

Back to Basics - Driving Play

This week, we take a step back to basics, and review the essential components of 'driving' play. This is often one of the first things people pick up when starting to play the game, however sometimes players and teams need to be reminded of some of the key points of driving play. Whilst your team may not score simply through driving upfield, it often provides the momentum from which line attack moves can be executed. Often teams which may not understand driving, go wide too early- trying to outflank a defence, however this can often lead to a team leaving the ball carrier isolated and a failure to 'go forward'.

When driving, players should be able to perform a number of key skills, accurately and under control, but still at speed. Players need to be able to perform a dynamic rollball on the mark with either hand, whilst initiating the Touch with non ball carrying hand. Players should also be able to pass accurately from the ground, picking the ball up cleanly and finally they should be comfortable catching and running with the ball. All these skills need to be performed under pressure and with control.

The aim of Driving play- GO FORWARD: Driving play is typically initiated from a team's own touchdown line (red zone), or within their own half. The aim is to progress up the field quickly with minimal risk and maximum yards. It may be that a team drive for a whole set of 6 Touches, or that once a team crosses the halfway line it may seek to set up for line attack. Driving play is all about creating forward momentum, from which other plays may flow. Teams might attempt to get the ball into the centre of the field as quickly as possible before they drive, if the ball is on the wing, this is often done by 2- passes infield from the initial rollball. This allows players to time their runs onto the ball from both sides of the rollball. Some teams may elect to drive up a sideline, possibly towards their sub box, allowing replacements to wrap wide into the long side of the field. Whatever the tactics of a team the aims remain the same, progress the ball quickly and safely up the field, avoiding basic errors such as overstepping the mark, voluntary rollballs, hesitation, dropped balls and avoid the ball being on the ground too long.

Effective driving will mean that a player in possession always perform a rollball for a Half, so that the ball is never on the ground too long (so that a defence can't re-organise). The Half should deliver an accurate pass from the ground, don't pick up and run themselves. The ball receiver should time their run onto the ball, so they don't overrun the ball. Upon receiving the ball, the receiver should slow down in anticipation of the next rollball.

The 'wedge' or 3 player drive: This is one of the most basic driving plays and requires 3 players. Player 1, the initial ball carrier, runs forward and initiates a touch on a defender- this should be done without delay so that the Half can follow easily. Once the rollball is performed, that player steps forward over the ball in preparation to become the next Half. Player 2, comes into Half and should deliver the ball to Player 3, the receiver, who has timed their run from depth. The receiver should angle their run back

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towards the original rollball, this is for 3 reasons: firstly, by running back towards the original rollball means that Player 1 is in position to be the next Half. Secondly, running back towards the original rollball attacks the defender who has just made the Touch, who is liable to be offside. Thirdly, running back towards the rollball allows Player 2 to 'wrap' (loop) the ball carrier and be an option for a pass. By wrapping out, Player 2 is also able to re-align to become the next receiver, and can time their run onto the ball. The process is repeated, as many times as required, and should result in good ground being made.

A team may wish to drive from alternate sides of the rollball, this is similar to the 3 player drive, with the Half wrapping towards the side they passed to. As a player 'hits' from one side of the rollball, the Half wraps to that side, and re-aligns to become a receiver for a third touch- not the next one.

This is a basic overview of driving play, it is an essential sub unit skill for a team, and should be practised at match intensity within training sessions.