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Developing Ball Skills

By Don Oxenham ARL Level 4 Coach

Having good ball skills is the basis on which the game is built, enabling players to perform the games demands and requirements with the football.

The fundamental skills are acquirable with the right teaching and an application to practise. The enhancement and development of the ball skills is the responsibility of the coach to ensure that players attain a standard of being able to control the ball in all situations. Practice can make any reasonably co-ordinated player with the basics, make their execution automatic and develop the other essentials of speed, anticipation and balance.

Every player in the team is a ball player, the more skilful they are the more they will be able to participate, and that is synonymous with enjoyment and pleasure. The more the learner experiments with the ball in their hands or passing through their hands the more it will feel a part of them. Children from the beginning should develop a feel for the ball to develop the ability to deliver a pass correctly to meet the target.

The early stages of ball skills is about players attaining a proficiency with the techniques. The advanced stage takes this ability to the next phase of using the ball in the game with the decision making of when to pass, kick or transfer the ball between two players who, after considering all of the information cues about them make the decision and take the appropriate action.

The term ball handling covers all types of hand contact with the football either in the air or on the ground, and a players association or affinity to the ball depends on developing sound techniques with

- * Holding a ball - correct method in two hands.
- * Passing or disposal of ball.
- * Receiving.
- * Catching a high ball.
- * Picking up a ball - stationery on the ground.
- * Picking up a ball - moving on the ground.

All of these techniques can be practised and developed through drills so that they can reach an advanced stage of performance. It is only after this is achieved that players can move on to the advanced ball skill stage.

The advanced ball skill stage can be identified as the when of passing and using the ball. This stage can be achieved through drills and practices but requires a mental component to be developed in conjunction with the physical actions in game related situations. Mental rehearsal of players actions can assist the development of these advanced ball skills.

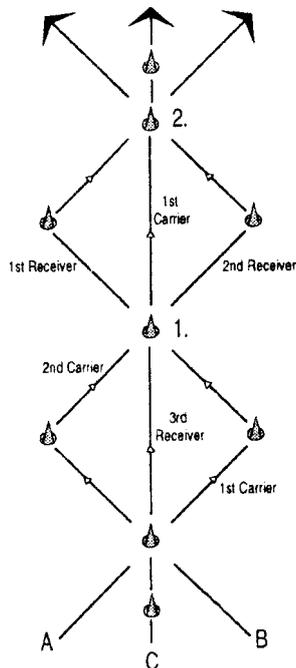
Development of these skills to this proficiency will depend on players understanding of:

1. Distance The space between the ball carrier and the support player.
Having the ability to quickly decide what this distance is.
2. Speed Running speed of both the ball carrier and the support player. Speed of ball when passed.
3. Positions Where all the players are in relation to the ball but primarily where the ball carrier is in relation to the support.
4. Environment Consideration to wind, rain, heat and other ground conditions.
5. Target Area Selected area or place where the ball will end up when transferred (passed, etc.)
6. Judgement A mental skill which the player will use to make a decision when all the above considerations have been taken into account.

A players ability to assess all of these factors will affect the success of the actions taken. This will allow players to time and weight the pass to have the ball reach its target area accurately. Development of these skills requires players to be put into game related situations and drills, to practise and be coached through their actions.

The following drill is designed to develop the timing, passing and support.

Timing and Coincidence



SETTING: Track 15 x 40m, 9 markers, 3 players, 1 football.

Aim is for all runners to time their run to coincide at given points, 1 and 2

- A commences, run with the football
- B sets off at same time (watching A)
- C follows
- on the intersection 1. A turns the ball to B - B immediately pops the ball to C.

- * C players should burst onto the ball at ball exchange points, 1 and 2.
- * Precision with arrival times indicate the skill.
- * Turns by players during runs can be introduced to increase the degree of difficulty.
- * Angles for the 1st carrier and 2nd receiver can be narrowed.
- * More difficult runs occur by commencing to run on the wide angle side.

The key achievement will be a players ability to 'weight' the pass, which is a decision based on considerations of all the factors that affect the success of a pass reaching the target. The role of the support player to receive the pass by good technique is essential for the success of all passes.

Situations

The requirement of advanced ball skills are evident in a number of situations used in the game for development of attacking play by promoting the ball in a safe and positive way

1. Draw and pass
2. Pass and tackle
3. Driving through the tackle and passing

As with all of these situations the role of both the passer and receiver are important and must be understood.

1. Draw and pass

Application in the game:-

The most commonly used and effective skill of attacking play. All players should develop this skill to create space for support players to run into.

Key Skill Points:-

This skill is the combination of many minor skills and must be developed and refined as players move through their development stages. This development includes the mental aspects of vision, anticipation and perception in conjunction with the physical motor movement pattern.

- (a) Correct running passing action with co-ordination of body movements.
- (b) Good ball control and correct handling.
- (c) Use of arms, wrists and fingers to pass.
- (d) Taking a short half step toward defender as pass is delivered.
- (e) Eyes on target area, by turning upper body and squaring the shoulders.
- (f) Release of ball at correct time.
- (g) Target area in front of receiver approximately waist high - eyes focused on target area.

Coaching considerations

- (a) Using judgement to know when is the right time to pass.
- (b) Position of defenders and support players.
- (c) Distance of support players.
- (d) Weighting of pass to reach target area effectively.
- (e) Players having the perception and knowing when a defender is committed to the attacking player.
- (f) Receiver to communicate his position in support.

2. Pass in the Tackle

NOTES

Application in the game:-

- * A valuable skill is to develop the ability to pass while in a tackle and promote attack.
- * When defence is hard to break.

Key Skill points

- (a) Good ball control with two hands.
- (b) Good balance by using legs and feet, spread wide to give a stable base.
- (c) Turn in tackle to face support players.
- (d) Well timed, weighted short pass.
- (e) Hit and spin technique.

Coaching Considerations

- (a) Strength of player to turn and make ball available while being involved in a tackle.
- (b) Good vision to read the situation and the position of support players.
- (c) The ball carrier puts his body between the tackler and the ball.
- (d) Only pass when there is a clear space to do so.

3. Driving through the tackle and passing

Application in the game:-

When situation dictates that the defence is tight and hard to break. Ball carrier is tackled and support player has penetrated the defence line.

Key skill points

- (a) Hold the ball securely in two hands.
- (b) Lift body up in tackle and continue to drive forward.
- (c) Keep the arms free enabling a pass to be effected.
- (d) Quick accurate, normally short pass to support player.

Coaching considerations

- (a) Ball carrier aware of support.
- (b) Good judgement of space, speed and distance to time the pass.
- (c) Communications from support players.
- (d) Good vision from both players.

Aquiring the Skills of Rugby League

By Don Oxenham - ARL Level 4 Coach

The major skills of Rugby League are considered to be passing, tackling, handling, play the ball, evasion and kicking. A player would be considered highly skilled when they could bring about a predetermined football response with maximum certainty and a minimum expenditure of energy. Elite players display an appearance of efficiency and smoothness of movement and are able to anticipate events and cope with unpredictable circumstance without adversely affecting their level of performance.

Learning is a continual process and therefore cannot be broken down into distinct or separate stages. However, irrespective of the age of the learner there are gradual changes that occur as the player develops an ability to reproduce a skill successfully.

The product of the learning process is when a player can produce the skill automatically. For example top players seem to be able to pay more attention to the development of the pattern of play around them than players with less skill. These players have refined the

The psychology of motor skill learning suggests that the condition under which the skills of Rugby League are presented to the individual player are very critical in the learning process. Although it is often said that “practice makes perfect”, It should be recognised that players may not learn just because they participate. It is important to practice and ensure that the correct technique is being employed, particularly at the junior level. The type and method of practice must be favourable in order that the player reaches the highest level of performance.

As coach you can vary the number, duration and intensity of practice periods. To guide the coach in his decision to select the most appropriate practice schedule he should consider the age and physical maturity and motivational level of the individual players along with the physical demands of the skill in terms of fatigue .

The more tired players become during the practice session, the less likely they are to retain their previous

In order that learners can modify their football skills they should be given some information by the coach as to whether or not performance is reaching the required level.

skills to a stage where they can be executed without conscious awareness of the necessary movements. That is, the skills are automatic, therefore, when a champion gains possession of the ball he is not concerned with HOW he is going to kick it, but is more concerned with WHERE to kick the ball for the best advantage of the team,

Throughout this learning process the changes that occur include a reduction in errors, improvement in accuracy, greater consistency of performance and a decrease in the feel and level of effort.

interest and skill level. In view of these factors, a distributed practice schedule provides a more efficient coaching system. For example, the use of a 5 or 10 minute tackling segment in a number of practice sessions is more likely to make greater impact on the players in terms of learning and retention than a single half hour tackling segment once a month.

In general, football skills should be taught by the whole (as distinct from the part) method. For example, in learning to kick, the total action should be attempted by the player.

Skill Scene

By Don Oxenham
ARL Level 4 Coach

Kicking

Kicking has become more a part of the game and all types of kicks should be taught, practiced and developed by all players. A player who has developed the various kicking skills will become a valuable asset to the team. It is important for all coaches to develop these skills in all players to improve their all round game and provide players with as wide a range of skills as possible.

The techniques for all kicks can be found in the ARL Skills Manual but there are some basic technique points that apply to all types of kicks.

1. Position of hands and grip of the ball.
2. Body movement of both arms, legs, head and shoulders, with eyes on the ball.
3. Guidance of the football onto the foot.
4. leg action.
5. Foot contact with the football.
6. Follow through action of the leg.

Practicing these kicks will also provide some well accepted training variety for the players.

A coaches responsibility is to instruct on the coaching points, providing appropriate practices, evaluating and correcting as players develop their kicking skills. Appropriate practices include those that concentrate on technique through to game related situations. Players progress in their development can be measured through skill testing with results recorded for future comparison.

Coaching points for the chip kick.

1. Eyes on the ball.
2. Hands holding the ball around the middle.
3. Football dropped onto foot in an upright position.
4. Foot held rigid with toes curled back.
5. Football contacts instep of foot to effect a short kick over the top of defending players.

Coaching points for grubber kick.

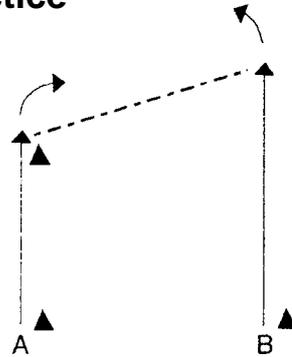
1. Eyes on the ball.
2. Hands on side of ball with ball cradled into hands.
3. Football dropped almost horizontally with a slight tilt forward.
4. Foot rigid with toes pointed.
5. Football kicked towards top of ball to effect an end over end travel along the ground.

Coaching points for the drop kick.

1. Hands on top of ball with thumbs near lace.
2. Football held at an angle of 45° and dropped at this angle onto foot.
3. Foot rigid with toe turned down.

4. Foot instep makes contact with ball.
5. Extend arms for balance.
6. After contact follow through with full swing of the leg.

1: Kick Practice



Have the players pair off. Distribute one football between each pair.

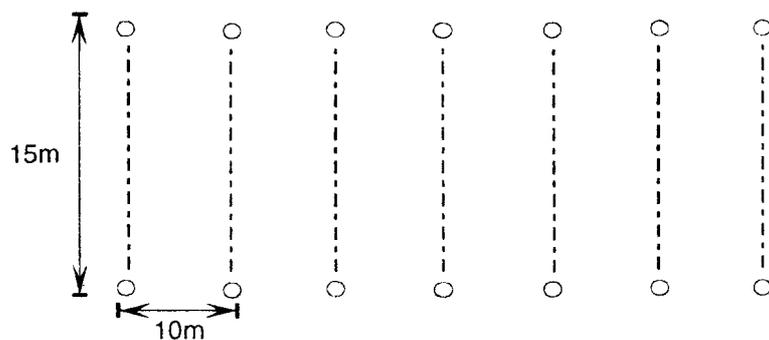
Space the pairs at intervals of ten metres. The players are to kick over a distance of fifteen metres.

Have the players practice the following kicks:-

1. Grubber kick
2. Drop kick
3. Chip kick

Have the players practice both the left and right foot kicks.

2: Kick to Support

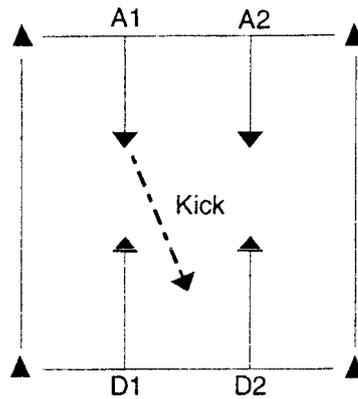


- Divide group into two teams
- A has ball, runs to first marker and kicks across to other marker.
- Either a grubber or chip can be used.
- B runs out and collects the ball. (he must "ATTACK" or go "OUT AFTER" the ball).
- A to the end of B's original line and B to the end of A's line and the drill continues.

Variations

- Introduce a support player, C who B passes to on receiving the ball.
- Introduce a defender, D, to tackle B and the ball has been collected.

3. Kick and Support



SETTING: 15m x 10m, 4 markers, 4 players, 1 football.

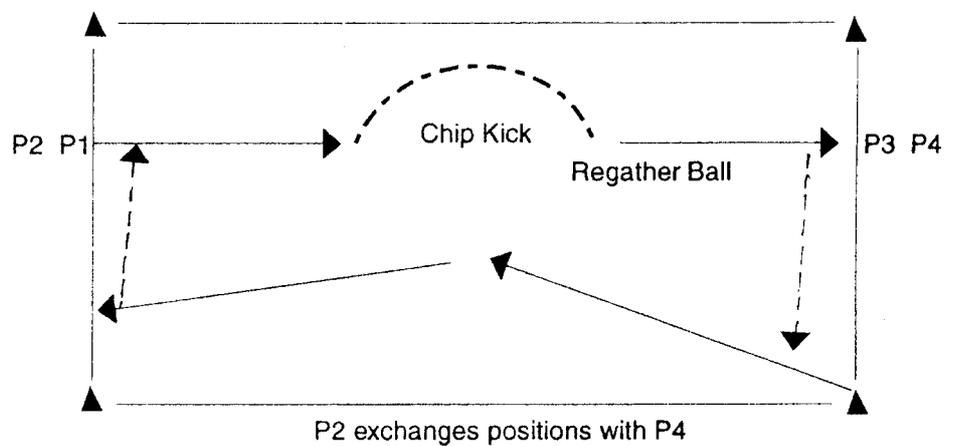
Two attackers against 2 defenders.

- Players stand on the base line of the grid, line up opposite and facing on another.
- Both teams advance and A1 grubber kicks between D1 and D2.
- Either A or A2 regathers to score.

Drill can be varied by having A1 and A2 passing to each other as they advance.

Either player then grubber kick for either to regather.

4. Kick Over



SETTING: Grid 15m x 5m, 4 markers, 4 players per group, 1 football.

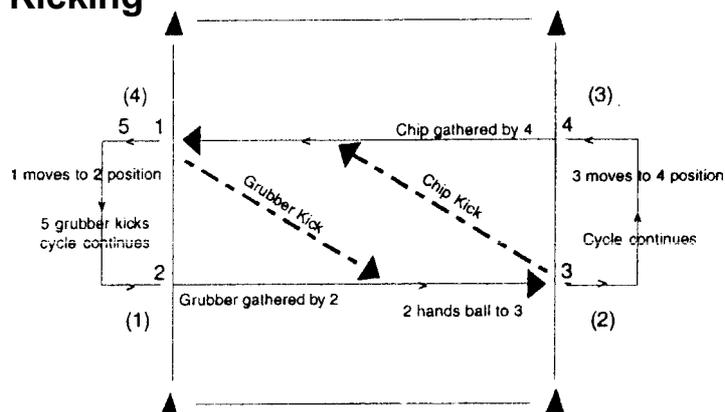
To be conducted at slow jogging pace.

- P1 carrying the ball, runs toward 3 who is also moving forward, chip kicks over his head, regathers and passes to 4.
- P4 runs, chip kicks over the head of 2, regathers and passes to 3.

The drill continues in this manner.

The “harassing” player approaches the kicker with more speed to add pressure to the drill.

5. Team Kicking

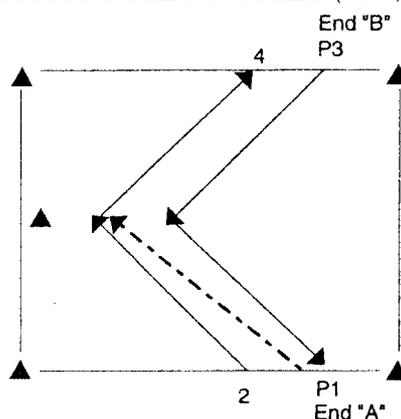


SETTING: Grid 15m x 15m, 4 markers, 5 players, 1 football.

- P1 grubber kicks across for 2 who chases and regathers.
- P2 hands the ball off to 3 who chip kicks across for 4 to regather on the full and hand off to 5.
- P4 moves to 5's position and 5 recommences the drill by grubber kicking to 1.

Encourage players not to kick the football beyond the grid.

6. CHIP KICK WITH PRESSURE: (a kick, chase and catch exercise)



SETTING: Grid 15m x 10m, 5 markers, 4 players, 1 football.

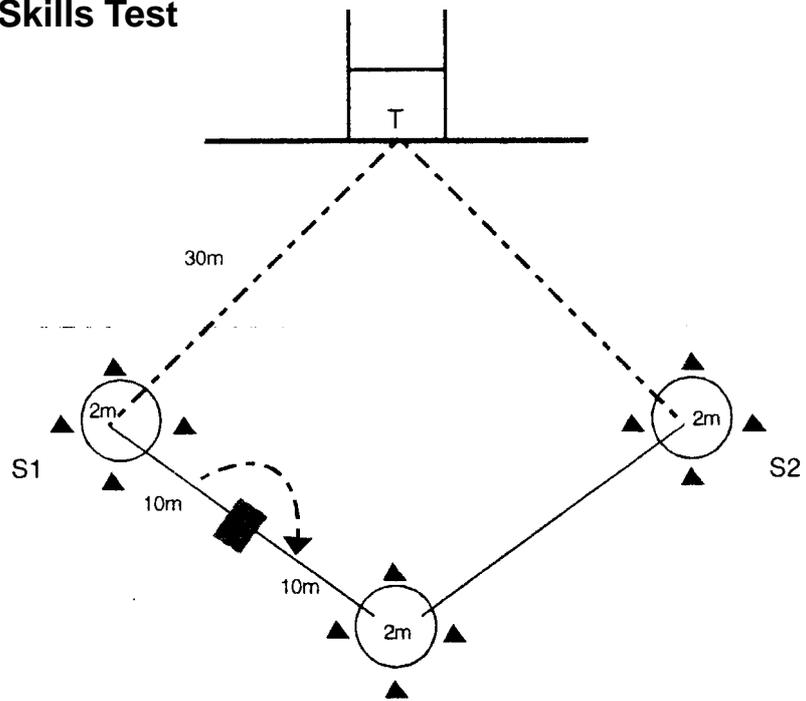
(i) Players are in lines at adjacent corners at each end of the grid - ends A & B.

- The ball carrier always kicks and the previous kicker always chases or pressures.
- 1st Kick. The drill commences with P1 kicking for 2 to gather, 3 pressuring him.
- P2, now with the ball, moves to end B.
- P3 to end A.
- 2nd Kick. P2 kicks for 4 with 1 applying the pressure.
- P4 having caught the ball moves to end A.
- P1 to end B.
- 3rd Kick. P4 kicks for 3, with 2 applying pressure.
- P3 with the ball, moves to end B.
- And 4 to end A.
- 4th Kick. P3 kicks for 1 who is pressured by 4.
- P1 with the ball, moves to end A.
- And 4 to end B.

The circuit is continuous with each player kicking, catching and pressuring.

(ii) For more than 4 players, the kicker catches, hands-off or passes to the first player in the opposite line then retreats to the end of that line while the chaser moves to the back of the kicker's former line.

7. Skills Test



SETTING: Grid 30m x 20m x 20m x 30m, 14 markers, 1 tackle bag, 4 footballs.

- There are two trials for this circuit.
- The kicks tested (a) punt, (b) chip (and gather), (c) ground kick and (d) drop kick.
- Then circuits are run anti-clockwise then clockwise.

Stage 1

T punt kicks from under the posts to the white marker target area (S1), 30 metres distant, T picks up a second football and moves to the target in preparation for the next kick.

Stage 2

T rounds the stage 1 markers and chip kicks over a tackle bag to regather before moving into the red markers area S2. (an extra football is located here).

Stage 3

T ground kicks between two markers to carry into the blue target zone (S3). (extra football location)

Stage 4

T drop kicks goal-30 metres.

Stage 5

Second attempt-punt, ground, chip (and gather) and drop kick.

When assessing players in the skills test the following points should be watched for.

Chip Kick

Ball held correctly
Ball flight (height, spin)
Accuracy

Ground Kick

Ball held correctly
Body carriage
Accuracy

Drop Kick

Ball held correctly
Dropped straight
Head down
Follow through
Accuracy

8. Kicking Games

(i) Kick Tennis

Divide players into two teams, and place them into respective grids.

The ball is kicked over the neutral zone into the other team's grid.

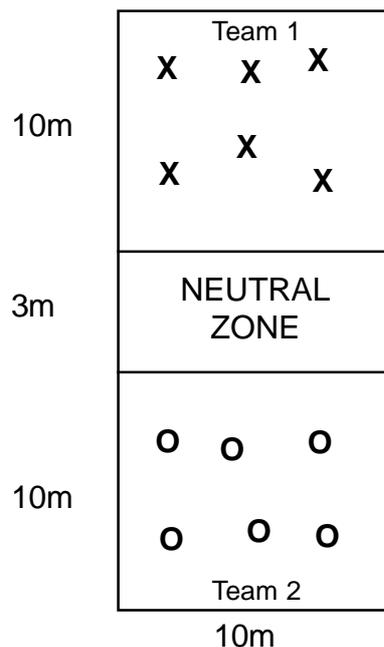
The receiving team must catch the ball before it hits the ground.

Any mistake in the catching scores a point for the kicking team.

First team to score 10 points wins.

The ball, at each kick, must go above chest height. If not, the receiving team scores a point.

Variations can be introduced to have players catch with non preferred arm or kick with non preferred foot.



(ii) Chip and Chase

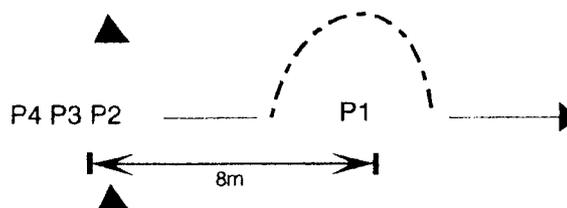
Groups of four

Each player starts 8m from stationary player - runs, chip kicks and attempts to regather, run on and score a 'try' at the end of the channel (see diagram).

A 'try' is worth three points.

After kicking player 2 returns football to player 3 and takes place of player 1.

Player 1 moves to end of line, behind player 4.



Coach Talk

Peter Louis - North Sydney Bears Head Coach

Q1 Do you have a coaching philosophy?

When I started I didn't. I was a very reluctant coach, it all happened for me after I had a bad knee injury and the club I was playing for at the time didn't have a coach. They didn't have any money or players and they asked me to coach. I didn't have any experience except being fortunate to play a couple of years in Sydney and so when I went into coaching I tried to reflect back on those who coached me and the things they did for me that I liked and the things I didn't like and I tried to go from that. I had one coach who was really keen on doing skills work and I took that on board. The next coach I played under was a strict disciplinarian so I took that as well. When I played First Grade the coach was a real players coach. He was a follow me type of coach. So I took all the positives from those three coaches. Then there was

The message to any aspiring coach is don't have a year off, keep going and talk to people, to other coaches, read anything you can, keep a library of information.

Q2. What do you consider to be your coaching strengths?

My strength is that I am flexible with listening to what the player has to say. I am a believer that sometimes players are the best judges as to what is going on, and even with player recruitment. If you are looking for a player to fit into your team then the best people to ask would be your senior players, how they respect those new players.

Billy Moore refers to me as 'the Sponge' because I like to listen to people's opinions and take them on board. I have the ability to use that information and shape the way I am going to coach and want the team

More than anything else the one quality needed is that you must be honest.

Malcolm Clift, a lower grade coach at the time with Canterbury and I enjoyed his coaching, he was more like the First Grade coach I had in the bush, who was also a players coach and a real hands on type. I took all that to start with and when I went to Sydney and worked with John Monie after Jack Gibson had left the club, John Monie was influenced by Jack Gibson and I suppose you could say most of the coaches have been influenced in some way by Jack Gibson. Out of all that you build up your own philosophy by learning through your experiences. When it all comes down now, I like more than anything else, to get the best out of players and I do so through listening and encouraging, which I consider my two main philosophies. I like to be a good listener and hear what the players have to say and offer and make up my mind from that.

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to play. You could say that my strength lies in that I am a players coach by doing these things.

Q3. What type of skills training do you do?

Skills training is very important. When I played in a D grade team years and years ago, the coach was very much skills orientated and that left me with that feeling that you have to be good in that area. There wouldn't be any part of our game that we don't attach some sort of skill drill. In our review of games on both our opposition and ourselves, if there is a weakness in our game, we sit down and devise game orientated drills and incorporate them in our training the following week.

One of my strengths is I do my homework and come up with plenty of drills to strengthen the team in all aspects.

Specifically game related skills with active opposition in some situations and the team does a lot of work in that area. Especially in attack. This year our attack has been reasonably good and we have scored over 600 points. It is an extremely important part of everyday coaching and I don't think there would be a day go by that we don't do some form of skill drill.

Q4. Do you use game plans and patterns?

Yes we do. The game to me has changed from the 5 metre rule to the 10 metre rule and now it is back to about 7 metres. With the change in the Play the Ball, all plans have to be adopted depending on the team you are playing. We don't go out with the same plan week in week out but there is a basic game plan that we try to execute, and perform everytime we play. So the basics to us are very important and depending on the opposition and where you want to be and concentrate on. We have quite a number of set plays in our collection and over the years you accumulate them and keep them in your "little book" often when you are looking at a tape of the opposition you think that a certain play will or will not work and so it is important that you do your homework. It is the old saying that "failing to plan is planning to fail" and that is something that has stuck with me.

Q5. How important is impulse play in your team?

Extremely important, the reaction to the situation. I never try to restrict my players to stick rigidly to what we have to do ruck after ruck after ruck. They have an open book to play what they see both in defence and attack, and encouragement to do that is given and reinforced just about every week. This will fit in with the basic plan but as you build pressure on the opposition you can't say there are not too many set plays that don't work for you. However, it is usually a missed tackle or a dropped ball situation that you have to be prepared to play off that and there is certainly no restrictions with North Sydney in that area.

Q6. How would you summarise your teams preparation each week?

We have a basic routine. The biggest problem I presently have with coaching is variation. This stems from the personality of the team and having been coaching First Grade for six years with players who have been there for the same amount of time. It is very important to have the variation in what you do but basically if it is a Sunday to Sunday game we do a recovery session on Monday, followed by a day time routine which basically remains the same.

We do change to match the situation, for example one week we have a night game so we changed all our training to night time. We have done the weights training at night, the ball work at night and our recovery session the previous Monday night which is standard for night game preparation. Most days are full on with Wednesday the only day off. Normally two sessions on Tuesday, weights in the morning with skills in the afternoon. Thursday is an all day session with a power session in the morning and some light activity during the day such as golf, I try to keep the players together on Thursdays. It's back into the office in the afternoon for a video session followed by our main ball work for the week. Friday is a light run and a top up on how we are going to play. Saturday is a rest day in preparation for play on Sunday.

We try and stick basically to that pattern, again depending on whether it is a night game, or a Saturday afternoon which may change it slightly.

Q7. Players are expected to perform at their peak each week. How do you ensure this performance?

It is extremely difficult and if I knew the answer I would have the Australian coaching job. You can't possibly do it, and it is extremely difficult to be able to keep players up all the time. The thing that does help keep them up is the variation spoken about earlier. Boredom is the biggest problem in trying to keep players concentration level and the more variation I can come up with the better they seem to perform. We strive and struggle to come up with different things even to the point of training at a different oval to surprise them and say we are not doing skills training this afternoon but are going to have a game of indoor soccer. This is the type of programme we design in an attempt to maintain their concentration. Rest and recovery is very important. As coach you have to be smart enough to recognise the distress signals and handle the situation.

Q8. How important is the mental aspect of players to achieve performance?

I would have to answer this question again with 'variation', because the variation in the training is the key to keeping players mentally fresh. It is the biggest problem that coaches have to deal with. The demand on players is extraordinary, and maintaining a variation to fit in with this demand is difficult. At North Sydney we have overcome a lot of these things because the players are involved in Junior Development whereby they can take off for a couple of hours, go to a school and be involved with the kids which keeps their mind occupied. Parramatta also have their players most of the day and they have to get out and do other things which is a good idea.

Q9. Is there a particular type of player that best suits your style of game?

Yes, the one that scores tries, and those who stop tries. Having a good mix of players is part of being successful and how you recruit is important. There is not much point in me telling Gary Larson I want you to stay away from defence and to play out wide in the centres and score tries, because that will not work and I think that is being smart as far as picking the player that you need. Many coaches would answer this question by saying, you need players with good temperament, be reasonably intelligent, they need to have a good personality and they have to be skilful. Out of these four attributes three of them are mental and players, although they need physical fitness with speed and strength for example, as well as skill, they also must have the capacity to train and have dedication. Players also need the mental toughness to be able to do the things necessary to maintain performance. If players didn't play and train just because they didn't feel like it on the day they wouldn't get very far.

That is the type of player with the mental toughness who is important to me. Players have to be smart and know football and if as coach you can develop and encourage that, players will be able to read game situations and react accordingly.

Q10. How much do you use videos in your team preparation and what information are you seeking?

I use videos all the time and I think they are the best working tool that coaches have, it certainly is for me and I spend a lot of time on video work. Not only to assess our own performance, which can take up to 5 hours, but to go through and write down the information for the players. It is important to give feedback and I know our players look forward to that, particularly the good things more than any constructive criticism. This is a part of coaching an elite player, where they are looking for the feedback, to improve themselves.

Our drills are set from the video in the skills work we need to do. As far as the opposition is concerned there is a lot that can be learnt on how to play them to win. I would watch an end on tape of ours then a side on view and then I will watch the previous two games and try to get a mix out of the players they have used and what they have done in the game. There are a lot of common things that come up and from that you can understand their play. So videos are extremely important.

Q11. Can you give your view on the importance of and the role of the team captain?

A team captain, before anything has to have the respect of the players. This is probably the most important quality for a captain, who doesn't necessarily have to be the best player, or the fastest or strongest but he has to understand the game, and be tactful. He has to be able to talk and think in the correct manner in pressure situations, particularly in the bad times when things are going against the team.

Jason Taylor to me fills most of these roles, as well as having a very good football brain and the direction he gives the players around the field is quite astute and they respect him. North Sydney are fortunate to have a person of Jason Taylor's qualities. I never send messages out to him but he will come to me after the game to discuss and confirm decisions he made. Reference can then be made back to the video with a look at decisions made in relation to the state of the game at the time. You have to have a working relationship and trust one another and we are fortunate to have the two most important qualities of trust and respect.

Q12. It was during the season stated that if the Grand Final was played in pouring rain, Norths would be certainties. Do you have any special preparation or plans for these type of conditions?

Simply, no. The only thing we do is train in the rain. If we have a training session set for a certain time and it happens to be raining we will go out and train. The secret is that as soon as training starts you find the biggest pool of water and get everyone to dive into it, to get involvement straight away without anyone being concerned about getting wet and dirty.

We don't do anything special for wet conditions. It might be a mental thing, it could be that we can grind it out well with opposition teams. When it is wet it could make players more conscious of ball security, not forcing the ball or the kick and chase. I really cannot explain why Norths have been successful in wet conditions.

Q13. Has there been any person you consider who has been a key influence on your coaching?

When I first started coaching I had to make do myself. I could only go back on the people who had coached me. If anyone has had an influence on me it would be John Monie. He was the person who gave me a start and I had played and coached with him on the Central Coast, then he went to Sydney under Jack Gibson. I coached a further year on the Central Coast, then had

one year off. Then I came back and coached reserve grade for a year and thought that was all I was going to do. When John Monie was appointed First Grade coach at Parramatta he invited me to work with him as Reserve Grade coach. I didn't think I was up to that level, and that was 1984, but John convinced me to take it on and that is how it all started. I suppose when I went to Parramatta there were a lot of rules still there from Jack Gibson and John Monie wanted to continue with the success of the club without making too many changes believing that "if something is not broken don't fix it".

He gave me the opportunity and I think the influence of Jack Gibson on John Monie and then to myself as well as working at Parramatta when they had a group of elite representative players in Peter Sterling, Brett Kenny, Ray Price and Mick Cronin. Those players were terrific to me, they knew I was a rookie and their influence as well as that of John Monie and the Parramatta club gave me a great start.

Q14. What do you see as a prime denominator for a coach at any level?

You have to be fair dinkum, honest, be able to trust people, as well as a father confessor. Once you get the respect of the players and they see you have their best interests at heart then I think it all starts from there. You have to be honest and you can never ever fool them in the end, if you try to play one against the other by telling them one thing and doing something else it just doesn't mix and they will certainly find out about these things and that is when respect goes out the window.

More than anything else the one quality needed is that you must be honest.

Q15. What are your coaching goals - Do you see yourself at Norths for a lengthy period?

After next year it will be seven (7) years as Head Coach and ten (10) years with the club, having spent three (3) years as Reserve Grade Coach so at the end of the 1999 season my time at North Sydney will end.

I certainly don't want to hang up my clipboard and I would like to continue coaching at this level either in the N.R.L. or in England. The relocation of the North Sydney Bears to the Central Coast for the 1999 season was very appealing for me to have one more year with the Club. I have lived on the Central Coast most of my life and to be part of the history with this move was beneficial to both the Club and myself. The North Sydney Bears have been very good to me over the years and I am glad that the relocation will allow the Club to maintain its own identity.

Q16. Have you any advice to give coaches who wish to reach the highest level?

You have to have passion for what you are doing and more than anything else, keep trying. There are ups and downs all the time. I know in my first year I was reluctant to do the job but we won the Central Coast First Grade premiership. In the second year we were beaten in the first semi-final and I was sacked because we didn't make the Grand Final, so the club's expectations were too high. The mistake that I made was to say 'if that is how you feel I will not coach', so I had a year off and then thought "I miss this and want to get back into coaching". It was extremely difficult to get back in again so I started with the Under 18's and moved up again. The message to any aspiring coach is don't have a year off, keep going and talk to people, to other coaches, read anything you can, keep a library of information. I still have an exercise book that I started in 1984 and I carry it around all the time in my bag and when I go through it and look back at some of the drills we did then it is a good reference. I still write in the book when I see a good play, this is the sort of thing you have to do.

Q17. Do you search for information through resources?

I wouldn't say I was a avid reader of books but I do read ones that interest me. If I think I need more information in any area I go searching for that, but rather than read it in a book I will go and ask somebody, to get a general opinion of what is required and then make my decisions from that. I rely on other peoples experience and information more than anything basically because of the time factor which doesn't allow for much reading.

Q18. How do you see Rugby League evolving in the next five years?

I think the elite competition through the NRL with all the money behind it will look after itself. I don't know whether all the motives are right but at least they will make sure it survives. The biggest concern I have about Rugby League in the next five years is the structure of what is going to happen to the grass roots, the Country Rugby League and the Queensland Rugby League. They have given Rugby League the quality it has now. I would hate to see Junior Rugby League suffer because of the fact that the more traditional clubs in Sydney are going to be kicked out or merged, whether the interest in Rugby League at the grass roots is going to be maintained. These are the biggest concerns along with the merging of traditional clubs or joint ventures as I see it in the near future.

Obviously the dollar is the driving force behind most of these decisions. I hope I am wrong and the moves rejuvenate everybody, but I can see a lot of identity lost in the merging of clubs and whether that will affect the junior levels in those areas is a concern.

SPRINT TRAINING

assisted running

By Lester Eiser B.Arts, B.Econ, B.Ed.St, Grad Dip Ed Admin
Level 2 Rugby League Sports Medicine Strength and Conditioning
Level 1 in Athletics, Indoor Cricket, Swimming Volleyball, Basketball

Assisted running or overspeed training aims to increase the stride rate and stride length by forcing the player to run at a much higher level than the player can do without assistance. In overspeed training, the player is getting his nervous and muscular systems used to higher speed.

Guidelines

Warm Up

- slow jog 400-1000 metres
- faster jog (same distance as above)
- 3/4 speed striding for 300-400 metres
- stretch 8-10 mins
- walk, jog, sprint cycles for 20 metres each over a lap of the oval
- Do the work on a soft grassy area
- Expect some residual muscle soreness for two days after a session
- Do overspeed training at the beginning of a session while the player is fresh
- Plenty of rest periods
- Stress only quality work
- Progress slowly and be patient
- Inspect equipment before use for tears in the rubber
- Maintain strict discipline

Types of Overspeed Training

- Down hill sprinting
- High speed cycling
- Towing using rubber harness
- High speed treadmill sprint training

Some of these have cost factors and may not be possible for football teams with limited budgets. Probably the best for a training session would be downhill sprinting and harness towing.

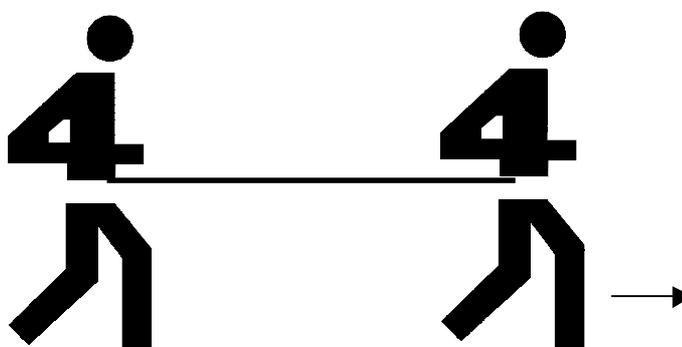
Down Hill Sprinting

This should be done on a slope of no more than three degrees-for example on the football oval from the centre to the side lines if the oval is cambered for drainage. There must not be any braking effect or change in sprinting style because the slope is too excessive. The ideal surface would allow a 20 metre sprint on a flat area followed by a 20 metre sprint downhill slope of three degrees and followed by a 20 metre flat area sprint.

PROGRAMME

Week	Repetitions	Acceleration Distance	Overspeed Distance	Progression	Rest
1	2 - 3 per week	15m	20m	Two per workout & add one	2
2	4 - 6 per week	15 - 20m	20 - 25m	add one each workout	2.5
3	7 - 9 per week	20 - 25m	20 - 25m	add one each workout	3
4	9 - 10 per week	20 - 25m	20 - 25m	add one each workout	3
5	9 - 10 per week	20 - 25m	20 - 25m	add one each workout	3

Towing Using a Harness



Two players are connected by harness and surgical rubber. Because surgical rubber is so expensive, use ten metres of bicycle tubes tied together. Be careful to regularly check the tubes for wear because there is a chance that they can snap.

Procedure

1. A player backs up to stretch the rubber until he is 15-16 metres away from his partner. Run at three-quarters speed with the pull until the player learns to balance and adopt a correct running style.
2. Five practice runs at 3/4 sprinting speed.
3. Back up 20-25 metres before both players take off at top speed. The rubber will now pull the second player at a speed faster than he has ever run before.

Progress slowly on this procedure until the players get used to the equipment.

An alternative is to attach the rubber to a goal post. The player stretches the rubber and sprints.

The advantage of two players connected by the rubber is that the player in front is toning and being trained with resisted running whilst the second player is enjoying assisted running.

Try to choose a faster runner in the front to gain the maximum benefit.

PROGRAMME

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5	9 - 10 per week	20 - 25m	20 - 25m	add one each workout	3

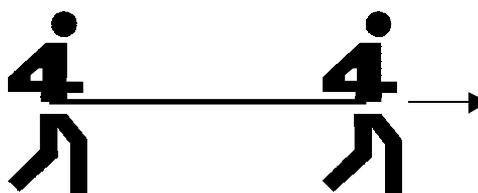
Other Drills with the Rubbers

1. Zig Zag Course



the two players connected by the rubber run a zig zag course.

2. Pull-Push over 50-100 metres



- Phase A player A takes off and player B explodes away under the influence of the rubber
- Phase B the rubber now has no tension so player A sprints ahead again to tension the rubber. Player B is applying the brakes to tension the rubber. Player A is now running against tremendous resistance.
- Phase C player B now explodes again with the use of the rubber
- Phase D player A sprints out again while player B holds back to tension the rubber.

There is a tremendous speed development and anaerobic conditioning in this drill. Again, footballs can be carried. Weight vests could be used.

Safety Precautions

- Inspect the rubbers before each run.
- Inspect the harness and belts for tears.
- Don't stand still for too long with the rubber stretched.
- Use shoes with spikes.
- Run on soft grassy areas only.

Conclusion

Expect great results after six to eight weeks. Ideally this sprint training should be done in the pre-competition phase of February-March when the player has completed his maximum strength phase and is beginning to convert his strength into power ready for competition.

Stretching

to Prevent Injury

By Brad Walker, Associate Diploma of Health Science

Brad Walker, is a prominent Queensland sports trainer with more than 10 years experience in the health and fitness industry.

He currently holds an Associate Diploma of Health Science, plus accreditation's in athletics, swimming and triathlon coaching. He has worked with elite level and world champion athletes and lectures injury prevention.

Brad has recently written 'The Stretching Handbook', an easy to use, quick reference guide for everyone involved in health, fitness and sporting activities. Aimed at minimising the likelihood of sports injury and increasing athletic performance, it gives coaches, trainers, athletes and fitness enthusiasts a complete reference handbook to assist with the planning and implementation of their training and rehabilitation sessions.

Having received some glowing endorsements from such Rugby League personalities as Wayne Pearce, Bob Fulton, Tony Green and Ron Palmer, we've asked Brad to put pen to paper once again and give us a few pointers on stretching and its importance in injury prevention.

In this article Brad has looked at the role of stretching in injury prevention, the importance and benefits of stretching and the dangers of poor flexibility. In future articles he'll discuss the different types of stretching, the rules for safe stretching, the basic how to's of stretching, and he'll also include a series of specific stretches especially for Rugby League.

Imagine an awkward tackle where a player's arm and shoulder are forced behind him. Imagine simply stepping in a pot-hole at training and being left with a swollen ankle. These are all common injuries which unfortunately can occur. But what can be done about them, how can they be prevented?

Some statistics indicate states that 1 out of every 17 participants of sport and exercise will suffer an injury of some kind while engaged in their chosen sport. This can be even higher for contact sports like Rugby League. But equally staggering is the fact that many of these injuries may have been prevented.

While preventative measures such as warming up, obeying the laws, using protective equipment and plain common-sense are all useful, stretching plays an underestimated, yet vital role in helping to prevent the occurrence of injury.

Rugby League Coaching Magazine

Stretching is one area of football preparation often neglected. Why is it that such an important injury prevention tool isn't taken seriously? Mostly, it's a simple lack of knowledge about what stretching can do for the player. If players were able to witness first hand the benefits that a structured stretching routine can bring, there would be no doubt as to the importance of stretching.

One of the greatest benefits of stretching is that it increases the length of muscles and tendons. This leads to an increased range of movement, which means that limbs and joints can move further before an injury occurs. For example, if the muscles of the neck are tight and inflexible this limits the ability to look behind. If for some reason the head is turned backwards, past its normal range of movement, it could result in a muscle tear or strain. This can be prevented by

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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, physhological 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 acheived 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)

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