

POSITIONAL SKILLS HANDBOOK



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FOREWORD

Greetings and welcome to Rugby Canada's position-specific skills manual. I would like to thank the staff of Rugby Canada's Development Department and the Rugby Football Union (England) for their support in putting this excellent coaching resource together.

As the Director of Rugby, I am delighted that this manual will serve to support teachers, coaches, and young players to focus on the positional and individual skills required to fulfill the fundamental roles in playing the game.

As coaches and teachers have the responsibility to prepare the strategic and tactical aspects of the game, it is important that players focus on the core skills including the development of their own skills in relation to their position. Strength and conditioning fitness are integral to the success of any player looking to participate in a performance environment.

Rugby players of all ages need to be diligent and pay close attention to the following aspects of Rugby:

Skills	Fitness	Rest and recovery
Sleep	Relaxation	Diet
Work	Education	Family
Match Play	Understanding of the Game	

All rugby players need to be committed and it is important to plan their rugby diary carefully so as to dedicate an appropriate amount of time towards each of the aspects noted above.

Rugby Canada wishes every player, coach, and teacher much success in developing the skills needed to move from grassroots rugby to the Rugby World Cup playing fields.



Martin Gallagher
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PREPARING YOURSELF FOR RUGBY

Due to the nature of the game, contact is frequent. You will need to ensure that you condition your body to cope with the many demands of rugby. This includes attention to improving:

- Strength (developing your muscular bulk);
- Speed (developing movement of your limbs);
- Flexibility (developing the movement range of your joints);
- Stamina (increasing the amount or length of time your muscles work);
- Power (developing the explosive strength in your muscles).

You should ask your coach or PE teacher for advice on improving your fitness relative to your age and playing level.

WARM UP

Before any physical activity (match or training session), it is essential that your body be prepared for exercise.

One method of warming up is outlined below, but there are others. The key is not to go straight into hard physical activity without undertaking a thorough warm up of the body beforehand.

- Wear appropriate/warm clothing to start with;
- Begin with gentle jogging (preferably with a ball) to increase your core body temperature;
- In between jogging, stretch all of your muscle groups;
- Ensure you hold the stretch for around 10-15 seconds before having another jog;
- Gradually increase the intensity of your jogging.

COOL DOWN

Cooling down your body after exercise is equally as important as warming up. Gently reducing your heart rate towards normal and stretching your muscles again will help to keep you flexible and prevent your muscles from becoming 'stiff' over the next couple of days.

You will also find that you may be able to stretch further than you did in your warm up. This is because your muscles have been used and are warmer. It is a good idea to hold your stretches in a cool down for 14-20 seconds so that you become more flexible, and less prone to injury.

KEY SKILLS FOR RUGBY

All players, whatever your position, should acquire competencies in the following skills:

- Ball delivery
- Receiving
- Tackling and defending
- Contact
- Running agility
- Kicking

HEALTHY EATING

Eating and drinking appropriately are essential for everyone, but particularly for those involved in sport. A healthy diet is one that supplies the right amounts of energy and essential nutrients for good health and physical performance. It should provide the right proportions of carbohydrate, fat, protein, as well as water and fiber. The main 'fuels' used by exercising muscles are carbohydrates and fats. The amount of each of these fuels used depends upon the type, intensity and duration of the exercise.

PROP



POSITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

GENERAL

To scrummage, both props must be extremely strong in the neck, shoulders, upper body, and legs. They should relish one-to-one contact. In the lineout, they should be able to support or lift the jumper (if allowed) to prevent the opposition winning the ball.

In today's game, props need to be able to handle the ball, deliver quality passes, support play, and tackle well.

SCRUM

Loose head – the player who wears number 1 and scrummages on the left-hand side of the front row. His job is to ensure the scrum does not move backwards and support the hooker by holding up his

opponent, which allows the hooker to see and strike the ball. He has to resist pressure from the opposition and have a stance that allows the ball to go back of the scrum from the strike.

Tight head – the player who wears number 3 and scrummages on the right-hand side of the front row. His job is to ensure the scrum is solid and does not move backwards, and support the hooker by holding a square-on position. With both shoulders in contact, he can provide additional pressure on the opposition's scrum.

Front rows must engage the opposition using the following sequence:

Crouch-Touch-Pause-Engage

PRACTICES

SCRUM

- Practice scrummaging (on a machine and against opposition) whilst supervised
- Practices should include individual work, work with the hooker, and work as a front row.

LINEOUT

- Practice correct supporting technique for lineout jumpers (U16d and above)
- Practice blocking and binding techniques to protect the ball and jumper

RUCK AND MAUL

- Practice correct, low driving techniques – make an impact with your shoulders, drive powerfully from the legs through a series of short steps

CONTACT (opposed 1 v 1 in groups of 4)

Equipment: 1 ball

Aim: to practice diving and mauling

Prop, P, passes the ball to player A, who catches and holds the ball into chest. P drives into A and should attempt to wrestle the ball off him. This should be repeated on players B and C. Ensure A, B and C stays high enough to allow the prop to adopt a lower position. The resistance provided by the opposition in the wrestling should be such that the prop has to work hard to win the ball but is able to secure it in a few seconds. Repeat as appropriate.



CONTACT (opposed 1 v 1)

Equipment: nil

Aim: to develop neck and shoulder strength

Player A should adopt a press-up position but on their knees. Player B should position themselves in the fully extended press-up position with arms bound around A.

- B tries to lift A by driving from his feet and lifting from his head
- B tries to resist downward pressure by A

HOOKER



POSITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

GENERAL

The hooker is a key team member; one of the spine of the team – 15, 10, 9, 8, 2. He tends to be the coordinator at the scrum and lineout. The hooker can play a similar role to the flanker due to his role as thrower at the lineout. The lineout is a key area of possession, and if the hooker throws the ball in, he must ensure that it is accurate to enable his receiver to maintain possession.

SCRUM

The hooker grips his props under the armpits and pulls them towards him; the props should bind around the hooker to ensure that they act as one solid unit.

The hooker strikes for the ball (usually with his right foot) and propels it through the loose-head prop's legs at the right pace and direction (usually channel 1 or 2)

The hooker may also try to put pressure on his opponent when it is the opposition's put in; he does this by either driving on him, or striking for the ball – sometimes called 'a strike against the head'.

LINEOUT

The hooker is the team's flanker at the front of the lineout, who is able to clear up any spilled ball or attack with ball in hand. He must also throw accurately, protect or react to any loose ball, and threaten the opposition ball.

PRACTICES

SCRUM

- Practice scrummaging (on a machine and against opposition) while supervised
- Practices should include individual work, work with the props, and work with the scrum half on:
 - Timing of the strike of the ball, speed of the strike, and direction (channel 1 or 2)

- Body position for the strike, and for the eight-man shove

LINEOUT

- Practice accurate throwing (e.g. a torpedo throw)
- Always practice using a target (e.g. a rugby post, a mark on a wall, a player)
- Try and work under match conditions (e.g. three short shuttle runs, and throw the ball in and repeat)
- There are various types of throws, but



one of the basic ways to carry out a throw is as follows:

- Hold ball in front of chest in two hands in a flat position
- The throwing hand supports the ball underneath on right-hand side of the ball (if thrower is right-handed)
- Spread the fingers along the seam of the ball
- The non-throwing hand rests on top, on the left-hand side of the ball
- Take the ball back over the head, with the right hand now at the back of the ball, and the left hand at the front
- Keep the eyes focused on the intended target
- Throw 'soccer style' with power derived from a quick action

SPEED AND ANGLE OF STRIKE

Equipment: a support for the right arm

Aim: to practice striking quickly with the right leg and coordinating timing

- From a supported sitting position, with the right arm taking the weight of the body, the hooker should strike, on a given signal, towards the left as on his own put-in.
- With the scrum half putting the ball in as required, the hooker should vary his strike to channel the ball (use only the left prop, hooker, and scrum half at this stage)
- Add additional front row players as necessary and emphasize the control needed on striking to channel the ball. Eventually, the opposition front row should apply weight at varying heights

LOCK

POSITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

GENERAL

The lock is a key ball winner in many areas of the field, but particularly in the lineout and restarts. As the locks tend to be bigger players, and are difficult to tackle, they should be competent at running with the ball in hand.

SCRUM

The lock, as an individual, must have an excellent scrummaging technique, which contributes to the total effectiveness of the scrum as a unit. The locks provide the 'powerhouse' drive of the scrum, and therefore have to work closely with their props to optimize the drive. They should develop strong bind through the props' legs (or around the hips for U12s), pulling the prop onto their own shoulder. The two locks should also bind so that they pull each other's hips close together, and have a flat back, ready to drive.



LINEOUT

The locks tend to jump to retrieve the ball in the lineout. Locks need to develop their ability to jump from a stationary position, or moving forwards and backwards. They should be expert at catching the ball while in the air in a variety of situations (e.g. one-handed, two-handed, in front of the jumper, or arching backwards to catch a looping ball). Locks also need to be strong in the arms and upper body to resist competition in the air for the ball from opponents.

RESTARTS

Similar to the lineout, the lock, being one of the taller and stronger players, should seek to catch the ball from their own opponents' restart kicks. They should practice

trying to take the ball as high as possible, by either catching, or catching and playing the ball back towards his players.

PRACTICES

SCRUM

- Practice scrummaging (on a machine and against opposition) while supervised
- Practices should include individual work, work with his fellow lock and with the front three and back row on:
 - Body position, dynamic driving position – flat back, legs in driving position



back again. Repeat as required.

LINEOUT

- Practice jumping going forwards, backwards and straight up, leading with the left foot and right foot
- Practice catching the ball in the air with one hand and two hands
- Basketball is an excellent game for developing handling and jumping skills

JUMPING (individuals unopposed in groups of 8)

Equipment: 3 corner flags

Aim: to develop height in jumping

- Three corner flags should be held as hurdles, at an appropriate height off the ground to suit the jumpers, by three pairs of players. The corner flags should be held parallel to the ground on top of open, upturned palms and to be 1 meter apart or at a distance to suit the jumpers.
- The two jumpers, working singly or as a pair, should jump sideways off both feet over the hurdles, extending their arms fully, moving along the three hurdles and

FLANKER



POSITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

GENERAL

Flankers form part of the back row of the forwards. They may play left or right of the scrum or **'open'** and **'blind'** of the scrum. Together with the number 8, flankers are the essential link in ensuring that play maintains its movement forward – they retain possession, recycle the ball, and give the team continuity. In defence, they are key players in winning possession from opponents.

SCRUM

A flanker's first role at the scrum is to push and add stability to the pack. If the flanker is on the side of the put-in, he should be helping to control the ball, if required, when the hooker has struck it. Once the scrum is over, flankers should be first away to support

play. On opponents' scrums, flankers should add to the eight-man drive and be up quickly to defend once the ball is played.

LINEOUT

The flanker's role in the lineout is varied. One flanker, often the stronger of the two, helps to support or lift a jumper, whilst the other, often the quickest and best ball handler, stands at the back of the lineout to support the attack and sweep up. In defensive lineout, the flanker at the back will look to put pressure on the opposition backs.

DEFENCE

In defence, the flankers must pressure the opposition inside backs. At the tackle area, flankers try and disrupt possession by either stealing the ball on contact, stepping over the ball and driving off opponents (if it is grounded), or by picking the ball up.

CONTINUITY/OPEN PLAY

A flanker should ensure that he is in support of play as often as possible. He should be a competent ball carrier, able to manage contact in the tackle area, and ensure that possession of the ball is maintained.

PRACTICES SCRUM

- Practice scrummaging (on a machine and against opposition) whilst supervised
- Practices should include individual work, and work with the front five and back row on:
 - Body position, dynamic driving position – flat back, legs in driving position;
 - Back row moves and plays



LINEOUT

- Practice correct supporting technique for lineout jumpers (U16s and above)
- Practice blocking and binding techniques to protect the ball and jumper
- Practice jumping techniques as per a lock

OPEN PLAY

- Practice running with backs and number 8 to learn
 - Backs' timing and alignment
 - Support play and decisions at the contact area
 - Practice playing the ball before, during, and after contact
 - Practice supporting the ball carrier – when to receive a pass and which running line to take
- Practice falling on loose ball and playing the ball off the floor

NUMBER 8



POSITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

GENERAL

The number 8 is usually a ball carrier, with good quality running and handling skills, and an aggressive tackler. As a key decision-maker, he is part of the spine of the team – 2, 8, 9, 10 and 15.

As part of the back row, he should work closely with his flankers to provide the essential link that maintains a forward movement of play. The number 8 must retain possession, recycle the ball and give the team continuity. In defence, he is an important figure in winning possession of the ball from the opposition.

SCRUM

In the scrum, the number 8 binds the locks together by having his shoulders against each player, whilst his arms pull them inwards. As he drives, this helps to transmit all the force in the scrum forwards. The number 8 has to control the ball at the back of the scrum with his feet, whilst maintaining his binding on the locks. He may need to transfer the ball to his right foot to allow his scrum half to pass the ball without interference from the opposite number 9. The number 8 may also pick up the ball from the scrum to start any back row moves.

LINEOUT

Traditionally, a number 8 has been a third lineout jumper due to his size. However, number 8s now may be required to lift or support a jumper.

DEFENCE

The number 8 should work with his flankers to provide defensive cover close to the breakdown or inside his own backs. If a flanker has been beaten on the inside, then the number 8 should be in a position to make the tackle. At the scrum, the number 8 should be the second tackler, after the flanker, around the sides of the scrum.

CONTINUITY/OPEN PLAY

The number 8 should ensure that he is in support of play as often as forward to the breakdown from scrums. He should be a competent ball carrier, be able to manage contact in the tackle area and ensure that possession of the ball is maintained.

PRACTICES SCRUM

- Practice scrummaging (on a machine and against opposition) whilst supervised
- Practices should include individual work, and work with the front five and back row on
 - Body position, dynamic driving position – flat back, legs in driving position
 - Back row moves and ploys
 - Controlling the ball at feet whilst static and whilst moving forwards or backwards
 - Timing of the pick up and drive or pick up and pass
 - 'Locking out' the scrum



LINEOUT

- Practice correct supporting technique for lineout jumpers (U16s and above)
- Practice blocking and binding techniques to protect the ball and jumper
- Practice jumping techniques as per a lock

OPEN PLAY

- Practice running with the backs and flankers to learn
 - Backs' timing and alignment
 - Support play and decisions at the contact area
 - Practice playing the ball before, during and after contact
 - Practice supporting the ball carrier – when to receive a pass and which running line to take

SCRUM HALF

POSITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

GENERAL

The scrum half is the key player in the team. He is at the center of all that happens. He is the link between the forwards and the backs, the coordinator who dictates when the ball goes and what happens next.

He is the key player in deciding the calls at lineout and scrums, an accurate passer of the ball, a good tackler, quick off the mark, an evasive runner, a motivator, a decision maker, a reader of the game and a tactician.

PASSING

The scrum half must be able to pass the ball quickly, without delay, off either left or right hand accurately, to the receiver.

KICKING

Ideally, the scrum half should be able to kick with either foot and should be able to effect high 'box' kicks over scrums, lineout, rucks, or mauls. To execute these kicks successfully, he should use the protection of the breakdown, scrum or lineout, and take only one step back as he performs the kick.

RUNNING

A scrum half that can make a break using powerful acceleration will present a threat to the opposition. However, this should be done selectively, where there are gaps in defence.

DEFENCE

In scrum defence, the scrum half may play a number of roles. He should work closely with his back row and be one of the first players to tackle. He could also decide to follow the ball around if the opposition back-row picks and go. He could decide to concentrate on pressuring the opposition's fly half if the ball is passed. At rucks and mauls, the scrum half is likely to be a defensive organizer.





PRACTICES

TECHNIQUE AND SKILL

- ❑ Practice under varying pressure to the left and right
 - The standing pass
 - The pivot pass
 - The drive pass
 - The reverse pass

- ❑ Practice passing the ball when receiving it from a lineout, scrum, ruck, or maul

- ❑ Practice high hanging kicks off his right and left feet to land in a marked area for accuracy.

FLY HALF



POSITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

GENERAL

The number 10 is the pivotal position in the team. The fly half is a key decision maker, as he will often decide the direction (left or right) and width (close or wide) of the next play, or the depth of the kick (short or long). He could also decide to run the ball and make a break.

ATTACK

The fly half should decide how 'flat' he could take the ball (close to the gain line) in order to threaten the defence. He may

attempt to break or retain possession on contact. He is also responsible for bringing his centers, wings, and forwards into play with a variety of passes or kicks.

DEFENCE

The fly half plays a full role in defence as a tackler and he will help to co-ordinate back line defence from set pieces.

KICKING

The fly half should be a competent kicker out of hand to add to his attacking capabilities. He should be able to make high hanging kicks, chips, grubber, and diagonal kicks, with the key aim of retaining possession. He often restarts play with drop kicks. He may also have to make clearing kicks to 'touch' under pressure in defence.

PRACTICES

TECHNIQUE AND SKILL

- ❑ Practice receiving the ball from his scrum half from both sides and at varying lengths of pass
- ❑ Practice receiving a ball and making a break using explosive acceleration
- ❑ Practice evasive running skills to avoid contact and beat defenses

- All types of kicks should be practiced with either foot under varying pressure – using a series of targets
- Practice kicking towards touch but keeping the ball in play to force the opposition to concede a lineout



CENTRE



POSITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

GENERAL

A center is a key decision maker when his team is in possession. He must decide instantly whether to pass, kick, or make contact and retain the ball, or make a break. In defence, the centre is often required to tackle his opponent.

ATTACK

A centre should have the confidence to take on and beat his opponent and play the ball out of the tackle. Centres are often involved in set moves from the scrum and lineout. They should be prepared to read the game and anticipate what happens next from open play. The centre should be able to deliver a variety of short and long passes, kick diagonally, high or grubber style, to beat flat defenses.

DEFENCE

The defence of the centres must be coordinated and watertight. As a general rule, centres should advance towards the opposition together in a flat line and on the 'inside' (nearest the breakdown) of their opponents to ensure that they are pushed away from their main support.

CONTACT

Centres need to have excellent contact skills. They are often the first tacklers in defence. They should be able to retain the ball in contact and support the new ball carrier after a pass.

PRACTICES

TECHNIQUE AND SKILL

- Practice receiving and passing the ball from left and right
- Practice different lines of running by changes of direction into gaps rather than running at opponents
- Practice receiving a ball and making a break using explosive acceleration
- Practice evasive running skills to avoid contact and beat defenses
- All types of kicks should be Practiced with either foot under varying pressure – using a series of targets.



WING

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POSITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

GENERAL

Chosen for flair, speed, and elusiveness, a winger must also be reliable in defence and be able to kick and to deal with opposition kicks. Wingers must have a high work rate and go looking for the ball if it is not coming in their direction. They should be able to read the game and anticipate what happens next.

ATTACK

The winger should have excellent handling skills, should be able to beat opponents by speed, change of pace, evasion and hand-off. He should be able to keep the ball alive by either

taking a tackle and passing the ball to a supporting player, or staying on his feet as long as possible, or by initiating a counter attack with his other wing and/or full back. The winger should have excellent ball retention skills on contact and must contribute fully to maul, ruck and tackle situations.

DEFENCE

Defensively, from the scrum and lineout, the open-side wing may stand wide and deep to ensure that if the opposition kicks diagonally, he will be able to gather the kick more easily. However, once the ball has gone through the attacking fly half's hands, he must rapidly move forward to be in a position to tackle in conjunction with his outside centre. Alternatively, the open-side wing could operate flat with his centres from the beginning. As a blind-side wing, he must understand his role in conjunction with his own back row and scrum half when defending in the 22 metre area and be prepared to cover across the field if the attack goes open.

RECEIVING

Numbers 14 and 11 should be able to field a variety of diagonal, high, or grubber kicks.

KICKING

To deal with opposition kicks by kicking clear to touch, by kicking long into opposition territory or by initiating a counter attack with the full back and/or other wing/centres

PRACTICES

TECHNIQUE AND SKILL

- Practice, against opposition under varying pressure, taking a pass and then
 - Running with the ball at pace
 - Evading the opposition by change of pace, change of direction, sidestep and swerve
 - Passing to support
 - Chipping and chasing
 - Making the ball available in a tackle
- Practice, under varying pressure, both moving towards and away from his own line, fielding high balls into the box and diagonal, rolling balls to the wing. Learn how to preserve space, pull defenders in and then swerve outwards to beat the defender (or pass to a looping support player).



FULL BACK

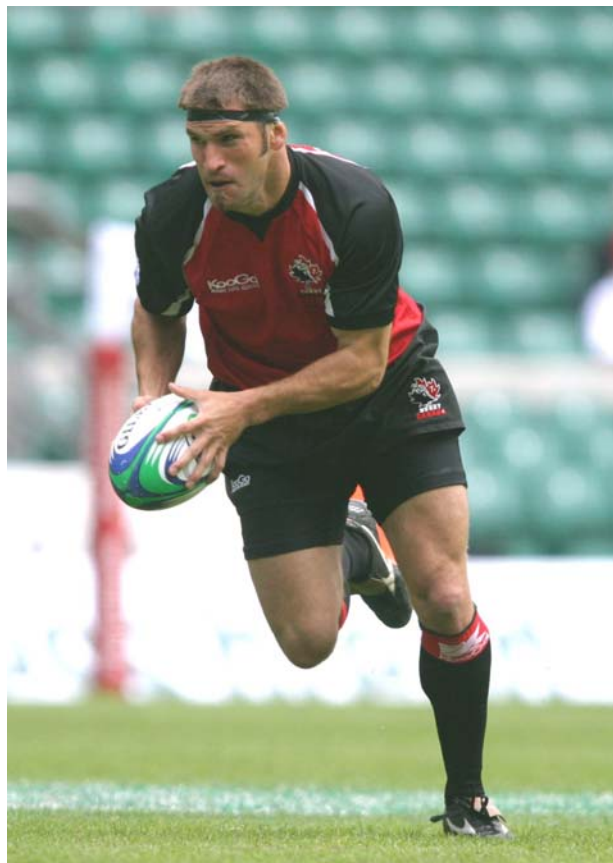
POSITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

GENERAL

The full back often has greater opportunity, time and space to read the game as it unfolds in front of him in attack or defence. The ability to read the game and to anticipate what happens next is a key quality in a full back.

ATTACK

The full back, whilst attacking, should look to be involved by either being a 'strike runner' (coming from depth into a gap and receiving a ball) or acting as a decoy runner to hold the attention of the defence. The full back can vary where he comes in to the line, but should do so at pace. If the ball is kicked into his own half, the full back should look to link up with other players such as his wingers and counter attack.



KICKING

The full back often has to execute a range of kicks, some to relieve pressure, some to counter attack.

DEFENCE

The full back is often the last line of defence. He should help to organize the defence, as he has a wider vision than most players. If a player makes a break, he should shorten the thinking time of the attacker by moving towards him in a controlled manner, shepherding him towards the touchline.

FIELDING/CATCHING

The full back has to deal with a range of kicks from opponents. Catching them in the air before they bounce is preferable; he will however, have to deal with long kicks and pick up or fall on the ball whilst it is rolling along the ground.

PRACTICES

TECHNIQUE AND SKILL

- Practice under varying pressure, both moving towards and away from his own line
 - Fielding high balls into the box
 - High balls under the post
 - Diagonal rolling balls to the wing
 - Grubber kicks through the centre
 - Chip kicks

- Practice, under varying pressure, from each of these fielding situations, the following:
 - Screw kicks
 - Bouncing the ball into touch when outside the 22 metre line
 - Running in counter attack, evading the tackle
 - Kicking into effective areas (e.g. 'up and under', diagonal rolling ball to wing, including kicks that stay on the field and put pressure on opponents.

- Practice, with a partner, kicking towards a target/target area.

