

# Top Tips for Coaches

**Tip 1 Juggle Bottles For Better Hands** This is a top tip for a player who has notoriously bad hands. Make them juggle plastic bottles. Start with one from hand-to-hand and then progress from there. The hands will adjust to the size of the bottle and the way it falls, replicating the oval shape of the ball and its unusual arrival at times. This improvement technique has been proven to work!

**Tip 2 Defensive Kicking** Out of defence do you always need to kick for touch? It could be better to kick the ball up the field near to the touchline. With only a winger to gather the ball it may be possible to close them down and turnover the ball. They might even run into touch. This avoids an opposition lineout. A box kick, a short kick over the defence, is very effective in this situation. Also, remember attacking sides least expect you to attack when you are in your own 22, so have a go.

**Tip 3 Kick Right For The Advantage** Some coaches say that it is better to kick right from the kick off, even if the kicker is right footed. This is because most players are right handed, therefore making it easier for your chasers to challenge for the ball with their stronger hand (assuming that your players are mainly right handed). It also means that opposition teams are more likely to kick for touch from this side and will find it more difficult to use long passes to move the ball away from this part of the field.

**Tip 4 Feedback - the England way** The England international side, albeit with the luxury of 10 minutes at half time, will split their team into groups to feedback at half time to each other on how aspects of the game are going. With less experienced teams this can be done by splitting the forwards and backs for a few minutes to talk about key aspects of the game. A group leader might have a checklist of areas to discuss and see what they might do to improve. A card with this checklist could be given to the player as they split off. Of course, if there are two coaches then they could facilitate the meeting. Best practice rugby union coaching techniques

**Tip 5 Holding Bags** Holding rucking shields poorly can cause unnecessary injury – this is because players tend to put their arms through the straps (increasing the risk of a broken arm) or hold the bags loosely with their wrists. Pull the bag tightly into the hip, with the hitting area as low as possible and lean forward. Alternatively, do as the England team have been doing in certain exercises – hug the bag, so the elbows are just above the hitter's target. This encourages the players to go lower and drive up. For more quick and easy tips like these, plus in-depth coaching ideas, subscribe to Rugby Coach newsletter.

**Tip 6 When The Scrum Is Not Working** What to say at half time:

- Sit lower, engage lower
- Bind tighter
- Hit square

**Tip 7 Load Of Old Balls** Keep old balls at the end of the season. They make excellent teachers of technique because they do not have the same grip as the new balls at the start of the season. Players will not sink into bad habits by carrying the ball in one hand, or executing unlikely passes under pressure. They can also be used as lighthearted forfeits for groups not performing well (paint one pink perhaps!)

**Tip 8 Make Drills Enjoyable And Effective** To make your drills enjoyable and effective, ensure there is a clear purpose and target – make them SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timed. e.g. "During this next half hour session we will reduce the number of dropped balls by 10%." This helps to build in a chance of success and provides a clear outcome.

**Tip 9 Clap Hands** To help make your players put their hands in the right place, as well as encourage more accurate passing, try this piece of magic. In a group of players, some of them carrying a ball, without saying anything, look at a ball-carrying player, clap your hands towards them persistently, and lo and behold the ball will be passed to you. In practices, encourage your players to clap their hands towards the ball carrier. The hands will then be in the right place to receive the pass. Best practice rugby union coaching techniques

**Tip 10 Tips for the Engagement**

Loose head

- Make your neck short and chin up.

- Try to move head to sternum of opposite player.

When the ball enters, LIFT and THRUST.  
Wide solid base.

Tight head  
Hips square and tight on hooker.  
Be as low as the hooker demands.

Hooker  
Get as low as possible (legally).  
In defence drive onto opposition's hooker and pressurise the strike.

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**Tip 11 Think Like The Enemy** When designing plays or patterns and then trying to put them into practice, it is often good to make your players try to see the move from the point of view of the defence. Perhaps practice the move with a key player watching from a defensive position, before integrating that player back into the move.

### **Tip 12 Creating Pressure In Drills**

Set a time limit to achieve a number of passes or tacklers.  
Make the drill area smaller.  
Add more balls or tackles.

**Tip 13 Bonus Plays** A prop props and a wing scores tries. Both are true, but to make a team really move forward, each player should be conditioned to offer bonus plays. Bonus plays are pieces of skill or action that are performed by players beyond their normal duty. For instance a prop may carry the ball forward more often or make open field tackles, a winger may ruck or maul when they are the first player to the break down. For each player it is worth identifying areas in which they can add value by performing these extra tasks. Sometimes the sight of a hooker chipping and chasing can bring tears to the eyes, but if executed well, it is a bonus play for the team.

**Tip 14 Name Names In Defence** When you are defending in broken play it is sometimes the case that players need to realign and cover areas of weakness, e.g. an overload on the blindside. Shouts like "cover the blindside" often pass over the heads of the closest players, who will be looking ahead and concentrating on the narrow tunnel in front of them. A name will be more effective because it has a more powerful pull on the player. So in defensive practices, name names. e.g. "John, cover the blindside".

**Tip 15 Don't Be Clever At The First Lineout** Referees want to stamp their authority and style on the game as soon as possible. The first scrum and first lineout will be the moment when they spend a little more time sorting out the positions. This causes a problem if you have a special lineout tactic, perhaps a shortened quick lineout, which relies on catching an opposition's unawareness. This will often be thwarted at the first lineout, because the referee will be insisting on the right gaps etc, slowing down the whole process. Instead choose a lineout play that takes time to set up.

**Tip 16 Left Shoulder Tackle Practice** Which shoulder do most players tackle with? Assuming that most players are right sided, then the answer is the right shoulder. Even in practices it is difficult to persuade players of many different abilities to tackle with their weak side. Assuming most sides practice tackling very little, then there is not much tackling practice going on with their left shoulders. So practice taking contact attacking the left shoulder of the defender.

**Tip 17 Multi Directional Warm-Up** Coaches are much wiser these days. They say things like always warm up with the ball, because that's more like the real game. But consider this: some players rarely see the ball, but what they do a lot of is move around in different directions. And this is what a wise coach should be saying about the warm up. Running up and down passing is not multi-directional; players should be zigzagging, running sideways, skipping backwards, jumping up, falling onto and getting off the floor, turning 90 or 180 degrees, and so on. Of course, the ball plays a part in all this, but from the kick off, the defending side could easily be doing all those previous exercises in the first 30 seconds and 90% of them won't have touched the ball.

**Tip 18 Chip And Chase** A good tip for chip and chase (provided by Jon Webb, former Bath and England full back): drop the ball from the middle of your body, and kick it on its point. By dropping the ball and not throwing it up you do not break your stride. By kicking it on the end means it will rise higher, quicker, and if it bounces it will bounce forward or backwards rather than sideways.

**Tip 19 Think Ball** . . . Kevin Bowering, former Welsh National Coach and now in charge of Elite Coaching for the English RFU, has often told players to "Think Ball" at his coaching sessions. Players should bring players to the floor as quickly as possible and get to their feet as quickly as possible to be a position to retrieve the ball. Don't think the tackle is the end of the process - immediately "Think Ball".

**Tip 20 Spring Load Your Scrum** It has been noticeable that a number of teams at defensive scrums have been using the number 8 to pull the two locks backwards just before engagement. This has acted like a spring-loaded drive when the teams engage, as well as helping to square the hips of the locks, so they have "spine in line". The Number 8 holds the top of the shorts of the locks, leans back as the props sit to engage and then drives in.