

RUGBY LEAGUE COACHING MANUALS

JUNIOR COACHING

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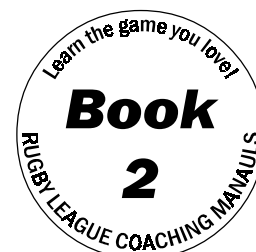
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Preparing the Junior Player on Match Day

By John Dixon, Brisbane Broncos

Preparing a junior player on match day is a task for all coaches and although there is no definite procedure to follow a course of action should be planned.

Every coach will have differing views on how to perform duties on match day. Outlined below are some ideas for coaches to think about. Included are some quotes from Jack Gibson's book "Played Strong, Done Fine". Discussion is invited, especially from coaches at mini / mod level through to coaches at elite junior level eg Colts or U/19.

To begin with:

- (1) Winning needs to be placed in perspective. It should not be the primary source of motivation at junior or recreational levels. While acknowledging the desire to win is a natural one, the coaches main emphasis should be on the players enjoying themselves and performing to the best of their ability.

The emphasis on winning also needs to personally be resolved by the coach within his own coaching philosophy eg. Is winning more important than giving each player the equal opportunity to play (not token involvement but genuine participation)?

- (2) Each team is comprised a set of individuals not a set of clones. The aim for the coach is to get the best from each individual, from the most talented and dedicated player to the least motivated and least skilled.

"You coach individuals not teams. If you can do this a side will emerge." - Jack Gibson

- (3) Game day is the culmination of a week's preparation.
- (4) Establish the routines that govern match day and ensure that you, the players, your support staff and the team's supporters know and follow them.

On match day there are three times that a coach has contact with the team as a whole and with individuals within the team: pre-game, half-time and full-time.

(A) PRE-GAME

'The coach's job in those days was to assemble a good team. Once he had done that he just let them go out and play. There was none of this blackboard nonsense you hear about today. Team talk? Johnny (Cochrane, the coach) used to stick his head around the dressing room door just before a match, smoking a cigar and smelling of whisky, and ask, "Who are we playing today?" We'd reply "Arsenal, boss," and he'd just say "Oh well, we'll beat that lot," before shutting the door and leaving us to it.'

- Raich Carter, on playing soccer for Sunderland in the 1930s.

• Know Your Players

The NRL and SL games often show a peek preview of the dressing room prior to a game and you will see players doing various things whilst getting ready to play. Some are getting a rub, others are already suited up, some are still fully clothed in their ordinary dress. The coach should respect each players pre-game ritual and give the players the space they require as long as it doesn't interfere with other players.

Spend this time talking to each player as an individual, ascertaining and establishing his state of preparedness and covering any aspects of the game specific to that player.

"I never give a footballer a job he can't do. Encouragement and giving each footballer a job which isn't beyond him often produce outstanding results."

- Jack Gibson

The expectation of this pre-game stage is that at a designated time prior to kick-off all players are ready (dressed / strapped / rubbed) to go to warm-up at the same time – no stragglers.

- Warm Up

A few thoughts:

- (1) A regular routine where players feel comfortable and know what is expected and they can best prepare within those parameters.
- (2) A varied routine that focuses on the particular team goals for that week.
- (3) A combination with the initial stages as part of a regular routine and the final stages focusing on team goals.

Warm-ups should prepare players for contact, include some decision-making processes and culminate in vigorous activity.

- Pre-Game Team Address

Ensure that while when you talk all players are seated, can see you and you can see them and that they are listening. Your address should be short. Therefore the expectation within the room is that for that time the dressing room is still and the focus in the room is on you, the coach.

There is a tendency in many dressing sheds for many

- (2) Positive thoughts and positive actions.

One negative thought created in the players' minds can blow away a week of positives.

No matter how the players are feeling, what the weather conditions are like, who the opposition is, the player's task is to act positively, to carry out the tasks he has set, to play to the best of his ability.

(B) HALF-TIME

Half-time is a break and should be used as one. Players should be given a chance to recover physically and to regroup their thoughts mentally. An injury check should be carried out on each player and all players should be re-hydrated.

The coach should then spend some time with each player, this includes bench players who may not have taken the field. As a coach you are expected to understand what is happening on the field and be able to provide answers but players are often able to provide explanations or insights that stem directly from their on-field involvement. Encouragement is better than derision no matter what your personal feelings about the effort the individual has put in during the half.

The player's task is to act positively, to carry out the tasks he has set, to play to the best of his ability

people / players to have a say.

These players would be better served internalising these thoughts and carrying the actions out onto the field with them. Best practice would indicate messages should come from the coach, team captain and if invited to speak, senior players.

The focus of the address should be on:

- (1) The specific goals that the team / coach has set for the week. Often one 'team goal' in attack and one 'team goal' in defence are enough. These goals have been the focus of the week's training and the challenge for the team on match day is for each individual within the team to do his best to see the goals are achieved.

"You don't roar and shout at a player for making a mistake - you tell how to avoid the mistake next time."
- Jack Gibson

Any team address, irrespective of the score, should retain a positive theme and should retain the team goal as the main focus. The team goals are what the team has trained for. It is a rare team that can change horses mid-stream, head off on a different course and still be successful.

"You will never lose a player by congratulating him, but plenty have been lost by abuse." - Jack Gibson

Being behind at half-time is in some ways easier for the coach to set the direction for the team for the second half. Being in front at half-time poses different challenges.

A thought on the effectiveness of half-time speeches.

"I give the same half-time speeches over and over. It works best when my players are better than the other coach's players."

- *Jack Mills NFL football coach.*

Notes

The game is over. Players again need the opportunity to recover physically and mentally. Physical checks and re-hydration should be the first priorities for each player. A room that is initially free from unnecessary personnel enhances the chances of this.

No lengthy speeches. If there is praise to be given for your players as a team or to individuals within the team for their outstanding contributions, this is the time. This can be irrespective of the outcome ie a win or a loss. It is based on preparation for and execution within the game itself.

“There is no greater compliment a coach can give to a player than to say he tried and played to the best of his ability.” - Jack Gibson

If you have nothing good to say it is best to remain calm, polite and say nothing. As they say in the song 'some days are golden, some days are stone'.

In either case the mental and written notes you have taken through the game are the starting points in planning for the first training session of next week.

“Winning starts on Monday, not on game day. Win or lose it only lasts one week. But winning starts early.” - Jack Gibson

Team songs are an integral part of winning dressing rooms. Alcohol in the hands of players, staff or supporters has no place in junior dressing rooms.

Players play and coaches coach because it is fun to play or fun to be involved on match day. As a coach it is our responsibility to best prepare the players so that match day is a rewarding experience for every player.

[illegible]

Hey Coach! - Did you keep a diary?

By Gary Roberts

The season is over, the premiership has been won and the presentation night was a resounding success.

Junior coaches could look back and think one of two things: “did a good job with the kids and I will improve them next year” or “Maybe I could have done better.”

But did he keep a diary of the year? Did he evaluate and test the players and keep a report card on every player they had in their charge for the past season?

Did he record the skill, fitness, strengths and weakness at the start of the season and where the players finished, in regards to those attributes under his coaching?

Just as importantly did he evaluate his own performance as a coach?

Peter Corcoran, Education Director of the ARL Foundation, said in RLCM Book 14 it is necessary to realise that there are three aspects of coaching to consider with self-evaluation - managing, teaching and communicating.

1. Corcoran outlined that managing is the spine of coaching:

“Just as the backbone keeps you erect, management is the support structure that you need to do the job well.”

In this area, coaches need to ask themselves, ‘Was management involved and if so, how did I manage the situation?’

2. Teaching can be seen as the heart of coaching:

“If you teach players the skills they need, assuming that they are basic essentials of good performance, the learning of all these things will make them better.”

In this case, ask, “How did I perform when teaching the players? Did they understand me?”

3. Communication can be seen as the soul of coaching:

Corcoran views communication as ‘the indefinable, invisible thing that allows you to bring it all together’.

Such questions touch on all the pivotal points of a particular action and therefore lay the foundations for strong performance assessment and rectification.

Coaches should thus note the underlying importance of regularly reflecting on their performances. They should also document in a diary or a report card format where their players are at now and how far they

progressed during the past season.

Malcolm McMillan of the QRL Southern Division coaching panel explains: “Although it is not really necessary to test the ‘Mod’ player, it is essential for the ‘International’ junior player. It will assist in the learning and teaching process.

As there is so much for the players to learn. There are all types of tests and evaluations that can be carried out. Keep the tests simple, create a competitive game to watch a skill that the players possess, maybe even stand back and have another coach run the skills session while you are evaluating and correcting the players. Record their ability with the basics; tackling, passing, catching, kicking, play-the-ball, agility and speed.

Children these days are not as naturally fit as they were in days gone by, so some type of fitness testing should also be applied during the year. They will react to the tests the same way senior players do and they will want to know their individual results.” McMillan said.

This is an opportunity for the coach to develop communication with his players by discussing the tests results.

The current coach’s report of all the players for the season can be previewed at the start of the next season. If a new coach takes over, the diary/report card will be an invaluable source of information for the incoming coach, ensuring a pattern of continuity for the particular team.

Records of the player’s strengths and weakness, the improvement that was made during the past year is all vital information that assists in the development of young players.

The timing of the testing is up to the individual coach or club, but it would be suggested early season would be appropriate time to begin with a maximum of another three times during the year.



Should junior coaches indulge in the mindset of ‘Teaching’ or ‘Winning’

By Gary Roberts

Few would deny the taste of victory is indeed sweet. However, is the role of the junior coach to indulge in the mindset of ‘winning the game’ or should they be there to educate young players for the future?

There is so much for a young athlete to absorb that once a coach begins on the track of ‘winning’, his concept of how the game should be played becomes clouded.

Malcolm McMillan of the QRL Southern Division Coaching Panel says:

“I do not stress before a game about winning. I have never told my players to go out and win the game. I tell them game day is when they can have fun.

“We only lost one game last year. Unfortunately it was the Grand Final, but I had no problems with it; we had a great year and the kids played great football.

So, how does a coach teach children to play the game and how does he develop a coaching procedure to adhere to on training days?

“Training should be about players enjoying learning the game, the coach is there to teach and correct player technique.” Says McMillan.

But where does it begin?

One method could begin by watching the previous game. The coach will see problems and situations confronting his team that the players are unable to understand.

He will see team weakness or technical errors with some players and undertake to correct them at the next training session.

Effectively, the negativity of an error in judgment or skill can be turned into something positive by making it the focus of your ensuing practise.

Junior players have a small concentration span, so in order to correct problems it is recommended to limit the focus of sessions to two major points.

Before training begins the coach must be prepared for the practise so that no time will be wasted once it commences. The session starts with the ‘warm up’ and should take about 5-10 minutes; don’t waste precious time with slow jogging exercises.

The coach should implement a warm up drill that will assist in the correction of an immediate problem.

After having a drinks break and a brief chat the ‘drill

practice’ begins. Allow about 20 minutes (divided into two ten minute sections) specifically for correcting the major problems that were identified during the previous game. Explain to the players why they are doing the drill, then explain it again. Encourage players to ask questions, explain the drill again if necessary and show them how you want it done.

Hopefully they will start asking questions, allowing you to reinforce why the drill is being practiced and enabling the fine-tuning of certain aspects.

Only one or two players may have the technical problem that you are trying to correct, but involve the entire team in the learning process. Do not make it too complicated; give them information they will be able to absorb and comprehend.

Practise continually, correcting and amending, and ask the players their thoughts on the drill. Evaluation is needed to confirm that the players understand the drill and its purpose. Has the problem been solved and have the players improved? Did they understand the error? Did all team members comprehend why the correction was needed?

Another drink and talk break is encouraged before moving to the next section.

With the players understanding the drill and its purpose, move the session to a game-related situation played at speed with pressure.

This is the next step in the training session and should last for about 15-20 minutes.

Practice the drills in a game type situation in both attack and defence. The plays should be evaluated by the coach, watching the players making their decisions as they adjust to what is put in front of them. The coach should question his players of what they have learnt. Legendary coach Jack Gibson once said about questioning players:

“The coach might be surprised with the answers.”

A 5-10 minute warm down follows, with the coach still communicating to his players.

The described training session can be completed in 45-60 minutes. If the session was enjoyable, the players feel they are learning about the game from a coach who is interested in them.

Winning will follow. You do not have to talk about it.

Let's Talk Tackling

By Gary Roberts

The game of Rugby league consists of two main principles and from these two principles the game evolves -

Attack and Defence.

RLCM spoke recently to Brisbane Broncos' John Dixon on how the Broncos want their younger players to tackle as they move through the grades.

Firstly the legendary coach Jack Gibson explains about defence in Roy Masters' Book 'Inside League' about Defence training sessions during the 1970's.

"Now the modern coach is really conscious of defence.

"In past days selectors were only worried about whether a player could run the ball. It did not matter if he couldn't tackle as long as he could advance it.

"But with our defence the boy who could run the football wasn't so successful because week after week we would jam our defence.

"We made that our number one priority. We gave recognition to players who went well in defence. I'd read it out 'He made 17 tackles', 'He made three in a row'.

"We drilled at it because, in the old days, not that long ago, if you went to football training there was no such thing as spending one minute on defence.

"They would spend one and a half hours running the football, but on Sunday you are lucky to have the ball 50% of the time.

"In reality, at training the coach should spend 50% of the time on defence and 50% on attack. That is what happens on game day." From the book 'Inside League' by Roy Masters printed 1990.

Jack Gibson back then may have been the first Rugby League coach in Australia to pick up on the importance on defence in the game and spent equal time on the training paddock involving defence and attack during the same session.

Now back to the present, we hear of footwork, fast feet, same leg same side, head in close, ball and all, smother tackles, edge defenders, ABC defenders all terminology that refers to the art of the tackle and

tackling, a terminology that is reasonably new to the modern game.

NRL coaches are always looking for a slight edge to get their club a win in the tough world of NRL football, thus the terminology and jargon has evolved.

But, is the defensive game that is played at the NRL level and the jargon used starting to get in the way of teaching the game at the junior level, and does this assist in the development of players at the junior level?

John Dixon, an assistant coach in the powerful Brisbane Broncos organisation explains it simply, he advises that the systems and patterns that are played in the professional game should be left up there with the super coaches with Bennett, Smith, Chris and Daniel Anderson and the like, as they strive to find a small advantage.

The junior game is about developing and educating players, for the long term and a correct technique must be showed at a junior level before young players move on to the senior level.

John Dixon explains, "I think the tackle is important. But coaches have gone away from the tackle and we have got very much involved in defensive systems and patterns and all sorts of things, and I think the basic tackle, which is the 'One on One' tackle, has been neglected.

"One of the reasons that 'One on One' tackling does not receive enough attention is that it is difficult to produce game-like tackling at training. Tackling hurts, so a lot of coaches at junior and senior level give insufficient time to teaching and practising the fundamentals skills of 'One on One' tackling. Ways need to be found to include basic tackling techniques [no matter how brief] in most sessions.

"It does not matter how big players are, or how small they are, small players will have to tackle big guys and the big guys will tackle small, elusive guys.

"If a player cannot make a tackle 'One on One', then I know he is in strife. Here, [Broncos] we make a great emphasis on making the tackle and being able to tackle everybody, whether they are big, fast, slow, little or whatever.

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The method of tackling had changed over the years, in past days all children were taught how to do 'front on', 'side on' and 'rear' tackles all around the legs, beginning with arms and hands around the buttocks area with the head behind or at the side and bringing the player to the ground by sliding down his legs with clasped arms, and the game saw great tacklers develop and mature through this method. Possibly the best ever at this type of tackle was the great cover defender Johnny Raper. A tackle around the chest area 'front on' was rarely contemplated.

Nowadays figures indicate that only 10% of tackles are around the legs and 90% are around the chest area, the aim is to stop the ball being advanced.

Dixon differs with the method in vogue today, of using the high tackle to stop the ball first; he states that at junior level the first action is to stop the ball runner.

"I look at it differently, maybe at the Broncos we coach the junior players different to most. I don't see a tackle that way [chest high, first] some people do emphasise stopping the ball initially, but we work on primarily stopping the ball runner first and then secondly we stop the ball.

"The majority of tackles nowadays are front-on, in the days gone by, we had more emphasis on side on tackles and later we taught blocking tackles when the players began coming more forward.

"So, for today's game, the players need to be strong with their head lead and strong with shoulder contact for all tackles whether front on, side on, or rear and they have to be very good at it. All tackles stem from the players ability initially to make good shoulder contact in a one on one tackle.

"At the Broncos our primary target zone is from the belt line up and below where the ball is carried [midriff] and that is for all tackles. The midriff area is a part the body that the player moves the least.

The proof of the target zone of where to tackle is emphasised by the magical ex Bronco ball runner Steve Renouf, who repeatedly when attempted to be tackled low by a defender showed what a swerve of the hips and a strong fend could do for an defending player who came in too low to tackle the champion centre.

"The beltline down to the knees was the traditional area target zone in the past for a 'side on' tackle, but a player still has movement there, they can open their body up or they can swivel their hips like Renouf would do and beat you with a fend if a defender is committed to that lower target area."

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Footwork is another really key part of being a good defender; it can be underestimated in tackling.

Although some great Bronco players such as Trevor 'The Axe' Gillmeister and Gavin Allen could launch at a tackle with two feet planted firmly on the ground it has been proven that this is not the footwork technique used commonly in the modern game.

Dixon continues, "Many tackles are missed because players don't use their feet 'to get to the tackle'. Players will plant their feet or place their feet wide apart and waiting for the ball carrier to come to them, this is not good technique. As a general rule the best defenders are on the balls of their feet and have their feet fairly close together and have one foot up and one-foot back.

"A defender is normally at the mercy of the ball carrier if the defender plants his feet too early. The defender can get bumped, run over, have no drive or cannot move laterally. This is where the 'jumper grabbers' come from, or the tackle is only shoulder contact with no leg drive or an arm outstretched attempting to implement a tackle, rather than moving the defenders whole body into the tackle.

"The defender should take short steps to the tackle, so that if the ball runner does shift, the defender can take his feet to where he wants to go".

"We [Broncos] don't over emphasise which leg the defender should have forward in the tackle, whether it is same leg/same shoulder or opposite leg and shoulder. The key is to get the front foot in close to the ball carrier. Weight distribution is needed through the leg drive, so if it is the near leg or the off leg it doesn't make much difference to us."



101 Coaching Tips

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By Les Bee, Wayne Goldsmith, Mike Keelan and Warwick Povey

It takes 20 years to become an overnight success. Successful coaches have a combination of experience, skill, education and practice, developed ways and means of getting the best out of themselves and their athletes.

Here are 101 Coaching tips to help you achieve your coaching goals.

1. Plan
2. Develop communication skills and never stop trying to improve them.
3. Learn to effectively utilise the Internet and email.
4. Never stop learning. Learning is life
5. Be open minded. Never say never.
6. What you may lack in knowledge, make up for with enthusiasm, desire and passion
7. Be a role model for your athletes
8. Accept constructive criticism as a positive. Learn from mistakes, take steps to improve from the experience and move on.
9. Allocate time every day for personal health and fitness.
10. Keep a detailed diary and record work actually done by athletes not just what was planned to be done.
11. Embrace effective change.
12. Use sport science wisely. The art of coaching drives the science of performance.
13. Seek out information - don't wait for the "secret to success" to fall into your lap.
14. Coach with your heart but don't forget the basics. Secure adequate training facilities, keep good records, observe O.H. and S. principles, maintain a commitment to safety and equity. Having the 'nuts and bolts' organised allows you to focus on what you do best - working with athletes.
15. Believe in your athletes - they believe in you.
16. Steal ideas from other sports (and improve on them)
17. Strive to make yourself redundant - develop independent athletes
18. Listen with your eyes and watch with your ears.
19. Attitude + application + ability = achievement
20. Coach the person not the athlete. Coach the person not the performance.
21. Develop a network and support structure. Be a resource manager.
22. Best, better, brilliant - there's always room for improvement
23. What you believe will happen will happen. What the mind can conceive it will achieve.
24. Persistence pays - never give up
25. Learn basic business skills. Understand the basics of insurance. Be familiar with legal liability. Understand the basics of taxation and the GST. Make coaching your business.
26. Give an ounce of information and a ton of practice
27. Communicate - clearly, concisely, calmly, constructively, consistently and cleverly.
28. Seek out a critical friend - they are your greatest asset.
29. Help develop your sport not just your current athletes.
30. Mix with successful people - success breeds success
31. Delegate, delegate, delegate - give athletes, assistants, parents and officials responsibility for aspects of your (their) program.
32. Enthusiasm, encouragement, energy = excellence
33. Look for things to improve in yourself.
34. Have fun - life is short.

35. It's easy to coach athletes when they are performing well. Do you have the ability to help athletes (and yourself) deal with the tough times.
36. Focus on the long term even when trying to achieve in the short term.
37. Contribute to the development of other coaches. You may learn from teaching and students are often the best teachers of all.
38. Listen to your athletes.
39. Develop peripheral vision - in your mind.
40. Present information at coaching courses and workshops. Be willing to share.
41. Treat athletes like customers - coaching is the ultimate in client service.
42. Read journals from alternative industries and seek out principles that you can apply to sporting situations
43. Be flexible in your methods.
44. Embrace the principle, 'For the love of it, not the money in it!'
45. Athletes develop confidence through competence. Nothing develops confidence like a thorough preparation.
46. Constantly challenge yourself and your athletes
47. Create a safe, stimulating, interesting training environment where athletes enjoy coming to train.
48. In preparing athletes: leave nothing to chance, nothing untested, don't rely on luck, make your own!
49. Subscribe to Sports Coach!!!
50. Do your homework. Know the strengths and weaknesses of your athletes, yourself, your opposition. Know the standards - what are the world records, national records, state records, regional records, club records - what are your goals?
51. Look to help athletes achieve their best - no matter what that level is. Not all athletes want to be the world champion.
52. Be innovative. Be creative. Dare to be different.
53. Try not to overcoach. You don't need to talk all the time.
54. Never lose confidence in yourself. You can do it!
55. Encourage your athlete to have ownership of the program.
56. Maintain good appearance - look like a professional.
57. Technology is your ally not your enemy. Use it wisely.
58. When the going gets tough, the tough get going. Mental toughness is still a key component of competition.
59. Adopt the D.R.A.M.A. approach, 'Do, Record, Analyse, Modify, Act.'
60. Confront problems calmly by talking directly with the athlete - don't rely on rumour, relayed messages or other second hand methods of communication. If a message CAN BE misinterpreted it ALREADY HAS BEEN.
61. Empathise don't sympathise.
62. Keep the reasons you coach at the forefront of your mind and your goals close to your heart.
63. Desire - keep the dream alive - every day. Motivation is a lifestyle not a one-off event.
64. What makes a great coach? - Great athletes!
65. Be firm and fair.
66. Build your program around the five Es: EQUITY - ENJOYMENT - EXCELLENCE - EMPATHY and EMPOWERMENT.
67. Share a joke - not sarcasm - just a funny joke when appropriate.
68. Field questions and throw back answers. Challenge athletes to discover the answers for themselves and to learn lessons.
69. Observe, ponder, respond - be an observer of human behaviour.
70. Share experiences willingly.
71. Establish open and effective communication with all stakeholders - parents, athletes, administrators, officials and important others.
72. When in doubt, pause and check it out. Don't be afraid to say 'I don't know.'
73. Employ actions that minimise risk. The primary responsibility of all coaches is the SAFETY of their athletes.
74. Encourage your athlete recovering from injury by involving them in the program in some capacity. Everyone is needed and everyone belongs.

75. Be aware of and carry out your legal responsibilities.
76. Efficient coaches take responsibility for their own effectiveness.
77. Self reflection is your constant companion: be your own best critic but strive to be objective rather than self destructive.
78. Recognise the contribution of others - players, parents, officials, assistants, facility maintenance staff - everyone enjoys being appreciated.
79. Recognise, publicise and reward. Praise in public - criticise in private.
80. Lead front the front and support from the rear.
81. The coach is the creator of positive experiences.
82. Proper prior planning prevents pitifully poor performance.
83. Praise and positive reinforcement are tools for the coach.
84. Think about what you say before you say it. Then watch for reactions to your words before saying anything else.
85. Body language replaces many words: it's not what you say but how you say it.
86. A nod is as good as a wink.
87. Coaching is a two way process: The athlete feels but can't see - the coach sees but can't feel.
88. Get to know something personal about your athletes. They are people who have chosen to play sport: not just sportspeople.
89. Holistically challenge your athlete - mental skills can be developed just like physical skills.
90. Athletes listen when the coach listens to them.
91. Know when to say NO.
92. Demonstrate, explain, demonstrate again, practice and give constructive feedback.
93. Concentrate on the performance not the outcome.
94. Process goals (how to achieve) should predominate over outcome goals (what to achieve).
95. Facilitate motivation by allowing athletes to fulfil their goals in some way at every session.
96. Coach your athletes to distinguish between attainable and unobtainable but to never stop dreaming of what's possible.
97. Buy a video and refine your filming and reviewing skills.
98. Sports officials give your athletes the best opportunity to achieve the best result - work alongside them
99. To coach well you'll need to know the CURRENT interpretation of your sports rules and regulations.
100. Coaches have a great opportunity to easily expand their social circle - you'll never be lonely.
101. Last year's programs produce last year's results. Resist the temptation to coach by routine or habit.

Add Your Own!

DEVELOPING A COACHING PHILOSOPHY:

where should our focus be?

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There are many factors that motivate players to play rugby league. Some players play for enjoyment, while others simply enjoy the camaraderie of competing alongside their peers. Equally, coaches can also be motivated by many factors.

The knowledge that they are contributing to the development of an athlete, or indeed the overall growth of a person, is often sufficient incentive for some coaches to first become involved in coaching.

However, all players and coaches, at least at the senior level, share one common motivating factor - a strong desire to win. Whether a coach is motivated by winning or the pure enjoyment of the game, the development of a coaching philosophy is necessary to clarify one's coaching objectives.

The development of a successful coaching philosophy is governed by (1) one's own experiences, (2) the knowledge one gathers, and (3) one's vision for the future. When developing a coaching philosophy, possible questions that should be asked are: (1) What do we, as a team or club need to STOP doing? (2) What do we, as a team or club need to KEEP doing? and (3) What do we, as a team or club need to START doing? The purpose of this article is to discuss some factors that require consideration when developing a coaching philosophy.

Developing Players vs Winning a Premiership

It may be argued that winning competitions is the 'true' measure of performance. While most coaches are motivated (at least to some extent) by winning, only one club can win the premiership each season.

Does this mean that the remaining clubs in the competition have failed? If winning the premiership is the club's only measure of performance, then the answer is 'yes'. However, the flipside to winning a premiership is player development. In fact, many

coaches openly state the reason for poor performances (as estimated from their position on the premiership ladder) is due to rebuilding of the club, or player development.

One National Rugby League coach acknowledged early in the 2002 season that his team was unlikely to win the 2002 premiership. However, the same coach also stated that the 2002 season offered an important learning opportunity for his young team to gain valuable first grade experience. The coach continued by stating that the exposure of his team to just one finals match would provide an important platform necessary for playing success in future seasons.

The irony of player development is that if clubs manage to secure the services of players long enough and develop them appropriately, their team develops continuity and their chances of winning a premiership increase dramatically.

For several years, country rugby league clubs have attempted to 'buy' premierships, by paying exorbitant amounts of money for high profile players. Quite often, the process is successful, with most clubs winning a premiership within the first three years of the initial financial outlay.

However, the negative consequences of this process far outweigh the benefits, with most clubs struggling to compete financially and professionally with opposition clubs on a long-term basis. Perhaps more importantly is the lack of consideration given to junior players already competing at the club. Many junior players progress through the junior ranks idolising the senior players of their club.

The major realistic incentive for most of these players is to play first grade for the club where they have spent their entire junior playing career. By 'purchasing' high profile players, administrators are sending a clear message to junior players that there is no clear pathway for progression at the club.

Clearly, if a club is to objectively gauge the team performance, then premierships or finals appearances can not be the sole performance measure.

Tradition vs Innovation

While the game of rugby league is constantly evolving, and the level of athleticism has improved considerably, the core skills and physical qualities required by players have not altered significantly over time.

Like the great players of the past, rugby league players still require high levels of muscular and aerobic power, speed, strength, and agility. The ability to dominate the ruck, make one-on-one tackles, and offload under pressure are skills that are required of successful players, both past and present.

If the game has maintained much of the appeal that it held fifty years ago, can coaches expect to coach the same way that successful coaches have done before them? Clearly, the answer is 'no'. Technological advances (allowing sophisticated computer analysis of a players' strengths and weaknesses) and the advent of full-time professionalism are just two examples of how coaching, and indeed, the entire coaching process has evolved.

These developments, coupled with strong junior development programs, has ensured that greater time and resources are devoted to the 'fine-tuning' of players skills, rather than the 'learning' of skills. However, just because the coaching process is now more sophisticated, does this mean that coaches need to 'reinvent the wheel' entirely? Once again, the answer is 'no'. It is very easy for the modern-day coach to criticise past coaching methods as archaic.

Just as coaches need to justify the reason for implementing a new training drill or game, justification should be provided for eliminating an 'archaic' activity entirely. On the other hand, coaches are to a large extent responsible for the way the game is played, both now and in the future.

There is no argument that the players are the most important people involved in the game. After all, the players are the entertainers, they are the people demonstrating the skill and taking the physical collisions each week. However, while successful players have developed many of the core skills required to compete at the highest level, the coach plays a significant role in improving those skills.

In addition, the coach is charged with the *power* to determine the way the game is to be played now, but perhaps more importantly has the *vision* to determine the way the game is to be played in the future. With

this in mind, coaches should be encouraged to take *risks*, be *innovative*, be *creative*, and *experiment* in order to test the limits of player performance.

An Autocratic vs Empowering Coaching Philosophy

"Players will rise to the challenge if it is their challenge", is a quote used by Wayne Smith, a previous coach of the Canterbury Crusaders Super 12 rugby team. Significantly, the Canterbury Crusaders won successive Super 12 campaigns under the coaching leadership of Wayne Smith. The success of the New Zealand Warriors has largely been attributed to the coaching prowess of Daniel Anderson.

Anderson has embraced an empowering coaching style by allowing his players to develop their own strategies to combat opposition teams (See Rugby League Coaching Manuals, Book 23). By advocating this approach, Anderson has given his players ownership of their successes. Perhaps more importantly, an empowering coaching philosophy allows players to develop decision-making and problem-solving skills.

These skills are unlikely to be developed in players who are coached under an autocratic coaching style. In fact, coaches who dictate to players or provide all of the answers to playing problems, may be inadvertently disempowering players. At the very least, players are being robbed of an opportunity to develop decision-making and problem-solving skills.

An empowering coaching philosophy does not absolve the coach from performing his coaching duties. Indeed, each player invariably will require some direction and guidance during the course of a season. In addition, an empowering coaching philosophy does not prevent the coach from implementing boundaries and structure within the team. However, if a coach is to select a team of players to perform a task based on their skill and ability to complete that task, then the coach should allow the players the opportunity to decide the best option/s for success.

Summary

Whether a beginner or experienced coach, the development of a coaching philosophy is necessary to clarify one's coaching objectives. A coaching philosophy is a set of guidelines or principles that govern the way one coaches. However, a coaching philosophy does not need to be set in stone, and may alter over time as one's experience in the game, knowledge of the game, and visions for the future of the game evolve.

Defence

By Glenn Bayliss - ARL Level 3 Coach

PRINCIPLES OF DEFENCE

Quite often in games, the winning team is determined not by what they do with the ball, but what they get done without it. The ability to attack in defence. It's more than tackling the dill with the pill, proper and effective defensive lines will not only blunt out creative attacking opportunities thrown at them by the opposition – they will also lay the platform for success down the other end of the field when their turn comes for possession. In this edition of RLCM we update an article seen in RLCM Book 4 of this series.

The basis of defence can be narrowed to four main principles.

1. Exert Pressure

Limit the time, space and therefore the options of the attacking team.

2. Gain Ground

A quick moving defensive organised line that exerts pressure can often stop the attacking team from gaining the “advantage line”. The loss of ground while in attack can have a demoralising effect on the defence. To achieve this aim players must be conditioned to retreat the required 10 metres and be set for the next PTB.

3. Win Possession

The old adage “you can't score without the football” sums up the third principle. Strong effective tackling coupled with applied pressure will achieve a higher turnover rate of possession. If your team can limit the time the opposition spends with the football it will go along way towards boosting your chances of winning.

4. Physically Dominate the Opposition

If you are coaching teams “international rules” this principle comes into being. Rugby League is a game of strong physical contact. Quite often a defence that is “physical”, i.e. powerful driving tackles that stop attackers “in their tracks”, can have a marked impact

on a game. If opponents are concerned by the fact they are to be solidly tackled a further mental “pressure” can be placed on their game leading to increased mistakes/ hesitancy, turnover of the football. It must be stressed that your “physical” defence doesn't “cross the line” and become illegal play. This can lead to unwanted penalties and put the football back in your opponent's hands more often.

ORGANISATION FOR YOUR DEFENCE

1. Individual Tackling Skill

For a defence to be effective each player in your team must be competent in tackling skill. As a coach it is important to concentrate on the player's:

a) Technique

Develop front-on and side-on techniques that put opponents to the ground quickly (and on their back) or ties up the football. When a team consistently dominates in the tackle by ensuring the player is ‘turtled’ [turned on his back] with his upper body facing his own goal posts, this dominance will increase the time that the attacking opposition has to bring the ball back into play, thus allowing more time for the defence line to be set.

Players must also understand the principle of ‘peeling’, which is the player who ties up the upper body holds the player down until the player around the leg releases. The upper body defender comes up with the tackled player and assumes the role of first marker.

b) Balance

Be able to react to the unexpected, moving quickly with control. Without balance, a tackle loses its

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power. Players should retain an upright stance for as long as possible as once they commit themselves to a tackle and bend they do not have the ability to react.

c) Footwork

Shorter quicker steps in approach to tackle. Correct positioning of feet when tackle is made. A stance that allows you to move and quickly follow.

d) Shoulder Contact

Contact zone must be hit with the “top” of the shoulder not your arm.

e) Head Position

Head to correct side and kept close to the tackled players body. Look at contact zone to keep your neck and back ‘locked’. A bent neck will lead to ineffective tackles and possible injury.

f) Timing

Contact with shoulder sequenced after front foot placement, supported by back leg drive. Power in tackle will come from the legs. You must know when to make your move.

2. The Defensive Line

Your defensive line has to be a well drilled and cohesive unit. A coach has to instantly review his team’s defence performance, identify and correct any errors that occur.

Some common errors are:-

- (a) The defensive line becomes too short.
- (b) An individual player moving up and out of the line too fast.
- (c) An individual player moving up too slow.
- (d) A player being drawn across field leaving space
- (e) Tired or lazy players not drifting to cover space on the inside of a “sliding” defence.
- (f) Shortside (blindsides) players “over reading” the play and covering across to the longside (open) of the field too early thus leaving you vulnerable to “switch back” to the shortside.
- (g) Players marking space instead of players.

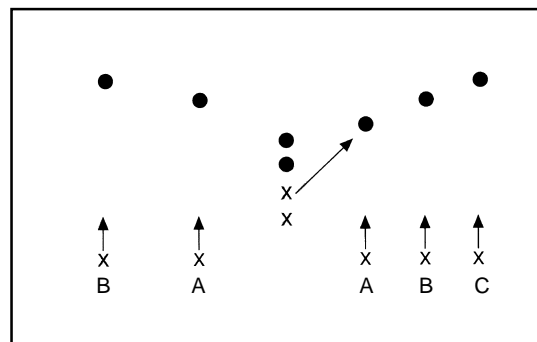
3. Marker Defence

Each coach will adopt his own style of marker defence, be it one marker, two markers, first marker chase, second marker chase, split markers etc.

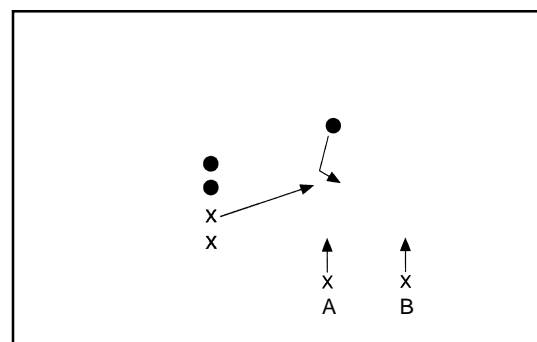
It is important to realise that all markers systems have their advantages and disadvantages. You, as

coach, must adapt the system that best compliments your team. No matter which system is used it is important that the following occur:

- (a) Markers are on their feet before the tackled player. ie. Peeling correctly.
- (b) Communication between markers and “tight” forwards in defensive line.
- (c) Markers do not anticipate the acting half pass and leave too early allowing exploitation of the area behind the ruck (ie. tight spot).
- (d) One marker chases, one marker holds, waits, fills defensive line.
- (e) Markers make sure the stand square as not to give away a penalty.



In today’s game against a well coached team, the marker will find it difficult to tackle first receivers hitting up on a flat pass 10 metres wide of the ruck. Despite this, his role to chase is still important. The marker must rush the receivers inside shoulder pushing his run line wider and possibly causing him to run an angle away from the ruck. This will “set him up” for your defence and help prevent a player cutting back into the tight spot area.



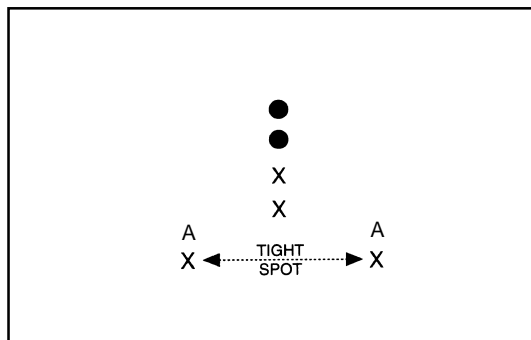
Above all, markers must maintain their CONCENTRATION.

4. Positional Play in the Line

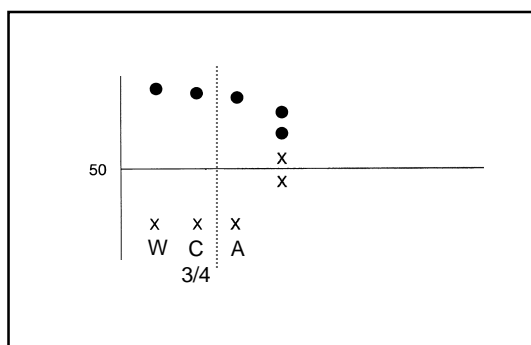
Your team should have a regimented defensive line with each player knowing his position as well as his defence assignment.

(a) Play the Ball

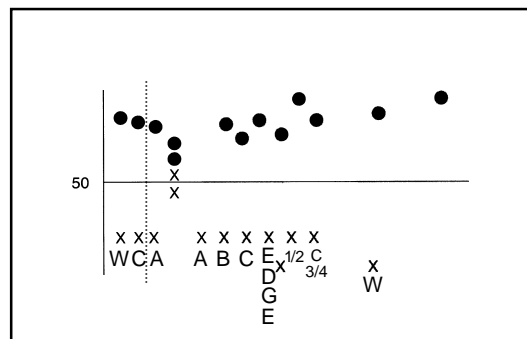
Once the marker defence is in place ensure that the two players on each side of the play the ball, commonly called “posts” or ‘A’ defenders, understand their responsibility to guard the area behind the ruck (tight spot).



The next objective is to “equalise” the short side with a ‘A’ defender, a centre and a winger. This is important as it is a lot easier to defend the long side with less numbers than it is the shortside. Three attackers on two defenders on the short side often spells trouble for the defence.



Finally ‘organise’ the longside with the defensive system you are operating, be it ‘up and in’ [umbrella] or “up and out” (sliding). Always remember that the defence can control the speed of the play-the-ball. Use this control to your advantage.

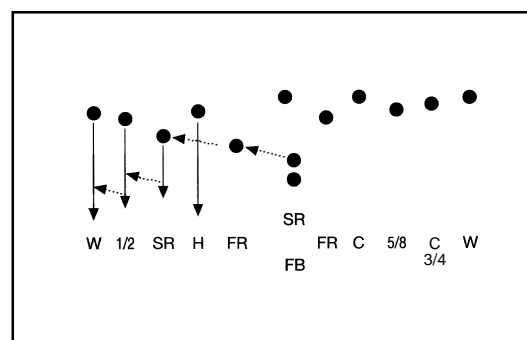


(b) Scrums

From scrums the backs, in the team not feeding, will generally stand up “flat” slightly outside their opposition man (be able to see opponent and football), mark up and nominate.

The “defending” scrum, i.e. the team without the feed, should endeavour to win the football with a “six man” push. The best result is a win against the feed or at worst an untidy football for the opposition halfback increasing the chance of an error or breakdown in planned play.

If the football is lost, ensure your forwards have a good “break pattern” covering the area both sides of the scrum. When the players join the defensive line at the next play-the-ball; two players (normally the half and shortside second rower) cover the two spots inside the winger. This pushes the slower forwards to the middle of the line so that they are not vulnerable to quicker players if your opponent’s attack back to where the scrum was packed.



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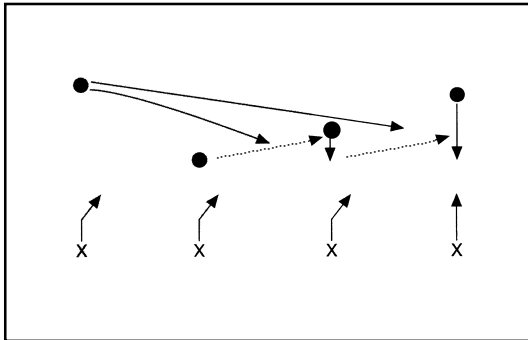
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(c) Drifting

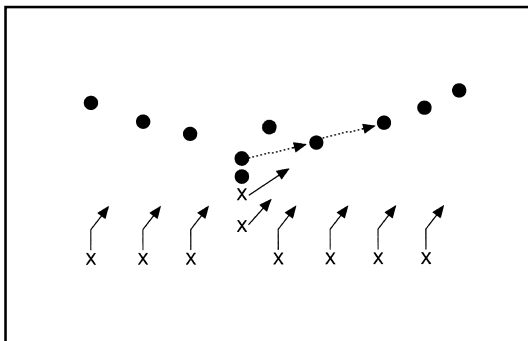
* Individual Drift

Once the football has passed through the opponent that you are “marked up” on your job is not finished. You must drift with your defensive line and cover the space between your man and the man on his outside. At all times be aware of the inside pass, the players that drift to quickly are easily wrong footed by a attacking player entering the line and changing direction.



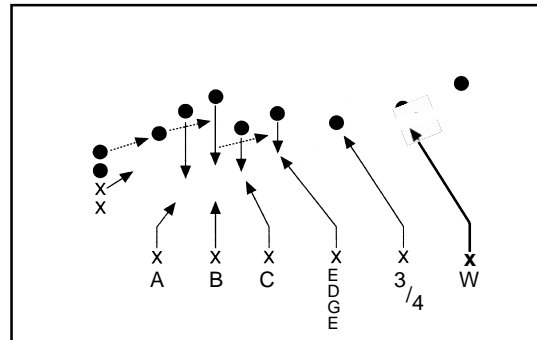
* Shortside Drift

When it becomes apparent that play will not be “switched back down the “shortside” the shortside defence drifts in behind the ruck area to cover any gaps left by the chasing marker.



* Longside Drift

If the defence line is to be attacked on the ‘Edge’ of the ruck, outside defenders drift back in to put more players around the football, thus reducing the pass options and applying more defence pressure on the attack.



5. Speed of the Line

The speed of the defensive line can be improved through physical conditioning and commitment.

The benefits are:-

(a) Time

Reduce the amount of time the opposition has to think or execute play.

(b) Space

By Limiting the ‘space’ the opponents have to work in, you exert a pressure that can throw out the oppositions ‘timing’

(c) Options

Cover the ball carrier, but just as importantly cover his support players. These three factors can cause the ball carrier to execute a play not originally intended. It could lead to a player receiving a pass while under defensive pressure. This all leads to prospects of an increased error rate.

(d) Containment

A speedy defensive line is capable of containing play to the ruck area or a particular area of the field (near the sideline). By containing the attack you reduce the “field” the opposition has to work in so there is less chance of a break in your own line if your defence is well organised.

(e) Possession

An organised defensive line that constantly pressures the attack will force them to “chip” or “grubber” kick. This allows the defensive team a chance to regain possession.



- * Faster player reactions
- * Increased enjoyment
- * Lower error rate
- * Good self feeling

- ### (b) Commitment

Players respond to both a challenge and encouragement. Statistics sheets can be useful motivational tools if used correctly. Remember, missed tackles have more affect on the game than the actual number of tackles.

- Offer praise to players with high work rates as well as those that make quality tackles or the tackles that really count in desperate situations.

(c) Attitude

Players must have a positive attitude in defence with assignments to achieve. These are:- Moving forward and attacking the opposition attack by reaching the **Advantage Line** to gain ground while in **Defence**. So as to **Exert Pressure** and **Force Errors** to **Win Back Possession** and **Control the Game**.

Above all remember - "There is attack in defence"
ATTACK IN BOTH!!!

NOTES

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MINI-COACHING

'Real Coaching'

By Matt O'Hanlon
ARL Level 3 Coach

In my last article titled 'Coaching the Mini-Mod Team' I finished by presenting an outline of the development of exposure to the demands of the team game. In that development a sequence was demonstrated for the skill of drawing the man that could be used from the basic skill, right through to the game. As with all theory it is great on paper but in the real world and in coaching mini players the coach is at the very centre of the real coaching world, there is often a fair gap between theory and practice.

In this article I am going to focus on the mini coach and some steps, drills, activities and practices I have found useful in coaching kids in the mini age groups. As you prepare for coaching your mini team, I will provide some things I have found helpful and that you may like to try.

Checklist Before Training Commences

An important job for any coach is to be prepared, but when coaching 6-7 year olds this is even more important from both a position of control, and from your position of responsibility. If possible all players should bring their own water bottle, and a football, if impossible encourage players to bring water bottles and the club to buy footballs. Markers that are colour co-ordinated (I would suggest 16 with 4 of each colour and numbered with thick Nikko pen) essential for any mini-mod session. It is always handy to have a parent rostered on for each session. Once these issues have been attended too you as coach are ready to get on with the job. That is to teach and coach the kids, not only how to play, but also to develop an appreciation of sport in general and rugby League specifically.

Development of Coaching Method

a) Exposure To Demands of a Team Game

Using the outline for the development of exposure to the demands of the team game set out below and discussed in 'RLCM' Book 9 we can, as

coaches, try and prepare our sessions around development of the skills and techniques required to play the mini game.

Outline For Skill Development

1. Basic skills
2. Sequence
3. Opposition - Token
 - Controlled
 - Competitive
4. Practice
5. Conditioned game
6. Game

Obviously this program will be heavily oriented to basic skills, token opposition, and conditioned games but there is still a requirement to develop a knowledge of the game and this can only be acquired during your training sessions. So what basic skills are essential for the mini player. I concentrate on the following:

- Tackling
- Passing
- Catching
- Falling

Falling may cause some debate but it is the fear of falling that causes kids to just throw the ball.

While many may be adept at falling without a football, falling with the football under the arm is a skill we cannot assume is inherent. Therefore when teaching these skills it is necessary that the children are falling correctly. Here are some progressions for the mini player that follow the above outline in the key areas of tackling, passing and catching.

b) Tackling

AIM - To build confidence and develop technique.

Tackling is a skill which requires most work because of the variety of skills of your players. Some will be effective tacklers whilst others will have no idea at all. As coach, focus on the key components of each of the tackles you are using - front on, side on and behind and then give the players plenty of practice so that confidence can

program. As coach you can concentrate on kids with lesser ability and coach their technique by giving instruction and demonstration. By modifying the rules to spider tackle you can use it in either the controlled or competitive opposition more. Finally when you are satisfied, use a game like ruck play (see last article Sept '98) as a conditioned game, and hopefully you will see results in the game the next time they play. Remember if you don't tackle properly at training you don't tackle properly on game day.

c) Passing and Catching

AIM - Improve skills so that catching and passing can flow on into the game situation.

Catching and passing can be treated together with the mini player. Explain the skills individually but when practising passing, it is logical to have someone catching so you can focus on that skill

It is easy to become obsessed with winning rather than developing the abilities of our players.

grow. This is the basic skill, don't be afraid to use the tackling bag or sand pit to emphasise technique. In the game situation often your best player will do most of the tackling, and this situation is not a good one. In training aim for every player to do 15 to 20 good tackles. Here is a game for mini's that allows for each player to perform tackles for you to monitor.

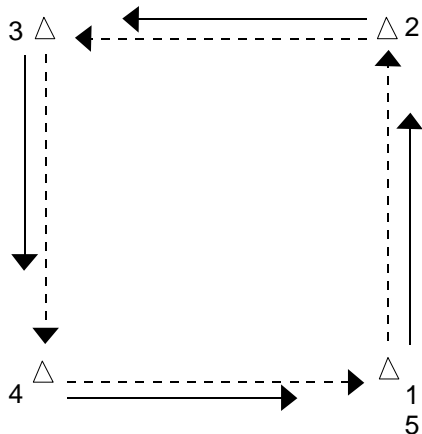
Spider Tackle Game

Mark out a grid suitable for the number of players you have and allowing a fair amount of running space. Nominate two spiders and their job is to tackle everyone else. When tackled, players move out and form a web on the ground by touching hands, head, feet etc. Spiders can then move through to choose prey and when all have been caught, these prey become the new spiders. If you have enough footballs make prey carry them. A simple game adapted for mini football but a confidence booster that builds fun into your

as well. The first point to stress to your players is for them not to spin the ball. This is significant because the floating pass is a lot easier to catch than the spiral, especially for young children. With mini football you will have to revise the basic skill continually, try and use words that sum up what you are trying to teach and be very repetitive with these words so as to condition your players to their meaning. E.g. in catching emphasise a word like 'target', explaining to your players that this means to get your hands up prior to the ball being passed to you. Over time players will react automatically to the word. You can develop your own words or simple phrases to go with many parts of the basic skill. Single words with clear meanings are an effective way to develop techniques. Once the young players have a basic idea you can then develop basic sequences. For example, passing off the ground to the first receiver. Here is a simple pass of the ground drill.

RUGBY LEAGUE COACHING MANUALS

off the ground to player 2 who places the ball at his feet. Player 1 runs to player 2 and passes to player 3 and so on. When player 1 passes to player 5, 5 becomes the new runner by passing to player 2 who will place the ball on the ground. Player 5 completes one circuit of the grid then passes to player 2 who completes a circuit. Player 1 takes 2's position on grid and drill continues. When everyone has had a go you can then reverse the pass. Once players are familiar with the drill you can make it a relay.



You can devise other games that practice these skills in the token, controlled and competitive modes and these can be used to not only provide enjoyment, but also improve skills.

CHECKLIST FOR SUCCESSFUL MINI COACHING

Often as coaches we are under prepared for the rigours of coaching mini players. It is easy to become obsessed with winning rather than developing the abilities of our players. Having been a player and knowing the technique may make you qualified to coach but it does not necessarily mean that you can create a good environment for the kids in your group. Often this is just as important in the delivery of your message. As coaches we need to be sure that our environment is appropriate in a number of areas, developmentally we are not asking our players to do things they are not capable of. Emotionally yelling to increase motivation may have a reverse effect. Here is a simple checklist I have modified off the internet you can use when evaluating your coaching sessions or games.

Checklist For Better Coaching

- ☐ I thank players for just turning up.
- ☐ I focus on positives
- ☐ I accept kids will make mistakes.
- ☐ My expectations are reasonable and realistic.
- ☐ I remind kids not to be too hard on themselves.
- ☐ I remember not to take myself too seriously.
- ☐ I model good sportmanship.
 - win without gloating
 - lose without complaining
 - treat opponents and officials with fairness
 - generosity and courtesy

The website for this was <http://www.tutornway.com> you may find it interesting to read if you have access to the internet.

Finally after being prepared before training, having a program of skill development, and coaching in a positive manner as a mini coach you are ready for success. Not in terms of winning or losing but in encouraging kids to play the game. Sport is a great provider of lessons in life and for those of us reading this magazine, Rugby League is a great sport through which this can happen. I will leave you with the following thought to apply to your coaching that I think is quite apt.

'As coaches we are able to be far more animated in our responses to negatives than in our reactions to positives. Turn this around and we will be successful and the mini's we are coaching will turn up ready to have fun and learn at the same time.'



Coaching the Mini Mod Team

For some, coaching the mini mod team may be their first appointment. Often this is a result of being a parent of one of the players or even being a local senior player, giving a hand. Very soon your thoughts may shift to, "Why did I ever choose this job". But if you are prepared to tough it out, this type of coaching can be very rewarding.

Mini mod coaching can be divided into three main groups. These groups could be loosely regarded as Beginners - Under 7 & 8's; Intermediates - Under 9 & 10's; and Seniors - Under 11 & 12's. The coaching of these groups requires the development of a number of skills that the coach might not normally associate with Rugby League.

The following points may give some ideas to the coach

In skill development there are a number of key areas. The following are most important, tackling, passing, catching, and falling. At the start of the Under 7's, players will be of a very mixed ability. By the end of under 8's the coach's aim would be to have all players at a basic level of competency. Mini football is designed in such a way that both training and games allow skill development. In Under 7's & 8's I use the following techniques.

Initially, I make sure communication is very clear and lacking ambiguity. Instructions should be concise and reasonably loud to the group in a close huddle. When using markers I write a number on each one. Kids are directed to that marker number. It then becomes a game of musical chairs. Each kid finds their number

As a coach if your players are improving in skills, playing better in games, and are happy at training I'm sure you are a success.

of appropriate activities that can be used to develop skills but using a game oriented approach.

The Beginners - Under 7 and 8's

Young children are only interested in one thing - having fun. If an activity is not seen as fun, you will lose players. As coach your responsibility is to structure a program that not only develops the rudimentary skills but also develops an ability to understand the game, and generates a lasting desire to want to play.

It is important at this early stage not to focus on winning. If you have a winning philosophy your judgement will be clouded as to equitable development of our beginners. In terms of your players - 5 minutes after the game all they are worried about is whether mum or dad will get them a pie and a drink. The end result of the match does not have a lasting influence.

and rotations are very simple - "You! Go to your next number". Along the same lines, use the jersey number at the order for having a run during the game. This stops the incessant shirt pulling of kids wanting a run, and ensures all get a go.

Try and develop the key areas above by playing games. Where I see a child, deficient in a particular skill they are withdrawn and given specific skill development. It is pointless coaching skills in static situations when the game is very dynamic.

The biggest problem is in tackling and this is on two fronts. Firstly, kids have a fear of being hurt, and in return they fear hurting anybody. Lots of tackling should take place to build confidence and allow players to recognise that the game is a contact sport. In training ensure every player does 20 tackles.

RUGBY LEAGUE COACHING MANUALS

However with the beginners this is very difficult. Here are some game oriented drills to use with beginners.

Activity 1 - Two Handed Chase (Warm up game)

Equipment

Footballs and Markers

Set Up

10m x 10m square grid, group of 4 or 5 in each square

Instructions

1 player has the ball and carries it in two hands and tries to tag as many others as possible in the allotted time. (about 15 secs) When tagged a player goes out of grid.

Verbal instructions

Stop, Change, Go

Skill Element

perception, deciding where to move, finding space.

Activity 2 - Tackle Red Rover

Equipment

Footballs, channel (area = width of field by 30m wide)

Set Up

As per Red Rover, runners carry footballs

Skill Elements

Perception, finding space, avoiding defenders, dodging, weaving, tackling.

Activity 3 - Ruck Play

Equipment

Footballs, numbered markers, channel 25m by 10m depth

Set Up

Place numbered markers in order of a ruck. Formation 1 - attacker, 2 - pivot, 3 - dummy half, 4 - PTB, 5 - attacker, 6 - attacker, 7 - 10 defenders. If you have more or less players adjust accordingly. 6 players per group works well.

Instructions

Each player stands at a marker. When all are in position you call 'play the ball'. At the completion of the ruck, you call 'rotate'. Each player moves to the next number and then you start again. As beginners progress you can add a range of different activities to this.

Skill Elements

Develop game situation, passing, tackling, finding space, movement execution.

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A major concern for the beginner coach is the development of basic motor skills such as co-ordination and balance alongside the development of specific rugby league skills. These specific rugby league skills can be taught in the context of the game situation and the last drill allows for this. Remember beginners should enjoy stimulating activities. If they do they will be back and will provide satisfaction for the coach.

The Intermediates - Under 9 and 10's

Many of the principles that apply to the beginners apply here as well. However, we are now looking for greater understanding of team patterns and tactics from the players. Although these are basic only, they are designed to introduce the players to team concepts and strategies in attack and defence. During this two year period, players should develop a simple attack plan that involves positional play and also a knowledge of using a defensive line. These plays should only be basic. Try to give the players specific roles in attack or defence and try to alternate positions so that the players are experiencing a feel for the game - not just a position. Often with Junior sides one or two players can dominate. These players need to be rotated through a number of roles so that they have the opportunity to develop all their skills. The 'bigger and faster' players especially need work so that they develop good evasive and drawing the player skills and do not rely solely on size or speed. The drills used earlier can be extended by adding variations and there are others suited to this level.

Activity 4 - Ruck Runner

Equipment

Football,

Set Up

Channel across field by 10-20m, depending on the number of players.

Instructions

Set up a normal ruck play. However dummy half must run and try to pass either as he is tackled or just prior to reaching the defence. Initially give teams 4 tackles and bonus tackles for 1 or 2 passes. As players get better effect a turnover each time a pass is not completed. Make sure defenders go forward as soon as the ball touches the ground, and defend as a unit so as to stop passes being thrown. Drop balls or other mistakes result in a changeover.

Skill Elements

Decision making, finding space, passing, tackling, evasion, communication.

Variations

Make the game 1 pass or use different numbers of attackers and defenders or make 4th ruck a must kick and chase.

Activity 5 - Marker Defend (U/10 drill)

Equipment

Football, markers

Set Up

As for Activity 3 (use numbers if required)

Instructions

Use marker to chase once ball is received and try to tackle low on receiver. If receiver passes, marker is to fall back into line that is coming up and defenders tackle as per normal.

Skill Element

Tackling, communication, teamwork.

It is important that the drills and practices that are used are stimulating so that the young players can be entertained whilst developing the particular skills that you have in mind. The development of capacities for varying responses will be of great benefit later, to children of this age group, fatigue very easily if the program you give them has a lot of anaerobic activities. Coaches need to be aware of this, especially if you want your skills development to be of benefit.

The Seniors - Under 11 and 12's

Once again the same principles apply to this group as to the two previous groups but now because of greater skills and a better grasp of the rudiments of the game, a your responsibility shifts to a new dimension. Whilst still refining techniques and skills the coach now has to increase exposure for team members to the demands of the game. With the younger age groups try to provide the basic skills but with varying degrees of opposition. The young, or new player is required to make a number of responses in a short period of time.

Often in a game this time is too short for a considered decision. For these players, and most players in these age groups the game presents many uncertainties through your program, and its development it is important to use and control your opposition in training. Opposition is used in many of the drills. With younger players it is introduced gradually and increased from token, to controlled and finally full competitive. As your opposition develops to full competitive you need to be aware of working both your attack and defence. An example of this could be shown in drawing the player, your strategy would

first allow the development of player anticipation so that the supporter can learn and recognise the cues leading to the execution of the pass. Likewise the defender can do the same. This can be further enhanced by the development of functional practices that have a sequence of movements from the game. Three on two plays, with at first token defence moving through to contact, and fully competitive, is an example of using all players in a decision making game simulating activity. Finally in training the players are further tested in the development of the skill, by the development of the games that require this play to be used. Development of these conditioned game allows for the coach to fully evaluate the development of these game skills. The benefit of this approach is that the players are gradually exposed to the various demands of the game and hopefully develop anticipation for suitable responses as situations present themselves. The time of the response will also shorten as the players develop a memory store or association for a response and its matching game cue. Below is an outline of the development of exposure to the demands of the team game, using drawing the player.

- | | |
|---------------------|---|
| 1. Basic Skills | - Passing, catching, position |
| 2. Sequence | - 2 players run, pass and catch |
| 3. Opposition | - 2 on 1 (opponent) |
| Token | 1 stands still |
| Controlled | 1 is drawn each time |
| Competitive | 1 is allowed to make decision |
| 4. Practice | - 3 on 2, or 4 on 3 |
| | Develop drills that include defence |
| 5. Conditioned Game | - Develop contest with point scoring each time the skill is completed effectively |
| 6. Game | - Evaluate performance during game. |

Finally, I have found that young players respond enthusiastically to game based training. All the elements of the game can be carefully thought through over a period of time via systematic progression. In my experience, players respond well and easily grasp principles of play rapidly and this allows for the coach to find deficiencies and work on them. As a coach if your players are improving in skills, playing better in games, and are happy at your training I'm sure you are a success. It may also help you shift your focus from 'Why did I do this' to a much more positive response. □

Performance Standards in Rugby League

By Mick Aldous ARL Level 3 Coach

NSWRL Coaching & Development Officer

Essentially, the cornerstone of any achievement is inevitably the accomplishment of a given set of appropriate standards. Such standards are established from analysis of performances over a given period of time. It is quite possible in Rugby League to define an accurate set of basic competency standards which form the foundation of individual and team success, and ultimately increase the likelihood of victory. We need only scrutinise the behaviours of winning teams to figure essential components of the game which when successfully undertaken dramatically increase team efficiency.

Standards - A Guide to Performance

By breaking the game into individual components, a coach can continue to focus on vital process type information which players find stimulating over the length of a season. Every player is looking for a way to improve individual performance, and is therefore constantly receptive to information pertaining to this area - particularly if gradual improvements are rewarded.

Emphasising on outcomes, such as winning, will only act to demotivate players with an interest in personal performance. De-emphasise winning by placing increased importance on the satisfaction of personal competency standards. Reward the satisfaction of standards, then set a new target!

Rugby League can be broken into the following areas:

1. Play the ball-rapidity of play the ball, eg 3 sec
2. Sculling/Turtling-tackling opposition on their backs
3. Involvements per position-with or without the ball
4. Penalty counts
5. offloads-pass once over the advantage line
6. Time in possession inside opposition half-attacking sets
7. Time in possession inside own half-defensive sets
8. completion rate-making it through to sixth tackle
9. Line breaks-clean breaks
10. Metreage per player-individual targets
11. A tackle forcing a turnover
12. Quality kicks
13. Support play

Individually, the satisfaction of each game component should become the focus of training, and then match day performance. Each aspect must then be analysed to identify the most critical factor limiting team or individual performance.

1. Play the Ball (PTB)

Time taken to play the ball will show individual weaknesses in this important area. Creating a club record or rewarding improving players will increase efficiently. Players must enable clearance of the ruck in 3 sec to achieve a high standard. Specific drills are then planned to develop this area.

2. Sculling/Turtling

The aim is to slow opposition play the ball to greater than 3 sec. To do this, defensive players must get to their feet first. If the attacking player is tackled on his back, allowing the tackler to rise first, then the standards has been achieved. Over time, establish a team standard. It is possible to improve individuals in this area by rewarding performance once game day standards have been met.

3. Involvement per Position

By adding the number of possessions for each position to the number of tackles made by each, it is possible to establish an involvement index for each position. Once established, any drop in performance could be monitored to suggest injury, physiological slump, position suitability or lack of fitness.

4. Penalty Counts

The total number of penalties is indicative of a teams discipline. It is therefore an important parameter to be considered when analysing team performance. Often, it is the poor discipline or technique of a small group of players, which, when addressed and drilled can eliminate the problem. When each individual is given a set of responsibilities, penalty counts become controllable.

5. Offloads

This is defined by the number of times a player causes play to continue once making an attacking move across the advantage line. It will always follow a metreage gain. Effective offloads are definitely not shifts of the ball, but a purposeful carriage of play immediately following an attacking run which crossed the advantage line.

6. Attacking Sets

This refers to the number of times a team gains possession of the ball inside the opposition half.

7. Defensive Sets

The number of times an opposition attacking set begins inside a teams own half.

8. Completion Rate

Each set of six tackles has its own inherent degree of difficulty, the result of which is a rate of completion based on the number of tackles utilised in every attacking set. A high completion rate is desirable, but not at the expense of creative play. Errors offer the only chance for non-completion, so concentration on skill development will act to improve this standard.

9. Line Breaks

The ability to evade defence is a direct measure of attacking potency. Both beating the man whilst in possession and passing ability are important measures of attack. An improvement in either will see marked changes to the overall standard of play.

10. Metreage Gained

It is necessary to indicate the quality of individual attack. This can be achieved by dividing metres gained by number of possessions. A coach will soon learn that team performance is directly related to effective running. Players will compete from week to week to become the metreage winner if an appropriate incentive is posted. Players setting their own metreage standards are more likely to achieve them. Be realistic. Aim high.

11. Turnover Tackle

One way to influence results is to perform aggressive defence which causes opposition to spill the ball. A tackle ensuring a turnover can turn defence in attack.

12. Kicking

An effective kicking game can lead to territorial advantage. A quality standard for kicking is based on metres and positioning. Ideally, a defensive kick should be long enough to force the football carrier into a corner close to his line. An attacking kick should put pressure upon the opposition, either in the air or on the ground.

A kick on the sixth or any tackle that forces the opposition to concede position is vital. It is therefore, the best attacking option.

13. Support Play

The ability of a team to capitalise on attacking opportunities is related to support play being in position to carry play forward. The number of support play receives is an important standard.

Calculation of Team Standards

The following formulas can be used to calculate performance standards (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1

Attacking Standards	$\frac{\text{Number of possession (P)}}{\text{Number of Offloads (O)}}$
Defensive Standard	$\frac{\text{Number of Tackles Made (TM)}}{\text{Number of Tackles incomplete (MT)}}$
Ruck Standard	$\frac{\text{Number of times in Possession (TP)}}{\text{Play the Ball under 3 sec (PTB)}}$
Evasiveness Standard	$\frac{\text{Number of Possessions (P)}}{\text{Defenders Beaten (*1)}}$
Defensive Ruck Standard	$\frac{\text{Number of Tackles (T)}}{\text{Number of Skulls (SK)}}$
Kick Standard	Effectiveness rating (1-10)

Preparing The Junior Representative Team

Part One

By Matt O'Hanlon - Level 3 ARL Coach

Often when faced with coaching a junior representative team, the first concern for the coach is the importance of the first meeting. Normally after selections are complete it is a case of ... "here is the coach, he'll look after you from here". This is not the best introduction and because after the trial games and the representative selections have been made, parents and players are ready to go back to their regional areas. The job of providing an outline of what is expected and details of tours etc., is often difficult and the confusion generated here can cause much stress later.

There are steps that can be taken to ensure that this pre-training but vital preparation stage can proceed unhindered.

1. Usher everyone else out of the room except the players and officials. Parents and well wishers can prove to be a distraction and this may effect the dissemination of information.
2. Have the manager prepare a complete booklet that outlines every aspect of the season. This should include all forms required, outfitting instructions, contact phone numbers, game venues and times, accommodation policy, names of officials and any other information likely to be required by parents or players, introduce the manager and let him run this short session completely so that players are aware of the divide between coaching and managerial responsibility.
3. Prepare a players handout. Include areas for players to set goals for their present representative season. Include a training diagram for the period leading up to the competition (see table 1) where players can record (in diary form) the extra training they are doing as a result of their selection, get players to send in their maximal push up scores, 12 minute run times and other data required. Players can also send in match reports that their local coaches have filled in (see player performance profile). Provide

these in a handout asking for specific information e.g.. Tackles, hit ups, mistakes, supports, coaches rating and individual rating. It is important to include a return addressed envelope so that players have no excuse for not replying.

4. If training days are prior to games or a camp, provide outlines of the session and especially where they are being held (with map if necessary) so that players can't get lost, 2 or 3 players missing from these preparatory sessions can have a lasting effect on team performance.

All this information, provided at the initial session will be invaluable in the overall function of the team and will give a most professional look to the coach. Players will take note of this professionalism and will know that he is 'fair dinkum'. Players will also be given cause to begin to analyse the way they play and this will be invaluable to them as the season progresses.

Introduce your players to some mental preparation drills. Many players will not have been involved with these and some simple practises will not only introduce players to mental rehearsal but also give you a chance to start using these practices in coaching strategies.

These skills can be acquired in their most basic form through many texts that now deal with the subject or through any of the coach and development officers in any of the various districts. Once again use a hand-out that outlines some visualisation and relaxation strategies. The end result is that players will feel the professionalism as a result of your efforts and will respond with greater enthusiasm. (see mental preparation sheet)

Players will now be ready for assembly at training days and/or camps aware that everything will be well organised. *Part 2 in this series will deal with how to team build at these training days.* Regardless of a team's end result the coach and managers guaranteeing that the trip and time spent will be a worthwhile and valuable Rugby League experience.

Current Performance Indicators

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Please fill in all three

Match: Your team V

Grade/Competition

Coach's Rating on Performance:


 Poor Satisfactory Best on ground

Personal Rating:


 Below my best Normal As good as I can play

Defence Stats:

Tackles.....Doubles.....Triples.....Bone Rattlers.....

Personal Evaluation:

Things I did well.....

Things I have to work on.....

How I am working on problem areas.....

Players Mental Preparation

It is possible to improve performance by mentally rehearsing or perfectly reconstructing ideal performance via an imagined experience. Some may scoff or laugh about this, but those who are aware of the performance of top class players and athletes know that mental preparation is as essential to performance as preparation in skills, speed, stamina and strategies.

For games played over the representative season take time to rehearse your involvement. Set yourself up in a quiet peaceful environment and relax. Use deep breathing techniques if you are familiar with them.

When visualising remember the following points:

1. Think positively only
2. Imagine vividly - try to get a feel for the game

Some visualisations should include

- breaking through tackles
- drawing a man
- clearing to a support player
- backing up
- making a try saving tackle
- doing a "big hit" that jolts the ball free
- successfully calling and using a team play

Make up others that are specific to **your** game. Write down four or five situations here in the spaces provided:

-
-
-
-
-

Make sure visualisations are at the game speed and not in slow motion.

Some principles to follow:

1. Relax.
2. You need to practice regularly before you see value - practise for the six weeks prior to the games so that when the team gets together this skill can be further developed.
3. Rehearsals must be vivid.
4. Select a skill or segment and rehearse it in full
5. Develop your **own** performance plan and use it in rehearsal (ask your club coach what he expects from you then add your own goals for each game to develop your performance plan).
6. Perfect practice makes perfect - in mental rehearsal you have complete control over your performance. Eliminate self doubt by rehearsing perfectly.
7. The more times you positively rehearse something e.g. "a perfect try saving cover tackle", the better you will be able to handle it when the time comes.
8. Rehearse at game speed.
9. BE POSITIVE

FOR REHEARSAL go over your role in Attack, Defence, Support, Communication and Leadership.



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Training Schedule

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Coach.....Manager.....

The Greater Your Effort Now, The Greater Your Return Later

Extra Training Required

STRENGTH (ST)	3 X 25 Push ups, 3 X 25 Sit ups, 3 X 10 Chin ups: 5 sessions/week
ENDURANCE (EN)	6 min out, 6 min back: 2 sessions/week (measure distance)
SPEED (SP)	Stretching, sprint session, 10m, 20m, 50m, 100m: 2 sessions/week
SKILLS (SK)	Club and School Training
GAMES (GA)	Concentrate on defence, ask someone to watch your club defence: Tackle

Counts

TRAINING DAIRY:

Fill in using letters above and bring with you to training camp. Enter tackle counts from all games into your training diary. Have a parent or friend to do a tackle count if your club or school does not keep records.

Week Ending	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday

Preparing The Junior Representative Team

By Matt O'Hanlon
ARL Level 3 Coach

Part
Two

The first part in this series looked at the preparation required when the coach first met his side. In this second part we will look at some things the coach can do to try and develop the junior rep team. Selections are now complete and an outline of what is expected and details of competition, tours etc has been provided. Now there is the job of finding the balance with coaching of communicating and moulding the players into a cohesive team that provides the opportunity for players to:

- a) seek further representative honours
- b) be competitive as a team
- c) benefit from playing in the team.

Interestingly players will have goals roughly in the above order but as coach your goals may be - or at least I believe they should be - the reverse. In preparing the team be aware of the standard of competition the team will be playing against and the relative strengths and weaknesses of your players. If the team is 'weak' the coach will have to reset goals much closer to (c) as opposed to (b). Presented are some areas on which to focus preparations on, for coaching sessions prior to the championships.

Prior to meeting the team think about breaking your preparations into two areas. Firstly, there are a number of areas that the coach can plan and upon which he can have an effect. Secondly, there are areas that the coach can plan to effect but which may be governed by assumptions that he has have been forced to make. Some of these include:

- selected players being able to repeat their performance from trials at the championships
- fitness information provided is accurate and
- player skill levels are adequate

When players don't measure up to these assumptions it can be disappointing but as coach you need to be positive. Don't panic and change from all the preparations but provide the players with a professional well prepared programme that you are

familiar with. The key area to start with is communication. It is essential and needs to be developed rapidly. Many teenagers are self conscious and a coach needs to break down the communication barriers and establish rapport. Often the quiet youngster who seems uninterested is affected by shyness or is introverted. As a coach there is a need to be careful not to leave this player out because at 'the moment of truth' (i.e. when he takes the field) his shyness disappears in the much more comfortable surrounds of playing footy in the park with his peers.

Likewise, the extroverted or more social youngster may not measure up to the level you thought causing a coach to be disappointed when really the boy may have been playing to his ability. The coach may have confused his ability to play with his ability to communicate and his extroverted personality and perceived confidence.

At these early sessions the ability to communicate and its overall effect on performance are often not stressed highly enough. Learn all the players names prior to the team meeting so that the faces only have to be added at the first session. Players can do this by playing a simple name game. There are a number of these types of activities.

One example is to get your players to sit in a semi circle. The first player says his name followed by the second player who says his name first followed by the first players name. This goes on until the last player says his name followed by all the other players names. After the last player has finished, make the first player repeat all the names in order. A simple drill but effective in developing, for all players a knowledge of names essential in the development of effective communication.

A secondary but also very important step is to make sure that when players are paired off for small games and drills that they don't break up into groups that they feel comfortable with (by comfortable I mean already established groups based on club, school or geographic lines).

RUGBY LEAGUE COACHING MANUALS

made up of the leftovers will struggle a little because they are not only working on the activity you have set but also developing communication. As coach you may think this group is behind in skills when really they are developing group dynamics at the same time as taking on new drills and activities.

If the groups are organised so they are not comfortable - and I would suggest this is the best way - stress the use of calling first names throughout the session. As a result of this, team dynamics will broaden and move away from the singular comfortable groups that are formed prior to team assembly and take on a team dynamic which is free of cliques that can often undermine the culture of the team.

Another benefit of the team culture is that it provides a defence against the malingering who will take all the shortcuts and can be very damaging to a team because they can lower the potential of the team.

I have also found that keeping the team together at carnivals and championships whenever possible and wearing common team gear for training and to games helps players identify with the team and helps build the all important team culture. Whilst all of these facets may not seem essential for performance, concentrating on these areas prior to flying into game plans, plays and team skills will provide the foundation for a successful campaign.

If as a coach we forget to establish this communication, team cohesion may take 3 or 4 days to adjust to the new order. This is time that could have been used more gainfully in other endeavours.

Another area of importance is to see if fitness levels are up to the required standard. At the first session the coach could test players against their stated 12 minute run or the 2.4km distance. Collate these times and find the average to give information that compares with the previous years. If it is the first time information of this type has been gathered you can use in the future. If your times seem dissappointing remember they are only an indication of fitness, not of how kids will play in the heat of battle.

Use parts of this information to let your players feel positive about their performance and their level of fitness. Positive affirmations can go a long way with young players, as a rule always keep your misgivings on players to yourself and staff because negative vibes from a coach can have a detrimental effect on apprehensive young player and in turn this can result in impending doom.

As stated in the first part of this series, team selection is a very tough and often a subjective process. As a

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result there often tends to be a slight imbalance between attacking and defensive style players in your side, usually slanted to the attacking side. Hence we need to make sure our training encompasses both tackling and defence and not just lots of feel good attack against an invisible team. An example would be to use a left side attack against a right side defence.(see drill 6) This will also help build productive groups that can be tested under a form of game pressure in skills of teamwork in attack and defence and importantly, communication.

In terms of development preparation and team attacking and defence strategies it is important that the coach develop his own so that at training he is confident with the programme being used. My preference is to use a minimal approach to the big plays and to concentrate on doing the little things correctly.

If players are bombarded with attacking plays that have worked elsewhere you may be confusing players with information that they may never use and therefore the time has been wasted. Use basic drills that emphasise communication and teamwork in a context of attack and defence simultaneously and not as separate parts of the same game.

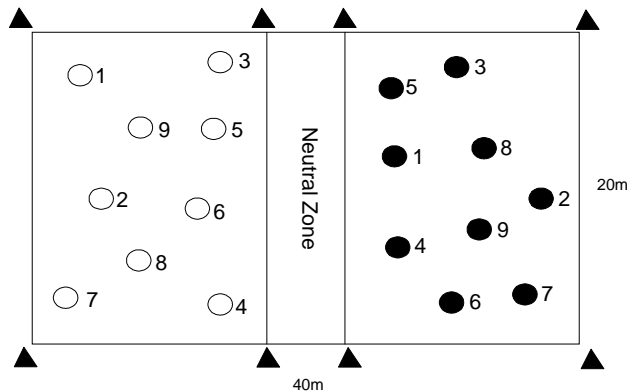
The following are a set of games and drills that could be used. They all emphasise communication and can be used as both attacking or defensive drills. Use your own drills as well. Especially those that you are confident with and which serve an important purpose for attack and defence.

A coach should be able to focus on both areas of play and look to improve overall team performance. Players can also use drills 4, 5, and 6 as practices for simple game plans, strategies and decision making in a relatively controlled environment that can mirror or stimulate real game situations and in which the coach can have input. By using a set of drills you are also adding consistency to your programme. Players become familiar with the mechanics of these drills quickly and that once again allows you to concentrate on coaching.



RUGBY LEAGUE COACHING MANUALS

NUMBER CATCH



Aim For the attacking team to successfully kick across the neutral zone and for the defender to catch the football on the full.

Divide players into two teams. Each player is given a number.

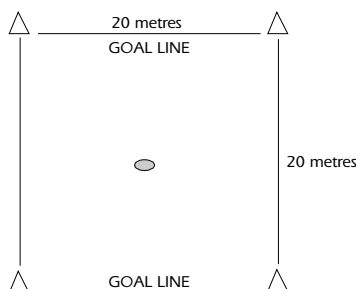
Teams are scattered throughout their own half, as indicated above. The player in possession of the football calls out any number then immediately kicks it over the neutral zone and into the opposition's half. The player with the nominated number must catch the ball. No other player can attempt to catch the ball. Teams must vary their number calls each time they kick.

As a variation another football can be added.

SPEED TOUCH

SETTING:

- Grid 20m x 20m (approx. depending on players)
- 2 Equal teams of players
- 4 Markers • 1 Football



AIM - Team is to score against other team without being touched (one touch per team before hand-over)

- Teams line up on their own goal line to start game
- Ball is placed in middle of grid
- Teams run out and one picks up ball
- Touch can either be a two handed touch, or full tackle
- When the touch is made the ball is placed on the ground and both teams retire to their own goal line and then return to pick up the ball and continue game (hand-over) with a play the ball.
- The team that was attacking now goes on defence.
- Incorrect play the ball incurs a penalty which is a hand-over.
- Other penalties are also a hand-over

BENEFITS OF GAME:

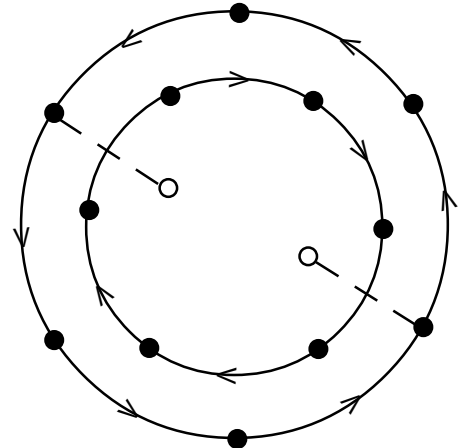
- Defence • Passing Skills • Communication
- Decision Making • Fitness

ROTATION

Setting:

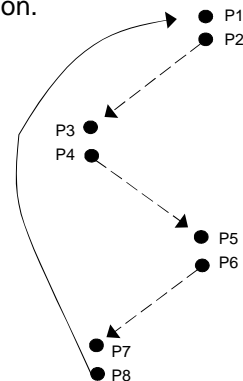
- Players form two circles
- Two players stand inside circles

- Players in the inside circle run one way whilst players in the outside circle run in the opposite direction.
- Two players in the middle make a pass:
 - To the players in the outside circle
 - Alternately to the inside and outside circle
 - To players in the outside circle with players in the inside circle attempting to knock down the passes



ROUND ROBIN PLAY THE BALL

- P1 who is positioned on the ground, rises to his feet and plays the ball to P2 who is directly behind him (acting half back).
- P2 passes left to P3 who falls to the ground and raises to his feet to play the ball to P4.
- P4 passes right to P5 who falls to the ground and then raises to his feet to play the ball to P6
- P6 passes left to P7 who falls to the ground and then raises to his feet to play the ball to P8.
- P8 runs to the position held by P1 initially.
- Each player, having completed his role moves to the position taken up by the next player in the drill.
- The drill is performed until P1 is back in his original position.



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