**Attacking Skill 1**

**Elite performer- Jason Robinson (England & Sale Sharks)**

**Side step**

The side step is one of the most commonly used attacking skills, it is used to catch the defender off balance and therefore makes it easier for you break the gain line or to draw a defender before passing the ball. I chose Jason Robinson as my elite performer because he uses quick feet, speed and guile to lose the defender.

*Diagram 1: Jason maintaining his core strength throughout the sidestep*

**Preparation Phase- B2**

Before Jason executes the sidestep he uses his peripheral vision to look at the defender in order to find space beyond the defensive line, this can be either clear space or if there is a weak defender standing in the line such as a front five forward who are usually weaker defenders. What Jason is especially good at is holding the ball in both his hands which creates options and doubt in the defenders mind because he can now pass where he could not easily if he held the ball in one arm. As well as this Jason will also be aiming for the defenders weakest shoulder which is the inside shoulder as this is where the defender has the least balance and power, two things which are needed in order to make an effective tackle. Once Jason has established which shoulder he is going to aim at then he needs to deceive the defender by using verbal communication with other team mates such as positions on the pitch, eye movements scanning the field of play and slight changes in direction. Deception creates more time for you since the opponent is still in the psychological refractory period where the player can only respond to one stimulus at a given time. Jason is blessed with high speed, this is important for a sidestep because it gives the defender less time to focus on the tackle; before Jason arrives at the defender he needs to control his pace to a medium speed so he has top end speed and acceleration left once he breaks the defenders tackle.

**Preparation Phase- B1**

When I am preparing for the sidestep I am usually one minded and fail to use my full field of vision. I need to think about the side step in more depth and further away as I am in the associative stage compared to Jason who is near autonomous. This doesn’t allow me to change my decision or respond to different stimuli as I have fully committed to sidestepping my opponent, this could result in bad decision making and not identify better options. Lack of vision coupled with lack of verbal communication between myself and my teammates, Jason’s verbal communication can place doubt in the defenders mind as they have more stimuli to process, because I am quiet compared to Jason, the defender can focus more of his attention at me and this reduces the chance of a successful sidestep. Since I have less speed than Jason I usually sprint up to the defender as it increases my chances of breaking the tackle if the sidestep doesn’t work properly; this differs from Jason who is able to jog up to the defender whilst travelling at a higher speed than me; because I do this I have less available time to assess the situation and if it changes I do not have time to correct my actions and this usually ends with me being tackled and losing the ball. Jason can accelerate into the tackle as he isn’t travelling at his maximum speed whereas I am. In the event that I do break the tackle I have little extra pace that I can use since I am travelling at my top end speed, Jason has more speed available because originally he was only at a medium paced run. To also increase my chances I hold the ball in one hand so I can dip the shoulder into the defender during the execution phase, this means that I cannot offload the ball with accuracy and control since it is in only one hand unlike Jason can who is holding it in two hands; this narrows my available options whereas Jason has all of his.

**Execution Phase- B2**

Since Jason is near autonomous at the side step he knows what speed he needs to be running at to give him the best chance at passing the defender, because he is at medium-fast pace he keeps his options open in case the situation develops. If there is space on the field further away from where he currently is he has the flexibility in motion to do so or he could not ignore the sidestep and use his power to run over the defender. During the execution of the side step it is vital to keep the core in an upright position (diagram *1*) because it maintains balance at speed. When he is around one metre away from the defender he starts to execute the manoeuvre. If the defenders weakest shoulder is his left then Jason will push off his left leg, Jason needs to plant his left foot into the ground firmly to give him enough grip when pushing off, this also will decrease the danger of him slipping on the turf and causing injury such as a twisted ankle. At the left knee there is flexion which creates the perfect position for the quadriceps to work, however it mustn’t be too flexed because otherwise when he pushes off more of his energy will be aimed in an upwards direction rather than forwards. When his leg is flexed he then powerfully explodes off of the leg across the defenders body targeting the weaker shoulder of the defender maintaining his leg drive in case the defender manages to tackle him. In the case of the defender making the tackle Jason is able to move his arms freely in order to make the offload to a team mate if needed.

**Execution Phase- B1**

Since I have less ability than Jason so I need to complete the sidestep further away from the defender so I have more time to visualise what the move is going to look like in my head; this means that the defender has more time to aim at my legs and tackle me; this is different to Jason who is able to side step the player one metre before the defender using his quicker feet to get past. Because he is moving at a higher pace, defenders are distracted by the movement of his legs, when I am travelling up to the defender my speed is lower than Jason’s so it gives the defender more time to make the tackle but also means the defender can set himself earlier because there is little chance of me changing my decision if play allows me to. I do also target the defenders weakest shoulder as it improves my chances of beating my opponent. Because Jason’s core is stronger he can maintain his posture at high speed, I need to focus on other components of the sidestep so my core tends to be weaker so I cannot maintain the speed throughout the manoeuvre. Core strength is often sacrificed my feet positions, I often end up looking at my lower body this causes me to be off balance and not be able to get the drive away once I’ve finished the sidestep; Jason is able to look at the opposition in order to deceive the player which creates more doubt in the defenders mind and accelerate away from the attempted tackle. Jason has more power in his legs and greater flexion which enables him to push off his leg and get the sideways position across the defender which is the desired aim; since I have less power I end up running into the defender straight on which makes the side step ineffective and if I do side step my body is falling to one side because I do not have the balance that is required. Finally, since in the preparation phase I am carrying the ball in one hand I cannot use my arms to offload the ball unlike Jason who holds the ball in both hands.

**Recovery Phase- B2**

Once Jason has broken the attempted tackle he needs to maintain his concentration and control arousal levels which may have increased due to the crowd applauding the executed side step. If there is another defender in the way, usually the fullback, he would need have to assess the situation, if he is close to the defender he could execute the side step again however if the full back is too far away and there is no resistance once the tackle has been broken Jason will use his superior speed and quick feet to sprint for the line evading any oncoming defenders. Once the tackle is broken he needs to look round in his peripheral vision to recognise his team mates positioning. He once again places the rugby ball in both hands as this means he can pass, kick or run. Holding the ball in two hands however does reduce their speed you can travel at since you are unable to pump your arms to gather more speed, however to compensate for this he has great leg power and footwork to evade the tackler. This is different to other elite performers who would rather tuck the ball under one arm, which reduces their available options.

**Recovery Phase- B1**

Whereas Jason is able to compose himself and think about what he will do next I have less peripheral vision means I am not able to scan the field for opposition or teammates and end up choosing the wrong response which normally ends with a turn over. This is due to my arousal levels not being under control so my decision is not based on a rational decision. Also as Jason is more of a team player he looks for his team mates for support whereas if I break the tackle I am more selfish and want to score myself. Compared to Jason I am incredibly slow and do not have the capability to use explosive speed to run for the line, resulting me usually being tackled by secondary defenders or kicking possession away because I fear I will be turned over. By holding the ball in one arm I am allowing the opposition team to focus on dislodging the ball in the tackle and winning the ball back. My aerobic energy systems are also not as advanced as Jason’s so most of my energy would be used up in the execution of the sidestep meaning that I don’t have the energy to make another run past the secondary defence. The end result is being tackled more.



**Defensive Skill 1**

**Elite Performer- Mils Muliaina (New Zealand &NTT Docomo Red Hurricanes)**

**High Catch**

The high catch is one of the hardest defensive skills in the game. To complete it effectively you need high levels of concentration to focus on the ball in the air whilst members of the opposing team chase you down. Mils Muliaina is renowned of being one of the best full backs in the game under the high ball.

*Diagram 2: Mils creating a barrier between him and the defender whilst concentrating on the ball catch*

**Preparation Phase- B2**

Before the ball has even been kicked Mils needs to be in the correct position on the pitch, this is hard because the ball in rugby is moved at a really high pace. Mils is needed to be able to track the ball everywhere it goes even from 50 metres away on the other half of the pitch. He positions himself far away from the ruck as he can so that he can still see where the ball is but is able to see clearly where everyone else is positioned on the pitch. He also has the speed to run for the ball if it drops short. What his positioning allows is more time to focus on the catch when the ball eventually becomes kicked. When the ball is up in the air, Mils then has to assess the environmental conditions, if the ball is being kicked into a head wind he can anticipate it and expect the ball to travel lesser distance; if there is a tail wind he needs to allow more room for the catch because the ball can move around in the air or if it is wet he stands more sideways so if the ball does spill out of his hands it does not result in a knock on. When Mils travels towards the ball he needs to get there as soon as possible so there is less time for the defenders to approach and challenge for the ball; however as he gets to around 5-10 metres away he needs to reduce and judge his speed to reduce his momentum so the ball does not bounce off of him. Throughout the preparation before the catch Mils always keeps his eyes on the ball, he has this option because he has pre scanned the field in order to avoid opposition, keeping his eyes on the ball demands concentration and allows him to track the ball wherever it goes in the air.

**Preparation Phase- B1**

When I am positioning myself on the field for the high catch I often have to stand closer to the ball when it is in the ruck than Mils; this is because I have less speed which means if the ball drops short then I am able to arrive at the ball wherever it lands and this gives me more time to concentrate on the catch. The disadvantages of this is I have less vision across the field so cannot notice the changes of movement by the ball and therefore have less time to react, this normally leads to me being incorrectly placed on the field. When it is windy weather I stand further back to compensate for the wind, however since I am less experienced I often miss judge the flight of the ball and do not have the judgement skills to gauge where the ball will end up. When I arrive at the ball I end up stopping before the ball which gives me more time to focus on the jump and the catch, this differs from Mils who is capable of completing the catch whilst in movement creating a more fluid attack. If I do attempt to catch the ball whilst on the move the ball ends up bouncing off my chest due to momentum; the reason this happens is because I end up sprinting for the ball because I have less pace than Mils which means I cannot slowdown in enough time to catch the ball successfully in the 5-10 metre gap that is needed. Similar to Mils I look at the ball throughout its flight until I get to the execution phase, at this time my focus ends resulting in me looking for the opposition, and this is because I am not as efficient at scanning the opposition before the catch as Mils is. Furthermore Mils is more confident that he will catch the ball even under the intense pressure of international rugby. I am less able than Mils even at a lower level of rugby which results in me taking this precaution.

**Execution Phase- B2**

During the catch explosive power from his legs is needed in order for Mils to gain a height advantage over his competitors. To do this he needs to flex his knees to get a 90 degree bend, whilst doing this his hamstrings will contract concentrically along with his quadriceps eccentrically creating optimal power so he can explosively push off of the ground and into the air. Mils is able to do this in one continuous movement which means he can jump from further away; giving him more time and is also more threatening in the air for opposition so he has a clean catch. Once Mils is in the air his body position is crucial. Mils is able to twist his body during the take-off for the jump by using his hips as momentum. Because he has moved his body it is now side on just in case that if he drops the ball it will land backwards and not concede a knock-on; this would happen if he was flat on. To further protect himself in the air and decrease the chance of turning over the ball his front leg is more flexed and higher than the trailing leg which is less flexed; creating a barrier between him and the oncoming defender, thus giving him more time to make the catch. He is able to bring his arms up towards his face in the short space of time; they are close to each other so the ball cannot drop through the gap that would otherwise have been there called the ‘basket’, this means he has a better percentage of completed catches. (*Diagram 2*) Mils’ eyes are always tracking the ball even when he is jumping which means he doesn’t have to stop running. This allows a more fluid transition to get the acceleration that is needed once he has got the ball to get away from the oncoming defenders but also have the optimal chance of catching the ball so his team maintain control of the rugby ball.

**Execution Phase- B1**

When I jump for the ball in the air I, similar to Mils, bend my legs to get the power I need to jump in the air. However Mils is able to do this in one continuous movement whereas I am not able to, this is because Mils has greater power in his legs for a high jump than I have as well as me focusing on my other bodily movements such as getting my hands in the correct position. What this results in is a more shallow jump and not getting into the air as high as Mils giving the opposition more time and a better chance of stealing the ball off of me in the air. When in the air my legs stay vertical which ends up in me not protecting myself against the opposition. This also reduces the distance the opposing players have to travel in order to compete for the ball off of me. Meanwhile my arms are being brought up into my face to create the ‘basket’ which is needed so I don’t drop the ball, I am able to get the arms into the desired position so I don’t drop the rugby ball; the main reason I have a lower catch percentage than Mils is that during the jump Mils can twist his hips around so in case he does let the ball drop it goes backwards and doesn’t result in a knock on. Since I cannot do this if I do drop the ball it does end up being a knock on and my team lose possession. The reason for this is because the height of my jump is not enough so before I have time to twist my hips I am already on the descent. From the preparation phase where I am not 100% concentrating on the ball when I do land my power and acceleration is not as quick as Mils because I end up fumbling for the ball and spending more time collecting the ball in both of my hands, also since my acceleration is not as fast as Mils; because he has more powerful leg muscles, the ball is positioned in one arm so I have the momentum to increase my speed; what this means though is my options are limited and cannot pass the ball with accuracy or precision because I do not have complete control.

**Recovery Phase- B2**

The first thing that Mils does once he has caught the ball is safely land, he does this by flexing his legs so they are bent which means there is less stress on his knees when he hits the floor. As well as not hurting his knee joints he is able to push off his legs immediately after landing because they already have been flexed; this enables him to continue the attack for his team. When he has landed Mils is especially good at being able to side step and evades the oncoming defender almost immediately after landing, this means there is more space to run into. Mils is able to do this because he is in the autonomous stage of learning and has over 100 international caps so he is used to different situations and has more motor programmes built in to him. He is also able to evade defenders because before and during the catch he has pre scanned the field of play so knows where the defenders and his team mates are situated, once again because he is autonomous and can process stimuli quickly even during the execution of the catch. To be able to start an attack for his team Mils places the ball in both of his hands once he has landed, this means he can run, pass or kick if needed; advantages of holding the ball in two hands means he creates doubt in the defenders which in turn do not tackle him as they are not sure what he is going to do next.

**Recovery Phase- B1**

Just the same as Mils I also bend my legs when I land so I don’t end up hurting my knee joints; however I am not able to get the push off of the ground in order to accelerate away, this is because my legs arent as powerful so I cannot explode powerfully away. This means that I give the opposition more time to tackle me once I have landed. Due to the fact that I am slow off the mark when running away my footwork for the sidestep to evade defenders is slow and sluggish, once again resulting in me becoming tackled and risk losing possession of the rugby ball. Since I am at the associative stage of learning for the high catch and not as good as Mils my information processing is slower; this also has an effect on my psychological refractory period which ends in it becoming longer. The result of my slower information processing is that I am not able to scan the field of play to see where defenders and teammates are on the field as Mils is able to do. So when I have finished catching the ball I am less able to sidestep oncoming defenders. When I have completed the catch to give me a better chance of retaining the ball I place the ball in one hand, what this allows is for me to dip my shoulder into the oncoming defender but means I do not have the control to pass the ball to my teammates making it easier to anticipate what I am going to do. Mils does do this to sometimes if there are many opposition players around him but it is not his immediate reaction, Mils uses his pace and fast feet to evade the oncoming defenders, making him a harder target to hit whereas I am more static and easier to tackle.

**Tactical Skill 1**

**Elite Performer- Ronan O’Gara (Ireland & Munster)**

**Drop Kick**

The restart is used to restart a game of rugby, the ball can be kicked short to regain the ball or kicked long to put pressure on the defensive team. I chose Ronan O’Gara as my elite performer as he is known to be one of the best tactical kickers in the game.

*Diagram 3: Ronan leg extending after the ball has left his foot which allows him to get more power and height on the kick.*

**Preparation Phase- B2**

Before the ball has even been kicked the kicker needs to know where the ball is wanted to be placed, this call usually comes from the forward pack that chase the ball. The ball can either be kicked long to put pressure on the opposing catcher or kicked short to give time for the forwards to challenge for the ball in the air. Choosing where to kick the ball is based on many different factors; for example the weather; if it is sunny or bright the kicker plans to kick the ball high so that the ball is in the eye sight of the sun. Secondly the kicker will usually target the weakest catcher in the team; this gives the chasers a target and put pressure on the catcher so that they drop the ball. The kicker also targets the smallest player on the team; this means that the chasers, who are usually taller, are able to reach the ball first when it starts to land down. As there are so many factors a lot of precision is needed by the kicker in order to give the best start to the game for their team. When Ronan has heard where the ball is wanted to be kicked then he is ready to kick the rugby ball, firstly he needs to find a space on the ground which is even and does not have patches of dried mud or wet grass; this is needed because the ball will then bounce up straight so the kicker can get underneath the ball to give it height. Height is very important on the drop kick at the restart since power is not always needed. Height gives your teammates more time to get underneath and challenge for the ball which gives you more chance of reclaiming the ball. Ronan has the ability to choose the area of the kick with precision because he can keep his arousal levels at an optimum level in order to maintain his focus and execution.

**Preparation Phase- B1**

Because I am at the associative stage of learning for this skill I concentrate more on the kick and getting it to land in the field of play rather than being accurate and placing in the space which gives the team the best chance of regaining the ball. This differs from Ronan who never kicks the ball straight out of play; he has the ability and the skill to focus solely on the placement of the ball. This means that my teammates need to do more work so they can get the ball back thus putting them under further pressure. Whereas Ronan can alter his drop kicks for the different conditions you face in the rugby season I cannot, this is down to practise and as I do not always do the restarts in games so my confidence and skill levels are not as high. Before I execute the kick I tell my teammates where I am going to kick the ball by using vocal commands or by using hand gestures that hidden out of sight from the opposition. The calls that I use are normally quite basic such as “left” or “right” this is different to Ronan who has different calls he can make to his teammates so they know where it is going to be placed. The use of codes and calls is that the opposition are less likely to know where the ball will end up; therefore I allow the opposition to change positions to catch the ball. During the preparation I am able to find the best place of ground the ball will bounce up straight; however I need to focus more on the dropping of the ball. When I am dropping the ball I am focused more on the ball than the surroundings. The environment can change even through the short amount of time, this means I do not have the capability to change where my kicked is aimed at; this may result in the wrong choice of kick and me putting my team under pressure. Because my arousal levels sometimes go too far and I end up over aroused I can’t concentrate as much and I end up making mistakes in the execution and not kick the ball cleanly or accurately.

**Execution Phase- B2**

At the start of the execution phase the ball needs to be dropped, when dropping the ball it needs to be vertical to ensure the ball comes back straight to give the best height on the kick. Since Ronan has practised the restart hundreds of times he can drop the ball consistently and does not need to think about the execution in as much depth as others would have to which means he can focus on other things such as the position of the kick. The ball should be aimed to be kicked at its optimal point which is when it is on the up; timing is incredibly important for the restart because if you get it wrong the rest of the kick may end up off target and put the team under pressure. The body position of Ronan is critical, at the start his arms, shoulders and back are hunched over slightly and his knees slightly bent so that he can drop the ball straight. During the kick when the ball is starting to raise his shoulders open up and his back straightens which allows more free movement for his legs. The kicking leg of Ronan, his right, flexes at the knee, whilst his leg hyperextends at the hip; this is only manageable because his body has an open position with his chest out. Ronan has the ability to move both parts of his legs simultaneously which makes his action smoother and more efficient. As well as the kicking leg he needs to prepare his supporting leg; this is bent at the knee to give him the push up needed so that his power is present in both legs. By the time his leg is correctly bent the ball is at its optimal height, when this occurs he has to time the swing his leg so that his foot connects to the ball when at its highest point. When his foot contacts the ball he should be aiming to kick it at the bottom of the ball, allows him to get underneath it to get the most height possible. Ronan’s foot is firm; because he contracts the muscles in his foot to make it hard. His laces are the part of his boots which contact with the ball because this part has the largest surface area and the most grip on the boot so the ball will end up going where he is aiming.

**Execution Phase- B1**

When I complete the restart I, like Ronan, drop the ball on its point to give it the optimal bounce and height. Because I am less experienced than Ronan, I need the ball to bounce up slower since I don’t have the timing to connect the ball effectively if it bounces up too quickly. To compensate for this I usually drop the ball with more force to give it the bounce; however this means that I do not have as much control on the drop of the ball as Ronan does. I have to focus more on the ball drop so that it is correct, however this means that if there are any changes in the environment I cannot adapt for the changing situation. I am at the associative stage of learning and not used to the drop kick restart as much as Ronan, because of this I usually rush the connection of the kick due to my confidence being lowered. My body position tends to be more upright and straight compared to Ronan who is lower to the ground so that he can explode into the straight position and gives him more speed and space for his legs to move more freely. I start to flex my leg when the ball is in the downwards motion and then start to extend it when I make the connection with the ball, this means my leg speed isn’t as fast as Ronan’s legs are. I also have less control of my legs which means that it is a less fluid motion; this then loses time and can affect the rest of the skill. The lack of smoothness leads to my leg not straightening as much as it could; this could be due to my motor programmes not being as defined as Ronan. I also connect with the laces of my boots and the underside of the rugby ball, similar to Ronan, but because I have practised the skill less the pressure of a game scenario means the contact with the ball is not consistent, leading to the ball not being kicked straight. The result of my legs not straightening at the correct time is that my kick gathers less height and makes it easier for the opposition to catch and also gives my teammates less time to get to the ball when it lands.

**Recovery Phase- B2**

Once the ball has been kicked by the foot Ronan then extends his leg from the flexed position to the extended position; this ensures that he gets more power and subsequently more height so that it makes the catch harder for the opposition team (*diagram 3*). In the rest of the preparation phase Ronan lands his leg safely to protect the knee joint from any sudden impact damage. To do this Ronan flexes his supporting leg and moves his whole body weight down with it to provide the cushioning that prevents injuries. His kicking leg also flexes but moves out forward so when it lands he is not off balance, because Ronan can do this he is prepared to move onto the next stage of the game straight away. Once it is kicked he cannot rest and usually drops back on the field to be able to catch the ball if it is kicked back. Also because Ronan has lots of experience and is autonomous at the restart he does not need to watch his kick until it lands because he is confident it is kicked in the correct place.

**Recovery Phase- B1**

For me the execution phase of the kick is more important than the recovery phase, because it is the defining moment of the kick, I am unable to land my kicking leg as softly as Ronan is able to do; because of this my leg ends up landing on the floor quite harshly putting pressure on my knee joints. This results in my whole body being off balance and not ready to play on as quickly as Ronan is able to. The result of this is that I have less control bringing my leg down from the flexed position to the extended position meaning I keep my leg ends up being across my body rather than in line with it. Once I have kicked the ball I usually stay there longer than Ronan to see where it lands, this is because I am not as confident or familiar with the restart. This could possibly put me in trouble if they kick back quickly because there are fewer players covering the kick back. When I do go back, instead of retreating to the end of pitch I need to stay around the halfway line; this is because my kicks do not always go to the correct place and there is danger the opposition break through the defensive line so I need to be there to prevent this from happening.

*Diagram 4: Morne making eye contact with his teammates and his arms pointing at the player after the pass which makes the pass more accurate.*

**Attacking Skill 2**

*Diagram 4: Morne lifting his arms above his hips to initiate pace on the pass*

**Elite Performer- Morne Steyn (South Africa & Stade Francais)**

**Flat Pass**

There are many types of pass however the flat pass provides the most attack. If done properly the pass can put your team on the front foot and put teammates into space. The pass needs accuracy, speed and confidence to be done correctly. I chose Morne Steyn as my elite performer as he is able to use flat passes effectively which provides attacking threat in the South African team.

**Preparation Phase- B2**

The flat pass needs to be executed at the correct time and if the timing is off then it can result in a turnover or an interception. Most fly halves in rugby would usually execute the pass in the midfield or after a set piece, Morne is different because he has the skill and ability to make to pass in any position on the field due to the confidence he has that the pass will reach the intended player. Before Morne executes the pass he surveys the field for opposition using his peripheral vision. What he is looking for are dog legs in the defence which means the line is not together and failing to act as one unit. He is also looking for weaker or slower defenders which are usually front five forwards or wingers to give him the best chance of passing the ball in the correct place. Once he has seen where he is planning on passing the ball he then needs runs fast at the defenders. This puts the opposition on their toes; since everyone knows that Morne will release the pass they face a difficult decision as to whether they hold off but exploit the gap for Morne to run through or make the tackle which allows Morne to make the pass. To further put the opposition under pressure Morne holds the ball in two hands so he can run or pass, if he was to carry it in one hand then the defender will make the tackle as there is less chance that Morne will pass the ball. Because Morne is particularly good at running at pace during the preparation of the pass, not only does it further make the defenders doubt themselves but also provides more speed for the pass. If Morne is passing off of his right hand to teammates on his left he will flex the right arm and straighten the left arm simultaneously, this results in the ball being lifted above his waist (*diagram 4*) and when he releases the pass he gets the speed and accuracy that he needs. The final part of the preparation phase is his footwork; he plants his right front forward and brings his left foot back to give him balance and a solid base to work from. It also means that if at the last minute he decides to run at a gap he is already 80% prepared to do so.

**Preparation Phase- B1**

Since I am not as experienced as Morne is at playing rugby I have less game experience and therefore not as many motor programmes stored in my long term memory. This means that I am less likely to be used to the situation in front of me; this means that I usually refer to my dominant response which is a short pass or run the ball myself, in other words the wrong response needed. Being less experienced further means that my timing is not as accurate as Morne’s due to lack of game time, therefore the defenders can stay in their defensive line because I am not able to pick out my midfield runners which would provide more threat. When I am carrying the ball up to the line I survey the pitch and the defenders in front of me but usually miss the finer details which change throughout the move. Because I look at the larger details it means that I am less aware and make the wrong decision or not the best one possible. Whereas Morne has great peripheral vision he is looking for forwards in the defensive line and can choose which one he is going to target I am focused mainly on making the pass and less about the environment around me, this means I am less threatening to the opposition team. When it comes to setting up for the pass I need to control my speed more carefully than Morne, if I run to fast I do not have the control I need to execute the pass and it is less likely to hit the target. To combat this I usually run slower to give me the accuracy, although this is no problem it again makes me less threatening and if I did want to run myself after seeing a gap I am less prepared. I do however carry the ball in two hands; if I only carried it in one hand then I would be even less than a threat to the defensive line. When I move my arms backwards to get the desired position I need to concentrate more on the position of the arms rather than what is happening at present in front of me, to correct this I hurry up the preparation of the pass to maintain the speed of the attack. Finally my feet stand quite far apart which gives me the base needed for the execution phase of the skill, I do this so I am able to get faster and more rotation when the ball leaves my hands. The extra base that I give myself has the advantage of making the pass better but the disadvantage of that I need to run at a slower pace so not putting the defenders under as much pressure as Morne is able to do.

**Execution Phase- B2**

When Morne has his arms in the correct position he is ready to make the pass. The first rule of any type of passing is to look at the player you are about to pass to, this fixes the teammates eyes so he knows the ball is coming to him. Morne does this really well without looking too hard at the player (*diagram 4*) because this gives time for the defenders to make a big tackle on the recipient. To generate the speed needed on the pass Morne’ arms extend quickly and both arms extend. Most of the spin and speed comes from the right arm as this is the hand holding the ball, the left, otherwise known as the support arm, ensures the pass doesn’t dribble on the ground and helps with direction. The intended catcher should be offering a target for the passer but if they are not the passer is looking to aim at the mid-section region just in front of the player so they can run on to it; the pass needs to be in front of the player because it stops them from having to check their run maintaining the fluidity of the attack and allows them to break through the defensive line and create a scoring opportunity. When the ball has been passed Morne’s hands are facing the target (*diagram 5*), if his hands are facing down the ball will hit the floor before it reaches the player, if they are facing behind the target the ball will land before him and result in a turnover. Whilst the ball has left his hands he continues to run forward to give himself more momentum than if he stood still and ensures that the ball reaches the player and the opposition cannot intercept the ball.

*Diagram 5: Showing Morne Steyn point his hands towards the target after the pass which ensures that the ball travels towards the recipient.*

**Execution Phase- B1**

As my level of rugby is lower I need to make more eye contact than Morne does to gain the attention of my teammate meaning I alert the defenders more; this also means I need to communicate more than Morne by shouting. Morne and his team have pre made calls and plays that they use throughout the game so calling is needed less at the actual player but Morne uses vocal cues to put the defenders off by calling a different move to the one that is about to be played. I also move my arms back just like Morne to get the pace needed for the pass, one difference between me and Morne is that my arms usually come up higher to allow more pace on the ball, however the disadvantages are that it is more obvious to the defenders that the pass is going to be a long pass. I push and extend my arms forward and point my hands at the recipient to get both pace and accuracy on my pass, Morne has quicker arm speed so less effort is needed due to his motor programmes and having powerful and bigger muscles in his arms. Morne will do passing practise as part of his training regime and has the ability to imagine where the ball is going to go so the attacker can run onto the ball; I use less of my training time doing passing drills and have less capability of envisaging where the ball will go. This is obvious in my passing because the ball usually ends up being passed to my fellow attacker at head height, this creates a problem as it means that the attack is not as fluid and continuous, to combat this I take the ball into contact more or use shorter passes because I know that the ball has a better chance of being retained. One thing I do not do as effectively is maintaining my momentum after the pass; I usually stop or run sideways to support the play at a later stage.

**Recovery Phase- B2**

Once Morne has passed the ball he needs to continue his run in order to provide support for his teammates. Because he is autonomous at passing and has practised the situation hundreds of times Morne has the confidence that the pass is in the correct place and has been caught, this enables him to sprint to give the support. Sometimes Morne will continue his forward run to block the defender in front of him or the defender opposite the ball catcher, although this can be deemed as illegal the referee only sometimes spots this in professional rugby. If he does decide to use this tactic the player that he has passed the ball to has extra time and space to provide a better chance of scoring.

**Recovery Phase- B1**

When I have completed the pass I take longer to get into support to the teammate who may need help, whereas Morne is confident in the pass and that it will go to the correct place he can forget about the pass and move on to the next stage. Morne is also sure that the pass will go to the correct player so can continue on his forward run, since I have less experience than Morne the pass may not have the desired length or accuracy so he has to worry less than myself. If the pass is not correct I need to react to the situation, this may mean that I have to drop back to cover a dropped catch or an interception, this means the attack does not carry on and means that my team lose possession and are put under pressure.

**Defensive Skill 2**

**Elite Performer- Joe Worsley (England, British and Irish Lions and London Wasps)**

**Side Tackle**

The side tackle is usually performed if the opposition player is running past you. The skill requires speed, timing and flexibility to catch and tackle the defender before they get too far away. Flexibility is again needed when the player gets back to their feet and competes for the ball. I have chosen Joe Worsley as my elite performer as he is famous for his ability to anticipate where the defender will be to be first to the tackle.

*Diagram 6: Joe putting his head on the correct side of the opposition which reduces the chance of injury*

**Preparation Phase- B2**

Joe is not the quickest defender in rugby; however he has one of the highest tackle success rates in the game. This is because he is able to anticipate where the defender and the play are going to be faster than anyone else in English rugby. The anticipation that he has allows him to concentrate on the execution of the tackle so he ensures the attacking player ends up on the ground. Since the tackle usually involves whilst travelling at speed Joe is always quick and light on his feet even though he has a high body weight. Quick feet enables Joe to be able to change direction quickly if the play changes. Because he is alert and on his toes he can produce more powerful tackles because he is travelling at faster speeds and get into better body positions. He has his knees bent already so only has to extend his legs during the tackle. When the player breaks through the defensive line Joe needs to sprint to where the player is as quickly as possible so the player does not get too far away. Before making the tackle Joe needs to judge how far away from the player; the gap needs to be short enough so he can dive at the players legs. When he has the required gap he is ready to execute the tackle.

**Preparation Phase- B1**

Similar to Joe I do not have the speed or acceleration in contrast to other players on the team; furthermore compared to Joe Worsley I do not have the ability to anticipate where the play is going to be whereas Joe does making my reaction times slower. This is because Joe has more experience than me and has practised the tackle situation in more depth than myself. The side effects of not having the anticipation means that I have more stimuli to process and therefore have more chance of missing the important and relevant information thus resulting in a lower tackle percentage rate than Joe. More of my concentration is processing the stimuli and not the technique of the tackle. Because I am processing more information I have less time to react to what is happening around me and makes me more flat footed, if the play suddenly changes I cannot move fast enough to reach the play and the opposing player may break through the defence and I am not able to catch up. And if I was able to get there I wouldn’t be in the correct position to make an effective tackle, this is because being more flat footed means my legs arent bent so I have to flex down and then up before I can make the tackle, which means I cannot get the power that is required and it takes longer to execute. This is different to Joe who is always lively and shows light and fast feet around the pitch. Because he is lively his lack of speed does not greatly affect the completion of the tackle whereas I am flat footed and have zero momentum before I start running. The lack of anticipation and speed of my feet accumulates in me not having the required gap that will allow me to tackle correctly and still be evenly spread out in the defensive line. These problems have implications further on in the execution of the tackle.

**Execution Phase- B2**

When Joe has acquired the correct gap to allow him to execute the tackle properly he needs to dive for the player so he can wrap his arms around the player enough that the opposing player gets to the ground. Before this he has time to aim for the spot on the opposition’s legs where he is going to impact. When the tackle is being completed the defenders head needs to be on correct side, what he is looking for is his cheeks to be on the opposing players backside, if his head is on the other side, the front side of the player, when he hits the ground the player he is tackling will land on his head and neck which can cause serious injury (*diagram 6*). At the same time as his head touching the player his shoulder should also be hitting the players upper leg which makes the player stop running and hit the ground, when Joe is tackling on his left his left shoulder will reach first and vice versa. Because Joe is moving at speed the player has less chance of evading the tackle and gives Joe’s teammates time to reach the tackle area and help out. After the initial stage of the tackle is completed, the shoulder and head, the tacklers arms need to wrap around the oppositions legs; if he is tackling to his left then his left arm is wrapped around the opposing players’ front side whilst his right arm is around their back side. Once Joe’s shoulder, arms and neck are all wrapped around the opposition Joe needs to use his whole body weight to drag the player down. In order to do this quickly and effectively Joe swings his legs around to the front of the player whilst his arms slip down the players thighs to the players ankles, this makes it harder for the player to move his legs and results in his falling to the floor and the tackle being successful. His arms also tightly squeeze on the thighs of the opponent using his superior arm strength to stop the player from running away and slipping out of the tackle.

**Execution Phase- B1**

Due to my anticipation in the preparation phase not being as good as Joes this affects my tackle and have more stimuli to process before and during the execution of the tackle. I focus more on bringing the player down to the ground eventually whereas Joe is aiming to tackle the player as fast and efficient as possible. Because of this I don’t concentrate on my head position as much as Joe is able to as I am normally in a rush to tackle the defender, this resulting in my head being on the front side of the opposition player, the downside to this is that when the tackle is completed the oppositions body weight will fall onto my head which could cause serious neck and head injury. If my head is on the wrong side when my shoulders do impact on the player I am unable to get the maximum amount of force possible, a key area when completing an effective tackle. My head and shoulders have more chance of bouncing off the opposition, giving them time to get away. When I do manage to have my head on the correct side of the opposing player the impact is not as forceful as Joes is. Whereas Joe is able to get all of his shoulder on the upper leg of the player due to him picking his spot on the defender beforehand, I usually get less of my shoulder impacting on the legs. This is because I have not aimed for a specific area of the defender since my tackle isn’t always done properly. Whether my head is on the wrong side or not I am still able to wrap my arms around the players’ legs and hips to give the squeezing motion that is required but not as powerful as Joe can because he has better timing and a stronger body position. Joe’s can stop the attacker advancing in a shorter amount of time by using his heavier body weight and having a stronger arm grip to swing around in front of the player to stop the opponent.

**Recovery Phase- B2**

After the tackle has been completed the tackler must roll away and get back to their feet or they will give a penalty away, to do this quickly Joe has the ability to know where he is situated on the pitch in relation to the ruck and where the ball is being held by the tackled player; this allows him to get back to his feet and almost simultaneously challenge for the ball. This means that the opposing player has more chance of holding onto the ball and consequently concedes a penalty themselves. Once the tackle has been completed Joe uses his momentum he has gathered throughout the execution of the tackle to stand back to his feet, to do this he flexes his knees and uses his strength in his quadriceps to extend up powerfully. At the same time both of his arms are abducted away from his body, normally to his side, to show the referee he has clearly released the player before he can challenge for the ball. Joe then flexes his legs again to get as low to the ground as possible which creates a strong base for him and therefore the opposing team find it harder to ruck him off the ball. To get the strong base he further needs to make a 45 degree angle in his back so his shoulders are above his hips. When he has the foundations Joe can then compete for the ball and make a turn over. Once Joe has competed for the ball and has his hands on the ball so he is supporting his own body weight he will then either win the ball or be shouted by the referee to release the ball. The tackle is then finished.

**Recovery Phase- B1**

I attempt to get back to my feet as fast as possible but it takes me longer to do this than Joe because of his ability to know where the ball and the player are. Joe can get back to his feet and challenge for the ball almost simultaneously which makes it harder for the opposition to help their teammate. I need to get to my feet first, and then look for the ball before I can compete; even though I can do this quickly it is not as fast as doing it at the same time. My quadriceps strength is less and my flexibility lower than Joe so I cannot rebound to my feet as fast. My reduced flexibility means that I cannot get as low as Joe in the tackle; making my base weaker and gives the opposition a better chance of clearing me out of the tackle. To compensate for this I usually rush my technique and concede a penalty for going off my feet, Joe is more composed and waits for the correct millisecond to challenge for the ball; he has more confidence. My arms are released in the tackle before I challenge for the ball which means I do not get penalised, this does take more time, time that I need over Joe because I take longer in the tackle overall.

**Tactical Skill 2**

**Elite Performer- Steffon Armitage (England and Toulon)**

**Jackling**

Jackling is now one of the most frequently used tactical skills at the breakdown area, it requires perfect timing to decide whether to challenge for the ball or leave it alone; it is a high risk high reward skill. I chose Steffon as my elite performer as he has a low centre of gravity and a strong core to maintain his position at the breakdown.

**Preparation Phase- B2**

The preparation for the jackling is the most important phase of the skill. It takes just a second miscalculation and you end up giving a penalty away or even worse getting a yellow card for slowing the play down. Since Steffon is an experienced rugby player he has the knowledge of when to compete and when not to. If the ball is easy to compete for; such as an opposing player being in far proximity or the ball being easily visible he will challenge the ball, if the placement of the ball is too risky, i.e. the ball is too hard to reach then he will leave it alone. Steffon has the capability to make the judgement in a split second whilst concentrating on the other aspects of the game such as where the opposition defenders are. Steffon has a low centre of gravity and uses his squat, powerful legs to be in a strong position where he cannot be rucked off the ball. He gets into a low position so that he can see underneath other players legs allowing him to see in more detail; this is different to other players who are stood more upright and can’t. Steffon can use the position of the referee to his advantage; if the referee is on the blind side of the ruck where he can’t see Steffon, Steffon still attempts to disrupt quick ball for the opposition, giving his team more time to line up in defence even his actions are illegal because the execution phase takes little time the referee has less time to stop any illegal acts. If Steffon is the player making the tackle he competes for the ball as long as he clearly releases the player first. To make the jackle as quick and effective as possible Steffon maintains a squat position throughout, he does this by flexing his knees taking advantage of his powerful thighs to create a solid base. Being in a low position makes it easier to compete for the ball in the execution of the jackle. If Steffon is the assisting player in the tackle he has to enter the ruck from the back feet, this means that he has to enter the ruck from his side of the field. Steffon uses his speed and stamina to sprint back to the site of the ruck and gets into the back of the ruck as quickly as possible so he can compete for the ball to help his teammates.

**Preparation Phase- B1**

Whereas Steffon is very composed at the breakdown I often rush too much and make rash decisions which could affect my team. I am unable to weigh up the pros and cons of competing for the ball as fast as Steffon is able to which regularly results in rash decisions being made. My decisions are usually based on whether I can see the ball or not, if I can then I will compete, if not I will leave the ball alone and line up in defence. My poor decision making results me in giving away penalties more often than Steffon would. This is different to Steffon who will attempt to make the ball harder for the scrum half to play even if he’s not looking to regain the ball. My body position is more upright than Steffon’s who’s is low to the ground, this means that when I do squat to get a strong position for the jackle I have further to travel which takes more time and gives the opposition more time to compete. When I do squat down to look for the ball my quadriceps strength is less than Steffon which makes it easier for the opposition to move me in the ruck. If I am the player that makes the tackle I need to get to my feet as quick as possible, the fact that I am taller and have longer legs means it takes more time to get to my feet and harder to get into the squat required. Compared to Steffon when I am the assisting player it takes me longer to get to the ruck, this is due to his greater acceleration and greater aerobic fitness means he can keep up with play better. What this means is that I am less than a threat to opposition because they are able to clear the ruck and get the ball away before I have arrived whereas Steffon gets there quicker so they either rush their play or he can challenge and steal the ball.

**Execution Phase- B2**

Once Steffon is in the correct position in relation to the ruck he can then compete for the ball. When competing for the ball Steffon must be in control of his own bodyweight in order not to concede a penalty. Steffon uses his natural physique to his advantage by using the strength in his legs to get into a firm squat position; his legs are bent at a 45 degree angle to provide a strong base to make it harder for the opposition to ruck him off the ball. At the same time as making sure his legs are in the correct position he ensures his back is in a strong position which cements his position further and stops him falling over; his back is flat with his head above his hips. If Steffon is stood upright there is more chance of the opposition rucking him off the ball, when his back is flat there is less surface area to aim for which means he is harder to tackle so wins the ball more often. The next step is to gain control of the ball, to do this Steffon bends down to the ball, keeping his legs bent, and wraps both his forearms over the ball. By using his forearms, instead of just his hands to get hold of the ball, he makes it harder for the opposing players to challenge for the ball because his grip is stronger. If the opposition do manage to get hold of the ball it will take them more time to do so and Steffon will win the penalty. Steffon is able to complete both these stages very quickly and almost simultaneously giving the opposition less time to get to the ruck and eliminate him from the game; what this means is he wins the ball the majority of the time and gives his teammates confidence that Steffon will win the ball, boosting confidence throughout the team.

**Execution Phase- B1**

My physique is different to Steffon’s, I am taller than Steffon and have a higher centre of gravity which takes me longer to get into the required position that would allow me more of a chance to win the breakdown; this allows more time for the opposition to get to the ruck and steal the ball. Steffon can get lower down quicker than me which reduces time that the opposition have. As well as this Steffon has stronger quadriceps and more power in his legs compared to me allowing him to get into a lower and more compact position. His greater mass also helps anchor him in a solid position, making it harder to ruck him off the ball. My legs aren’t as bent which often puts me in a more upright position which gives the opposition a larger target to hit and are able to ruck me off the ball. Because Steffon is able to use his increased flexibility to get his back into a strong, flat position he is able to look for the ball in the ruck since his head is not faced down but instead is looking forward. I am not able to do this because I am unable to flatten out my back and it ends up being bent resulting in my head facing down reducing my vision. As well as my vision being reduced, if the opposing players ruck me off the ball I am not in as stronger position as Steffon because my back is bent. The final part of the jackle is attaching onto the ball; Steffon’s lower position means that he can wrap his forearms totally around the ball because he is closer to the ground. I find this difficult as I am not as low to the ground so I end up having to use my hands rather than my arms because I can reach further. However the ball is more easily available for the opposition to rip off of me because I am not totally wrapped around the ball and my grip is not as strong as Steffon’s. This results in me not winning the ball as often as Steffon. The speed of which I can do this also affects my success rate; getting down to the ball takes longer and because of this, so does the speed at which I can gather the ball. If I were more flexible and could get into a lower position my speed of gaining the ball will increase and give my team more confidence I will win the ball when I am in the ruck.

**Recovery Phase- B2**

When Steffon has gained possession of the ball he will either be told to release the ball by the referee, this would be if Steffon didn’t manage to get to the ruck quick enough and the ruck had formed. Because Steffon is so quick to the breakdown this scenario is unlikely; however if he is told to release Steffon manages to release his hands off the ball and out of the ruck incredibly quickly, using his powerful legs to push past defenders meaning he is so quick that he can then get into the defensive line and help out other areas. The other scenario which could happen is Steffon would gain the ball, because he is in the correct position throughout the whole of the jackle this is most likely. The referee will award his team a penalty and he will move onto the next phase of play. To make this transition easier he will be very alert to the situation that could happen next and not rest around because this could affect the consecutive phases of play.

**Recovery Phase- B1**

Just like with Steffon the referee will tell me to either release the ball or I will win a penalty. When the referee tells me to release the ball I attempt to remove my hands from the ruck and get back into the defensive line as quick as possible, however Steffon is able to do this quicker than me due to him having stronger legs allowing him to push himself out of the ruck past many players; his stronger legs contributes to him having more speed to be able to line up in defence. Since I am not as quick there is more chance to that the defensive line will be a man short, where I would have been, allowing the opposition to exploit the gap and run through. Because Steffon’s body is in the ideal position to win the ball the referee is nine times out of ten going to give him the penalty, this makes him a more efficient performer. My body position on the other hand is weaker allowing the opposition to ruck me off the ball to my penalty success rate is less and I would win a penalty four times out of ten, meaning I am less efficient. If I do win the ball then my lack of fitness may cause me to relax and not anticipate where the play is going to be, this could affect the next stages of play.