



Attacking Play – Handling Technical Development Program

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Program Outcomes

This program is designed for elite USA Rugby players and is designed to develop their technical passing skills. The players can work on this program while not at the assembly.

The outcomes of the sessions are that the players will be able to:

- Catch the ball consistently with their finger tips
- Catch the ball away from the body
- Use their wrists to provide power on to the pass
- Carry the ball across their body in one movement and plane
- Keep their hips square while being able to catch and throw a pass

The drills can be done for 1, 2, 3 or 4 players. This program is only focused on technical develop and National Team coaches should work on the skill development at the assembly.

The handling program will cover 3 basic passes:

- Flat pass
- Pop pass
- Spin pass

Players will develop the technical proficiency to be able to execute each of these passes.

Flat pass – this is a “normal” pass thrown with no spin or rotation on the ball. This pass is the quickest through the hands because it does not require specific hand position. For the majority of players, this should be the predominant pass they use.

Pop pass – this pass is used to exchange possession with a teammate that is running a tight line, either on a loop, inside loop, switch or strike line. The ball is left in the air for their teammate, giving them a greater chance to catch the ball cleanly

Spin pass – the spin pass is used to stretch the defense with a wide pass. It is most effective when the hand position is correct and a long accurate pass is needed.

Passing Fundamentals

The pass is broken into 5 parts:

- The Catch
- The Carry
- The Snap
- The Follow-through
- Body and Hip Position

The Catch

The catch is vital for the player to be able to execute a good pass. To be able to catch the ball cleanly the player must be prepared to catch by have their hands out towards the ball with their arms bent. Their hands must be close together and have their fingers pointing towards the ball carrier. Many players find it difficult to disconnect their upper and lower body, and so it can take practice to be able to run straight and have their hands prepared to catch.

To be able to catch the ball effectively the player must move both hands towards the ball and “softly” catch it in their finger tips. You create soft hands by giving a little when the ball is about to reach them. The ball should be caught with the hands still out towards the passer.

To be able to catch the ball so you can throw a spin pass quickly, the player needs to catch the ball so they can pass it without any adjustments. The ideal hand position has the hands shifted slightly with the lead hand (left hand if passing to the left) nearer the back of the ball so it can provide power, and the power hand nearer the front of the ball. The player should have their fingers around the ball and they should only see their thumbs. For a flat pass the player should catch the ball in the middle, and should also only see their thumbs.

To get the hands into the right position should trap the ball on their lead hand with their power hand. The ball will strike the lead hand a little early and then the power hand will come in and trap it. It takes some work to get used to catching the ball so you can pass a spin pass, and players need to be able to throw the pass without perfect hand position.

The Carry

Once the ball is caught the player must carry it across their body and prepare to pass. The player should also be in an “athletic” position with their shoulders slightly forward. The ball should be caught with the arms out towards the original passer, therefore giving the player the backswing to be able to generate power. Throughout the carry the player should have bent arms and the ball should never drop below the waist. The player should keep the ball out from their body and should not to bring it in, or adjust their hands. The more the ball is moving directly towards the target the more accurate and powerful the pass.

The Snap

The Snap is the use of the wrists, forearms and triceps to add power to the movement of the hands in the carry. Generally the snap is completed near the end of the passing motion to maximize the strength of the pass.

For a flat pass, the arms must be bent, with the back elbow away from the body. The player will snap their wrists and by rotating their hands and ending up with their little fingers pointing towards the target. During the snapping of the wrists, the player is also extended and straightening their arms quickly towards the target.

The spin pass is different as all power is generated by the back/power hand and arms. The back elbow for the spin pass is out and bent, and the back hand is underneath (“cocked”) the ball. As the player carries the ball across the body, the elbow must remain bent and the ball needs to remain cocked. After the ball has passed the belly-button of the passer, they accelerate their hands by “pushing” with their back elbow towards the target. Once the acceleration starts the back hand begins to rotate and come over the ball quickly and extend towards the target. The back hand will have put full power through the ball when the little finger is pointing up.

For the pop pass, the snap has a slightly different role. Instead of providing power to the pass, the snap is used to float the ball by pushing the ball slightly up on release.

The Follow-Through

The follow-through determines the direction of the pass and has a significant effect on the power generated. The hands should go towards and end up pointing directly at the target. Any motion around the body during the carry will affect the ability of the hands to end up in the correct motion. Swinging of the arms around the body will usually mean that passes go behind the target, and any upward motion (because the ball was dropped below the waist in the carry) will cause the pass to go high.

Body Position and Hips

The player should try to keep themselves in an athletic body position with a strong core, staying low and keeping their shoulders forward. This prepares the player for contact as well as allowing for a more natural carry. Standing upright will cause the player to rotate their hands around the body, creating inaccurate passes.

The goal for the passing program is to allow the player to be able to throw a variety of passes off either hand while keep their hips square. Rotating the hips can generate additional power, however it also cause horizontal rotation in the hands and may cause passes to be thrown in front or behind the target. Turning the hips also reduces the threat the ball carrier presents to the defense and can cause space for the attack to be destroyed.

Development Program

Coaches should consider this passing program similar to the strength and conditioning program. Players will go through a 3 week development cycle that progressively takes them through the exercises. Once a player has gone through the 3 week cycle they start again and increase their distance and/or their number of reps. The program asks players to work on their passing 3 times a week; however a coach can develop a more aggressive program.

Ideally the players have their passing assessed at each assembly, so they can track their development. It suggested that the coaches use the gauntlet drill with 4 pairs and video the players. A key part of the program is to help players understand their own skill, so they can coach themselves when not in an assembly. Players need to be able to assess honestly. The players should have a chance to watch tape of their assessment and their performance each assembly.

	L	R	Assessment Key
Flat pass			10 = all the time
Hands up and fingers forward			8 = most of the time
Catch to throw spin pass- no adjustment			5 = some of the time
Hands go across the body in one plane			1 = almost never
Hips stay square			
Flick wrists			
Follow-through is towards the target			
Flat pass			
Hands up and fingers forward			
Hips stay square			
Hands go across the body in one plane			
Flick wrists			
Follow-through is towards the target			
Pop Pass			
Hands up and fingers forward			
Hips stay square			
Flick wrists			
Put height on the ball			
Leave ball in space for supporter			

3 Week Program

Each session is designed to be 15-20 min in length. Player can choose their own exercise, or follow the program below.

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3
Session 1	Ball familiarization	Developing soft hands	Passing Technique
Session 2	Ball familiarization	Wrist Development	Passing Technique
Session 3	Developing soft hands	Wrist Development	Passing Technique

Week 1

Session 1

Exercise	Time	Record of Length/Reps
Finger tip drill	5 min	
Finger tip juggling	5 min	
Seated overhead drill	5 min	

Session 2

Exercise	Time	Record of Length/Reps
Finger tip drill	5 min	
Finger tip juggling	5 min	
Seated overhead drill	5 min	

Session 3

Exercise	Time	Record of Length/Reps
Quick hands	5 min	
Peripheral drill	5 min	
Turn and catch	5 min	

Week 2

Session 1

Exercise	Time	Record of Length/Reps
Peripheral drill	5 min	
Over shoulder	5 min	
Turn and catch	5 min	
Vacuum cleaner	5 min	

Session 2

Exercise	Time	Record of Length/Reps
Wrist flick	5 min	
Pair wrist flick	5 min	
Belly button passing facing	5 min	
Belly button passing sideways	5 min	

Session 3

Exercise	Time	Record of Length/Reps
Wrist flick	5 min	
Pair wrist flick	5 min	
Belly button passing facing	5 min	
Belly button passing sideways	5 min	

Week 3

Session 1

Exercise	Time	Record of Length/Reps
T-drill	5 min	
Spin pass hand position	5 min	
Triangle passing	5 min	

Session 2

Exercise	Time	Record of Length/Reps
No ball passing	5 min	
Walk/Shuffle/Jog passing	5 min	
Box passing	10 min	

Session 3

Exercise	Time	Record of Length/Reps
Attacking structures - switch	5 min	
Attacking structures wide pass	5 min	
Gauntlet	5 min	

Passing Exercises

The program includes exercises to develop a good pass. The exercises are split into developing soft hands for catching, wrist and forearm development to create strong rips and passing technique. Players should work to do at least one exercise for each area and then focus on the area that they need to develop. Most of the exercises can be done in 4 reps of 1 minute, with 1 min rest between reps. Players should be progressive in their approach and only do the final jogging exercise once they have developed the different areas of the pass.

Ball Familiarization

Finger Juggling

- This drill focuses on hand-eye coordination, and controlling ball with fingertips.
- Get in pairs or three's or even group of 4. Start with one ball. If in group of 4, can move onto two balls.
- Stand about a meter or so away, facing your partner. "Pop/pass/juggle" the ball back and forth in the air between you and your partner only by using your fingertips, one hand at a time. When ball comes to you in air, receive/collect it on your fingertips, and send back to your partner. Alternate between both hands. And go back and forth for a few minutes.
- Add a ball for additional pressure

Finger Tip Drill

- Each player has a ball and works the ball back and forth with their finger tips
- Arms out in front moving ball from side to side
- Arms to side moving ball from side to side over head

Over the Head Seated Drills

- Pairs sit facing one another with balls of feet against each other using one ball throws to partners' right hand from your left.
- As above except throw to partners left hand from your right
- Progression is to use 2 balls at same time.

Developing Soft Hands

Peripheral Vision

- This drill makes the player develop their peripheral vision and forces them to use their touch to catch the ball.
- The catcher stares at a spot that is not moving on the wall, or on a rugby post.
- The feeder is at the maximum angle to the side of the catcher for them to still see the ball clearly and about 5m away.
- The catcher puts up their target and must catch the ball while still staring at the spot on the wall.
- The catcher passes the ball back to the feeder.
- Goal is to increase the angle over time

Quick Hands

- Each player has a ball and hold the ball between their legs with their legs spread shoulder width apart. The player releases ball between legs and regather with hands behind legs
- Progression is the same with their eyes closed
- Next progression has one hand in front of legs holding ball and other behind release and regather ball whilst swapping hands. ie. Left hand from front to back; right hand from back to front

Over Shoulder

- Players drop the ball over the shoulder of their partner. Partner has to react to catch, keeping hands together
- The partners stand back to back. Throw ball over head for partner to react and catch

Turn and Catch

- Catcher and feeder at 5m away from each other.
- Catcher turns away and puts her back to the feeder.
- The feeder says go and the catcher turns around and needs to catch the ball that is fed around them.
- Catcher must use their wrists to flick the ball quickly and then turn back around.
- If on your own you can use a wall and throw the ball up at the wall and react to the bounce.

Vacuum Cleaner

- Catcher is in 10x10 grid
- Feeder can throw the ball anywhere in the grid and the catcher must go and get the ball and get it back as quickly as possible
- Ball can be thrown in the air or along the ground
- Catcher needs to stay low for balls on the ground and keep their feet moving
- Catcher needs to get the ball back to feeder as quickly as possible, either with a flick of the wrists or with a spin pass.
- If on your own you can use a wall, and a target on the wall. Throw the ball at the wall and when it comes back catch the ball and pass it to the target.

Wrist and Forearm Development

These exercises are designed to develop the strength in the wrist, the forearms and the triceps to be able to throw passes with power. Like most strength developing exercises, it is the process that is important, not the outcome. These should not be nice passes, but the passer should feel the work they are doing in their muscles.

Wrist Flick

- Player holds the ball at the belly-button and uses their wrists to flick the ball in the air and catches it with their finger tips
- Focus on the rotation of the hands so the little fingers point up.
- Players can do this while running for additional pressure.

Pair Wrist Flick

- The players face each other 5m apart (or as far as you can throw)
- The passer has the ball, point down in front of their belly button
- Their little fingers are at the back of the ball, with their thumbs on the front, and their arms bent.
- The passer “flicks” their wrists and straightens their arms towards the catcher. The little fingers rotate through the ball and end up pointing towards the target.

Belly-Button Passing Facing

- stand facing partner ~5m apart, using weighted or regular ball

Spin Pass

- hold towards the end of the ball in palm of hand, with fingers and thumb grasping as wide around ball and tightly as possible
- hold ball at center of body, in front of belly-button
- push the ball towards partner by focusing on “loading” your triceps and exploding arm towards your partner by utilizing triceps.

- Your wrist should start “palm up” when holding ball in front of belly-button. After the pass, arm should be straight pointing towards partner and wrist should have turned ~270 degrees, so the side of the pinky finger is now on top, and thumb is down towards the ground.
- * Focus on exploding and “ripping” the ball out of your hand by rotating wrist quickly and explosively.

Flat Pass

- Hold the ball in the center so you can only see your thumbs with point of ball up and down.
- Rotate ball by bringing back elbow out and up
- Snap wrists with no body movement or step, and little fingers should end up pointing towards the ball.
- * Focus: really focus on exploding arm forward by exploding triceps and pectoral muscle.

Belly-Button Passing Sideways

- Stand ~5-10m apart and to the side of partner. Both facing the same way.
- Hold ball towards end of the ball in palm of hand, with fingers and thumb grasping as wide around ball and tightly as possible
- Hold ball at center of body, in front of belly-button. Palm of hand holding the back of the ball should be underneath ball, facing up. Your second “lead” hand acts as a guide hand and starts off holding towards the front of the ball
- Push the ball towards partner by focusing on “loading” your triceps and exploding arm towards your partner by utilizing triceps.
- Your back wrist should start “palm up” when holding ball in front of belly-button. And there should be no backswing in arm to pass the ball. After the pass, both arms should be straight pointing towards partner and your back wrist should have turned ~270 degrees, so the side of the pinky finger is now on top, and thumb is down towards the ground (or as close as possible to achieve full rotation of wrist to give the ball an extra “snap”).
- * Focus: really focus on exploding arm across body and through to the passer by exploding triceps and pectoral muscle. After that motion focus on exploding and “ripping” the ball out of your hand by rotating wrist quickly and explosively.

Passing Technique

No Ball Passing

- The goal of the exercise is to help the player de-couple their upper body and their hips.
- The player runs and pretends to catch a ball and then pass it across their body.
- Key areas of focus is having your target up with your hands together, moving your hands across your body without dropping them below the waist, and finishing up towards the target.
- The hips should stay square and the stride should not break

T-Drill – Flat Pass

- 4 players stand in a “T” with the outside players 5 meters away from the center player – who is the focus. 2 balls start with the outside players.
- The balls always go through the center of the T, and the feeders pass the ball to the center once that player has passed the ball to another outside player.
- The center player needs to catch and pass the ball quickly, working keeping their hands up and together and not changing their grip.
- The feeders can pass the ball more quickly as the center becomes more effective.

Spin Pass Hand Position

- To throw a spin pass the hands need to be in the right place. Adjusting your hands takes time and slows down your pass.
- This is a simple drill that a player can do on their own or with a partner to work on their hand position.

- On your own – take a ball and decide which way you want to pass. Throw the ball in the air and try to catch the ball with your hands so you can pass it in the direction. Generally try to catch the ball on your lead hand, and then

Triangle Passing – Spin Pass

- 3 people needed, set 3 cones up in triangle shape, 2 corner cones make right angle with middle cone, 1 person on each one. Cones ~7-10m away from center cone.
- Person 1 starts at middle cone, faces into middle of triangle, standing so that other 2 cones are at 45 degree angle to them.
- Two people on outside cones, 1 at each cone. Both people have a ball. Take alternate turns passing spin passes (same pass and technique as in above drill, facing sideways to person being passed to, with little backswing, focusing on exploding wrists at end) to person at center cone.
- Person at center cone receives each pass, without moving/adjusting feet. Receives pass from person to their left, and passes it back from their right side. Vice versa when pass comes from person on the right. Outside person on cone to left of person in the middle is sending pass with left hand. Outside person on cone to the right sends pass from their right hand.
- Person in middle focusing on power in the pass coming from exploding triceps and wrist (late), keeping hands going through the target after pass.
- After each pass, person in middle receives pass from other side immediately. Middle person sends 40 passes total, each person on outside cone sends 20 passes from Left or Right hand (depending on cone). Then everyone rotates.

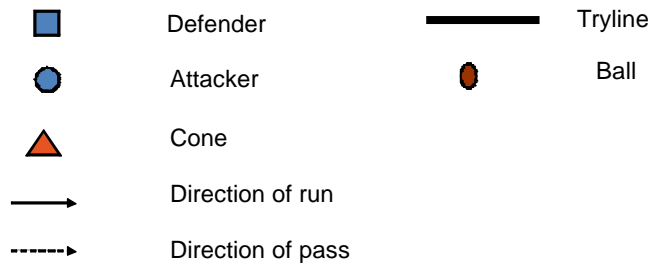
Walking/Shuffle/Jogging passing up and down field

- Can be done with 2 or 3 people
- With two people, line up on the try line, both people facing down the field, standing about 10 meters apart for spin pass and 5 meters apart for flat pass. (get further as passing ability/power increases)
- Both people walk, shuffle or slowly jog down the field, while passing between themselves (spin or flat depending on distance). Hips should stay facing forward while jogging and while passing.
- While passing, hips stay almost completely square facing front. Upper body/shoulders may turn to get the pass to partner. Small backswing allowed, but power in pass derived from “loading” triceps and exploding back wrist late. Back arm should make same movement as in passing drill #2, exploding from right angle starting formation in front of bellybutton, straight forward through to target. Hands should end up pointing through target. If pass is consistently going behind target, be aware of lead hand pointing behind the person.
- Walk/jog passing back and forth down the field until reaching other try line. Then turn around and repeat, so as to pass with opposite hand.

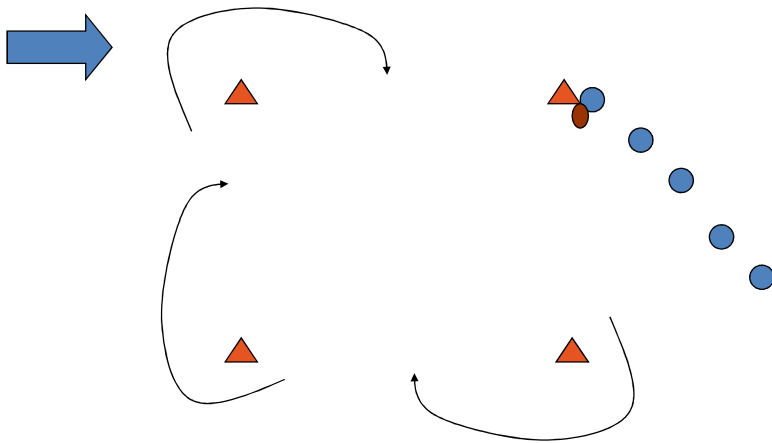
* Focus: really focus on power in pass coming from triceps and EXPLODING that back wrist late in the pass. Try not to “fall away” from pass as releasing ball in order to generate power, as you cannot still be an attacking threat if falling away from pass, your hips will no longer be facing forward, and you will lose power in your pass.

Game/Drill Structures

≠ Key to symbols:



Box Passing

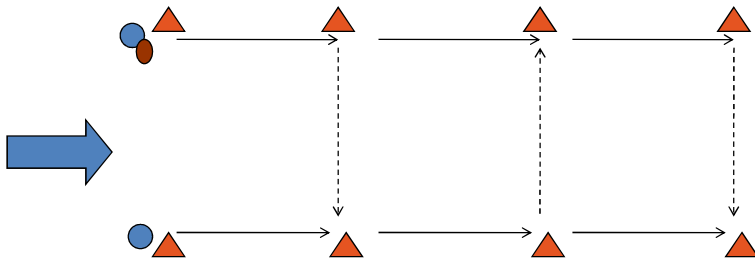


Groups of 5 need to attack inside the box. The goal of the players is to get the ball to the last player before he gets to the cone. They then have to realign around the cone and attack again.

Box Passing Outcomes

- Catch and throw passes under some pressure
- Setting alignment for attack line

Attacking Structures – Wide Pass

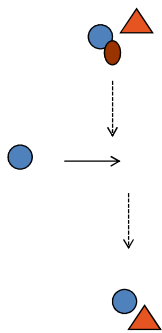


Players work in pairs. They run down the edge of the channel and throw long passes at each cone

Attacking Structures – Wide Passes Outcomes

- Throw wide flat passes while running
- Keep hips square
- Catch long passes at pace

Gauntlet Drill

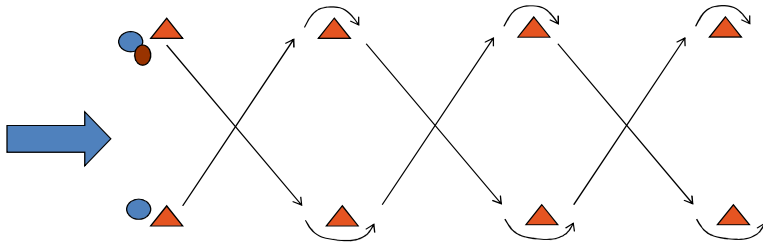


Players run down the middle of the gauntlet, catching and passing the ball. Add more
More players running to add pressure. Can shift receiving line to make it an easier pass.

Gauntlet Drill – Outcomes

- Throw wide flat passes while running
- Quick transfer of the ball across the body
- Keep hips square
- Catch passes at pace

Attacking Structures - Switches



Players work in pairs. Run the opposite cone and then execute a switch or a dummy switch in the middle.

Attacking Structures – Switches Outcomes

- Leave the ball in the air for the supporter
- Time run of supporter to take the ball at pace
- Catch pop pass at pace