

## *Deep Defense*

### The Pendulum and Other Scenarios

It is recommended you read this discussion online so links to videos can be easily accessed.

#### **The Deep Defense**

When we talk about defense in rugby what often comes to mind are concepts like taking away time and space, line speed and spacing. But the space behind the gain line must also be defended also. Let's call the defense of that space the Deep Defense.

Deep defense most often consists of four players, the number 9, 11, 15 and 14. Their job most of the time, is to be the auxiliary defense against the run and the primary defense against the kick. Most of the time, they're defending the space where the ball *might* be played. This does not mean they don't have to actually make plays. After all, if they position themselves well, they will be the last line of defense. They will have to make the catch or make the tackle that saves a try.

When the attacking team wins the ball the deep defense's first concern should be the attacking number 9 and 10. They will be the players who initially dictate whether the ball will be kicked down field or advanced in hand. If they are good players their decisions will be based on a number of predictable factors including field position, score, wind and field conditions. To stay a step ahead of them the people in the deep defense must also be aware of these factors.

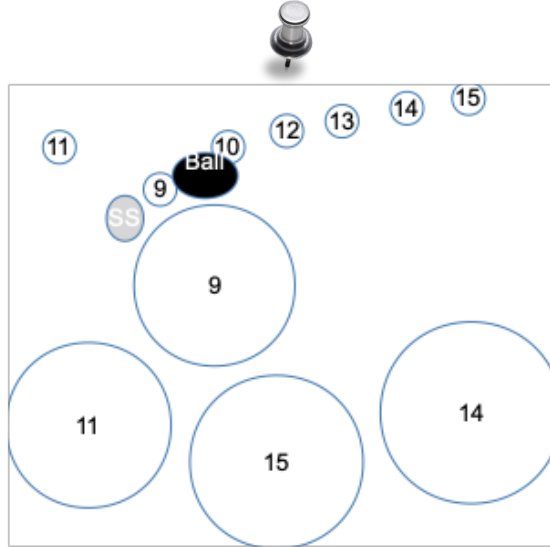
If you've played baseball you know that it is important to know the score, the number of outs, the base runners, the count on the batter, are they right handed or left, power hitter or not. Why wouldn't you do the same mental preparation in rugby given the chance?

Just like the fielders in baseball, the 9, 11, 14, 15 must work together to position themselves as a group to respond to what might happen next. They must work together and communicate.

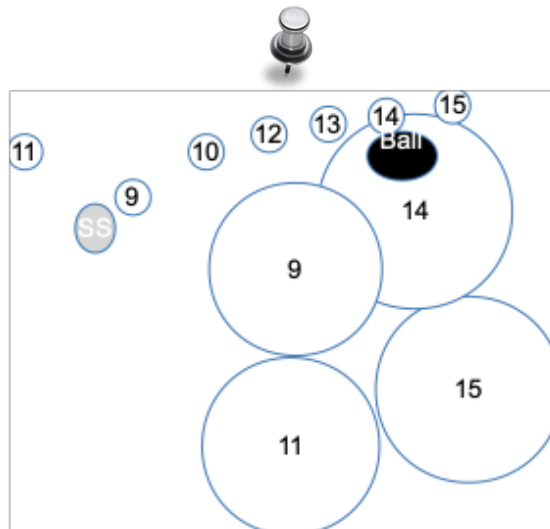
Imagine in baseball the right fielder, center fielder, second baseman respond to the presence of a left-handed pull hitter at bat by shifting to the first baseline and playing deep. But the third baseman and left fielder do not. It would leave a huge gap in left center to be exploited by the hitter. The same situation is created in rugby if the off side wing and scrum half do not respond to the ball being passed or kicked to the far side of the field.

#### **The Pendulum Defense**

Each player has a sphere of influence (SOI), that is the limit of territory that they can reach from their current position on the field. Each player in the deep defense should start from a position where their SOI extends to the SOI of the other players in the defense. If all four players position themselves correctly, and move in concert, there should not be much area on the field that one of them can't make a play.



In the pendulum defense the full back and the scrum half should follow the ball across the field. The back side wing should move towards the center field to back the fullback, the open side wing should move up on the outside shoulder of the last defender. Remember, you're not defending a man, you're defending where the ball is, and where it might go next.



**See it explained on the BT Sport Show with Austin Healy and Tommy Bowe at:**  
<http://bit.ly/btsportpendulum>

**Discussed at The Rugby Site by Leigh Halfpenny at:**  
<https://www.therugbysite.com/blog/defence/working-the-pendulum>

From the discussion, "We call it working a pendulum. As the attack shifts from side to side of the pitch, so must a team's last line of defense. There have to be two players back at all times.

You do not want the opposition to kick to the corners, so there always needs to be the fullback and one of the wings covering the touchlines. The key to it all is communication.

When the attack shifts direction, the defensive fullback has to be talking, telling one wing to push up and the other wing to drop back.

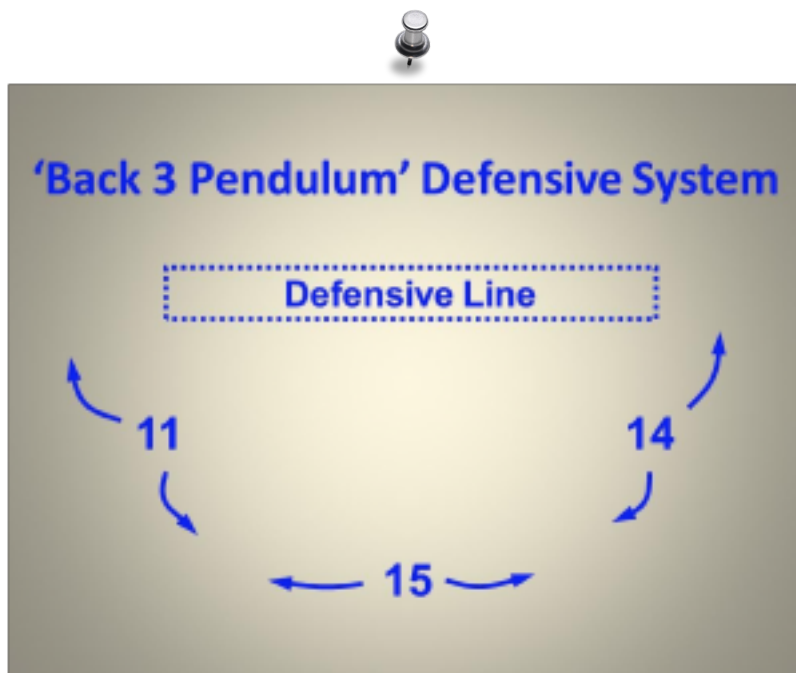
But you all need to be talking. One wing will be moving up and telling me to move across into his space.”

**Watch an elementary slow motion video at:**

<http://bit.ly/pendulumdefense>

### **From Nick Hill Coaching**

The overall set-up looks like this

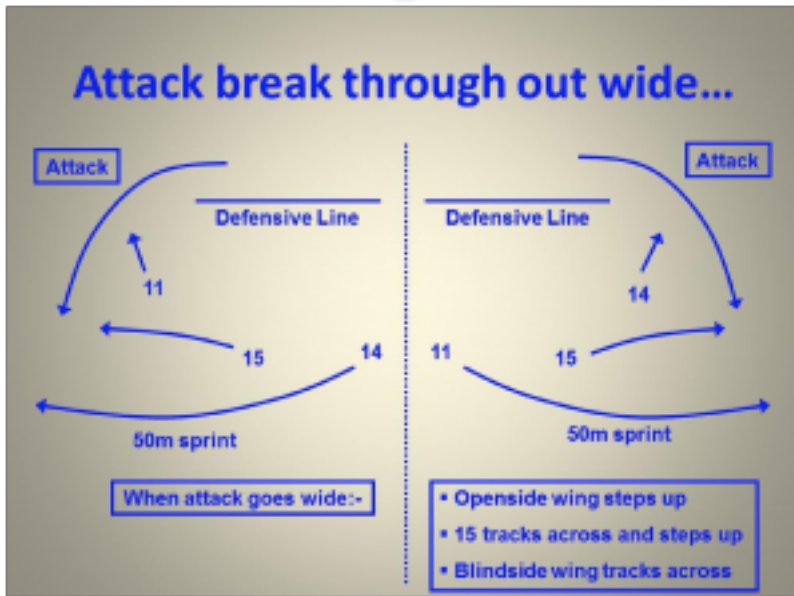


### **How this benefits the team if your defense is broken**

When the Attack break through out wide...it looks like this

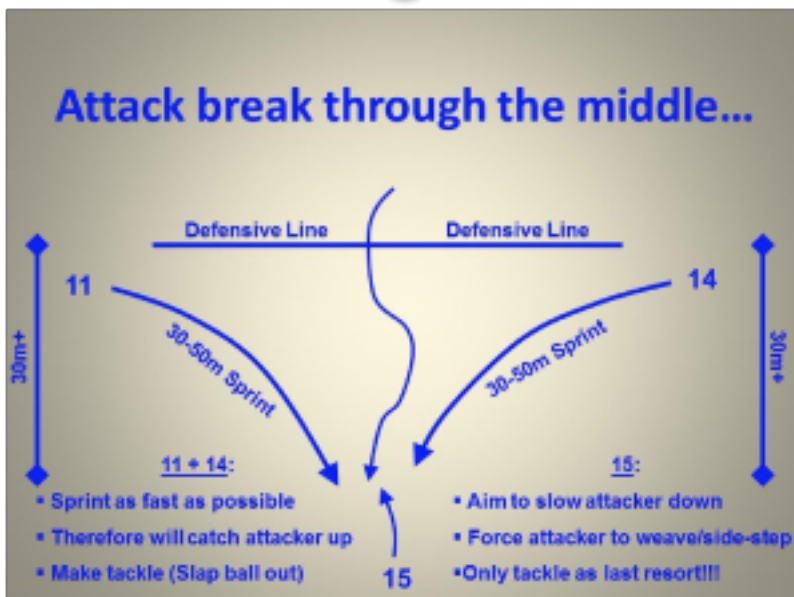
Examples can be seen in the following video clips:-

- Ben Cohen (backside wing): England v. Australia RWC Final 2003 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5tk4TKS77dM>);
- Mils Muliana (fullback): New Zealand v. South Africa (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=93p303FISvM>);
- Ugo Monye (backside wing): Harlequins v. London Irish (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vH-c3hYfU4k>);



- JP Pietersen(backside wing): South Africa v. England (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ly0bg-rQmxY>).

When the Attack break through the middle...it looks like this:-



Some examples can be seen in the following video clips:-

- England v. South Africa (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5B4p55PQhYQ>);
- Cheetahs v. NSW (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gR6VfyLmSPk>);

- New Zealand v. Australia (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ErwfxM4DwWg>);
- NSW v. Auckland Blues (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l05Tgb6iGXA>).

## How deep should the 11, 15, 14 play?

As a general rule the closer to their own goal line the attacking team is, the deeper you should play. Giving up a few yards to an attacking player with ball in hand in their own end of the field is better than letting an exit kick go over your head for 30 yards.

If the attacking team is behind their own 22 m line, a kick is probable and the touchline should be covered by the fullback and the wing. The wing can stand in touch while anticipating the kick, after the catch in touch or in field he is ready to do a quick throw in to the fullback.

Inside your own 22m line, attacking kicks will necessarily be shorter, the dead ball line being a great deep defender. The wings and fallback need to only be 5m behind the defense. Enough for their SOI to cover grub kicks through the centers or to come up to make tackles in front of the goal line. As the ball moves across the field, the back side wing should stay even with the ball as it moves across the field.

## How to play against overloads on the wing

You are playing the wing position, the ball has moved to your side of the field and you find yourself out numbered by the attacking team. You should not rush up on defense unless you are sure you can make a “ball and all tackle”. The safest option is to give ground with shoulders 45 degrees to the attackers, allowing you to jump off the passer towards the receiver, forcing them toward the sideline, encouraging him to delay his pass. This delay gives your 15 and 9 time to reinforce you and moves the play towards the best defender, which is the touchline. Beautifully explained here

**Winger Tackling Masterclass | Rugby Tonight at:** <https://youtu.be/j3-tQbRvAIE>

## Common mistakes

1 - The wings play a flat defense on the outside shoulder of the last defender. (this makes it difficult to defend the kick from 9 or 10 or to cover for breaks in the center or far side of the field. Their SOI doesn't reach those areas if they play up)

2 - Wings move wide to match the width of last attacking player. (same as previous, your SOI will contain one man, so you better hope he gets the ball or you've wasted yourself! )

3 - Fullback plays too deep (this leaves a gap in the middle of the field where the 15 and 9 are unable to catch the ball in the air. The 15 should know how deep the 10 can kick and how kicks will be effected by the wind, and if the kick does go over his head, he is always the closest to the ball by a good margin )

4 - Fullback moves up into the defensive line to cover attacking fullback who has moved into line. (remember the 15's first job is to defend the kick from 9, 10. This leaves a huge gap in the middle of the field for the kick. The player has limited his SOI and created gaps in the field where deep defense cannot make a play.

## **Quotes from famous Fullbacks regarding communication and thinking ahead**

Willie le Roux Springboks No 15; "Good communication is the most important thing – as a full back, life can get pretty lonely and tough at the back if you don't have your wing partners around to assist with those long kicks or to talk you through what could be coming your way."

Rob Kearney Ireland No 15; "You need to learn to read the play a couple of phases ahead. Learning the body language of the opposition 9 & 10 or some of the key figures on their team. I consider the Back 3 to have a good game if we win all our aerials for the ball, and if the ball ever doesn't find grass when the opposition is attack kicking against us."

Brett Thompson, USA: "If you don't stay and do not analyse the opposing attack next thing you know a try is scored that could have prevented if you were in position."

From Don Cottrell - Rugby Coach Weekly

<https://www.rugbycoachweekly.net/rugby-drills-and-skills/defence/how-to-position-your-full-back-in-defence/>

"Follow the line of the ball" is the adage I was taught, with the full back tracking across in line with the ball. The more sophisticated full back will stay within the confines of the two 15m lines and will try to read the actions of the opposition fly half.

Here's my top tip for full backs expecting a kick. Watch the opposition number 10's shoulders. Where they point is generally the direction in which the kick will go

## **From Nick Hill Coaching - What does the evidence say to back-up why 'Back 3 Pendulum' Defensive System should be used?**

Try Scoring Stats: From the 1157 tries scored that I have analyzed to date...from both the Northern and Southern Hemispheres...from all types of competition...from club games to Provincial games to International matches...including the likes of The Rugby Championship, Super Rugby, the Heineken Cup, Autumn Internationals, the Top 14...58% of tries are conceded because of NO 'Back 3 Pendulum';

Match Video Clips: Watch these video clips showing NO 'Back 3 Pendulum' in action...and see what the end result is each time:-

- Auckland Blues v. Queensland Reds (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UtmGWSmDHDs>);
- Adam Ashley-Cooper: Australia v. New Zealand (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HXc02m0oHSc> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FIeOJ1a2qlg>);
- Ben Foden: Northampton Saints v. Saracens (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lb4vdMdW2oQ>);
- South Africa v. New Zealand (1st Half) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RWyeGFyz4bE>);
- South Africa v. New Zealand (2nd Half) (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tyx3HjgZNeE>);

Now watch these 'Back 3 Pendulum' video clips to back up the reason by 'Back 3 Pendulum' Defensive System should be Practiced-

- New Zealand v. Wales: RWC 2003 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B9EmQM4W3BE>);
- Bryan Habana: South Africa v. Australia (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=anLpc7rdN5Q> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v4g-55pDk-Q>);

- Ben Foden: Northampton Saints v. Leinster in the Heineken Cup Final (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9mNKrrOg18> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NmUvQ11fk14>);
- Ben Cohen: England v. New Zealand at Twickenham with England beating New Zealand 31-29 with 78:22 on the game clock...and their 'Fortress Twickenham' name tag on the line...watch Ben Cohen's try saving...game winning...tackle.....(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZsTe4ZAvEEg>).

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## **Knowing the Laws Creates Opportunity**

Many of the Laws of Rugby involve the borders of the field and it is the 11,15,14 who most often play along those borders. Decisions regarding the Laws can lead to huge differences in field position.

Here are some game situations where knowing the Laws can reveal great options and reduce the possibility of bad outcomes. Each will provide a link to the relevant Laws.

### **Scenario 1 - Catching kicks near the touch line**

Situation 1 - the opposing team is kicking to touch from BEHIND their own 22m line. The kick is coming down very near the touch line

Law 18 Touch, quick throw and lineout  
<https://laws.worldrugby.org/?law=18>

Possible actions

- 1 - Stand in touch and catch the ball
- 2 - Jump into the air above the touch line and deflect the ball in field.
- 3 - Stand with one foot in touch and catch the ball

In all three situations your team gets possession of the ball, so why not just do the easiest thing, catch the ball in touch?

Situation 2 - the opposing team is kicking to touch from OUTSIDE their own 22m line. The kick is coming down very near the touch line

Consider the same 3 possible actions as in Situation 1

Actions 1, 3 will cause play to restart with a set scrum to your team at the place of the kick.

### **Scenario 2 - playing the ball after the other teams missed kick at the goal.**

Law 21 In Goal  
 (Note exception in part 12) <https://laws.worldrugby.org/?law=21>

You are standing in goal or just outside the goal line waiting for the kick at goal.

- 1 - The kick is short but it has enough momentum to carry into goal. Should I catch it or let it roll into goal and then down it?
- 2 - The kick is wide and has enough momentum to carry into goal.
- 3 - The kick is wide and is landing in goal.
- 4 - The kick is wide and has enough momentum to carry over the dead ball line

Touching the ball down in goal or letting it cross the dead ball line both result in a 22m drop out for your team. Catching it gains nothing and creates the possibility of a knock on, resulting in an attacking team 5m set scrum.

### **Scenario 3 - Last man is out numbered**

You are the last man on defense and you find yourself out flanked by the attacking team.

You should not rush up on defense unless you are sure you can make a “ball and all tackle”. Give ground with shoulders 45 degrees to the attackers allowing you to jump off the passer towards the receiver, forcing the ball carrier toward the sideline encouraging him to delay his pass. This gives your covering defense time to reinforce you and moves the play towards the best defender, the touchline.

### **Scenario 4 - Gathering an opposition kick near your own goal line**

Law 21 In Goal

<https://laws.worldrugby.org/?law=21>

An opposition player has beaten your full back with a pop kick which is now rolling towards your goal line. You are the off side wing and you've played the pendulum perfectly. You will get to the ball first but you will be under immediate pressure. What are your options.

- 1 - Well I guess you could break the tackle and run 90 yards the other direction for a try . . .
- 2 - Run or kick to touch.
- 3 - Get tackled.
- 4 - Keep running away from the opposition and carry into goal.

2 Produces a 5m line out for the opposition. 3 could result in retaining possession at a ruck but just as likely will lead to a lost ruck or holding on penalty. 4 keeps all your options alive and concedes nothing worse than #2. If you're trapped in goal you can touch the ball down, kick or run over the touch in goal or dead ball lines all which result in a 5m set scrum for the opposition. And if you're not trapped you can keep trying to find a way up field and maybe run 105 yards for a try . . .

### **Scenario 5 - Gathering the ball inside your own 22m**

Law 17 Mark

<https://laws.worldrugby.org/?law=17>

Law 21 In Goal

<https://laws.worldrugby.org/?law=21>



An opposition kick from near middle has passed the 22m line and is moving towards your goal line.

1 - You have the opportunity to catch the kick in the air.

2 - The kick clearly has enough momentum to carry into goal.

3 - The kick clearly has enough momentum to carry over the goal line and then over dead ball line or touch in goal line.

#1 you can consider calling a mark. If under pressure, jump to make the catch. That way, you can't be hit (in theory).

You must take a kick from the mark and *if you are near your goal line* you won't be able to gain much territory beyond the 22m with a kick to touch. Consider letting the ball go to ground and roll over the goal line then touching it down or letting it roll over the dead ball line. If you can make the fair catch near the 22m then do it. If you make the fair catch in the middle of the field far from either touch line, take a tap kick, then pass or run the ball towards the sideline and then kick to touch.

#2 Touch down in goal and take the 22m drop out.

#3 Watch it go into touch in goal or over the dead ball line and take a set scrum at the place the kick was taken ( or a 22m drop out, which ever is more advantageous). Gathering the ball and trying to run it out from behind the 22m line is super hero stuff.

### **Scenario 6 - While attempting to catch a kick you knock the ball into touch.**

Law 21 Touch, quick throw and line out

<https://laws.worldrugby.org/?law=18>

As soon as the ball goes into touch you need to start playing defense immediately. The ball belongs to the opposition and their most dangerous option is to gather the ball and do a quick throw in any where behind where the ball went into touch ( the ball has to travel 5m and must not be forward ). Guard a potential receiver and don't forget the opposition can quick throw to themselves.