



# Go forward - give the game its shape back

## ELITE SESSIONS

Stop using rucks as a method of creating shape to attack with. Instead work on go forward skills in tight areas to draw in the defence and create space out wide.

**MIKE PENISTONE, ELITE COACH CONSULTANT**

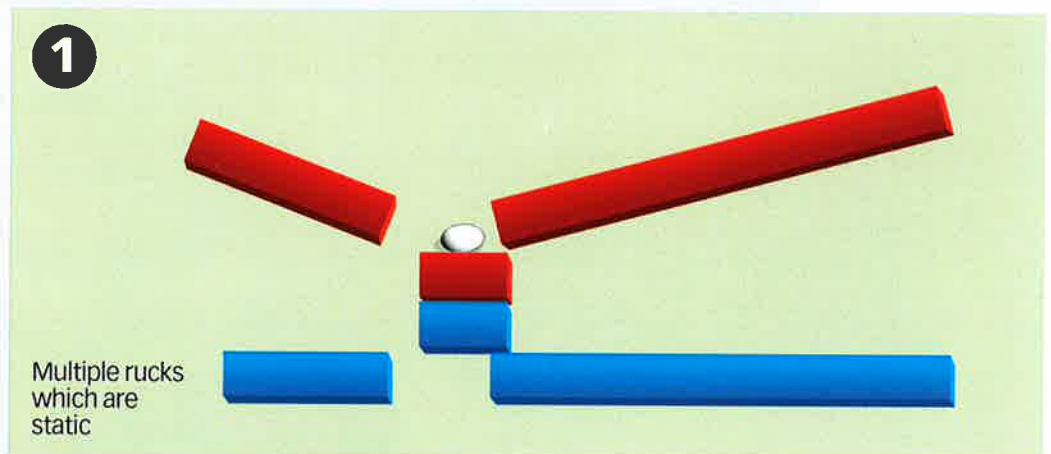
It's widely accepted now that the ruck is the major skill used for recycling possession. Indeed there are around 150 rucks each game and you can now buy a manual; "The Ruck and how to win it". Click [HERE](#) to buy the book.

As a result the game has lost its shape.

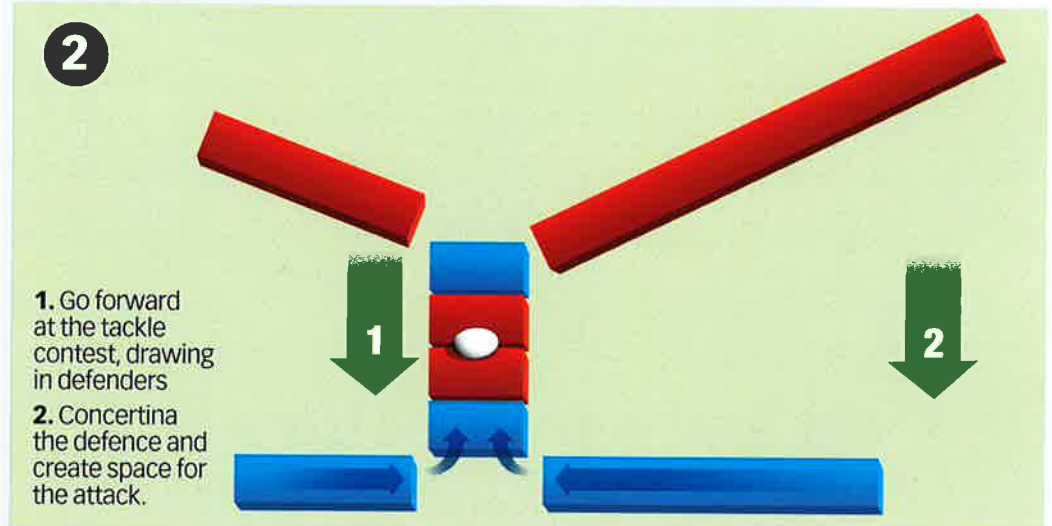
I have attended many games in Sydney and watched countless matches on TV where the commentator takes great delight in stating the recycle stats: 18th phase, 20th phase and so on. Most of these phases consist of moving the ball right to left or left to right often with little forward progress and occasionally no progress! There is little or "no contest at the tackle contest" and if there is slow ball, the resultant pass goes to a first receiver who goes head first forward to form the next ruck; often laterally and behind the previous one.

Why is there so little action and alternative for advancing the ball forward at the tackle contest? Why has contact –offload,

### Current shape



### A better attacking shape.



rip and run, rip and pass, mini-maul and drive, largely disappeared from our coaching strategies? Have coaches taken the easy option in coaching "go to ground"? Have the players

decided the safest way to get selected next week is to "go to ground"?

There is pick and go off quick ball, but when it's slow ball I begin to shuffle in my seat with frustration.

There are alternative techniques for taking the ball forward which seem to be confined to the "lost arts" of the game.

I fear we have a new "Global culture" called go



to ground and a new hybrid game called second man plays. Union attack is now mirroring League attack. The second man play (passing the ball behind a runner to another runner arriving on his outside) has confined the loop and running overs and unders lines on the advantage line to the rarely used tray.

At a recent coaching experience in South West France you can imagine my delight when I watched several French coaching sessions where the primary focus was on immediate support, either side of the ball carrier, from depth, punching through the hole. After watching more sessions at different venues it became apparent that this was a "cultural approach". I watched for other choices being made rather than go to ground. Training

session games played at pace with touch contact and then applying methods of progressing the ball forward other than going to ground keep your players alert and reactive. Fast go forward action around the tackle contest concertinas in defenders and creates space elsewhere

A few players in world rugby look to keep the ball carrier from going to ground. Louis Picamoles the outstanding French number 8 is arguably the most prominent with his rip and run technique being the most effective way of keeping the ball progressing.

The lower body tackle is now more prevalent and the pop pass from the tackled player, to a supporting player is equally devastating and supports the French style of support play. Maybe it's not surprising that Toulon

Louis Picamoles keeps driving forward rather go to ground with ball in hand. He uses techniques like "rip and run" where he rips the ball off the tackled player before they go to ground.

“ It is important for the coach to “feel” the dynamism of the session ”

and Clermont fought out the final of the Heineken cup.

My Elite Session on page 18 is designed to introduce players to alternative tackle contest choices.

Practices A & B are a concentration on the techniques available for the ball carrier and the support players.

Practice C is a conditioned game which allows the

players the freedom to exercise those techniques in the heat of battle, played with solid technique, dynamism and some ferocity.

In both practices I feel it is important for the coach to “feel” the dynamism of the session and apply any playing “conditions” on gut instinct rather than what’s next.

## Mike Penistone

Elite coaching consultant

Mike began his coaching career in the English Midlands and has coached both union and league. Mike's sides include Cambridge University RLC, England and GB international student RL coach, Sheffield Eagles RL and Nottingham RUFC. He was Elite Player Development Coach at Leicester Tigers from 1999-2006 and joined the NSW Waratahs Academy as Coach in 2006. Mike was the Director of Coaching at Eastern Suburbs from 2007-2010. He is now an elite coach working with Bob Dwyer Rugby workshops as well as an elite coaching consultant working in Australia and Asia. You can contact him on [mike@bobdwyerrugby.com](mailto:mike@bobdwyerrugby.com).





# ELITE SESSIONS

## Go forward – not to ground

Suck in the defence so you can go wide by keeping on your feet in close contact areas. Use passing, offloads, rip and runs and mini mauls to maintain momentum

MIKE PENISTONE, ELITE COACH CONSULTANT

### Activity one

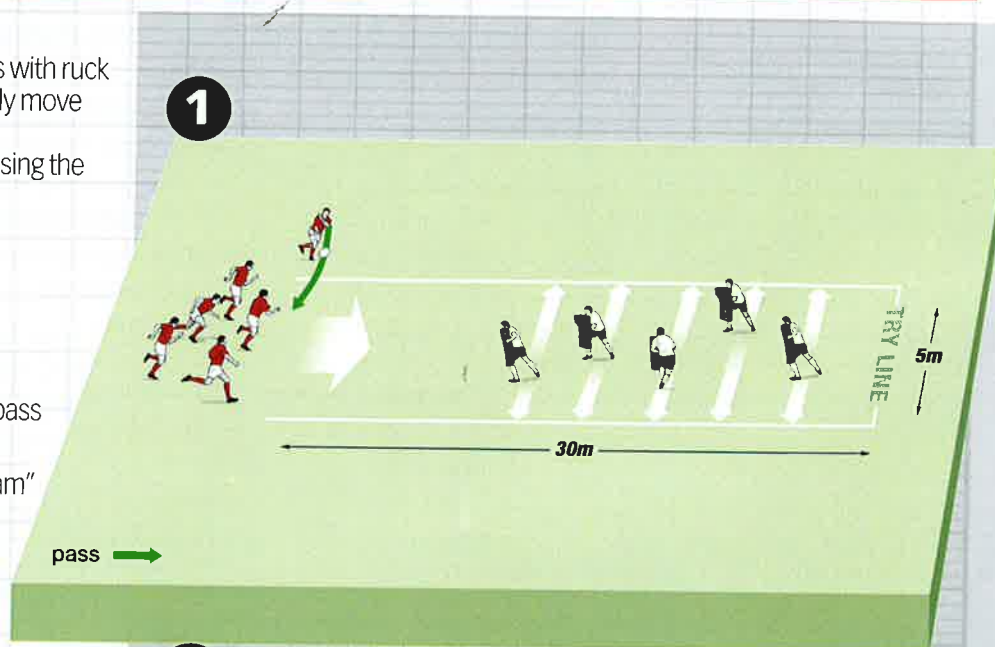
Use the 5m channel. Place 5 defenders with ruck pads in the channel. Defenders can only move laterally.

Use 5 attackers who must score a try using the following –

1. Pass – no contact
2. Contact immediate offload
3. Contact rip ball and run
4. Contact rip ball and pass
5. Contact seal ball - mini maul, drive pass

#### Technique

- At least one attacker should “slipstream” the ball carrier.
- Use leg drive at all times.
- No static play.



### Activity two

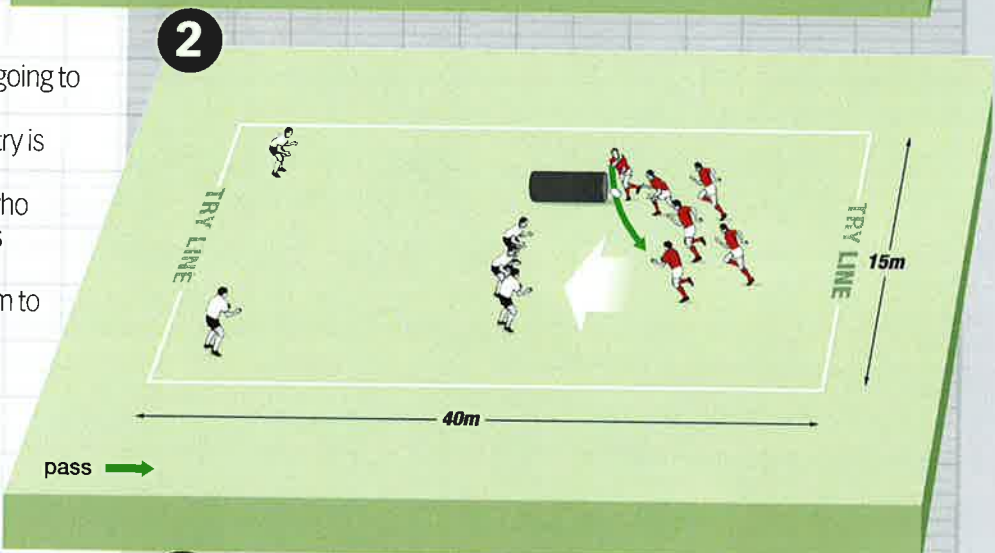
Use 15m channel. Play 5v3.

Use contact or pass option rather than going to ground.

If forced to ground, keep playing until a try is scored.

Add additional second line defenders who become involved when defensive line is breached.

If defenders turn the ball over allow them to attack the other try line.



### Activity three:

#### Go forward - all action game

Use 15m channel. Overload the attack for instance 10v7. Defenders can use -

1. Tackle shields
2. Body armour
3. No protection
4. Mixture of all 3

Aim is to score a try without going to ground.

#### Notes

- This is a very demanding physical game and should be refereed firmly.
- Allow each attack a number of attempts to score, and then rotate the players.
- Vary the “conditions” e.g. you may want to allow 2 rucks.
- Use the stopwatch to apply urgency to the practice e.g. time to score.

