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1 **Differences in the kinetics and kinematics of supported and un-supported landings of**
2 **the rugby union line out.**

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18
19 **Keywords:** Rugby, lineout, biomechanics.

20
21 **Abstract**

22 The aim of the current investigation was to comparatively examine the kinetics and
23 kinematics of supported and un-supported landings during the rugby union line out. Eleven

24 male line-out jumpers were tested under two conditions, ‘supported’ in which the lifters
25 maintained supportive contact with the jumper until the jumpers’ feet touched the floor and
26 ‘un-supported’ in which the lifters released the jumper once they had caught the ball.
27 Kinematics were examined using an eight camera motion capture system and kinetics using a
28 force platform. Differences between conditions were examined using paired t-tests. The
29 findings showed the instantaneous loading rate (supported = 212.9 ± 102.5 BW/s & un-
30 supported = 449.0 ± 142.4 BW/s) and vertical velocity (supported = 2.7 ± 0.4 m/s & un-
31 supported = 4.0 ± 0.4 m/s) at foot contact were significantly larger in the un-supported
32 condition. The findings from the current investigation indicate that if the line-out jumper is
33 un-supported by the lifters in returning to the ground then their risk from injury is likely to be
34 greater. Therefore, given the number of line-outs that are conducted per game it is
35 recommended that this law be clarified to also specify supported lowering of the jumper at all
36 levels of play.

37

38 **Introduction**

39 In rugby union the lineout is a fundamental mechanism for restarting the game when the ball
40 has left the field (Trewartha et al., 2008). The lineout is accomplished when the thrower
41 throws the ball infield towards the two opposing units of jumpers and lifters whose aim it is
42 to retain/ regain possession of the ball (Sayers, 2011). The lineout is a key attacking platform
43 in rugby union that provides a mechanism for scoring opportunities (Trewartha et al., 2008).
44 In professional rugby match play, the team who is in possession (i.e. the team that initiate the
45 infield throw) will subsequently acquire possession of the ball in around 80 % instances and
46 26 % of all tries are attained after securing possession of the ball directly from a lineout
47 (Trewartha et al., 2008).

48

49 In professional level rugby union matches there are approximately 34 lineouts in each game,
50 (IRB, 2007). The ball must be thrown directly down the middle of the two opposing teams
51 (separated by a gap of 1 m), thus teams must utilize a range of mechanisms in an attempt to
52 secure possession. The principal manner by which this is achieved is by having the lifters
53 hoist the jumper as high as possible allowing them to catch the ball prior to the opposition
54 (Croft et al., 2011). Due to this the majority of lineout throws are now caught at a height of
55 around 3.5 m (Sayers, 2011). The mass of the jumper is distributed equally between lifters at
56 the start of the motion; however this is then transferred towards the rear lifter towards the end
57 of the lineout (Sayers, 2011).

58

59 Once the ball has been caught and the lifters from both teams release the jumper resulting in a
60 landing for the jumper. As such whilst each of the distinct positions in the lineout places
61 different stresses on the body, given the height at which they are landing from it is likely that
62 the jumpers are at greatest risk from musculoskeletal injury during the lineout. This notion is
63 supported by the observations of Bathgate et al., (2002) who demonstrated that second row
64 forwards are at the highest risk from injury in relation to all other players. Similarly, Brooks
65 & Kemp, (2011) showed that firstly that second row forwards were at greater risk from injury
66 at the Achilles tendon, ankle collateral ligament and knee anterior/ medial collateral
67 ligaments in relation to other forwards and secondly that a higher proportion of these injuries
68 were sustained as a function of the lineout in relation to other forwards.

69

70 The World-Rugby Law 19.10 (g) indicates that “players who support a jumping team-mate
71 must lower that player to the ground as soon as the ball has been won by a player of either
72 team” (IRB, 2005). This rule is somewhat ambiguous in that it does not stipulate that

73 supported lowering of the jumper by the lifters is a specific requirement. Rather it mandates
74 that the lifters must not continue to support the jumper in the air once the ball is secured by
75 either the attacking or defensive side. Therefore, in their haste to make it quickly to the next
76 play, the jumper rotating 90° in order to set-up a driving maul from an attacking lineout,
77 interference from the opposing jumpers challenging for the ball or competition from opposing
78 forwards necessitating the rapid establishment of an attacking/ defensive maul; lifters may
79 neglect or are unable to support the jumper appropriately in returning to the ground (Patton et
80 al., 2006).

81

82 Despite the importance of the line-out to success in modern rugby union there is currently a
83 paucity of published biomechanical information regarding the line-out and the majority has
84 concerned the mechanics of the thrower (Sayers, (2005; Trewartha et al., 2008). However,
85 whilst there is some information in scientific literature concerning the biomechanics of the
86 thrower and the accuracy of the throw, there is currently no information regarding the
87 mechanics of the jumper. Therefore, the aim of the current investigation was to examine the
88 kinetics and kinematics of supported and un-supported landings during the rugby union line
89 out. The current investigation may give important information to officials regarding the
90 interpretation and clarity of law World-Rugby Law 19.10 (g).

91

92 **Methods**

93 *Participants*

94 Eleven male rugby union players volunteered to take part in this investigation. Each player
95 had a minimum of 2 years of lineout jumping experience and played competitive rugby union

96 at university first team level. All participants were free from musculoskeletal pathology at the
97 time of data collection and provided written informed consent in accordance with the
98 principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. The mean characteristics of the participants
99 were: age 22 ± 4 years, height 1.9 ± 0.1 m and body mass 93 ± 6 kg. The procedure utilized
100 for this investigation was approved by the University of Central Lancashire, Science,
101 Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, ethical committee.

102

103 *Procedure*

104 The test protocol required jumpers to catch 10 throws (5 supported and 5 un-supported) from
105 a single thrower with 5 years of lineout throwing experience who competed at university first
106 team level. World-Rugby Law mandates that front of the lineout must be at least 5 m infield,
107 therefore in order to simulate a throw to a jumper at the front of the lineout, a linear distance
108 of 6 m was chosen. The jumpers all wore taped jumping supports on their thighs and were
109 supported by the same two lifters throughout, who had a minimum of 5 years of lineout
110 lifting experience and who also were competitive at university first team level. In the
111 supported condition the lifters were instructed to maintain supportive contact with the jumper
112 until the point at which the jumpers' feet touched the floor, whereas in the un-supported
113 condition the lifters were required to release the jumper once they had caught the ball. The
114 lifters and jumpers were positioned so that the jumpers dominant foot landed on an embedded
115 piezoelectric force platform (Kistler, Kistler Instruments Ltd., Alton, Hampshire). To prevent
116 any order effects, the supported and un-supported conditions were presented in a
117 counterbalanced manner whereby five participants performed their supported trials first
118 followed by the un-supported trials and vice versa. Participants (lifters and jumpers) were
119 required to undergo a traditional warm-up procedure and several minutes of practice lineout

120 drills prior to the commencement of data collection. The landing movement was defined as
121 the duration from foot contact (defined as > 20 N of vertical force applied to the force
122 platform) to maximum knee flexion.

123

124 Kinematics and ground reaction forces data were synchronously collected via an analogue
125 board. Kinematic data was captured at 250 Hz via an eight camera motion analysis system
126 (Qualisys Medical AB, Goteburg, Sweden). Dynamic calibration of the motion capture
127 system was performed before each data collection session. Lower extremity segments were
128 modelled in 6 degrees of freedom using the calibrated anatomical systems technique
129 (Cappozzo et al., 1995). To define the segment co-ordinate axes of the foot, shank and thigh,
130 retroreflective markers were placed bilaterally onto 1st metatarsal, 5th metatarsal, calcaneus,
131 medial and lateral malleoli, medial and lateral epicondyles of the femur. To define the pelvis
132 segment further markers were posited onto the anterior (ASIS) and posterior (PSIS) superior
133 iliac spines. Carbon fiber tracking clusters were positioned onto the shank and thigh
134 segments. The foot was tracked using the 1st metatarsal, 5th metatarsal and calcaneus
135 markers and the pelvis using the ASIS and PSIS markers. The centres of the ankle and knee
136 joints were delineated as the mid-point between the malleoli and femoral epicondyle markers
137 (Sinclair et al., 2015; Graydon et al., 2015), whereas the hip joint centre was obtained using
138 the positions of the ASIS markers (Sinclair et al., 2014). Static calibration trials were
139 obtained allowing for the anatomical markers to be referenced in relation to the tracking
140 markers/ clusters. The Z (transverse) axis was oriented vertically from the distal segment end
141 to the proximal segment end. The Y (coronal) axis was oriented in the segment from posterior
142 to anterior. Finally, the X (sagittal) axis orientation was determined using the right hand rule
143 and was oriented from medial to lateral.

144

145 *Data processing*

146 Lineout trials from both supported and un-supported conditions were processed in Qualisys
147 Track Manager and then exported as C3D files. Kinematic parameters were quantified using
148 Visual 3-D (C-Motion Inc, Gaithersburg, USA) after marker data was smoothed using a low-
149 pass Butterworth 4th order zero-lag filter at a cut off frequency of 15 Hz. Kinematics of the
150 hip, knee and ankle were quantified using an XYZ cardan sequence of rotations (where X is
151 flexion-extension; Y is ab-adduction and is Z is internal-external rotation). All data were
152 normalized to 100 % of the landing phase then processed trials were averaged. Sagittal plane
153 kinematic measures from the hip, knee and ankle which were extracted for statistical analysis
154 were 1) angle at foot contact 2) angle at landing termination, 3) peak angle during landing, 4)
155 angular range of motion (ROM) from footstrike to landing termination, and 5) relative ROM
156 from foot contact to peak angle.

157

158 From the force platform instantaneous loading rate was calculated as the maximum increase
159 in vertical force between adjacent data points (Sinclair et al., 2013). The instantaneous
160 loading rate was normalized by dividing the values by each participant's body weight
161 (BW/s). In addition limb stiffness was quantified using a mathematical spring-mass model
162 Blickman, (1989). Limb stiffness was calculated by dividing the peak vertical GRF by the
163 amount of limb compression (Farley & Morgenroth, 1999). Limb stiffness was normalized to
164 by dividing by participant's bodyweight (BW/m).

165

166 *Statistical analyses*

167 Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) were obtained for each line-out
168 condition. Shapiro-Wilk tests were used to screen the data for normality. Differences in
169 kinetic and kinematic parameters were examined using paired t-tests. Statistical significance
170 was accepted at the $P \leq 0.05$ level. All statistical actions were conducted using SPSS v22.0
171 (SPSS Inc, Chicago, USA).

172

173 **Results**

174 *Kinetics*

175 The kinetic analysis showed that instantaneous loading rate was significantly ($t=5.54$,
176 $P < 0.05$) larger in the un-supported (449.0 ± 142.4 BW/s) condition in relation to supported
177 (212.9 ± 102.5 BW/s). In addition it was revealed that limb stiffness was significantly
178 ($t=5.03$, $P < 0.05$) greater in the supported (8.5 ± 2.6 BW/m) condition compared to un-
179 supported (5.5 ± 2.0 BW/m).

180

181 *Kinematics*

182 The kinematic analysis showed that vertical velocity at foot contact was significantly
183 ($t=10.02$, $P < 0.05$) greater in the un-supported (4.0 ± 0.3 m/s) condition compared to
184 supported (2.7 ± 0.4 m/s).

185

186 *Hip*

187

@@@ *Table 1 near here* @@@

188

189 For the angle at landing termination the hip was shown to be flexed to a significantly (t=6.15,
190 P<0.05) greater extent in the un-supported condition. In addition, peak hip flexion was found
191 to the significantly (t=6.02, P<0.05) greater in the un-supported condition. Finally, both ROM
192 (t=10.04, P<0.05) and relative ROM (t=9.59, P<0.05) were shown to be significantly larger
193 in the un-supported condition.

194

195 *Knee*

196 @@@ *Table 2 near here* @@@

197 For the angle at landing termination landing termination the knee was shown to be flexed to a
198 significantly (t=6.89, P<0.05) greater extent in the un-supported condition. In addition, peak
199 knee flexion was found to the significantly (t=6.75, P<0.05) greater in the un-supported
200 condition. Finally, both ROM (t=5.74, P<0.05) and relative ROM (t=5.67, P<0.05) were
201 shown to be significantly larger in the un-supported condition.

202

203 *Ankle*

204 @@@ *Table 3 near here* @@@

205 In addition, peak dorsiflexion was found to the significantly (t=3.17, P<0.05) greater in the
206 un-supported condition.

207

208 **Discussion**

209 The aim of the current investigation was to examine the kinetics and kinematics of supported
210 and un-supported landings of the rugby union line out. To the authors knowledge this
211 research represents the first to examine the biomechanics of lineout jumpers during different
212 conditions. The current investigation may give important information to coaches, clinicians
213 and officials regarding the appropriate implementation of the lineout.

214

215 The first key observation from the current investigation is that instantaneous load rate was
216 significantly larger in the un-supported condition in relation to the supported jumps. This
217 observation may have important implications as there is believed to be a strong association
218 between the magnitude of repeated impact loading and the aetiology of chronic lower limb
219 injuries (Whittle, 1999). Therefore, this investigation suggests that in un-supported conditions
220 jumpers are at increased risk from injury in relation to being supported until they reach the
221 ground.

222

223 The current investigation importantly showed that the vertical velocity of the jumpers at foot
224 contact was significantly larger in the un-supported condition. It is proposed that this change
225 vertical velocity relates to the vertical (upwards) forces applied to the jumper by the lifters in
226 the supported line-out condition. This provided resistance to the constant acceleration caused
227 by gravity and thus reduced the velocity of the jumper at the instance of foot contact. It is
228 likely that the increased vertical velocity at the point of foot contact is the mechanism
229 responsible for the larger instantaneous rate of loading that was observed during the un-
230 supported lineouts. The rate of loading is proportional to the change in momentum of the
231 body during landing (Whittle, 1999), therefore an increased vertical velocity of the body at

232 the instance of foot contact will mediate a proportional change in the vertical loading rate
233 experienced by the body (Whittle, 1999).

234

235 In addition, the findings from the current investigation confirmed that significant changes in
236 sagittal plane kinematics at all of the lower extremity joints were evident between lifting
237 conditions. Specifically it was shown that peak angles at the hip, knee and ankle and ranges
238 of motion at the hip and knee joints were significantly larger in the un-supported condition. It
239 is proposed that jumpers utilized these mechanical alterations to promote deceleration as a
240 result of the increased vertical velocity observed in the un-supported condition (Derrick,
241 2004). These alterations in lower extremity biomechanics serve to reduce the bodies'
242 effective mass, and are utilized extensively in sports movements in response to a perceived
243 high impact situation in order to decrease the proportion of total body mass that is decelerated
244 during the impact phase (Derrick, 2004).

245

246 Of further importance to the current investigation is that limb stiffness was shown to be
247 significantly larger in the supported in relation to the un-supported condition. This was to be
248 expected given the kinematic observations as limb stiffness is expressed as a function of limb
249 deformation under a given load (Farley & Morgenroth, 1999). It is proposed that this
250 alteration in limb stiffness is a result of the changes in sagittal plane kinematics that were
251 observed between the line-out conditions, which served to mediate increases in limb
252 deformation. It is alleged that limb stiffness during the absorption phase preconditions the
253 muscle-tendon units to store elastic energy, which may improve power production during
254 explosive movements (Kyrolainen et al., 2001). It is currently unknown what implications

255 this may have for performance at the line-out; but it is nonetheless an avenue that future
256 investigations may wish to explore.

257

258 A potential limitation to the current research is the laboratory based nature of the data
259 collection protocol. Although this was necessary in order to scientifically obtain synchronous
260 kinetic and kinematic data in a controlled manner, the ecological validity of the procedure
261 from a practical context was compromised. Furthermore, in the interest of generating an
262 impartial comparison between the two line-out conditions the current investigation simulated
263 an attacking line-out, during which there was no requirement to continue play after the
264 jumper had landed. This indicates that the variants of the line-out that are dictated by the state
265 of play and the position of the set-piece on the pitch were not accounted for. Future work may
266 wish to concentrate on the different variants of the line-out in order to provide a more
267 comprehensive representation of the biomechanics of jumper during the line-out.

268

269 In conclusion, although the biomechanics of the line-out have been examined previously
270 (Sayers, 2005; Trewartha et al., 2008), there is currently no information regarding the
271 mechanics of the jumper and therefore the effect of supported and un-supported conditions on
272 injury risk has not been investigated. As such the current investigation adds to the current
273 knowledge by generating a comprehensive evaluation of both kinetic and kinematic
274 parameters measured during supported and un-supported line-outs. The results from this
275 investigation indicate that both instantaneous loading rate and vertical velocity at foot contact
276 were significantly larger in the un-supported condition, despite lower body kinematics in this
277 condition being modified in favour of deceleration. The findings from the current
278 investigation indicate that if the line-out jumper is un-supported by the lifters in returning to

279 the ground then increased exposure to the mechanisms linked to injury are likely to be
280 greater. Therefore, given the number of line-outs that are conducted per game it is
281 recommended that this law be clarified to also specify supported lowering of the jumper at all
282 levels of play.

283

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333

334 **Tables**

335 Table 1: Hip joint kinematics as a function of un-supported and supported conditions.

	Un-supported		Supported		P-value
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Sagittal plane (+ =flexion & - = extension)					
Angle at foot contact (°)	26.8	13.7	24.4	13.8	0.41
Angle at landing termination (°)	76.7	20.8	45.8	18.6	0.0001
Peak flexion (°)	76.9	20.7	46.3	18.3	0.0001
ROM (°)	49.9	14.0	21.5	10.0	0.000002
Relative ROM (°)	50.1	14.0	21.9	9.9	0.000004

336 *Notes: Bold/ italic p-values denote statistical significance*

337 Table 2: Knee joint kinematics as a function of un-supported and supported conditions.

	Un-supported		Supported		P-value
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Sagittal plane (+ =flexion & - = extension)					
Angle at foot contact (°)	18.7	5.1	15.0	6.6	0.36
Angle at landing termination (°)	93.1	22.6	63.2	16.2	0.00004
Peak flexion (°)	93.1	22.6	63.2	16.2	0.00004
ROM (°)	74.4	22.7	48.2	14.3	0.0001
Relative ROM (°)	74.4	22.7	48.2	14.3	0.0002

338 *Notes: Bold/ italic p-values denote statistical significance*

339

340 Table 3: Ankle joint kinematics as a function of un-supported and supported conditions.

	Un-supported		Supported		P-value
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Sagittal plane (+ =dorsiflexion & - = plantarflexion)					

Angle at foot contact (°)	-34.4	8.3	-36.8	7.3	0.11
Angle at landing termination (°)	15.5	7.7	14.2	7.3	0.21
Peak dorsiflexion (°)	20.8	8.5	17.6	7.1	0.01
ROM (°)	49.9	8.2	50.9	6.3	0.48
Relative ROM (°)	55.2	6.9	54.3	5.8	0.47

341 *Notes: Bold/italic p-values denote statistical significance*