

Living **Rugby**

**Sam Vesty -**

**Rugby Coaching Ebook1**





# Sam Vesty - autobiog

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I have been a professional rugby player for over 13 years, building up a wealth of top-level experience. I started my career at Leicester Tigers, for whom I made 176 appearances. During my time there, I played – and won – three Premiership finals and one EDF Cup final. I also played in two Heineken Cup finals.

In 2009, I fulfilled every boyhood rugby player's dream and represented my country, winning two caps against Argentina. In 2010, I joined Bath Rugby and have so far made over 50 appearances for the club.

Over the years, I have played under some great coaches who really sparked my interest in that side of the game and I recently completed my RFU level 3 coaching badges, which enable me to coach at the highest level.

While playing for Bath, I have started learning my trade as a backs coach, working with Frome RFC.

My motivation behind this E-Book was to illustrate some of the core coaching principles I have picked up over the years and share some of my favourite backs' moves that will help you open up those increasingly tight defences.

As always, a decent set-piece platform from those blokes with the numbers 1 to 8 on their shirts will help them run more smoothly.

Good luck and enjoy.

Sam



Read [Sam Vesty's blog on Living Rugby](#) for more coaching tips and plays.



# 1

## Blitz versus drift defence

“The system that your club should use depends on many factors.”

– Sam Vesty





# Blog No.1 - (defence)



Every club's defence coach has their own system.

But what they all boil down to is a decision on whether to 'Blitz' or whether to 'Drift'.

The core principle of a Drift defence is to move sideways until you have equated numbers before committing to the tackle. (fig 1)

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**(a) If the ball carrier has one knee or both knees on the ground, that player has been 'brought to ground'.**

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*IRB Law (15.3)*



# Drift

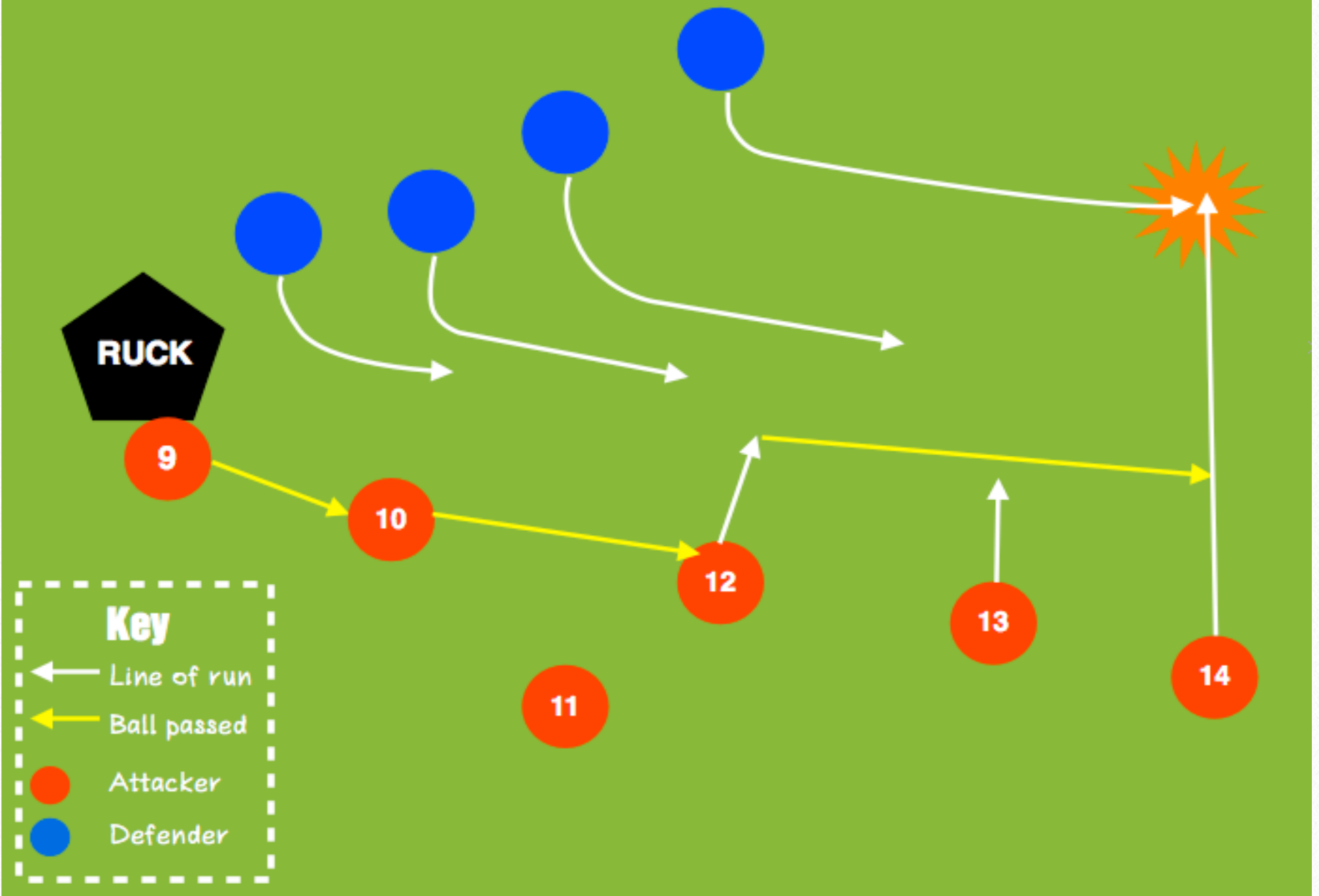


Fig.1 - The Drift defence - teamwork is essential.

It requires the whole team to work in unison to usher the opposition towards the touchline with each player looking after the guy on his outside.

This can result in the attacking team making yards down either touchline but it is very hard (if done correctly) to make a clean break against.

The Blitz defence, however, is the complete antithesis of the above.

Its over-riding key is to pressure the opposition with the speed of the defensive line.



Each player nominates an attacker, then sprints up to make a tackle – the bigger the better. (fig 2)

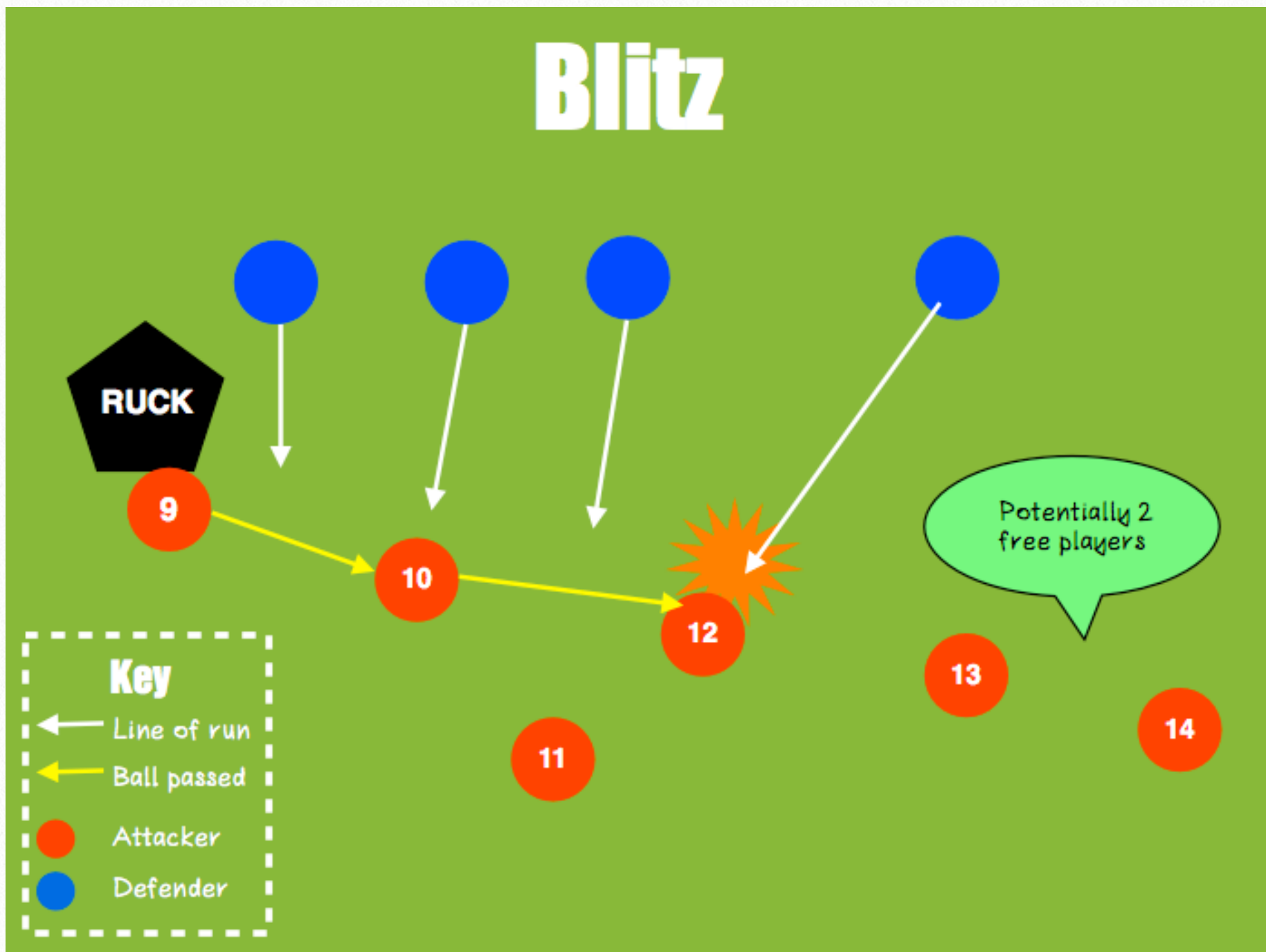


Fig.2 - The Blitz defence - you aren't getting the ball out wide.

The principle message here is - they may have an overlap on the outside but we are going to stop them getting the ball there.

As you can imagine, this creates lots of opportunities for dominant tackles, the force of which can often lead to turnovers.

If the attacking side do manage to get the ball to the free players, however, they can make clean breaks and score points.



Both of these approaches to defence effect the set-up of the backfield (the space the full-back and wingers look after) in different ways.

With the Blitz, it is vital to have plenty of numbers in the front line, meaning that wingers defend high up the pitch, leaving more space behind them for the full-back to cover. This obviously makes a defending team more susceptible to a good kicking game.

The Drift defence, however, allows for the open wingers to be deeper and they can therefore help the full-back more.

From a fitness standpoint, the Blitz defence is a killer. It relies on the players being fast off the defensive line and then getting back onside to repeat the process.

Doing this for 80 minutes is exhausting and I speak from personal experience. But the reward is more turnovers and therefore more possession to work with.

The problem with the Blitz comes when your team aren't fit enough. Some of the players can be fast off the line but others may be struggling and that leads to dog-legs in the line – a dream scenario for any attacking team.

A big plus point about the Drift is that once you have made the tackle in the outside channel, invariably, you will have more numbers near the breakdown than the attacking side.

It is hard for attacks to clear wide breakdowns when the defence are already there in numbers. If you watch Northampton Saints, for example, they pick up a lot of penalties and turnovers using this defensive system.

## **DRIFT**

### **Pros:**

1. Less clean breaks
2. Backfield easy to cover
3. Defensive numbers at wide breakdowns

### **Cons:**

1. Fewer dominant tackles
2. Gives the attack time to execute their plays



## BLITZ

Pros:

1. Pressures decision-makers
2. Dominant tackles
3. More turnovers

Cons:

1. Hard work (high level of fitness required)
2. More clean breaks
3. Harder to patrol the backfield

So what to use? Blitz or Drift?

The system that your club should use depends on many factors.

If you have some especially weak defenders in your team, the Drift is easier to protect these players.

If the weather is bad, it is harder for defenders to make passes so a Blitz is a good option here.

A lot of the time, it will be a case of making the right call on the pitch.

It is easier to Blitz from a left-hand defensive scrum than from a right sided scrum as you can use the scrum-half as well.

On your own line, it is also easier to Blitz as you can rely on the full-back getting to the end of the line.

Then again, when you are in the opposition's half, the full-back and wingers need to be deep to look after any kicks from hand, so a Drift style is probably best here.

I hope some of this theory is food for thought and it is up to you to adapt it for whatever you think will work best at your club.

Personally, I think the pressure that the Blitz can put on attacking sides if done well is so important, it should be used at every possible opportunity.

As ever, good luck.





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**(b) If the ball carrier has one knee or both knees on the ground, that player has been ‘brought to ground’.**

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*IRB Law (15.3)*

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# 2

## First-phase attacks from scrums

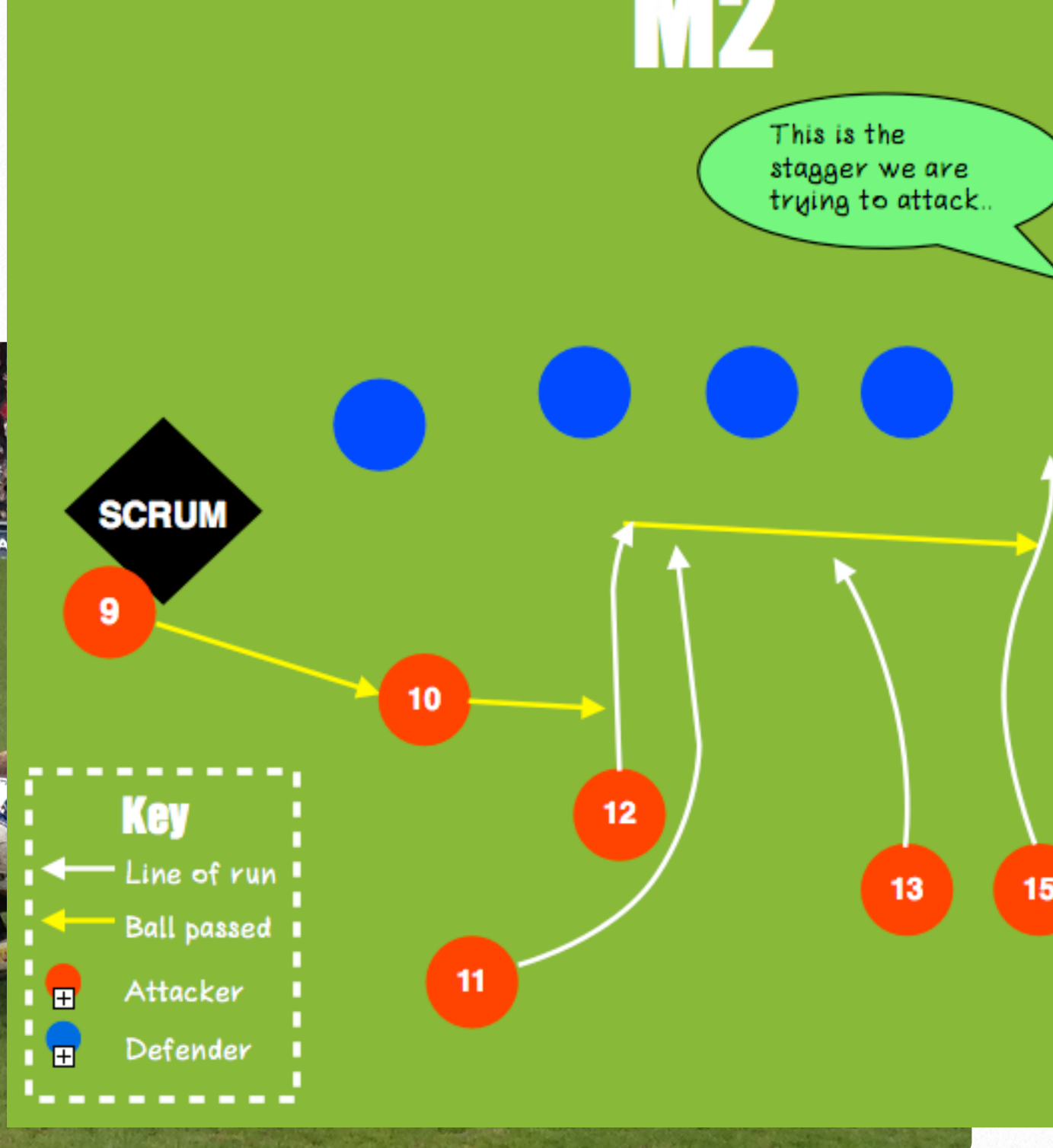
“Quality ball from scrums is the best first-phase attacking opportunity you get in rugby.”

– Sam Vesty





## Blog No.2 - (scrum attack)



Quality ball from scrums is the best first phase attacking opportunity you get in rugby. The opposition have all eight forwards tied to one small area leaving the rest of the pitch to be marked by the backs. This means they have to look after the back field as well, so, if you have a scrum on the half way, the opposition full-back and one of the wingers will have to be back to cover the kick to the corner. This leaves just four backs left, so effectively you have a six-on-four overlap. Obviously the back row and scrum-half try to get away from the scrum ASAP to cut your odds.

As the scrum moves towards the opposition try line, the full-back doesn't have to watch for the deep kicks, this means that the defence can front load their defence and it is therefore harder to attack against. So if you get scrums around the halfway, try one of these plays to attack in the wide channels and score more tries.



## M2

This is a very simple play but executed effectively it is very hard to defend. This play relies on lots of convincing dummy lines and A12 making a good, flat, wide pass. If this is not a strength of your 12 just swap in the best suited player for the task. I believe that you should play to players' strengths.

Notice in the diagram the lines A11, A13 and A15 all run. As I have previously mentioned, it is imperative to use the blind winger in all backs plays. In this instance his job is to make D12 think he is getting it, this gives us the overlap on the end of the move. A13 and A15 start close together and run at D13 then, just as A12 is releasing the pass, they split. D13 is loaded with two people and has to decide which one to take, this indecision is what gives our full-back the space on the outside.

As we want to attack them in the wide channel it is important that we start tight. This makes the defence tighter giving us more space where we ultimately need it.

In all we do in rugby you cannot know how the opponents are going to defend but by doing all these little parts accurately you give yourself the best chance of an overlap and that is all you can ever ask for.

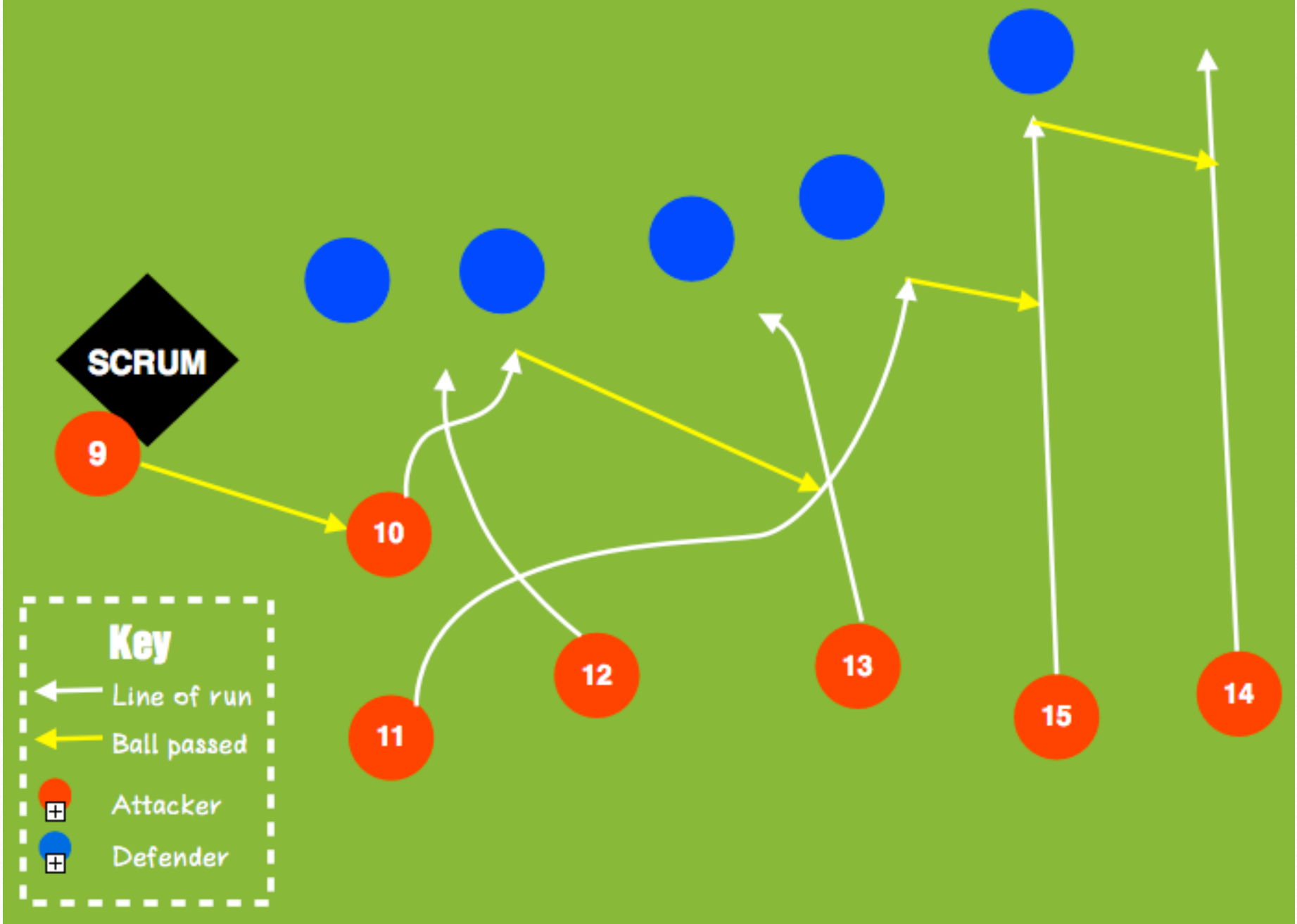
### Dummy switch PO

The reason this play works is because A10 carries the ball at the line. Whilst A10 has the ball in his hands the defence have to stay tight. When A10 finally releases the ball the pass will beat the defence into the space.

A13 and A11 are trying to overload D12 with a play called a PO (diagram next page). This is where the outside player, A13, runs short and the inside player, A11, runs behind him. The ball player, A10, chooses which player to hit. It is the timing of this PO that decides the outcome of the move. Both A13 and A11 have to be options at the point when A10 is passing the ball.



# Dummy switch PO







Lots of junior rugby clubs use a play very similar to this, but often don't use the blind side winger and pass straight to the full-back instead. This is a massive bug-bear of mine as this isn't giving your team the best chance of an overlap. Use the extra man every time you can.

The M2 is a good play against a drift defence and the dummy switch PO is better against a blitz style. POs make it hard for a blitz as they have to come out of line if they want to go and get the winger and we all know that defences are stronger when everyone is in line. The M2 beats the drift by a wide flat pass that never lets the drift catch up. As they start to drift, you are already past them meaning they have to go backwards, giving you lots of soft easy yards in the outside channels .

I have referred to dummy lines but it is important that players run expecting the ball. If you are expecting it, you are more of a threat to the defence if you get the ball, or if, in fact, you are the dummy.

When coming up with which moves your team are going to play, take into account what suits your players. Then practice them remembering that it is the small parts of each play done accurately that give you the best chance.

Remember, don't be a dummy. Even if you are the dummy runner, expect the ball!





Read [Sam Vesty's blog on Living Rugby](#) for more coaching tips and plays.



# 3

## Patterns of play

“Professional teams usually plan their first three phases down to the ‘Nth degree’ ”

-Sam Vesty



Players know who is carrying, who is clearing-out each ruck and exactly the objective of the three phases in question.

I'm going to explain three patterns that teams may use



## Blog No.3 - (attack)



Each professional rugby team has their own style of play.

Wasps and Wales, for example, like to attack around the corner with their forwards, allowing time for their backs to regenerate, get together and attack the opposition's forwards.

Other teams like to have players across the whole width of the field, meaning they can attack anywhere at any time.

To get into these shapes, professional teams usually plan their first three phases down to the 'Nth degree'.

Players know who is carrying, who is clearing-out each ruck and exactly the objective of the three phases in question.

I'm going to explain three patterns that teams may use:



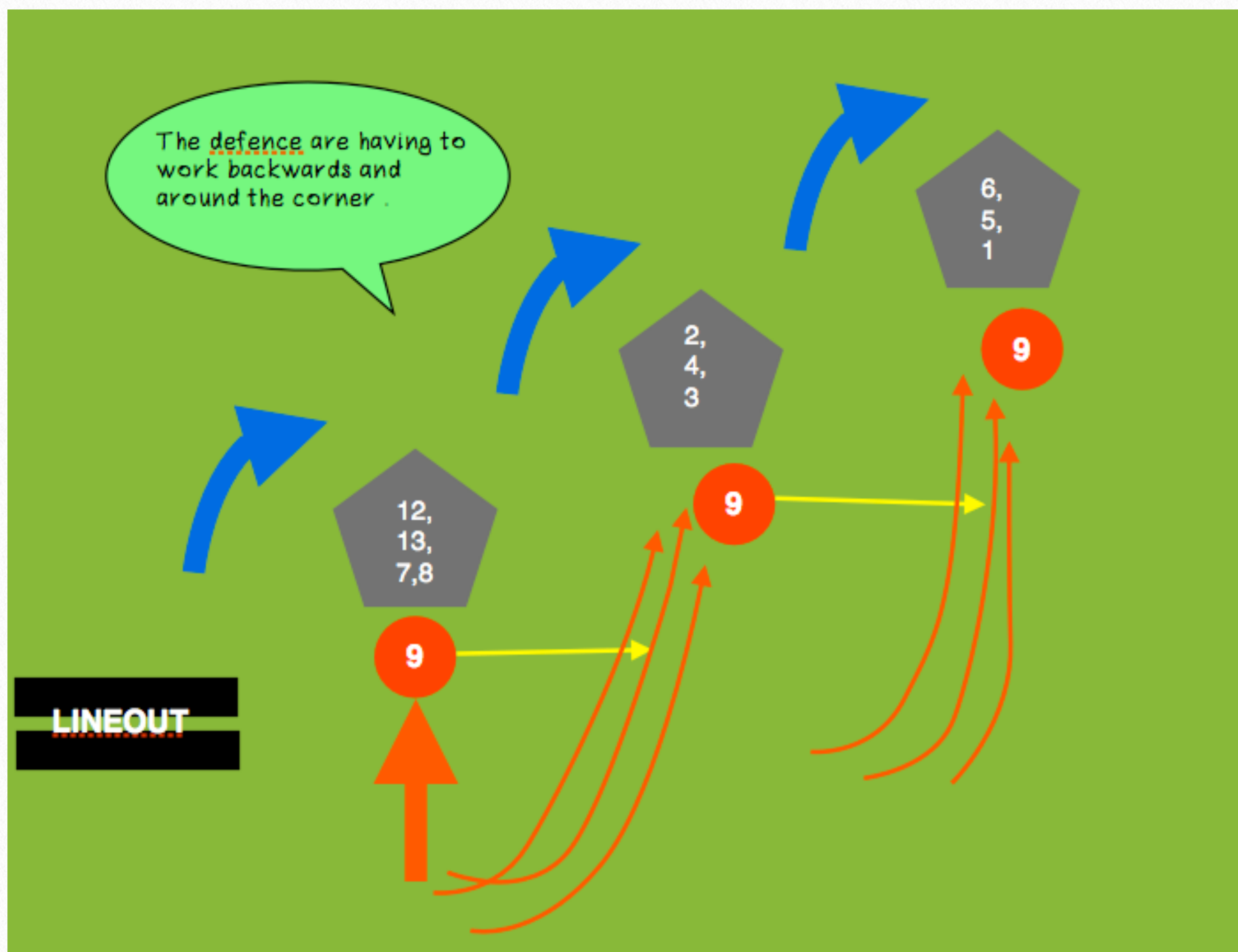
## 1) Keep Going 2) The 21 Pattern and 3) The 11 Pattern.

### 1) Keep Going

The objective – to get forwards running at backs and to free up a full back line.

This pattern is very simple. The backs run a play into the midfield as backs and two back-rowers clear this ruck. Then three forwards race around the corner to run off the scrum-half. That is followed by three other forwards doing the same off the second breakdown. They keep going until they reach the touchline.

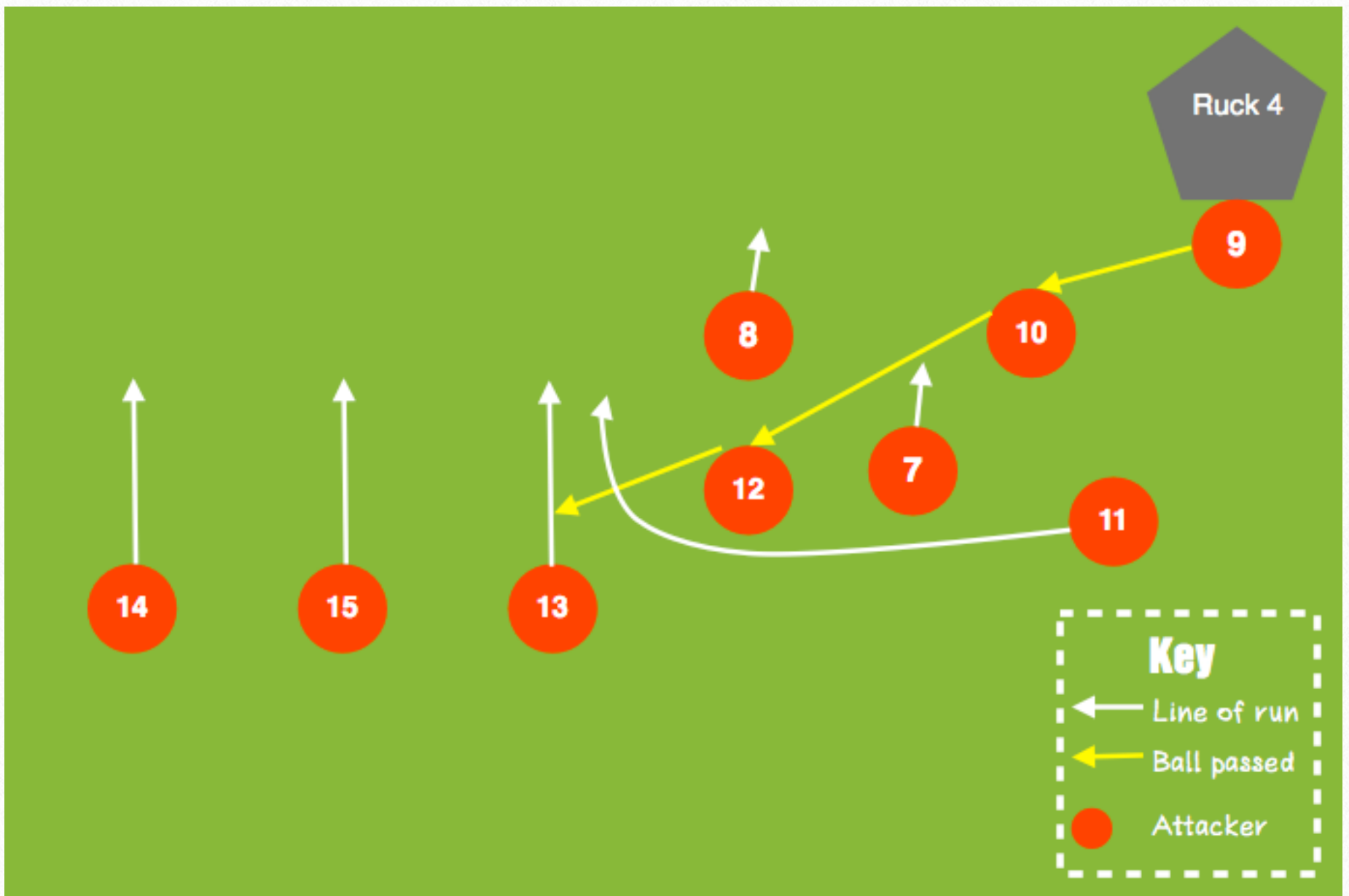
If the breakdowns are quick and the forwards can beat the defence around the corner this can be devastating for the opposition. It leads to the big forwards running into fly-halves and centres and, as a result, quick ball is achieved. For the defence, it is a vicious cycle. If





they do not win the first collision and breakdown it subsequently becomes harder and harder to defend the next one and so forth.

After the attackers have gone around the corner many times, they eventually reach the touchline. This gives the defence a chance to get back on equal terms as they can wait for the attack to come back towards them. But because the attacking forwards have done all the carrying, they have a full back line plus two back-rowers ready to attack tired forwards.



From this breakdown, you can play what you see. I have put this play in for illustrative purposes only. By this stage of the phases, it is too difficult to predict where each individual will be. It is for this reason that I do not like seeing teams organise any more than a couple of phases.

At this point of the attack, it is down to the decision-makers in the team to spot where the weaker defenders are and to get the ball to this area for the desired result of a try.



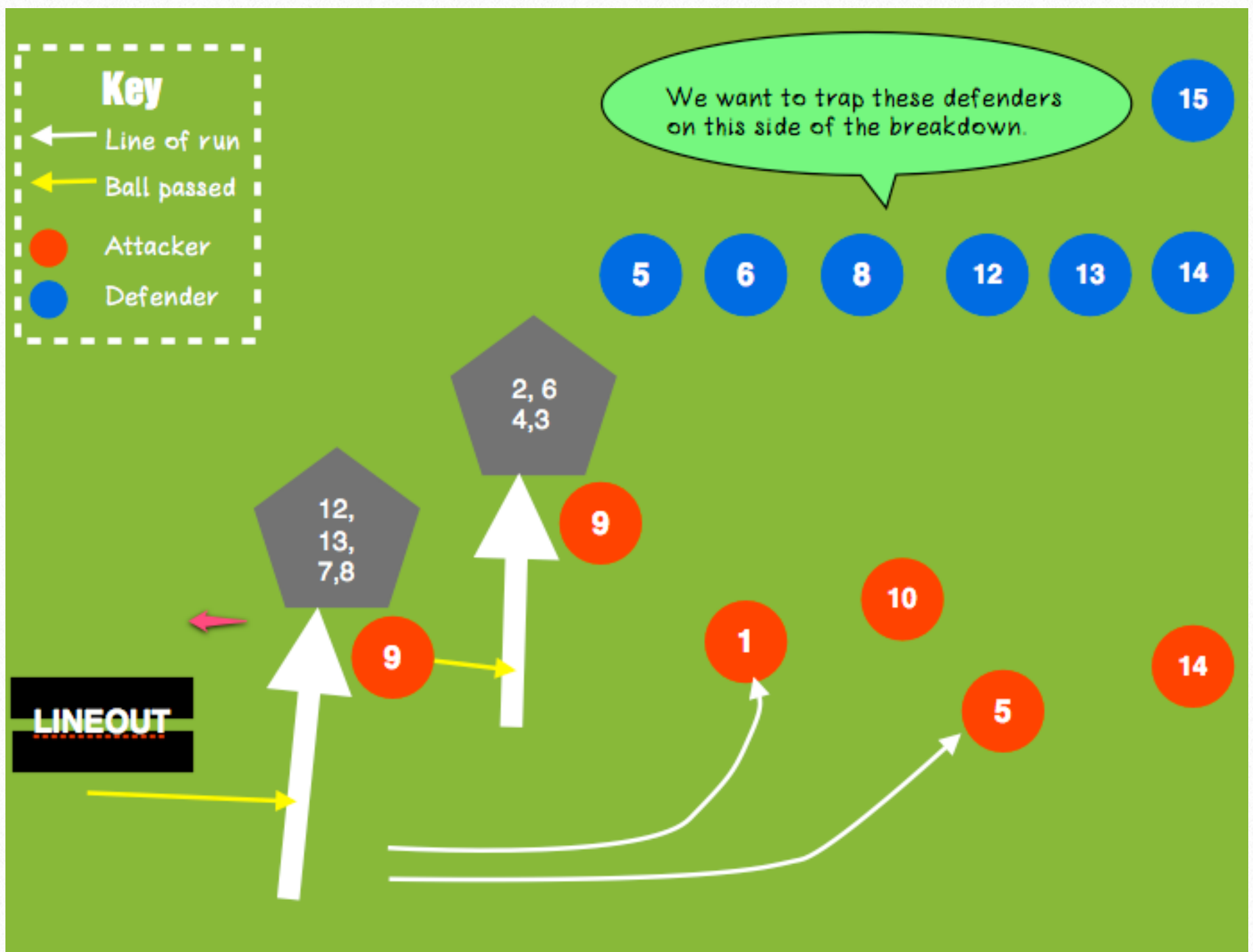
## 2) The 21 Pattern

Objective – to get our best attackers running at their weakest defenders.

For this pattern to be effective, we must make the defenders believe we are doing the 'Keep Going' pattern. We want them to chase our forwards around the corner but, unlike 'Keep Going' we are going to nip down the blindside after two phases with our backs.

It is important to make the first breakdown tight to the back of the lineout and the second breakdown tight from that as well. This means it is easier for the defence to get around the corner which is just what we want them to do.

The accuracy of these first two breakdowns makes the third one so effective. Notice that the A1 and A5 go around the corner along with A10 as most plays go through the fly-half.



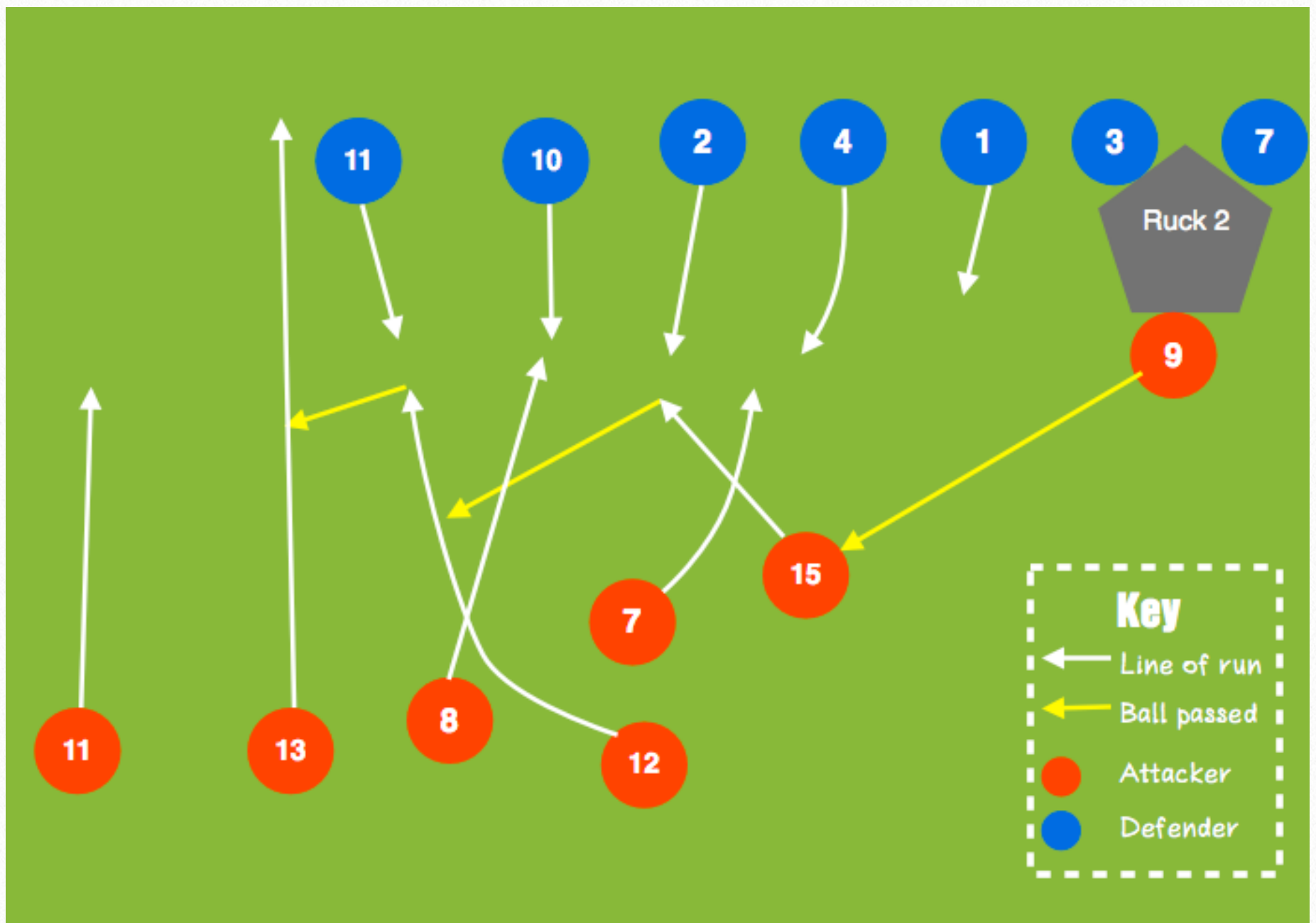


It fools the defence into following him to the far side of the ruck and this traps their better defenders on the wrong side.

The accuracy of these first two breakdowns makes the third one so effective. Notice that the A1 and A5 go around the corner along with A10 as most plays go through the fly-half. It fools the defence into following him to the far side of the ruck and this traps their better defenders on the wrong side.

Now for the killer part...

The people from the first breakdown have to get up and into position as quickly as possible. And when the ball comes from the second breakdown, these players need to have good depth so they can attack the ball at pace.







In this example, we have got A15 attacking against D2 and D4 with three backs running at their winger (D11). Obviously this is a dream situation and you do not play rugby on paper - but at least we have given ourselves the best chance of putting our best attackers against their weakest defenders in the this particular situation.

As I mentioned, the first two phases of this pattern are vital for giving us the best chance on the critical third phase.

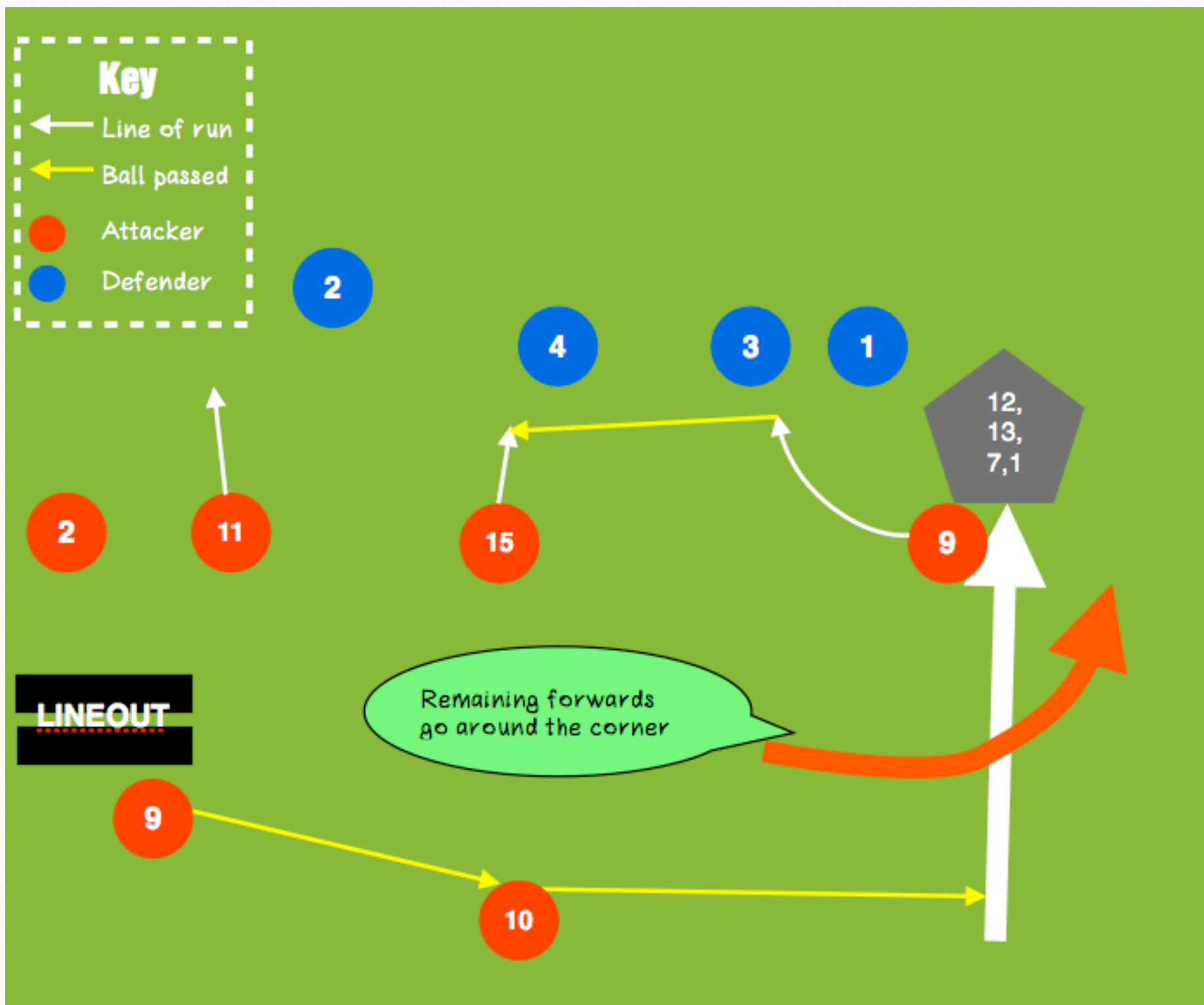
### 3) The 11 Pattern (from a five-man lineout)

Objective – to get them to ‘over fold’ from the lineout and then hit back with our A15 and winger versus their front row.

This pattern has the same principle as the ‘21 Pattern’ but it is done off a five-man lineout. It needs to be a five-man lineout as quite simply there will be fewer defenders on the short side. If you try this move from a full lineout, it will be clogged-up. So to give yourself the best chance of isolating their front row, it needs to be a five-man set-piece.

From the lineout, we must make contact in the D10 channel. This gives us enough space to come down the blind side but, crucially, not so much that they feel exposed and put extra defenders in there.





A9 needs to break from the ruck and try and get to their second defender. This helps the attack so that instead of him just passing, he becomes a threat to the defence. This gives you three good attackers against the defence's front five.

Notice in the diagram, how A2 has stayed in the wide channel because he is there to recycle the breakdown or hopefully get on the end for a simple try.

All these patterns are designed to give your team the best chance of scoring. It won't go perfectly every time but if you execute it accurately you will get your best runners against their weaker defenders. Or your big runners against their backs.





Read [Sam Vesty's blog on Living Rugby](#) for more coaching tips and plays.



# 4

## How to win lineouts

Lineouts are a very important part of the game. They are a re-start which, if run effectively, can give a great attacking platform to play off.

*-Sam Vesty*



Most teams will have a selection of different lineouts ranging from seven man (which is the most common) to five man, four man and sometimes three man. The variations can be almost endless, here I cover the essentials for any team developing their core lineout options.



## Blog No.4 - (lineout)



The purpose of the lineout is to restart play, quickly, safely and fairly, after the ball has gone into touch, with a throw-in between two lines of players.

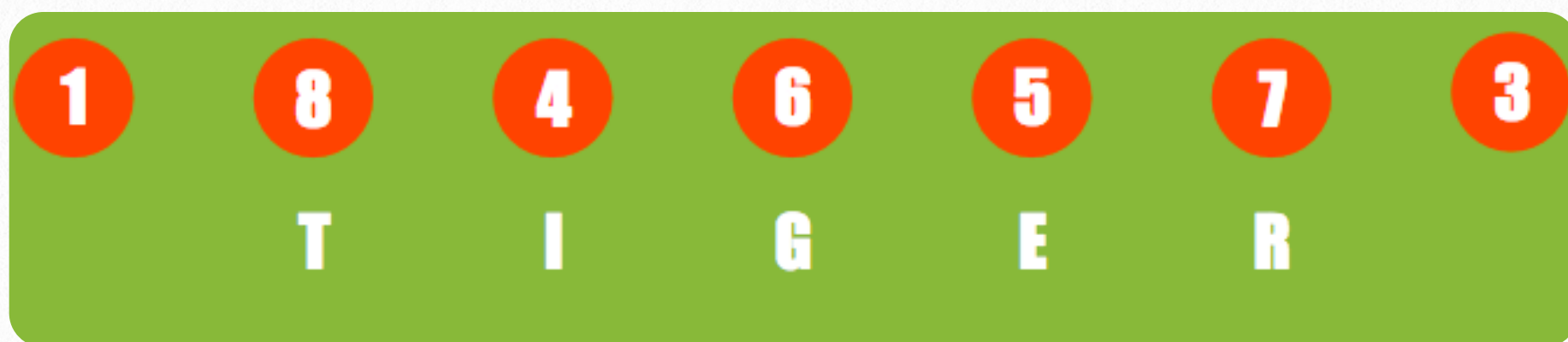


Lineouts are a very important part of the game. They are a re-start which if run effectively can give a great attacking platform to play off. Most teams will have a selection of different lineouts ranging from seven man (which is the most common) to five man, four man and sometimes three man.

The most common is a 7 man spread with props at either end and ideally jumping options throughout.



Each jumper in the line will correspond to a letter that can spell out a word, for example, TIGER



The letter called will represent where the ball is to be thrown.

Most lineouts work with a primary and secondary option system.

It is the first option and if it is not marked it will be taken.

Concentrating on a seven man lineout – there are many different formulations for a seven-man-lineout, for example:





The primary option will not change. It is the first option and if it is not marked it will be taken. The primary option will not be called before the lineout, as it is always known. For example, the primary option could be 5 being lifted by 6 and 7 on the spot. Once the 5 gives eye contact with the hooker to signal the primary is on, the hooker will then throw. Timing of the jump is taken off the hooker's throw which is very important.

If the primary option is marked, then the secondary will be called into use. The secondary option will be triggered by a word, in this case 'CANCEL'.

The pack leader who makes the call is often a 2nd Row, or main jumper. For example, 'CANCEL is G' So the first option is the primary (657), if CANCEL is called the hooker will throw to 6 (G) lifted by 4 and 5 (465).



Timing is very important, on straight up throws the timing is on the hooker, the hooker throws, then the jumper jumps. If the timing is good it gives the opposition very little time to react and put up a defensive jumper. This timing will not come easily, our lineout practices doing repetition after repetition and only with this repetition will you get the improvement. So make sure you give the lineout the time it deserves during training as more tries come from this set piece than any other.

To advance the lineout, bring in movements. Movements can correspond to a number.





Keeping it simple there will be three movements to a lineout.

1 = Jumper moving forward

2 = Jumper one step lob

3 = front lifter dummies and moves out, jumper goes forward onto next front lifter.

The movements that the number corresponds to, never changes.

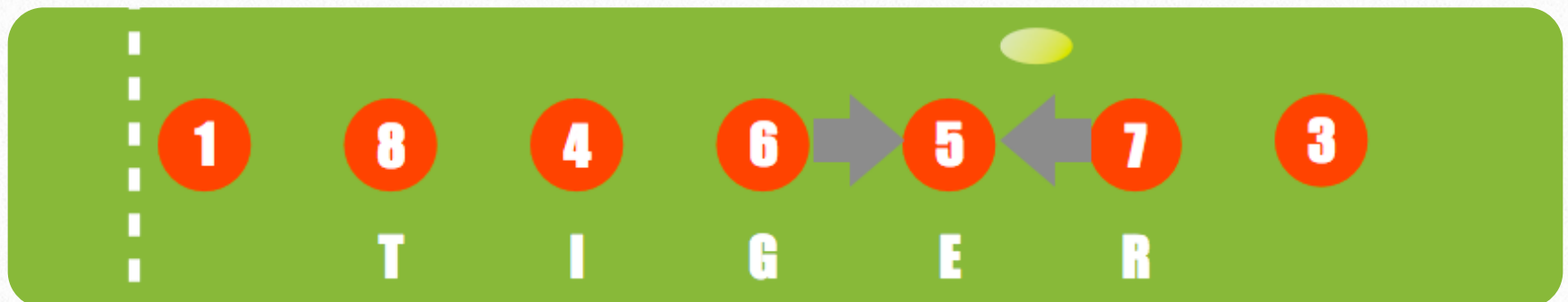
*EXAMPLES:*

G1 - 6 forward onto 4. Trigger is back lifter's movement.

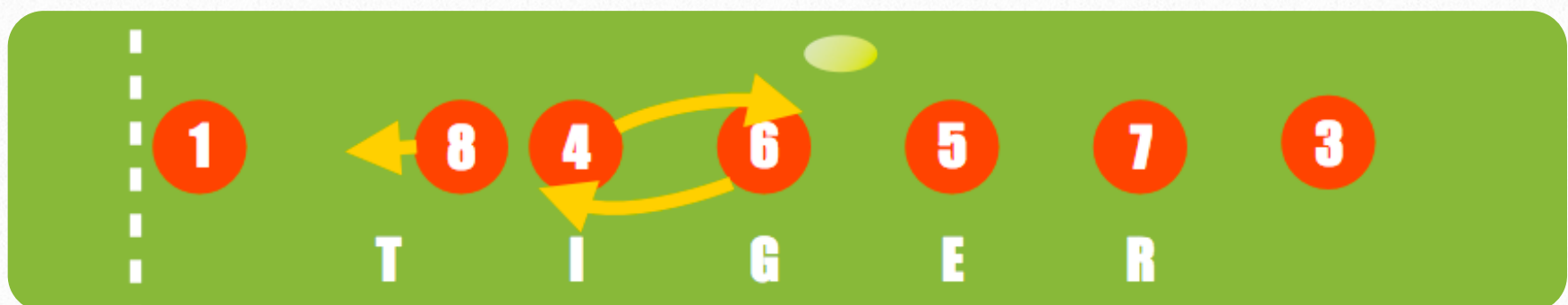
R1 - 7 forward onto 5, triggered by 3



E2 - 5 steps 1 step lob onto 7, triggered by 6 movement



G3 - 4 back to 6, jumps out, 6 forward onto 8 (865)





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**Players may assist a team-mate in jumping for the ball by lifting and supporting that player providing that the lifting and/or supporting players do not support the jumping team-mate below the shorts from behind or below the thighs from the front.**

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*IRB Law 19.10(d).*

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Key Points:

- On movements going forward it is often triggered by the back lifter as he has more ground to cover.
- On lob throws movement is often triggered by the front lifter as they have more ground to cover.
- The hooker's throw depends on triggers and movements, however it can also depend on the player, some jumpers move quicker and jump quicker than others.

Teams can spend long amounts of time devising lineouts with many numbers corresponding to numerous movements all designed to confuse opposition's defense and win clean ball.

Does your team put the emphasis on the lineout it deserves?

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**Players who support a jumping team-mate must lower that player to the ground as soon as the ball has been won by a player of either team.**

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*IRB Law 19.10(g)*

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# 5

## Acknowledgements & Links

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Sam Vesty and Living Rugby are working on a second eBook, to make sure you know when it is available sign up for the newsletter on the [home page](#).

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We would like to get your feedback so please contact us via any of the methods above and tell us what you think.

Thank you for downloading the book.

Sam & the Living Rugby team.



# Play movement (diagrams)

White arrows - Lines of running for the players

Yellow arrows - The movement of the ball (passing)

Thick Blue arrows - The general direction of defenders

Thick Red/White arrows - The general direction of attackers (more than one player, e.g. a pod of forwards)

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## Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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**Index**

Find Term



# Referencing players in plays (A#/D#)

A# (as in A9) - The attacking player and their number in the play. So you have a pod of forwards A3,4,5 or a single player, such as A9 (the scrum half)

D# (as in A9) - Refers to a defending player in the play, such as D12 (the centre).

In the diagrams attacking players are red and the defenders are blue; red (the attacking scrum-half)

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## Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here



# Set piece marking (diagrams)

Lineout - Two thick black/grey lines

Scrum - A black/grey hexagon

Ruck/Maul - A black/grey pentagon

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## Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here