



2005 -2006  
"Alternate Back-Line Structure"

n Rugby Union

## Level 3 Coaching Course

2005 2006

### Assignment 12

# ***Alternate Back-line Structure***

**By:**

**Bill Gordon-Thomson**

in 1995 the Wallabies, of all the international teams, arguably adapted quickest to the new competitive environment. The supportive structure that was put in place, as well as the training program, was well advanced of the other nations, with a stand-out feature of their game being the rock solid defensive structure incorporated largely from league.

This had the immediate effect of raising the bar in defence on all teams who followed the Wallabies lead, such that the game was being dominated by defence at the highest levels. To find ways to break this wall of league defence, coaches looked back to league for answers. One answer they found was the three man attacking options, such as blocker, roach and circle ball, to name just a few.

The principle behind these plays is to transform a three-on-three situation into a two-on-one situation. It needs to be stated here that a large number of union coaches, including some at the highest levels, appear to have never understood this critical principle behind the three man plays, which resulted in them being incorrectly taught to a large number of rugby players.

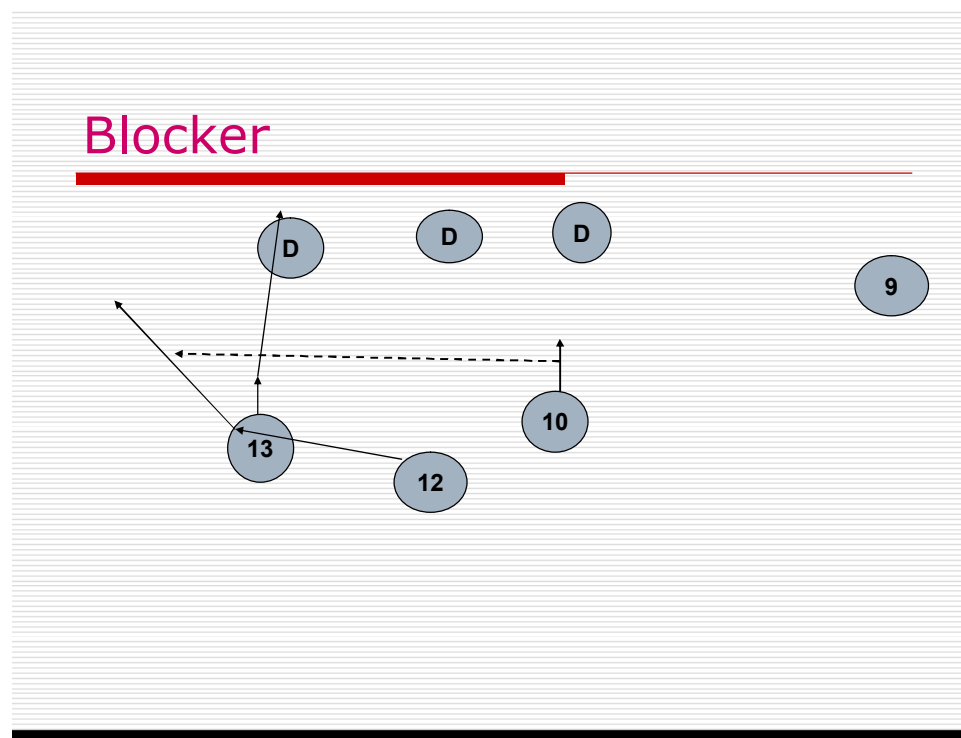
This is most clearly demonstrated through the ‘blocker’ play, demonstrated on page 4, where nearly all coaches in union have the third man running an ‘unders’ line back into the slide defence. This completely defeats the purpose of the play which is to create a two-

defender. If the third attacker is running second defender then the third defender is left free to cover the second attacking player, running an ‘overs’ line behind the third attacker. I would argue that the same mistake is made in union with the other phase option plays but that is not the purpose of this paper, merely food for thought.

I highlight that because the alternate primary phase attacking structure that I present here is underpinned by the philosophy of creating a two-on-one situation on a solid defensive structure. This is coupled with an insight developed when considering the fact that most players, even at the highest levels, very rarely call three-man plays as phase options. They execute them when they are incorporated in sequence plays but rarely call them themselves, nor execute them, dynamically “on the move”.

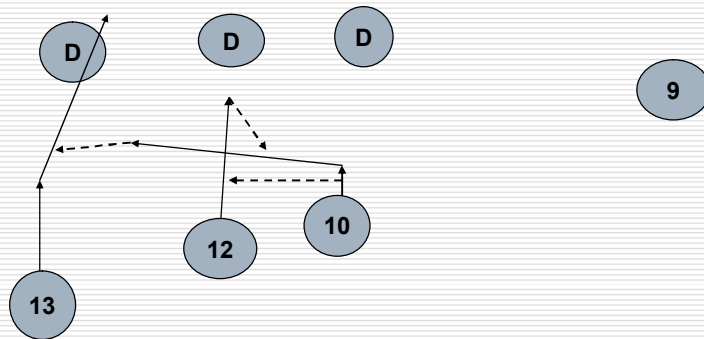
When they did spontaneously call and execute three man phase options, they seemed to be dominated by circle ball and suck ball, demonstrated below. After a number of years of contemplating this, and fruitless years of attempting many different training methods to encourage players to incorporate three-man phase options into their ‘spontaneous’ multi phase attacking play, I realized that the three-man plays they favored, being circle ball and suck ball, are in fact multiple two-man plays.

man and blocker, demonstrated in diagrammatic form below, involve three attacking players simultaneously executing one play, incorporating one pass. For instance in blocker, the third man runs straight at the third defender standing him up, and the second attacker runs behind the third attacker, receiving the ball from the playmaker behind the third attacker, thus creating a two-on-one on the third defender. This is why this move was called “arse ball” in league, as the second attacker received the ball behind the third attacker’s arse.



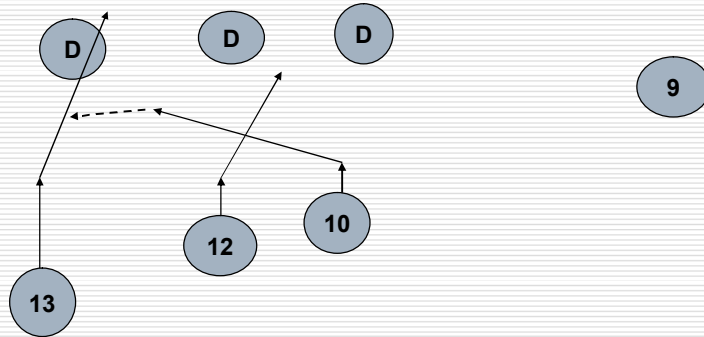
First two players executing a loop, a two-man play, followed by the first player, having received the ball back from the second player, another two-man play, giving the third player a short pass, a third two-man play.

## Circle Ball



The same with 'suck' ball where the first two players execute a dummy switch, a two-man play, followed by the first player giving the third layer a short pass, another two-man play.

\_\_\_\_\_



The first step was to develop the simplest structure possible which provides for a variety of two-man play options, such that from this

multiple two-on-one situations on a solid defensive line.

The answer was found in 'trailers'. A trailer is a player who runs behind another attacking player, traditionally offering support to that attacking player, though also providing them with attacking options.

The most common method for the trailer to be used as an attacking option is when the ball carrier has a trailer and the ball carrier steps either left or right and pops the ball to the trailer who has stepped the other way, demonstrated below. This is very often practiced but very rarely incorporated in attack, but was the answer to our challenge in developing numerous attacking options off a simple attacking structure.

## Trailer:

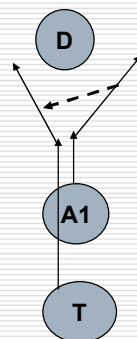
D = Defender

A1= Attacker

T = Trailer

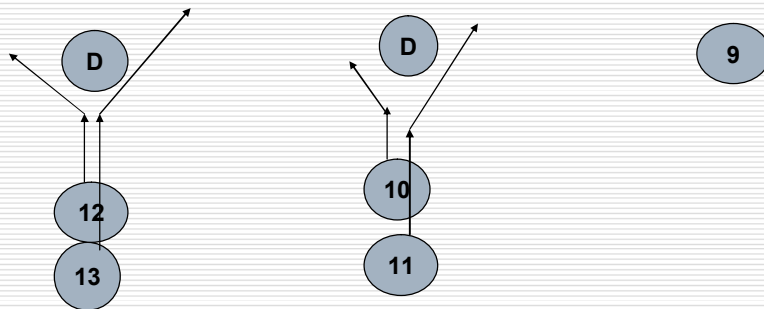
-----> Pass

-----> Running line



unders', 'overs' or A-lines, one can transform a two-on-two situation into a four-on-two.

## Dozer:



In this 'Dozer' phase option the two attacking players, being 10 and 12 in this instance, run overs lines, while the two trailers, being 11 and 13, run unders lines.

What this created in phase option attack, was a very simple structure which every player could easily understand and execute, but which had multiple attacking options. Even if one wants to get the ball out wide, the playmaker simply needs to feed the ball to the second trailer running wide from behind the second attacker. The only call

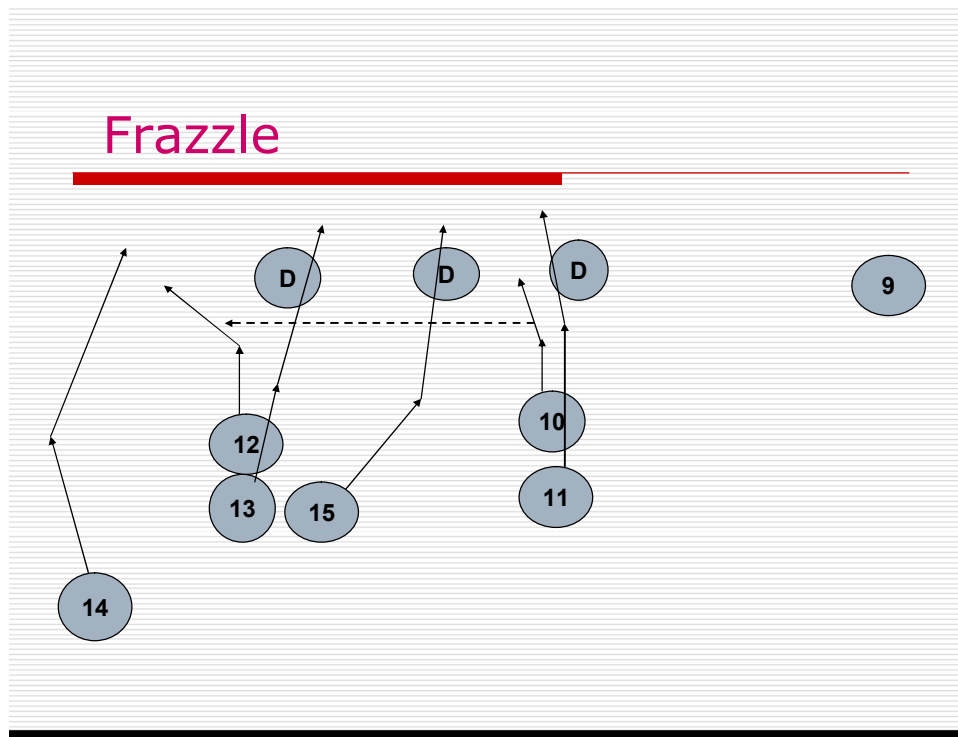
Whether the two attackers are going to run ‘overs’ or ‘unders’ lines and the trailers run the opposite. Naturally one can add the option that the two attackers actually run in different directions just to keep the defence on their toes.

It was at this point I looked at how we could extrapolate a full back-line structure out of our phase option structure and achieve the same result of creating two-on-one situations on a solid defense from what appears to be a very simple attacking structure. I found that there were actually many combinations possible, one of which I will elaborate on here.

Ultimately the end result is that, just like the traditional back-line structure, once the fundamentals are understood it will be up to the individual coaches to add their creative flair to the mix and develop their own patterns and plays. So, to reiterate, I intent only to present one of the many possible structures here, simply to illustrate the principle, from which all coaches can create their own variations.

I will call this move “Frazzle” for the purpose of this paper, which is not the name we use with the teams I currently coach, for obvious reasons.

the inside centre position, and has a player in the outside centre position (though not necessarily the outside centre per se) relatively flat. There is a player directly behind this 'outside centre', running as their trailer, and another just on the inside shoulder of this trailer. The blind winger runs as a trailer to the 5/8<sup>th</sup> and the open side winger stands wide and deep, and runs a sharp unders line.

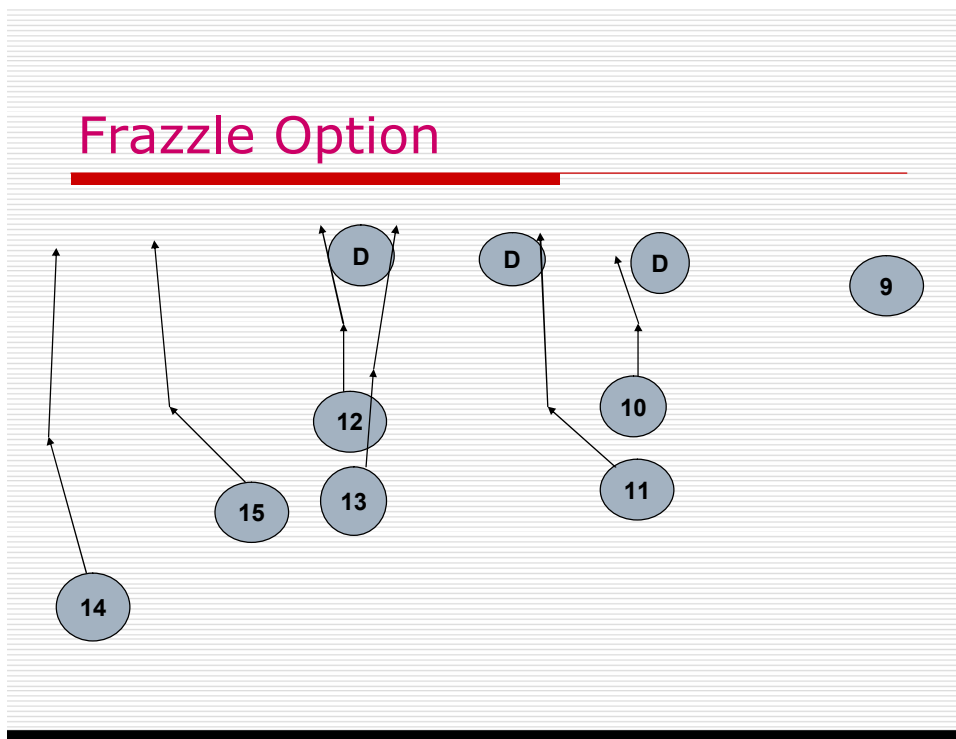


In the above diagram our 10 and 11 are creating a two-on-one with the oppositions 5/8<sup>th</sup> with our 11 running as a trailer, our 15 is committing their inside centre and our 12 and 13 are creating a two-on-one with their outside centre. Even if the opposition bring in their open winger, our 12 and 14 can create a two-on-one with him by our

centre, or our 12 can commit their outside to create a two-on-one with their inside centre. It is naturally very important that the players learn why they are running these particular lines, such that in a game they can vary their running lines to specifically target a particular defender.

A very simple variation of Frazzle is to have our 15 stand on the outside of our 13. We commit their inside centre with our 11 and we create a two-on-one on their outside centre with our 12 and 13 and another two-on-one on their open winger with our 14 and 15.

## Frazzle Option



It must be consistently and repeatedly highlighted to the players the whole purpose of the move is to create two-on-one situations which the players must then exploit. Developing the skills of the players at

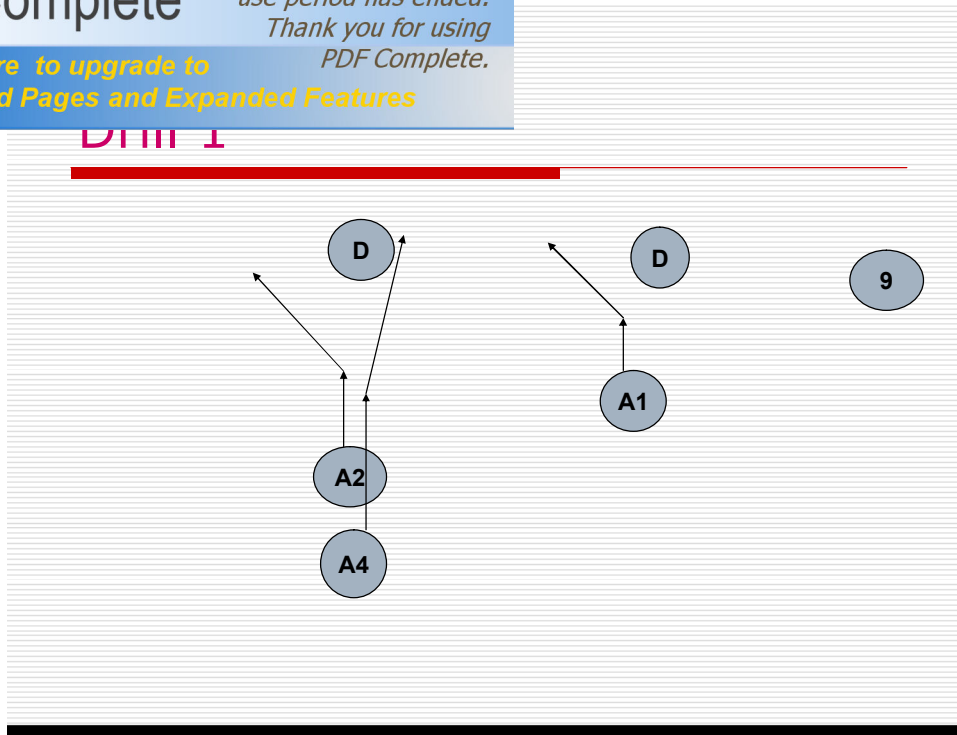
evolving two-on-one situations obviously requires a lot of practice, which requires a lot of time which is a limited resource at club level.

Another limited resource at club level are fly-halves with the capacity to read the play such that they recognize when we have created exploitable two-on-one situations, or the skills to then exploit them. We have had to be very prescriptive with some of our players to at least realize some of the potential of these moves.

It is therefore important to design drills which develop the player's capacity to read situations where we have created mismatches on the defense.

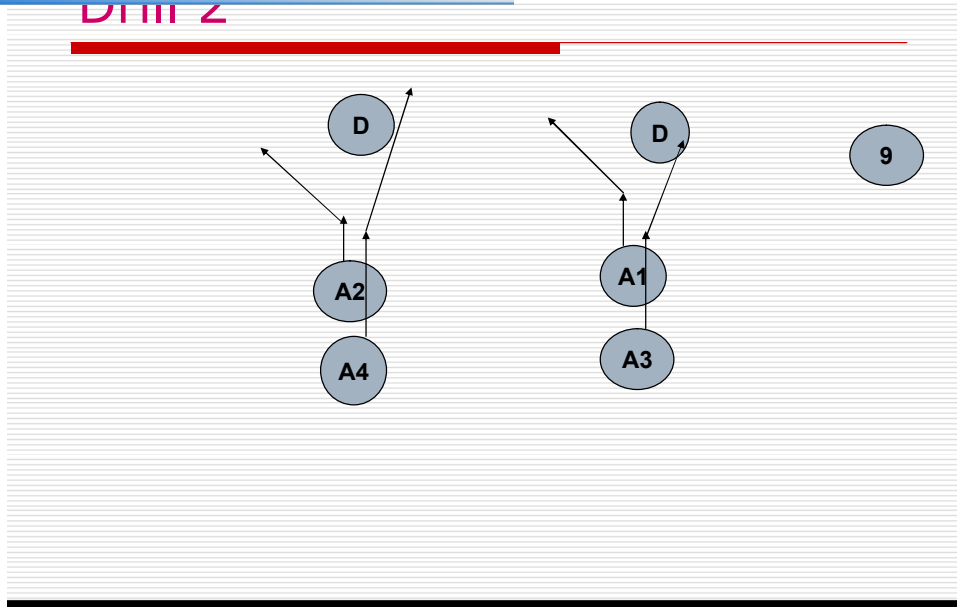
Initially begin with them becoming familiar with the attacking structure of creating a two-on-one through the application of a trailer on the second attacker, demonstrated through ‘Drill 1’ below. The attackers are creating a simple three-on-two but, with the play-maker ‘fixing’ the 1<sup>st</sup> defender, they manipulate a two-on-one on the second defender, from this situation.

The challenge is for the playmaker not to predetermine which of A2 or A4 receives the ball, but rather determines that depending on who the second defender commits too.



A1 needs to vary their attacking line between 'overs', 'unders' and 'direct' running to commit the first defender, and A2 does the same to the second defender, with A4, being the trailer, varying their line of attack opposite to the lines A2 runs. This very simple drill teaches the playmaker to read the defense and pass the ball to the unmarked attacker.

In Drill 2, one then adds a second trailer behind the playmaker, such that two two-on-one scenarios are created, as demonstrated below. The playmaker and A2 both either run 'overs' or 'unders' while their trailers run opposite lines, and the playmaker reads the opportunity created depending on what the defenders do.



One can see that these are the fundamental structures underlying the 'Frazzle' attacking move. Once the players have mastered this basic setup, one then adds another defender and more attackers. The attackers are still creating two-on-one scenarios, but there are more possible combinations which complicates the playmakers' decision making.

It is very important to teach the playmakers to read the defense, by reinforcing repeatedly that they must look at the defense as they run their lines and have confidence the rest of the attackers are running their predetermined lines. Thus when a hole opens up in the defense, some-one is running into it and the playmaker simply needs to pass the ball into that hole. This is naturally easier said than done.

playmaker limitations, this move such that the ball is carried over the advantage line, more often than not. It is stopped only when our timing is out, our fly-half misses the exploitable two-on-one opportunity, or when the defense ‘guesses’ where the ball is going to go. This is borne out even at training when we put a defense together with players who know the move; the attack carries the ball past the advantage line more often than not.

I reiterate that this is only a couple of variations of Frazzle itself. Further, Frazzle is only one variation of the many possible alternate back-line structures available which one can put together to create two-on-one situations regardless of the defensive patterns presented by the opposition. One must simply be prepared to look beyond the traditional back-line structure.

This paper is intended primarily as a tool to initiate creative thinking in back-line coaches, moving away from the traditional 5/8<sup>th</sup>, inside centre, outside centre back line structure, with the goal of breaking past the very effective defensive patterns and structures faced in the modern game.

If we can coach our players to consistently carry the ball beyond the advantage line of first phase possession, and occasionally completely split the defense resulting in a try, then we have achieved one of our primary responsibilities as back-line coaches.