

## How to Play With a Small Pack

Here we examine some of the strategies you can use to deal with the challenges of having a small set of forwards. You could be playing the most exciting rugby in the league.

**Fitness:** smaller packs must be fitter, able to run all day, able to support each other all game. Coaches of 'big' teams tend to overlook fitness hoping their packs will simply steamroller oppositions.

**Speed and agility:** your forwards must be quick off the mark, able to run at top speed over 40 to 50m constantly and able to change direction quickly. Again 'big' packs tend to be a bit one paced and struggle changing direction, they also tend to tire quickly if working at top speed repeatedly.

**Handling skills:** you need forwards who are comfortable passing the ball under pressure, have fast hands and are comfortable offloading the ball in contact.

**Tackling skills:** the forwards must tackle low and make every first up tackle. The goal is to put the ball carrier on the deck quickly and then get supporters to the breakdown first. Opposition runners need to be closed down quickly and the tackle technique needs to be honed constantly.

**Scrummaging:** big packs tend to be lazy at scrums relying on their weight advantage rather than technique. It's well worth getting in a scrum expert for a few sessions to work on individual technique. In basic terms get as low and as tight as possible, win the hit and get the ball in and out quickly. Don't waste energy on their ball, stay low and tight, stop the initial shove then concentrate on getting away quickly and make use of any speed advantage around the pitch.

**Lineouts:** shorten the lineout and use lots of movement to create space for your jumpers. If your hooker can hit the tail then use back peels. On their ball lift the lightest player as quickly as possible to get in front of their jumper. If your players can't steal their ball they must stop the catch and drive, hit the ball carrier low as soon as they hit the ground and get them to deck before the drive starts.

**Open play:** in attack you must keep the ball away from contact; attack space and offload or commit defenders and pass before contact. Everyone must support each other and players cannot afford to get isolated. Never maul and hit low and hard at rucks getting the ball away as quickly as possible. In defence get numbers to every breakdown and legally compete for the ball.

Every 50:50 ball in the game must be your team's. Kick into open spaces and chase (don't kick to touch as you just give possession away).

## Small Pack Do's and Don'ts

### Own scrums

- **Do:** Get low, get tight, win the hit, get the ball in and out (channel 1), get up and away a.s.a.p.
- **Don't:** Waste energy pushing more than you need, hold the ball in at the base, use back row moves in close.

#### **Opposition scrums**

- **Do:** Get low, get tight, win the hit, stop initial shove, get up and away a.s.a.p.
- **Don't:** Waste energy pushing more than you need.

#### **Own lineouts**

- **Do:** Shorten the lineout, use lots of movement, get in front of opposition jumpers, throw to the tail as much as possible, use peel moves off the back, get the ball away a.s.a.p.
- **Don't:** Catch and drive, front peel.

#### **Opposition lineouts**

- **Do:** Lift lightest forward to compete, get in front of opposition jumpers, stop the catch and drive.
- **Don't:** Compete if you can't, let them get a drive on.

#### **Open play – attack**

- **Do:** Keep the ball out of contact, offload if contact is taken, support, get the ball away from rucks fast.
- **Don't:** Maul, get isolated, create slow rucks.

#### **Open play – defence**

- **Do:** Put the ball carrier on the deck fast, get support to the breakdown, compete for the ball legally.
- **Don't:** Miss first up tackles, try to tackle high, allow mauls to develop.