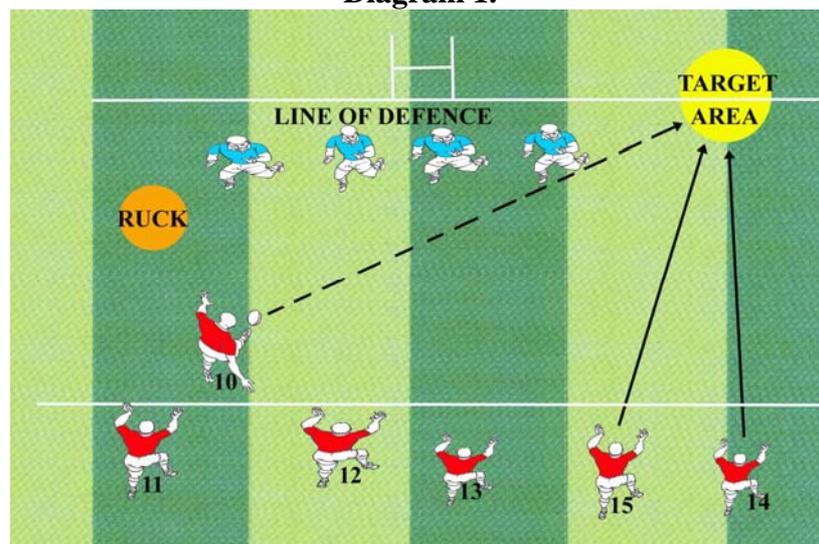
As a player, I regularly used the 'kick to score' ploy. Some would say I did it too often, but it nearly always came off. Defences don't stand a chance when the kick is executed well. Communication and delivery are the key factors, as long as your team knows the calls. The adoption of the 'kicking to score' system creates uncertainty in defences, which then has further knock on effects. Once uncertainty has been introduced, defences will probably hold off coming up too quickly. They would not, for example, push their full back up in a man-on-man defence if there were the

possibility/probability of a ‘kick to score’ tactic, which automatically allows more space to attack through the hands if that option is a better one.

It doesn’t matter at what level you play, a little preparation and practice in training can pay great dividends during any game. Having a fly half with a good rugby brain and vision does help the process, as he should be able to create this ‘kick to score’ opportunity by using his skill and vision to see openings, options and possibilities.

Timing is essential when it comes to executing the kick. Pressure on defences creates opportunities. Sucking in a defence through drives to mid field would offer an opportunity to use the **wide hanging kick**, using the ‘end over’ method. This can be particularly good news when you have a tall winger who can get up high to either catch the ball or palm it back to support runners (See diagram 1). As you can see from the diagram, the winger drifts wide after having sucked the defence narrow. Support runners come from full back and outside centre. The kick must be precise in the target between the 15m and 5m lines.

Diagram 1.



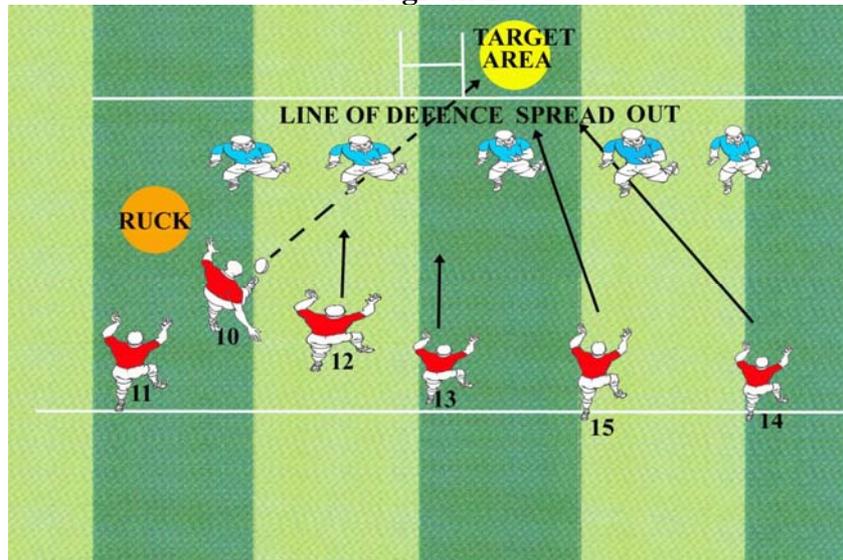
The winger must have had this call communicated to him well before the kick to him and he has to start from a flat position; he must not start his run from depth. Supporting players must also manoeuvre themselves into a position to support the wide player. Once the ball is kicked precisely into the target area, there ought to be a high rate of success. However, it has to be practised and going through the method in the comfort of a lecture room is not enough. Once it becomes well rehearsed teams will score regularly from the ploy.

If the wide kick is not an option, another possibility is to **slide the ball diagonally** from a flatter position, with support runners running in on angled lines (See diagram 2).

From a position of defending their own line, defences are much keener and committed to make the tackle(s) to stop the score than they might be in other areas of the field

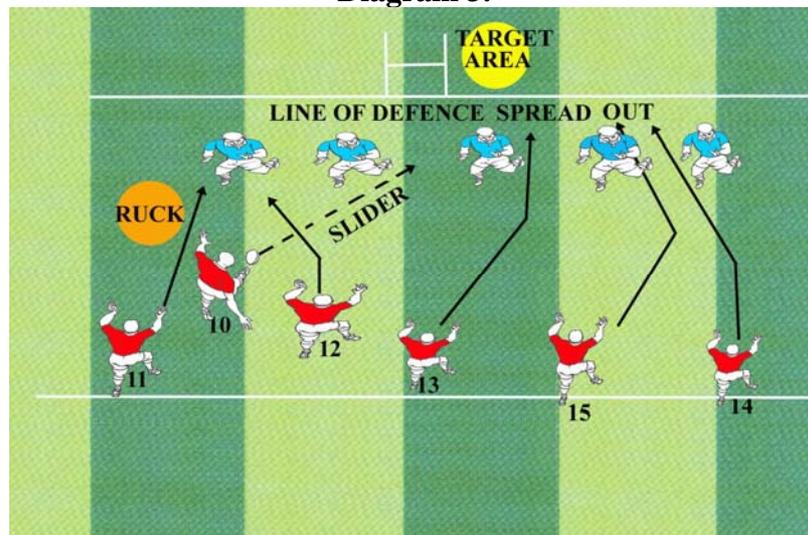
when a score does not always seem a realistic option. Thus, the usual call is ‘man on man’ defence which comes up very quickly and straight. This defence can be very difficult to break down but the slider on an angle can be very effective.

Diagram 2.



Positioning is key when using the slider. Both open side winger and fullback should take up a flat line, but this time they should not be in a wide position as the target area has changed to just to the right of the posts. The kicker must be able to slide the ball into an area between the two goalposts and the supports players make angled runs into this area. Another option might be to run a dummy switch between 10 and 12, thus giving the impression that you are running the ball - and then put the slider through after the defence has come up closer to the attack line. (See diagram 3.) The key is to have as many dummy runs as possible and angled runs out wide.

Diagram 3.



To my mind you should *only* kick in the 22 if you have more than a 60/40 chance of scoring or the defence is so good you can't break them down by running the ball through the hands. However, there is a logic behind this 'kick to score' strategy and coaches can use this tactic successfully at any club and at any age level. It is a planned way to play in certain areas of the pitch and in circumstances that require more than *hoping* that handling skills will prevail. You do require, though, intelligent players who are tuned into what is happening in the opposition's defence; and the method does need players who are playing with their heads up and can see that space is available.