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## Ruck and Learn

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**In this week's installment of our new coaching feature *Ruck and Learn*, former Springbok strongman Cobus Visagie brings us a fascinating insight into the 'dark arts' of the front row.**

Visagie is rated by many as one of the greatest tighthead technicians to play rugby in any era. A destroyer of scrums and opposition looseheads, the Springbok fused natural power with an amazing technical appreciation of the scrummaging arts. We're delighted to have the big man blogging for us this week and if you truly want to know how to be a top quality tighthead, read on...



Master of the dark arts: Cobus Visagie

Planet Rugby and [RuckingBall.com](#) bring you this technical piece in collaboration. For more coaching articles or to talk to Martin Corry, Jamie Roberts and our other experts, please visit [RuckingBall.com](#) Those signing up before 10th June using referral code PR will get a **free upgrade worth £18** ! Those signing up after June 10th, using code PRC, will automatically enter a draw to win £200 of Samurai training kit.

### Tighthead Masterclass

By Cobus Visagie

Since my playing days, I've spent a lot of time coaching young emerging props. This has allowed me to really break down the various aspects of tighthead play, and to understand just how important technique and belief are over and above pure strength. I'll focus on common mistakes, the basic role and also some insight into those that gave me harder times than most during my career. I truly hope you gain knowledge from my thoughts and that it improves either your scrummaging or your knowledge of what props actually do!

#### Tighthead Prop - The Basic Role

The tighthead (THP) has to scrum against two people - both the hooker and the loosehead (LHP). I have never seen many big tight heads dominate smaller looseheads, and I believe the perfect body shape is with slimmer, smaller shoulders with a barrel chest. The art of the tight head is to 'severe the connection' between the LHP and the hooker. If you think about this logically, it's impossible to beat two men in a straight up battle, so you just use technique and intelligence to overcome your opponents. It's also key for the THP to understand the bigger picture and what the side are doing - I call this 'Scrum Management'. Too many get embroiled in their own personal battle to the detriment of the team and in many ways, the THP is the captain of the scrummage and must assist with delivering the best options for the best team result.

To be a good tighthead, you must also take cognisance that your battle is not a horizontal battle; it's one of height. You want to be scrummaging in a downwards power vector and controlling the scrum height to make it impossible for the opposing LHP to have any form of upward power. I am an accountant by trade, so I like numbers. Many moons ago they came up with the following equation: Pressure = Force per unit area. This means the smaller the area through which you apply your power and the power behind you, through to the LHP, the

Fixtures	Results	Tables
<b>Forthcoming Fixtures</b>		
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All times are local		
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Friday , June 3		
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Reds vs Brumbies	19:40	
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More Super Rugby fixtures		

### SPECIAL FEATURE



### Ruck and Learn

In this week's coaching feature former Bok prop Cobus Visagie brings us a fascinating insight into the 'dark arts' of the front row.

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more pressure he and the hooker will have to bear. Offer him the minimum area to scrum against - the point of your shoulder and nothing else. This is key to getting the hit and the initial advantage. Make sure the pressure is directed down his right side and in the process you will separate him from his hooker by also keeping your chin close to your right shoulder.

Each THP must find, by trial and error, his optimum lowest scrummaging height. This is the lowest possible position where from he can unfold and apply pressure. It can take many years to find this optimum position and it's what we call 'experience!' Once you know where this is, then you must use the engagement hit to your absolute advantage, hitting at 'your' height, with a square position, but also with a dominant right shoulder, thus giving the LHP as little to scrummage against as possible (hence my opening point about sloping or narrow shoulders).

Looking at the above, I want to contextualise these points in terms of common mistakes and I believe there are 4 of these:

1. THP set up too low - This means you should not use your quads and back to unload an upward power vector towards the LHP. The result will be that the LHP can manipulate you higher to where he is stronger and exactly what you do not want, and making your downward power vector impossible. Make sure you're on your own terms and having able to have an angle of attack.

2. Yoking or throwing your right arm too far forward on the moment of engage. Often, with refs calling for a clean bind, THP's will over compensate and throw his arm out right to the small of the LHP's back. DO NOT DO THIS. It will expose your rump (ribcage area) and allow the LHP to pivot out and then drive back in under your ribcages and force you up. You need to keep your arm back, tuck your elbow in on the hit, and promote your right shoulder downward and forward. After you make contact and wedge into the ideal position your right hand will be placed on top LHP's left shoulder which is completely legal. It's also worth pointing out that to apply leverage like this you need to be not too close or not too far away. Experiment to find your optimum hit point, which will depend on your height, your reaction speed and your relevant size versus the LHP. A tip here: don't be rigid in your right arm - think of your right shoulder as a fist that is going to punch - to get that action, you have to keep your elbow back and tugged in.

3. Going for the Gap- Look, we are props! Gaps are for centres and wings! Being serious, one of the biggest mistakes people make is going for the gap between the hooker and LHP. If you do this, you give the LHP free rein to attack you. If you attack the hooker on the angle, again you expose your ribcage and more fundamentally, you fail to deal with the LHP and control his height. All in all a recipe for a good stuffing. Realise you need to be square and deal with both players. A good tip here is your hooker bind- keep your left arm as straight as possible and go low onto the hooker's bum cheek with your bind. Do not bind too tightly (don't bend your arm) - if you do you naturally pull yourself out of square and become too hooker orientated. You need that angle of attack on your opposing loosehead.

4. No prop can win a game on his own! - You are the right hand of a boxer. You have the speed and the killer jab, but you need the body, feet and left hand too! Understand you need to communicate with your own LHP and get him 'pinching the scrum back to your side' - doing exactly the opposite of what you're doing on your side. You need the whole body to work with you so you need to lead that hit, and set the scrummaging agenda for your side. Do not get embroiled in a one on one battle come what may. It will ruin your effectiveness.

I really hope the above helps you. I played against many quality opponents and the crazy thing is I never really worried about who the player was I was facing. I knew that if I did everything I said above, I'd win the battle! By saying that I thought it would be interesting for the readers to comment on a few of the players of my era:

#### *Props:*

As mentioned before, size was never an issue for me. I found the likes of Sheridan, Ollie le Roux and Os du Randt quite easy to scrummage against, because of their height and the fact I could manipulate their long levers in the down to up vector. However, Tom Smith was a different proposition and only 5' 10"; a master technician and someone happy to be as low as I, his work with Wallace in the Lions 1997 series showed just how good he was. Equally, Jason Leonard was as solid as a rock - you'd never see him go backwards and his technique was excellent. The other player worth mentioning was the young Sylvain Marconnet - he was a brute especially when alongside Pieter de Villiers.

Although the question posed to me is always who was the best loosehead you ever scrummed against, the players I rated most and who determined my success most was the hookers:

Hookers give a good technical tighthead the most trouble if they can keep him out of the gap. To do that you have to be low and have immense power in your neck and upper body to take the pressure. However, I loved facing arrogant hookers as they'd go one on one with their

opponent and it gave me the space to attack them! Some of the players I rated most include Garin Jenkins, a dwarf at 90kgs and 5' 9", but an amazingly strong technician who would use his lack of inches to get low and then attack me down to up. Very tricky customer. Equally Seb Bruno, the Frenchman- a very strong and confident scrummager with powerful neck and shoulders. He'd be happy scrumming all day and I think he was really a frustrated tighthead! Others worth a mention - Chris Roussouw, the 95 Bok hooker - another technical, but very aggressive guy, and Mefin Davies, a clone almost of Garin Jenkins and able to use a low scrum to his own advantage.

My last bit of advice to frontrowers is on the mental side of the game: you have to believe that as you are lined up opposite your opponent before the engage, that in 2 seconds, you are going to be where he is now. You need to visualize it and believe it. That was the only thought going through my head in the 24 hours before a game. You will only go where you can see yourself go.

Well, there we have it. A stroll through the THP role, and I hope you've managed to glean some useful tips from a quick summary of my 15 years in the professional game. I really hope the prop forward continues to be a focal part of the game and that the Law Makers continue to encourage proper scrummaging.

Thanks to all at *Ruckingball* and *Planet Rugby* for having me and I hope to be back sometime soon.

*Totsiens,*

Cobus.

Cobus Visagie Bio:

Visagie earned 29 caps for his country and was the cornerstone of the Springbok team that reached the 1999 World Cup Semi Final. He earned the nickname "Drieman", or three man because he played number 3 and scrummed like 3 men. He won four Currie Cups with Western Province, earned 43 Super 12 caps with the Stormers.

In 2003 Visagie moved to the United Kingdom to join Saracens for whom he played in 121 games and was voted in the Guinness Premiership team of the season for three consecutive years. After retiring in 2009, he take up the role as Commercial Director of Saracens.

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