

Mauling By Matt Ryan

Since the introduction of the Super 12, mauling has definitely been on the decline in the Southern Hemisphere. The Super 12 with its emphasis on quick continuous play has led to the decline of all tight forward play. So much so that teams like Australia and New Zealand find it very hard to combat the Northern Hemisphere heavyweights such as England and France. In June of 2003, England in Australia on a short tour demolished Australia up front in all aspects of lineout, scrum and mauling play. France in New Zealand did the same to the All Blacks especially in the lineouts and scrum. This paper sets out the Queensland system of mauling before the introduction of the Super 12. A very successful system, which had its foundation in the Brothers Rugby Club in Brisbane.

Mauling Principles

1. **Body Position**
The ideal body position for scrummaging is also the ideal body position for mauling. This is straight back, back parallel to ground and feet comfortably back and apart.
2. **Ball Transfer & Safety**
The football must be moved as quickly as possible from the front of the maul to the rear. The ball must not be put on a hip or be held unsafely, it must be held in two hands close to the chest and used as the focal point of the drive. Don't pass the ball back until you hear the call from behind.
3. **Maul Set Up**
The front of the maul must be as narrow as possible so the power generated is transferred through a small point. If there is width in the maul the power generated will be dissipated. Maximum of three players at the front of the maul, two blockers and the original ball carrier.
4. **Players Adding On**
After the starting set up of ball carrier, ripper and blockers the players adding on have an important role in generating power and moving the maul forward. These players must add on to the inside of the maul and hit as close to the ball as possible. It is very important that players adding on to the maul look for a slot on the inside for their heads and where they can get good contact with both shoulders. The last man in the maul is the driver and he can either hold the ball in one hand and keep himself stable with the other or hold the ball in two hands and rely on shoulder contact to stay upright.
5. **Score the Try**
The football must move in a straight line from the front to the rear of the maul just as the maul must move in a straight line to the opposition's tryline. It takes many hours of practice to achieve this but dominant mauls never move sideways they move in an unrelenting straight line and adjust to all circumstances.

Body Position



The above diagram shows a perfect body position for scrummaging, which is; straight back, back parallel to ground and feet comfortably back and apart. This also the ideal body position for mauling, with all mauling drills having the ultimate aim of achieving this ideal outcome as depicted in the diagram.

The basis of a good maul is similar to a scrum everyone involved must have a good body position and also generate power. I have developed 5 Key Factors of Contact which are very pertinent to mauling, these are:

1. Low Body Profile
2. Wide Base With Feet
3. Stay Front On
4. Hit Hard
5. Go Forward

The first two are self-explanatory, the last three require some explanation. Stay Front On is simple but very hard for players to apply to a game. You must stay completely front on when mauling, drive for the opposition's tryline and not allow yourself to be turned. So often you see players trying to maul and the opposition have easily turned them so they are driving towards the touchline. Hit Hard is also an easy concept but so often players adding on to the back of a maul do so with virtually no impact, some even putting their hands up to slow themselves down. Go Forward also an easy concept but so often lost in translation, you must keep your legs pumping and drive through the entire duration of the maul.

We now move forward to the breakdown of the maul with an explanation for each stage.

The Ball Carrier



The above diagram gives the top view of a player making contact in a tackle with the left shoulder and the ball held to the right hand side of the body, away from the tackler.

The ball carrier must make good contact and keep driving through the tackle. The ball carrier must endeavour to stay front on and not turn in the tackle. Turning reduces the forward momentum, the ball must be shifted away from the opposition. This means if the ball is carried in one arm and contact is made with the right shoulder then the ball must be carried in the left arm.

As the ripper arrives the ball carrier lifts the shoulder of the arm that is carrying the ball. This gives the ripper a good target area (centre of chest) to make contact with his shoulder.

The Ripper



The above diagram shows the ripper almost completely front on with ball transfer having already occurred from the ball carrier. This diagram depicts after the initial contact has been made and the ball carrier would move to this position as he is driven forward from the ripper.

The ripper is the next man to hit the ball carrier, the blockers arrive after. Very important that the first contact made by the ripper is with the shoulder, a very good contact is necessary for the maul to move forward right from the start. The first contact by the ripper must be extremely dynamic keeping the 5 Key factors of Contact in mind. The ripper drives forward, whilst moving forward the ball is transferred from the ball carrier to the ripper.

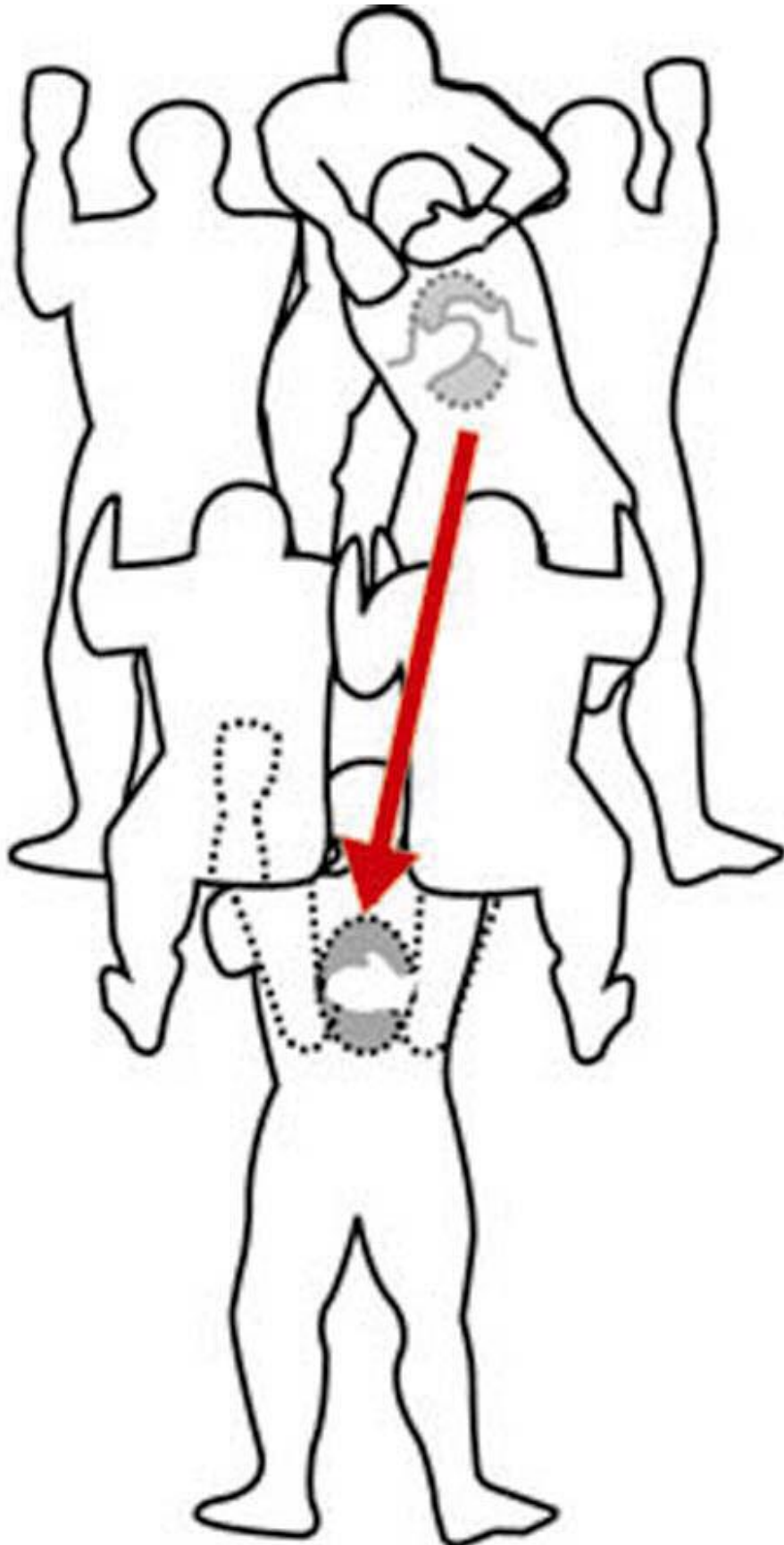
The ball carrier, once the ball is transferred, holds the ripper in tight with two hands and pulls him through the tackle. In pulling motions, the narrow grip is stronger than a wide grip, I think this an advantage over the Leicester system where the ball carrier uses a very wide grip and binds onto the two outside blockers. Also the ball carrier is pulling through the centre of the maul with the narrow grip, which should be the entire focus. It is very important that the ripper holds onto the ball tightly and uses it as a focus of drive, the ball must not be set up on the hip or in any other loose fashion. This means that the players adding on to the maul will not have to worry about hitting the ball when they arrive.

Left and Right Blockers



The above diagram shows the left and right blockers attaching to the original ball carrier.

The left and right blockers must bind over the original ball carrier and be mindful of the 5 five key factors of contact. Very important that the left and right blockers get over the original ball carrier as this moves the opposition a further half metre away from the ball. Especially important to blockers are the principles of Low Body Profile, Being Front On and Hit Hard if any opposition players are fringing. The left and right blockers must bind very tightly with their hips in close to the maul this will keep the front of the maul very narrow and allow for an efficient transfer of power. If the maul is spread wide at the front it becomes inefficient and unable to transfer the power.



The Completed Maul

The diagram on the preceding page shows the completed maul with the direction of the ball transfer being shown with a red arrow. This diagram shows the perfect maul with all players in a good body position. As you can see all players adding on, have added on to the inside of the maul as close to the ball as possible. There are only seven players in the diagram, the eighth forward can add on where required as the maul moves forward. The player at the rear of the maul with the ball is the Driver and he is very much in command.

The principles of contact strictly apply to the players adding on to the maul after the initial set up of Ball Carrier, Ripper and Left and Right Blocker. Players adding to the maul must add on to the inside of the maul and not to the outside. They must try and enter the maul as close to the ball as possible. This enables the forward momentum to be focused on the ball and not other aspects of the maul, after all we are trying to get the ball over the oppositions tryline and not the maul. There should be no football sitting on the hip of any player they should be hanging onto the ball and not passing it back until called on from behind.

As the maul moves forward and players find they are no longer contributing to the forward momentum they must quickly break off and rejoin at the rear of the maul. When they add on at the rear they must add on to the inside of the maul as close to the ball as possible.

Rolling Maul

This is very much a lost art with the advent of the Truck & Trailer penalty. Previously the driver would feel the maul slowing and call a roll to the left or the right depending on which way it was leaning. The player closest to the driver on the left or right in the maul would reach back and grab him with one arm. They would then “turn the corner” or roll both together around the back of the maul with their backs to the opposition. The player taking the driver around the corner would really try and generate a lot of speed as they turned the corner. They would also stay very close to the edge of the maul a wide turn would result in them being easy targets for fringing players.

Once they rolled all the other players would be moving at the same time and the left and right blockers would get on very quickly. Players would add on and a driving maul identical to the previous would be set up.