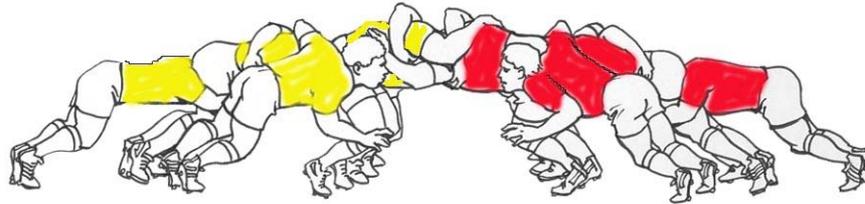


SCRUM TIME

Around thirty coaches and referees attended a presentation given by Phil Keith-Roach at Darlington RFC in April as part of this year's Beyond Level 3 seminar programme. The opportunity to hear from England's World Cup winning scrum coach was too good to miss. This resume of the presentation has been compiled from notes made at the seminar by David Beck, a Level 3 coach currently with Scarborough RFC.



The last time I met Phil Keith-Roach in person was some thirty-five years ago when I was a Cambridge University player and he had been invited to give a guest session. What he said then made a lot of sense, so I arrived at Darlington confident of receiving further sound advice and opinion and with the vague hope that Phil would remember me. He didn't. The damage to my ego was momentary, however, as the next two and a half hours of solid, practical rugby talk kept everyone riveted to their slightly uncomfortable chairs. For ease of reference, I shall split these notes into two parts – the first aimed at coaches and the second at referees.

ADVICE TO COACHES

The scrum sets the standard for your team and is the first line in attack and defence. In simple terms, it's about "producing the ball and doing something with it", but the reality is far more complex, with individual roles all contributing to a collective effort that must be properly directed.

Aim: Build a powerful, consistent and coordinated unit.

Objectives: Win, control and use our put-in.
Steal, disrupt and pressurise the opposition's.
Go forward at all times.

1. Preparation.

Coaches should all have a **plan of action** for their scrum, based on the principles of *clarity and simplicity*. This plan could include, for example:

- Establish your methods and tactics.

- Establish roles and responsibilities. *This must include your 9, who is a critical component of the scrum.*
- Build in any calls, codes and triggers that each player can recognise and respond to.
- Be aware of field positions and options arising from them.
- Adjust to your opponents.
- Work with the referee, not against him.

Linked into this Plan come a number of **fundamental principles**, such as:

- Selection – don't guess about your players, or rely on reputation. Know what makes each one tick. Put them into 1v1 competitive situations with each other.
- Scrum set-up – binding and balance are critical.
- “Crouch/Touch/Pause” phases require discipline and control. Don't jump the gun.
- “Engage” phase requires the delivery of collective force on impact. All sixteen arms, legs and feet working together.
- Follow the hit – keep working, especially if the opposition is using an early feed.
- 6 and 7 must “scrum and scan” – keep them delivering weight after the ball is in and avoid the temptation to look back at the ball as this leads to loss of power.
- Drive shoulders – react to any angles encountered.
- 2, 8 and 9 must be skilful and integrated.
- THE SCRUM IS A 9-MAN OPERATION FROM HIT TO BREAK.

The role of the flankers was a constant theme of Phil's talk. There must be seven out-and-out scrummagers (including both flankers) at the set pieces, with 8 and 9 being classed as *users*. Even then, the 8 has a role to play at the hit – this means engaging with both shoulders on contact, and *not* employing the ‘catapult’ technique creeping into some NZ teams, which is regarded as ineffective. Any unnecessary moves involving 6 and 7 should be discouraged as it undermines the scrum effort.

2. Using possession.

Having looked at the set-up, how do we then use possession? This will depend on how our scrum is competing.

1. **Under pressure:** 8 protects and recycles / 9 perfects the dive-pass.
2. **Scrum solid:** 9 takes early ball right or left / 8 & 9 can attack together.
3. **Scrum dominant:** Secondary shoves / push-overs.

On our own put-in, we need 2, 8 and 9 to be slick operators. The sequence of events must be based on:

- Timing of CTPE sequence.
- The put-in itself.

- The strike.
- The channel.
- Play off the base.

On opposition put-in, the principles must be:

- 1-8 pressurise.
- 9 pressurises at the base.
- 6,7,8 and 9 defend as a unit.

3. Analysis and feedback.

Forwards are customarily the last to get feedback and, because of that, they thrive on it when it happens – particularly front row players. Coaches should scrutinise every scrum for visual, written and videoed forms of feedback. This should be collectively and individually based.

Players like targets, so give them some. For example: secure 100% possession on our put-in, steal or disrupt 25% of the opposition's, etc.

Don't forget to include the 9 in this process – scrummaging is a 9-person operation.

4. Training.

The overall principle must be, "Play as you train and train as you play". There is a certain stairway process that can be applied to scrum training, loosely following the format:

- Scrum training – acquiring the basic individual body and foot positions.
- Unopposed – as above, except as a unit.
- Machine – only progress to the machine once the basic skills are there, and **always** allow forward movement by the machine to encourage the hit to be chased.
- Controlled opposed.
- Live with referee.

Questions and answers.

During the interactive presentation, two main questions were posed of the delegates as follows, together with answers arising from the ensuing debate:

Q If your scrum is getting continually pushed back on your put-in, what do you do?

Answers

- Put the ball in on engagement.
- Get the 9 to stand away, inviting the ref to impose the “square and stationary” law *a la* George Gregan.
- Use Channel One option. Old-fashioned, but still effective.
- Focus on driving your TH forwards.

Q What strategies do you have for dealing with opponents who continually look to wheel your put-in?

Answers

- Load up TH side. Consider putting LH flanker across.
- 2 binds on TH before LH, to promote cohesion.
- Our LH and 2 to target chest of opposite numbers.
- Go forward at the exact moment opposing front row steps round. Our TH to take the space between their LH and 2 to drive forward, helped by crotch bind by flanker.
- As opposing TH pulls back, out LH shortens bind grip and drives straight.

ADVICE FOR REFEREES

A scrum is a pushing contest. It is safer for all if it is, and must be refereed as such. A dominant scrum should be rewarded and attempts to illegally interfere with the process penalised.

The recent law change to the Crouch/Touch/Pause/Engage (CTPE) sequence doesn't solve all the problems, but is a good basis to work from. If done well, it ensures both front rows are in balance and at the same height on engagement. The key is to ensure each section happens distinctly from each other. The referee's active involvement is vital to ensure the process is controlled, otherwise players will do as they see fit. This is particularly important at the Touch (must be deliberate and in the right area) and Pause (must be a distinct pause to avoid the 'momentum hit' favoured in NZ) phases.

A useful checklist for referees will include:

- Keep control of the engagement.
- Understand the logic of the front row binding laws. TH must bind on the body, (either short or long bind) not on the arm or inside LH's arm. This enables the
-

- opposing LH to also bind on the body, but can **only** occur if the TH's bind is legal.
- Reward the dominant scrum – penalise the side standing up.
- Walking sideways is illegal – penalise wheels that occur by this means.
- Back row binding must be full arm – police it.
- Straight feed – this is coming back into fashion, and 2s are having to learn how to hook properly.

So there you have it. Sadly, these notes cannot incorporate the numerous video clips Phil used to illustrate his talk, nor the varied hands-on demonstrations of body and foot positions utilising some of the host club's players. I was sitting in the front row of the audience and over the two and a half hours was convinced Phil would finally remember me and have a chat about old times. He didn't.