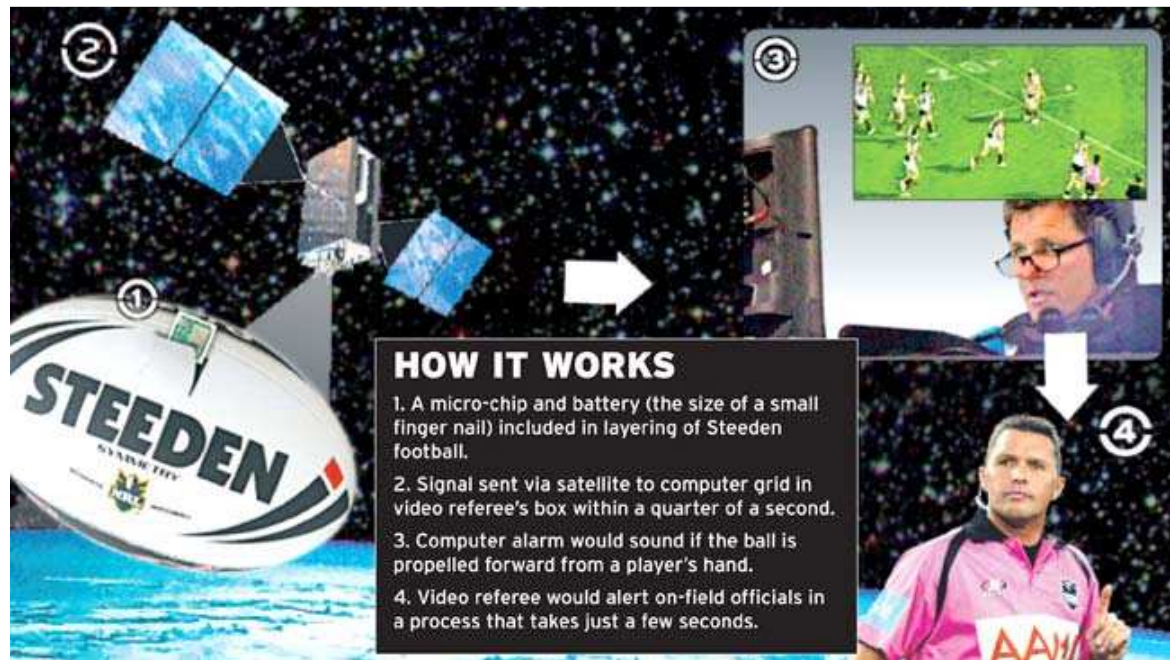


Plan to use GPS technology in NRL footballs to track forward passes

From: [The Daily Telegraph](#)

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CRICKET has its Eagle Eye, Snickometer and Hot Spot. **Tennis** has Hawk-Eye. **Swimming** has electronic sensors in the pool, **athletics** has photo finishes.

Rugby league has got its video referees to judge offside, foul play, grounding of the football and just about everything else - except for forward passes.

Now one of Australia's leading sports technology companies, GPSports Systems, is developing cutting-edge software that will ensure an accurate ruling on forward passes from next season.

It works like this ... a micro chip and battery (the size of small finger nail) is included in the layering of Steeden footballs for NRL use only. A signal is sent via satellite to computer grid in the video referee's box within a quarter of a second.

A computer alarm or beep will sound if the ball is propelled forward from a player's hands - not for passes that have been directed backwards but float forward. The video referees will alert on-

field officials in a process that takes just a few seconds and will not interfere or slow down the run of play.

GPSports System spokesman Damien Hawes declined to go into great detail about his invention because the company is still in the process of getting a patent on the device.

However, he did say: "I can confirm we'll have a positional system for the football that will get down to a centimetre for accuracy and reliability of where the ball moves on the field. Our staff have been working on it for some time because it has to be robust enough to handle kicking, passing, impact in tackles and players falling on it.

"It's something we will take to the NRL during the off-season.

"There is no question it will help on the adjudication of forward passes."

Referees boss Bill Harrigan concedes at least six tries have been allowed this season from forward passes and that others have been called back from legitimate passes.

One blatant miss - when Robbie Farah passed 1m forward to Blake Ayshford in Gosford last Friday night - cost Manly the game and possibly a \$100,000 bonus that comes with the minor premiership.

"Considering the number of tries scored, it's a small percentage," Harrigan said.

"But if anyone can show us technology that is going to help our guys, I'm all for it. Umpires and referees in other sports like cricket and tennis are getting help all the time."

Channel 9 has welcomed the innovation and wants it to be part of their television broadcasts next season. "It would be a fantastic thing for television," said Nine's sports technology guru Brad McNamara.

"It will tell you exactly what angle the ball leaves a player's hands within a quarter of a second. The fans will love it and it will take enormous pressure off referees."

A spokesperson for Steeden, whose footballs are made in India, said manufacturing a football with a sensor was a possibility and said the company looked forward to having talks with GPS experts.

"It's definitely something we could look in to," brand and marketing manager Leah Curtis said. "It's something that could be included in the layering of the ball. The mechanics would have to ensure it didn't affect the performance of the football."

Harrigan said he was looking forward to being shown the new technology that could be trialled in the All Stars match in February and other pre-season matches. "If this sort of technology was available and it takes pressure off the referees, I'd be all for it," he said. "If it can happen without impacting on the continuity of the game, it's something I'd love to look at."

NRL boss David Gallop said of the plan: "If it works then we would consider it - tracking devices used in cricket and tennis are terrific. Anything that is going to help our game and help our referees is worth looking at."

Results: GPS in footy

This poll is closed.

Do you think it's a good idea?

- **Yes** 66.98% (1079 votes)
- **No** 33.02% (532 votes)

Total votes: 1611