The Lineout Throw

Introduction

The lineout is one of the most common forms of re-start within the game of rugby. Securing your own lineout possession allows a team to launch their key attacking starter plays. Simplistically, the lineout consists of two key participants – the jumpers and lifters working as one participant, and the thrower as the other. This paper focuses on the role of the thrower.
The paper consists of two parts – a breakdown of the various elements of the lineout throw and the practise drills that can be employed to improve throwing skills.

Elements of the Lineout Throw

- **The Grip**

The grip affects the flight and the timing of the release of the ball.
A poor grip will cause inconsistency of accuracy on release.
The fingers of the dominant hand should be spread across the seam of the ball. This will provide a good handle on the ball even in wet conditions. It will also force the ball on release to provide a nice spin through the air – this is important for direction and countering the effect of the wind.
The position of the thumb on the ball is also important and needs to be placed back along a seam as well to assist in guiding the ball and creating a nice tight spiral.

The ideal flight pattern of the ball is a nose first flight – this will be expanded on further but the correct hand position on the ball is essential to deliver this. The positioning of how far the hand is on the back end of the ball is also important - if the hand is placed too far back towards the end of the ball, when it is released, the ball will have a tendency to fly too upright.

Good fingers on seam

Good thumb on seam

- **The Stance**

Strong core

The correct stance is important in all aspects of rugby – the stance of the line-out thrower is no different. A good thrower stands in a strong position to stop falling forwards or backwards after releasing the ball and being able to participate in the next play as quickly as possible.

In setting up for a line-out, the thrower should choose a consistent stance to be used for every line-out and stability, or “strong core”, is the most important aspect of this.

There are two main different ways to position the feet and retain a good stance.

The first involves the feet being in a parallel position which provides allows good stability from left to right.

Alternatively a split stance, with feet apart but with one foot set further forward than the other provides good forward/back stability as well as horizontal stability.

Ideally feet should be shoulder width apart - feet too close together will provide an unstable platform for the throw.

Parallel feet position

Split feet position

To provide good power in the throw, for fast throws or for throwing to the back of the lineout, the large muscle groups of the body will be needed to be used. The correct stance is very important to achieve this. Legs should be slightly bent which enables an extension of the legs and the forces from this to transfer through the hips and torso to create greater force through the ball.

Another important aspect of stance relates to the ball position immediately before release. The ball should be in a good recoil position as early in the set-up as possible. If the ball is held too far forward prior to recoil, the opposition may use the recoil movement as a “cue” to the timing of the throw and provide too much indication of when the throw will launch. This would assist them in their attempts to disrupt your lineout. For this reason, a short throwing sequence is preferable.

- **The Release of the Ball**

Having set up the throw with good ball grip and good stance, the actual throw can now be initiated.

A straight throw is essential – too often, teams lose momentum or possession from a crooked throw in to the line-out.

It is important that all throwers, but especially younger ones, understand that the use of the large muscle groups (legs, buttocks and abdominals) is very important to assist the small muscle groups (the arms) to deliver a consistent and accurate throw. These larger muscle groups create the momentum and the power of the throw, with the arms finishing the throw by providing the accuracy.

To deliver a straight throw, all of the aspects of the throwing momentum must be kept in a straight line. Starting in a slightly squat position, with the ball in the recoil position, the thrower should deliver the ball with all of the muscle forces facing the desired direction of the throw.

The thrower should finish the throw in a tall position. To achieve this, the thrower should complete the momentum by rising onto the toes and maintaining the same direction that ball is intended to travel. To finish tall, throwers should follow through and avoid having their arms drop on release.

Finishing tall on delivery

Any form of rotation during the ball release is not good. Rotation away from the direction of the throw will result in a crooked or variation in the throw.

No rotation

Rotation of hands

Most rotation is caused from the upper body but can also be caused from a lack of straight follow through. To avoid rotation the throwing sequence should be conducted consistently, repetitively with the focus on maintaining direction.

- **Flight and Timing**

As mentioned in an earlier section, an important principle is the flight pattern of the ball – this should be consistent from throw to throw travelling through the air nose first and with a tight spiral as it is released. A ball that

is not flying in a tight spiral will gain unnecessary wind resistance slowing the speed of the ball through the air and affecting the timing of the throw meeting the jumper. Also, if the ball is sitting up in windy conditions, this could cause the ball to go off line and result in lost possession.

Ideally, the ball should meet the jumper at the full jump extension.

Meeting jumper at highest point (notice spiral of ball)

The use of lineout codes, different jumping positions, and movement by jumpers and lifters provides the throwing team with a distinct advantage at the line-out, however the critical component still requires the throw to arrive in the right place at the right time. This requires good understanding between the thrower and the jumper in respect to the position of the jumper but most importantly, the speed and trajectory of the throw to ensure the ball and jumper meet at the fullest extension position.

A critical aspect of timing the throw depends on whether the throw will be a “thrower initiated throw” or a “jumper Initiated throw”.

With a thrower initiated throw, there is not really a target for the thrower to hit – the thrower is throwing to a position where the jumper is expected to be. This requires the thrower to “throw into space”.

The alternative to the thrower initiated throw is the jumper initiated throw. This is also a difficult skill for throwers to master because it involves having to throw on an external cue such as a jumpers feet movement which is the signal for the beginning of the throw sequence.

With both types of throw, precision timing is important and this can only be obtained by repetitive practice with between the thrower and the jumpers and lifters.

Practise Drills to Improve Throwing Skills

1. One-handed throw

To help with the release and flight of the ball, the thrower makes the throw with only one hand by adjusting the grip to achieve the tight spiral and nose first release. This provides the thrower with good feedback on the role of the dominant hand and how the ball travels through the air. By varying the hand position it also helps determine the best placement of the hand in relation to the seam.

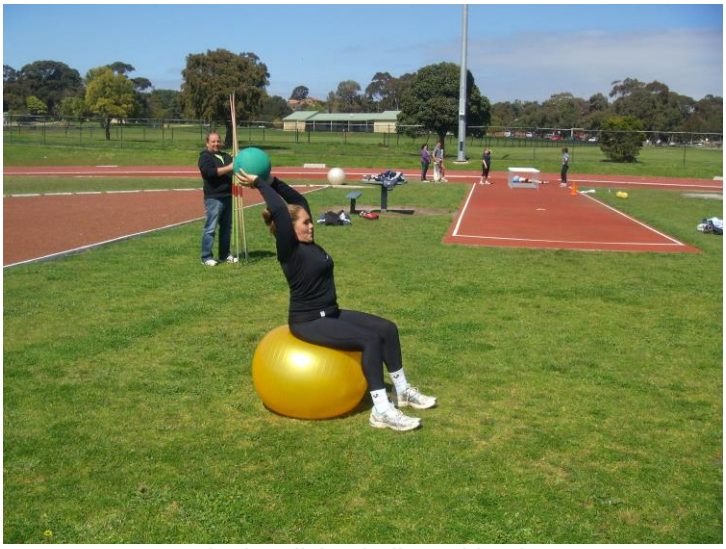
One handed throw

2. Core strength and muscle transition

Fundamental to throwing is a strong core to maintain stability and to generate power from the large muscle groups. Two drills to help with this are:

a. Swiss/medicine ball combo

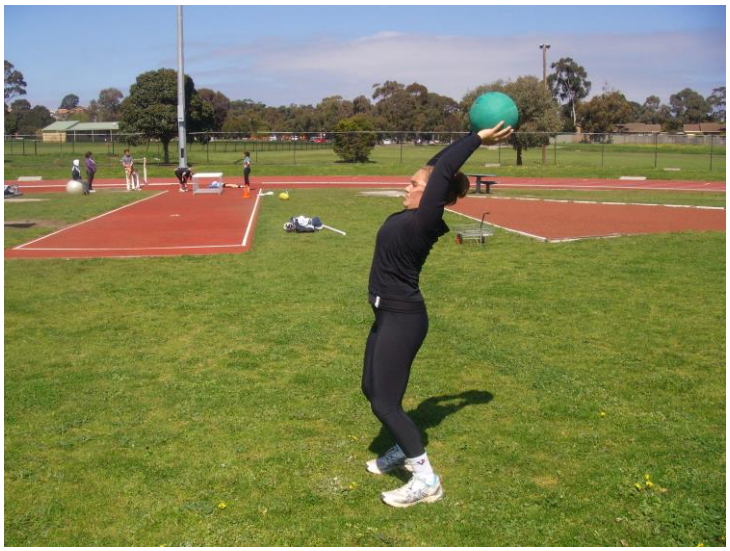
Seated on a Swiss ball, the thrower throws a medicine ball to a catcher. The thrower will need to use abdominal and glute muscles to import power through the arms to the medicine ball.



Swiss/medicine ball combination

b. Standing medicine ball throw

Have the thrower throw a medicine ball to a static receiver through the normal throwing sequence. The thrower should concentrate on power transition through the legs to the glutes and core onto release through the arms and hands. This drill is aimed using the large muscles for power while maintaining accuracy the arms and hands.



Standing medicine ball throw

3. Accuracy

Throwing accuracy is an absolute. To improve this, have two throwers standing 15 metres apart with another player in between them with a Swiss ball. The middle player throws the Swiss ball up and the throwers take turns at attempting to hit the Swiss ball at its peak with the rugby ball throw. This trains the thrower to throw to pace, rather

than having a static target. An extension on this drill is to use a smaller target such as a medicine ball or a rugby ball.

Aiming at moving target