



INFORMATION PAGE

Week of October 29th, 2004

2004 Tri Nations

Possession is clearly an important element in winning a game of Rugby – but if ever an example was needed to disprove the assertion that possession is everything, then Tri Nations 2004 would rank as one of the best. It provided an almost classic example of how a lack of possession is not a barrier to winning a game or even a tournament.

I attach a *zipped* copy of the IRB Game Analysis Centre's Statistical Review and Match Analysis of the 2004 Tri Nations.

While in RWC 2003, seven of the last eight matches were won by the team that had most possession, South Africa in Tri Nations 2004 proved that possession is far from being the essential element in winning either games or tournaments.

In Tri Nations 2004, South Africa

- Obtained far less possession than the other two teams
- Created noticeably fewer rucks and mauls
- Made significantly fewer passes, and
- Had a rate of rucking and passing that was markedly less than the other two countries.

These differences were not marginal

- New Zealand had 40% more possession than South Africa and Australia 11% more
- Both Australia and New Zealand made 50% more passes
- New Zealand created almost double the rucks and mauls while Australia made 40% more.

In addition to this, South Africa was, by a long way, the most heavily penalised team in the tournament.

What South Africa did, however, was defend and – what was noticeable – they kicked more. They not only made far more kicks than New Zealand and Australia in open play but they used the kicking option at a far greater rate. Unlike the other two countries, they also attempted almost every kickable penalty.

But what they managed to do better than either of the other two teams was convert their restricted possession into tries. They used fewer rucks and passes to do so but in the end managed 13 tries compared to Australia's 9 and New Zealand's 4. Their effectiveness in converting possession into points is best illustrated by the following:

South Africa scored 1 try for every **4.5** minutes possession
 Australia scored 1 try for every **7.2** minutes possession
 New Zealand scored 1 try for every **20.6** minutes possession.

There were also other highlights or differences from previous years.

- While ball in play went up by just 1%, it was noticeable that there was much more ball in play in the second half than the first. In New Zealand's case, they achieved 50% more
- Twice as many tries as last year started from within 22 metres of the goal-line
- Scrum possession accounted for more tries than line-outs which is most unusual
- Two thirds of tries came from set piece possession compared with one third last year
- There was not a single successful drop goal in any of the six matches.

There were, on the other hand, many similarities with previous years: scoring profiles changed little, neither had kicking success rates, ball in play showed minimal change, possession retained at set pieces was the same, and offences at the breakdown still accounted for around 45% of all penalties.

Nevertheless, some of this year's differences may indicate a certain shift in the Game – for example, tries being scored from closer in, and set piece possession setting up more tries. Future matches will provide confirmation or otherwise. What will, however, characterize this year's Tri Nations 2004 is the fact that possession is not a guarantee of success. While it may be a characteristic of most wins, it is never a guarantee. South Africa proved that in 2004.

The IRB Game Analysis Centre is headed up by Corris Thomas, who some of you will remember as one of the world's leading referees back in the seventies and early eighties. The Centre produces cutting edge statistical analyses of all aspects of the Game. Please feel free to circulate the document, remembering to credit the IRB and the Game Analysis Centre for its work.

Best wishes to all.



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