

**THE COACHES' GUIDE TO
SURVIVING
THE ELVS**



Dan Cottrell



How the ELVs affect you

The ELVs (experimental law variations) are experimental no more. The 13 new laws are in official use from August 1st. Dan Cottrell outlines the key technical and tactical areas to consider.

	TECHNICAL	TACTICAL
LAW 6 - MATCH OFFICIALS		
1. Assistant referees are able to assist the referee in any way that the referee requires.	No technical difference.	No tactical difference.
LAW 17 - MAUL		
2. The reference to the head and shoulders not being lower than the hips has been removed.	There is little technical difference because players should not enter the maul at this angle anyway. A strong driving position derives from the hips being lower than the shoulders.	No tactical difference.
3. Players are able to defend a maul by pulling it down. However, the "pull down" has to be made between the hips and shoulders.	<p>Attack: Practise creating dynamic mauls where there is no "keystone" player (a player who can be pulled down to collapse the whole maul).</p> <p>Have the front players create a "seal" around the ball carrier, with the ball continued to be moved to the back of the maul.</p> <p>Players still need to be able to roll off the maul without causing a "truck and trailer", something which remains illegal.</p> <p>Defence: Train your players to pull down the maul safely, using only one or two players and focussing on the "keystone" player.</p>	<p>Attack: Mauling is still an option.</p> <p>The defence have to stand off to pull down a maul. If this is the opposition's tactic, there is a good chance you can still get some forward momentum.</p> <p>If the defence pulls down a player who is not a "keystone" player, then the maul can continue.</p> <p>Therefore teams can still catch and drive at the lineout. You might even consider catching and "holding", before launching another attack.</p> <p>Defence: You need to consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> When is the best time to pull down the maul? A maul close to your try line might be pulled down over the

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<p>3. <i>Players are able to defend a maul by pulling it down. However, the “pull down” has to be made between the hips and shoulders. (Cont.)</i></p>		<p>line, so players still need to drive back an attacking maul.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How many players to commit to defending a maul? • Which players are responsible for pulling down the maul?

LAW 19 - TOUCH AND LINEOUT

<p>4. If a team puts the ball back into its own 22 and the ball is subsequently kicked directly into touch, there is no gain in ground [for the lineout].</p>	<p>The back three will need to improve their:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long kicking. • High ball kick and chase. • High ball catch and return. • Positioning to offer options to the player taking the ball. 	<p>Attack: You need to decide whether to kick from a set piece just outside your 22.</p> <p>If you want to use a kicking game, it seems sensible to kick long for the corners, or use a high ball down the centre of the pitch.</p> <p>It is likely you will kick infield more than before the changes, so your chase needs more organisation with a chasing team and a backfield recovery team in place.</p> <p>Defence: Defending against these kicks requires a new type of set piece from lineouts and scrums on the edge or just outside the opposition 22.</p> <p>Wingers need to be deep and the full back lined up inside the line of the opposition fly half.</p> <p>The predominant foot of the fly half usually dictates the position they take. More sophisticated teams may look at the possible options offered by a “wiper”/cross kick or with a kick from a different footed centre. This affects the positioning of the defensive openside winger.</p>
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	TECHNICAL	TACTICAL
5. A quick throw in may be thrown in straight or towards the throwing team's own goal line.	<p>Wingers making and taking long passes.</p> <p>Players need to be in position to take the throw. They need to think about arcing round from midfield positions, looking to find space to run on to the ball from behind the throw.</p> <p>Wingers and full backs need to improve their kick and chase game.</p>	<p>The quick throw in carries a certain amount of risk, so you need to work out how risk averse you are as a team.</p> <p>A quick throw guarantees possession, but the receiver has to either run to space or kick to space. It also risks the receiver becoming isolated, so the rest of the team need to be aware of the possibility of taking the quick throw.</p> <p>A quick throw could take place some way behind the possible lineout position, so the lost ground needs to be made up. Hence the quick throw needs to be a team tactical plan, not just a whim from a quick witted winger.</p> <p>A kick return from a quick throw could be either a high ball, a chip for a shorter retrieval, a long kick to the corners or, as some sides are already doing, long down the middle of the pitch.</p> <p>A kick to touch needs to be further beyond the touch line, with your players aware of the quick throw in possibilities.</p>
6. There is no restriction on the number of players from either team who can participate in the lineout.	<p>There is more emphasis on the speed of the jump and the accuracy of the throw.</p>	<p>You need to decide how many players to commit to each lineout and in each area of the pitch.</p> <p>Attack: How are you going to use shortened lineouts?</p> <p>A team that over compensates in the defensive line might be exposed in the midfield, allowing your side to punch holes, create quick ruck ball and attack against a more disorganised defence.</p> <p>A shortened lineout can give you the opportunity to have your forwards running at their backs in the midfield.</p>

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6. <i>There is no restriction on the number of players from either team who can participate in the lineout. (Cont.)</i>		<p>A three man lineout can beat a sevenman lineout, it just needs to make the space to do so.</p> <p>Defence: Do you pack each defensive lineout, even if they have forwards in the midfield? Or do you match their numbers exactly or approximately?</p> <p>On wet and/or windy days, packing the lineout makes more sense, since the length and accuracy of the throw is likely to be compromised.</p> <p>However there is a danger of a mismatch in parts of the pitch if you over compensate when defending their shortened lineouts.</p>
7. The receiver at the lineout must be 2 metres away from the lineout.	A player coming into the lineout to jump or support has to arrive faster. Beforehand they were able to be closer.	No tactical difference.
8. The player who is in opposition to the player throwing in the ball must stand in the area between the 5m line and the touch line but must be 2 metres away from the 5m line.	The hooker cannot lift from in front of the 5m line.	<p>No major tactical differences, because the numbers in the lineout don't need to match up.</p> <p>However, the previous practice of having a hooker at the front of the lineout to step in to lift is now redundant. So you may think about having your scrum half "marking" the throw in and defending against the front peel, which would enable your hooker to cover the midfield.</p>
9. Lineout players may pre-grip a jumper before the ball is thrown in.	There is little technical difference because teams tended to do this before.	No tactical difference.
10. The lifting of lineout players is permitted.	No technical difference.	No tactical difference, because players still cannot lift until the ball has left the thrower's hands.

LAW 20 - SCRUM

11. Introduction of an offside line five-metres behind the hindmost feet of the scrum.

A good disruptive scrum can reduce the 5 metre advantage, so scrummaging in defence is important. A slight wheel towards the attacking angle needs practicing.

The tackle line: This is now closer to the gain line if not over it, which has implications for the running lines of the back row and the pack from a scrum.

The first attacking pack players now have better forward momentum at the first ruck, perhaps allowing quicker ruck ball. This can mean a faster second phase move, so the backs have to realign quicker than before.

Attack - back row moves:

Close to the scrum back row moves retain their relevance in terms of tying in the opposition pack. However the extra space means your number 8 (eighthman) has more options to attack the space in front of the opposition fly half.

Other players can feed off your 8 (or scrum half) if he picks and goes, because the opposing flanker will be pulled out of position to cover the attack. (In defence, it is likely that the flanker will cover wide and the number 8 will fill in next to the scrum.)

Attack - backs moves: From scrums, the attacking team has more time and space to move the ball wider, thus reducing the chance that the opposition will block the move at outside centre.

The defence either has to drift or go up and out. On a drift there will be a gap inside the fly half, with the up and out there will be space outside the 13 or winger.

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<p>11. Introduction of an offside line five-metres behind the hindmost feet of the scrum. (Cont.)</p>		<p>Defence: How do your back line and back row defend from scrums?</p> <p>Your flanker is now about 7 metres in front of your fly half, not 2 metres as before. This causes a bigger dogleg in the defensive line in the area where the flanker covers inside the fly half.</p> <p>When breaking from the scrum, the defensive flanker now either needs to slow down a little or cover across more, leaving the gap inside to be covered by your number 8, or the lock packing down on that side.</p>
<p>12. Identification of scrum half offside lines.</p>	<p>No technical difference.</p>	<p>Defence: The scrum half now has to stay close to the scrum. He can still challenge for the ball or aim to get out into the back line, or track back.</p> <p>However, the scrum half is now by far the closest defending back to the attacking back line.</p> <p>Defending an openside on the left, the scrum half can go round to the other side of the scrum to get into the midfield.</p> <p>Defending an openside on the right, he can block the pass and then move into the midfield.</p>
LAW 22 - CORNER POSTS		
<p>13. The corner posts are no longer considered to be touch-in-goal except when the ball is grounded against the post.</p>	<p>Practise diving for the line to score tries. Players must get into the air and then dip forward.</p>	<p>No tactical difference.</p>

View from the top

There has been plenty of confusion and misinformation, plus a number of conspiracy theories about the ELVs. The world's top coaches see the ELVs as an opportunity and are working on how to deal with them. Here is what they say about them.

Graham Henry, New Zealand coach

Before the Tri Nations tournament:

"The big thing about ELVs is the tackle area still and the refereeing of the tackle area. If the refereeing is accurate and the team plays well in that area and is highly skilled then that increases the spectacle of the game."

After the first Tri Nations game in 2008:

"If you asked the All Blacks what they enjoy playing the most they'd rather play with the new ELVs in place. They enjoy that game. It's more open, it's more athletic."

"From coaches who have coached the game a long time, we find it less structured and I guess that creates challenges in itself. It's a game where you have to play off the cuff a lot more and play what you see. It's not as structured as the old laws were."

"The two new ones [the laws concerning lineout numbers and the maul being pulled down], the jury is still out, still waiting to see how sides cope with them."

Steve Hansen, New Zealand assistant coach

Henry's forwards coach, however, is not enamoured with the new lineout law:

"They [the IRB] have possibly made a mistake. The contest in the lineout has been flipped over to one side. The defending team has got an advantage. Currently I think they are too much in favour of the defending side and the decision to make those laws has been based around making it easier for the referee so he doesn't have to count numbers. As we play more games we'll get better at exploiting them, both on attack and defence."

Peter de Villiers, South Africa coach

“ELVs give us a chance to explore, to speed up the game and there will be more passing. They should bring the true nature of the sport to the fore. The one I’m a big fan of is not passing back into your own 22. It should help the game to be more positive.”

Robbie Deans, Australia coach

“There’s a little bit of difference in so far as the ball can be in play a little bit longer and that teams that want to can choose to take the initiative... The game has become less and less discernible from what was there before, which is good because there is scope for teams to be attacking and positive.”

Warren Gatland, Wales coach

“I didn’t see anything wrong with the game as long as you get a strong referee. The five-metre rule [at scrums] and allowing a quick throw to a lineout to go backwards are very positive. Players being allowed to collapse the maul [is a concern], plus the change in the number of players at lineouts. These may change the nature of the game.”

Frank Hadden, Scotland coach

“It’s important they [the ELVs] are tested comprehensively and at all levels... All have some merit in the sense that they are attempting to address concerns. I’ve seen them in operation in Scottish club matches and was broadly happy with what I saw.”

Ian McGeechan, London Wasps and British Lions coach

“It’ll be interesting to see the impact it has, not only on players, but on coaches and how they interpret them. You need to be coaching and playing under the ELVs to make the most of them. They’re here now and that’s what we have to deal with but I liked the word ‘experimental’.”

Syd Millar, former International Rugby Board (IRB) chairman

When it was decided to trial the new laws in the Super 14:

“Defences are on top at the moment. We need to free the game up a bit, make it easier to play, easier to referee, easier to understand and we have to produce more options for players.”