Developing Rugby Coaches

INDIVIDUAL SKILLS
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Introduction
Individual skills are the fundamentals of rugby performance. Key skill areas have been identified. The coach must understand and apply the “Key Factors” of Individual Skills to effectively improve player performance.

Key Factor Analysis
- Rugby is a complex game in which players are interacting with teammates all the time.
- This is further complicated because of the wide range of skills that can be used.
- To simplify this complexity, the skills can be divided into three categories: individual skills, unit skills and mini-unit skills.
- Individual skills are handling, running, kicking, tackling and contact skills.
- Unit skills are scrums, lineouts, attack and defence.
- Mini-unit skills are support play, second-phase play and kick starts.
- The **individual actions** that are linked to complete the skill are the key factors.
- The key factors are in sequential order. When each key factor is performed in the correct order, the skill will achieve the outcome.
- In this course the Key Factor Analysis is applied to all of the skills of the game.
- The Principles of Play allow the coach to identify particular aspects of the game.

Key Factor Analysis is used to identify the skills that contribute to each Principle of Play. The following table links each of the skills to the Principle of Play they contribute to the most.
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Second phase play:
- rucking
- mauling
Key Factors

Skill A: Running
(1) Running in Possession of Ball

Objective:
To evade opponents while running without becoming isolated.

Key Factors
• Ball in two hands.
• Run towards defender.
• Change pace and/or direction of movement.
• Position ball away from defender.
• Accelerate into the space.

Coaching Points

Sidestep
• Run towards defender’s inside shoulder.
• Shorten stride for timing and balance.
• Change direction close to them by pushing sideways powerfully off the right foot to go left or the left foot to go right.
• Accelerate to take advantage of the defender’s hesitation.

Swerve
• Run towards the defender.
• Change direction by veering away into the outside space.
• Accelerate to take advantage of the defender(s) hesitation.

With the attacking player running towards them, the defenders are forced to slow down to make a tackle. The player changes direction close enough to commit yet avoid the defender.

To prevent the defender from recovering, it is important to accelerate away as fast as possible.

The sidestep and swerve are two techniques. All players should be encouraged to use natural flair and ability.

Both the sidestep and swerve can be combined with a change of speed/pace and a body feint.

Common Errors
• Not running at the defender.
• Changing direction too early or too late.
• Not accelerating forward immediately after the sideways movement.
Running
(2) The Fend/Push-off

Objective:
To create space whilst running by pushing off a defender.

Key Factors
• Prepare to sidestep or swerve around an opposing player.
• Transfer the ball to the arm furthest from the tackler.
• While sidestepping or swerving, if the tackler comes within an arm’s length, use an open hand to push the tackler away.

Coaching Points
• The fend is only effective if the tackler gets within an arm’s length.
• This allows the ball-carrier to exert force to either push the tackler away or knock away the arms as the tackle is attempted.
• If the fend is not successful it is difficult to maintain continuity because the ball is held in one hand.

Common Errors
• Raising arm too early, therefore allowing tackler to drive underneath.
• Straight arm, as opposed to bent arm, pushing away on contact.
• Not focusing on target or contact zone on the defender.

Running
(3) Running in Support of the Ball-Carrier

Objective:
Utilise space: provide continuity options for ball-carrier.

Key Factors
• Anticipate point of attack.
• Stay inside the ball initially.
• Maintain depth.
• Communicate your position/options.

Coaching Points
• Points of attack need to be identified and communicated to all players.
• Frequently play can be at some distance from a player. The player should anticipate where play is moving to and move in that direction. With practice players will become expert at this.
  (NB Players can support from outside the ball on some occasions.)
• Staying inside the ball initially provides defensive balance should the ball be lost.
• Depth provides the ball-carrier with an inside and outside support option as well as allowing time and space to identify and communicate best option, eg if no inside defender, run into that space and demand the ball.
Common Errors
• Taking too long to get into a support position.
• Running too flat relative to ball-carrier.
• No communicating or reading of the situation.
• Overrunning the ball.

Running
(4) Running in Defence

Objective:
To be in a position to apply pressure, reduce options, make the tackle and regain possession.

Key Factors
• Anticipate point of opposition attack. Communicate.
• Position on the inside shoulder of ball-carrier.
• Tackle.
• Regain possession.
• If ball passed, support.

Coaching Points
• Communication allows you to organise your defensive lines giving players around you responsibility and direction.
• Positioning inside the ball-carrier:
  - limits the ball-carrier’s options
  - provides opportunity for cover defending
  - allows you to contest the ball in tackles made outside you.
• Players to approach at a speed that allows them to maintain balance and react to ball-carrier’s evasive skills.

Common Errors
• Lack of communication.
• Coming up too straight on ball-carrier.
• Approaching too quickly.
• Not following the pattern.
Coaching Activities

**Handling Relay**

**Category:** Running

**Name of Drill:** Handling Relay

**Objective:** To improve ball-handling techniques

**Equipment:** 1 ball, 4 cones per group

**Group Size:** 2 players

**Area:** 40m x 20m

**Drill Set-up:** Player groups line up facing the cones which are set out in a line 10 metres apart in front of the groups.

**Drill Explanation**

1. First player sprints out the first 10 metres carrying the ball in two hands in front of them, tucks the ball under the right arm for the second 10 metres, in front of them for the third 10 metres and under the left arm for the final 10 metres.

2. When the player reaches the last cone they sprint back carrying the ball in front of them, swerving in and out of the cones, passing the ball to the next player in line, who repeats the drill.

**Key Coaching Points**

- The player should always “feint” and then “swing away” executing the swerve.
- Alternate both sides of the field.
- Nominate whether the defender will use a two-handed touch or tackle.

**Variations / Progression**

1. Change angle, add obstacles, etc.

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**Evading the Player**

**Category:** Evasive Running

**Name of Drill:** Evading the Player

**Objective:** To practise beating the man one-on-one

**Equipment:** 1 ball per pair

**Group Size:** 3-6 players

**Area:** 22m x 15m

**Drill Set-up:** The defender starts at various points along the 15-metre line within the 22-metre line. The attacker starts outside the 22-metre line with the ball.

**Drill Explanation**

1. The player aims to beat the defender whilst staying inside the 15-metre line zone. This can be done by sheer speed, change of pace, sides step, swerve, fend or chip kick.

2. Alternate both sides of the field.

**Key Coaching Points**

- Alternate both sides of the field.
- Nominate whether the defender will use a two-handed touch or tackle.

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**Transition**

1. Change angle, add obstacles, etc.
**Category:** Sidestep  
**Name of Drill:** The Step  
**Objective:** To practise stepping off both feet  
**Equipment:** 1 ball, 5 cones per group  
**Group Size:** 4–5 players  
**Area:** 10m x 10m  
**Drill Set-up:** Players stand together on the line facing out to the cones.

**Drill Explanation**
1. First player runs with the ball in two hands out to the centre cone.  
2. On reaching the cone, the player steps off the right foot then runs out around the outer cone and back to the waiting group, passing the ball to the next runner, who repeats the drill.

**Key Coaching Points**
- Player is to carry the ball in two hands.
- Important points for sidestep:
  - leg drive (hard step)
  - get away (fast step)
- Player should:
  - slow down with a short step
  - bring the balancing foot up slightly in front of the thrusting foot
  - with both knees bent, and balancing foot on the toes, push thrusting foot out to one side and plant it hard on the ground.
  - when the foot lands, lean the body back the other way and drive hard with the leg, making the next step as fast as possible.

**Variations / Progression**
1. Have all players involved in drill.

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**Category:** Evasive Running  
**Name of Drill:** Shadow Run  
**Objective:** To practise quick evasive movement  
**Equipment:** 1 ball per pair  
**Group Size:** Any number, even number preferable  
**Area:** 20m x 20m  
**Drill Set-up:** Players form up in pairs - if an odd number, form a group of 3.

**Drill Explanation**
1. One of each pair has a ball.  
2. On the coach’s call the ball-carrier runs evasively at speed. The fellow group member tries to follow keeping only 1 metre away.  
3. Continue for 5–15 seconds depending on the pace desired. Give a similar period of recovery and repeat the drill.

**Key Coaching Points**
- Players carry the ball in two hands.
- Runners keep their heads up and eyes open to avoid running into other players.

**Variations / Progression**
1. On the coach’s call, the ball-carrier turns, sets and feeds to their partner who becomes the front runner.  
2. The ball-carrier faces the partner, who tries to remain directly in front of the ball-carrier. If the partner is passed, the players swap roles.
Key Factors

Skill B: Handling
(1) Passing

Objective:
To maintain continuity of play by passing to a teammate in a better position.

Key Factors
- Run straight.
- Hold the ball in two hands.
- Run at defender.
- Look at receiver.
- Swing arms.
- Follow through.
- Pass at chest height in front of receiver.
- Complete pass, support.

Coaching Points
- By running straight down the field or towards the closest defender the passer draws a defender. The passer commits a defender preventing them from assisting in defence elsewhere.
- Hold ball in two hands: standard pass - fingers down the seam; spiral pass - fingers across the seam.
- Look at receiver to assist accuracy of pass.
- A dummy pass may be used to create a gap to run through.
- Turning inside shoulder, thigh and hip to the tackler reduces the risk of injury.
- A straight follow-through to the target by the passing hand reduces error. The elbows and wrists can be used to fine-tune the pass’s speed and flight.
- The standard pass is the preferred option in most instances because it is quicker and easier to catch and pass.
- The spiral pass should be used for greater accuracy and speed when passing over longer distances.
- Players should be equally proficient passing off either hand.
- By following through the passer is able to guide the ball to the target area. This is at about chest height just in front of the receiver. The receiver is therefore able to catch the ball without reducing running speed. In addition, the catcher is able to catch the ball without looking down. This will enable the ball to be caught while observing opponents.
- Once the pass has been made, the passer should support the receiver.
- A pass is only as good as the ease with which it can be caught.

Common Errors
- Running with the pass.
- Not having a straight follow-through.
- Not passing to target area.
- Overuse of spiral pass.
Handling
(2) Receiving a Pass

Objective:
To catch the ball so that the attack can be continued.

Key Factors
- Chin up, eyes open.
- Move straight onto ball.
- Extend hands towards ball, fingers spread.
- Watch ball into hands.
- Choose best option.

Coaching Points
- By positioning with depth, the receiver can move forward onto the ball, and will be able to maintain running speed and retain vision of opponents.
- The passer can move left or right, creating space on the other side for the receiver to run into.
- By extending the hands (fingers spread) in the direction the pass is coming from, the receiver provides the passer with a target. In addition, the ball can be caught earlier, giving the receiver more time to decide on what to do next.
- By catching the ball with soft hands the receiver is able to make an immediate pass should this be the option chosen.
- The options that can be chosen are to pass, take the ball into contact, run or kick, depending on the situation. This may depend on the position on the field, but generally will depend on the positioning of opposing players.

Common Errors
- Not presenting target.
- Not meeting ball early.
- Hands too rigid.
- Taking your eyes off the ball.

Handling
(3) Catching the Kicked Ball

Objective:
To regain possession of the ball by catching it.

Key Factors
- Eyes on the ball throughout.
- Attack the ball.
- Assess options - stay on ground or jump into air.
- Extend leading arm in direction of the ball.
- Position side-on to opponents.
- Call.
- Catch above eye level.
• Watch the ball into the hands, arms then body.
• Brace the body in anticipation of contact.

**Coaching Points**
• By being in a position to attack the ball, the catcher can leap to catch it, or upon catching it continue to move into or away from opponents.
• Extending the leading arm in the direction of the ball allows the catcher to judge its flight and watch it into the hands, arms and body. Being side-on presents thigh, hip and shoulder to opponents, protecting the catcher should a tackle be made. In addition this ensures that the ball is not knocked forward should the catcher be unable to catch the ball cleanly.
• Communication is essential to prevent teammates all trying to catch the ball. Calling “my ball” achieves this.
• Players should be coached to catch above eye level. To catch the ball in a basket formed by the arms at waist level can result in the ball bouncing out. Catching the ball above eye level then bringing it into the body with the arms will prevent this from happening.
• It is important that the catcher jumps into the air to catch the ball if an opponent, by also jumping, is contesting possession. The catcher duplicates all the key factors mentioned above while jumping in the air. The jump will be higher and the catch more successful if the catcher is in a position to run and leap towards the ball.
• The catcher will be able to judge if opponents are going to make contact once the ball has been caught. The side-on body position in a crouch will enable the catcher to withstand this impact.

**Common Errors**
• Taking eyes off ball.
• Not side-on.
• Not calling.
• Misjudging position.
• Catching below eye level.

**Handling**

**Objective:**
To safely secure the ball, assess and initiate best available option.

**Key Factors**
• Move forward into the ball, side-on.
• Bend knees and present hard parts of body to opposition.
• Front foot past ball.
• Wide, balanced base.
• Secure the ball with both hands.
• Assess and initiate continuity options.

**Coaching Points**
• Move into the ball maintaining balance.
• Approach the ball side-on keeping eyes on the ball.
• Present hard parts of body to opposition on pick up, eg hips and shoulders, to claim space around ball.
• Front foot should be placed ahead of the ball. Low body position and wide stance aides stability.
• Secure ball with both hands, one in front, one behind.
• Protect the ball from opposition players by turning towards support players.
• Initiate best option.

Common Errors
• Poor body position.
• Not moving into ball.
• Using one hand only.

Handling
(5) Spiral Pass

Objective:
To transfer the ball quickly and accurately over a longer-than-normal distance.

Key Factors
• Be aware of options.
• Catch the ball in two hands.
• Turn the ball longways with fingers across the seam.
• In the passing action use the passing hand to give power and to impart spin.
• Use the guiding hand to provide stability and direction.
• Follow through towards receiver.

Coaching Points
• When a spiral pass is made the ball is spinning. It is therefore more difficult to catch.
• Consequently it should only be used to increase the distance of the pass.
• By spiralling the ball with fingers across the seam it is able to travel greater distances at a faster speed. Consequently the spiral pass should be used when it is necessary to clear the ball from a congested area to a less congested area where there are greater attacking opportunities.
• Players should attempt to run straight while passing the ball.

Common Errors
• Not focussing on a target.
• Lifting head too early.
• No follow-through.
• Using bottom hand to spin ball.
• Drifting with the pass.
Handling

(6) Clearing Pass (ie Halfback Pass)

Objective:
To clear the ball quickly off the ground from a congested area.

Key Factors
- Body in a crouch.
- Sink at hips, bend at knees.
- Eyes on the ball.
- Plant passing foot close to ball.
- Wide stance.
- Leading foot pointing to target.
- Head over the ball.
- Passing hand provides power, guiding hand provides stability.
- Transfer of weight to leading foot increases power.
- Follow straight through with the passing hand to ensure accuracy.

Coaching Points
- This pass is used by the halfback to clear the ball away from the source of possession to less congested areas.
- The ball is usually on or near the ground when it is given to the halfback. The player must, therefore, be able to crouch to the ball while remaining stable.
- This is achieved by sinking down at the hips and bending at the knees. Too much bending at the hips will create instability.
- Halfback must focus on the ball. By placing the foot next to the ball, sufficient power will be obtained through extending the arc of the passing arm. In addition, the player will be less likely to take two movements before passing.
- The greater distance is assisted by the power created from a stable base.
- Transfer of weight to the leading foot during the passing action increases power.
- The spiralling action can cause the ball to curve back in the air. The halfback should allow for this. It can be corrected to some degree by following through straighter with the passing hand.

Common Errors
- Not keeping eyes on ball.
- Lifting the head.
- Reaching for the ball rather than getting the passing foot into position.
- Being square-on to the ball.
Handling (7) Dive Pass

Objective: To avoid interference whilst clearing the ball from a congested area.

Key Factors:
- Position to see the ball and the receiver in the same line of vision.
- Move to the ball in a crouch.
- Body between ball and opponent.
- Bend at the knees, sink at the hips, standing close to the ball.
- Spread the fingers.
- Scoop the ball.
- Drive with the legs.
- Pass the ball to the target area.
- Follow-through.
- Regain feet immediately.

Coaching Points:
- The dive pass momentarily puts the passer out of play.
- This is because the passer is on the ground when the pass has been completed. Therefore this pass is only used when the halfback cannot use the clearing pass.
- The dive pass is used to get the halfback out of trouble. It clears the ball from a congested area to space. In making a dive pass, the halfback avoids interference.

Common Errors:
- Not keeping eyes on ball.
- Poor feet position.
- Standing up before passing.
- No follow-through.

Handling (8) Lob Pass

Objective: To pass the ball over an opponent to a teammate or to give time for a teammate to run onto the ball.

Key Factors:
- Use vision; choose best option.
- Two hands on the ball.
- Free up arms.
• Use swing or chest pass.
• Soft hands.
• Follow-through.

**Coaching Points**
• Non-verbal cues such as the positioning of teammates and oppositions, determine the type of pass.
• The ball is lobbed to avoid the defender.
• Because little power can be used to pass great distances, the pass must give supporting players time to catch the pass. The lob allows support players this time.

**Common Errors**
• Not being aware of possible options.
• Not enough elevation on the ball.

**Handling**
(9) *Pass through the tackle*

**Objective:**
To fully commit defenders and then unload the ball.

**Key Factors**
• Sight and run at space between defenders.
• Hold the ball firmly in two hands.
• Power step into contact.
• Extend arms through, upwards and behind the tackler.
• Slightly rotate towards receiver.
• Keep arms free.
• Pass ball to space receiver is running into.

**Coaching Points**
• Ball must be held firmly in two hands throughout to withstand the impact.
• The impact of the tackle will turn the ball-carrier in the direction the tackle has been made from. When a player is tackled from the right, the player will be turned to face the right, and when tackled from the left, turned to face the left.
• To keep the arms free, the ball-carrier may have to lift them up above the level of the tackle.
• Effective communication from support players is vital as passer is often unable to sight players until late.

**Common Errors**
• Not running into space between defenders.
• Not holding the ball in two hands.
• Not power stepping into contact.
• Not freeing arms.
Handling

(10) Falling to the ground to pick up the ball.

**Objective:**
To claim, protect and control the ball.

**Key Factors**
- Sight ball.
- Slide towards the ball on the hip and thigh, feet first.
- Claim the ball, positioning body between ball and opposition.
- Continue attack:
  - immediately regain feet and pass to support; or
  - immediately regain feet and set a drive target; or
  - immediately pass from ground to support; or
  - immediately place and release ball for support.

**Coaching Points**
- Note: This technique breaks the law if it is performed in close proximity to a tackled player (with one metre).
- When sliding into the ball on hip and thigh the player is able to stand up.
  This is achieved by “planting” the foot furthest from the ground and pushing so that the player drives up to be in a low, forward-moving body position.
- Communication from supporting teammates determines what option is taken.

**Common Errors**
- Sliding too close to or far from the ball.
- Knocking ball away from body.
- Holding ball on ground.
Pass & Catch

Name of Drill: Passing Waves

Objective: To improve players’ passing & receiving technique

Equipment: 8–12 cones / One ball

Group Size: 9 minimum – 25 maximum

Area: 10m x 10m (this will need to be extended with more players taking part in the drill)

Drill Set-up: Three teams of 3, 4 or 5 players. Set up as shown in diagram.

Drill Explanation
1. Group A runs towards Group B passing the ball laterally. The last player who receives the ball in Group A passes to the person in Group B.
2. Group B runs towards Group C passing the ball.
3. Group A lines up where Group B was originally stationed.
4. The last person in Group B passes to the player in Group C.
5. Procedure is repeated.

Key Coaching Points
- Ensure that all players have appropriate alignment to ensure that they can receive the ball in front of their body.
- All ball receivers must have their hands up to provide a target for the passer.
- All players should be encouraged to run straight.

Variations / Progression
1. Move cones closer together to increase pressure.
2. Two teams running in opposite directions if there are sufficient numbers (two balls can be used).
3. Have a halfback feeding the ball to each team.
4. Have an extra player coming into each backline with the opposition team acting as defenders.

Pass & Catch

Name of Drill: Watch Out

Objective: Develop good technique and accuracy of the pass under pressure

Equipment: 10 cones / 1 ball per pair

Group Size: 9 in each group

Area: 5m x 5m (smaller for young players)

Drill Explanation
1. Two players draw and pass on first defender.
2. Once passed, the first defender can then chase from behind and tackle legally.
3. Once the two players pass D2, then D2 turns and chases.
4. With two defenders coming from behind, the two attacking players need to score past the third defender.
5. Move from low confrontation to high confrontation.

Key Coaching Points
- Speed and urgency needed.
- Passes must be well directed.
- Defenders chase realistically, with commitment.
Category: Cut-out Pass  
Name of Drill: Miss Pass Drill  
Objective: To develop good alignment with the cut-out pass and work on passing and catching technique  
Equipment: 1 ball in each group  
Group Size: 5 in each group  
Area: 15m x 50–100m  
Drill Set-up: Players are arranged in a mini backline of 5 players. The ball is with the end player.

Drill Explanation
1. The first pass is thrown as a cut-out from Player A to Player C. Player C then throws a short pass back inside to Player B.  
2. Player B then throws a cut-out pass to Player D, who in turn passes the ball back inside to Player C.  
3. Player C then throws a cut-out pass to Player E. When the ball reaches the end of the line, the end player throws a cut-out back to Player C.  
4. The drill continues back across the line.

Key Coaching Points
- Players receiving the ball must accelerate onto it so that all other players are onside.
- Players being missed out should have their hands up and look as if they are receiving the ball.
- All players should always be in a position to receive the ball, ie players must always be behind the ball.
- The speed of the ball through the hand is important.
- All players should work on running straight for the duration of the exercise.

Variations/Progression
1. The length of the pass can be increased or decreased depending on the skill level of the players.

Category: Pass & Catch  
Name of Drill: Passing Circle  
Objective: To develop good passing and catching technique  
Equipment: 1 ball per group  
Group Size: 6–8 in each group  
Area: 10m x 10m  
Drill Set-up: Players should stand in a circle. One circle competed against another, with all players facing outwards.

Drill Explanation
1. Players pass the ball around the circle from one player to the next.  
2. The winner is:  
   - The team that completes the circle first;  
   - The team that completes the greater number of passes in a set time; or  
   - The team that makes a certain number of passes without a drop.

Key Coaching Points
- Players should:  
  - Have their hands out to receive passes.  
  - Turn their shoulders to pass and receive.  
  - Pass with loose shoulders and arms.  
  - Bend their elbows to pass, as straight arms will pull the ball behind the receiver.  
  - Pass the ball in front of the receiver.

Variations/Progression
- Perform the drill jogging on the spot.  
- Increase the distance of the pass.
Key Factors

Skill C: Tackling
(1) Side-on Tackle

Objective:
To stop forward momentum of the ball carrier.
To regain possession of the ball.

Key Factors

- Position on the inside shoulder of the ball-carrier.
- Run in a crouch.
- Chin up, eyes open, back straight.
- Sight the target.
- Drive with the legs to make firm contact with the shoulder on the target.
- Head behind ball-carriers body, eg cheek to cheek.
- Wrap arms around the ball-carrier.
- Continue leg-drive through to complete the tackle.
- Regain feet.
- Recover ball.

Coaching Points

- By positioning inside the ball-carrier this limits the ball-carrier’s options.
- Chin off chest ensures back is in a stable position.
- By having the head up, the tackler is able to sight the target and make adjustments before impact.
- The tackler should position as close to the ball carrier as possible before making contact with the shoulder and driving with the legs.
- To generate maximum force, feet must stay on the ground.
- For low tackle, contact is made with the shoulder at thigh level with head behind the buttock.
- For higher tackle, contact is made under the armpit – this may be more effective in dislodging or tying up the ball.
- Turning the ball-carrier in the tackle will help the defending team regain possession.
- Once the tackle has been completed the tackler should regain feet and re-enter play by attempting to regain possession or returning to position.

Tackling Chest High:
When making a chest-high tackle, the tackler is aiming to make contact with the ball-carrier between the hips and shoulders. This type of tackling is based on leg-drive and on making chest contact for a more upright position.

Common Errors:
- Waiting for the ball carrier to come to you.
• Eyes closed.
• Head down and on wrong side or in front.
• Diving into a tackle, ie front on, feet leaving the ground.
• Not using arms to wrap.
• Lack of urgency to regain feet.

Tackling
(2) Falling in the tackle

Objective:
To retain possession of the ball by creating options for support players.

Key Factors
• Ball in two hands.
• Position ball away from point of contact, turn towards support on contact.
• Stay on feet as long as possible.
• When falling to ground, tuck the shoulder under and roll on to upper back.
• Position body between the ball and opposition.

Coaching Points
• Players should be competent in taking ball into contact with both sides of the body.
• Ball in two hands promotes ball security and post-tackle continuity options.
• Turning towards support gives you the best means of linking with your support.
• When falling to the ground it is important to perform three key actions:
  (1) Turn far enough to land on the back of the shoulder, not on the shoulder point.
  (2) Continue to hold the ball in two hands.
  (3) Players lie across the field at 90° to the sideline.
• Roll, pass or place the ball immediately so support players can retain possession and continue attack.
• Emphasise players need to regain feet as quickly as possible.

Common Errors
• Running in front-on, ie “ball before body”.
• Breaking fall with outstretched hand.
• Twisting body against direction of impact.
• Falling in such a way that your body is not between the ball and opposition.
• Losing control when placing the ball.
• Attempting to play the ball while still on the ground.

Tackling
(3) Front-on Tackle

Objective:
To stop an opponent with the ball and regain possession.
Key Factors
- Sight target.
- Crouch low.
- Move slightly inside the ball-carrier (inside shoulder).
- Move forward into the tackle.
- Position tackling foot close to ball-carrier.
- Make firm contact with the shoulder between the waist and the hips.
- Wrap with the arms.
- Drive with legs.
- Turn with the impact.
- Land on top and release.
- Regain the feet and contest possession.

Coaching Points
- A lack of preparation time can be compensated by the player already being in a low crouch with head up and eyes open.
- This enables the tackler to move the head inside the line of the ball-carrier.
- By moving forward, the ball-carrier is given less time and the tackler is able to ensure the ball-carrier absorbs some of the impact.
- Contact is between the ball-carrier’s waist and hips, just below the centre of gravity.
- The tackling foot should be planted close to ball-carrier ensuring power in leg drive.
- Upon impact, the arms are wrapped around the ball-carrier tightly.
- In most circumstances it is safer and effective to turn with the impact. Upon completion of the tackle, the tackler is usually on top and better able to stand up and regain the ball.

Common Errors
- Too high.
- Not moving forward into tackle.
- Head down.
- Not using arms.
- Not regaining feet.

Tackling
(4) Tackling from Behind

Objective:
To stop an opponent with the ball and regain possession.

Key Factors
- Target above the waist band.
- Drive with the legs as close to the ball-carrier as possible.
- Drive with the legs and make impact with your shoulder.
- Wrap with the arms.
- Regain the feet and recover the ball.
Coaching Points
- It is difficult to tackle from behind because the ball-carrier’s feet may back kick the tackler and the player is moving away from the tackler.
- To compensate, the tackler should aim slightly high, i.e., above the waist band. Even if the ball-carrier moves away, contact will still be made with the buttock/upper thigh area.
- The other key factors for tackles apply.

Common Errors
- Making contact too low.
- Diving.
- Too far away.
- Too high.

Tackling
(5) Smother Tackle

Objective:
To stop forward momentum of ball-carrier, and prevent ball-carrier from releasing the ball. Regain possession.

Key Factors
- Sight target.
- Move forward towards the ball-carrier.
- Plant the foot as close to the ball-carrier as possible.
- Drive with a shoulder firmly to make contact just above the position of the ball.
- Wrap with the arms to prevent the ball being released or grab the ball-carrier by the jersey.
- Continue to drive the ball-carrier back.
- Turn the ball-carrier towards supporting teammates.
- Take the ball-carrier to the ground, turning the player.
- Stay on feet or regain feet.
- Contest possession.

Coaching Points
- The maul law has increased the use of the smother tackle.
- By making firm contact with the shoulder above the ball and wrapping with the arms, the tackler prevents its release.
- A maul usually forms and, in most cases, the tactical option is to prevent the release while supporting teammates ensure the maul remains stationary or is driven back.
- When the ball-carrier is standing, use the tackler’s weight and body strength to take the ball to the ground.
- Any urgency is with the ball-carrier, whose team will lose the put-in to the scrum if they are unable to deliver the ball.
- If the tackler remains on their feet throughout the tackle, they have a better chance of contesting for the ball on the ground.
Common Errors

- Too high.
- Not moving forward into tackle.
- Head down, eyes closed.
Coaching Activities

Developing Rugby Coaches – Individual Skills

Tackling from Behind

Name of Drill: Pick Up or Tackle Competition

Objective: To practise ball pick-up and chasing/tackling from behind/in-front

Equipment: 2 cones, 1 or more balls

Group Size: The more balls available the greater the number of players who can be involved

Area: 22m x 22m

Drill Set-up: 2 lines of players form, each line facing a cone which is positioned 10–15 metres from the lines and 10m apart. A ball is placed between the 2 cones.

Drill Explanation
1. On “go”, the front players from each group sprint around their cone and compete for the ball.
2. The first runner to the ball picks it up and attempts to score back at the start line.
3. The second player must try to prevent the player with the ball reaching the line by tackling them from behind.

Key Coaching Points
- Clean pick-up of the ball.
- Low tackles aimed at the player’s shorts, head to the side.

Variations/Progression
1. The coach uses additional balls as soon as the initial ball has been picked up. This adds pace to the drill.
2. More than one player from each line sprints out.
3. Defender runs in opposite direction behind team to make a front-on tackle.

Side-on and Front-on Tackle

Name of Drill: Basic Tackle

Objective: To practise techniques with the side/front-on tackle and falling in the tackle

Equipment: 3–4 cones

Group Size: 7

Area: Small

Drill Set-up: Tackler stands facing 3 attackers who are next to cones.

Drill Explanation
1. On their knees, tackler makes three tackles: two side-on and one front-on. Upon making the three tackles each player rotates and the drill continues.

Key Coaching Points
- Technique with confidence is the key to effective and safe tackling - it must be practised regularly.
- Build up with progressions.
- Watch and correct their technique.
- At each stage players should practise with both shoulders.

Progression
1. Tackler on knees - Attackers walking.
2. Tackler on knees - Attackers jogging.
3. Tackler on knees - Attackers running.
4. 4 - 6 repeat 1 - 3 with tackler in a crouch.
Category: Side-on Tackle  
Name of Drill: Stop a Try  
Objective: To stop forward momentum of the ball-carrier. To regain possession of the ball.  
Equipment: 4 cones and 1 ball  
Group Size: Groups of 8  
Area: 5m x 5m

Drill Explanation
1. Attackers stand in line, facing defenders opposite.
2. Attackers one at a time try to score a try on tryline.
3. Defender does a side-on tackle to save the try.
4. If successful, defender gets up quickly, gets the ball and gives it to next attacker.
5. Drill continues, then roles are reversed.

Key Coaching Points
- Position inside the ball-carrier.
- Run in a crouch.
- Chin up, eyes open, back straight.
- Sight the target.
- Drive with the legs to make firm contact with the shoulder on the target.
- Head behind ball-carrier’s body, ie cheek to cheek.
- Wrap with the arms around the ball-carrier.
- Continue leg drive through to complete the tackle.
- Regain feet.
- Recover ball.

Category: Side-on  
Name of Drill: Grid Tackling Variation  
Objective: Make a side-on tackle  
Equipment: 4 cones, balls  
Group Size: Groups of 8  
Area: 5m x 5m  
Drill Set-up: 4 cones, 5m x 5m grid with 4 players grouped at 2 different cones.

Drill Explanation
1. Player from team A runs to cone C.
2. Player from team B makes side-on tackle, regains ball and joins team A.

Key Coaching Points
- Head behind cheek.
- Getting off the ground quickly to retrieve ball.

Variations/Progression
1. Change tacklers and attackers so both shoulders are used.
2. Bring in support players to contest ball.
Key Factors

Skill D: Contact
(1) Taking ball into contact

Objective:
To engage opposition. To maintain possession.
To give teammates time and opportunity to support.

Key Factors
• Focus on contact zone of opponent.
• Chin off chest; eyes open.
• Ball in two hands.
• Low body position.
• Body before ball.
• Small steps on approach.
• Wide “power step” into contact.
• Plant front foot close to the defender’s feet.
• Contact side-on with hard part e.g. shoulder, hips.
• Maintain low, stable base, chin off chest, eyes open.
• Short steps, drive forward and stay on feet as long as possible.
• Transfer ball at appropriate time.

Coaching Points
• The ball carrier is the “determinator” of ball retention at contact. This person will have
  the single greatest influence on ball retention.
• They must effectively shield ball from opponents by positioning ball away from
  contacts.
• Low body position and power step increase force and stability of contact.
• Every player on the field will take ball into contact, therefore every player must understand
  and be competent in the key factors of this skill.
• The contact option, if taken, must be more advantageous than continuing the passing
  movement.
• Setting a target for support is not the only option when taking the ball into contact.
  Other options include:
  - Hit and spin
  - Hit and pass
  - Hit and go to ground

Refer to Continuity Skills for the key factors of these alternative contact options.
## Common Errors

- Too upright at contact.
- Narrow base of support at contact causing instability.
- Front foot planted too far from defender.
- Too frontal at contact.
- Shoulders below hips.
- Avoid T-boning on contact, ie sternum of player.
### Tackle, Place, Pick Up And Pass

**Category:** Post-contact  
**Name of Drill:** Tackle, Place, Pick Up And Pass  
**Objective:** To practise presenting the ball and retrieving in tackle situation  
**Equipment:** 1 ball per group  
**Group Size:** 7–8 players  
**Area:** Length of field  
**Drill Set-up:** Defenders placed every 10–15 metres down the length of the field on their knees

**Drill Explanation**
1. The attacking team proceeds down the field.
2. 1 is tackled by A and places the ball across the back of the defender with the attacker’s body between the ball and the defence.
3. 2 picks up the ball by placing one foot past the ball, picking up the ball and whilst still in a low, crouched position passes to 3.
4. The group then interpass moving towards the next tackle situation where the process is repeated.

**Key Coaching Points**
- The ball-carrier should not just fall in the tackle but attempt to go as far as possible through the tackle before falling.
- As the ball-carrier falls he should attempt to fall across the back of the tackler and turn so that his back is to the defenders.
- The player who picks up the ball should first place one foot past the ball.
- The screen pass is delivered from a low body height and the ball-receiver drives on in a crouched position to the next tackle situation.

### Hit and Support

**Category:** Pre-contact, Contact, Post-contact  
**Name of Drill:** Hit and Support  
**Objective:** To develop correct technique, timing and ball presentation at contact  
**Equipment:** 2 hit shields, 1 ball  
**Group Size:** 10 players  
**Area:** 10m x 10m

**Drill Explanation**
1. The first player of the first pair runs out with the ball, hits and spins off the hit shield and offloads to the receiver who comes from the ball-carrier’s right-hand side.
2. The receiver then throws a pass to the player in the next column who repeats the drill with their partner.
3. The sequence followed should be: hit, spin, offload, pass, hit, spin, offload etc.

**Key Coaching Points**
- Aims to develop timing, so ball presentation and movement must be fluid.
- Encourage communication.
- Have the supporters (ball-receivers) running at depth.
Individual Skills – Developing Rugby Coaches

**Coaching Activities**

**Category:** Pre-contact, Contact, Post-contact

**Name of Drill:** Multi-Man Drills

**Objective:** To utilise a number of players in contact situations to retain possession.

**Equipment:** 1 ball between groups

**Group Size:** 4–8 players

**Area:** 15m x 50m

**Drill Explanation**
The following drills are all variations on the same pattern. The pattern is as follows:

1. The first player runs out 10 metres, places the ball, runs another 5 metres, turns and becomes a defender.
2. The remaining players perform the designated skill against the defender and then the player who ends up with the ball after the skill is performed runs 5 metres ahead, places the ball, continues on and becomes the new defender.
3. The original defender then rejoins the attacking group who again performs the required skill against the new defender.
4. The pattern continues for the length of the grid.

**Key Coaching Points**

- Ensure players’ understanding of required drill and roles within drill.
- Attacking players create space for support. Must be immediate.

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**Category:** Pre-contact, Contact

**Name of Drill:** Step and Drive

**Objective:** Use of binding to go into a contact situation

**Equipment:** Tackle bag and hit shield

**Group Size:** 4+

**Area:** 10m x 10m

**Drill Explanation**

1. Tackle bags and hit shields are laid out in a 10m square with a tackle bag and a hit shield on each corner.
2. The bags are on the ground with a shield holder standing over them.
3. Players are paired up and lie on their back with their feet facing away from the first bag.
4. On the coach’s signal the first pair get to their feet and take a tight bind on each other as they step over the tackle bag and drive into the shield holder.
5. Here they move to the second tackle bag and repeat the drill, until all bags have been done.

**Key Coaching Points**

- Follow pre-contact, contact procedures.
- Drive past the shield holders.

**Variations/Progression**

- Introduce more obstacles to practise contact elements.
Key Factors

Skill E: Kicking
(1) Punt kick

Objective:
To apply pressure to opposition by putting the ball into touch or gaining field position.

Key Factors
• Eyes on ball.
• Head and shoulders still; hold ball at 30° angle.
• Step forward, plant non-kicking foot.
• Place ball onto the foot with dominant hand, ie right hand onto right foot.
• Swing leg straight through. Maintain balance on non-kicking foot.
• Lock ankle and point toe downward at contact.
• Follow through with kicking foot, opposite arm extended.
• Return to normal, balanced stance.

Coaching Points
• Stand in relaxed balanced position.
• Right shoulder forward for left-foot kicker.
• Left shoulder forward for right-foot kicker.
• Hold the ball in two hands, so its long axis is aligned at 30° with the kicking foot, to maximise foot contact.
• Step forward and plant non-kicking foot in the direction of the kick.
• Swing the kicking foot through the line of the ball. Place ball on the foot striking it at 30° along its long axis.
• Contact ball with boot laces.
• Follow through with the kicking foot to maximise length of kick and to spiral the ball.
• Extend the arm on the opposite side of the body for balance.
• Returning to normal stance indicates that the follow through has been straight and balanced.

Common Errors
• Lifting head too early.
• Turning shoulders at point of contact with the ball.
• Trying to kick too far.
• Trying to kick too hard losing timing, balance and power.
• Throwing the ball in the air to kick.
• Making contact with the ball too late.
Kicking
(2) Drop kick

Objective:
To apply pressure to opposition from kick-off, in order to regain possession and go forward. To score points from field of play.

Key Factors
• Hold the ball in two hands, point downwards.
• Eyes on ball; head still.
• Step forward onto non-kicking foot flexing at the knee.
• Drop ball onto ground landing on the point.
• Swing through the line of the ball with kicking foot.
• Contact ball at the top of instep.
• Follow through onto toes of non-kicking foot.
• Raise opposite arm to kicking foot for balance.

Coaching Points
• Ball dropped to ground to the side of planted foot and in front of kicking foot.
• Non-kicking foot facing the target, flexing at the knee.
• Keep the shoulders and head still while kicking.
• For low kicks, strike the ball close to the ground; for high kicks, let the ball bounce higher.
• Make sure you follow through to target with kicking foot.
• End up in a balanced position.

Common Errors
• Not dropping ball in same alignment as it is held.
• Lifting head too early.
• Taking eyes off the ball.
• Turning shoulders with kick.
• Not contacting the ball correctly on foot.
• Trying to kick too hard and losing timing.

Kicking
(3) Grubber Kick

Objective:
To apply pressure and/or regain possession by kicking the ball along the ground into space just in behind the opposition defence line. To kick the ball into touch when outside 22m line.

Key Factors
• Hold ball in two hands.
• Long axis in line with kicking foot.
• Eyes on the ball.
• Head down.
• Point toe to ground.
• Body weight over top of ball.
• Step forward to plant non-kicking foot, flexing at the knee.
• Place ball on foot.
• Push ball forward onto ground with top of foot.
• Short stabbing motion with foot.
• Follow kick through to regain possession.
• Make contact under the ball at the point facing the body.

Coaching Points
• Hold the ball in two hands, moving forward into kicking position.
• Run into space between defenders before kicking.
• Move forward into kicking position.
• Keep eyes on the ball; push it forward with the top of the kicking foot.
• At point of contact, the knee of the kicking foot is bent.
• The striking action is a short stabbing motion with the foot.
• The aim is to have the ball roll end-over-end, to allow fellow players an easy pick-up.
• The ball should only travel at a distance which makes it easy for support players to reach it, unless kicking for touch.

Common Errors
• Kicking too far.
• Spiralling the kick rather than end-over-end.
• Ball contacting the ground too far in front of kicker, ie more than 2 metres.
• Drop kicking instead of grubber-kicking.
• Kicking into opponent’s legs.
• Toe upwards.

Kicking
(4) The Up-and-Under (Bomb)

Objective:
To apply pressure by putting the ball high into the air, allowing attacking players to contest possession.

Key Factors
• Hold ball in upright position.
• Eyes on ball.
• Head over top of ball.
• Turn slightly side-on to protect ball.
• Swing hips into kick.
• Contact ball just behind and under point.
• Raise toes on contact.
• High follow-through.
• Protect ball from opposition.
Coaching Points

- Hold the ball in both hands, moving forward into kick.
- Keep the head down and eyes on the ball to maintain accuracy.
- Strike the ball with the top of the kicking foot.
- Try to contact the ball just behind the point to impart end-over-end rotation in the air; raising toes on contact will help this. This enables support players to take the ball in the air more easily.
- Follow through with foot, keeping head and shoulders as still as possible. The higher the follow-through, the higher the kick.

Common Errors

- Kick goes too far or not far enough.
- Kicker lifts head too early.
- Ball not placed correctly on the foot.
- Follow-through not high enough.
- Non-kicking foot leaving the ground creates imbalance.

Kicking

(5) Chip Kick

Objective:
To apply pressure and or regain possession by kicking the ball just over the line of defence.

Key Factors

- Position ball as for an up-and-under kick.
- Head down; eyes on ball.
- Short follow-through with kicking foot.
- Raise toe to impart backspin.
- Keep head and shoulders still.
- Chase kick.

Coaching Points

- Moving onto the ball, look for space behind defence to place kick.
- Strike the ball with top of kicking foot, ie bootlaces, bringing toes up on contact, with head down and eyes on the ball.
- Impart backspin to ensure the ball pops up.
- Use short follow-through and look to regain the ball from the kick.
- When using the kick, regaining possession is paramount.

Common Errors

- Kicking too hard.
- Kicking to opposition player.
- Not following kick through.
- Kicking too close to defender and getting kick charged down.
Kicking

(6) Drop Punt

**Objective:**
To apply pressure to opposition by putting the ball into touch.

**Key Factors**
- Hold ball in upright position.
- Eyes on ball.
- Contact ball just behind and under point.
- Follow-through toward target.

**Coaching Points**
- Stand in relaxed balanced position, facing direction of attended kick.
- Hold the ball in two hands, with point of ball facing kicker’s foot.
- Step forward and plant non-kicking foot in direction of the kick.
- Swing the kicking foot through the line of the ball, place ball on the foot striking it behind and under point.
- Contact ball with bootlaces.
- Follow-through with the kicking foot to maximise length of kick.
- Returning to normal stance indicates that the follow-through has been straight and balanced.

**Common Errors**
- Lifting head too early.
- Turning shoulders at point of contact with the ball.
- Trying to kick too far.
- Trying to kick too hard losing timing, balance and power.
- Throwing the ball in the air to kick.
- Making contact with the ball too late.

Kicking

(7) Place Kick

**Objective:**
To kick ball accurately from a placed position on the ground in order to convert a try or score penalty goal.

**Key Factors**
- Lean the ball slightly forward to expose the “sweet spot”.
- Before moving back stand over the ball in the kicking position.
- Move back to a comfortable position.
- Concentrate on the “sweet spot”.
- Relax.
Focus – use key words.
Use imagery to picture the complete kick.
Approach by running in an arc.
Turn non-kicking shoulder side-on to target.
Place non-kicking foot in line with target.
Swing through strike zone.
Keep head over ball.
Make contact with top of instep.
Rise onto the toes of the non-kicking foot.
Follow straight through.
Return to balanced stance.

Coaching Points

The “sweet spot” of the ball is about a quarter of the way up the back seam. This can be seen easily if the ball is placed leaning slightly forward.
By placing the feet in the kicking position before walking back, the kicker is able to judge the footing and “cue up” the actions that follow.
There is no particular pattern to moving back.
Relaxation can be cued by taking a few deep breaths. Focussing can be achieved in two ways, both of which can be used: (1) cue to a key phrase or such as “head down, follow through”; (2) imagine the complete action through the goal posts.
The arc that must be created in the approach allows the kicker to arrive side-on to the ball. The non-kicking arm is ahead of the body, drawing the non-kicking shoulder forward so that the player is side-on to the ball.
The key to a successful kick is the placement and alignment of the non-kicking foot. It must be hip width from the ball and aligned to the target. Any changes in these two factors are the main causes of inaccurate kicking.
By having the head over the ball the kicker can be sure that body weight is moving forward through the strike zone. Power is generated by having the hips open as the supporting foot is placed and quickly closing them as the kick is made. The kicking foot moves down and through the line of the ball.
The non-kicking arm must be ahead of the body. If it is not, the player’s head will move back and the player’s weight will not be pushed through the ball.
Contact is made with the bone at the top of the instep.
By following through, the player’s weight moves through the ball. The player will end up on the toes and may even make a small skip jump.
A straight follow-through to the target is essential.
The ability to end up in a balanced stance after the kick is an indicator of the straightness of the follow-through.

Common Errors

Lifting head.
Leading shoulder to open.
Non-kicking foot too far from ball.
Poor follow-through.
Unbalanced finishing position.
Category: All Kicks

Name of Drill: Force Back

Objective: Put into practice a range of kicking skills.

Equipment: 1 ball

Group Size: A team

Area: The field

Drill Explanation

Groups advance only by kicking within the following rules:

1. The ball is kicked off from halfway as in a normal game.
2. If the ball is caught on the full, the catcher may advance 10 metres before kicking the ball again.
3. If the ball is dropped, the kicking team moves up to this mark and retains possession.
4. If the ball is recovered, but not caught, the next kick is made from the point of recovery.
5. When the ball goes into touch on the full:
   - if kicked from behind the 22-metre line the non-kicking team restarts play 15 metres infield from where the kick went into touch.
   - if kicked from in front of the 22-metre line the non-kicking team restarts play at the point where the original kick was taken.
6. Points are scored by:
   - punting the ball between the goalposts - 1 point
   - drop-kicking the ball between the goalposts - 3 points

Category: Field Kicking

Name of Drill: Rotational Kicking

Objective: Improve accuracy of a variety of kicks and improve catching reactions.

Equipment: 1 ball for every player

Group Size: 8–10 players or any suitable number

Area: Quarter or half field (depending on the number and skill level of players)

Drill Set-up:

Players stand in a circle equally spaced, “kicking distance” apart, as shown in the diagram. All players standing by a cone with a ball.

Drill Explanation

1. On the coach’s call “kick”, players kick accurately to the next player in an anti-clockwise direction. Each player immediately runs in a clockwise direction to catch a ball that has been kicked.
2. Once the kicked balls have been recovered, the players return to the cones.
3. The drill continues.
4. Players receiving the ball can catch or trap the ball, depending on player’s accuracy.

NB: To avoid disorganisation, the coach must retain tight control.

Key Coaching Points

- Go through these kicks: basic, chip, spiral, grubber, up-and-under, drop kick, box and drop punt.
- Remember catching and trapping skills.

Variations/Progression

- Make area bigger.
Coaching Activities

Individual Skills – Developing Rugby Coaches

**Category:** Grubber and Chip Kicks

**Name of Drill:** Opposed Kicking

**Objective:** To improve a player’s ability to grubber and chip kick accurately.

**Equipment:** 1 ball, 4 cones

**Group Size:** 8+

**Area:** 22m x 15m

**Drill Set-up:** Players in four lines, two at each end

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**Drill Explanation**

1. The first two attacking players move towards two defending players along the channel.
2. A grubber or chip kick is executed by player A to put the ball behind the defenders.
3. Ball is collected by player B and given to next line of two players.
4. Defenders move up in a line and run to the other end of the grid.
5. Next line of players are now the attackers and the new defenders are those opposing them.

**Key Coaching Points**

- Put ball between defenders if a grubber and over players if a chip kick.
- Assess options each time.

**Variations/Progression**

- Increase the number of players.

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**Category:** All Kicks

**Name of Drill:** Pair Kicking

**Objective:** To improve players’ ability to kick accurately

**Equipment:** 1 ball for each pair of players

**Group Size:** Any number depending on the number of balls

**Area:** 22m x 22m

**Drill Set-up:** Players pair up in two lines facing each other.

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**Drill Explanation**

1. Players kick the balls accurately to one another across the grid.
2. Punts and drop kicks should be made so they can be caught on the full.
3. For grubber kicks, the ball should be almost stopped as it reaches the partner.

**Key Coaching Points**

- Go through these kicks: basic, chip, spiral, grubber, up-and-under, drop kick, box and drop punt.

**Variations/Progression**

1. The coach may increase the pressure on players by reducing the time they have to kick the ball.