

**INTERNATIONAL RUGBY BOARD**  
**COACHING SEVENS**  
**A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO COACHING**  
**SEVEN-A-SIDE RUGBY**





# Coaching Sevens

## A Practical Guide to Coaching Seven-a-side Rugby

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**OVERVIEW**





# Overview

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## Foreword

Welcome to the IRB's Practical Guide to Coaching Seven-a-side Rugby. This manual is designed to be used in three separate ways:

- as a stand alone resource
- to support the Level 1 - Introducing Sevens course
- to support the Level 2 - Developing Sevens Skills course.

If you are attending a course this resource will be used to support the development of your skills as a Sevens coach.

The presence of sport in a person's life carries enormous benefits for social, physical and personal development while broadening cultural awareness. Rugby is a uniquely inclusive sport, and you, as a coach, hold a position of genuine influence over the players' rate of personal development and their sense of community and self-worth.

The Level 1 Sevens course aims to give new coaches some practical tools to help them coach Sevens. This course is an attendance only course and delegates receive an IRB Certificate of attendance.

The Level 2 Sevens course is an accreditation course and aims to develop Sevens coaches who have already collected some experience. The course examines the coaching process and technical aspects of Sevens in much more depth, and is formally assessed. Throughout the course, you will be encouraged to practise your coaching skills. Grasp the opportunity for feedback from your IRB Educator and your peers. These opportunities will also form the foundation of your competency-based assessment.

I sincerely hope you enjoy reading the resource and/or attending the course.



**Mark Harrington**

Training Manager, International Rugby Board

## Acknowledgments

*The commitment to the task and efforts of the author and the editorial team as well as the consultancy team in contributing to the development of this education program are gratefully acknowledged.*

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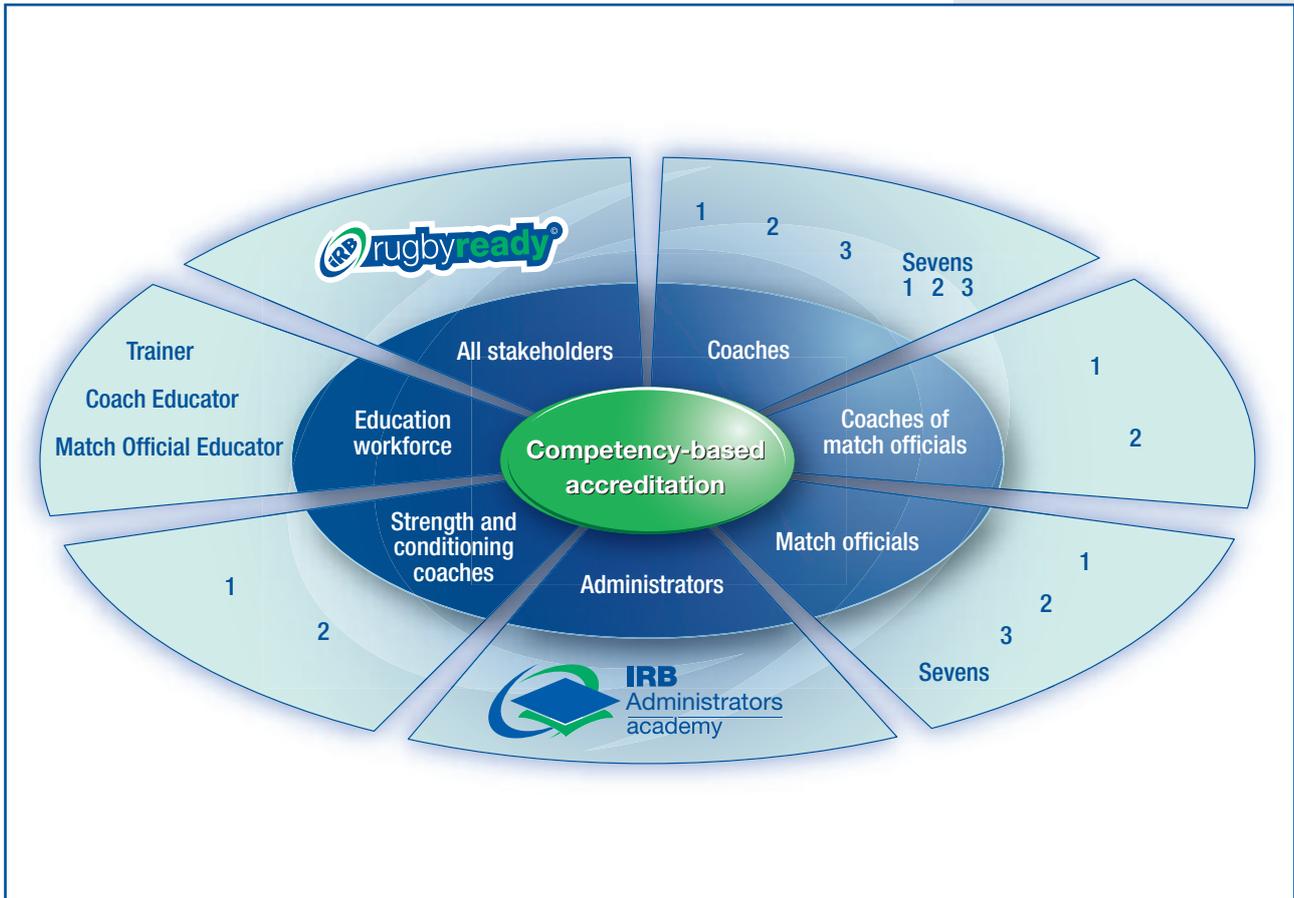
*The Bridge  
www.bridge-sport.co.uk*

## About this resource

*This resource is essentially a generic course manual for IRB Coaching Sevens Level 1 and 2 courses. The relevant workbooks can be added to this manual as you attend a relevant course.*

*Educator notes are available separately from the IRB.*

## IRB Training and Education courses



IRB Training and Education courses have evolved since the mid 1990s, and have been updated regularly since then using the expertise in member Unions and the skills of a select number of IRB Trainers who are also 'content experts'.

Since 2006, the IRB provision has extended to serve more stakeholders, as demonstrated in the portfolio above. All courses are now competency-based, designed to provide learning and training appropriate to the contexts in which coaches and officials are active.

In addition, IRB courses can now only be delivered by IRB licensed Educators who have demonstrated their technical and facilitation skills to prescribed standards. All record keeping and certification is undertaken from the IRB's headquarters in Dublin, Ireland.

## Introduction to Sevens Rugby

The game of seven-a-side Rugby has grown in popularity in recent years with a number of international tournaments being conducted.

Literature on Sevens Rugby is surprisingly scarce. The top coaches are busy people involved directly in national team coaching.

To continue the discussion which has taken place more informally than formally, this manual is a formal contribution.

It is not definitive; no manual on any evolving game should be. It does provide a structured approach to the analysis of the Game and content that will serve as a starting point for the discriminating coach to develop game plans, patterns of play and tactics for the team.

Whether Sevens is used for developing talent for the national team or to popularise Rugby in Unions where it is little known as a sport, its potential can only be enhanced by informed and structured coaching.

## Aim of this manual

To instruct coaches to coach players to play Sevens Rugby to the level of the players' ability based on an understanding of the Game.

## Summary of outcome goals

### ATTACK

- Gaining possession
- Retaining possession
- Creating space
- Penetrating using the space
- Supporting
- Scoring

### DEFENCE

- Contesting Possession
- Denying Space
- Tackling the Ball Carrier
- Regaining Possession



## Summary of performance goals

Q. How can the outcome goals be achieved?

A. Through the use of skills, patterns, tactics in attack and defence

### ATTACK

- Gaining possession
  - Kick-offs
  - Scrums
  - Lineouts
- Retaining possession
  - Handling
  - Alignment
  - Lateral space
  - Linear space
- Penetrating
  - Before the tackle
  - In and through the tackle
  - Supporting
  - Lateral support
  - Linear support

### DEFENCE

- Contesting possession
  - Creating untidy delivery of the ball at scrums and lineouts so options are limited
- Denying space
  - Move forward in formation
  - Player on player defence or zone defence - the ability to adapt from one method to the other
  - Covering the space behind by the use of a sweeper
  - Deny space to reduce time and to force the attack to have greater depth in their formation
  - Defend inside out, not outside in
- Tackling the ball carrier
  - Tackle to stop the player running on
  - Tackle to recover the ball
  - The use of multiple tackles
- Regaining possession / attack
  - Maintain some depth so players can accelerate onto the ball
  - Loose ball on the ground - recover quickly and pass the ball to space
  - Be alert
  - Immediately exploit the lack of sweeper when a turnover occurs



## Summary of team selection

### Priorities

- Speed
- Handling skills
- Evasion skills
- Tackling and the recovery of loose ball
- Anaerobic fitness
- Specialists skills:
  - Goal Kicking
  - Lineout / scrum
- Composure to maintain team discipline and structure

### Common errors in Sevens

The most frequent errors occurring in Sevens are:

- Aligning with insufficient depth so players have to slow down and reach back to receive a pass.
- Supporting across the field rather than providing linear support from directly behind the ball carrier.
- Ill discipline under pressure that results in the loss of a pattern in attack and defence.
- Poor preparation so that there is not a pattern for the most frequent eventualities. These may be attacking or defensive.
- Bunching on attack to assist the ball carrier only to concede the ball and be beaten on the flanks.
- Going alone and becoming isolated.
- Committing too many players to win ruck or maul ball. It is better to commit 1 or 2 players and if the ball is won there are numbers to attack and if not numbers to defend.

## NOTES

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**COACHING SEVENS**  
**OUTCOME GOALS IN DETAIL**



**COACHING SEVENS OUTCOME GOALS IN DETAIL**





# Outcome goals in detail

## ATTACK

### Gaining possession

As in all rugby, gaining possession of the ball and keeping it are the primary objectives of the team. Consequently, scrums, lineouts and kick-offs are of major concern, however, in Sevens these are fewer in number.

Because of the large number of points that can be scored, priority should be given to kick-offs. Secondly, because of minor infringements the next priority should be to scrums and last of all to lineouts because teams usually avoid putting the ball into touch. How possessions is to be won at these set pieces will be covered in the section on performance goals.

### Retaining possession

Players must be able to retain possession of the ball even when they are under pressure. In doing this they may be stationary or even moving backwards.

Once a player is on the ground the ball must be released consequently, fundamental to ball retention is the ball carrier's ability to be physically strong enough to spread their base and lower their centre of gravity in contact to prevent going to the ground.

The player must have the skill of making the ball available to a supporting team mate by turning either side on or back on to opponents and holding the ball so a team mate can drive in to secure possession.

The support player should drive in with the shoulder just above the ball. To ensure the player is able to drive forward the ball carrier should hold the ball at about waist height. The support player should not only secure the ball and drive forward, but should also bind with one arm onto the ball carrier to increase stability. In this way, the ball carrier is kept up so that the ball does not have to be played immediately as it would in a tackle.

Once the ball has been secured, the support player should pass quickly to another player in space so that the attack may regain its composure and formation to remount the attack.

If the ball carrier goes to ground the immediate action must be to roll or pass the ball back from the tackle to once again gain space to remount the attack. The aim must be to get the ball away from the congestion surrounding the tackle. Players driven sideways in the tackle must go to ground immediately to re-establish stability lost by the impact of the tackle.



### **Retaining possession**

*Does the ball carrier have an 'escape route' in mind to ensure ball retention?*

In all cases players must endeavour to go into a tackle on their own terms. This requires anticipation of when and how contact will occur so that players know immediately how they will react and do this before possession can become contested.

## Creating space

Space exists in two directions, it may be lateral space across the field or linear space down the field.

### Lateral space

Lateral space across the field can be created by the positioning of team mates in attack.

Of course possession is best retained by avoiding contact altogether. The movement of the ball to a player in space who eventually penetrates is the ideal, as all players will remain in the match as receiving options.

When the ball is in a congested area, it should be moved to space immediately. To offer options players must not bunch together, but must spread out across the field. The ball is best moved to space by passing, however, in the context of the match this may not be available. Alternatives are to roll or kick the ball back to a team mate.

The exception to this is when play is close to the goal line. Here the player recovering the ball should make as much space ahead as possible while still being conscious that the use of support to retain is a close second priority. By going forward, space is created whereby attackers can align to move forward to receive the pass and the teams alignment can force the defence to concede some space.

As the defenders must be committed to defend each individual attacker they will have to spread across the full width of the field. This will create space between each individual defender through which the attack can penetrate.

This may occur when an attacker is able to isolate the defender and, using superior skills, beat the defender through the space on left or right.

See diagram 1-1, lateral space • Situation 1

Secondly, a player from elsewhere in the formation may enter the space between two attackers. As both the ball carrier and the player to which a pass can be made both have to be defended, the extra player entering the space between these two may be able to penetrate before the defence has been able to adjust.

See diagram 1-2, lateral space • Situation 2

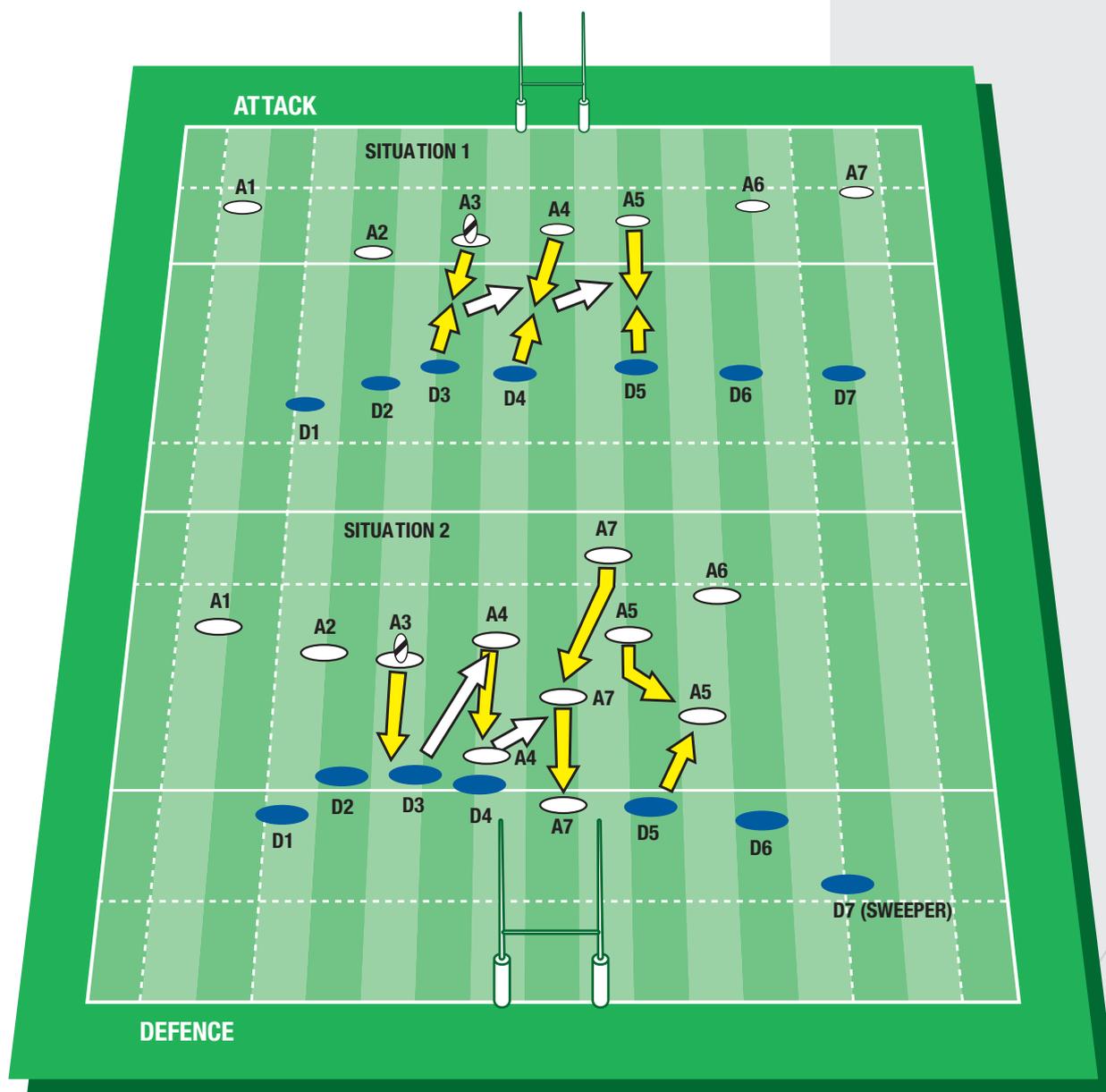


### Creating space

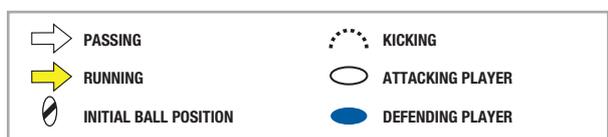
*The defender has been committed and the pass made to a team mate in a better position than the passer*

## Diagrams 1-1 and 1-2, lateral space

**Situation 1:** A5 vs D5 individually using the space between players. Attacking players remain spread so that the defenders cannot assist D5 creating a one-on-one for A5 vs D5.



**Situation 2:** A4, A5 and A7 - Passing to a player in space between players A4 and A5 who create space for A7 to run into by taking their defenders away from the space between them.



In any formation the players must stand far enough from each other to prevent the defender defending more than one attacker. This is assisted by the lines of running of the attack. The line of moving would initially be directly at the designated defender holding the player. If the defender moves away to assist, elsewhere the ball carrier will penetrate. However, the players may stand a little closer so as not occupying the full width of the field. This will create space beyond the last player in the formation. In this case it is space on the outside that is exploited rather than that between two defenders.

See diagram 1-3, lateral Space • Situation 3

A player moving into this space has considerable room and may be fast enough to score. When this is not the case the player should create a delay until support arrives and run lines to create space for supporting players.

To do this, the player should alter running lines to draw the defence away from the support. If the player moves left, space is created to the right and if the player moves right, space is created left.

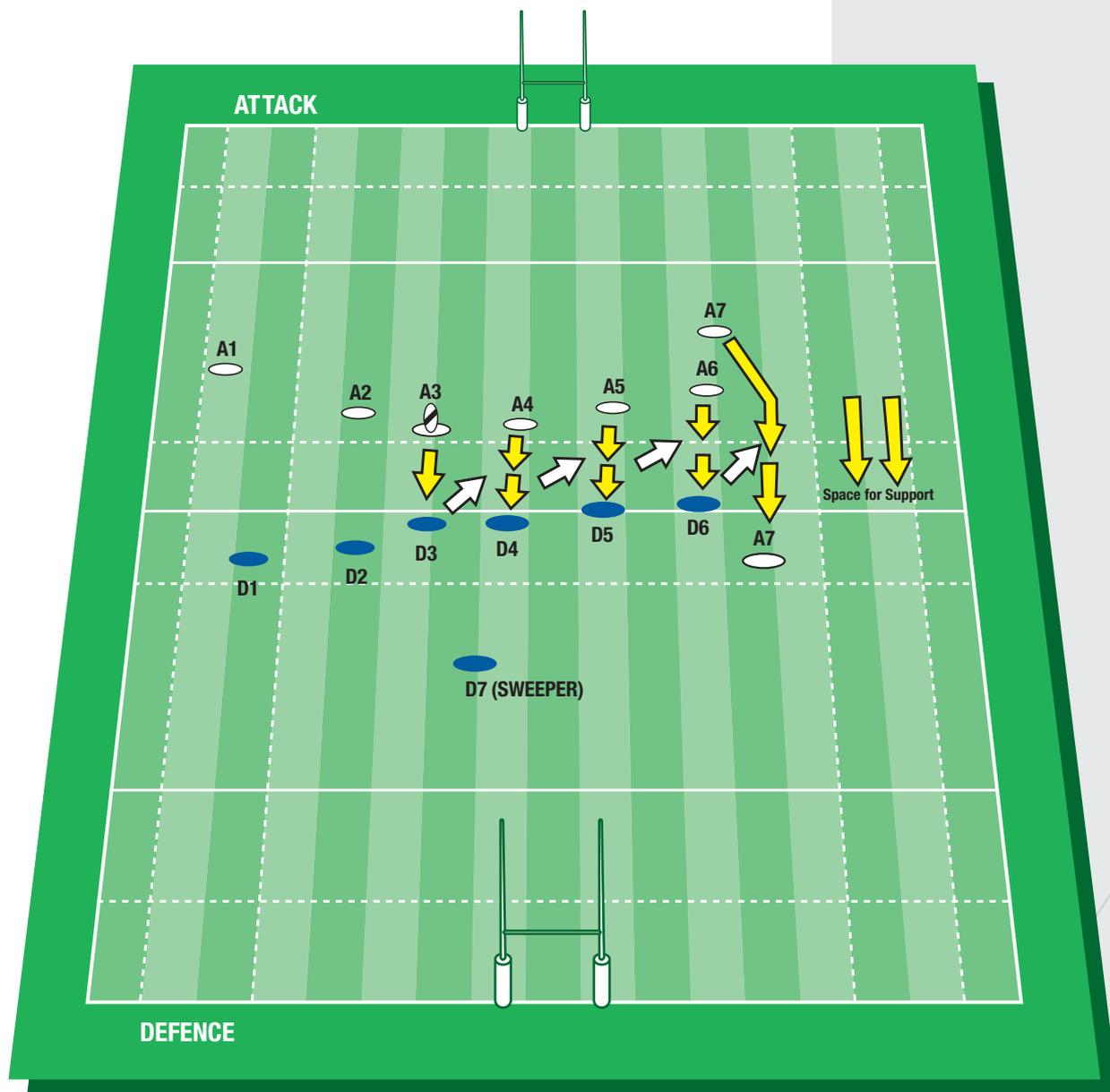
This can best be achieved by the player running infield as they run down the field creating space on their outside, further from the defence. This also enables a comfortable pass to be made to support players running into the space.

The other option is to move away from both support and the defence by veering towards the touchline. If the player can beat the defence on the outside, this is fine, but if this cannot be achieved there are two difficulties. The first that it is difficult to pass into the space and the second is that the defence will have been drawn into the space by the movement of the ball carrier.



**Diagram 1-3, lateral space**

Situation 3: The overlap for A7 from A6. A3, A4 and A5 hold their defenders creating space on the outside for A6 and A7.



	PASSING		KICKING
	RUNNING		ATTACKING PLAYER
	INITIAL BALL POSITION		DEFENDING PLAYER

## Linear space

Linear space is the space between the two teams. From scrums, lineouts, rucks and mauls this is the distance between the offside line and the alignment of the backline.

See diagram 2-1, linear space • Situation 1

Creating space by setting up rucks and mauls is often not an option in Sevens. This is because the players wish to avoid contact to retain the ball. And secondly, because there are fewer players contact situations do not necessarily constitute a ruck or maul by definition.

This means that while there is space at these aspects of play this occurs less frequently than in 15-a-side, because relatively few of them take place. So in Sevens the offside Laws are more often those that apply to General Play. These apply mainly to the attacking team in that an attacking player is offside if that player in playing the ball is ahead of the last player in his/her team to do so.

Consequently, linear space is created in Sevens only by the attacking team's ability to exploit faults in the defence.

If the attack has the ability to exploit a loss in the alignment of the defence they will create space. Most frequently this is created by a defensive player moving ahead of team mates in the line.

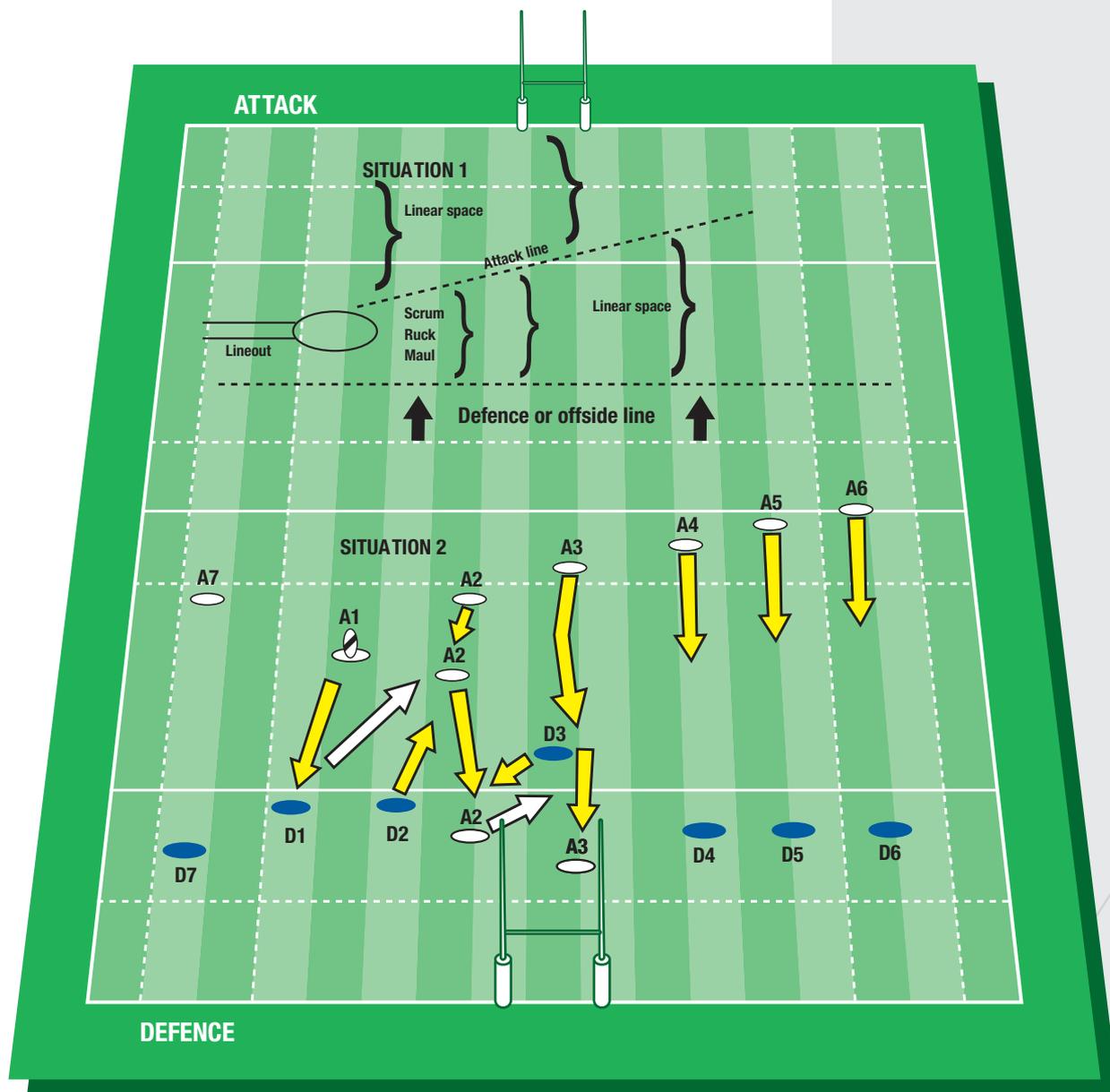
See diagram 2-2, linear space • Situation 2



### Diagrams 2-1 and 2-2, linear space

Situation 1: Linear Space from Phase Play

Situation 2: Linear Space created by exploiting a gap in the defence. D3 is out of alignment. A2 takes the gap between D2 and D3 and penetrates, A3 runs in support



	PASSING		KICKING
	RUNNING		ATTACKING PLAYER
	INITIAL BALL POSITION		DEFENDING PLAYER

If the attack is unable to pose a threat they will attack with less and less space as the defence is not impeded by an offside line and no space is created for the attack.

This is why teams attempt to create space by moving away from the defence towards their own goal line. Ultimately they will have to go forward. To do this from a position in which they are backing-up is difficult and has to be practiced.

Attacking players must be aware that when they go into contact defending players may enter play from any direction. Be aware however that an experimental Law Variation has been implemented by the IRB in late January 2000, which will ensure players enter from their side of the ball at the tackle. This will create space and time for the attacking team.

The linear space between the teams can be too great also. This is because while it gives the attack time to attack, it also gives the defence time to defend. It must be recognised that a high skill level allows players to attack when little space is available. The less this space, while still achieving the objective, the less time there is available for the defence to react.

While there is linear space between the attack and the defence, players should be aware that there is space behind the defence also. When the space is used by kicking into it, it may have an immediate effect if possession is regained. But even if it does not there is threat that the kick may be used again to prevent the defence from over-committing to moving forward to make the tackle.

## Penetrating using space

Space creates time to mount an attack. However, the attack will only be successful if the attack aligns on the defence keeping them spread across the field. Secondly, success will be enhanced by the depth with which the attackers stand relative to each other.

The depth should be sufficient that it gives the player time to choose options whether they be run, pass or kick.

The space can be reduced to reduce the reaction time of the defence by moving forward to receive the ball. As the ball carrier moves forward the defence is threatened and will be held until the ball is passed.

This may be quite close to the defender. Because of this, if the next receiver is aligned flat on the passer then there will be little space and time for the player to react.

This may be prevented by the passer passing early, however, the commitment by the defence will not be as great. Alternatively, the support player can retain greater depth, however, the passer will have to pass back further than is often the case.



### **Penetrating**

*Once the initial line of defence is broken pace ensures the try is scored.*

In this instance, support players must resist the temptation to flatten up in alignment as the attack moves forward.

Penetration has already been alluded to under Principle 3 - Creating Space. The basic blueprint is to create a situation in which there are more attackers in a channel of linear space than defenders. When the ball is passed to the unmarked attacker the player penetrates.

Speed is essential as the defence will be adjusting to ensure each of the attackers is marked, in 1 v's 2 situations or 2 v's 3 situations. It is these situations that must be practiced to cue the players into the options during matches.

When a penetrating player moves into the gap a defender will be drawn from another part of the defence to prevent penetration. When defended the attacker may be aware where the defence has come from and by passing to the player in that space the gap will once again be threatened.

See diagrams 3-1 to 3-3, penetrating using space

The second player may also be tackled, however, the same awareness will create the same opportunity. Support players must be aware of the possibilities and converge on the lane so that the attacking formation alters from a lateral pattern across the field to a linear one down it.



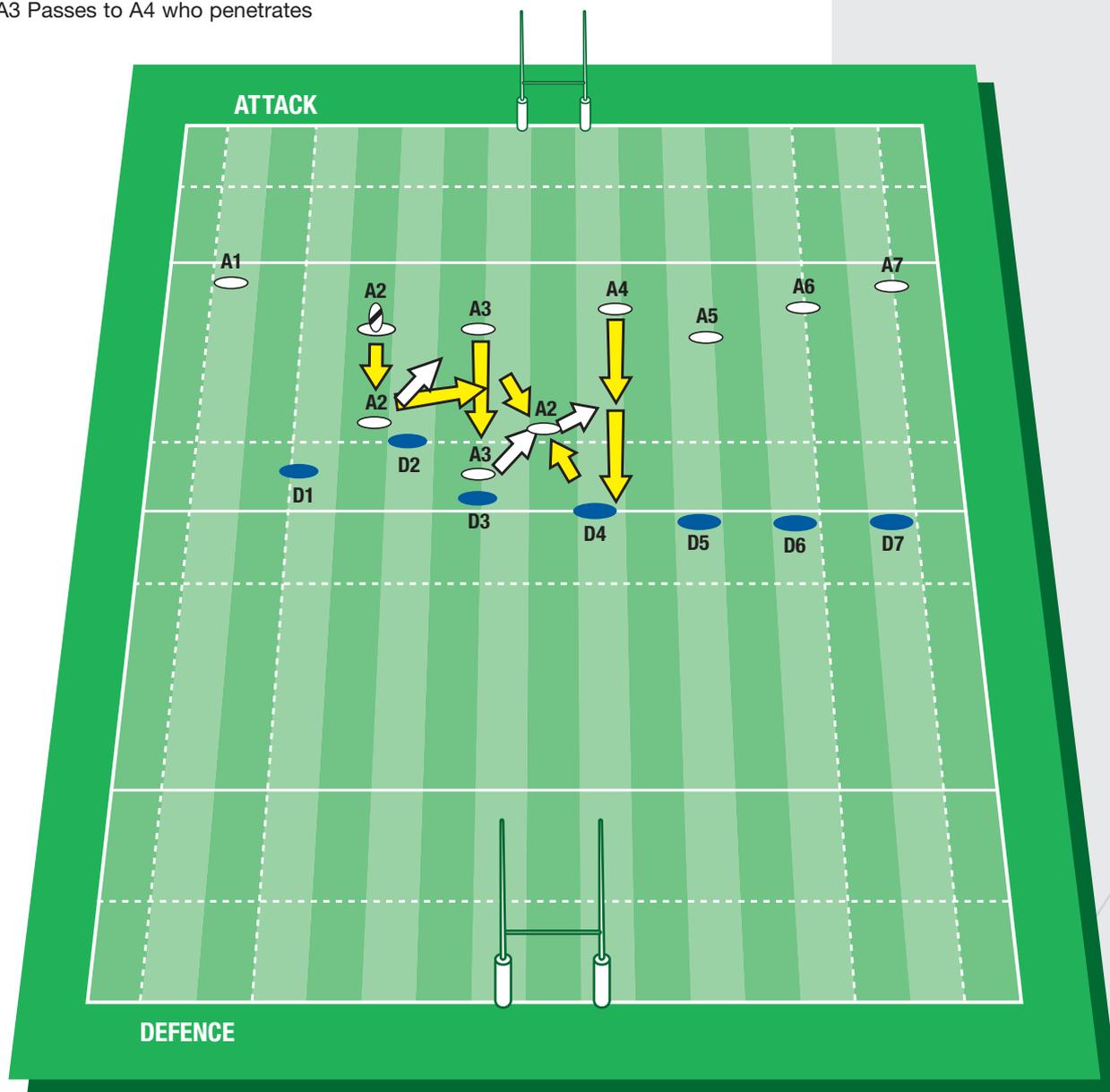
### ***Passing into space***

*The defence has been held but is the ball carrier ready to pass immediately?*

### Diagram 3-1, penetrating using space

#### Situation 1

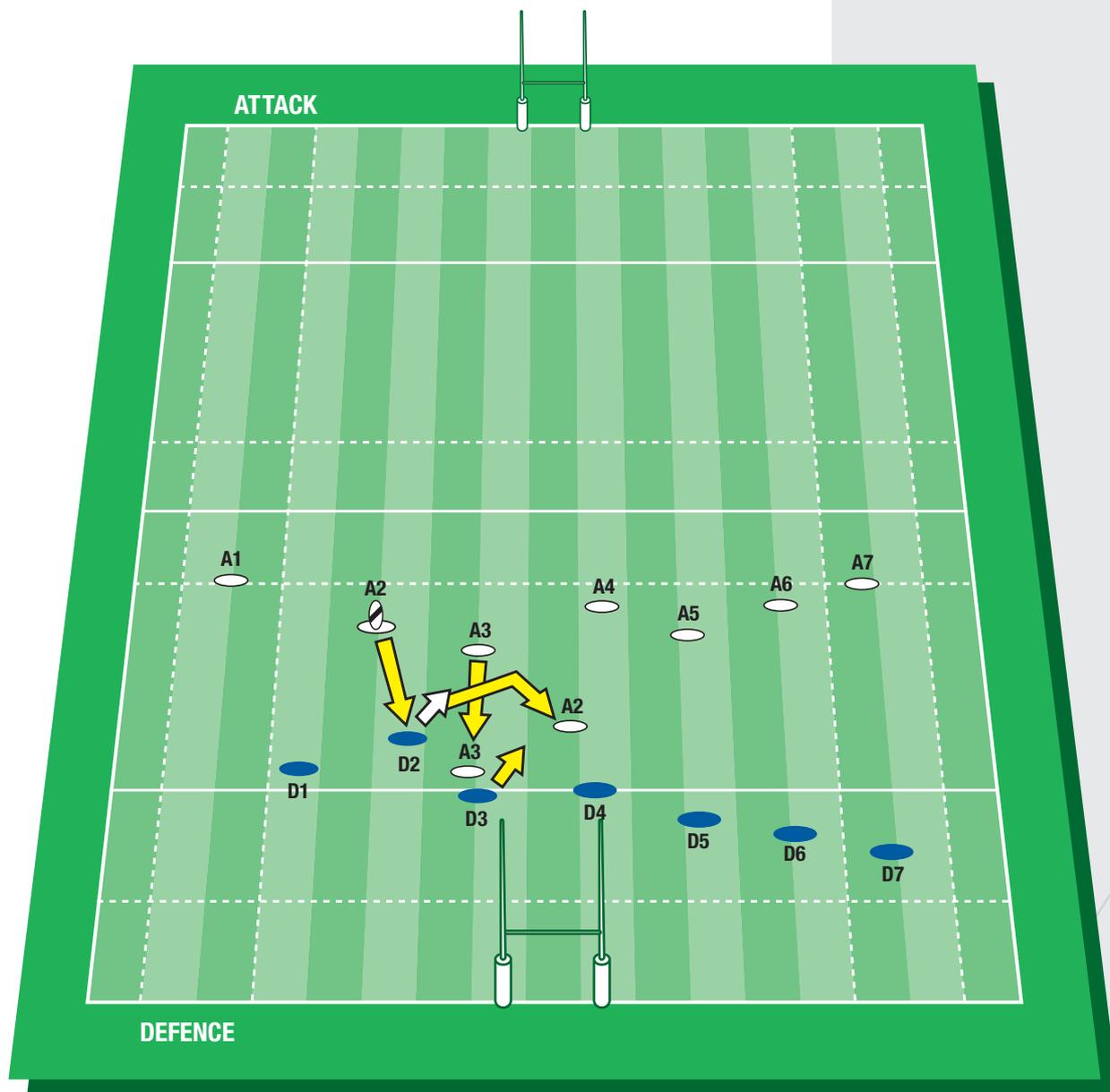
- A2 is to penetrate between A3 and A4
- A3 runs straight to D3
- A2 enters the gap
- D4 moves into the tackle
- A3 Passes to A4 who penetrates



	PASSING		KICKING
	RUNNING		ATTACKING PLAYER
	INITIAL BALL POSITION		DEFENDING PLAYER

### Diagram 3-2, penetrating using space

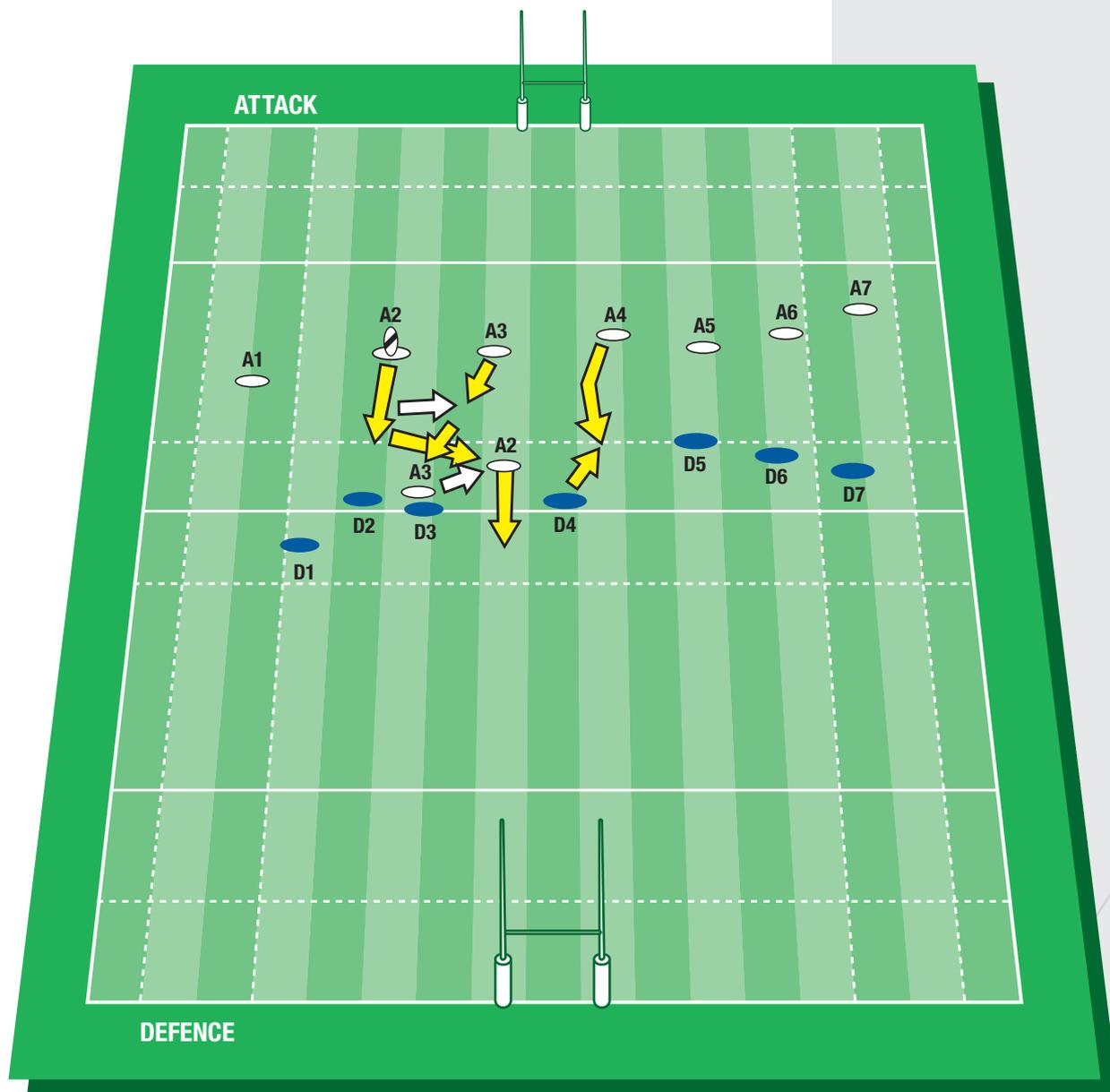
Situation 2: D3 moves across to tackle A2 on the double round A3 doesn't pass and takes the gap left by D3 moving across



	PASSING		KICKING
	RUNNING		ATTACKING PLAYER
	INITIAL BALL POSITION		DEFENDING PLAYER

### Diagram 3-3, penetrating using space

Situation 3: D4 is drawn out by A4 and to increase the size gap between D3 and A2 penetrates between D3 and D4



	PASSING		KICKING
	RUNNING		ATTACKING PLAYER
	INITIAL BALL POSITION		DEFENDING PLAYER

## Supporting play

In 15-a-side rugby, with some exceptions, the main form of support involves players being close to the ball so that the ball carrier has immediate support on contact. This ensures the retention of the ball.

In Sevens the relative infrequency with which contact should be made means that close support is not nearly as important.

The ball carrier attracts the defence creating congestion. This creates space elsewhere across the field that can then be used to attack. If the attacking players group around the tackle as the defenders may do to prevent a score the opportunity to use space is lost.

Consequently the ball carrier must enter contact knowing how the ball is to be cleared to space, away from congestion. Equally, the supporting players must be in that space and aware of the ball carrier's options so they can react to them.

Their positioning should be lateral and also deep enough so that they can respond to the pass, the roll or the kick back by the ball carrier, by moving forward to gather the ball. This position enables most players to use their peripheral vision to assess options. Once the ball has been gathered the player has all the ball carrying options but more space may be created by an immediate second pass away from the congestion.

This can be enhanced by players aligning in lanes across the field. This enables them to isolate the defender. Even before they receive the ball they can use distractions to occupy the defender. This is done by changing running lines, feinting and by communicating openly with team mates.

Depending on the behaviour of the defence the player may become the ball carrier or continue to be a decoy. As the ball carrier, the player may have out manoeuvred the defence prior to receiving the ball so penetration can occur. If the defence continues to mark the support player, the player's role would be that of a decoy and the pass could be made to another player further along the line. Once a player's primary task as the ball carrier has been completed, the player should once again assume a supporting role.

More often this will mean taking up a position in depth in their lane. This will keep the defence spread. The exception may be a player who assists the ball carrier in contact to retain the ball and distribute to the players in space. Care must be taken when support is needed in contact to retain the ball. If players over commit and the ball is lost the opposing team has space in which to attack.



### **Supporting play**

*Should the arriving player commit to regaining possession or leave it to the other players to complete the job?*

# Outcome goals in detail

## DEFENCE

### Contesting possession

If a team defends, only after conceding possession the effectiveness of the defence is reduced. It is the quality of the possession that will initially determine the effectiveness of the attack. By contesting the ball this effectiveness will be reduced enabling the actions that follow to recover the ball to be more effective.

### Denying space

By denying space to an attack the defence gives the attack less time and space to penetrate.

However, in Sevens the defence must operate as a unit by moving forward together so that they keep their formation and shape. To retain peripheral vision players further from the position of the ball must align so that they can see what is happening with the ball. Equally, they must not get ahead of those inside as this will create a gap in the defensive line.

Players should move up and across together so that the ball carrier can be tackled from the inside, not the outside. If a defender is directly in front, both sides are available to the ball carrier.

See diagram 4-1, defending directly in front

If the defender is outside the ball carrier, the player will have to move in to make the tackle. While this may be effective, better players will pass to a support player running to penetrate through the space which the defender has moved away from.

See diagrams 4-2, 4-3 and 4-4, defensive alignment • Situations 1, 2 and 3

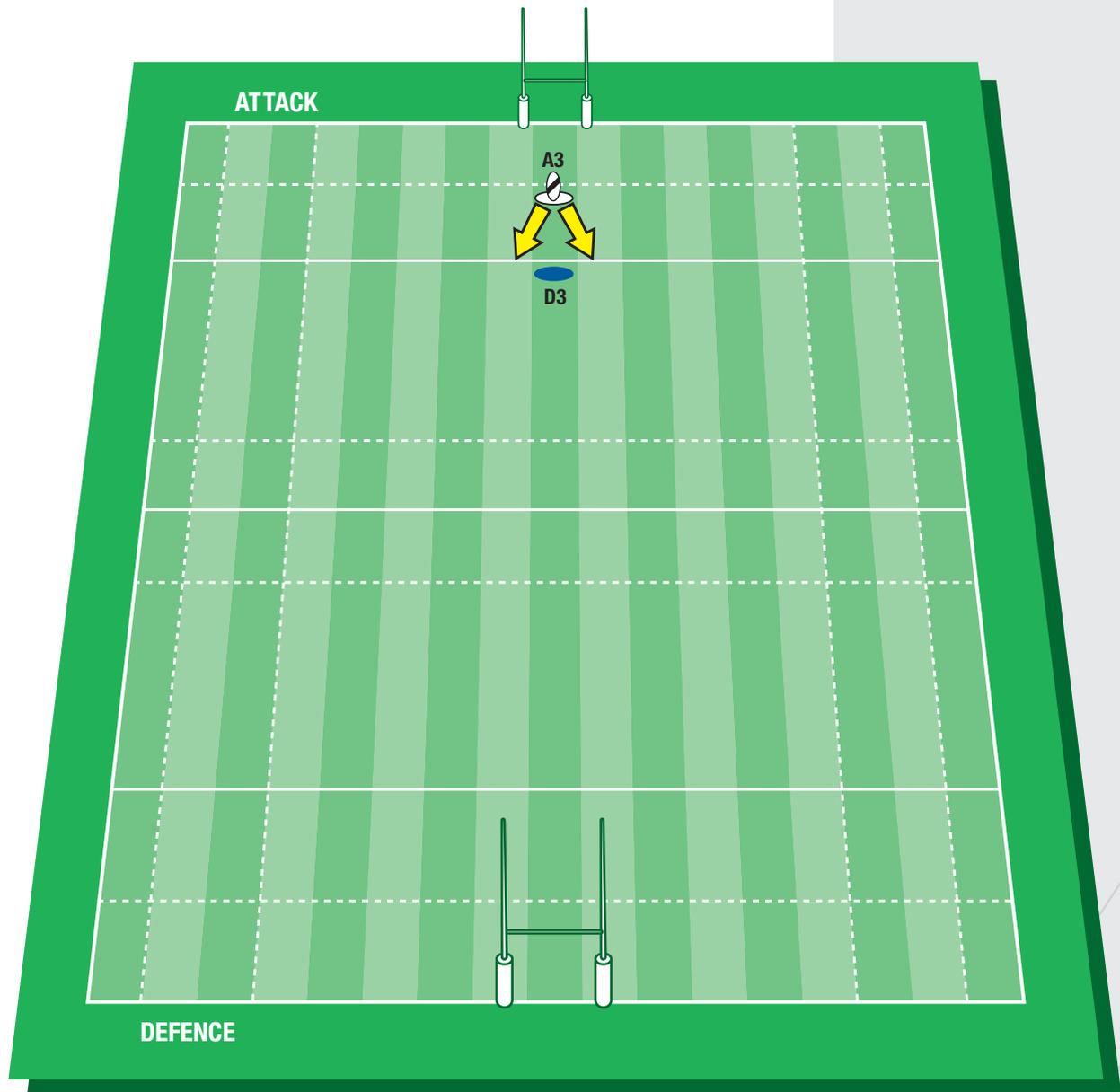
The basic method of defending is, therefore, 'inside-out'.

However, better players may develop variations to this. As a unit, the defence must be disciplined to operate to a pattern. This involves a total understanding of the pattern by each team member and confidence by individual players in those around them. This allows the players to focus on their role within the pattern. They will not be distracted by a flaw in a team-mates defence distracting them from performing their role successfully to select their opponent.



**Diagram 4-1, defending directly in front**

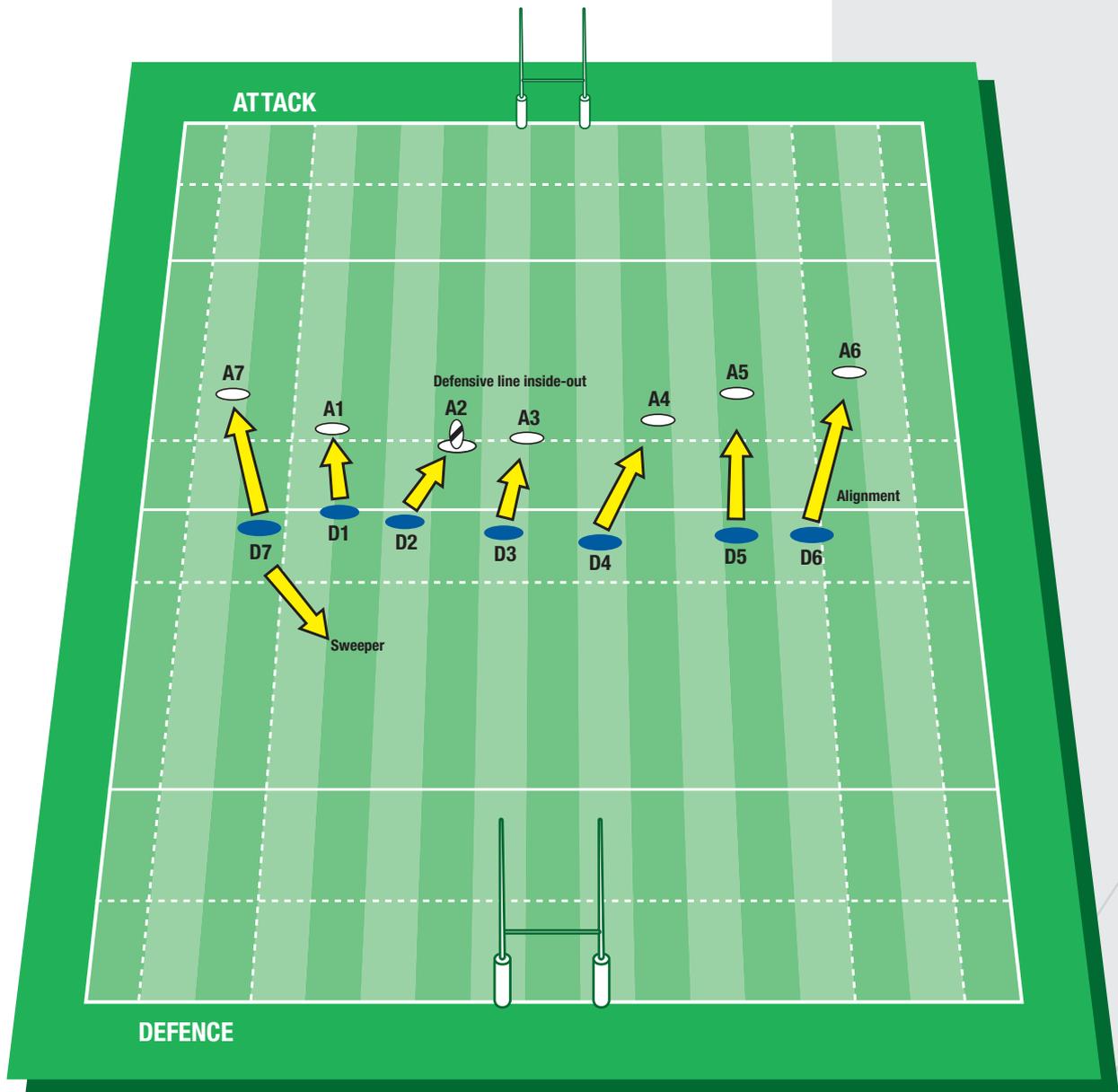
Defending directly in front - both sides available



	PASSING		KICKING
	RUNNING		ATTACKING PLAYER
	INITIAL BALL POSITION		DEFENDING PLAYER

**Diagram 4-2, defensive alignment**

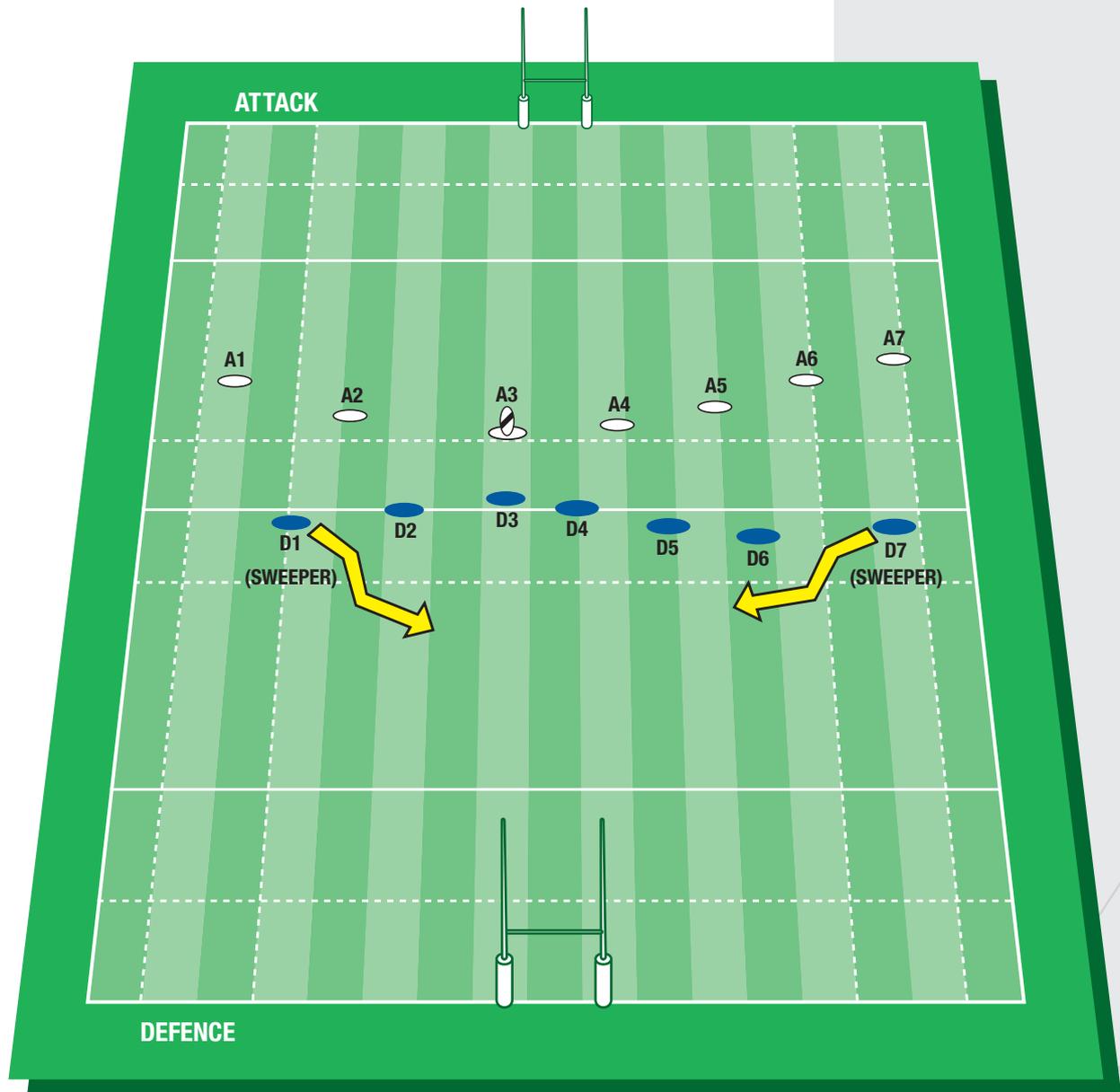
Situation 1: Attack left to right



	PASSING		KICKING
	RUNNING		ATTACKING PLAYER
	INITIAL BALL POSITION		DEFENDING PLAYER

**Diagram 4-3, defensive alignment**

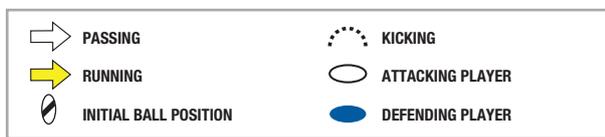
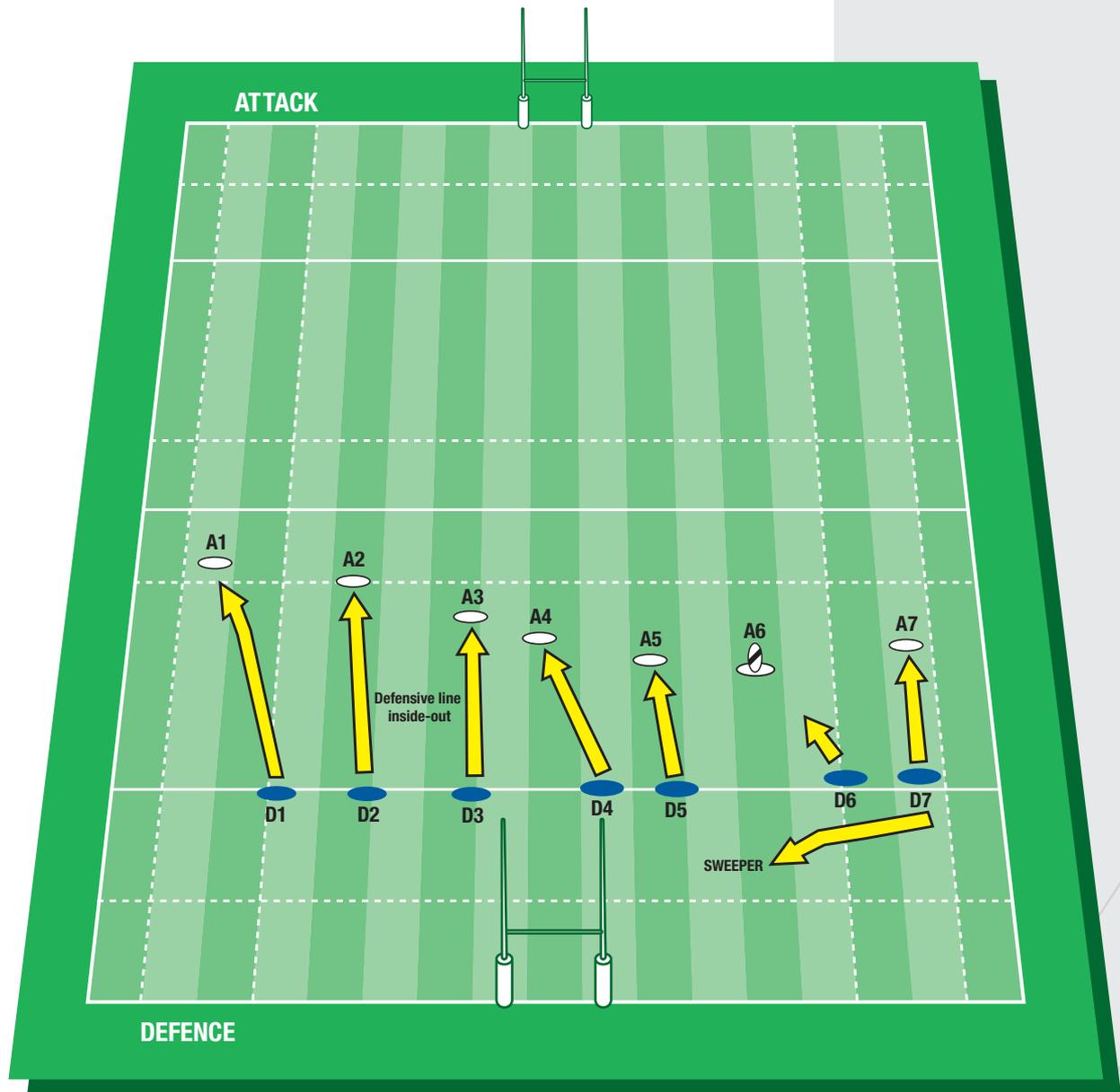
Situation 2: Attack may be to left or to right



	PASSING		KICKING
	RUNNING		ATTACKING PLAYER
	INITIAL BALL POSITION		DEFENDING PLAYER

**Diagram 4-4, defensive alignment**

Situation 3: Attack right to left



To play as a unit the defence must play to a pattern. The two main patterns are where the designated attacker is identified by numbering along the backline to select their opponent i.e. player-on-player defence:

See diagram 5-1, defending inside-out and diagram 5-2, defending outside-in

and the second by defending a zone and being responsible for a ball carrier in that zone. A major advantage of zone defences is that it prevents the defenders from bunching when the attack is lateral. ie: across the field, as they are defending a space not a player.

See diagram 6-1, defending zone defence

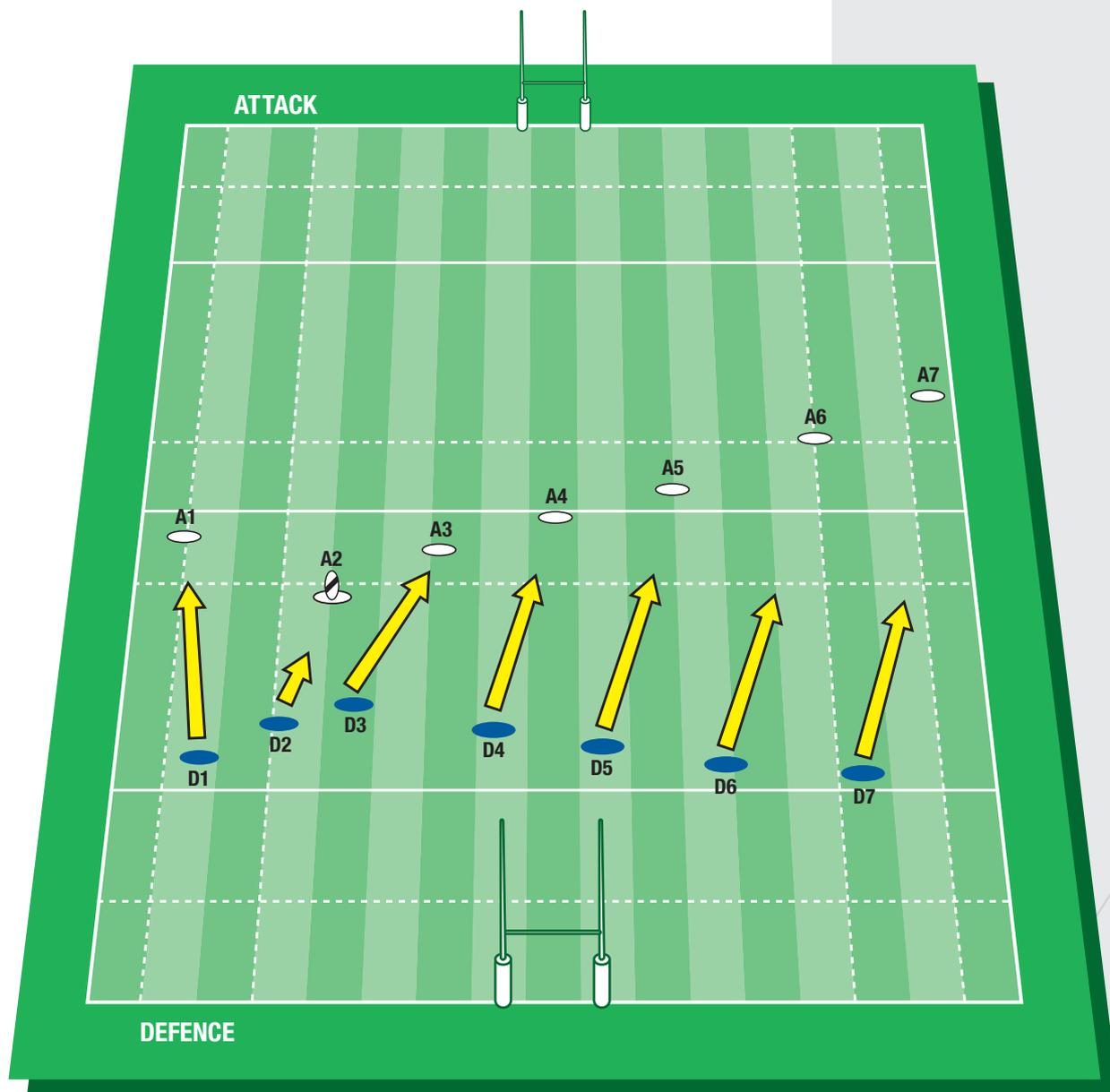
In all Sevens defence, the player should position so that both the ball and the player the defender is most likely to have to tackle can be seen at the same time. This will require the defender to stand deep enough to do so. Players with better peripheral vision will be able to stand closer to the defence reducing time and space. With less skill, more depth is required and more time and space will be conceded to the advantage of the attack.

In the section on performance goals each defence pattern will be explained. Included in this explanation will be the patterns necessary to defend the space behind the first line of defence when either the ball is behind or the first line of defence is penetrated.



**Diagram 5-1, defending inside out**

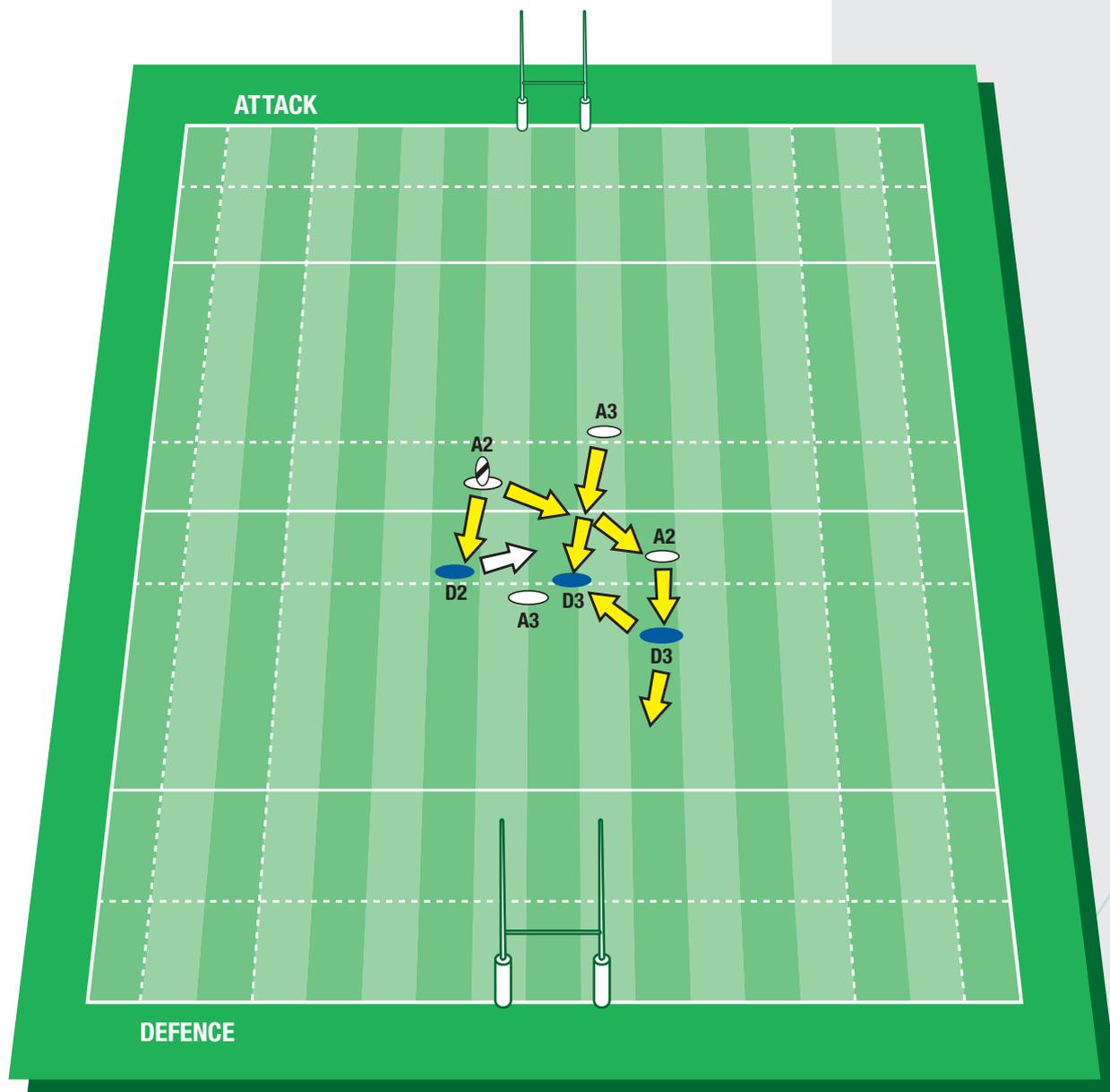
Situation 1: Inside-Out Defence - Player-on-Player Defence



	PASSING		KICKING
	RUNNING		ATTACKING PLAYER
	INITIAL BALL POSITION		DEFENDING PLAYER

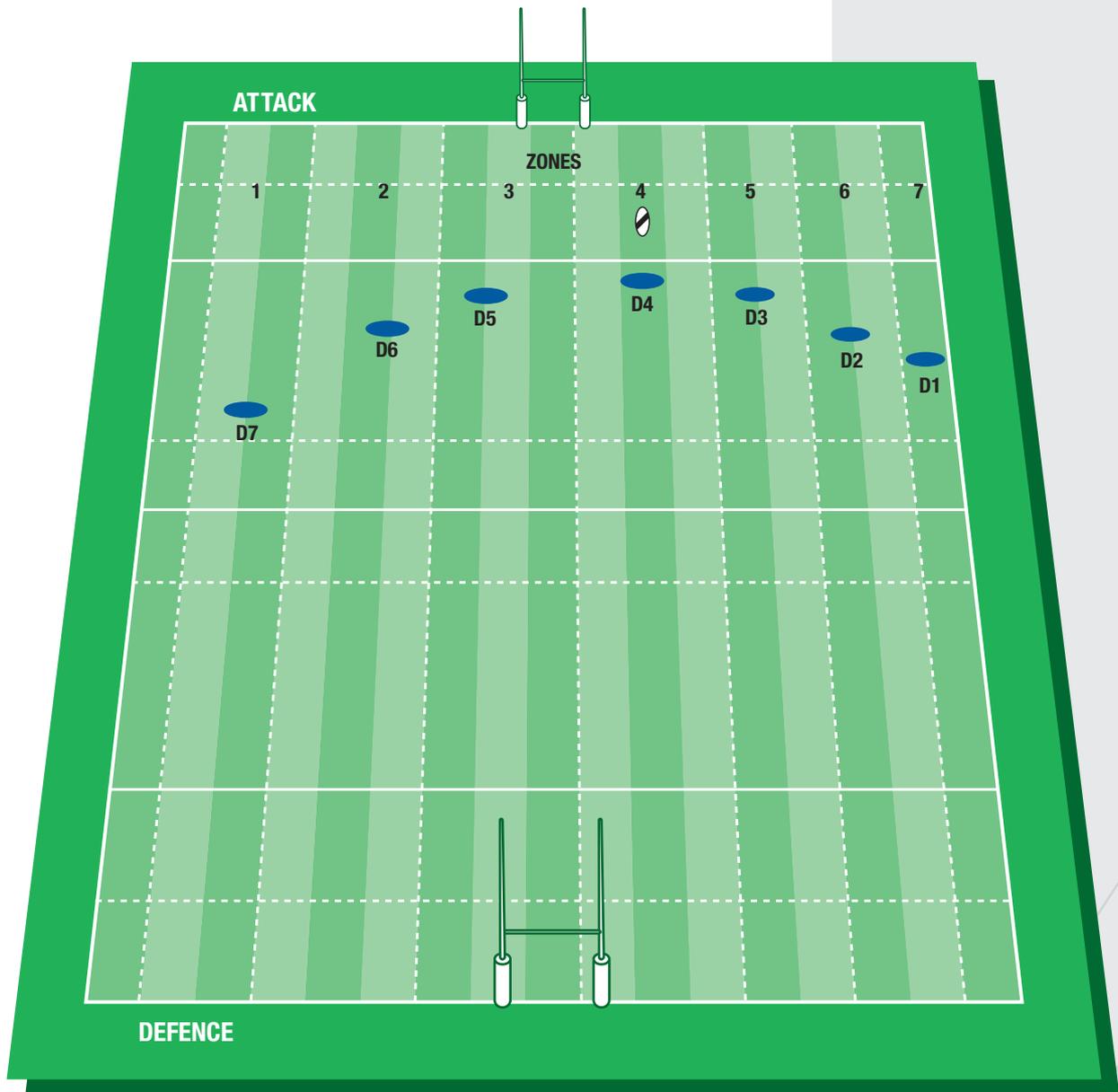
**Diagram 5-2, defending outside-in**

**Situation 2: Outside-in defence.** D3 is outside A3, to make the tackle D3 must move in. A2 initially draws D2 and passes to A3. A2 then doubles round A3 running into the space D3 has been drawn away from the tackle.



	PASSING		KICKING
	RUNNING		ATTACKING PLAYER
	INITIAL BALL POSITION		DEFENDING PLAYER

Diagram 6-1, defending - zone defence



	PASSING		KICKING
	RUNNING		ATTACKING PLAYER
	INITIAL BALL POSITION		DEFENDING PLAYER

## Tackling the ball carrier

Effective tackles are made inside out giving the ball carrier only one side of the tackler to attempt to penetrate on the outside.

While a low tackle may stop the ball carrier, a pass can be made to an attacking player as the arms are free. This is aggravated if the pass is made to a player running inside the ball carrier as the tackler will have been taken out of the space the pass is made into.

Unless it is a head-on tackle, this will always be the case, as the tackler will have to move out of space to make a side-on tackle.

If support is not available and the pass is not made, the ball will become contestable as it will have to be played immediately the tackle has been completed.

However, it may be better defence to use a smother tackle to prevent the pass being made in the first place. This may involve more than one defender. So that an advantage is not conceded, if possession is not regained defenders must form a maul and rely on the "use it or lose it" Law to obtain the throw in at the scrum. Often to complete a tackle more than one player is required. Sound judgement is necessary for this to occur in Sevens because if too many players become involved in the tackle and the ball is not regained, there will be gaps in the defence pattern.



### **Tackling**

*If the tackle is too high the tackler may be avoided, if it is too low the arms and hands are free to pass the ball.*



*A perfect tackle will bring the ball carrier to a halt.*

## Regaining possession

Possession can be regained during the tackle as mentioned under 'Tackling the ball carrier'.

However, possession can be regained in other circumstances. Obviously recovering the ball after it has been kicked is the responsibility of the player defending the space behind the defence. The skills required to do this are catching the high ball and picking up the ball off the ground.

However, because retention of possession is of such high priority in Sevens most opportunities come from loose ball.

This occurs when the ball is placed after a tackle and when errors are made in passing and receiving a pass usually because of defensive pressure. In Sevens, offside Laws are far less effective because so much of the play is general play. General play is play not initially based on a source of possession from which offside lines exist for the defending team. These sources of possession are the scrum, ruck and maul in which an offside line exists through the hindmost foot of players in the formation. Players who are not involved in the contest for possession are offside if they are in front of this line before the ball leaves the formation. The same applies to lineouts, however, from lineouts the line is 10 metres from the centre line down of the lineout. Once the ball leaves the sources of possession there are no offside lines for the defence.

Consequently the defending team may position anywhere until another formation is formed, after which the restriction once again applies.

The Law preventing a defender from entering play from their opponents side of the ball will have important implications for the attacking team.

In Sevens, players wish to retain possession even if this means conceding territory. To prevent turnovers the ball will not be kicked out of play unless the situation is desperate and contact will be avoided if possible, reducing the likelihood of turnovers.

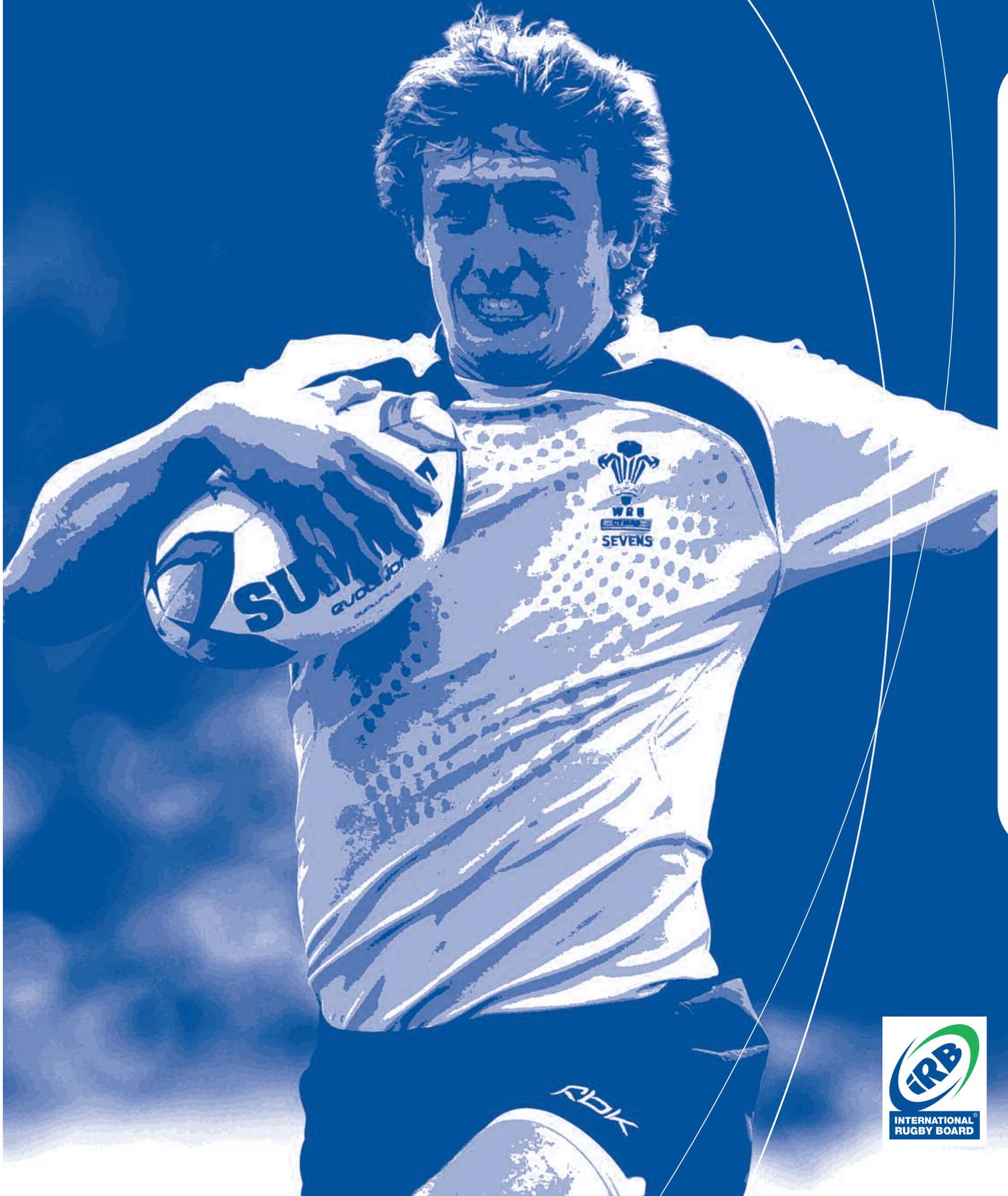
In general play, restrictions exist for attacking players who may not enter play from a position ahead of the last player in their team who has played the ball.

For the defence, play can be entered into from only the defending teams side of the ball. This means that when a tackle is made the defending player can attempt to recover the ball from a position in front of the ball carrier. Retreating defenders will not be able to enter play without first passing the line of the ball within close proximity of the tackle. This means that when a tackle is made and the ball is rolled or placed towards the tackled players team mates, the retreating defender cannot recover the ball if it is within 1 metre of the tackle.

This will alter opportunities for the defence to regain possession.



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# Performance goals in detail

## ATTACK

### Gaining possession

#### Kick-offs

##### The kicking team

See diagram 7, kick-offs - positioning of players and kicking options

The first type of kick aims to recover the ball in the air while contesting it with the opponents. It relies on the kicker placing the ball accurately and with sufficient height for team-mates to arrive in time for the ball to be contested i.e. the conventional kick-off.

To be successful this type of kick needs a firm surface so that the kicker can get sufficiently under the ball to kick it high and shallow. A successful chasing pattern is to have one player running down the 15 metre line, the second 10 metres from the touchline and the scrum half running down the touchline. By positioning in this way all lateral options are covered. The positioning of the scrum half allows this player to move towards loose ball from the outside enabling a pass to be made further infield without turning and wasting time.

When the ball is contested it can easily be deflected in any direction. To cope with this supporting players should position themselves so they can move into a deflection made by team-mates or opponents. It is worth analysing deflections from a number of matches to determine the distance and direction that the ball is deflected.

In Sevens, teams will not wish to commit too many players to contesting the kick-off as this will leave space that may be easily exploited by opponents should the kick-off be lost. As a rule one player should follow the jumper while being sufficiently far enough away to enable a deflection to be reacted to and yet close enough to support should the ball be caught.

Another player may be placed in a similar position on the opposition's side to take advantage of deflections made by them.

Once possession has been gained it should be passed from the congested area to space. This space will give those committed to the kick-off time to regroup.

The playmaker should be in mid-field so that the left and right options are available once play gets underway. This kick creates space because in contesting the ball it enables the opposing players to be held in space.

Once it is won the ball can be passed to take advantage of the players bunching in this area.



There are a number of kicks that can be made to space. All are based on the positioning of opposition players. The kicker should recognise the opportunity and exploit it immediately. There are a smaller number of the most frequently available examples. Amongst these are:

- The grubber kick that just crosses over the 10 metre line directly ahead of the kicker.
- The kick to the opposite side of the field to where most players are positioned.
- A long kick to isolate the catcher. By chasing to a pattern the catcher can be isolated and forced into touch. Chasers should force the catcher towards touch and position to cut off a long pass infield.

If a team has a weak link at kick-offs it can be worthwhile to play to that player, the players position determining the type of kick.

### **The receiving team**

See diagram 7, kick-offs - positioning of players and kicking options

To contest the ball the receiving team should position to move towards the ball not back to recover it. Be aware of the positioning of the opposition. The kick will be made to the side of the field in which they have the greatest numbers. The best pattern is 4 up and 3 back. In so doing they will be moving forward and in balance when they take the ball. If possession is gained the ball carrier will immediately be in a position to attack the defence. The positioning of team mates in depth and spread across the field will create options.

To avoid a player becoming isolated when a long kick-off is made, team-mates must hurry back to support in depth. However, they must not bunch as this reduces passing options that will clear the ball to lateral space, away from opponents. Usually there will be time to bring the ball forward before the opposing team defends. This should be done quickly so that the greatest amount of territory is gained. In the chase the defence may lose its shape and bunch offering counter-attacking options to the team being kicked to.

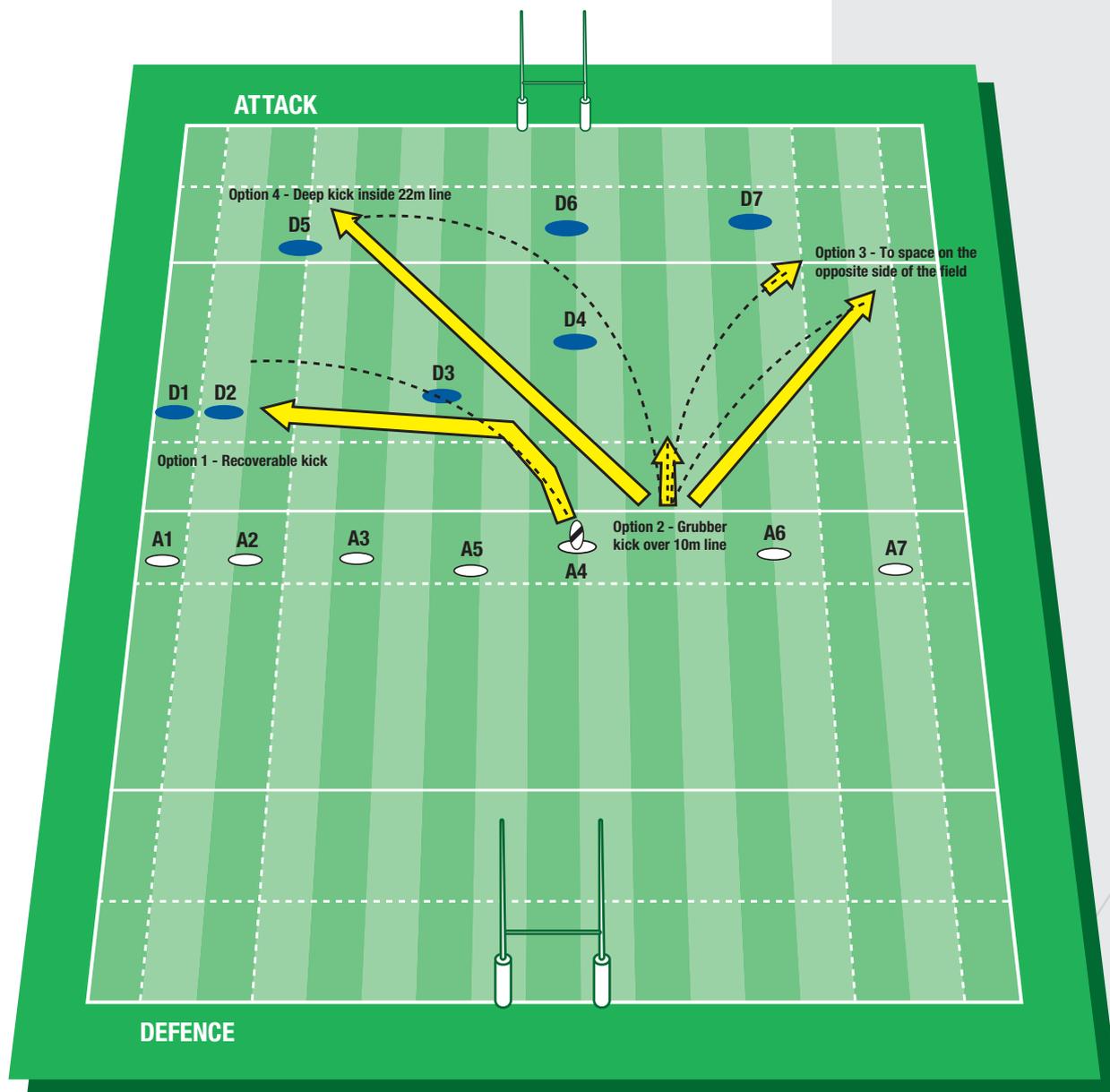
Finally, when a long kick is made, time is available to trap the ball with the foot avoiding handling errors. If the ball does bounce, it should be recovered by a player moving back to avoid a handling error. However, this player should then pass to a player moving forward.

It is advisable to reserve one of the front positions for the player who has attempted the conversion as they will be needed in the defensive pattern immediately the kick-off has taken place.

When the ball has been won the blind-side is an effective place to attack. This is because the defence will anticipate an attack where space is greatest leaving gaps on the flanks. This will draw the defence towards the touch-line creating the full width of the field to continue the attack.

**Diagram 7, kick-offs - positioning of players & kicking options**

- Option 1 - Recoverable kick
- Option 2 - Grubber kick over 10m line
- Option 3 - To space on the opposite side of the field
- Option 4 - Deep kick inside 22m line



	PASSING		KICKING
	RUNNING		ATTACKING PLAYER
	INITIAL BALL POSITION		DEFENDING PLAYER

## Dropouts

Because drop outs can be taken quickly anywhere along the 22 metre line and need only cross the line for the ball to be in play they offer a number of options. All are dependent on getting the ball quickly to the kicker standing close to the 22 metre line. Team mates touching down must quickly pass or kick the ball to this player to gain time to make the kick.

Amongst the kicking options are:

- Kick the ball just over the 22 metre line, recover it and immediately pass it to a team mate in a better position with more time and space to begin an attacking move.
- Kick long into space and use a well organised chasing pattern to either contest the ball or reduce the opposing ball carriers attacking options.

The chasing pattern for all long kicks should be based on the following:

- The player who is most likely to make the first tackle should position inside the ball carrier so the player can only run to the narrower side of the field. By positioning to one side it is easier to make a tackle as the ball carrier can only run to one side.
- Players should move up in an arrowhead formation with the tackler at the point and the remaining players on a slight angle. This enables them to easily see what happens. It also puts them in a position to recover the ball should it be kicked behind the first defender.
- No player should be ahead of a team-mate who is closer to the position of the ball. A player ahead of a team-mate will create a gap in the defence.
- Assist in regaining possession when there is an opportunity to do so. This occurs when the ball carrier is isolated from team-mates. If however there is support for the ball carrier other defenders must initially assume the tackler will complete the task. If it is not completed, supporting players are still in a position to assist. However, if more than one defender is committed to the tackle a pass to a team-mate may allow the opposing team to attack in space.

Depending on the circumstances of the match the drop-out may be made to touch. Of course this must not be on the full. However, if it is done quickly there may be space for the ball to roll into touch. This will gain territory while conceding the lineout. The score and the time remaining in the match are also important when considering this option.

To gain most territory this kick should be made close to the touchline. A grubber kick can be used to prevent the ball going to touch on the full so long as there is not a charge down.

If the opposing team positions to one of side of the field more than the other, a chip kick may be used. This kick enables a team mate close to the kicker to catch the ball. It is a kick high enough to go over opponents along the 22 metre line and also to give the team mate time to run and catch the ball.



## Scrum

See diagram 8-1, positioning during scrums and after scrums

As there are more scrums than lineouts they are the most important of the set pieces.

By co-ordinating with the scrum half the forwards are able to push past the ball. Consequently, contact, put-in and strike must be part of a single continuous movement.

Prior to engagement the props should bind with the hooker binding under the props to allow the player to enter play quickly once the scrum is over.

The scrum should be square to the touchline and the players bound and crouched so that upon engagement they are lower than their opponents. This allows them to drive forward and up using their strength to greatest effect.

So that the hooker is turned slightly to face the scrum half the tight head prop should lead in. This will also counter the clockwise screw that could reduce attacking options once the ball has been won. When the ball is put in, the loosehead prop should follow it in using the outside left leg. In combination with the hooker, using the right leg, the hook may be controlled. However, if the action of the prop prevents the more essential role of the hooker being effective then it is better for the prop to provide a stable platform and not strike.

Under pressure the loosehead may be the player hooking for the ball with the hooker and the tighthead prop maintaining stability.

Once the ball has been hooked the hooker must quickly pull out and enter play.

The options available at the scrum depends on the composition of the front row. This may not be the same as in fifteen-a-side rugby as players are not subjected to the same front row pressure. Consequently a player may be selected to be a forward in a Sevens team because of other attributes the player brings to the mode of play in Sevens not just scrummaging. While scrums are the most frequently occurring set piece the overall number is not great.

If the hooker selected is quick at striking for the ball, it is worth contesting the put-in. If the front row is physically and technically superior then the forward drive can be used.

As a general strategy the screw or wheel can be used. In a six player scrum this is difficult to counter. The most likely direction is clockwise. This can be used to manoeuvre the opposing forwards towards the touchline on the right of the field. When the opposition attacks it is difficult to pass the ball to the open-side. In defence this will delay the entry of the three defending forwards into the defensive pattern.

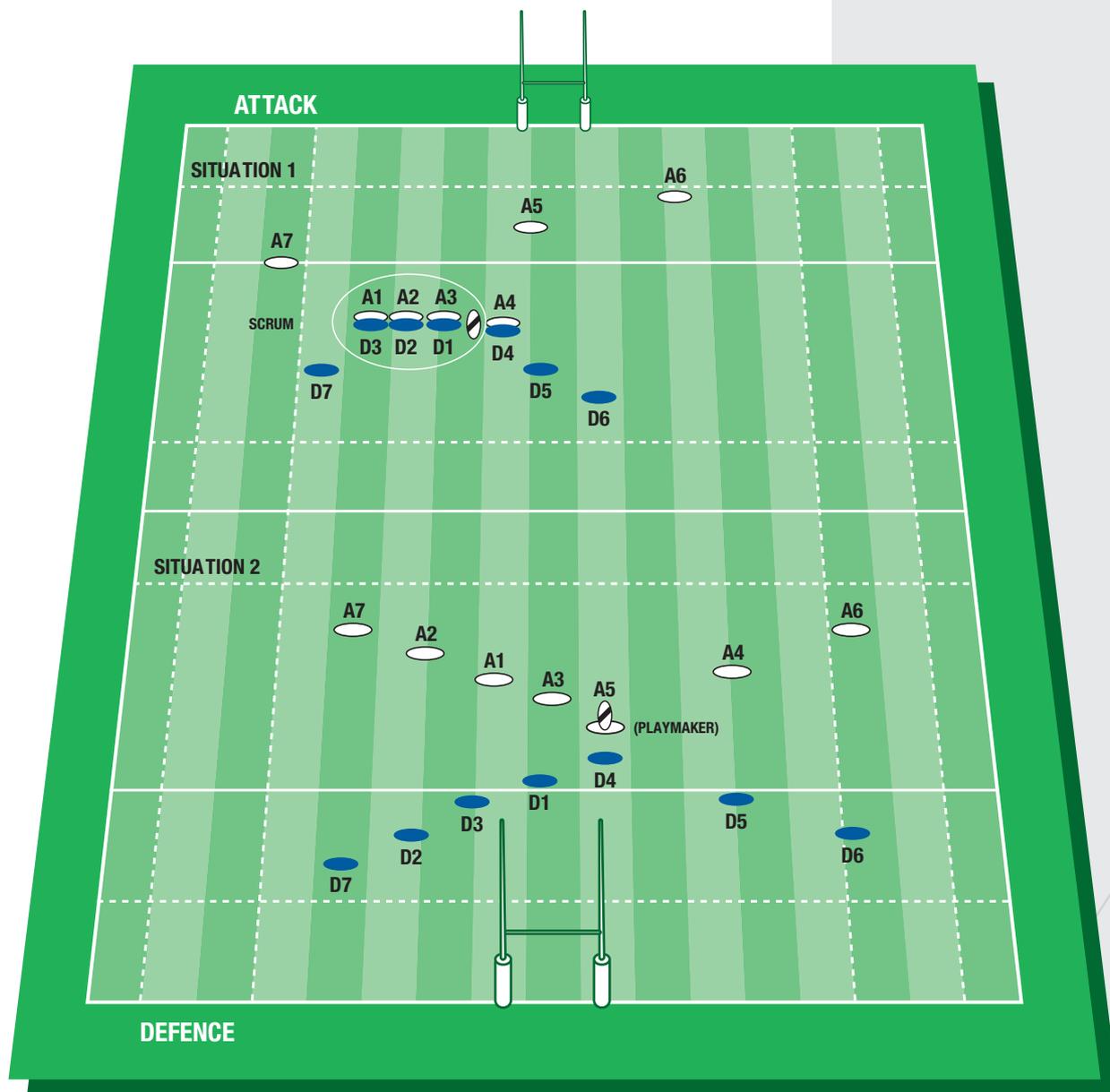


### Scrum

*Pushing is fine but quick release once the scrum is over is equally important both in defence and attack.*

**Diagram 8-1, positioning during scrums, positioning after scrums**

Situation 1: Positioning during scrums  
 Situation 2: Positioning after the scrum



	PASSING		KICKING
	RUNNING		ATTACKING PLAYER
	INITIAL BALL POSITION		DEFENDING PLAYER

On the left of the field the opposite will be true. When the opposition attacks they will be prevented from using the narrow or blindside.

In attack it will turn the opposition forwards infield opening up space on the blindside to attack.

When the ball is hooked there is no opportunity to control its delivery. The strike can be too quick for the scrum half to recover the ball. To overcome this, the scrum half may have to kick the ball back to a team-mate. Alternatively, another back can position to recover the ball by standing more directly behind the scrum. The sweeper may perform this role.

Once the ball is hooked, the forwards must quickly align on the playmaker to give passing options. By binding under the props, the hooker is able to release quickly. It is more difficult for the props as they are bound to an opponent.

Because of this if the ball is won with some control, the scrum half can often penetrate by going to the right, away from the opposition's scrum half.

Once the scrum is over, all the forwards join their teams in attacking or defensive formations. They don't follow the ball as they would in fifteen-a-side rugby. The attack moves back into the attacking formation so that they offer passing options. The defensive forwards occupy a zone or lane across the width of the field and align with the players already forming the defensive pattern. Alternatively they defend in a player-on-player formation. While the hooker may be able to leave the scrum quickly binding would prevent the player from immediately going forward. This role in triggering off the defence pattern could fall to the loosehead prop as the player is less bound to the scrum and may be able to leave immediately and move forward. The early release at the hooker enables this player to position in defence on the blindside. If it is not worth contesting the ball after the hook the scrumhalf may position on the blindside especially to the right.



## Lineouts

See diagram 9-1 - positioning during and after lineouts

Seven-a-side lineouts are very similar to short lineouts used in fifteen-a-side. As only three players occupy a 10-metre lane there is considerable space around players. Consequently, players make space for themselves by feigning back or forward and then moving in the opposite direction to make the catch.

Players who are physically superior to their opponents may not need to use distractions to contest the throw. If a player jumps to catch the ball before an opponent the space the player moves into will prevent the opponent from recovering. This is assisted by the player stepping into the space and jumping vertically. Of course, if the player is supported in the air the position is even more stable preventing opponents from contesting the ball. Players may support the jumper to make the catch. In most cases only one support player is used. To allow for both movement and support, the jumper moves towards the support player, who then supports the player in gaining height and stability in the air.

A further option is for the scrum half to enter a gap in the lineout to catch the ball. This may be in front of, behind or between the two lineout jumpers. The scrum half may also be used as a support player with the thrower playing scrum half.

Support results in delivery from the lineout being more controlled than scrums. Attacking play can be made directly from the lineout because of the space available. Options using the forwards and the scrum half to attack the defence line directly from the lineout enables good use of the number of players grouped in this area. This option is particularly available if the opposition do not contest the throw as there is no need to support the jumper in the air. This frees these other forwards to attack immediately at the line of touch. The defensive lineout must be careful not to over commit themselves contesting the ball. Over commitment will create gaps in the defence elsewhere.



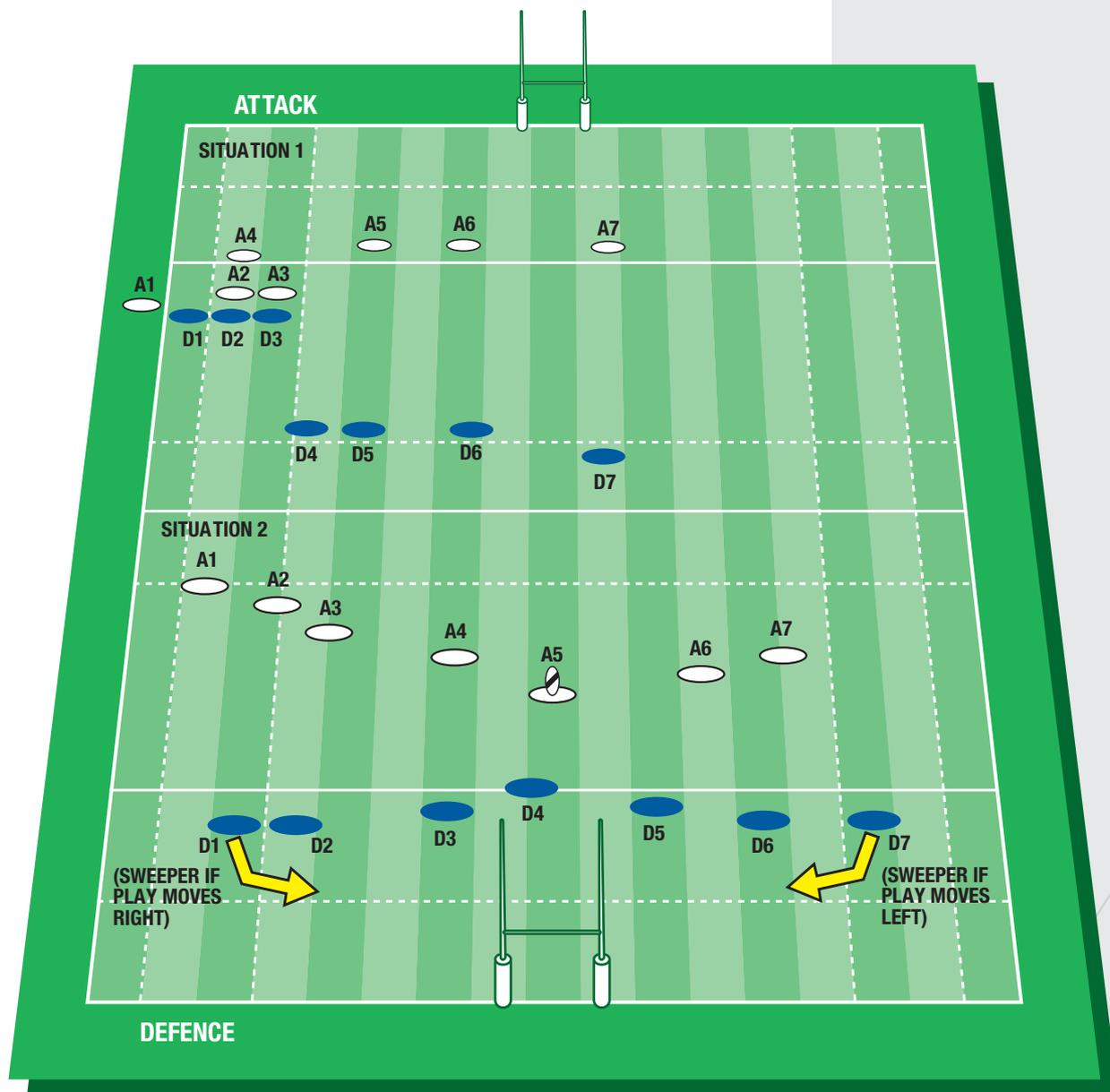
### Lineouts

*There are not many lineouts but the athletic players at the lineout will be equally athletic at other aspects of play.*

### Diagram 9-1, positioning during and after lineouts

Situation 1: During the lineout

Situation 2: After the lineout



PASSING	KICKING
RUNNING	ATTACKING PLAYER
INITIAL BALL POSITION	DEFENDING PLAYER

## Attacking lineout options

The aim of these options is twofold. Initially the aim is to win possession and secondly to pass the ball to a player in space. This space will probably be created by the positioning and movement of the opposing players. These are practiced moves but will only give an advantage at the time by the behaviour of the opposing players. At the immediate lineout this may be difficult. However, as players react in the same way at successive lineouts especially if their positioning has been previously exploited planned moves can occur at the next lineout.

Examples of these options are:

### Throw to #1

- catch and run forward
- direct feed to the scrum half
- tap or feed to the #2 lineout forward peeling around the front
- catch and pass back to the thrower

### Throw to #2

- catch and run forward
- direct feed to the scrum half
- tap or feed to the #1 lineout forward peeling around the back
- tap or feed to the scrum half running between both lineout forwards

By spreading initially or doing so once the lineout has formed, space can be created in the centre for the scrum half to run in to catch the ball.

Finally a throw may be made over the back of the lineout for the scrum half or another back.

## Retaining possession

The space that is available to attack into can equally result in a player becoming isolated by the defence. To avoid isolation supporting players must provide options for the ball carrier. The key to support is depth so that when the ball is passed it is passed to space and the receiver can run into the space to catch and continue play.

The support must also be in width to spread the defence and create gaps to penetrate. Depth and width create a platform for penetration.

If a player moves into contact, either to go forward and penetrate the defence or to draw the defence to create space elsewhere the ball carrier must have in mind how possession will be retained if the attempt to penetrate is unsuccessful. This can be called the escape route. Some examples of escape routes are:

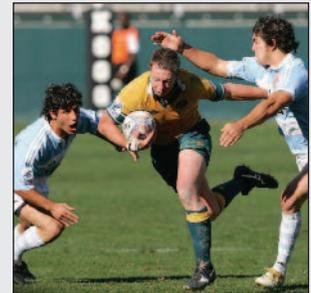
- To evade the tackler, be tackled below the arms and to use the hands to:
  - place the ball in space
  - pass the ball to space
  - roll the ball back to space
- By accepting the contact but turning back towards the tackler screening the ball from the defender and, by making the pass to supporting players.
- By remaining standing, back to opponent, facing team mates and making the ball available to a team mate who drives in to recover the ball. If the ball is loose on the ground in the zone of contact it should be moved to space quickly using any method available - pass, scoop or kick.

In order to retain possession the ball carrier must be careful not to be tackled while running across field. While a defender may be evaded it is good practice to straighten up as soon as possible. If the player cannot go forward because of pressure, it is better to stand or back-up rather than run across field. Running across field takes up the space at other players and enables the defence to make a side-on tackle. Team mates must be alert and move back into the space created.



### **Retaining possession**

*Decisions should have been made before this to prevent the inevitable turnover.*



### **Retaining possession**

*Now the escape route to take advantage of the numerical advantage elsewhere as two defenders have been committed.*

### Free kicks

In general these should be tap kicks as it is more important to retain possession than kick for touch from those awarded inside the 22 metre line. This depends on the state of play.

### Penalty kicks

The use of these also depends on the state of play. Each option has the same advantages as in the 15-a-side game, however, the reduced duration of Sevens and the space available to attack into most likely places greater emphasis on the use of the tap kick.

The options are:

- Tap kick
  - to retain possession
  - to attack immediately
- Kick for touch
  - to gain territory
  - to gain the throw-in at the lineout
  - to delay the recommencement of play
- Kick for goal
  - to score points
  - to delay the commencement of play if the kick misses but the ball goes over the dead ball line or to touch in goal
- Long Kick
  - to put the ball behind the defence to relieve pressure

In all kicks the advantage obtained by the kick is only as good as the pattern used to chase the ball. This pattern may not necessarily move forward at great speed, but it must be organised to reduce attacking options.

Players should be alert to the options.

## Creating space

The wider the player stands, the wider the defence stands and the greater the gaps between players. Lateral space may be created by the formation as mentioned above. The pattern is usually to have seven players across the field aligned on the ball carrier.

See diagram 1-1, lateral space (page 11)

To create linear space, teams often back up towards their own goal line while retaining their formation. As they get closer to their goal line, they become conscious of it. It becomes a psychological wall and they lose their depth. In doing so, the team loses its ability to attack the on-coming defence because they are too shallow to receive a pass from which they can run forward at pace.

It is therefore essential that teams decide on how much territory they are willing to concede in order to create space. Secondly, they must decide what their reaction should be if there is insufficient space, i.e. how they are going to attack the defence. This will depend on the positioning of the opposition.

Some options are:

- To kick into the space between the first line of defence and the sweeper and chase to recover the ball.
- To kick as far down the field as possible and chase. The kick should go beyond the sweeper into space. The chase is aimed to isolate the sweeper or even beat the sweeper to the ball. The sweeper will be isolated if the chase is fast and organised and if the defence is slow to get back in support.
- To remain spread across the field and to use the kick as a fast method of “passing” to an unmarked team mate who is too far across the field to be passed to by hand. To penetrate using the space between defenders. This will be explained in the next section.



## Countering reverse alignment

When the defence forms up in reverse alignment in general play they are in a position to tackle a ball carrier as the player receives a ball. However there is a space immediately behind each of the defending players. Consequently if this space is used then penetration can occur. The following options may be used to create space and penetrate:

- By the ball carrier making a recoverable kick into the space behind the next defender for the attacker to run into to collect the ball.
- By the potential receiver drawing the defender out and then changing the line of running to the inside. The ball can then be passed into the space the ball carrier is running into attacking the defender's inside shoulder.
- By the ball carrier threatening the defender by feinting outside and then changing the line to the inside. The change of direction should result in a low tackle. The receiver changes the running line and receives a pass running off the ball carrier's shoulder.

Note: the deeper the attack stands, the greater and more immediate is the space behind. Secondly, the more spread the attack, the more isolated is each defender, so that when space is used and the player is able to penetrate there is little opportunity for team-mates to assist in defence.

## Penetrating

Lateral space for penetration is created by the positioning of the opposition and the depth in alignment of the attack. If the defence is grouped, space will exist on the outside while if it is spread, space will exist between players.

To exploit these situations the attack should align as close to the defence as their passing skills will allow. This will reduce the defence's reaction time giving them little time to recover if they haven't "read" the attack and acted correctly.

When a ball carrier attempts to penetrate the extent to which the attack is forced is a matter of judgement. The ball carrier may well go all the way and score, secondly, as defenders converge a method of transferring the ball to support must be found. Finally, the ball carrier may pull back retreating into space to avoid isolation and from this position reset play.

## Using the overlap

See diagram 1-3, lateral space • Situation 3 (page 13)

To exploit space on the outside, the attack must first decide which side to attack. This will be a matter of numbers. The direction left or right will be the one in which there are more attacking players than defence. As the defence usually will have a sweeper, they will be outnumbered in their front line of defence. It is a matter of deciding which side to go.

If the sweeper joins the front line to create player-on-player defence, linear space is left to kick the ball into and chase.

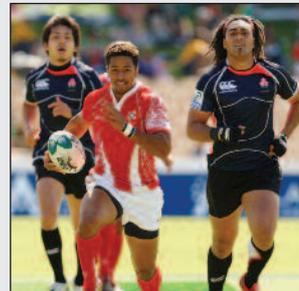
To retain the overlap, each passer should commit a defender before passing. To do this each player should drift in as they catch the ball, holding the defence on their inside shoulder.

If the defence drifts wide to counter the overlap, the ball carrier should take the gap that has been left. If the defence is held in position, the overlap will be retained and progress made down the field.

## Patterns to use the extra player three-on-two

See diagram 1-2, lateral space • Situation 2 (page 11)

Attacking gaps between spread defenders is the same as taking the gap that a defender has drifted away from. Within a defensive line, the gap is created by the ball carrier drifting in, and the next player drifting out. This will increase the size of the gap that another player can move into.



## Options

See diagram 3-1 to 3-3, penetrating using the space (pages 18-20)

If the ball carrier's defender does not continue to defend the player and drifts wide to tackle the player entering the gap, the ball carrier should take the gap. If the player stays with the ball carrier, the pass can be made as space will exist. This can be achieved even if the defender moves back to make the tackle. When the ball carrier takes the gap, the tackle is likely to come from the defender who will check and tackle from the outside. The ball carrier will have forced the defence to tackle from the outside in. Space will be created in the space the tackler has moved away from. It is into this space that the pass can be made to penetrate. This will be a channel pass or a screen pass.

If the next player's defender does not drift out to follow the next attacking player in the line then the pass can be made to this player who can take the gap. If both defenders stay in position, the gap will exist for a third attacking player coming between them.

Both options, the overlap and penetrating through the gap are based on a situation in which the attack has one more player than the defence. This player threatens the gap and the defence. If the defence doesn't react the player is able to penetrate. If they do, the player they have been drawn away from can penetrate. The ability to read this situation and anticipate and react to the defence's behaviour takes much practice. In Sevens this is not always the case and numbers may be even. In this situation a number of different options emerge.

## Patterns where numbers are equal

### Situation one - 1-on-1

In Sevens the situation can be manipulated to create mismatches in the attacking teams favour. By spreading across the field the attack forces the defence to do the same. This isolates both the attacker and the defender, creating a one-on-one match up. The mismatch will enable the attacker to use superior attacking skills to penetrate. If this happens on the flanks, the defender will be able to use the touchline to drive the attacker out of play. When it happens in the mid-field, support can come from both sides to continue the attack. Keeping away from the touchlines is a general rule for the attacking team because the defenders can use the touchline as an extra player and force a turnover by gaining the throw in to the lineout.

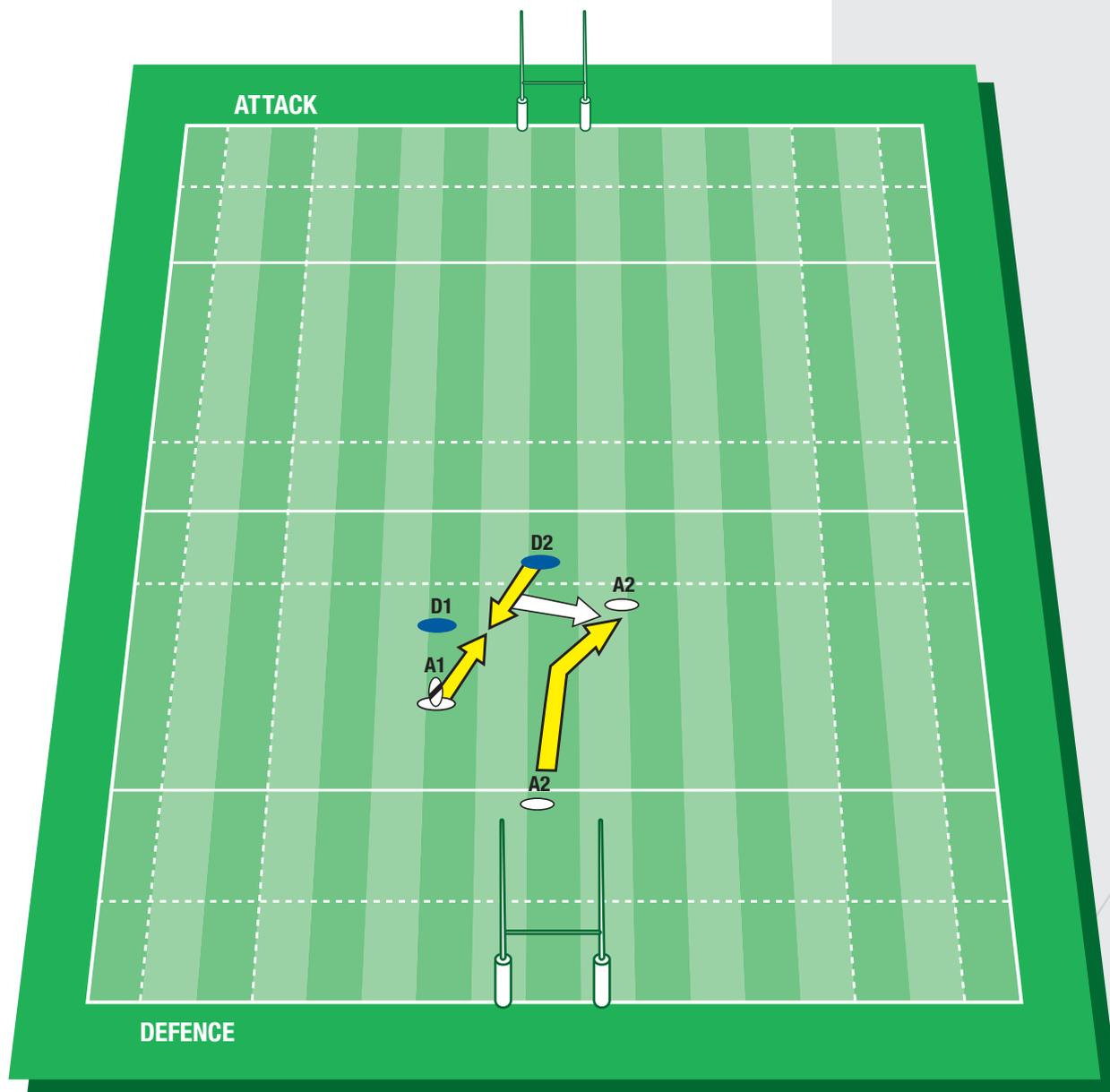
### Situation two - 2-on-2

If both attackers are defended, there are a number of options that will threaten the defence.

See diagrams 10-1 to 10-3, patterns where numbers are equal

**Diagram 10-1, patterns where numbers are equal, 2-on-2**

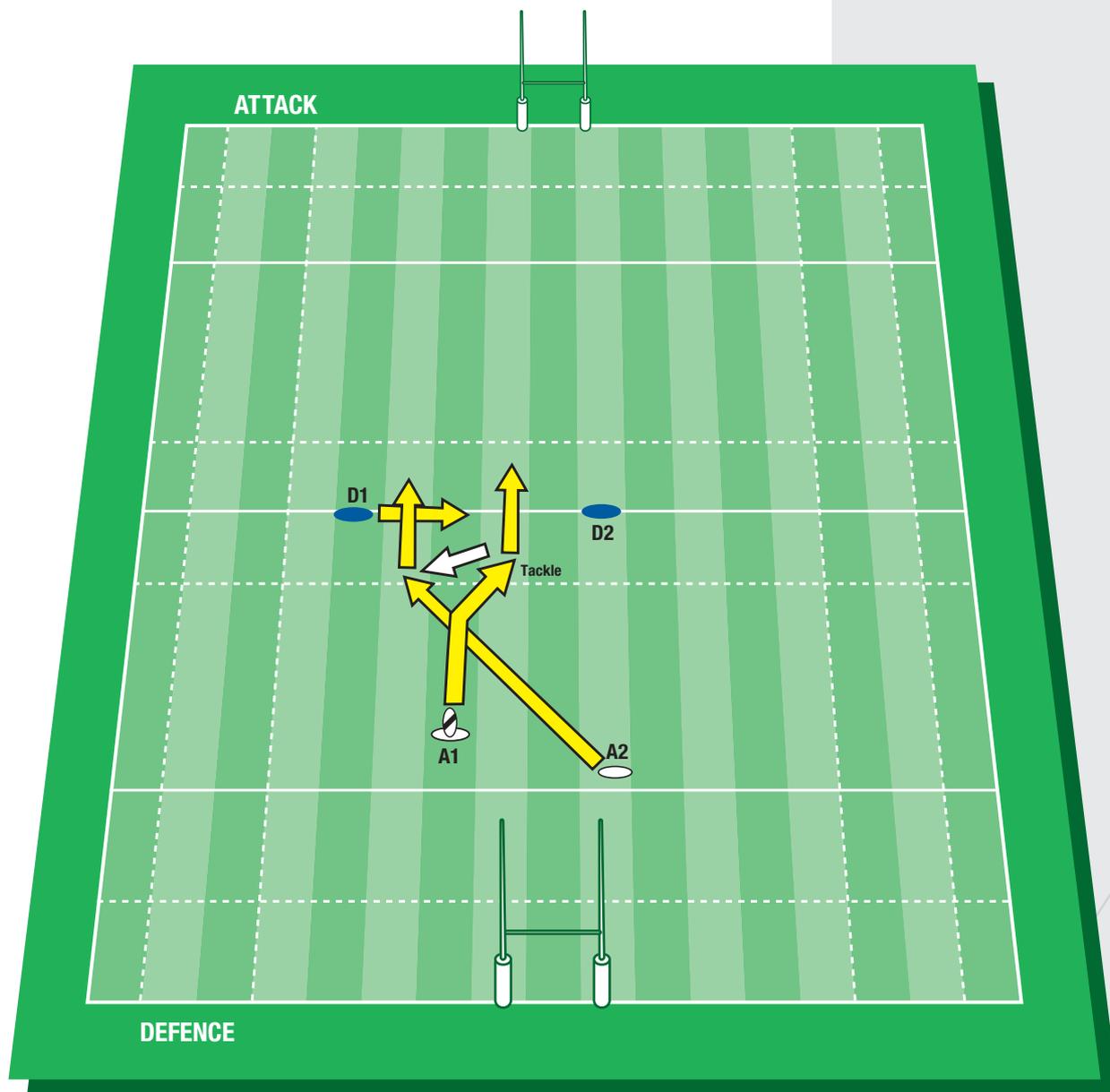
**Option 1:** The ball carrier may initially threaten the first defender and then changes direction to immediately threaten the second defender. If that defender turns to tackle the pass is made to the second attacker who is now in the gap, i.e., A1 has the ball, threatens D1 and then D2 moves towards A1 to tackle, A1 passes to A2 in space.



	PASSING		KICKING
	RUNNING		ATTACKING PLAYER
	INITIAL BALL POSITION		DEFENDING PLAYER

**Diagram 11-1, patterns where numbers are equal, 2-on-2**

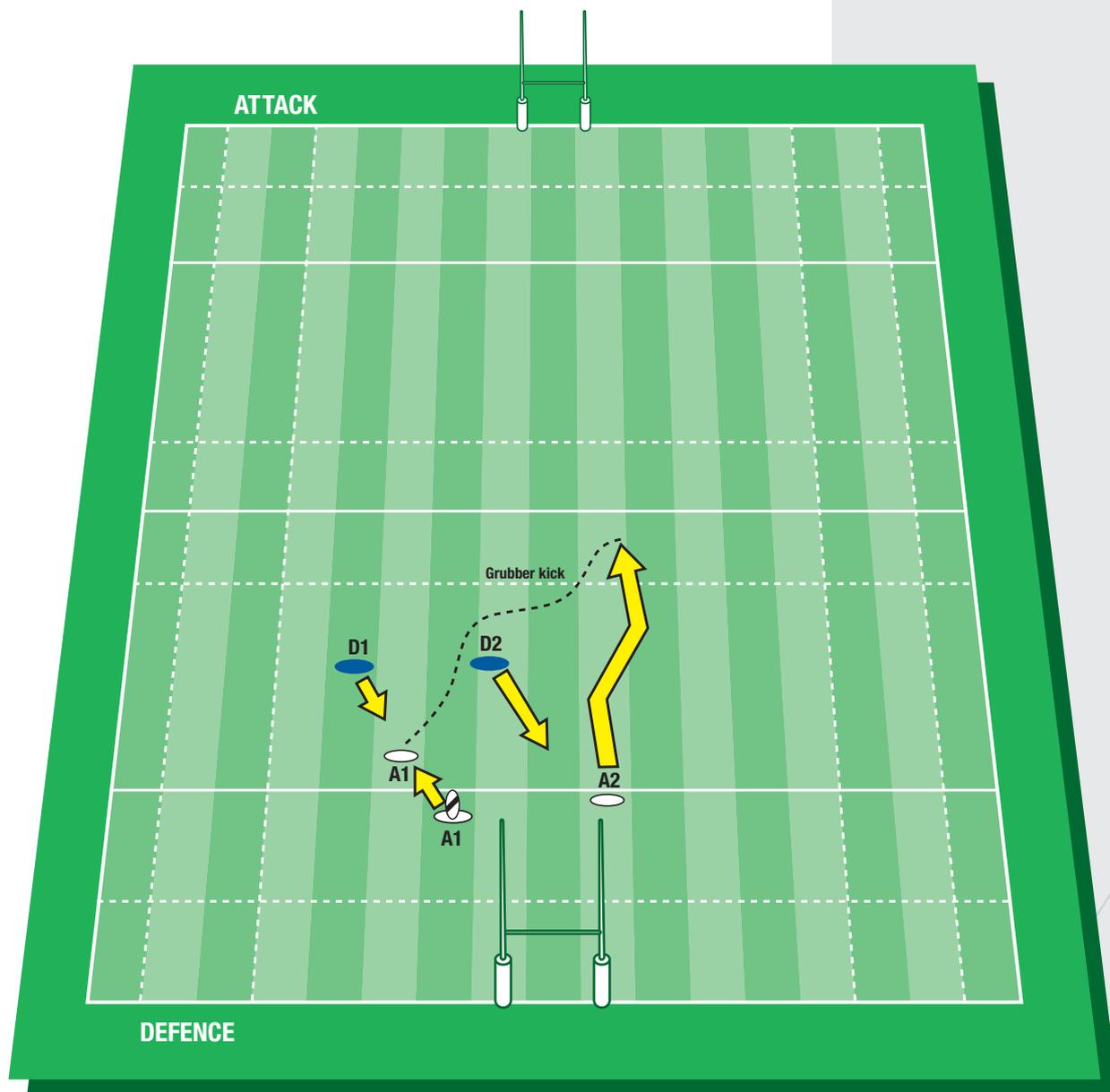
Option 2: A1 runs at D1 and then threatens the gap between D1 and D2. D1 is forced to make a low tackle enabling A1 to pass to inside on the left.



	PASSING		KICKING
	RUNNING		ATTACKING PLAYER
	INITIAL BALL POSITION		DEFENDING PLAYER

**Diagram 12-1, patterns where numbers are equal, 2-on-2**

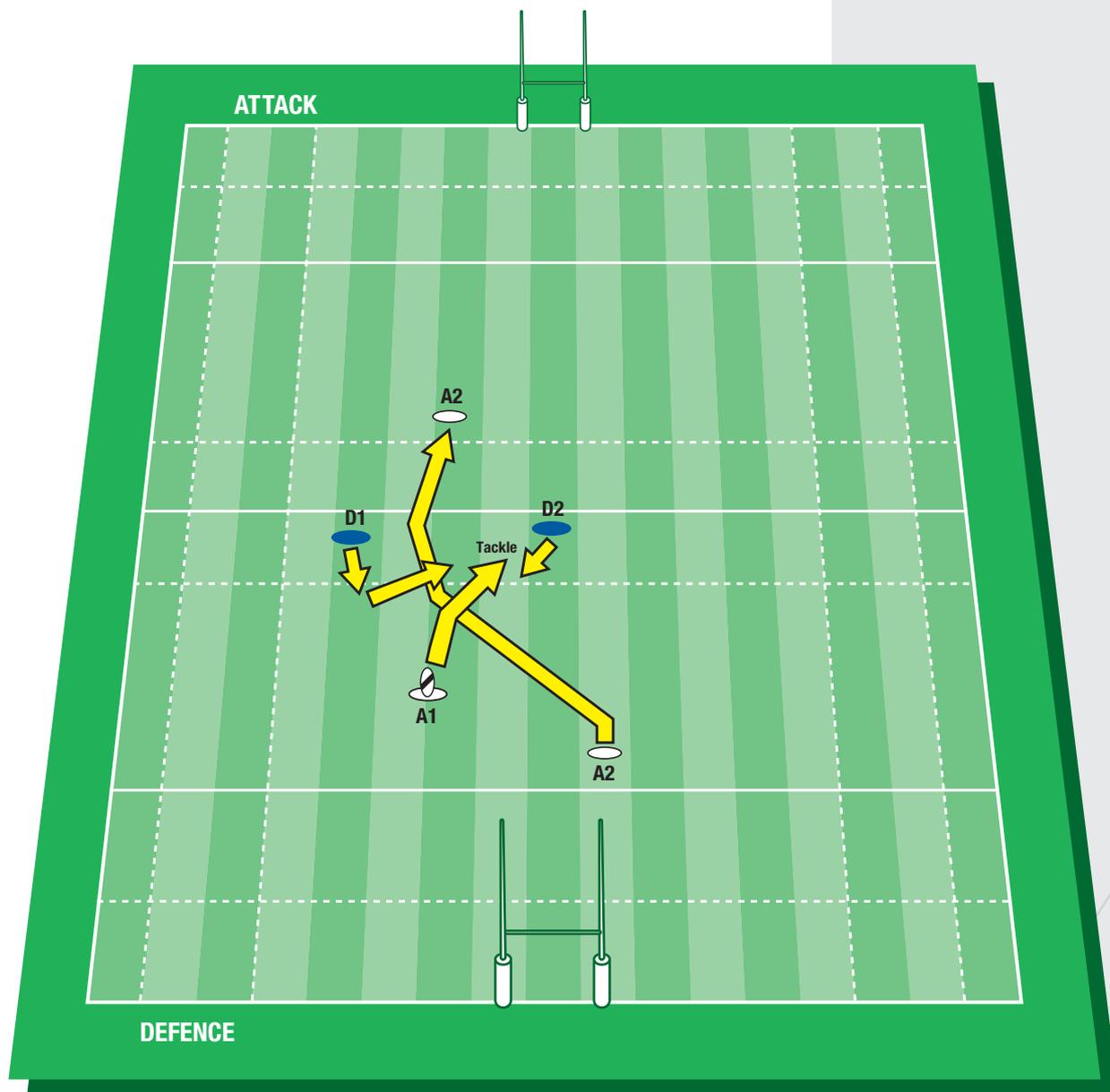
Option 3: A1 draws D1 and then threatens the space between D1 and D2. D2 moves forward of D1, A1 grubber kicks behind D2 for A2 to run and pick up the ball.



	PASSING		KICKING
	RUNNING		ATTACKING PLAYER
	INITIAL BALL POSITION		DEFENDING PLAYER

**Diagram 13-1, patterns where numbers are equal, 2-on-2**

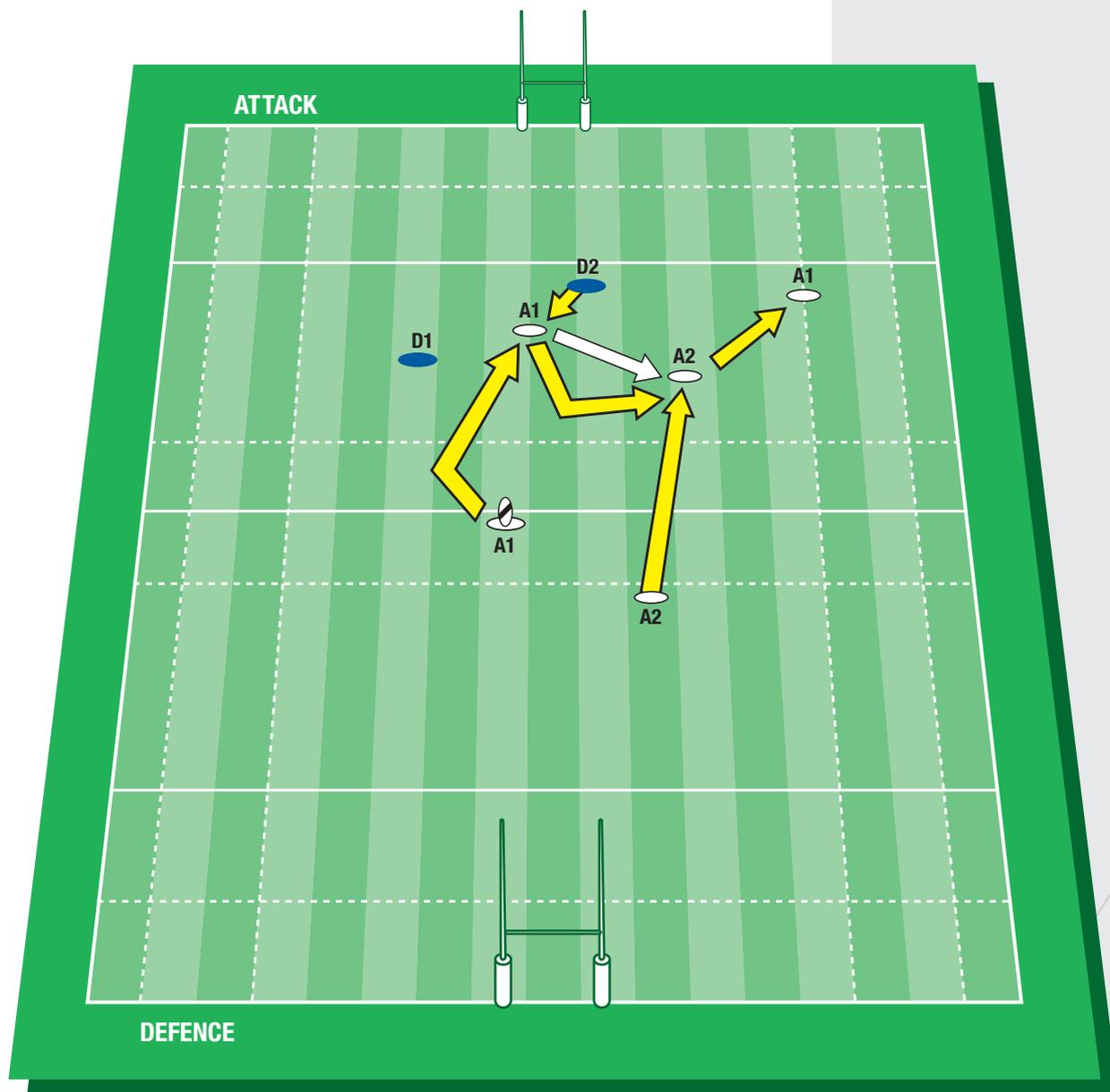
Option 4: A1 threatens the gap between D1 and D2, D2 remains wide to defend A2. D1 is drawn across to tackle A1. A1 scissors passes to A2 who penetrates into the space D1 has moved from. If D1 doesn't move across A1 retains the ball and penetrates.



	PASSING		KICKING
	RUNNING		ATTACKING PLAYER
	INITIAL BALL POSITION		DEFENDING PLAYER

**Diagram 14-1, patterns where numbers are equal, 2-on-2**

Option 5: A1 draws D1 and passes to A2. A2 draws and passes to A1 on the left, A1 having doubled round.



	PASSING		KICKING
	RUNNING		ATTACKING PLAYER
	INITIAL BALL POSITION		DEFENDING PLAYER

### Situation three - operating as a unit

When operating as a unit the team can use the options available to any backline in the fifteen-a-side game, whose aim it is to put a player into space. All the same key factors apply and the back line can operate without having to contend with defensive forwards. Equally however there are no forwards available to support the attack.

An example of one such pattern would be to set up two waves with one creating space for the other and offering options. These waves are difficult to establish from set pieces because there are too few players available. However they can be used when the attack is reversed when the forwards are no longer tied up in the scrum and lineout. These waves can be set up at any time during the play.

See diagram 15-1, unit options

#### Formation

This pattern creates a number of options. In this formation the first wave would be A1-A4 and the second A5-A7.

#### Option one

A2 passes to A3, doubles round, receives the ball on the inside and penetrates between D2 and D3.

#### Option two

A2 passes to A3 and doubles round A3, receives the ball on the inside and passes to A5 or A6, or A7. These players can then perform 2 Vs 2; 3Vs 3 or 2 Vs 3 manoeuvres.

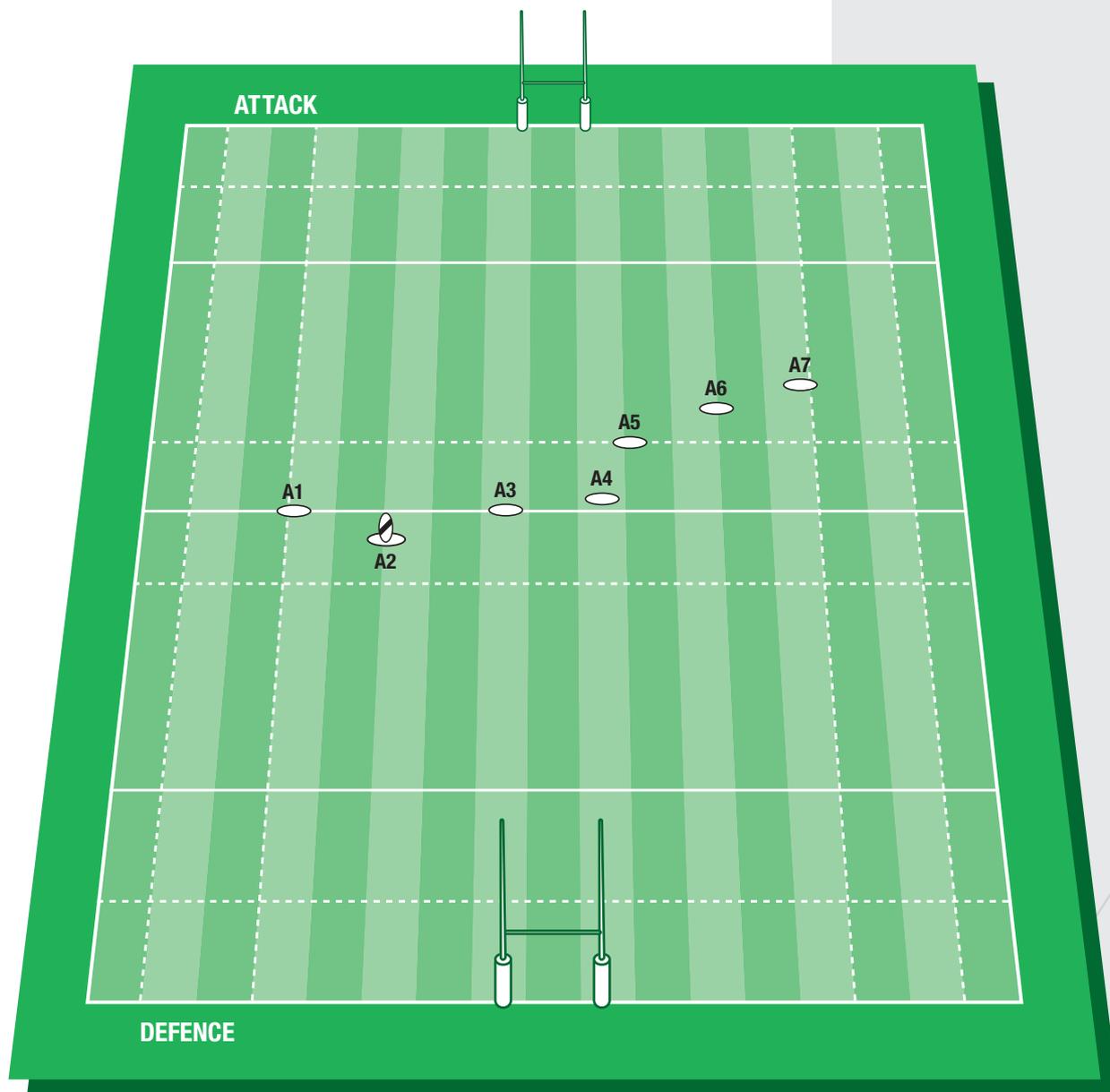
#### Option 3

A4 may stand deep enough to receive from A2. Adding a further player to the second wave.



### Diagram 15-1, unit options

This pattern creates a number of options. In this formation the first wave would be A1 - A4 and the second A5 - A7.



	PASSING		KICKING
	RUNNING		ATTACKING PLAYER
	INITIAL BALL POSITION		DEFENDING PLAYER

## Using impact players

From set pieces an impact player can be used even though that player may have initially been involved in winning the ball. To enable the player to move to a penetrating position the ball is immediately passed across the field to the player on the flanks. The direction of the attack is then reversed. The penetrator, having taken up a deep position can accelerate into a gap between two defenders to penetrate.

It is the role of the play maker to identify favourable mismatches in attack placing the attacking player in a one-on-one with space around enabling the defender to be beaten.

## Team formation

The attacking team can help itself greatly by its positioning. If it stands wide it can spread the defence creating gaps between players.

If it takes up less lateral space and the defence follows then there is space on the flanks to run extra players into. If, on the other hand, the defence remains spread, they will be forced to defend outside-in. This means that they will have to move in to make the tackle as the ball carrier threatens the gap. The space they have moved away from will now be vacant. The ball carrier can now pass into it for a team-mate to catch the ball and penetrate.

Consequently, it is not always best to spread across the field. This depends on the positioning of the opposing team. What is wrong is to bunch, especially when going into contact. If the ball carrier loses the ball, the opposing team will have space to pass, run and score.

It is crucial to decide how many players will commit to ensure possession is retained and what their roles will be to ensure this. This will now be explained in Supporting Play.



## Supporting play

When a player moves in one direction, space is created in the other. As opponents drift in defence, the space may be created inside the ball carrier or close to the ball carrier in the direction of running, especially if the defender has gone on to the next player.

When a player deliberately goes into contact or when penetration has been unsuccessfully attempted, the ball carrier must have an escape route to ensure retention of possession. To give the ball carrier options, the supporting players should assist.

A key role in assisting is the player who positions directly behind the ball carrier, 10-15 metres back. This gives the player the ability to move towards loose ball. More effectively this gives the player time to gather the ball and assess options if the ball is played back the 10-15 metres.

Conventionally, the position is known as the pocket and may be occupied by the last passer from the previous movement or by the defensive sweeper who assumes a similar role in attack. This outlet player is the safety value should possession be threatened.

From scrum and lineout there are offside lines giving the attack linear space ahead to attack. However, once the ball has been won, the limited number of players in a Sevens match seldom create rucks and mauls. Consequently, the relevant Law is offside in general play, which places few restrictions on the positioning of the defenders.

The defence can stand next to an attacker ready to tackle the player should the ball be passed. The threat to this positioning is the ability of the ball carrier to either kick into space ahead so the ball is recovered or to penetrate using the gap in the defence. This has implications for support play as defenders can stand in the gap between attackers cutting off lateral passes. Should the ball carrier penetrate, support can accelerate past their individual defenders. However, if this does not occur, the defence is in a position to cut off the ball when it is passed.

To overcome this, the ball carrier must attack the defensive line. This is best done by attacking a gap to draw the defender away from space so that the ball can be passed into that space.



### Supporting

*Space would seem to be available on the outside if the ball carrier can get the ball away. Is there support there?*

To create the space the ball carrier must evade the defender. By doing this the tackle will be low around the lower part of the attacker's body, freeing the arms to make the pass. To use this space, the support players need only stand directly behind the ball carrier initially and run on, in the same line, as the ball carrier moves the defender away. This supporting player is often the player who has just passed the ball. Care must be taken not to run across in the direction of passing before supporting allowing the defence to drift.

Once the pass has been made, the player must position in depth so that play can be entered into by running down the field and not across which is must less effective.

In fifteen-a-side rugby offside lines at scrum, lineout, ruck and maul gives the attack linear space. These occur less frequently in Sevens. In fifteen-a-side, the grouping of players at ruck, maul, scrum and lineout creates space wide out. This doesn't occur frequently in Sevens either.

Therefore, teams are no worse off if they attack from the outhalf and not positions further along the line. This is because there is no grouping of players breaking from scrum, ruck or maul that are to be avoided.

But what can happen is that the defence can be drawn in when the attack attacks in a single lane with the ball carrier creating space for the player coming from behind.

To defend the constant probing down a single lane, the defence will have to leave their lateral positions and come in to tackle. They will then leave space laterally so that if a try is not scored by linear support by passing wide the opportunity to score a try will be created.

# Performance goals in detail

## DEFENCE

In defence it must be assumed that players can tackle, this is the first priority. However, a very close second priority is that players must be disciplined when under pressure to keep the shape of the defensive pattern.

### Contesting possession

Once the opposing team has the ball, the other principles of defence apply. However, this can be assisted greatly by contesting possession so that it is difficult for the opposition to control the ball. This applies to kick-offs, scrums and lineouts. Contesting kick-offs is explained in the section on Attack.

### Scrums

To contest scrums, the defending scrums tactics may be to drive the opposition off the ball. This can force the opposition to hook the ball without control, creating an opportunity to regain possession. This may also be achieved by the defending scrum allowing itself to be pushed back.

As with “fifteens” the scrum may be screwed within the requirements of the Law. This may be used to force the attack to go only left or right, losing the opportunity to attack on both sides. Usually, the aim will be to force the attack towards the nearest touchline. To avoid turning over possession, the attack will wish to avoid going into touch. It will be awkward to reverse the direction of play in-field. The screwing of the scrum may also be used to force the scrum half to pass to the left against this players running line as after putting the ball in the running line is to the right.

### Defensive scrummaging

To defend at the scrum the defending team should attempt to do the exact opposite to what they wish to do on their put-in. Consequently they should phase their engagement to crouch, pause, engage so that engagement, put in and strike are three distinct movements and not one continuous one. This will upset the rhythm of the opposition. Also they should not form up too quickly. This allows an adjustment to be made to the opposition’s positioning.

Secondly the loosehead should lead in to turn the attacking hooker away from the tunnel. To assist in this, the tight head should pull back to wheel the opposing scrum away from the tunnel.

If the defending scrum is able to do this the scrum half should position alongside the attacking scrum half. In this position the ball can be followed and the untidy delivery exploited to regain possession.



When the scrum is over, the first member of the scrum to leave should be the hooker. To do this, binding must be under the props.

The props from both teams will be able to legitimately delay the entry into play of each other by binding with their opposite number momentarily. When the defence do this the advantage is greater as the attack will have fewer support players. To overcome this, the attack will have to move back to gain time and space. This will concede territory to the defence. When their props are free they will have to go back further to join the attacking line while the defensive props will easily join theirs because their defence line will have moved forward.

The scrumhalf should position to best advantage. If the open-side is to the defensive teams right, there is little point in the player being on the left of the scrum, especially as the scrum tends to wheel clockwise. Specifically the hooker will be able to leave the scrum quickly because the player is not bound to the opposition. On the right side of the field the player can defend the blindside.

### Lineouts

When defending the lineout four players can be used. The two lineout forwards to contest the throw, the hooker and the scrum half. It is the responsibility of the hooker and the scrum half to defend the front and back respectively. This enables the lineout forwards to contest the ball in the air in the knowledge that should possession be lost there is support around them.

A further option is to commit fewer defensive players to the lineout if a greater threat exists elsewhere. This can be achieved by the hooker and scrumhalf roles being performed by one player.

When possession is lost the ball carrier close by should be tackled immediately and the ball contested.

However if the ball is cleared to space the four players involved in the lineout must join the defence quickly.

For this to happen the three defending players not in the lineout shuffle side ways across the field to defend the wide out attackers or wider zones.

In Sevens, the option is the same as fifteens, i.e. either to contest the ball when it is thrown into the lineout or concede the throw and counter the attack by tackling the ball carrier once the lineout is over. If the ball is contested and it is not won then committing both forwards may result in having too few defenders. However, if the ball is won then the same problem is posed to the opposition. Consequently, the option of jumping to contest the ball must be combined with a defensive strategy if the ball is not won. Experience shows that it is difficult to win the ball and it is better to concede possession and apply defensive pressure. To ensure the attack doesn't develop immediately from the lineout, the thrower and scrum half may have to immediately smother tackle the ball carrier. The delay that this will cause gives the forwards time to join the defence pattern. If the ball is not contested then the forwards are already part of the defence pattern and should adjust to their role.



Frequently, the catcher passes immediately to the attacking scrum half who then passes to the out-half/ playmaker to set up attacking play. Without being offside, the forwards may be able to move with the pass and tackle the scrum half. If the ball is passed to the out-half/ playmaker, especially if the player is deep, then the forwards and scrum half should join the defensive pattern. Rushing towards the attack individually as the ball is passed can create a gap in the defence that is too easily exploited.

### **Opposition's free kicks and penalty kicks**

As these may be taken quickly the players must be alert. This will involve a player being back 10 metres so that this player can immediately defend. The players within 10 metres must retreat without interfering with play. They should move back, running backwards so they can see what is happening. An opponent deliberately running into a retreating player should not be awarded a further kick 10 metres down field.

For both kicks, the sweeper must be alert to the kick and chase option.

### **When defending at 22 metre dropout**

To defend a 22 metre dropout the receiving team must be in position to counter all options. Apart from player(s) on the 22 metre line to contest the tap kick, the best formation would seem to be that resembling a banana.

This formation has players between 10 and 15 metres of the 22 metre line on the left and right flanks and players considerably deeper in the centre of the field. This position allows both the shallow contestable kick and the deep "kick and chase" to be covered.

Of course, knowing the formation and playing to it in a match can be quite different. This is because there is little time between the touchdown and the kick to be in position.

In these circumstances it is easiest to contest the tap kick by being on the 22 metre line marking the kicker. This will enable the tap kick to be contested and cause a delay should any other option be used. This delay will enable team-mates to hurry into place. This always requires flexibility. If it is too rigid players may not be able to be in position. The players must fill the gaps, enabling late arriving team-mates to complement the balance achieved by those already in position.

## Denying space

### Forcing a decision

By moving forward the defence denies the attack time and space to make the best decision to attack. However, because there is much space around players defenders moving forward individually can easily be evaded in a one on one situation. The defence must therefore move forward to a pattern.

The defence can obtain an advantage if the pace at which they move forward is varied. The pattern, something akin to the “full-court press” in basketball, can be most effective. This particularly occurs when the attack backs up to obtain space and becomes too flat because they don’t want to stand in their in-goal area.

Each individual must identify which player they are marking and communicate this to team-mates. The defensive players should align on each other so that they have vision of play taking place inside. They must also not concede space should the ball be passed to the player they are to tackle.

### Inside-out

They should align inside their designated ball carrier so that they can defend from the inside driving the defender out. By defending inside out, they ensure that the ball is moving away from inside support. This allows the defence to operate to prevent passing options inside the ball carrier. If the players defend outside in, space is created because the tackler moves in to make the tackle. The ball carrier can then pass into the space the tackler has moved from to a team-mate who penetrates.

The players should identify the player they are to defend. By counting the players from the flanks across the field this player can be identified. Some defence patterns have the defenders on the outside being ahead of those inside. The purpose is to turn the ball carrier back infield where the defence positions its strongest tacklers.

This requires experience and is based on the assumption that the ball will not be kicked behind the outside defenders who are ahead of team mates leaving space behind them. This involves risk, but can be very effective if it is used as an option when the opposing team assumes only one pattern will be used.

### Reverse alignment

When possession is won from scrum and line-out the limited number of ball carriers that are immediately available often results in the attack creating time. This time is created to allow the forwards to enter play and offer attacking options. It is achieved by the attack standing deep and each member some distance from the player inside them.

The ball is passed with very little commitment by the attack to engaging the defence. The major thrust in attack occurs if the last receiver in the attack line and a support player can create a two-vs-one mismatch or by reversing the attack with the forwards now offering options.

Seldom in this play is a ruck or maul formed so the offside law that is applicable is offside in general play. This allows the defence to move forward and position ahead



of the position of the ball. Because the defence is so far from the attack, the defence will be able to drift with the flight of the ball.

The drift offers two strategies:

- The first is that they may be able to wedge the ball carrier closest to the far touchline against the touchline. This is achieved by the defender positioning to invite the outside break and 2, maybe 3, defenders preventing the player from cutting inside.
- The second strategy is to reverse their alignment by players positioning to defend attackers being further down the field than those inside them. In doing this they must position to be able to see the ball and their designated attacker in their same line of vision. This probably involves being further infield than the attacker and facing the touchline.

### The sweeper

In Sevens, because possession is very important, teams are reluctant to kick the ball. This allows the defence to concentrate on tackling the ball carrier and not worry about the space behind. However, an alert team will aim to exploit this space by making a recoverable kick just behind the defence or kicking well down the field and chasing. To counter this, there must be a designated sweeper. This may be the player on the flanks who is on the opposite side of the field to that which the attack is taking place.

Alternatively, teams may have a defensive screen of six players with a permanent fullback to cover balls that are kicked and to provide a second line of defence should the attack break through. The reduced defence line must adjust their positioning as the attack develops to cope with there being one extra attacking player. A further alternative is to make the adjustment from seven to six in the front line of the defence when the attack is most likely to use the kicking option i.e. when there is considerable space behind the front line of the defence down the field.

This seems to occur when the attack moves backwards towards their own line in an effort to gain space to attack. Often this will result in their formation getting too flat. Because too few players are able to accelerate with the ball to attack, they will kick to the space behind the defence and chase the ball.

When there is less space i.e. closer to the goal-line, players may form a single line to defend running and passing options with players on the flanks hanging back slightly so they can sweep if needed. The role of sweeper is a very difficult one because the player must position to cover kicks both deep and shallow and to tackle the ball carrier should the attack break through. From deep kicks in particular there is the risk of becoming isolated from team-mates by opposing players chasing the ball fast and to a pattern. This makes the choice of player for sweeper, or fullback, very critical. In most respects, the player should be the most talented player in the team.



A more complex method of defence is to form two lines, a front line of 5 players and a back line of 2. The back line is approximately 15 metres behind. So long as the front line can adjust to the changing position of the ball the back two are available to cover tackle, recover kicks and to enter the back line from depth should possession be regained. In this formation, the front five aim to push the attack to one side of the field offering the outside space to the ball carrier closest to the touchline. The back two can then be used to screen this player from team mates by shepherding the player to touch and cutting off the infield pass.

A further option is to have three lines of defence, a front four, a middle line of two, 2-15 metres behind, and the sweeper.

These are options that can be effective amongst experienced players who have the ability to adjust to the attack so that penetration does not occur.

When the defence is being effective, the attack may kick or they may attack the defensive line by attacking the space between two players. Their aim will be to draw a defender to the space and because the tackle is likely to be around the legs, the attacker will be able to pass into the space to a team-mate to penetrate. By moving right, space is created on the left and by moving left, space is created on the right. The defence must shuffle sideways in order to defend the space that has been created. Consequently, apart from aligning both on team-mates and the designated ball carrier, each defending player should occupy one of 6 or 7 lanes down the field. These lanes may be narrow or wide depending on the play of the opposition. So they must be flexible. The defender enters play when the ball carrier moves into the defenders lane. If play moves past the lane, the defender re-establishes alignment on team-mates and the attacking player in the lane.

Should two attacking players move into a lane initially defended by one player, the defender in the lane and the one in the next quickly split the lane into two narrow ones, team-mates adjust similarly.

The key is that no player follows the ball or an individual player they just deal with the action when it enters their lane. This spreads the workload and prevents the defence from becoming bunched. Bunching makes them vulnerable to attacks on the flanks. This pattern also ensures that a player who receives a pass back inside from a tackled player can be defended.

In all defence but especially in lanes or channels the defenders must be in a position to defend players in their lane and the ball. It is essential that a player is agile, has good lateral movement, good communication skills and good peripheral vision. To achieve this their alignment must be such that they can split their vision defending the player in their lane and the ball.

To do this they will have to move laterally shadowing the movement of the ball. Experience has shown that the opposition player should have the greater amount of attention.

## Tackling the ball carrier

When the tackle is made the act of tackling will draw the tackler away from a space in the defensive screen. If the ball carrier is able to pass into the space the defence screen could be penetrated. The preferred tackle therefore would be the smother tackle that would prevent the pass being made. The problem could be however that a high tackle smothering the ball carrier can be easily evaded and, as the tackler is standing, there is not the requirement to immediately play the ball.

To regain possession, the tackler or a team-mate must be skilled at ripping the ball free or smothering so that ball is not released. This results in a scrum in favour of the defending team. It is difficult to smother a strong player or a player who changes direction immediately preceding the tackle. To overcome this, it is essential to tackle from inside the ball carrier giving only one way to run and driving the player out. This applies particularly when the ball carrier is close to the touchline.

## Regaining possession

Possession may be regained by being able to wrestle the ball from the ball carrier or by recovering a loose ball or intercepting a pass. It may also be recovered by forcing an infringement and gaining the throw in at lineout and scrum. As there is a great deal of loose ball, players must be alert to regain possession and attack.

In Sevens, it is surprising how defensive pressure can create mistakes leading to a turnover and a try. This particularly occurs when the attacking team loses its alignment and depth as it backs up close to their own goal-line. Because there are fewer players on the field there is much space about the players.

Consequently, when an infringement occurs there is both time and space to play advantage. This may force a player to adjust immediately from a defensive role to an attacking role or vice versa creating an opportunity to exploit the situation. Consequently, advantage is more frequently played in Sevens.



### ***Regaining possession***

*Stop progress, prevent the pass, get the ball.*

## NOTES

**INTERNATIONAL RUGBY BOARD**  
COACHING SEVENS

**POSITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND SELECTION**



**COACHING SEVENS POSITIONS & SELECTION**





# Positional responsibilities and selection

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In general play, players must identify and perform their roles as play develops. There are few specific positions as exist in 15-a-side. Players must recognise the situation and react to complement the behaviour of team-mates. Of the specific roles the role of sweeper in defence is one example. This players role is explained above as are the roles of the thrower, jumper and support player in a lineout and the front row in the scrum.

## Half back / scrum-half

The role of the half back or scrum half is a specialised role. In defence, this player stands behind the scrum so that the player can move to the side in which play is developing. By committing to one side, usually the side of the put in, the other side is left free in the absence of flankers.

This may vary if the scrum is able to exert greater pressure. In these circumstances the scrum half will take advantage of being able to stand just behind the centre line on the right hand side of the scrum initially. Once the ball has been put-in the ball becomes the offside line for this player so long as the player does not move away from the scrum. Problems created by the screw and the kick through makes this a better position to exploit this advantage. In attack, the speed with which the ball comes out of the scrum means that the scrum half must be very quick and agile. The player must be alert to the positioning of the opposing scrum-half. If this player stands on the right side on the throw-in a gap in the defence will exist on the left which should be exploited immediately.

If the defending scrum half stands behind the scrum then there will be time to recover the ball to attack.

As the defending scrum half is some way from the ball the scrum half may have time to go forward. This will enable forwards breaking from the scrum to enter play more easily as they will have to move back only a few metres to be onside.

## Hooker

Even though there may be few scrums in Sevens matches, the specialists skills of hooking and throwing in at the lineout may be worth considering to ensure accuracy at these. The player must, however, be talented at the other aspects of the Sevens Game.

## Team selection

In Sevens all players must be skilled in a wide range of individual skills so they can react to any situation. Each must be able to be performed at pace as Sevens is a game of rapid changes of speed from slow manoeuvring to an explosion of speed once there has been a breach in the defence. Players must be fast and powerful with high levels of anaerobic stamina so that they recover rapidly. In order to select a Sevens team the Game Plan and Pattern of Play that the team is to play to must be known.

This will allow for fine tuning however there are both general roles and position responsibilities that are common to most teams.

### General characteristics of Sevens players

As opposed to fifteen-a-side rugby position specification is not as important. Sevens selection places a premium on speed of running, reactions and expertise at individual skills. Of these, the most important are passing, running and tackling. There is no substitute for pace, speed of hand and strong devastating tackling. There is no room for poor tacklers as this single weakness can lose a match.

In addition to this, players should have excellent peripheral vision and spatial awareness. This combined with the judgement of when to go into contact and when to maintain a pattern to enable a long-term advantage to be gained makes for the best Sevens player. The best all round athlete makes the best Sevens player. Of course, size without compromising the other characteristics is a bonus. Loose forwards or backs can adapt to the forward roles. They probably have to because tight forwards do not normally have the most important general skills.

Of the specialists you probably require a scrum half who can clear loose ball to space.

Each squad should have at least two play makers. These players must have peripheral vision, judgement and decision-making abilities. More than any other player, they must be closely involved in the development of the Game Plan, Patterns of Play and Tactics.

This involvement should involve their participation in decisions made by the coaches and the captain on these issues. They should therefore be a regular member of the team of long experience and/or someone who has an innate feel for Sevens. These skills can be fine-tuned by decision-making practice drills.

The obvious players for this role are the link players in Fifteens, ie, the scrum half/halfback and the outhalf/stand-off/ 1st five-eighth as they will be used to this role in fifteens. However, they must also have the other basic attributes of a Sevens player. If they do not they may be isolated and targeted by opponents.

Their individual involvement in the match could be so great that they will not be able to perform the play-maker role.

On attack the play maker should set up the play and let others carry it out. By doing this the player is able to think ahead to the next option.

It is essential that a team has one or two players who are able to drop kick both at restarts and to convert the tries that are scored.

The normal format for Sevens is a Tournament. Teams must be fit enough to last the whole tournament. To achieve this the team may wish to adopt tactics that conserve energy once a win has been achieved in pool matches. Tournament rules may base seedings for the post pool play on tries being scored, but this should not prevent a team from adopting sensible policies regarding use of kick options, the use of substitutions and the extent to which they are prepared to race to score or defend once a clear break has been made.

## NOTES