



COACHTALK

YEARBOOK

Written by Hanna McCarthy

- 3 Running Better Team Meetings, Simple as 3 x 3 x 3
By Wayne Goldsmith, Moregold Performance Consulting
- 5 Ten things every young Rugby League Coach should know.
By Wayne Goldsmith, Moregold Performance Consulting
- 9 Goodbye To The Old Mission Statement / Values / Vision Day
By Wayne Goldsmith, Moregold Performance Consulting
- 11 Sports Psychology With Wendy Swift
- 13 Strength & Conditioning With Vince Kelly - South Sydney Rabbitohs
- 15 Strength & Conditioning With Steve Nance - Fulham Football Club, London UK
- 17 Coaching Methods With Shane McNally - Wynnum Manly RLFC
- 20 Performance, Needs Structure & Resources
With Scott Dickinson – Knights Performance Manager
- 22 Performance Psychology With Paul Penna - Australian Institute of Sport
- 24 Player Learning Styles With Luke Ellis - ARL Development
- 27 Optimal Health and Mental Wellbeing
With Leanne Hammond - Dietician and Exercise Psychologist
- 30 Coaching Methods With Kurt Wrigley - Assistant Coach St George Illawarra Dragons
- 32 Coaching Methods With Ivan Cleary - NZ Warriors
- 34 Coaching Methods With Ian Millward - NQ Cowboys
- 36 Coaching Methods By SteveFolkes - Canterbury Bulldogs
- 38 Coaching Methods With Craig Culnane - Parramatta Eels
- 41 Recovery With Angela Calder - Recovery Coordinator and Performance Consultant
- 44 Recipes For Success Written by ANNE THOMPSON
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Running Better Team Meetings, Simple as 3 x 3 x 3

By Wayne Goldsmith, Moregold Performance Consulting

There are five key elements to playing rugby league these days:

1. TRAINING
2. PLAYING
3. RECOVERY
4. LIFE ACTIVITIES – e.g. work, study, family life, business.
5. **MEETINGS!**

Teams are spending more and more time meeting and discussing past games, future games and all the other games, training activities, travel and logistics issues involving the team.

The increased use of video at all levels of the game has led to more and more analysis and more meetings to discuss, review, and present the analysis.

This has also presented some challenges for coaches and players on how to best manage the increased flow of information.

THREE GOLDEN RULES – 3 x 3

- 3 messages per meeting: Aim to deliver no more than three messages to players in any one meeting
- 3 minutes per presentation or video show: Aim to keep all presentations or video clips to less than three minutes
- 3 engagements of players into the process: Aim to engage players, e.g. seeking their input, feedback and comments at least three times per meeting.

What we know about how most footballers take in information.

There has been a lot of study done on how players learn and how they prefer to receive information.

1. **They want to be engaged** – they want some sort of involvement in the process: to be involved in the presentation and the information that is available.
2. **They like it to be short** - one flow on from the technology age we all live in is that players have grown up with video, DVD, CD, internet and video games and like short, sharp, interesting messages.
3. **They like variety**
4. **They like to DO** - more than just listen.
5. **They like to SEE** - more than just listen.
6. Their learning styles are **individual and unique**.

TYPICAL MONDAY MORNING OR TUESDAY NIGHT TEAM MEETING (i.e. first meeting after the game): TOO MUCH: TOO SIMILAR: TOO LONG.

Coaches love to talk! Typically after a game, coaches will spend hours working through video, stats and other analysis tools to prepare a synopsis for players for the next team meeting. In general, coaches make several errors in delivering this important game analysis information:

- TOO LONG - some post game team meetings go longer than 60 minutes!!!
- TOO MUCH INFORMATION - most of it goes in one ear and out the other.
- TOO MUCH TALKING AT - rather than TALKING with the players and staff.
- TOO MANY POWER POINT SLIDES.
- TOO MUCH TELLING and not enough ASKING, QUESTIONING AND ENQUIRING.
- TOO MUCH VIDEO.
- TOO MUCH SAME VENUE / SAME SEATING / SAME FORMAT.
- TOO MUCH OF THE SAME PRESENTATION FORMAT TO ALL PLAYERS REGARDLESS OF INDIVIDUAL LEARNING STYLES.

In other words, too much information delivered over too much time to too many players.

Ten Tips for running effective post game meetings in Rugby League:

1. Limit team meetings to a maximum of ten minutes and no more than three minutes on any one topic.
2. Limit the number of slides on any one topic / message to three.
3. Limit the amount of video in any one meeting to three minutes.
4. Ask lots of “why” questions and “what happens next” and “how can we improve on this”.
5. CONSTRUCTIVE RATHER than DESTRUCTIVE. The video era has led to the ANALYSIS era. Analysis by nature is DESTRUCTIVE as its purpose is to pull apart, study and understand what happened. Use the analysis process to find new and creative ways to construct better performances.
6. Deliver information to players in a way that makes sense to them - that is, consistent with their unique learning styles and learning preferences.
7. Learn, think, act - make sure there is opportunity for players to learn from the meeting, give them time to think about it and to put it into action.
8. Regularly seek feedback from players on how effectively meetings are conducted.
9. Change the meeting structure, format, venue, presenters etc.
10. LESS MEETINGS - MORE ACTION!

In the end team meetings are about three things:

1. WILL THE INFORMATION DELIVERED AT THIS MEETING IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE OF EACH INDIVIDUAL IN THE TEAM?
2. WILL IT HELP THE TEAM AS A WHOLE TO PERFORM AS A GROUP?
3. WILL IT HELP MAKE THE PERFORMANCE ENVIRONMENT MORE EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT?

If the answer to these three questions is YES - you are in for a great meeting!

Ten things every young Rugby League Coach should know.

By Wayne Goldsmith, Moregold Performance Consulting

1. Learn from the guys who have been there

The best way to learn is by **doing**. Next best is to learn by working with those who **do the doing**.

Find yourself a mentor: A senior coach who has experienced the ups and downs of coaching Rugby League. If you can't find a suitable senior Rugby League coach, seek out a senior coach from another sport. If you want to learn how to coach from someone who knows and understands coaching – the skills are generic across all sports.

Find a senior coach who has strengths you lack. Find one who will be honest and sincere: one who is open in sharing the benefits of their experiences. One from whom you can listen to and accept honest criticism. Look for one who *disagrees* with your philosophy – who will challenge you – who will argue with you – someone who stimulates you to think, learn and grow.

A few hours a month with a great mentor is worth a hundred seminars, workshops and lectures.

2. It's not *all* about the science

Sports science has made significant contributions to all sport including Rugby League in the past fifty years.

However, it is not the defining element of the sport. The day to day of coaching is more about dealing with parents than periodisation, more about politics than physiology and more about managing club presidents than sports psychology.

Learn the sports science you need to do your job well. As you develop and improve, continue to learn about and experiment with sports science. If you get to NRL or international level, develop a network of outstanding sports science professionals to support your coaching program. But ultimately it is your coaching – the intangible factors and inherent qualities that you possess as a coach which will drive the success of the program.

Heart – not heart *rate* is the key.

Rugby League Coaching Manuals

3. Keep it simple.

Don't get too hung up on VO2 Max, heart rate monitors, lactate testing, blood testing and DNA testing*keep it simple*.

Don't go looking for short cuts, easy answers, quick fixes, miracle supplements, amazing new training equipment, the latest strength training toys.....*keep it simple*.

One of the biggest mistakes made by young coaches is to over complicate their coaching.

What do you *really* need to be successful?

1. A coaching philosophy that makes sense to you and you can live by.
2. Passion, enthusiasm, commitment, dedication, compassion and great communication skills.
3. Somewhere to train – a park or oval.
4. Some players with the same passion and enthusiasm to be successful as you have and the desire to get the most out of themselves.
5. The leadership skills to inspire those around you to work together towards achieving common goals.
6. A basic knowledge of Rugby League technique and skills.
7. A supportive partner / family / friends to provide balance and stability in your life.
8. A basic understanding of planning and programming.
9. A strong imagination – with this, you can achieve anything.
10. The ability to think laterally and creatively.
11. The ability to deal with tough times and to overcome hardships with a smile.
12. A love of coaching.

Many young coaches believe that the “fancy stuff” will solve all their problems. They suffer from the “IF ONLYS”.

“If only we had a new ground with state of the art lighting”.

“If only we had twenty heart rate monitors”.

“If only we had a brand new gym and 50 grand worth of new weight training equipment”.

“If only we had the latest tackling and scrimmaging machines”.

“If only, if only, if only.....”

The limiting factors in coaching are not these material elements.

A coach with passion and determination, working with a committed group of motivated people can achieve anything. A coach without these things but the latest and greatest technology has to offer is only capable of *looking* good – and even then not for long.

Keep it simple. Stick with the basics and doing them well consistently.

4. Politics and Personalities

If you live on this planet, life is about dealing with personalities and politics. Learn to deal with it. Learn to manage it. Learn to be comfortable dealing with difficult people and political situations **but don't let it define you.**

Dealing with difficult people and political situations causes more coaches to drop out of Rugby League than any other factor. Fights with parents of young players. Battles with club committees about “who runs the team”. Arguments with local councils about ground access. Brawls with other clubs over turf issues. These are the things that can make or break young coaches.

When faced with difficult situations young coaches will often say, *“I am not interested in politics, only coaching”.*

Get interested!

Learn how to deal with conflict. Learn how to control meetings. Learn how to work effectively with clubs and committees. Set up clear lines of communication with parents and supporters.

Master the political domain, learn to deal with difficult people effectively and you can coach with the confidence of knowing your coaching environment has been managed effectively.

5. You will never stop learning.

You will learn everyday as a coach. You will learn from players. You will learn from other coaches. You will learn from winning. You will learn from losing. You will learn **ONLY**.....if you are ready to learn.

The essence of learning is **humility**. That is, admitting you don't know everything and being open and enthusiastic to learn more.

There is no coach – no person – in any field of endeavour who knows it all. In fact, the most outstanding coaches, business people, players, academics and other leaders, spend more time and energy on learning and ongoing professional development than anyone.

Once you commit to life long learning, your coaching will be a life long adventure and your improvement is guaranteed.

6. Who you are determines the outcome of your program – NOT just what you do.

Who are you? John Smith? That's just a name.

Who are you? A Rugby League coach? That's just a job.

Who are you? A dad. That's just one role in your life.

Who are you really and what do you stand for?

This simple question rarely has a simple answer.

But developing a coaching philosophy is critical to be successful and to develop a coaching philosophy you need to understand who you are and what you stand for.

Why?

Because who you are underpins your philosophy to coaching and this in turn underpins every thing you do as a coach.

If you stand for nothing, you will fall for anything. In other words, if you don't have a meaningful coaching philosophy, you will change with the ebb and flow and compromise every time a new idea or new challenge comes along.

If you stand for something – if you embrace values like integrity, honesty, humility, courage, discipline, empathy, compassion, determination and sincerity – these values not only define you but they will be reflected in every element and aspect of your program.

The challenge is for you – right now – to sit down and write what it is you believe and what it is you stand for.

This one simple act will make all the difference in your coaching career...and your life.

7. Do not compromise for talent.

One of the biggest mistakes young coaches make is to “worship” talent.

Here’s the scene.

A young coach has taken over the local Rugby league team.

The young coach has a vision and a plan. They have developed a good program and have put together the fundamentals of a good team environment.

Then some talented kid walks in.

The kid is tall, strong, athletic, genuine speed – seems to do everything easily.

The young coach thinks, “Here is my chance – my chance to prove to the world what a great coach I am”.

So the young coach compromises. The young coach bends the rules. The young coach adjusts the program and their vision to meet the needs of this one individual talented player.

Do not compromise for talent – particularly young precocious talent. Young players with natural talent – those who do everything easily because of genetic gifts rarely make it to the top. They rarely take advantage of their talent and even more rarely make the most of their opportunities.

Yet, young coaches often invest time and money and effort on precocious talents believing these kids are the “ticket” to get them the coaching recognition they deserve.

If you get a talented kid who believes in you and your program, who wants to work hard and commit to the vision and philosophy of your program and support the team and team culture – great.

If they want to come in and change the rules, miss training and generally have a negative influence on the team because they just scored three tries in the under 10 rep team game – give them the phone number of another coach. Better still drive them to another club. And fast.

8. Communication skills are what it is all about

Some coaches have a strong sports science background.

Some coaches were players themselves with a great understanding of the sport and an empathy for their team.

Some coaches come from teaching backgrounds and are highly skilled educators.

Some coaches were Rugby League parents who decided to get more involved in the sport.

Coaches come from all backgrounds and walks of life.

But if there is one skill common with all great coaches it is the ability to communicate effectively.

You are not in the Rugby League business – you are in the people business and Rugby League is just the vehicle.

You change lives. You inspire people to do things they can’t see or feel. You influence the hearts and minds of everyone you work with.

And you do it through your communication skills.

Master every element of communication – verbal language, body language, eye contact, written communication – all of it.

9. Develop a culture NOT an athlete or a program

The aim of coaching is not to produce a successful result. Well, ultimately it is, but the result comes as a *consequence* of developing a winning culture.

The real aim is to create a culture around your program, your club and your team which increases the likelihood of a winning result.

Most young coaches will throw all their energies into an individual player or a single season and sometimes achieve a single successful

performance. The following year, the “star” player moves to another town or things change and the success of last season is only a memory.

The most noticeable thing about the leading coaches is their **consistency**. They develop systems, structures and a culture around their team which ensures high standards every year.

Some years they get really lucky and have an outstanding season. Other years they just have good seasons. But they rarely have times where everything goes wrong and if they do, it doesn’t last long.

They work on a principle called **MAXIMUM AVERAGE**. In other words, if you develop a structure, system and culture which ensures that on **AVERAGE**, the fitness, speed, skill, technique, attitude and strength of your team members is the highest it can be, then you are significantly increasing the likelihood of achieving success.

10. Accept the concept of coaching “evolution”

You will change as a coach. Your ideas, your thoughts, your “magic training sessions”, your “super set moves”, your “secret drills” that only you understand will all change...you *will* change.

Once you accept this, and embrace change as a natural part of your coaching life or even actively seek and invite change, you are on the path to coaching greatness.

One of the worst things that can happen to a young coach is to get success too easily.

This creates the biggest enemy of successful coaching – **THE INFLATED EGO SYNDROME** or **T.I.E.S.**

Once a coach has developed this condition, characterised by a belief that they have all the answers and they are the only coach in the world who really understands the sport, they are on a one way ride to failure.

Accept change. Invite criticism. Thank people for offering advice. Get excited when people attack your program. Listen, learn and evolve. There are no limits to the coach who accepts and welcomes evolution.

Notes

Culture Change: Goodbye To The Old Mission Statement / Values / Vision Day

By Wayne Goldsmith, Moregold Performance Consulting

Don't you hate the old "Mission statement / Values / Vision" day? You know the one I mean. It goes something like this.....

Someone at the organisation decides some culture change is needed.

"What we need is a break out day where we all get together in a spirit of co-operation and team work and change the culture of the organisation."

They enlist the services of a consultant who gets all the staff together in a big room, plays an ice breaker game or two, then says something like, "OK gang – what do we stand for? What do we as a group stand for? What is our trade mark?"

Then for the next 30 minutes, people yell out things like "honesty", "integrity", "team work", "passion", etc, etc.

Over the following 30 minutes, the words are grouped, a sentence – a "mission statement" is formed and **HEY HO PRESTO ABRACADABRA – THE CULTURE CHANGES!**

Let's face it – some people have been through so many of these sessions they end up giving what they know the executive and management want to hear.....and most importantly the behaviour and performance of the staff **DOES NOT CHANGE** – (well, not for more than a few days anyway).

Be honest. When was the last time you did one of these all day Mission Statement time wasters and actually got a real, meaningful, sustainable change in your organisation's culture????

Culture does not change like this. Culture is a result of a real commitment of people to sustainable success and performance improvement. Culture grows from within people.

It spreads like a kind of "positive virus". It feeds on enthusiasm. It thrives on passion. It seeks out opportunities to learn and improve to sustain itself. Like a virus it needs to continually seek new "hosts" to help it grow and survive.

Culture is not a Mission Statement or set of words – it's a way of life! Culture comes from **CONSISTENCY** – the consistent desire of people (and organisations) to perform.

I once worked with a football team who did the old Mission Statement bit **EVERY YEAR** with each new group of players, coaches and staff.

We got all the "usuals" – honesty, integrity, humility, team work, passion, enjoyment, etc, etc. We developed a lovely little vision statement: "We will work together to strive for excellence on and off the field in an environment of quality, consistency and fun" (sound familiar?).

Then when we hit the gym or the training paddock, the old behaviours came back...poor performance, inconsistent effort, sub standard attitudes, lack of commitment.

The actions bore no resemblance to the words – the behaviours did not support the vision. The culture did not change, the team’s performance did not improve, the coach got sacked, the CEO retired and five years later, they are still trying to change the culture through the annual Mission Statement “pilgrimage”.

THERE IS A BETTER WAY!!!

Instead of getting everyone together to yell out their favourite words and catch phrases, start with a small core group of people who actually want to change. The desire to change is the critical element in the culture change equation.

Really aim to understand who they are and what they want out of their lives.

Spend some real quality time learning about them and how they work, what motivates them, what they want out of the organisation and what they have to contribute to its sustainable success.

Then work with them teaching them how to maximise their own individual performance and how to work as a highly effective team. Teach them to teach. Teach them how to inspire and how to lead.

Then.....provide the core group with the environment and opportunity to “infect” and influence others members of staff. Empower them to engage their team mates in learning and growing. Empower them to drive the change process and the culture dynamic.

Nothing ENFORCED is sustainable.

Nothing IMPOSED creates continuous excellence.

Culture GROWS. Culture GROWS. Culture GROWS...from within.

Moregold works with people, teams and organisations to develop sustainable performance improvement through our unique, individualised performance enhancement process. Experience the MOREGOLD difference.

Notes

Sports Psychology.

With Wendy Swift

Sports psychology lends itself to every sport. Whether it be at a grass roots level, or within a professional arena, the psyche of any sport's person undoubtedly has a great impact upon their individual performance. By definition, sport psychology is a specialization within psychology that seeks to understand psychological/mental factors that affect performance in sports, physical activity and exercise and apply these to enhance individual and team performance. It deals with increasing performance by managing emotions and minimizing the psychological effects of injury and poor performance.

Wendy Swift, a principal consultant for the company Swift and Associates, Performance Consultants, is a registered psychologist as well as being Director of Sport Psychology Services for the company. Essentially, she deals with program development, client consultations as well as promoting the based learning of sports psychology.

Swift identifies that there is one primary area involved with promoting a healthy psyche for an athlete's; motivation. However, it's not that simple. The motivation Swift is referring to is the point at which the athlete feels he or she is performing at an optimum level. Before they reach this stage, they need to have an 'action' plan, as well as a series of process goals. This works in conjunction with the flow state.

The flow state is the mental state of operation in which the person is fully immersed in what he or she is doing, characterized by a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and success in the process of the activity. Swift believes:

"If we want a flow state experience to occur, the challenge has to be equivalent to the preparation and ability of the athlete."

In short, the challenge or activity the athlete is participating in must be in line with the athlete's own ability and the training they have been doing to prepare for the event. If the athlete feels they have reached a stage where they feel they are completely in control, then they can become immersed in their performance. If they allow themselves to start thinking about their performance while competing, then they cannot achieve within the flow state.

For example, if they start thinking in such a way that they convince themselves their coach will be disappointed if they lose or even if they become angry with themselves with their lack of preparation, they cannot be immersed in the activity. The same pattern occurs when the athlete knows a significant person in their life is not going to be happy if they're not at their best. The athlete cannot achieve a level of positive exhilaration at competing if they are distracted from what they are doing. If they are comfortable with their performance and training, however, they look forward to competing and can attain the state of total immersion. As a result, they have a great time performing and they access the best of their training, which ultimately leads to success.

It's essential that the athlete must only be aware of the now, no past, only the future. If they detached from the process, then their results will demonstrate this.

"Obviously, if they're not thinking about the outcome, they're not in the moment."

Swift explains:

"If we [as psychologists, coaches etc.] keep those concepts in mind, it's likely we can guide our kids [or elite athletes] to be in the best state for that particular performance."

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Consequently, the best thing to do is eliminate negative thought. This begins with concentrating specifically on action based thinking. As a general rule, athletes usually tend to 'feel' first – they 'feel' nervous as they anticipate an upcoming performance and they begin to 'hope' that they will do well. Instead of focusing on their own performance, they get distracted by those performing around them. What they should be doing is trying to remain focused and pin point the positive things about their training and their performance that will help them succeed. This is something that a coach or a parent can have a large influence over and keep control of.

“Anything to me that is wishful thinking is a negative thought. It's not really controlled.”

Swift says:

“If you start thinking negatively it affects your actions.”

This can be easily combated with having an action plan. The key to this concept is identifying what the athlete's success pattern is; when do they perform at their best, what are they doing when they achieve this level of performance.

If they perform best at club level, then identify the routine and patterns of behaviour they stick to at club level, and adapt as necessary to other competition. Again, the important thing to remember is not to start thinking about the imminent event before it happens, but to start with 'doing' – training and establishing a plan of attack. A mode of thinking that works in this circumstance is 'it doesn't matter how I feel, it only matters what I do'.

This is all a part of making process goals. A process goal is the balance between the long time goals and the in the moment goals that an athlete works toward week in and week out. As Wendy Swift believes:

“You need an in the moment process goal to teach them how to learn the long term process goals.”

These process goals are the goals that are attainable over the course of a season. For an individual athlete it may be reaching a standing overall in their league, for a team it may be a

premiership. If the athlete knows the requirements of the sport then they can set their goals accordingly.

Again, the goals being set all relate to positive thinking. For instance, state each goal as a positive statement: express your goals positively - 'execute this technique well' is a more effective goal than 'don't make any stupid mistakes'. Setting a precise goal, putting in dates, times and amounts so that you as a coach can measure an athlete's achievement are all a part of the process routine. Doing this, you will know exactly when the athlete has achieved their goals, and can take complete satisfaction from having achieved it.

When you have several goals, give each a priority. This helps to avoid feeling overwhelmed by too many goals, and helps to direct your attention to the most important ones. Be aware of self talk – self talk should be positive, present tense, talk focused and believable. Another component of the athlete's psyche, self talk is what can be the breaking point for good performance. Communication between coaches and athletes is imperative at this stage – if an athlete realises you are referring to a certain point of their performance, they will recognise its importance.

If all of these processes are put in place, an athlete has a greater chance of having an optimal performance. Optimal performance is a state of euphoria for an athlete; they enjoy what they are doing, they are prepared for exactly what they are facing and they know they will perform well. It is a feeling of absolute control that can only be attained through stringent routine, the achievement of process goals and training.

Moving along from the flow state, it's all about a healthy thought process and the implementation of positive thinking.

“If that's what they're describing when they have a great game and we know that's what optimal performance is, we can make that a goal of sports psychology.”

Wendy Swift concludes:

“If I could achieve something, it would be to enable athletes to have that experience.”

Strength & Conditioning

With Vince Kelly - South Sydney Rabbitohs

Much like the game of rugby league, parameters of the human body are constantly evolving. Every day it is being challenged to push itself beyond its limits; to run faster, jump higher and be stronger than ever before. It must extend to reach past its capacity and continually improve. Prior to the professional era of rugby league, little constraint was taken by athletes to take care of their bodies in the manner they are required to today. Of course, they were expected to be at the peak and perform outstandingly every week. They trained and played to the best of their ability. Yet today's game works in an entirely different playing field.

Today, instead of a club having one member upon their support staff to assist with their strength and conditioning training, they have upwards of three. Training for an intensive competition such as the National Rugby League is a fulltime job, with technology now being able to instantaneously provide feedback to players and coaches, and sports scientists working alongside teams to ensure their success.

Not only are the body and its role evolving, but the demands on it are growing. Vince Kelly, a member of the Strength and Conditioning team at the South Sydney Rabbitohs, has high expectations of the team and their performance. At their level, optimum fitness is necessary. For the entire squad, training begins with pre-season, and it only gets tougher from there.

“It really depends on how the guys come back. If they come back in good shape, then we can start at a higher level [of training].”

Kelly says that with the advancement of technology, coaches and support staff can tell almost instantly what stage their athletes are at. Programs are now based around a player's physical competence. If a player is incapable of getting into a deep position because their glutes are too tight or they have no range in their ankles, there is no point in trying to make them more powerful if they can't get into the position in the first place.

“We can monitor the guys from the off season to see if they're losing any strength or whether they're maintaining it.”

Traditionally, the off season is used as a time for recuperating and for some player's surgery. Following rehabilitation, the players are then required to get back to a level where they can fire at full intensity. For new recruits, a physical competency test is instituted to examine what parts of the player's body are strong or weak and what needs work. Up to forty small tests are undertaken by the young players to give them a goal to aim towards as they start to try and strengthen up – something that is essential before they resume any heavy lifting in their training.

“We're really concentrating on the function of the body as opposed to trying to get them strong in the first four weeks.”

If a player can get those functional moves right and eradicate the weaknesses they have, then support staff can start working on building them up or stripping them down to make them stronger or more powerful. Players get themselves into grappling positions on the field. However, the ability to move an external resistance on one plane doesn't necessarily translate on to the field. With the correction of functional capacity, the transference of these skills on to the field is an easier process. When it comes to the breakdown of a training session, this is the foundation.

“We start [the session with] functional type movements. You might call them injury prevention movements and then we'll get into the strict lifting part of it.”

The modern day front or back rower needs this type of movement in their armoury – they can't just be a hit up merchant, they need to have that footwork when they get close to the line. Instead of running straight into a player, they can step and get over the advantage line. This links back to all the functional work a player does – their ability to hop, stop and stretch to break that line.

While the session won't last more than an hour from start to finish, roughly forty minutes of it is the strenuous part where numerous sets and reps and rest periods based on the stage of the season or the phase of training being concentrated on. Players will then have a circuit session in the weight room with a small conditioning component to it. The same principle is taken with aerobic and anaerobic training. Trainers will first find out what aerobic capacity the player has at the beginning on the season. Hopefully, they will have maintained the same level as the season prior or have even improved upon it. If not, they will have more work to do – more anaerobic training over short distances with repeated sprint work.

In season, players are put through a cycle which will rotate around their games, three or four games to each cycle. Within that cycle the team will get close to their maximum strength type sessions so they can be monitored to ensure they are retaining or maintaining fitness. To maintain a high level of interest with their training, variety is welcomed to keep the players reenergised.

“For instance, we might do something simple like changing grip position. We might add in some balls and chains as an external resistance which is different for the guys.”

Kelly explains, “It causes them to work harder through the movement. The weights might be lighter, but the resistance of the chains means they get to lift all the way through the movement.”

Medicine balls are also used to develop the relationship between strength and speed. There is a direct relationship between the rate of force development and maximum strength. The other relationship is muscle mass and maximum strength. By getting a lot of muscle mass a player should be able to achieve a high maximum strength that then relates to force development. If a player needs to increase their speed, then building their strength can help.

As a part of South Sydney's function work, they do a lot of production and reproduction. If players are able to reduce their external forces when they're running and cut both balance and stability into those positions, it's going to help their agility. Once those are built with body weight exercises, then external resistance is added. That's where the translation comes across.

The next aspect of training is weights. During the off season, Souths usually have four sessions a week, while in season, depending on the amount of time there is between games, there will be one or two sessions scheduled. Most weeks the club will have two sessions. The sessions are mixed up with more of a circuit type session a couple of days after the game. Later on in the week the session will have more of a strength and power focus when players have more time to recover before the game.

In regard to recovery, the club usually looks to implement different recovery novelties for different sessions. During a conditioning session where the team may have some sort of fluid or fuel replacement or for a strength session, replacing supplements is a priority. They might have a different recovery mechanism, for example, an ice bath to allow players to freshen up when they have training twice on the same day. Having an ice bath in the morning allows the body to begin restoring nutrients and dissipating lactic acids in the system to prevent soreness and swelling.

Generally, the team's routine would not change dramatically during a season. The most important part of their training is to ensure they are fresh for their next game. If anything, the support staff will make adjustments to the volume of the sessions. Instead of lasting sixty minutes, the session may be cut back to forty or forty-five minutes. The secret to success is establishing the right formula for your team – an equal balance of strength, speed and weight training, mixed with conditioning and recovery will best prepare the squad for the season ahead. By testing their physical limitations, players will be forced to maintain an optimum level of fitness at all times, which will ensure they are at their best on game day.



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Strength & Conditioning

With Steve Nance - Fulham Football Club, London UK

Throughout the National Rugby League season, professional rugby league players may play upwards of twenty-six games of football. Factor in another four possible matches during the final series, as well as representative league, and as a coach you are confronted with a player who will take to the field upwards of thirty times in eight months. Excusing injury, it is highly possible that he will play over 60 minutes in a game. Essentially, this places heavy emphasis on a player's fitness. How, as a coach, do you cater for your players' needs?

Primarily, you concentrate on their strength, their conditioning and their recovery. Three words which are incremental to any athlete, in any sport. Yet, in rugby league, these qualities seem to ascend to an entirely different level altogether. For any athlete pursuing a career in sport, they need to constantly be at their optimum fitness level. They are constantly working to improve their performance, with both adaptations to their fitness routines and resistance training.

Steve Nance, Strength and Conditioning coach at Fulham Football club, is more than qualified in the area of player fitness. Chiefly responsible for getting Fulham fit, strong, prepared and injury free for the rigours of the English football season, Nance has also worked with the Brisbane Broncos, and is familiar with the required particulars of a player's routine.

It begins with accountability. When they're starting out, more often than not, players fail to take real responsibility for their fitness; they haven't done a core fitness program, they might not have done any cross training or they haven't lifted weights properly before. The initial focus is then obviously to build up their strength and their conditioning; the added bonus is that while most people exercise to improve their performance, very few people exercise because they know it will improve their cardio vascular.

Strength work is obviously crucial to a league

player's conditioning. For players, strength is gained by weight training, but also by resistance training. Strong stomach and lower-back muscles are required for upper-body contact with strong shoulders and chest assisting a player in fending off an opponent whilst moving. Similarly, strong legs are also vital. Players squat, front and back, do leg extensions, leg press and hamstring curls to promote balance and the power provided to tackle. For these reasons, strength training works in conjunction with resistance training.

Resistance training is a form of strength training in which each effort is performed against a specific opposing force generated by elastic resistance (i.e. resistance to being stretched or bent). Properly performed, resistance training can provide significant functional benefits and improvement in overall health and well-being.

“As conditioners and coaches we want to cause adaptations for your sports and your activities that develop the people that are playing them or doing them to perform better.”

What is essential is players learning to adapt. When an adjustment is made to a player's schedule, something changes. If a player exercises properly, then you will get an adaptation – whether it is for better or worse. The purpose of the exercise is to clarify exactly what it is that needs changing and make further changes to your training regime from there. These audits of performance are necessary if you're looking for continual improvement.

“You can cause a bit of a breakdown in your body, especially if you train hard. A fitness session can cause a breakdown. It's the ability of your body to recover after that breakdown that causes the adaptation”.

To begin with, for every training session or match played, there's a recovery protocol that goes with it. From hydrating to ice baths and nutrition, it's

Coaching Methods

With Shane McNally - Wynnum Manly RLFC

Rugby league play at any given moment within a match usually consists of an attacking team, who has possession of the ball, and a defending team, who must attempt to stop the attacking team from scoring. In order to score points the attacking team must move up field. Effectively, they use a combination of kicking and running to do this; moving head-on into the defensive line to either force back the defence or break the opposition's defensive line. The defending team must then devise tactics to limit the effectiveness of the attacking team's ball running and kicking.

Indeed, the focal point of the game is to retain possession and score more points than the opposition. However, not every team walks out onto the field ready to achieve this feat. Before winning can even become a possibility, various processes must be put in place to ensure that a team knows what must be done to get to the point of success. Players must be aware of what they are required to do in attack, yet also in defense to secure victory.

Wynnum Seagulls head coach, Shane McNally, has identified three levels of attaining success within attack and defense. A former Development Officer for the Queensland Rugby League, McNally maintains that these three levels aren't difficult to aspire too - they're relevant to all levels of the game, whether it be Under 8's or on a professional scale. In their most basic form, the levels (and the sub levels contained within) are as below:

Goals

- To score points
- Continual go forward
- To retain and maximise possession and to
- Gain and maintain field possession.

Processes and Methods

- Attempt to cross the advantage line on every play
- Make the defense think: target players
- Gain lateral field position whilst going up field
- Support the ball carrier and
- Continuous completion of sets
- Focus on turning the ball over positively on your terms and
- Maintaining a good kick and chase

Essential Skills

- Dummy half players
- Good catch-pass-carry
- Being able to run good lines
- Communication
- Organized play
- Quality kicking skills and
- Disciplined play.

As noted above, there is a direct correlation between the three levels, the intricacies of each interlocking together to form a cohesive game plan. The essential skills, having preceded the methods and processes are the basis of the goals a team works towards.

“You need Essential Skills to follow that [Methods and Processes] and that [Goals].”

McNally affirms, referring to the relationship between the three levels, which for all intensive purposes can be seen as a pyramid; of the elements of the first level (essential skills) must be at an exemplary standard before players can elevate themselves to putting the second level (methods and processes) into practice. After the essential skills (level one) and methods and processes

(level two) utilizing the essential skills are implemented, then the third level or final stage of the game plan seems more attainable: goals. Of course, goals will be made irrespective of whether the two primary levels of the pyramid are implemented or not; this simply recognises the distinction between having the right ingredients to get to the stage, and how a team needs to think when they're there.

“The first thing to look at is our objectives or our goals.”

Shane McNally explains:

“[Essentially], some of the things you're trying to do when you've got possession [are to] score and maximize possession; completing sets and staying up there [in the opposition's half]. [Also, being able to] Gain and maintain field position [while] going forward.”

To be able to do this, the basics of a player's game must be the initial focus of the team plan. Without the ability to run good lines (which encompasses having good footwork and speed as well as evasive skills), a player automatically cuts out one area of their game that could very well be an essential part of the team's attack. If simple ideas like the catch-pass-carry method are ignored, then every process that alludes from the basics of the game will suffer. McNally emphasises the importance of communication, quality kicking skills and disciplined play among the essential skills that should be revisited continually.

For example, with quality kicking, there is no advantage in knowing when to kick if you don't know where to kick. Instead of kicking the ball 70 metres, straight into the arms of the fullback, kick the ball short at roughly 50 metres and make the fullback work. These basic skills are things that should be done at every training session. As a result of doing so, the rest of a player's game will benefit from a low mistake rate and increased awareness of their surroundings. This creates the platform for the next level; methods and processes.

“Turn the ball over positively; at the end of a set of six you should have a plan, or part of your plan should be to put the ball in a certain part of the field on your terms.”

McNally says:

“What tends to happen a lot is teams tend to see the last tackle, they think kick and they kick it. There is not much thought about it.”

Turning the ball over positively under the team's terms is one method and process that Shane McNally identifies as being an intricate part of any attack. It ensures that the attacking team remains in control of the ball, even when they have to turn it over to the opposition.

Coupled with other philosophies such as making the defense think (targeting individual players) and supporting the ball carrier, this process induces the game plan closer to the goals the team is working to achieve. By implementing processes such as making the defense think, therefore forcing them to adjust their defensive line with every play, the attack benefits. If the defense is just moving up and down, they don't have to think. If the attack is challenging them continually, then the methods they have developed and instituted are working.

Again, this is similar to the idea of supporting the ball carrier. Instead of running one decoy who may divert the attention of one or two members of the defense, have a number of options running behind the ball carrier to both confuse and assault the opposition. An innovative approach, this sort of method comes from the honing of the essential skills discussed in level one under communication and an organized plan or structure. The different sub levels within the three levels all come together to create an effective game plan.

The next level is where everything comes into fruition. All of the skills developed in level one and the processes instituted in level two form the building blocks for what the team hopes to achieve with their attack. Several scenarios have been created and models put in place for the team to work into their attack. Instead of aimlessly striving to win, there are several sub-level goals on more attainable levels that can be achieved; yes, to score, but also to go forward in attack, retain and maximize possession and gain and maintain field possession. If these goals are reached successfully, then what has been the bigger picture - winning - is now a possibility.

Focusing on defense, a defensive side must prevent metres lost, defending against ball runners and kickers. The main effort, as always, is to avoid being scored against. To prevent scoring, the main ideology is to limit the opposition's position, force them to make errors and to ultimately gain possession to limit their time with the ball. To do this, players must be proactive in getting off the line and putting defensive pressure on the opposition, by forcing them to drop the ball. Good talk, as well as good line movement, are two important tools in shutting down the opposition's attack, along with good speed and good structure. These all assist in the mission to gain and retain field position, yet they also help to sap the confidence of the opponent.

“If a player is confident, he'll go to the line.”

McNally states:

“As soon as he starts being a little unsure, he'll start playing behind the line and that makes it easier for your defense.”

In preventing metres lost it is also important to 'wrap up the ball' to prevent the attacking player from offloading. Offloading ultimately causes second phase play, which equates to more possession for the opposition and more opportunities for them to create something out of nothing. There is heavy emphasis placed upon line recovery; after a tackle; it's important that players get back to reform the line. This allows for time to adjust to meet the attack if necessary.

A correlation between 'targeting players' in methods and processes is recognised here. It's essential that the defense is so strong that the attacking side cannot break the line. The idea is

to restrict attack on certain areas of the field and provide a good kick return game, something taken from the essential skills level.

A good marker defense system is imperative so that even on the offensive, a side can control the speed of the play the ball while not giving away too many penalties. For example, 'sliding defence' requires that gaps are left at either edge of the field at the end of the defensive line, which aims to squeeze more players around the area of play. This allows the line to be at its strongest around the position of play, leaving the attacking side less opportunity to run through the line. Should the attacking side move the ball towards one edge of the field in an attempt to go around the defensive line, then the entire defensive line will move in that direction. Inevitably, if a team scores too many back to back penalties, they are going to be scored against.

“My observations as a coach tell me that most coaches seem to focus on this area [goals]. Less time on this [methods and processes], less time on that [essential skills].”

Shane McNally surmises:

“[The] Most attention should focus on essential skills.”

Ultimately, McNally identifies three main levels that demonstrate the importance of the breakdown of the attack and defence processes. Essential skills, methods and processes and goals are basic philosophies that acknowledge the relevance of skill training and the development of a thorough game plan.

Although the overall goal of a team is to win, it's essential that small successes be recognised as contributing factors to that effort.

Notes

Performance, Needs Structure & Resources

With Scott Dickinson – Knights Performance Manager

When coaching at a small regional club, or working with a junior side, sometimes there are simply not enough resources available for you to access as much as you would like. Whether it's about a lack of financial assistance, not enough staff and volunteers or the lack of appropriate resources such as equipment, every club has struggled at one time or another.

There are several components that must be taken into consideration when it comes to developing the appropriate support team for your club; structure, staff and resources.

Scott Dickinson, Performance Manager for the Newcastle Knights, is well aware of the various constraints that clubs experience. A former employee of the Queensland Academy of Sport, Dickinson recognises the importance of a division of funds and the need to provide adequate support for players currently in the National Rugby League system, as well as those playing at a lower level. Comparing the National Rugby League to the Government sector, however, Dickinson also distinguishes the unique situation facing the team module verses the individual amateur athlete and the support they require.

“The importance the Governments place on success in the international arena or the national arena is probably one of the highest priority issues for them because our national sports teams are a representation of us as a country.”

Dickinson explains:

“The resources and funding that they pump into them is phenomenal. Things like nutrition, physiotherapy, sports science; that includes biomechanics, physiology, skill acquisition, all these type of things. They're as good as you can probably get.”

The individual athlete competing within the representative realm is most likely an amateur. They will work all day and then turn up for a training session in the afternoon. They will train in the morning and then return again in the

afternoon. As expected, their level of commitment is enormous, given that they essentially don't receive anything back. However, when it comes to professional league players, it's a completely different story.

“Speaking from experience at the Knights; when I came on board fifteen months ago, we had a situation where players are getting paid – in some circumstances, an enormous amount of money – to play a professional game, but the support around them was certainly not what you would expect of a professional sporting team.”

For instance, with a senior squad comprised of approximately thirty to forty people, there was one person assigned to the physical dedication of the players. This equates to one person in charge of the team's rehab, all of the team's strength work and all of their cardio. Admittedly, this is impossible; the work of an entire team of specialists – support personnel, assistant coaches, IT and video analysts and coaches of underpinning programs such as premier league – cannot be done, or done properly, by one person.

“There is no way that anyone can work with that type of numbers and have success. This is our national flagship; it's the game, the highest level these guys are going to perform at in this country. We're expecting them to perform; if they've got one person helping them along the way. Trying to get the job done would be an insurmountable type of obstacle.”

As Dickinson explains, there is an extraordinary difference between the two arenas. Empathising with struggling clubs, he recognises the divide where there is an enormous amount of support and very little funding going on towards the athletes as opposed to an arena where there was an enormous amount of financial support going toward the players and very little support.

Comparatively, the government sector can be likened to any club, at any level. Every club requires the same facilities and staff; however they

all operate under different circumstances. Every club needs the following – money, administrative assistance, personnel and resources, including training venues and equipment. While money could be poured into these things, it instead often goes toward player’s salary. Evidently, the money issue is probably the limiting factor in many situations. It controls the amount of support personnel you have available to your team. For example, if your head coach is the person who is running the show and trying to link the physical preparation with the skill, then by definition your support staff is there to provide back up. If the funding isn’t there, then the support is also lacking. The important thing is to compensate what you may not have, for what you already have at your disposal.

Within the club there may not always be people there with one specific purpose, such as strength and conditioning. Therefore, the possibility of staff having to multi-task becomes a reality. In an ideal situation, each club would have a performance manager who is also their co-ordinator, the strength and conditioning coach, the rehabilitation coach, sprint coach and a junior strength and conditioning coach. In addition, the performance manager would also have control of strength and conditioning coaching for their underpinning programs as well as serving as a massage co-ordinator or consultant and a stretching co-ordinator. Unfortunately, many clubs simply have a head coach with one assistant, and possibly someone who covers rehabilitation and strength. Again, this is because of a continuing lack of resources.

“At some stage, most of us face different limitations, whether it’s financial, administrative or structural types of limitations that are placed upon us. Yet, even if you don’t have the best of everything, maybe you can make a couple of adjustments and get the best of what you can possibly achieve out of it.”

Aside from financial assistance, there are two other types of support a team can benefit from greatly; physical support staff and sports

medicine. The physical support staff are necessary in that they provide players with physical competencies to perform the technical skills required of their position, including their strength, speed, agility and their endurance. They provide essential information pertaining to the physical well being and readiness of the players, as well as their physical preparedness week by week.

Medical staff aid performance staff in ensuring players are fit and able to train, fixing them up from injury and getting them back on the field. Once again, this comes down to a finance issue. However, there are ways of working around the problem by adjusting what you do already have. The possibility of bringing in students from local Universities and massage schools is a good substitute for the ‘real deal’. Students would be working on a volunteer basis in a professional environment and gaining experience while bridging the gap between the support system with the team and the head coach.

“If we’re talking about making sure they get the best result, we all know that one on one coaching is going to result in probably better results for the athletes concerned,” Dickinson notes. “Although this is a situation many clubs can only dream of.”

Seemingly, as the game becomes more professional, several clubs are falling along the wayside as they cannot keep up or compete for resources, coaches and even players. In comparison to the national sporting institutes around the country, who have the resources with sometimes no reward, they are drastically behind.

As Dickinson says, “My experience up there is that the resources that are pumped into the national institute are by far superior to what I’ve seen in most professional sporting clubs.”

Consequently, without secure financial booking, clubs will always be limited by budget constraints, and in turn a definite lack of staff and resources. While they can use what resources they have to stretch their imaginations, and increase the work load of the current coaching staff, they will still struggle to find even ground.

Performance Psychology

With Paul Penna - Australian Institute of Sport

Dispute is a natural part of any sport that has to deal with performance, pressure and people's expectations. Regardless of whether you are an athlete or a coach, conflict and the resulting disputes are something that continually occurs during training, during competition and in the locker room. Yet dispute is not the issue at hand; what is important is the way that coaches and their athletes deal with dispute and handle the pressures of working with each other, and in cooperation with the parents, administrative figures and referees that are involved with their sport. The important part of dispute is to take responsibility for the issue and attempt to resolve it. This can only be done in a harmonious environment, therefore highlighting the need to eradicate as many disputes from their job as possible.

Paul Penna, Performance Psychologist with the Australian Institute of Sport, believes that there are two principles that correlate with dispute – control, and being proactive. For a coach, control is essential. As their role requires them to both direct and assume command of a team, they must exhibit their control accordingly. But how do they attain the right balance of control and avoid disputes from occurring within their club? They are proactive, in both their thinking and their actions. Responsible for a unit of people, they deal with the pressure of success and people's expectations every day.

So why coach?

“Coaching, just like any sport, as an athlete is going to be a love hate relationship. We love it when the team is playing well. We love it when they're listening.”

Penna explains:

“We hate it when we're not playing well or getting thumped, and the media is just writing rubbish. We've got to balance that out and make sure there are more reasons, more reasons that we focus on, the reasons why we're doing it.”

Penna heralds getting back to the basics. Rule number one: control yourself. Being a coach, there are only three things in life you can control. The way that you think, the way that you feel, and your actions. These three things combine to form the following theory - the way we think directly influences the way that we feel. The way we feel and think directly influences our actions. Essentially, this is the most important thing a coach can learn and translate through his approach to control. Once it is established what he can and cannot control, it becomes obvious that there is also a reason for his actions and a reason for his behaviour. This can then be transferred onto his team.

“One of the keys is that you are responsible for controlling yourself in every situation. That's exactly what we want our athletes to do; we want them to control themselves under pressure, to focus on what they need to do to get the job done.”

Penna says:

“It comes back to controlling those three elements and it's no different for you as the athlete, coming back and controlling yourself.”

The next rule is simply being proactive, and taking active steps to control yourself and your actions. In doing so, you make sure that you are fully adverse to what's going on, that you know the individuals involved and that you have invested time in a relationship with these people already. The main problem with disputes is that when they haven't been shut down early enough they often escalate as a consequence. Both parties become irritated and more often than not one party leaves unhappy. Unfortunately, then you are often unable to resolve the issue quickly. To prevent situations like this happening, strategies and techniques need to be developed so that you are aware the person has heard what you have said. If not, stories begin to circulate and then conflict really begins.

“As a coach, you’ve got to develop listening skills. Why? Because you’ve got to listen to absolutely everybody.”

A healthy relationship with the entire club including staff and players is essential. Under pressure, these are the people you need to perform, and without complete confidence in each other, what you are asking is not possible.

“It matters most that when they’re under pressure, they’re going to perform. You’ve got to know that they’re going to perform for you, because you’ve got that relationship.”

The only way to develop that relationship is by investing time.

“Time is something that every coach doesn’t have – every coach is time poor. You’ve got to make it a priority.”

Paul Penna says:

“I don’t work with an athlete only. I work with a person as a whole.”

Conflict also occurs within a team. For everyone involved, it is essential to recognise that all people make mistakes. The best way to overcome such obstacles is to be proactive and swallow one’s pride and by trying to understand both parties and having them explain their actions, consequently making them partly responsible for them by having insight into the problem.

One way to get this insight is through effective questioning. Understanding the right time and location for dealing with conflict is a large part of the resolution process. For a coach, being able to control your tone and body language as you approach the situation leaves you with a great amount of leverage. The coach has to maintain his credibility at all times, especially when it

comes to dealing with parents. Parents always believe they know what is best for their children which can be hazardous in a club environment. A balance needs to be created so that what a player gets from both his parents and his coach is strong and positive reinforcement. Developing ground rules and establishing guidelines are the first step to achieving this balance.

“You’re going to be far better coaches when you’re more relaxed and in charge of the situation.”

Again, don’t worry about the things you can’t control. Stay calm and confident throughout adversity. Promoting individual responsibility and maintaining clear rules will let everyone know what you stand for as a coach, and with the principle of advocating positive feedback, team unity will be secure.

Ultimately, conflict resolution is the process of attempting to resolve a dispute or conflict. Successful conflict resolution occurs by listening to and providing opportunities to meet the needs of all parties, and to adequately address interests so that each party is satisfied with the outcome. If someone is going to come to you, take the time to sit down with them uninterrupted. Be patient and speak pleasantly, and if the situation is getting out of control shut it down and leave. Control your behaviour and control yourself, manage your time and find a balance that helps both you and the team achieve the best. The basics can be hard to do under pressure; always maintain your control and remember that there is no winner in conflict resolution. Why? Because you’re trying to achieve a common goal.

“Winning is something that you don’t control so don’t get caught reinforcing it all the time – it’s the way a team plays that is the important thing.”

Notes

Player Learning Styles

With Luke Ellis - ARL Development

Every coach adapts a different combination of teaching and learning to meld their coaching style. Regardless of the age or skill bracket they are in charge of, every coach must realise that he must adjust his methods for his charges. As a coach, your learning style determines not only the way in which you and your athletes learn, but also provide an indication of the methods you prefer to use while you coach.

Essentially, there are three ways in which athletes will learn; visually, auditory and via doing and kinaesthetic behaviour. Luke Ellis, Education and Training Manager with the Australia Rugby League, is well aware of these methods and the way they affect an athlete's ability to learn. However, in the same way they affect an athlete, they affect a coach and the way in which they handle themselves. Just as athletes are visual, auditory or kinaesthetic learners, coaches are visual, auditory or kinaesthetic teachers. Depending on the needs of the majority of his team, a coach must change his style accordingly.

"It's important for me as a coach to get an idea that I need to cross those three forms of presentation to get the message across to my athletes," Ellis says.

For example, visual learning: Some athletes need to see a coach's facial expressions and body language to fully understand what they are being shown. Visual learners often think in pictures and learn with visual aids. During training sessions, they can be found at the back of the pack, watching demonstrations and processing what is shown for their own learning. A coach who learns visually is more likely to teach using a lot of demonstrations to get their point across.

In contrast, auditory learners learn best through listening. Lectures, as well as pre-game talks are the most beneficial mode of learning for auditory learners, and as a result, these players respond quickly through verbal feedback.

"These players in your team, these auditory learners learn through talking. When you're talking at half time, when you're talking before a game, they're taking in most of their information at that time,"

Ellis explains:

"If they're doing a passing drill or a kicking drill, all you need to do is go up to them and speak to them, and they'll be able to quickly transfer what they're doing."

Following either methodology, athletes will process the information they are being shown in their own way. As for the kinaesthetic learners, the majority of the group, they learn by doing. Recalling information best through a hands-on approach, kinaesthetic learners find it hard to sit still for extended periods of time, becoming distracted by their need for activity. These are the players in the group who, when you explain a drill, are all excited that they get to do something, until they realise what it is.

"You say, 'You're going to go from this hat, to that hat, you're going to go round and around that hat, pass the ball to this guy, and then you're going to come back to here.'"

Ellis explains:

"They line up, and they go straight to the back of the line because they've got no idea about what they are being asked to do. They watched you do it, watched you go through it and they've listened to the instructions, but because they haven't done it themselves, they're not learning."

Regardless of the team, or the sport, you're going to have visual learners, auditory learners, and kinaesthetic learners in your team. It's important in the way that you coach that you take that into consideration and you can implement successful training techniques that can benefit everyone.

Again, if you're a coach who is an auditory learner, you tend to talk a lot to your team, because that's how you learn. Remembering that learning styles are only preferences for individual players, all three approaches should be used in combination to assist in providing variety. It's imperative that when you do a demonstration that it is just not talked about – it should be shown to the group and then they should be given the opportunity to get involved. Changing your mode of teaching style away from your preferred mode of teaching will encompass the whole team.

“The way you like to learn, is the way you like to coach.”

For instance, when you are introducing a new skill at training, get the team in and talk about it before you demonstrate it. Take into consideration that until you've spoken about it, demonstrated it, and experienced it, some players won't know what you're talking about.

“What do we usually do at halftime? Talk. What do we do pre-game? Talk.”

Instead, use the pre-game period to run through the game plan with the team. The visual learners get to see it, the auditory learners hear it and the kinaesthetic learners get to do it so it is fresh in their mind before they go out onto the field.

At halftime, use a whiteboard to illustrate what you mean. If you can transfer your intentions to a board, it will make the picture clearer. By changing your style a little bit, the players will become involved quite quickly. Everybody will still take in the information some just take it in more effectively.

When a coach starts to mix up his approach, the players start to learn differently, increasing the coach's chances of broadcasting the message successfully to his players. Take, for instance, this brand new skill. At the early stages of learning, players may look clumsy and uncoordinated. Their performance may be error-riddled and their physical movement may be slightly restricted. Their rhythm and control are at a limited level. As they progress, they reach a more intermediate stage. The player will have a basic command of the technique and sequencing. A reasonable return will start to be noticeable, though some of the same mistakes from the

previous stage may be made. Players will be more competitive and proactive with their training.

At their most advanced stage, the task is mechanically efficient. A player can process other information while performing the task and will display confident and purposeful movement. Depending on the quality of instruction, the acceleration of the skill may be quite quick.

“It's important for us as coaches. It's important to identify what stage your athletes are at and then what sort of feedback you can give them.”

*“The way
you like to
learn, is the
way you like
to coach.”*

Ellis says:

“If you have knowledge at these three stages of where your players are at, it really gives you an indication of what sort of feedback you should be giving.”

Institute new skills into your training – try the D.E.P.E method, or a chaining strategy. All apply to improving individual skills; passing, catching, kicking, tackling and evasion. With the D.E.P.E method, the coach demonstrates the skill, explains how and why it is necessary and then encourages participation. The last step is evaluation or critique, which will occur several times over.

“Demonstrate it, explain it, let them have a go,

Optimal Health and Mental Wellbeing

With Leanne Hammond - Dietician and Exercise Psychologist

Health is: “A state of complete physical, mental and social well being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”

Previously, it used to be seen that health was the absence of disease. If a person wasn't critically ill or suffering from an illness such as diabetes, then they were considered healthy. Now, health compasses all areas of the body and the mind. In terms of optimal health and wellness, now it's seen as being optimal health and mental wellbeing. Leanne Hammond, dietician and exercise psychologist, identifies six key areas in regard to a person's wellbeing; their spiritual and intellectual health, emotional and social health, environmental and physical health and their occupational and leisure health. Partnered, these areas create the wellness wheel, a tool designed to create equality within a person and their state of mind.

“We've got a thing called the wellness wheel and it's important to have a balance of each of these areas in the wellness wheel.”

Hammond explains:

“You don't have to have an equal balance of each to work, just enough to be in line with your priorities.”

First, there is your spiritual wellbeing. Stemming from your mental wellbeing, your spiritual wellbeing is about being one with yourself, knowing who you are and being one with your environment. This also concerns your emotional and social wellbeing. For instance, how well would you rate your social wellbeing and your ability to interact with friends, and your inclusion of social activities that are within your lifestyle? If you have a healthy spiritual quarter, chances are that your emotional and social wellbeing are healthy too. Your physical wellbeing, on the other hand, covers everything from nutrition, your exercise and your actual health. It also deals with

your absence of health – without a decent physical fitness level, your physical health does not exist. The more exercise a person undertakes, the healthier their physical fitness.

Does this absence of physical fitness stem from your occupational and leisure wellbeing? Taking into account how much you actually enjoy your job and the roles that you're doing, are there enough challenges within the work to maintain your interest – it also poses the question, what are you taking from this job? Do you have a desire to further your own personal development through reading and discovery in addition to what you are already taking care of? This works hand in hand with your intellectual wellbeing; keeping up with current affairs, learning about people and furthering yourself in your profession. It also says a lot about your environment, which is how happy you are – where you're living, are you happy with your health, with your family environment and your work environment as well.

“For example, athletes when they're leading up to the Olympics, their physical wellbeing is something they're going to be putting a lot of effort in to.”

Hammond says:

“The other areas may suffer for a little while, but as long as they're comfortable with that, and it's fitting in line with their goals, they can adjust it back in their own time.”

In correlation with the wellness wheel, there are Six Pillars of Optimum Health; eat well, be active, stress less and be smoke free. In addition to those, limiting smoke and other drugs as well as learning how to manage sleep and fatigue can help a person achieve their personal best. It all begins with eating well – sustaining a healthy Glycaemic Index (GI), eating healthy fats and avoiding emotional eating. Your Glycaemic index is an indication of how certain carbohydrates are going

to be digested when they are eaten, broken down and then absorbed into the bloodstream. If you eat foods such as cordial, soft drinks and lollies, you will have a high Glycaemic index, causing your blood sugar to rise dramatically and then drop suddenly. After consuming foods high in GI, your energy will peak with a short burst and then fall quickly, leaving you to crave more.

“If you have a high glycaemic lunch, it’s not going to sustain you and you yourself are going to be tired and moody.”

Hammond says:

“You tend to get sweet cravings at that time as well, and think you need another kick.”

A way to prevent this is by ensuring you eat low GI foods to give you that slow energy release. It won’t give you that quick hit, but it will give you a sustained energy rise, keeping you from getting that last hit that leaves you craving sugar. What you are best doing is eating things that are generally less processed – rolled oats, fruits and most vegetables. Grain bread and white pasta are also beneficial to the system, unlike potatoes and white bread. To increase the glycaemic index, protein can also be added to the diet, in addition to extra vegetables.

What you eat has a large impact upon your cholesterol level. Cholesterol is required to build and maintain cell membranes, and is important as it gets the blood flowing through the system as easily as possible. But just like there are good and bad carbohydrates, there are also good and bad varieties of cholesterol. LDL cholesterol will

stick to tubes that transfer blood and increased the chance of blood clots, blocking the transfer of blood to the vessel which can potentially cause strokes. The risk of clots is also affected by the amount of saturated fats ingested. Saturated fats lower the level of HDL – good cholesterol – in your system and increase LDL levels. Unsaturated fats help HDL levels which help to clear out arteries and reduce the risk of heart disease. Salmon, avocado, fish oil and nuts and seeds are fats that should be consumed in a regular diet, especially flax and linseed that give a person Omega 3, the best type of fat. Dairy fat, although thought to be a bad fat, increases magnesium and vitamin D.

This is indirectly related to emotional eating.

“In terms of emotional eating, it’s hard to try and prevent that. It’s not actually the food that you’re craving; it’s something else – comfort.”

Hammond says:

“Food won’t solve the problem; it may just make it worse.”

In advance, try to come up with strategies to combat that. Things like stress management may be the answer. Exercise releases the chemical compound that contains endorphins, boosting a person’s motivation through their sense of achievement from exercising. This relates directly to the second Pillar of Optimum Health – Be Active. A person is never too old, or too young to start exercise. The key is to make exercise fun. It’s never too late to make a difference to your lifestyle.

continues



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In terms of being active, only half of the population is active enough to enjoy the benefits of good health; an improved quality of sleep, improved mental well being and weight management, not to mention that it decreases the risk of diabetes. It can be as simple as trying to make the active choices the easiest in your lifestyle; making sure everything you do counts. When you exercise, you head into an area of muscle breakdown which stimulates the muscles to adapt and improve when you move. Gradually progress, and push yourself every time by exercising regularly.

“The idea is that over time you’re going to get stronger and improve.”

The third Pillar focuses on the principle of stressing less. Stress is your perceived ability to be able to cope with things that are causing you stress. As long term stress can have adverse health effects, healthy strategies must be advised to help eliminate it. Unfortunately, people often attempt to treat this stress with alcohol, which is connected to the fourth and fifth Pillars of Optimum Health – limiting alcohol and other drugs. The use of caffeine, tobacco (smoking being the fourth Pillar) and other drugs is increasingly being used as a way of releasing stress.

“It’s not something that’s going to be an effective stress management technique.”

Alcohol and caffeine also attribute to the sixth Pillar – managing sleep and fatigue. Over consumption of drugs is one of the most common contributors to sleep deprivation and insomnia. Identified by the World Health Organization as being one of the most important things for health, sleep is essential for helping the body replenish by releasing chemicals such as melatonin into your system.

The number one cause of people feeling chronically lethargic is dehydration. To get the most out of their day and achieve optimum health, people should be constantly rehydrating. Whether exercising or simply working, rehydration helps to keep the system alert and replenished.

Regardless of your current health levels and whether you are a professional athlete or not, optimum health is something that is achievable. Eating well, being active, and eliminating stress are three simple steps to improving your wellbeing. In conjunction with not smoking, limiting your drug and alcohol intake and managing sleep and fatigue, optimum health is attainable.

Notes

Coaching Methods

With Kurt Wrigley - Assistant Coach St George Illawarra Dragons

Attack, defence and transition; three terms that are used liberally in the game of rugby league, and three essential components of any game plan.

Kurt Wrigley, an integral member of the St George Illawarra coaching staff, works with the Dragon's in their attack, their kicking, statistical analysis and forward planning. Formerly of the Adelaide Rams and Cronulla, Wrigley joined St George in 2004, and has since changed the way the three terms used above are utilised within the Dragon's match environment. From the start of a set right to the finish, Wrigley outlines essentially what will make a difference within a side.

“We work hard to get every little advantage we can.”

Attack has always been about the following; the larger players, typically the forwards, generally move the ball up field through a hit up in order to push back the defence. In other words, the forwards use their power to gain field position. Skilled forwards will attempt to pass the ball after drawing in the defence which breaks down the effectiveness of the defensive line. More commonly, this is known as an off-load.

The attacking team may also use combinations of plays utilising speed, passing and kicking designed to confuse the defence, breaking down the effectiveness of the defensive line. However, it is their kicking game that is usually used as a method of gaining field position. When an attacking team is struggling to make ground down the field, a kick can be used to return the ball to the opposition team in their half of the field.

“Look at your attack. You break it up into ones coming out of the end zone, back of the field, front of the field when we get some good ball, whether they made an error or they've had a penalty.”

Wrigley explains:

“When they've had the ball or they've had a scrum; we call that transitional. Transitional is basically where you get rid of the ball, kick chase and also when you're receiving the ball.”

These are typically back of the field strategies. For example, take the 'stay to get out'. With the 'stay to get out', the team is essentially in one area, with the possibility of 'getting out'. The team may not 'get out' in the finish, depending on the defence of the opposition, yet they have had the capacity and the shape to get out and shift. However, if the opposition cramps their defence up too much, then there is a possibility to make it out and make some clean yards down the field.

In contrast, another technique is the 'move to stay'. The focus rests on obviously getting down the field and getting some yardage. Unless you're behind on the scoreboard and it's late in the game, the aim is to not have a 'windscreen wiper' attack that folds in and out.

Other strategies include balanced ball movement where the focus lies on the strengths of your team and the middle 1/3. Late in the half when players are tired, a lot of dummy half running is ideal. There will no doubt be a lot of bigger players in behind the ruck, which will make people double and triple their efforts. Heading down the middle of the field allows the attacking side to get a kick in - it doesn't mean that the ball can't be shifted to either side if there is an advantage to be had, yet it means you can force a channel down the middle.

“We have two principles at the back of the field – one, if we get a reasonable play the ball, we try and stay there again. Teams now are rather good at covering up things, so rather than shifting away from the area if we get good play, you tend to

Coaching Methods

With Ivan Cleary - NZ Warriors

Living in the shadow of rugby union, rugby league has always struggled to find its own identity in New Zealand. In a nation host to five separate Super Fourteen rugby franchises, rugby league is often dwarfed by the other code, with talented players being scooped up immediately. With only approximately 20,000 players registered with the New Zealand Rugby League, it is blatantly obvious that in comparison to what the Australian Rugby League can offer talent, the game is suffering.

Following their inception as the Auckland Warriors into the National Rugby League competition in 1995, the game across the Tasman is undergoing what can only be called a resurgence.

A resurgence that is being led by Ivan Cleary.

Approaching only his sixth season as a coach, the former player is a large factor in determining the direction of the game in New Zealand in years to come. However, what is at hand right now is rebuilding the club. Man Management, structure and club culture notwithstanding, the former Warrior is setting the foundations for seasons to come.

Much like the way Cleary was literally thrown into the lion's den many coaches at a junior and a competitive level experience the same. Every day brings a new challenge to overcome, and unlike the likes of Wayne Bennet or Tim Sheens, a new coach must face the often daunting task of championing it perfectly.

As Cleary says, "It's all about discovery, taking risks and doing the unknown. I had a good apprenticeship at the Roosters, I was just thrown in ... I was just sent to find my own feet. I was under Ricky Stuart there so I learnt a lot."

Ivan explains, "And I'm still learning. I really appreciate what goes into coaching. There are a lot of good coaches out there and I've been lucky enough to be fast tracked into a high profile job."

Cleary speaks of coaches like Stuart and Bennet with great admiration, but at the same time is aware of the responsibility he has as coach.

"All the coaches that I've mentioned have picked some good stuff out [to use in their training]. You pick some stuff that you think maybe you wouldn't do as well, but [I think] you've got to be yourself as well."

As a former player, Cleary has an advantage in that he is well versed in the workings of a team environment, and the diverse characters and cultures that shape a side. When it comes to Man Management, he understands the dynamic, but like other coaches, through no direct fault of his own, he doesn't have the time to give it that he wishes too. With an intense competition like the National Rugby League, it's hard to give each individual the attention they may need when there are so many other aspects of training to be considered. However, as such an important part of identifying a team identity and club culture, Man Management cannot be ignored. At any level, a good relationship between a coach and a player is necessary to form a partnership that will transfer into the team and on to the field.

"Every day is a new experience. It's hard to learn a lot about one person in a short space of time when you've got a whole lot of people there."

Cleary explains, "It's a continual process learning about each guy. Staff, players – it's a learning curve."

Stemming from this is club culture. Obviously, each club will have characteristics that will determine the way they interact with each other, the social side of the club and the way they play. For the Warriors, with players from so many ethnicities, this is very important.

"We try to create our own culture where it doesn't matter. No matter where you're from, your background or ethnic group, anyone can fit into it, that's what we've tried to do."

Sometimes, simplicity is the answer.

“A big part of what I’ve tried to do as a coach is just create the right environment for players to play well in.”

Cleary says, “There needs to be a structure in place at any level for it to be successful. If you’ve got the right structure in place then football comes from that.”

The right structure is important in forming the foundations of a successful club, but it is even more important when it comes to the intricacies of the game itself. As a halfback, Cleary is aware of the need for precision kicking. As a part of your defence what you’re always looking at is targeting the opposition’s kickers. If you can create some pressure on their kickers, if the kick isn’t accurate and you can get the ball, you then can gain some field possession.

What is important to recognise is that players must first be able to create these opportunities to give themselves options in attack. If there are several options available to the team as a kicking unit, it’s going to be a lot harder for the opposition to target you. The problem lies in getting the ball to the right player at the right time – if there are four kickers fighting over the ball and the wrong player is getting it at the right time, then an opportunity is wasted and the opposition will capitalise upon it. With communication and practice, the team will become more conscientious and aware of their individual roles.

“There needs to be a [progression of] working towards a kicker. You can’t just play five tackles and think ‘we better kick it!’”

Cleary says, “There might be certain parts of the field you want to kick from. It’s a lot harder to kick from a sideline then it is easier to get pressure on the opposition.”

Inherently, it relies upon the coach and what he wants his team to do.

“When you’re coaching do you go for the safety net or do we say ‘hey, we’ve got to get to this position and get our kick in or chance our arm on the fourth or fifth tackle?’”

Throwing caution to the wind is something that isn’t familiar to the New Zealand Warriors, and as a coach, Ivan acknowledges that sometimes they do give that extra edge. If you do take risks,

the opposition is going to have to look at you with caution. If you take risks it’s a lot harder for them to study up.

“You’ve got to take risks. As a coach in the NRL, I think that’s something that I’m definitely learning. If you look back at a game, maybe we competed really well, maybe we didn’t take enough risks, or some risks that we probably didn’t need to at the time.”

“Whether you’ve got a guy who’s a good passer or a good kicker, or a good dummy half runner, if he’s good at it, encourage him to do it. It’s an easy way to make ground; it’s a lot of risk. If you’ve got guys who are good at it, why not?”

However, that’s not to say that structure should completely be abandoned in the game. Structure allows for some great football to be played. If it breaks down and the defence starts winning when they play the ball, there can be problems. Yet if the attack can stick to it and retain the ball, they have the chance to gain some ground. This can be evidenced by offloads. Good structure and good support play can minimise the amount of offenders on you at one time. Some players have the skill to capitalise upon this and attempt to offload the ball, which gives the side a massive advantage in attack. In contrast, if the side is playing defence and the structure of the game has broken down, then their goal is to bring it down to more of a passive mode and eliminate the speed of the opposing team. If trailing, risk becomes more of a hidden element. The team will need to become more creative and aggressive in play.

“It’s a little dangerous to have too many ideas because in the heat of battle it can only be achieved if you communicate well.”

Cleary says, “There’s a place for technique in defence but often the guys with the best attitude defend better than the guys with the best technique.”

The bottom line is, if the team is playing well and with a lot of confidence it’s a lot easier for them to do things well. It’s a fine balance, just like being a new coach. Taking risks and experimenting is often the only way to learn things and gain the knowledge and experience you can gain by doing things first hand.

“Being yourself is all a part of the learning experience.”

Coaching Methods

With Ian Millward - NQ Cowboys

At present, kicking is the most important part of the game of rugby league. From how you put pressure on the opposition's kicker that will determine the kick, to how aggressively you can come in on the ball, the focus is initially set to both aggravate the kicker and gain the advantage. But how?

Ian Millward, assistant coach of the North Queensland Cowboys, explains:

“It's a bit of a chain reaction. If your pressure on the kicker is poor, you're going to find what happens is that the kicker is going to hit open space and the chasers can really compress their defence up and be aggressive on you.”

Millward says:

“Obviously, the idea is that you make him kick up, you get some great hang time, allowing you time to catch the ball on the full. No pressure, gives the ball time to travel along the ground.”

Essentially, this has a huge impact on the back three – the fullback and the wingers – and how they can come in on the ball. Depending on the coach, they can be aggressive or attempt to beat the ball back, or they can be conservative and play safe ball. Every coach has different philosophies, allowing their players to get into the routines of wingers providing the assist, or running dummy half runs. For the Cowboys, aggression is paramount.

“I want to be aggressive in that area. I think it's an area that creates momentum. The momentum you create there will set the standard for your first few rucks.”

Similar to what is talked about in normal attack, the main concern is often the shape off the ball. If the fullback is bringing the ball back behind him, he's not a threat. What is important is to get the pass, and make your way across the defence. This way you can create doubt in the defence.

Though this is sometimes looked upon unfavourably by fans, the element of risk it creates can pay off. Millward's philosophy is that if you've got a two on one situation approaching the try line you expect to pass the ball. If you've got a two on one coming off the try line, you should also expect the ball to be passed off. If you don't think about the consequences initially, you've got a greater chance of being more adventurous. The best way to eliminate a defender is to draw a pass. In some ways, people who are at the last tackle want to kick it whenever they get the ball, yet sometimes this is not always the best option.

“At the Cowboys we practice a lot with our top three. Obviously, teams practice a lot on their kick chase, but then again, the quality of the kick will have a big bearing on that. A good chase can get in and improve a poor kick, but at the end of the day some coaches aren't in the position to be adventurous because they're under pressure.”

This also happens if the coach is in a situation where he considers the consequences. Millward believes if you've had some success, or if that is your style, you can go into it with a little bit more aggressive vigour. With the back three, everyone expects them to run the ball from dummy half. By taking that risk, teams will be more prone to the possibility of running it wide or coming up with a play straight away. The back three should be given the opportunity to explore more possibilities and be adventurous. Given the chance to practice it, they should be able to perform under pressure.

Usually, everybody wants to try and get into the middle of the field so the defence will cluster. Once the defence has numbered up, you can create more numbers in attack. By getting players off the ball you can create a situation where they expect the ball to go to a corner, but there's an

escape route for a player to get across the face of the defence, and they can link up. It's not like the halfback going for the line. The pass is a lot easier. Other players must have an appreciation of what pressure the back three are under to gain field position.

"If they can't do it right at the defence, they have got to do it from the back. Sometimes they might be going a little bit backward before they go forward. There's an understanding here that they're just trying to have an impact."

Unfortunately, a lot of wingers cannot pass the ball properly left to right. They must learn how to perfect that pass, and then master passing on the run. Millward says that it is a very hard pass. If you pass on your inside leg, the ball won't get great width and the ball will drop. They have to learn to pass from the outside leg.

Another difficult part of the game for a winger is the situation of defence. All players are competent at kicking the ball and the understanding of reading key indicators in their kicking game. When to stay up, when to sit back in a pocket and how to answer the questions of coming in to numbers and aiming for a more rounded edge. For a winger, it's not just about being brave and catching a high ball or how they arrive at that ball. They have to be a good communicator, be able to identify threats on the outside, or take a forward in an early ruck. Much like the rest of the back five, the position of the winger is becoming a lot more specialised.

"A winger is an important job. It's the winger that is a lot more specialised."

Millward says:

"It's your two wingers, your fullback and your two centres in the back five. In some cases it might be your six or seven. It's usually your second last defender in your defensive line, and then when your winger drops back it's your last defender in your defensive line."

It is then their job to get shape off of the ball if they want to shift it, to go to dummy half. They then may be asked to do a sweeping run and get outside the core ruck defender. The hardest thing for that defender is when the winger has dropped

back. They've not only got to run people off the ball, but they've also got to get behind the ball as quickly as possible and be a player that offers an option. This is when the back five have to do a lot of work together; running people off, getting back or just creating more numbers at the base on early rucks so they present more threats.

They must be able to make decisions, and constantly be on the edge of the defence. It's okay for a coach to say, 'I want this defence', but then they must have the players to do it – the shape, the agility, their understanding and their game sense. With a myriad of talented players, coaches should be asking more of their team – to get players out of their comfort zone, trying a new spot and challenging themselves. Put a second rower in the centres, or a half at hooker. If a coach worries more about development than simply winning, they'll have more of a multi skilled team. They have to be there to come up with the errors, recognise mistakes and build the skill level of their team. It is here they will have the greatest effect on the opposition.

"Game sense is one of the most important things on an edge. More second rowers go forward around the ruck instead of at the edge. Each player should be expandable. You have got to formulate your personnel before you can formulate that."

Millward explains:

"People talk about up and in defence, people talk about a bit more compression, pushing from the inside out. Everyone will come up with different theories and different ways but you've got to work out what your personnel are suited by."

It may have to do with the team's size, or it may have to do with their speed. The thing is becoming pedantic about it and in turn becoming very good at it. It's difficult on the edge and understanding with open spaces how to handle that.

At the end of the day, coaches shouldn't take away the fact that the game is about defence and passing; they're situational. What matters is that every player is exposed to the different positions and plays that can be taken when the team takes a chance.

Coaching Methods

By Steve Folkes - Canterbury Bulldogs

Ten minutes to go in the game, and you're behind the opposition by a single try. On the back of three repeat sets of six, the opposition is weakening. They've been defending their line solidly throughout the game, yet little holes are beginning to appear, there is a noticeable gap forming between the five-eight and the halfback, and every time they rush forward to attack the ball carrier, the gap widens.

All that is needed to claim victory is to feign to the right, before passing to the inside runner who can bolt through the halves and score under the posts.

The clock runs down, and you know you need to run that crucial play. However, the halfback wants to run wide and try and score around the wing, thinking that the opposition won't even see them coming. The five-eight wants to chip the ball over the top, setting the winger in position right beneath the ball, ready to score and the lock forward wants to go himself. The coach doesn't care what you do as long as you get the winning result.

Play continues, the whistle blows. The game is over. What could have been a great victory is simply another loss, something that could have been avoided if only for one essential element of any team's game plan; communication.

On the field or off, Steve Folkes stresses the importance of communication; between the head coach and his staff, between players, and especially between the players and their coach.

Stronghold of the Canterbury Bulldogs for nine years and counting, Folkes has led the team to two grand finals and a premiership from five finals outings. A strong believer in perfecting the basics of the game, he learnt long ago which buttons to push to achieve success within his squad.

Button number one: players socialising together and forming friendships off the field. Steve Folkes

places special emphasis on his players enjoying time together when they're not in uniform or at training. His theory is that if team mates gain the trust of one another in social situations, the better they will work together on the field. Using the example of the half and five-eight, Folkes believes that the better the relationship between the pair, the more "harmonious partnership" the halves will have. The more they train together, and show each other a shared commitment to the game, the bond grows, and so does their confidence on the field. Players begin to build some cohesion, and the team automatically reacts in kind. They talk more on the field, and the job gets done.

Regardless of the position on the field, the most important defence and attack mechanism is communication. Whether supporting the ball carrier from the play the ball or building the defensive line out from the twenty, it is crucial for players to be able to read the opposition's next move and combine to combat any attack put forward.

Folkes remarks,

"Again it's communication. Everybody has to be vocal and everyone has to be trying to make the guy next to him have an easier job by letting him know what he is going to do.

"Then you let the talent of the players that you have at your disposal take charge of the rest."

For example, communication is vital to combat quick play the ball while keeping your line intact. The aim is primarily to dominate the play of the ball. If the opposition gets a couple of quick play the ball, then your goal has to be to dominate the next one, and numbers across the field are necessary to do that. To succeed, the whole defensive line needs to be doing exactly the same thing. It is impossible to have players running forward if the opposition is coming at you. You need to hold the line, try and get some numbers in and slow the next play down.

Now you hit button number two; communication between players, and their coach. The first challenge is communication channels between the coach and his players. If these are not overcome, problems arise that might impede the player's ability and desire to implement any suggestions. Canterbury's latest initiative, a leadership group of players voted upon by their team mates, is one platform that allows the players to interact with their coaches about their game. Designed primarily for the purpose of improving the Bulldogs game overall, the group gives the players more responsibility over their performance. Heralded by Folkes as a vehicle for expressing themselves, the groups focus is interaction between each other, with the leaders sharing any further concerns with the coaching staff.

As Folkes explains,

"It gives them accountability for themselves.

"It gives them ownership of everything if they are consulted on decisions that we make. If they feel something is not the way they would quite like it, we have a discussion."

An added benefit of this approach, is that it allows the coaches to maximise time at training for areas of the game that are important. Like every coach, Folkes has limitations on how much time he can allow himself to spend with his team at training, yet he still emphasises the importance of connecting with his players.

"You certainly take notice of what they think and what they say, and, quite often, they are just a mouthpiece for all the rest," he concedes.

"If they come to you and feel really strongly about a particular way you are playing the game that

they think should be different then I guess you need to listen."

By instituting that level of compromise, the connection between the coach and his players becomes secure. Players need to be able to interact with their coach, and the coach needs to maintain the respect and support of his players. The feedback that comes from the players as a result is beneficial to both parties, and consequently, their game improves.

After affirming the communication channels between players, and the team and the head coach, the final hurdle to overcome is opening the channels between the coach and his staff. Hence, button number three.

Having only one assistant coach may seem daunting, yet Steve Folkes believes one is enough. This allows for the coach's message to come across more clearly and doesn't allow margin for error. This method minimises confusion, and is another example of clear communication.

Priding himself on taking a hands-on approach with his coaching, Folkes has an interest in every aspect of the football team. While he may have certain staff working with players on one specific aspect of their training, he devotes as much time as possible to overseeing the team. The success of the team is a collaborative effort.

A large part of the winning formula for a team is the ability to communicate on and off the field. The interaction between the coaching staff and players, and the relationships formed between players can have great influence over their performance on the field, and even help obtain that winning result.

Notes

Coaching Methods

With Craig Culnane - Parramatta Eels

There are many similarities that can be found in both the roles of player and coach within the game of rugby league. Number one, it's often thought that a loss was the fault of one, when it may have been the other. Number two, both require mental alertness, a clear head and the ability to work well under pressure. Number three, they are both motivated and committed individuals; the player, to securing the win and appeasing his team mates and his coach, and the coach, to ensuring his team is prepared to the best of his ability. Suffice to say, they do not always see eye to eye. Yet there is another thing that coaches and players will always have in common – they are always looking to learn.

“Watch it, make notes of it, take it down and see how you can apply it to your coaching.”

As can be witnessed by examining the National Rugby League season in 2007 and comparing it to last year, there is no room for complacency in the professional game, or at any level. Rules are constantly changing as the game becomes more elite. Players are becoming more innovative and coaches are under more pressure than ever. Approximately seven NRL clubs came under new leadership prior to the new season, eight, if the new Gold Coast franchise is included in the tally. The demand for success by clubs and fans alike is still there, yet how is the standard met?

“You’ve seen players with better vision than others and you as a coach have responsibilities to put those into positions that are best going to suit your team.”

Speaking at a NSWRL Academy Level Two coaching course in Narrabeen, Craig Culnane, currently of Parramatta's Jersey Flegg side, is well aware of what it takes to be a good coach. A former player, Culnane also knows what a good coach expects of his team. Essentially, it does indeed come down to learning; practice, refined ball skills and a desire to know more.

“Be a sponge at all levels. Even if you're dropping your kids off at netball and you see someone who's a decent coach doing something that's worthwhile and you think it's okay.”

Culnane explains:

“You've got to be a sponge in this game,” Culnane reiterates. “Always be looking to learn. That's a real sign of a good coach. Don't sit back and think that you've got it all because no one ever has.”

So what gives a club their advantage? One theory is advanced skill. Whether considering support play, tackle selection, marker defence or passing, every skill a player possesses can be continually improved upon.

Heavy emphasis is being placed on skill from an early age. From younger representative sides to Under 14s sides, players are being taught how to

grip the ball correctly. They're being taught how to pass on either side of the body. These basic skills are being practiced beyond belief to lift a player's game. Obviously, skill is not the only thing that can make a professional player, but it can be the deciding factor that can break him. The higher a player hopes to achieve, the harder it is to get to the top. Yet if they don't have the foundation skills, it can make things a lot more difficult.

"As well as improving nutrition and analysis and all of those sorts of things you've got to continue to give your players advanced skills."

Culnane says:

"When we look at advanced skills the more basic they can be, the more effective they will be for the players."

This all starts with ball skills. Receiving and controlling the ball, vision, passing and offloads are advanced skills that coaches are impressing upon players. Receiving and controlling the ball can happen in a variety of ways. Whether the ball comes to you via a pass, a kick down the field or a loose ball along the ground there is always a multitude of things you can do with it. Better yet, these things can be practised in training. Simulated drills and games present similar situations to those that may appear within a match. Inevitably, mistakes can be eradicated with persistence.

The same can be said for passing. For example, the 6 o'clock pass. Presenting an easy catch for the person who's catching it, the 6 o'clock pass is a short pass travelling no more than three or four metres in the air. If the pass is thrown long, it will begin to wobble and won't reach the intended target with definite precision. A specific pass for a specific area of the field, the pass is something that can be perfected in training, reinforcing the ideology of advanced skill and the need for continual practice.

Players need to recognise that applying the correct skill at the correct time is important for both the coach and team. However, vision is a different story. Something that cannot be perfected over night, vision comes from experience.

"Some players are more gifted than others with vision and as a result they'll play in certain positions."

Culnane says:

"You've seen players with better vision than others and you as a coach have responsibilities to put those into positions that are best going to suit your team."

This can also be applied to evasion. There are a number of ways a player can be evasive in the game of rugby league; the sidestep, the swerve, the feint or the draw and pass. A player can also use the hit and spin method of repulsion, or attempt to change their pace to escape the opposition. The skills required to be evasive include balance, speed, agility, power and the ability to create space between the ball carrier and the defender. They also need coordination and vision, as mentioned previously.

A method of practice that Culnane recommends is the warm-up game. These games are vital as they allow players to put into practice the skills that they have learnt. Players learn the skills first in a controlled environment and once their skills are able to be performed without pressure, without opposition or unopposed, then they can be moved into warm-up and continue their progress.

One scenario that fits into this bracket is the one hand carry. During training, a player starts with a two hand carry, and works to put the ball away in the chest with his non-fending hand. Working on distributing the weight evenly he concentrates on his grip being spread across the ball through his fingers. Putting the ball away again into the middle of the chest the player then moves back to the two hand carry. This skill can be practiced in an individual carry drill, or a drill similar to the ¼ turn and catch. Once a player is confident with the new manoeuvre, the skill is carried into the warm-up environment and then on to the field if the player and the coach decide it's a warranted play. The emphasis throughout the game may be placed upon grip, holding the ball, passing and catching and ball movement.

Other skills include tackle techniques, the side step and the hit and spin. The games process is very important as it allows a coach to give good demonstrations of what he expects of his players, and ensure that all players are involved. Allowing

Recovery

With Angela Calder - Recovery Coordinator and Performance Consultant

Regardless of the standard or intensity of competition, regardless of their physical fitness or age level, all athletes, professional or amateur suffer from fatigue. Exhausted muscles often lead to poor decision making and a distinct drop in skill level. Players become less aware of their surroundings and as a consequence players become susceptible to injury. Unfortunately, fatigue is unavoidable.

By having a player at their optimum fitness level, fatigue is something that can be virtually eliminated from a player's routine. However, fatigue can also be beneficial. As a coach, your job is to make your players tired. When a player gets tired, their performance declines; yet as they are pushed beyond their limits, they get faster and advance their skill level, which is what training is designed to do. Whether you are testing their capacity for speed, their ability to solve problems or with different skills you intend on training them in, each brings with it some degree of fatigue. A depletion of energy stores, fatigue is the result of a combination of environmental factors.

Metabolic fatigue hits a player after extensive training, while Central Nervous System fatigue is almost psychological, affecting a player's drive and motivation. Neurological (nervous system) fatigue is noticeable following short high intensity sessions, while Environmental and Travel fatigue is prevalent while playing away from home, or after having to travel to training. For example, when a player experiences both a hot and cold climate while training, it causes the body to tire easily. Sunlight has a similar effect. If a player is training without sufficient eye protection, the small muscles that control the movement of the retina in the eye can be fatigued. The same type of muscles that control a player's arms and legs, they build up lactic acid, with the impact of the fatigue lasting up to 36 hours, impairing a player's vision and reflex response time. Sitting down for an extended period of time, opens the window to potential injury.

“If your players feel better, then they’re going to train better.”

Angela Calder, Recovery Coordinator and Performance Consultant, is well aware of the symptoms.

“Every time you [sit down for an extended period] shorten your hip flexes, you shorten your hamstrings, you tighten your lower back,” said Ms Calder.

“If your players sit down for even half an hour, there’s an acute residual shortening of the muscle in the leg.”

Sedentary activities actually make some muscles fatigue, which is why players then need a longer warm up period. This is when a coach must ask themselves; do they have an appropriate system in place to quantify the workload they ask of their players? If players are being overworked at training and then are forcing themselves to perform at competition level, then there will be no improvement in their game. Yet if a coach collates the amount of training and competition undertaken to seek player improvement, than

dramatic changes may be seen. By concentrating on one specific facet of the game at training, progress will be made.

“As a general rule of thumb, the thing you want to train that week should be done when a player is at his freshest,” Ms Calder said.

Therefore, if you want to focus on speed at a training session, don’t do a weights session first as it will tire the players out.

“Think about what it is you want to focus on.”

Fatigue can be measured in many ways; through a player’s observation of himself, a coach’s observation, or through a sport’s science and medical perspective. Both coaches and players should be asking themselves these questions:

- Does the player feel tired after training?
- Does the player continue to feel tired?

When a player’s skill level starts to decline or when they fail to accelerate off the mark as they usually do, it is evident that fatigue is beginning to impact upon their performance. If a player starts to position themselves incorrectly, it puts increased pressure on their decision making. If these mistakes are identifiable, then the initial thought must be – ‘how can we minimise that?’

If players continue to feel tired, then there is definitely a problem. Following physical activity, they should be able to get over their fatigue as a part of their body’s response to the punishment it has taken. Essentially, it should learn to adapt. But what can be done to stimulate the body into repairing itself?

Active Recovery

In rugby league, any team will find that they score the majority of their points against the opposition while the opposition is tired. Right after half time, and following the match, coaches should institute recovery procedures to regulate a player’s routine. As soon as the players get over that fatigue, and the sooner they bounce back, the better the effect of their recovery will be. At present, recovery strategies are collected from a number of areas, dependant on the balance of work with time of rest, and the amount of carbohydrates, electrolytes and protein entering an athlete’s body. The RLCM COACH TALK Yearbook

amount of work undertaken to maintain the body, physical strategies and psychological factors must also be considered.

“It’s no good just to do one and not the others. It’s my belief that there are probably only small benefits from each of these but collectively you get a significant change.”

Ms. Calder explains:

“If your players feel better, then they’re going to train better.”

The role of recovery is to promote adaptation by minimising the impact of fatigue. One of the first steps is replenishing the body. Electrolytes as well as carbohydrates that have exited the body during competition must be restored. Sports drinks are essential in assisting this process. If a player is replenishing with only water, then the carbohydrates already stored can be depleted, exposing a player to cramping more readily than before. Electrolytes enable the body to absorb the fluid from the gut more easily and will stimulate the thirst mechanism and help get carbohydrates into the muscles faster. In addition to hydrotherapy and massage, electrolytes, carbohydrates and protein enable the body to return to its previous state. Hydrotherapy’s most common form exists in competitive sport as cold and hot blast showers. Using environments such as hydro-pressure in water makes it easier to delay the onset of muscle soreness while reducing lactates.

“The Central Nervous System can get overstimulated with high intensity training. If you want to quiet it down quickly, put it in a hot environment.”

Ms. Calder says of the showers:

“[In conjunction with the hot water] they need the cold immersion as well.”

Working simultaneously with massage, the showers are designed to ease any niggling injuries. Not only is it for the treatment of injuries, but also for the monitoring of players. If players receive regular massage they can train themselves to pick up problems in advance.

Finally, the most important part of active recovery is sleep. The quality of sleep that any athlete gets can have severe consequences upon their

performance. Resting the body for a period of seven to nine hours per night is advisable. Too much sleep or too little can be a problem; too little sleep doesn't give the body time to recuperate and produce the hormones it needs, such as melatonin. In comparison, too much melatonin makes the body sluggish. It has also been advised that training in the morning is not a good idea, as the Central Nervous System takes approximately three hours to fire up. If the body hasn't produced the melatonin or the anabolic hormones it needs, the body cannot react as well as it normally would, leaving it susceptible to injury and illness.

“The sleep you have is designed to help your body adapt to the stresses you have in your life,” Ms. Calder says. “Not just the physical ones, but the emotional and social stresses as well.”

The formula to recovering from fatigue is this – rehydrate and refuel, stretch, and have a contrast shower to stimulate the circulation and increase the delivery of carbohydrates and protein to the muscle. Massage and rest round out the routine.

The bottom line is that coaches have to make sure the athletes understand what they are doing to improve their game, and be flexible enough to change things according to the recovery principle of adaptation. Focus on the processes and not the outcomes, because the process itself will determine the outcome.

“The simple message is there are simple things that can be done to minimise fatigue. Whatever you decide to do, do it well. Simple little things done well and done consistently have the most effect.”

Notes



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RECIPES FOR SUCCESS

PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR RUGBY LEAGUE COACHES

Written by ANNE THOMPSON

Senior Coach, Hull FC Scholarship, sportscoachUK Coaching Consultant (Yorkshire)

INTRODUCTION

There is a lot of written information that rugby league coaches could make use of to aid their coaching.

A lot is written about coaching and how to coach, about technique and skills training, about tactical training, and about physical and mental conditioning.

Nonetheless, most of what is written is often lost on rugby league coaches. It's lost because it either 'goes over their heads', they 'aren't into it', or they 'can't be bothered to read all that stuff'.

If written 'stuff' is ever to get read by more than the minority of rugby league coaches, then it's got to start giving them a **RECIPE**. A RECIPE that gives them: -

Real
Easy
Clear
Instructions for
Practical

Everyday things they can do.

This article gives the first in a number of **RECIPES** that rugby league coaches can use to 'cook up' success in different areas of their coaching.

RECIPE 1

Setting Team Goals

In a team sport such as rugby league, setting team goals has been shown: -

- To be more effective for team success than setting individual goals.
- To give teams focus and direction.
- To help teams stick together and develop a strong team spirit.

So, what's the recipe? How do you go about setting team goals?

Ingredients

- Time, about two 20-30 minute sessions, preferably during the pre-season period.
- Good weather outside or inside space where players can move around to sit in groups.
- Four or five clipboards to rest on to write.
- Pens or pencils.
- Paper.
- Players and coaches.

Method

- Gather players and coaches around and tell them we're going to spend about 30 minutes setting team goals for the season. Tell them it is to give us focus, direction, to help us stick together as a team, and to give us a benchmark by which we can evaluate our performance.
- Split the team into four groups of about four, five or six. Make sure there's a good talker in each group and tell them they are the group captains. It's their responsibility to make sure their group answers and writes stuff down.
- Ask each group to think and talk about what they think the team should be aiming for in terms of outcome goals this season. Explain briefly that an outcome goal focuses on the end result, in this case, league position. Tell them to come up with a 'dream' outcome, a 'challenging but realistic' outcome, and an 'unacceptable' outcome in terms of league position. Tell them they have a few minutes to agree on this.

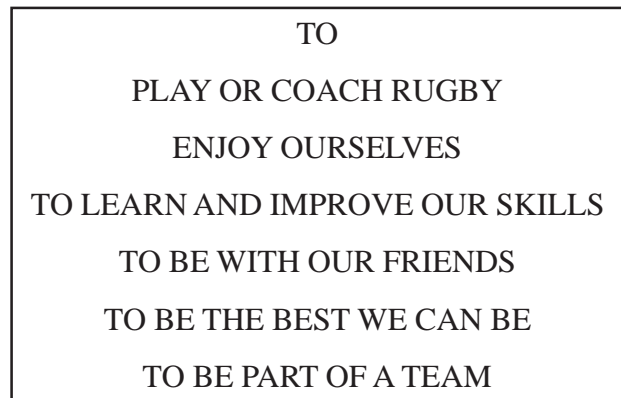
- After a few minutes ask group captains to say out loud what their group think. Address each group in turn and write down first the dream, then the realistic, then the unacceptable outcome.
- Discuss to get a verbal agreement from all about what the team should aim for.
- Once this is done, give each group a clipboard and two sheets of paper and a pen or pencil. Tell them to write a separate heading on each sheet. The headings are with the ball and without the ball.
- Ask the question, “If we are to get the outcome we want, what would we have to achieve, week in and week out, on the pitch as a team with the ball?” Give them examples such as ‘control the ball for full sets’ or ‘turn over the ball always in their half’.
- Tell each group to write a list of things they think the team needs to achieve to help get the end outcome. Give them about ten minutes.
- Ask them to shout out to you what they’ve got and write up their answers.
- Repeat the process for without the ball.
- Some answers will be performance goals and some process goals.
 - o Performance goals specify end products of performance (or aspects of performance) that need to be achieved to make it highly likely the outcome goal(s) are reached. These are the goals you measure.
 - o Process goals specify the processes that are important during performance to make it highly likely the performance goal(s) are achieved. These are not usually measured.
- Tell the team you are going to write this up and summarise the goals next session. Collect all their sheets.
- Away from training, take time to separate the performance from the process goals.
- At the next session, summarise back to the players the performance goals they want. If

there are some you feel are missing, ask to add them. Get a verbal agreement about the team’s performance goals.

- Tell the team how you intend to measure and monitor each performance goal.
- Monitor performance goals and set performance targets for each performance. Always set targets that require a little improvement on the last performance. Targets will therefore adjust up and down as the season progresses.

Here’s one I prepared earlier from Skirlaugh Bulls under 12s team.

PURPOSE: WHY WE ARE HERE



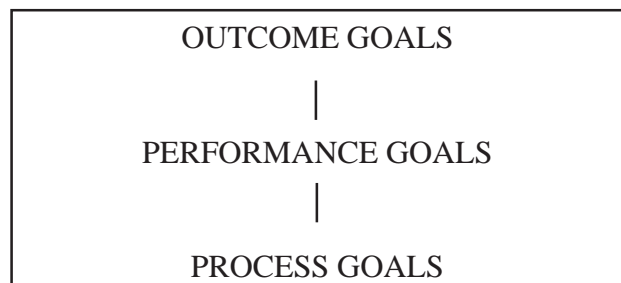
What about you? Why are you here?

The coaches want to be the best they can be as coaches.

Do you want to be the best you can be as a player?

Do you want to be the best you can be as a team player?

GOALS



Outcome goals – desired end results

- End up in the top three of the league at the end of the season.
- Get a win against the team currently dominating our league.

Performance Goals – things we need to achieve to make it highly likely we’ll achieve our outcome goals

With the ball (+)

- When we start a set of six in the RED ZONE (see plan on page) end by turning over the ball in the AMBER or GREEN ZONE (see plan)
- When we start a set of six in the AMBER ZONE – end by turning over the ball in the AMBER or GREEN ZONE
- When we start a set of six in the GREEN ZONE – end by SCORING, GETTING THE BALL BACK or by turning the ball over in the GREEN ZONE

Without the ball (-)

- When we start tackling in the GREEN ZONE get the ball back in GREEN or AMBER
- When we start tackling in the AMBER ZONE get the ball back in AMBER or RED
- When we start tackling in the RED ZONE get the ball back in RED

These are the things we will monitor and measure.

Process Goals – things we need to focus on to give us the best chance of achieving our performance goals

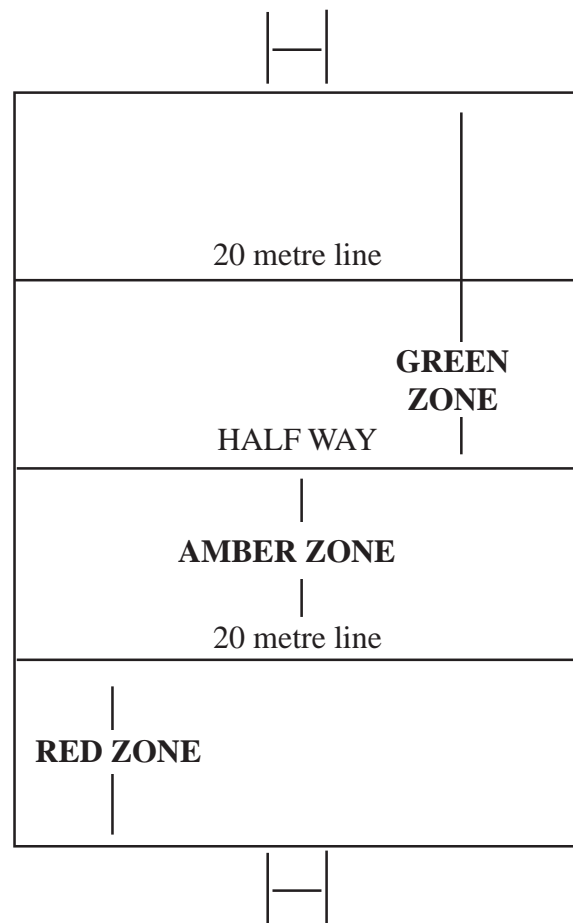
- Controlling the ball – safe grip, carry, pass, catch
- Retrieving the ball – safe stopping, dropping on, picking up and catching a high ball
- Fast and hard running over the advantage line
- Quick and efficient play the balls
- Getting a ‘roll on’
- Running, passing and catching to use and/or create space to score
- Kicking and chasing the ball
- Tackling
- Playing with structure in attack
- Playing with structure in defence
- Knowing our individual roles within the team structures

- Reading the game – where we are on the field, who is around us (team-mates), who is in front of us (opponents)

Also

- Keeping cool under pressure
- Focusing on the task at hand
- Talking positively - about what’s working and about what we want (rather than what we don’t want!)
- Encouraging each other
- Being enthusiastic
- Listening to others
- Being reliable and trustworthy
- Being responsible for yourself
- Being open and honest

TEAM PLAYING PLAN



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