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## 1.

# Coach Talk

With John Lang  
Penrith Panthers Coach

John Lang has a wealth of experience, both as a player for his club, state and country, and as a first grade coach. He is also a man who is willing to pass on his experiences and thoughts on the modern game.

RLCM talked to John Lang as his consistent Panthers' team continued its steady climb up the NRL ladder to the Minor Premiership, the Grand Final and the Ultimate Prize.

**RLCM: As a coach, how do you instil confidence into players after a poor season?**

**LANG:** You are trying to do that all the time. You talk to people about things and you don't know what sinks in and what they will take action on. However, one of the things I try to stress to them is self-belief. I feel we are up there and have the ability, and that's what I have to get the team to feel.

Secondly, as you are trying to get people to improve, you would think constructive criticism should work, but it doesn't always. Even the most constructive criticism, if somebody is down on confidence, can knock him down further. You really have to put a lot of thought into how to get people to see they need to improve and work on improvement without actually criticising them. That's a big part of it, particularly when their confidence is low. You can be more critical sometimes when things are going well. You can say, "Okay, we are going really well. What are the areas that we need to improve?" I like to call it 'suggestions for improvement' rather than criticism.

Rather than saying that a player or the team is deficient in this or that, I try to get the thought across that we are continually working to improve and get players motivated so they are looking at ways they can advance their own game.

If I say, "I think you are doing well, but ..." it is a natural instinct for people to feel a little negative when

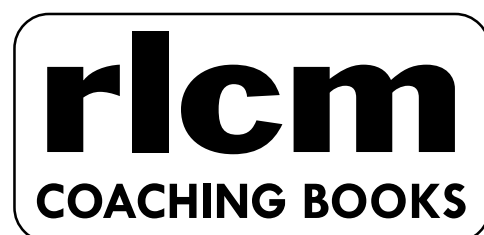
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they hear that qualification. I have tried to develop the attitude that if you are going to give someone a wrap, never say 'but'. If you can get into the habit of saying that things are good 'and' we can work on this, then you have a better chance of getting the improvement that is needed.

Building confidence is trying to get them looking for ways they can improve, rather than something that is imposed by you and they feel they are being examined all the time. The skill is trying to do what is right for that stage of the development of the team and what's right for each individual. Some players handle criticism well because they are business-like types who want to get it right and they want to be told so they can, but they are a minority.

**RLCM: It looks like people management skills are very important.**

**LANG:** I think anybody who is in a position where you are dealing with a group or team needs good people management skills. Some guys might be very tough on the football field, yet they are very sensitive to personal criticism. I don't think you make people tougher by treating them harshly. Two of the toughest blokes I have seen on a football field were Les Davidson and John Sattler, but they aren't aggressive characters. They are mild-mannered and thorough gentlemen.



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You have to treat people with respect. That's the basic thing that I work on in dealing with people. Treat them with respect and try to get them thinking self-improvement so that they are always looking for ways they can improve their own game.

Like anyone, I don't like criticism. My staff never criticises me because I get in first and ask them how we can do things better, so then there is no need to criticise me. If you are constantly asking how can we do it better, there is no need to criticise. They can just make suggestions for improvement in my performance.

**RLCM: You have been a little fortunate this year to have continuity with the players you have been able to put on the field.**

**LANG:** Sure. We have had a fair run but we've been a little bit thin at times as well. We had three of our top front rowers out for a couple of weeks and one of our frontliners out for a period durinh the year. Otherwise, we have had a good run with injuries, which is a very important part of your season. Perhaps we have benefited also from the fact that some of our contenders have been overlooked for the rep teams.

**RLCM: How much work do you put in with your forwards with regard to taking the ball up and hitting the line with the right technique?**

**LANG:** Not as much as I should, perhaps. Everybody has got their own style and a lot of these guys do it well anyway. Things that you have to work on at this level are not necessarily the same as if you were working at a lower level. I like to think that these players have hit the line hundreds and thousands of times.

The thing is, you can make a difference with just little subtle variations. Aim at the tackler and swerve away or aim at the gap and swerve back towards him and change the point of contact. Then there is the hit and spin for more agile type players. There are a lot of little subtle techniques and it is not whether you hit square. It's mixing it up a bit.

Generally, people say you've got to get the ball right on the advantage line. That's fine if you've had a quick play the ball. It mightn't be fine if you have a slow play of the ball where you would want to get it a little bit deeper. If you are playing a team like the Roosters and you have had a slow play of the ball, I wouldn't necessarily recommend that you get the ball right on the advantage line because they would be

hitting you just as you get the ball. In this case, you might want to get the ball a bit deeper so you've got time to react a little bit before you hit the defensive line or they hit you. It is not one size fits all.

If you are rolling forward, your backs can be flat and still go wide because the defence is backing off and trying to reform. Reading the game is a big part of it. You've got to be putting pressure on the opposition and then looking for opportunities.

Bob Dwyer said recently when reacting to a question about the changes in Rugby Union, that it hadn't changed that much. The forwards are still trying to create some space for the backs to use their skills. He said the difference is that they are bigger, faster, stronger and heavier. They are more skilful but still they are doing the same job. They are still trying to create some space for the quick men out wide. It is really the same in Rugby League.

**RLCM: Once you have established the go forward, you have the luxury of a number of key players to take advantage.**

**LANG:** Yes, we have our 9, 7, 6 and 1 who can capitalise. We don't have to rely too heavily on any one player or even any two players. Previously, I've had teams that were good defensively but have had trouble scoring so my game has evolved from that; not because of me but because of the different players that we've got. One of our big strengths in attack is the fact that we've got so many players who can do something. We don't rely on any one person as a springboard for our attack and I prefer it that way. If everything revolves around Craig Gower, who is our dominant playmaker, then the opposition box him up or he has an off day or gets injured, then suddenly you are in trouble.

Whereas with our side, we've got a lot of players who can launch an attack and that makes it harder for the opposing team to counteract.



**RLCM: How do you see the role of hookers today, compared to when you were playing?**

**LANG:** There is not a lot of difference except that obviously scrums used to be different and winning the scrum was very important. Apart from that, the role is the same. It is just that the players now are better at it. They are like heavy-duty halfbacks. They've got the skills of a halfback but they've got the physical capacity to do more heavy work around the rucks. They have to do the heavy tackling of sometimes 110kg forwards so there is that tough physical part of the job but it is also a great advantage if they've got the other skills. There is the long pass, the accurate pass, passing both sides, running from dummy half and kicking.

An important part is working with the tight forwards too. It is just knowing when to pass, when to hold it up a little bit, when to throw it straight off the ground to a forward coming a bit wider. There is nothing worse than a dummy half coming away from the ruck and holding the ball up and then giving it at the wrong time. He can get his players hurt. It really is an art. They have to have intuition. You can't teach it if a player hasn't got it. You can enhance it but you can't teach it. They have got to have it naturally.

**RLCM: On the other side then, what do you want your markers to do?**

**LANG:** They are an integral part of your defensive line and all players have to know what they are doing. Communication is important. If one player wants to chase out quickly, the other one has to know. It is no good one marker taking off and the other one stepping the same way. The opposing dummy half will come down the middle. They must split and read the play. That is game sense and practice at training.

There are also the times when there is only one marker. There might be two in a tackle and you can't afford to have three others hanging around the middle of the ruck. If one of the tacklers hasn't got back into position, you may be left with only one marker. So

there has to be an awareness and communication so that most defenders are not on one side of the ruck and that a player knows that he is on his own.

I think that communication in defence is a big thing - that, and being aware - aware of who you've got alongside you and who you are marking up to. If I am standing next to a big forward who is marking up to a Craig Wing or Shaun Berrigan, there is going to be a problem. If the runner steps him, I have to be extra switched on to be there to block him or, if he dummies somebody back on the inside, I should have communicated effectively with my big mate to lock on to the first man.

This communication and awareness of your own players, your opposition, and where the threats are coming from is vital. A lot of that comes with experience. It has to be almost subconscious but you've got to work on it consciously first.

**RLCM: How do you prepare for the things you want to emphasise at next week's training?**

**LANG:** We have our stats of course from the video analysis system, but I also like to get an overall view of the previous game. I watch the tape at home with the set-up I've got in my rumpus room. I've got a big screen TV and two videos and I've always liked to do it this way.

Sometimes I make notes myself as I go, but I find it better if I can call it so my wife helps me out. I will call it and she will write it. We are a good team.

Reluctantly, RLCM had to turn off the tap on this wealth of knowledge and John had a game to prepare for. However, we had learnt that the man who took no 'buts' as a player had evolved into a coach who avoided the word. Lang's bustling second rower Tony Puletua verified this philosophy in the winner's after-match press conference later in the day.

This man of few but well chosen words commented, "Our coach is positive even after a loss."

## Notes

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## 2.

# Winning The Tackle

With Chris Fullarton  
Brisbane Norths

Winning the tackle is a huge factor in winning the game. More and more coaches are concentrating on dominating the tackle not just when defending but also in attack. Coaches are scrutinising hit up statistics looking at the number of play the ball wins.

RLCM talked with Chris Fullarton, Coaching and Development Officer for Brisbane Norths, the Melbourne Storm's feeder club, to see what is happening on the training field to implement this. Chris saw it this way:

Basically, a play the ball win is when the ball carrier is able to land on elbows and knees and square on to the D line, enabling him to play the ball before the defence is set.

The player requires several skills to achieve this. They include speed, strength, footwork, timing and ball control. Team skills include support play with options to reduce the number of defenders involved in the tackle.

The player hitting the line square on has a far better chance of achieving a play the ball win. Also a sideways runner is more likely to get one under the ribs or be anchored, held up and gang tackled. It is a tough game but by using footwork to get between defenders and going to the line square on, you greatly improve your chances of simply not being bashed up.

Of course, several other factors such as field position must be taken into account.

Take exit sets from your red zone for instance. The plays more commonly used here are dummy half scoots and ruck plays usually against a compressed defence. The Roosters are good at being able to anchor and frog march a ball carrier running a poor line or trying to stand in the tackle rather than find his front. Rhys Wesser, a most likely first receiver from a kick return or dummy half scoot, is adept at reading when to run, fight the tackle or promote the next play by way of a play the ball win.

Dominant play the ball wins on exits are essential in building momentum for the kick.

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In the green zone, a good go forward on tackles one, two or three should create opportunities for a spread against a D line that is not set. Forwards with good agility and speed are a bonus but good strength, footwork and balance are essential.

Adrian Morley is a great example of a dominant, skilled, ball carrying forward who consistently stays square on and wins the play the ball. Glen Lazarus is another example. While not the fastest forward, he was very strong, balanced and with good footwork at the line. He knew how to stay square and land on his front.

The required line running, enabling the player to go square at the line, is dependant upon the defensive pattern being used. Add to this the fact that most teams will adjust their defensive pattern to jam or slide and it is evident that running lines have to be adjusted also. Good line running basically attempts to off-balance or misalign defenders. Remember the goal is to be square at the line when contact is made.

If the defence is jamming up and in, the initial running line is to the inside shoulder creating a defensive reaction, then step to the outside and square at the line. If the defence is sliding, angle to the outside shoulder then step to the inside and square at the line.

Unfortunately, it appears to be more of a natural instinct for players to want to run around the defence than use footwork and run through spaces.

Simple and competitive designer games can reinforce these skills.

For example:

(a) If the ball carrier runs sideways and does not straighten to pass or hit the line, it is a turnover.

(b) Three metre defensive line - one on one tackles. If the ball carrier does not stay square and find his front in the tackle, it is a turnover.

Players soon become aware of what is required.

Chris was ready to go on but we had the point. There is much more to it than just taking the tackle. The player in attack has to win the tackle and a big factor in this is to be square when you get there.

## 3.

# Decisions Maketh The Defender

With John Dixon  
Brisbane Broncos

“He can’t tackle - he can tackle. He is a poor defender - he is a good defender.”

Such comments are heard on the sidelines and in selection panel meetings throughout the year. Though tackling and defending are in many ways synonymous, good coaches know teams and individuals need coaching to be able to do both.

RLCM talked to John Dixon, Broncos’ Juniors Coordinator and Colts’ Coach.

**DIXON:** Being a defender is a broad encompassing thing as opposed to just being a good tackler. The two are interwoven. To be able to defend, you have to be able to tackle. One on one you have to be able to make the tackle. A big man has to be able to tackle a small man; a small man has to be able to tackle a big man. A slow man has to be able to close down on a nifty little player. These are just some of the combinations that make our game so much of a challenge.

Sometimes though, people can tackle but they are not necessarily good at defending. The two are not mutually exclusive, but one is a sub-set of the other. To be a good defender, you must be able to tackle. However, being able to tackle, isn’t all that is needed to make you a good defender.

**RLCM:** So the player has mastered his tackling technique. What factors determine that he can be a good defender?

**DIXON:** Attitude is a key. The desire to make the tackle no matter what the circumstance. Things like decision-making come into it as well, in terms of the ability to turn up in the defensive zone and then make the right decision. This is linked to anticipation. This is the ability of the defender to know the ball is going to arrive at that moment and know that it’s a tackle he can make, or know the ball is going to arrive a moment too early and say I’ve got to hold off here and push on

to the next player. Communicating with other players around and ahead of you is another factor so the key things are attitude, decision-making, anticipation and communication.

**RLCM:** How do you instil these skills into the good tackler to make him into a good defender? The player has a lot of decisions to make out there, so can you drill them on being a defender?

**DIXON:** It’s innate in some people. It’s like the good ball player. They see things and they’ve time and I think a good defender has got that innate ability as well. But no one is a closed book. At any level, we can ask that our players make good decisions so we should be able to drill and teach decision-making in a team system and have some success.

We can set up scenarios and ask, “Do you tackle this player or do you tackle that player? What are the cues and signals that say this is the player to take?”

You have to cover the whole gambit and there is a host of things in that. You’ve got to cover where the attackers physically outweigh your defensive players and where there is a numerical imbalance between attackers and defenders. You have to teach young players how to defend off a scrum and how to do that effectively in different areas of the field. There are hundreds of scenarios so you can’t cover them all every time but you can and should work on players making good decisions in a variety of situations that are likely to come up in a game..

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Sometimes the decisions will be reactive ones in terms of the line is broken, so how do we react and how do we respond to cover the breach?

Sometimes they might be pro-active. This now is the situation where we can gain ascendancy when they've got the ball because we can get up, make a tackle, dominate the tackle and jam them into their own defensive corner.

**RLCM:** You mentioned different areas of the field. What are some of the decision-making situations there?

**DIXON:** You might be defending your own line, or have the opposition pinned on their line. There are different decisions to be made.

When you defend on your line, the best place to defend is off your line. You need to push off the line and get out there and take their time and space and reduce their potency by getting amongst them as quickly as you can. Their mindset is that they've got the yards behind them so now they've got depth and width. Defensive decisions here have to be good because there is no margin for error.

When you have the opposition coming out of their own quarter, their thought processes are primarily about ball retention, momentum and the kick on the last play. A fast moving defensive line can exert real pressure here. There are still decisions to be made. Your side does have room to compensate if there is a defensive error but down on the opposition's line you are probably talking about attacking defence. Really, you are trying to attack the ball with your defence. Different decisions are being made when compared to defending your own line. The aim is to be as aggressive and as dominating as you can. This has to be done along with the decision not to do something that draws the penalty and allows the opposition a soft get out.

Situations arise all over the park. Take defending a last play in the middle of the field. The team may have a player designated to harass the kicker. The rest of the defensive line is faced with a decision when to pull back off the footy because they need to get

back for the kick return. A player, playing in the centres, should wait until they kick or shift the ball. He could be faced with the situation where he has attackers coming down his side and he doesn't have the wingman outside him because he has retreated down field for the kick. That's where the good defenders, whatever the situation, come up with good answers. The fact that they can tackle doesn't necessarily enable them to come up with the answers. It is the decision-making that counts.

Even the kind of tackle can be a vital decision. Do you tackle high through the ball or low around the legs? Often a player goes high and gets pushed off. In most of these instances, the player should have gone in low and completed the tackle. However, in another situation going in high may have been the right decision because at that point in time a high tackle would have stopped the ball and the offload.

In a game recently, I saw a try scored because both players tackled low on the same ball-carrier. Both players made a good tackle in terms of low-tackling technique but the tackle didn't shut the ball down. The offload came and a try was scored. The technique for a low tackle was right but the decision by both players to tackle low, instead of one tackling through the ball, was wrong.

This is where your video analysis can be used. You have a look at that situation with the player/s and discuss what they did, why they did it and what could have been done differently. The players can see the vision, talk through the decision they made and hopefully be better for it in the future.

In defence, everybody should understand their role in the line and how the responsibilities of that role respond to varying situations. However even within a rigid defensive pattern there can and should be allowances for players to make decisions 'outside the box'. Within a team structure a player should be able to say, "I can read the play and I can make a decision that the place for me to be is right here, right now, as opposed to the team defensive system which may demand that I stay here and hold the line or push up." Because he can read the play, in the situation that has arisen this good defender says the best thing to do now is break the pattern and make the tackle. Players will make mistakes with this kind of decision but through analysis and practice they can and will make better decisions and thus become more effective defenders.



**RLCM:** What drills would you use to have players work on to be a good defender?

**DIXON:** I don't think there is any magic with drills. It's technique and then the numbers game. It starts with one on one. Then it goes to two on one and two on one in small spaces and two on one in large spaces. Then it goes two on two and three defenders on two attackers and so on. The drill is built up to try and get the players in different field positions under different scenarios and reacting defensively in those situations.

You also have to work with the size factor. The small player has to match up against the bigger player and the big players against the smaller more agile ones.

For the small player the challenge is to be effective when tackling the bigger players. The big player is not going to go around the small man but he has to be able to cope with the fact that his opponent is large and has to be able to tackle him with some dominance. He has to be effective on him when he tackles. In some situations he can't just go in low around his legs when the ball carrier hits the line because there will be an offload or the quick play the ball. But you don't hide that small player away. You work on his technique and his decision-making and you work hard on the troops around him to provide support.

We don't want to lose those smaller players. They are so valuable in our game because they ring alarm bells in defenders' minds, particularly the bigger forwards. That's the wonderful thing about our game. You want those little blokes. What we have to do is find the strategy that is best for them - a strategy that allows him to contribute both in attack and defence.

It is not just the small player you have to work with. There is a flip side to the coin. You have the big player who is strong, carries the ball well but is poor laterally in the defensive line. He is as equally a problem as the small player and requires equal amounts of coaching to overcome his shortfalls. They tend not to be found out as often because generally they've got more troops around them. But at the back end of both the first and second half of the game, players around him have to be alert when he is lined up against the smaller, spontaneous attacker. His lateral movement may not be good and the smaller player poses a real threat.

So RLCM's advice to all players: To be a good defender, you not only need good tackling technique but attitude, communication and, above all, good decision-making. Selectors, discerning spectators and coaches are looking for Answer (D) - All of the above.

**Notes**

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## 4.

# To Win or Develop

With Michael Crawley  
and John Dixon

The role of coaches, who are in charge of a Club's developing teams, can be contentious. Are they there simply to develop the players to be able to move on to the next level or do they aim at winning the current competition?

RLCM talked to Michael Crawley, experienced coach of Queensland State League Club Wynnum Manly's Under 19 side. Comments were also sought from John Dixon, long time coach of the Broncos' Under 19 team and recently appointed Toowoomba Clydesdales' mentor.

Both men agreed that you could marry the both.

Michael answered the question by saying, "If I said winning wasn't important I'd be kidding myself. But if you work hard in their preparation, you can increase their chances of winning. It's pretty important to be realistic in your goals. Many years ago I coached a Third Grade side in country NSW.

No matter what I tried, we couldn't win. I called an old coach to come along and watch us. He did, we lost and he just said, 'If you're going to make soup Michael and all you've got is vegetables, you're going to end up with vegetable soup'.

"I changed my goals from winning to making the best vegetable soup possible."

John, in a succinct way, agreed. "You do have a feeder role and you are preparing them for First Grade. If you go through the right processes, outcomes will follow. You don't set out to win the Under 19 competition but on a day to day basis winning is important and the kids look for it. They know that coming first is better than coming second."

While we had them going, we asked how they developed the young player's skill, speed and strength.

Michael said that he trained them how he wanted them to play - physically and mentally. However, at some

levels it was next to impossible to incorporate everything into your season. "This season I coached an Under 17 Development Squad at Wynnum. In planning the season, it was clear Time would be the key factor. The players in the squad were in their final year at school. They had to juggle schoolboy football, rep football and casual jobs along with their studies and still find time to train and play with us. I decided two, one hour sessions per week was all I could expect of them. There was no way to fit skill, speed and strength into that time frame.

"We started in November with two gym sessions a week. It was a basic introduction to weights with the emphasis on technique and good habits in the gym. A similar program was developed for speed. The players were then expected to continue their programs throughout the season in their own time. Kelly Egan (Head Coach) and I decided that we would try to accelerate their development on the skill side in 2003 and step up the strength and speed the following season when school commitments were finished.

"I hope they get good marks at school because we were knocked out in the Minor Semi!"

John sees skill and strength as the main factors to be developed but said that it depended very much on from where the lads were recruited. "If they have come from one of the elite High Schools, their skill development is usually very good but if they haven't come from a football school or have come from the country, that may not be so. It will differ from squad to squad and year to year. Across the board though the new recruits need to improve their strength. In terms of physical development the most marked differences between our new recruits and the NRL squad are in terms of strength and power "

As for the type of player they are looking for to join their development squads, both coaches agreed that

the youngster needed to be able to play the game well to start with. Then it was potential and attitude.

“I find early impressions can change down the track so I like the train and trial system,” said Michael. “It gives you a bit more time to make an informed choice.”

John added that at the Broncos he had an advantage as they were usually recruiting from the top tier of up and coming players.

Both men had helpful ideas on developing playmakers and utilising ‘the naturals’.

“If you can just improve them a little bit each game, you’ll have a handy player come season’s end,” Michael stated. “You can help your playmakers learn to create by challenging them. I do plenty of game situations at training. I play even numbers or give the defenders the extra man to see how they react in different field positions, early in the tackle count, last tackle, under the hammer and in space. Then we will pull up and have a talk about how, why, where and when. I like to make the practice harder than the game. Let them see the opportunity and play it and know I’m not going to blow up for a mistake because come game day, you will need to give them the authority to be your playmaker.

“As for ‘the naturals’, they’re the ones who make what some players think impossible, possible. They can do more than just see the opportunity. What they do usually creates a bit of momentum and that’s fairly handy in football.”

John agreed. “Don’t try to curb the natural kid’s ability but harness it for the team. Players need to learn to live off a player like that. He can buy them some space, give them some room. It’s no good having the best front rower if the dummy half can’t capitalise on it. It’s no good having the best ball passing halfback if no one turns up around him.”

Michael saw multi- skilled players as valuable. “In reality, today’s back rower and centres are pretty much interchangeable. So too the hooker and halfback. He cited Cronulla’s moving of Phil Bailey to the centres as an example.

John agreed and added that with the above relocations, good players could handle the different workloads. However, with less able players, expectations should be tempered. “If it is an improvisation,” he said, “you have to initially make the player’s new job as simple as possible until he grows into the role.”

On the role of the Senior Coach in the young players’ development, styles were slightly different.

“At Wynnum, our Head Coach oversees the entire development process”, Michael said. “He has

enormous experience in coaching. He attends training and games whenever possible and gives plenty of support and feedback to the players. Preparing the players for First Grade was on top of Kelly’s list when I came on board at Wynnum. He wanted the players to get a platform in the positional play required at First Grade level as well as an introduction to attacking and defensive structures used at Wynnum. We also try to use the same terminology so that in 2004 they will fit straight in with the senior club”

John said that Wayne Bennett similarly wants the young players prepared for First Grade and at the start of the year clearly sets out the things he wanted emphasised.

“However, on a week to week basis I do the training and game day tactics. Wayne doesn’t interfere. This way the young players are not missing out on what the Under 19 coach can give them in the way of patterns of play and defensive styles. Wayne believes the players readily adapt to his style and patterns when they get to him and full time training with the NRL squad.”

Both coaches were agreed on the importance of instilling decision making skills in their young charges.

As Michael put it, “Kids usually understand there can be a hefty price for making certain decisions in footy. ‘Sterlo’ shows them with his marker pen. What they sometimes don’t understand is that making no decision is usually worse. By putting players under the hammer in game related situations at training, you can rehearse the decision making process. Do it often enough and players gain a bit of confidence in their own decision making. Importantly, they get more confident in those being made by their mates because if they haven’t got trust in the player beside them - look out!”

Finally, both men were asked how talented young players made the transition to the top level.

John said that good kids could make the change. “Initially they might not be able to cope with all the situations that arise in First Grade but their game sense is heightened with each outing.”

Michael agreed. “If they are ready physically, absolutely,” he said. “I believe that once in senior football, ability should be the criteria. We have seen it this year with several young players in NRL teams. Talented youngsters can add so much to a team. Their excitement and enthusiasm can often help the senior players rediscover what they loved about football.”

# 5.

## An Approach to the Role of Camp Head Coach

By Ray Unsworth  
Director of Coach Education, The Rugby Football League

In issue 30 I wrote an article on how to approach the short term coaching environment, paying particular reference to the preparation for a one off fixture and then moving forward to identify your preparation from a Head Coach's perspective.

In this article, I want to remain in the short term coaching environment and examine many of the similarities and subtleties required to operate efficiently on the various player development camps.

From a purely player development point of view, the player development camps broadly speaking are a means of;

- Assisting players to achieve and fulfil their potential
- A means of identifying and progressing players to the next level.

That being the case, then from a Head Coach's perspective, the major objective that would assist in facilitating the above rests in your ability to;

- Create a quality environment and a quality experience in which players do realise their potential and if ranking permits move forward to the next level.

Actually, the player development camp is more than that, it's not just about players; it represents a major opportunity to develop yourself, in your role as Head Coach – a role that includes responsibility for:

- The overall management of the coaching environment
- The planning and delivery of the programme ·  
The inclusion, utilisation and mentoring of your immediate staff
- The continual evaluation and refinement of the work being done
- Preparation for competition
- Coordination of interaction with all other camp personnel
- Staff, player and self-evaluation

By way of an example, your responsibilities are not just for your immediate coaching staff and the group of players in your charge; you actually have a duty to develop a working environment and a work ethic that caters for all interactions involving a staffing list that may well include and involve:

- Head Coach
- Assistants
- Players
- Team Managers
- Physiotherapist
- Welfare Officer
- Coach Educator
- Performance Analyst
- Camp Director

This represents a vastly different situation, compared to how you operate as Head Coach at club level, and the creation of that quality experience I spoke about is very much dependent on how you coordinate and interact with this identified group of people.

This also presents a great opportunity to impose your work ethic and personality into creating a best practice setting.

It would also be a smart move, in my opinion, to do your homework and prepare yourself by exploring the likely interactions and areas of communication that need to be established.



- How do the other members of staff fit in?
- What are they responsible for?

Let us then examine the roles of the ancillary staff;

**Coach Educator** – is on camp to evaluate the coaching process. They will offer assistance on the programme should you require it, and they are in effect a sounding board, another point of view, and are there to support and offer you and your immediate staff appropriate and constructive feedback.

**Performance Analysts** - are responsible for player assessment throughout the camp, talent identification, player ranking and recommendation for selection.

They are, in most cases, experienced coaches who have trained to assess players against set criteria and in every conceivable situation.

**Physiotherapist** – is an important part of your welfare team, whose major responsibilities include; general treatment and care, rehab and prehab.

Your physio is actually more than that. If used correctly, [apart from the obvious] they can become your eyes and ears, for players will confide in them, where they may not confide in you.

Your physio will most certainly have a feel for ‘how it’s going’.

**Welfare Officers** – They have a huge responsibility, in many cases where your day ends, theirs is just beginning.

All welfare officers will have undergone child protection training and are fully aware of the potential issues.

They too will have relevant information to contribute, particularly in the important areas of player discipline and attitude. In fact, their opinion could be taken into consideration should you have a close call on who to include in your final selections.

**Camp Director** – In effect the boss with overall responsibility for the smooth and efficient running of the camp. Should you need clarification on any issue, if there is something you are unsure of, or not comfortable with, then the Camp Director is there to resolve or give direction to, whatever your query.

Having taken into account the roles of the various ancillary staff, then consideration must now be given to the immediate coaching environment.

What for?

- Primarily to gather or impart information, or, plan or evaluate activity.

Examples of meeting content would include;

**Immediate staffs**; to plan the following day’s activities, discuss and evaluate work done, or to coordinate or delegate responsibilities.

**Performance Analysts**; to cross reference the selection and ranking of players.

**Physiotherapist**; to check on injuries, pre and rehab programmes

**Welfare**; for information; how do the players behave in their down time?

Are there any issues?

**Coach Educator**; to discuss and evaluate coaching feedback.

**Team Manager**; with regard to player co-ordination; Where do you want them? What time? etc

And last, but certainly not least the players themselves.

These meetings are extremely important and just like your skills sessions they also need dressing in different wrappers. Do not always address the group to impart information, or facilitate feedback in the same way, vary it.

Finally guidelines for planning and evaluation;

- The success of your coaching sessions is directly related to the planning that you do.
- Failing to plan is planning to fail.

Always set out clear objectives of what you hope to achieve in your sessions.

Do not be guilty of trying to achieve too much or you will find that more often than not, you achieve little.

Initial considerations to assist in the planning of your sessions would revolve around the logistics of;

- How much time you have?
- What facilities are available?
- How many participants are there?
- What equipment is required?

Other things I would suggest you consider with regard to the delivery of the sessions are; The retention of your status remains the same whenever there is a time out.



Do not allow the players to get mixed messages.

Do not let the players hear every point, explanation and instruction in triplicate.

If you are happy with the session, then allow the coach who is delivering to impart the information whilst you and the other members of staff take up a position within the group.

However, if for whatever reason you are not happy and feel that you need to address the group, step out to the front of the group. By doing so that should be the cue for your delivering coach to 'give way' and integrate themselves into the general group, thus allowing you to make your point.

These things do not just happen. In order to affect some of what I have just outlined then a pre-camp meeting must take place to;

- Agree best working practice
- Set out areas of responsibility
- Programme plan

The key to successfully coordinating the camp, now rests on how well you communicate. For instance meetings;

- When?
- Who with?
- What for?

When? - Daily – certainly with your immediate staff.

Who with? - Could be with any one of the personnel we previously identified who are active and in the coaching environment.

The role of the Team Manager is non contentious, taking care of the logistics and general organisational duties that support the coaching and playing process.

But your relationship with your Assistant Coaches should be carefully thought through. Can I suggest that you begin by exercising your powers of;

- Delegation

Allocate areas of responsibility.

This camp is also about their development as coaches and you (the Head Coach) are the key to facilitating this process.

This is an opportunity for you to adopt a mentoring role, and by mentoring, I do not mean solving every problem they encounter. That is not mentoring. Discussion and direction leading them to their own solutions is mentoring.

You most certainly need to establish and communicate a protocol.

A modus operandi.

An agreed way of working that throughout the duration of the camp allows your assistants to function and to coach, probably more than you do, but in doing so retains your status and a visibility to all involved that you are the one in charge.

For example, should you operate at the beginning of a session and again at the end, then that alone allows you first and last word. Your coaching team then become the filling for your sandwich and incidentally while they are working you have an ideal opportunity to assess:

- How the staff operate
  - The players in action
  - The programme
- Keep introductions simple
  - Use warm ups to underpin core and where possible that bear a relevance to what is to follow
  - Develop and relate your coaching activities to the competitive situation
  - Be prepared to adapt
  - Always emphasise quality
  - Evaluate

And whilst on the subject of evaluation, it is not just about the session. It is also about evaluating your own performance.

To improve as a coach, then you too need to reflect.

Not every session you deliver will be ideal. Circumstances change all too frequently when



coaching and coaches have often got to respond and think on their feet.

Self reflection allows you the opportunity to examine your decisions and performance at leisure and to make further decisions about how you would respond should similar circumstances arise again.

You do not need a formal document to reflect with. You can do it in your own time and in your head. Although having said that, making notes on your thoughts, reflections and future direction would help.

A simple structure that will assist you to self reflect, would be to ask, and then answer the following questions:

- Did you achieve the standards you set yourself?
- What problems arose?
- Why did they arise and how did you deal with them?
- How will you respond to such problems in the future?
- What was particularly successful in the session and why?

Reflection will assist in identifying the areas of difficulty that you may be experiencing which require attention.

But overall the time set aside for regular self reflection will undoubtedly help in your progression and further development as a coach.

**Notes**

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## 6.

## Day Tripper

“An article written by Joseph Carey which appeared in M&M Sport, a publication of Sports Law Specialists Mullins Lawyers.”

In the recent State of Origin series, the season ending knee injury suffered by Justin Hodges proved the catalyst for a media circus concerning the possibility of the player taking legal action against Suncorp Stadium management. While the player has ruled out any such action, the incident does raise the issue of what standard of care is owed when it comes to the condition of sporting fields. This question is particularly pertinent when it comes to fields supervised by amateur sporting bodies who obviously do not have the resources to ensure their grounds are in the condition of fields such as the Gabba. To avoid the costs of litigation, what measures can these bodies put in place to discharge their duty of care concerning the quality of the field?

This issue was recently examined in the ACT Supreme Court decision of *Abazovic v ACT (2003) ACTSC 15*. In this case, the Plaintiff suffered a fractured ankle at soccer training, when he inadvertently stepped in a hole on the training field. In his pleadings, the plaintiff claimed that the officers of the Defendant had negligently failed to detect a hole in their inspections which was approximately 30 cm by 10 cm. Further, it was this negligence on the part of the Inspectors which caused the Plaintiff's injury.

In deciding the matter, Crispin J acknowledged that the Defendant had a duty to take reasonable steps to ascertain the existence of latent dangers which may arise in public sporting fields. The ultimate question then was whether the Defendant's inspection system satisfied this duty. Evidence was presented that formal inspections of the ground occurred every four weeks, and informal inspections took place on an almost daily basis. However, no evidence was able to be presented as to how long the hole in the field had existed for. While Crispin J conceded the ground condition was poor, he could not see any evidence that the defendant

had acted negligently in failing to detect a hole which may not have even existed on the day prior to the accident. For this reason, the Plaintiff's claim was dismissed.

While the ACT Supreme Court decisions are not binding on Queensland Courts, the rationale does accord with decisions made by Queensland Justices. The leading case in point is *Lanyon v Noosa District Rugby League Club (2002) QCA 163 Inc*, which involved a coach who tripped on a field and ruptured his achilles tendon. Likewise to *Abazovic*, *Lanyon* argued that the football club had been negligent in failing to detect the depression which caused *Lanyon* to trip. The Queensland Court of Appeal though, ruled that the Defendant had not breached its duty as it would be unreasonable to have a football field maintained to the same standard of evenness as a lawn bowls or croquet field. Given the Noosa Shire Council conducted regular inspections of the field, the Court concluded that the Council had taken all reasonable steps to ensure the ground was depression free.

From these cases and others such as *Bartels v Bankstown City Council (1999) NSWCA 129*, it would appear persons seeking damages for injuries suffered due to the condition of local football parks will have difficulty in proving negligence. Given the difficulties in finding all depressions within 650 square metres of grass, Courts have indicated that authorities in charge of such fields will discharge their obligations by conducting regular inspections and removing any potential hazards found. While the Courts have acknowledged that the world is not flat and plaintiffs should be wary of that fact, bodies responsible for fields upon which amateur sporting events occur should remain diligent to ensure any potential risks are negated.



## 7.

# Guidelines to Reduce the Risk of Injury During Weight Training

By Shane Rogerson BHMS (Hons)

Rugby League players often dedicate a considerable amount of time to weight training. This is in an effort to maximise strength and muscle mass so as to enhance performance and reduce the likelihood of contact injuries. However, if performed incorrectly weight training can result in injuries that may sideline a player for weeks or even months. The old adage that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure is certainly true in regards to weight training injuries. The purpose of this article is to outline some simple guidelines that can prevent injuries in the weight room and allow players to get the maximum benefit out of their resistance training programs.

## **GUIDELINE 1: ALWAYS WARM UP PRIOR TO LIFTING**

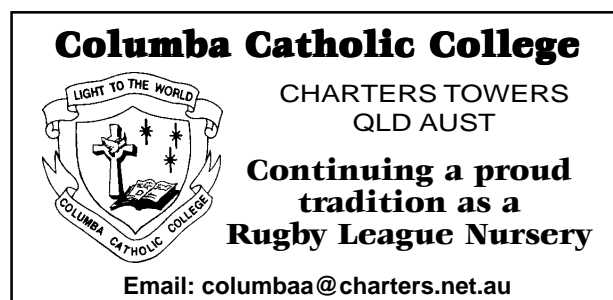
Everyone knows that you should warm up prior to training. However many athletes and coaches fail to appreciate what constitutes an appropriate warm up. All too often stretching is used as a warm up for a weight training session. However, stretching does not result in an increase in core body temperature, muscle temperature or other physiological changes that may ultimately prevent injuries. The warm up for a weight training session should consist of both general and specific components. The general warm up should consist of 5-10 minutes of light cardiovascular activity (eg cycling, jogging) that will raise the core body temperature (Bishop, 2003). The specific component

should consist of sub-maximal lifts in the exercises that you are to perform during the session (Dalglish, 1993). If for example you were going to perform multiple sets of heavy squats, ten minutes of light cycling would be sufficient for the general warm up. Following the general warm up the first couple of squat sets should consist of lighter loads (less weight) in order to prepare the specific muscles and joints for the heavy loads to come.

## **GUIDELINE 2: ENSURE A SPOTTER IS PRESENT FOR MAXIMAL LIFTS**

Often athletes will train to momentary muscular failure. This is the point at which another repetition cannot be performed. On many exercises (eg bench press) this can be a problem, as failure to complete another repetition will result in the athlete being trapped under the bar against the bench. Thus assistance is often required by another individual to allow the athlete to complete the final repetition safely. This individual is referred to as a spotter.

It is important to ensure that the spotter being used knows the correct exercise technique and is strong enough to assist if required. It is no use having a spotter that is not strong enough to assist with the lift if need be. This places both the athlete and the spotter at risk of injury. Some exercises such as the back squat may require multiple spotters to maximise the safety of the exercise (Fleck and Kreamer, 1997). Additionally,



spotters should not wait until the athlete asks for help. Often at the point of momentary muscular it can be difficult to speak and ask for help. Therefore it is the responsibility of the spotter to be prepared to assist with the lift when he or she feels that the athlete is in need of assistance.

### **GUIDELINE 3: ENSURE THE EQUIPMENT IS APPROPRIATELY MAINTAINED**

It pays to regularly check the strength training equipment prior to use. A recent study investigating weight training injuries reported that one athlete died from asphyxiation (choking) after the bench he was using collapsed sending the barbell down onto his neck (Jones, Christensen and Young, 2000). Although this is a rare occurrence, it is a bit of an eye opener as to the potential dangers of weight training. Lets face it, not many athletes would ever consider that they could die during their workout. However with proper maintenance of equipment the likelihood of such an event can be almost eliminated.

### **GUIDELINE 4: OVERLOAD THE BODY PROGRESSIVELY**

It is important to overload the body (eg increase the weight lifted) in order to stimulate gains in strength and muscle size (Stamford 1998). However this overload needs to be a progressive and gradual process. Particularly when initiating a strength training program muscles and tendons need time to adapt to the new stress of training. An over zealous approach (eg too much training) combined with insufficient recovery can lead to overuse injuries such as tendinosis (Khan, Cook, Taunton and Bonar, 2000). Such injuries are difficult to treat and can slow the player's progress both on and off the field.

When initiating a weight training program the intensity (eg weight lifted) and volume (eg number of exercises and sets performed) should be low. As the player's strength and training status increases the volume and intensity can be progressively increased. As long as the increase in volume and intensity is progressive and not over zealous, the athlete should be able to increase their strength levels without risk of overuse injuries.

A common story to illustrate the principle of progressive overload is that of a young man called Milo (Rogerson, 2001). Milo was a farmer who lived in a village surrounded by hills. One year Milo decided that each day he would carry one of his new borne calf's to the top of a nearby hill. Over the following months Milo performed this ritual religiously. As the

calf progressively grew heavier, Milo would have to adapt to the increased weight in order to continue his daily ritual. At the beginning of the year Milo found it difficult to carry the calf to the top, however by the end of the year he was able to carry the fully grown bull. Legend has it that this was achieved without any overuse injuries, as the nature of the overload was progressive. Had Milo attempted to lift the fully-grown bull at the very beginning it would have likely resulted in injury. The tragedy of this story is that at the end of the year Milo was forced to eat the bull for his protein requirements!

### **GUIDELINE 5: LEARN SAFE LIFTING TECHNIQUE**

Poor technique is probably the major contributor to weight training injuries. It is often difficult to learn correct weight training technique out of a book or by simply emulating other athletes in the gym. When introducing athletes to strength training they should be taught correct techniques from the onset by qualified personnel such as a strength and conditioning coach. If an athlete cannot demonstrate the ability to perform an exercise with correct form they should not be permitted to perform that exercise in training. Allowing an athlete to perform an exercise with poor technique is an open invitation for injury.

### **GUIDELINE 6: FOCUS ON WHAT YOU ARE DOING**

A recent survey suggested that ten percent of weight training injuries could be attributed to inattention (Jones, Christensen and Young 2000). It can be difficult to maintain your focus for extended periods of time and many athletes allow their thoughts to roam while training. However, athletes should be taught to focus on key aspects of exercises to ensure their safe execution. This will reduce the tendency for an athlete's mind to wander and will simultaneously lower the potential for injury.

### **GUIDELINE 7: DON'T FORGET TO BREATHE**

Particularly when beginning a weight training program athletes become so focussed on trying to get their technique right that they forget to breathe. This can lead to problems such as syncope (loss of



consciousness), which can then lead to further problems such as injuries resulting from dropped weights.

Athletes should be taught to time their breathing with the exercise. It is generally recommended that athletes exhale during the concentric phase or lifting part of the exercise and inhale during the eccentric or lowering phase of the lift (Mazur, Yetman and Risser, 1993). If a bench press were used as an example an athlete would inhale as the weight is lowered towards the chest and exhale as the weight is lifted away from the chest.

**GUIDELINE 8: ENSURE THE PROGRAM IS WELL DESIGNED**

A weight training program can reduce the incidence of on field injuries if it is well designed. A well designed program should increase muscle strength and joint stability, increase muscle mass if necessary and correct pre-existing muscle imbalances (Wardle and Wilson, 1996). A poorly designed program can do the opposite, resulting in minimal strength gains (possibly even loss of strength), reduced joint stability and muscle imbalances. This can then predispose a player to on field injuries such as hamstring tears or even more serious injuries such as ligament tears. If the coach or athletes are not sure how to design an effective strength training program a professional such as a strength and conditioning coach, exercise scientist or physiotherapist should be consulted.

**GUIDELINE 9: DON'T TRAIN THROUGH MINOR INJURIES**

Although this article has been dedicated to preventing injuries, they are a fact of life and can occur despite the best intentions. Minor injuries have a nasty habit of turning into major injuries when not treated correctly. If an injury occurs in the weight room, don't try and train through it. The old adage "no pain no gain" does not apply to sports injuries. Have injuries correctly diagnosed by an appropriate medical professional such as a doctor or physiotherapist. If diagnosed early, most injuries can be treated effectively thereby reducing the time a player must spend on the sideline.



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## 8.

# Laws of the Game.

By Richard Johnson - QRL Referee's Coaching & Development Manager

## General

- Q1. Red attempts a penalty kick for goal which is unsuccessful and the ball goes over the Blue touch line.**
- A1. a  Scrum, loose head and put in to Red.  
b  Free kick to Red, 10 metres in from touch..
- Q2. Red attempts to score a try by placing the ball at the foot of the goal posts in the field of play.**
- A2. a  Award the try.  
b  No Try.
- Q3. Red passes the ball forward to an onside Red player. Blue intercepts the pass runs and is tackled by Red.**
- A3. a  Play the ball by Blue, tackle 1.  
b  Play the ball by Blue, zero tackle
- Q4. Red is awarded a penalty. A Red player who was temporarily suspended comes back onto the field and wants to take the penalty kick.**
- A4. a  Allow the Red player to take the kick.  
b  Do not allow the Red player to take the kick.
- Q5. On the last play the ball Red stands to play the ball but loses control of the ball before playing it.**
- A5. a  Handover to Blue.  
b  Scrum, loose head and put in to Blue.
- Q6. On tackle 3 Red is tackled and the ball bursts.**
- A6. a  Replace the ball and Red play the ball.  
b  Replace the ball, scrum loose head and put in to Red.
- Q7. In a scrum the hooker can strike for the ball with:-**
- A7. a  Either foot.  
b  Only the near side foot.

- Q8. Red kicks the ball which accidentally hits another offside Red player. The Red player who kicked the ball regathers.**
- A8. a  Scrum, loose head and put in to Blue.  
b  Penalty to Blue
- Q9. Red on the last tackle is held up in the Blue in goal.**
- A9. a  Scrum, loose head and put in to Red.  
b  Handover to Blue 10 metres out from the Blue goal line.
- Q10. Red attempts a drop goal which is unsuccessful but is fouled in back play.**
- A10. a  Penalty where foul play occurred.  
b  Penalty in front of the goal posts.
- Q11. On the last tackle Red kicks the ball which crosses the touch-line on the full.**
- A11. a  Handover at point of the kick by Red  
b  20 metre optional restart by Blue.
- Q12. Red passes the ball to an onside player who loses control of the ball. Before the ball hits the ground he kicks it.**
- A12. a  Scrum for the knock on.  
b  Play on.
- Q13. Red stands up and plays the ball backwards. There is no acting half back so the Red player turns and picks up the ball.**
- A13. a  Play on.  
b  Penalty to Blue
- Q14. Blue restarts with an optional 20 metre restart by a drop kick. The ball bounces over the touch line at the Blue 40 metre line.**
- A14. a  Scrum, loose head and put in to Red.  
b  Scrum, Loose head and put in to Blue.
- Q15. Red attempts a drop goal. The attempt deflects off a Blue player and goes over the cross bar.**
- A15. a  Disallow the drop goal  
b  Award the drop goal of 1 point
- Q16. Red passes the ball backwards to another onside Red player. The ball hits the ground before reaching the onside Red player and bounces forward. Red regathers the ball.**
- A16. a  Play on.  
b  Scrum, loose head and put in to Blue.
- Q17. Red punt kicks the ball directly from a free kick. The ball is caught on the full by a Blue player standing in-goal who then stands on the dead ball line.**
- A17. a  Goal line drop out by Blue.  
b  20 metre optional restart by Blue.

## 9.

# League Coach Forum

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/leaguecoach>

**QUESTION: 1**

**I have returned to coaching after a 10 year break and coached an Under 18 side in Brisbane this year. We were late starting the season and we never got fit enough.**

**We still finished third but the top two teams were quality and fitter than we were.**

**I am looking at taking a 17's side next year and want to start the season earlier, and am looking for advice on structuring fitness sessions.**

**The club also has a weights room and I would be grateful for any assistance.**

**I need advice on the following:**

- 1. The break up of the session, how long spent running, drills exercises.  
What are acceptable limits for fitness work?**
- 2. Benchmarks for fitness drills and where to obtain them.**

**Any advice would be appreciated.**

**Tony**

**ANSWER 1.**

Firstly I would like to qualify this by saying that I am not a football coach and never have been. This is, however, what I would do regarding the strength and fitness if I were.

Firstly, I would test the team, looking at their strengths and weaknesses.

Next, prioritise the weaknesses in order to bring them up - sticking to the old adage that a chain is only as strong as its weakest link.

Weaknesses should be worked on:

- Early in the season (not to say that you do not work on other areas early in the season but weaknesses should definitely be the main focus.)

- At a time early within a training.
- At a time when they are most trainable.


At age 17-18 and coming out of an off-season, your players will most likely be able to make concurrent improvements in all motor qualities. This is a little different from that seen in the elite athlete where say, if an elite sprinter or power lifter were to work on his/her endurance, some speed/strength would be sacrificed.

So do not be afraid to work on several aspects within the same training week. However, at the same time remember that with school commitments and playing and training commitments your athletes will only have so much energy.

So if say you have a fit team and strength is their weakness, having them run 10K's a day will only fatigue them. This will detract from the progress that they could make if they had focussed more on strength and will not necessarily improve their fitness as they are already fit. It will do nothing for their 'game' or 'football' fitness.

For fitness, I would start by developing a fitness base to allow you to train properly when you move to the next training objective, which is to train towards the specific goal, which is football fitness. To do this I would use interval/fartlek training.

To develop the fitness base you will need to undergo non-stop activity for a medium to long duration.



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Running five or six K's would be one method, but any activity will do, whether it be swimming, cycling or doing football drills that requires being active for longish periods.

As for the interval training, try to get the intervals very close to that experienced in a football game.

Maybe something like this: Five-second 100 percent sprint followed immediately by 25-second walk/rest. Immediately followed by 30-second hard run (hardest run that can be maintained for 30 seconds). Immediately followed by one-minute jog - repeat, repeat, repeat. All you really need are periods of high/very high intensity, periods of medium intensity and periods of low intensity.

For Strength and Power: Squats, dead lifts, bench press, various rowing movements, shoulder press, power cleans (if you can instruct proper technique) should be focussed on.

Start light and easy, with an anatomical adaptation phase, general physical preparation phase then progressively increase the weights.

It will probably be best to decrease the volume but maintain the intensity as the season is in full swing. No point in taxing bodies excessively and causing injuries due to fatigue.

Don't go thinking that it all has to be done in the gym either. Plyometrics and bodyweight exercises have been the basis for many very strong and powerful people.

How you include strength training into a training program, will be up to you. If your players were keen, I would have them do it separately from the team training. That way they can train multiple times per week. The one problem with this though is that they will lack supervision and will be likely to do biceps curls and bench presses all day. You will need to stress that they stick to the program that YOU give them.

If, due to motivational/economic/other reasons, they can not train for strength separately, what you do will depend on how many times per week you train and how many games per week they play.

Below could be a sample program:

**PRE SEASON**

- Sat - off
- Sun - off
- Mon - individual weight session - upper body
- Tues - team training (fitness, agility, skill based drills)
- Wed - individual weight session - lower body
- Thurs - team training (fitness, agility, skill based drills)
- Fri - individual weight session - upper body
- Sat - off
- Sun - off
- Mon - individual weight session - lower body
- Tues - team training (fitness, agility, skill based drills)
- Wed - individual weight session - upper body
- Thurs - team training (fitness, agility, skill based drills)
- Fri - individual weight session - lower body

**IN SEASON**

- Sat - recovery day, do nothing
- Sun - weight session - whole body, high intensity, heavy weights)
- Mon - team training 1 - (skill based drills/fitness/agility) hard training
- Tues - weight session - whole body high speed training
- Wed - team training 2 - easier (skill based drills mainly) training to allow recovery for Friday
- Thurs - recovery before game.
- Fri - game night

For some ideas on how to do your heavy days and speed days check out the following links:

<http://www.protraineronline.com/past/june9/practicalperiodization.cfm>.<http://t-mag.com/html/133per.html>

You will want to get the ideas from the above articles not follow them word for word.

Okay, I hope that helps. If you have any further questions or criticisms of what I have written, I would be delighted to try and help or explain myself further.

Chris



**ANSWER 2**

Just a general over view, as this is a very wide-ranging subject.

Firstly, break your overall year into phases - off-season, pre-season, in-season, mid-season and finals. Then funnel your training from generalised to specific as you get closer to the playing phases.

Think about the Five S's - speed, skill, stamina, strength and suppleness. Add to this list agility and with these you have the basic components of what a Rugby League player needs. Go and see the Broncos' trainers for relevant info, get on the AIS web site, ring people and read. After this form your own opinions and don't stop learning.

Remember; be able to read your players to know when real fatigue and boredom are setting in, as these are the two biggest wreckers of quality sessions.

A couple of guides: do general training using the Five S's and agility for two thirds of your sessions then spend a third doing positional specific training to enhance individuals skills.

After three physically demanding drills, make the team compete in a game of some sort where they have to think when fatigued. Watch them react as it will pay off in the long run.

Rick

**QUESTION 2**

**Interested in peoples' thoughts on the best way for attacks to implement a game plan to beat a team which plays a slide defence in Rugby Union.**

**ANSWER 1**

Slide defence systems are reactive and aim to push attacks toward the edges of the field.

To counter this you must change the angle with which you attack the slide system. Notably, two passes wide with a dummy runner seeming to get the next pass but with a second man angling back in behind the ball carrier. This is designed to catch any lazy defenders not shutting the gate back on the inside.

Another way to beat slide defence is to have runners angle back in at the defenders with a single ball runner choosing to drop-off the runner or pick up a wider receiver or run himself. With the angled runners, they must go straight before angling back in. This will put the defenders in two minds and take the heat off the ball runner.

One other way is to run a "J" pattern with the original receiver wrapping around. What happens is that the

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first ball player will pass to a runner and this runner is going straight at the line. Just a couple of metres before impact, the runner puts a short hook in his run so that his back is to the defence - a "J" pattern. The first ball player then wraps around receiving the ball and then has options inside and out to create other options. This movement holds up the slide defence by committing defenders to come out of their corridors. This is also good for isolating weak defenders.

Hope this helps.

Rick

**QUESTION 3**

**I have a son who is interested in sprint training so that he can improve his speed in the game. As he is too young to do any form of weight training, what would you guys suggest to best help him in sprint training? Resistance training and dragging a sled when running have been suggested. What do you think? I am keen to help my son in every way I can but I do not want to damage his body or dampen his enthusiasm for the game.**

Mark

**ANSWER 1**

Firstly, I do not recommend strength training for this age group UNLESS under expert supervision. This age group is extremely vulnerable to stress and overuse injuries during their growth spurt, which won't finish until about 15/16.

The focus is on technique rather than strength for these guys.

The first thing I would do is have him assessed by a good sports' doctor and possibly a physio as well. Both should be familiar with training injuries for this age group. If he were cleared with them, I would look to enrol him with an athletics club and attached to a qualified sprint coach.

Health conditions you should be aware of:

Osgood-Schlatter's Disease





Case

A 13-year-old boy comes to the clinic complaining of pain in his knee. He is playing competitive soccer daily. How would you evaluate this adolescent?

Osgood-Schlatter’s disease is an apophysis. The apophyses are cartilaginous areas with their own growth plates and are sites for tendon insertion. Overuse may lead to microtrauma and inflammation where the quadriceps tendon inserts on the tibial tubercle.

Osgood-Schlatters usually affects boys about 13 years old and girls 11-12. It is the most common cause of knee pain in children less than 16 years old. Common activities associated with OS include soccer, basketball, ice hockey and gymnastics. Most often OS occurs in the rapidly growing phase of early puberty. About half of the cases are bilateral.

Clinical Course:

Usually present with pain over the tibial tuberosity and there may be obvious swelling.

Physical examination usually demonstrates very tender swollen tibial tuberosity but no limitation of mobility of the knee.

The diagnosis is clinical and a radiographic examination is not necessary.

Treatment:

Self limited course.

Limit activities as necessary although most athletes can play through the pain if mild. Instruct patients to stretch hamstrings and quadriceps prior to activities and ice afterwards.

May use NSAIDs

If there is direct trauma to the area, use of pads for protection may help.

Symptoms may last for months and usually there are no permanent sequelae. Occasionally there is prominence of the tibial tubercle afterwards and may have prolonged pain on kneeling.

Most cases of OS can be taken care of by paediatricians without orthopaedic referral.

SEVER’S DISEASE

Sever’s disease is an overuse syndrome that involves the apophysis where the Achilles’ tendon inserts to the calcaneal bone. Most affected children are between 9-12 years of age. There is often heel pain and tenderness can be elicited if both sides of the insertion area are palpated.

Treatment consists of strengthening of the muscle of the leg by doing dorsi and plantar flexion exercises of the foot. Analgesics and icing may help.

The placement of a quarter inch heel pad in all shoes may alleviate the pain.

For more in depth info about Osgoods simply do a search on Google.

My son (now 21) presented with this problem when he was 13. It effectively finished his sporting career by age 15 even though it was aggressively managed. Today he now faces surgery to correct the problem because it substantially limits his ability to work and play any sort of sport.

Kerry

# Notes

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## 10.

# Fuelling for Rugby League

Australian Institute of Sport, Department of Sports Nutrition

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SPORT

### *Overview*

Rugby league is a game of strength, skill and speed, dominated by short bursts of running and heavy tackling. The object of the game is to score **tries** by grounding the ball in the opponents' in-goal, or **goals** by kicking the ball over the opponents' cross-bars. Teams consist of 13 players - 6 forwards and 7 backs. Four substitutions are allowed per match. Games consist of two 40 minute halves.

### *Training*

The rugby league season is divided into three phases - pre-season, competition and off-season. At the professional level, the off-season is usually a short break of 1-2 months where no formal training is scheduled. Some players may continue to do their own conditioning work during this period. Pre-season generally begins late November - early December. Strength and conditioning is a primary focus, with skill and match play becoming more important as the season approaches. The competitive season runs from March to September. Teams typically train 4-5 times per week for 1-3 hours. In addition, individual and recovery sessions may be scheduled.

### *Competition*

The National Rugby League (NRL) competition involves 15 teams and is played as a weekly competition. Games are primarily played on Saturday and Sunday afternoons, although night games are also scheduled. In addition, selected players compete in the State of Origin series, a City versus Country match and an International match. State, junior, club and women's competition follow a similar season.

Rugby league involves short bursts of play rather than continuous activity. The game is physically

demanding due to heavy body contact and tackling but is unlikely to deplete fuel stores. Games can be played in a variety of conditions from heat and humidity to rain and even snow.

### *Physical Characteristics*

Muscle bulk and strength are important features of rugby league players. Forwards need to be able to run the ball offensively and to tackle. They are typically heavy with a large muscle mass and relatively high body fat levels. Backs are typically 10-20 kg lighter with lower body fat levels.

## COMMON NUTRITION ISSUES

### *General Nutrition*

Rugby league is becoming more professional and making greater use of sports science. However, many outdated ideas and practices persist due to tradition and folklore. Players exist in a close-knit environment and many attitudes and behaviours are shared due to the persuasive power of peer influence. Professional clubs now recruit players at a very young age, requiring them to move away from the family environment. Often players with limited knowledge and cooking skills share houses and try to cope with heavy training schedules plus study or work. Lack of nutritional knowledge and cooking skills can be compounded by lack of time and post-training fatigue, making irregular meals and fast foods an easy routine

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to fall into. Astute clubs utilise sports dietitians to support players with education, cooking lessons and ensure appropriate food is provided post-training and matches.

**Carbohydrate Requirements**

Rugby league players need a diet which focuses on nutrient-dense sources of carbohydrate, includes moderate amounts of lean protein and smaller amounts of fat and refined carbohydrate.

Nutrient-Dense Carbohydrate	Lean Protein	Fat	Refined Carbohydrate
bread	lean meat	butter	lollies
cereal	skin-free chicken	margarine	cordial
fruit	fish	oil	soft drink
pasta	eggs	cakes	jam
rice	low-fat milk	biscuits	honey
vegetables	low-fat yoghurt	pastries	sugar
low-fat yoghurt	low-fat cheese	chocolate	sports drink
low-fat flavoured milk		chips	
		takeaway meals	

Rugby league is often not as aerobically demanding as other football codes, however players still need to work at consuming sufficient carbohydrate to recover between training sessions and prepare for the weekly match. A single game of rugby league is unlikely to exhaust fuel stores provided players begin the game with a full supply of muscle glycogen. However, players who eat poorly through the training week will struggle to perform optimally for a full match.

**Controlling Body Fat**

Rugby league players need to be big and strong yet have speed and agility. Many players struggle with the fine line between increasing muscle mass without gaining excessive body fat. It is common for players to gain body fat during the off-season then want to drop it quickly once pre-season begins. Some players resort to crash or fad diets to drop body fat. This usually results in a loss of strength and muscle mass rather than body fat. Players looking to lower body fat levels need to adopt a balanced, long-term strategy. It is important to target excess sources of ‘empty’ kilojoules (i.e. foods which provide kilojoules but few nutrients) yet still maintain an adequate intake of nutrient-dense carbohydrate and lean protein. Key areas to target include alcohol, high fat foods and refined carbohydrate. It may also be necessary to reduce the size of meals and rethink the number of

snacks consumed. A sensible goal is to lose 0.25-0.5 kg per week. This roughly equates to about 5 mm of body fat. Some players will also need to reassess their training practices and schedule additional conditioning sessions in their week to assist with the reduction of body fat. For further information on losing body fat see our fact sheet on Weight Loss.

**Gaining Muscle Mass**

Muscle mass and strength are important to help rugby league players withstand the physical contact of the game. The desire to improve strength quickly, leads many players to turn to fad diets or the latest supplement. Smarter players make a commitment to an appropriate training program and support this with a high energy diet. For further information on supplements, see the AIS Sports Supplement Program. Players wishing to increase muscle mass need to consume an extra 2000-4000 kilojoules each day. These extra

kilojoules should come from low-fat, carbohydrate-based foods which also provide protein, vitamins and minerals. Players should add a snack such as a tub of yoghurt and a banana or cereal bar before and after weights sessions, consume sports drink during sessions and consume additional snacks between meals. Further information on bulking up can be found in our fact sheet How to Grow Muscles.

**Alcohol**

Rugby league is a sport where enjoying a drink with team members at the end of games, and sometimes training sessions, is an important part of team bonding. Drinking alcohol to excess is common and can compromise recovery and attempts to improve body composition. The decision to drink alcohol is the personal right of each athlete. Sensible use of alcohol does not impair health or performance however, alcohol intake can interfere with post-exercise recovery. Alcohol acts as a diuretic and may slow down the process of rehydration after the match. Despite what you may have heard about beer and carbo-loading, alcoholic drinks are low in carbohydrate content and will not fuel up your muscle glycogen stores. After exercise, concentrate first on rehydration and refuelling goals. Rehydrate and refuel

with carbohydrate-rich foods and fluids before having any alcoholic drinks. Then set yourself a limit and be aware of how much you have consumed. Avoid any alcohol for 24 hours post exercise if any soft-tissue injuries or bruising have occurred. The injured athlete who consumes alcohol immediately after the match may cause extra swelling and bleeding and therefore delay recovery. Many NRL teams are making an effort to improve the professional behaviour of athletes and curb binge drinking. As the physical demands on players increase, and education strategies are implemented, this will continue to improve.

**Preparing for Training and Matches**

Ideally, a light, high-carbohydrate meal should be eaten at least two hours before a match. Breakfast cereal plus fruit, pasta with tomato sauce, rolls or sandwiches, baked potatoes with low fat fillings and fruit salad with yoghurt are all good options. Experiment to find the best one for you. Many clubs like to organise the pre-event meal as a team activity, especially when they travel to an ‘away’ game. Eating together can be a good way to raise team morale and get focussed on the match, as well as making sure that all players are well-fuelled.

**Fluid and Carbohydrate Intake During Matches**

Players who eat well during the training week are likely to have adequate carbohydrate stores to last them through a game. Those players who commence the game with sub-standard fuel stores may require a source of carbohydrate such as sports drink or carbohydrate gels to ensure they perform at their optimum for the full 80 minutes.

Fluid intake is important during matches as dehydration will impair skill and judgement and make exercise seem harder than it actually is. Players need to start each game hydrated and work at drinking fluid regularly throughout the game. The following tips will help rugby league players to optimise hydration:

- Drink sports drinks - they encourage better fluid intake, supply carbohydrate and assist with fluid absorption and retention.
- 2-3 hours before a match, drink 300-600ml of fluid.
- Drink an extra 300-600ml immediately before the game begins. This primes the stomach and assists with fluid emptying from the stomach throughout the match.
- Aim to drink small amounts regularly whenever breaks in play permit.
- Use half-time to catch up with fluid intake.

**Recovery**

To kick-start the recovery process, it is recommended to consume foods which provide a combination of carbohydrate, protein, vitamins and minerals. Good options include yoghurt, cereal bars, sandwiches, milk drinks and sports bars. Combine these foods with a source of fluid and follow-up with a meal in the next hour or so. A team approach to recovery is the best way to ensure all players replace fuel and fluid immediately after matches. Organise to have suitable drinks and snacks available after the match as a team activity so that everyone can enjoy the benefits.

**CASE STUDY**

Ryan is a promising junior rugby league player. He is on the cusp of breaking his way into the senior team. Like many league players, Ryan wants to increase his muscle mass and drop some skinfolds. He has been advised to follow a low carbohydrate, high protein diet. Ryan has been told that carbohydrate makes people fat as it causes the body to produce lots of insulin. Insulin inhibits fat oxidation and increases fat storage. Following a high protein diet causes the body to release less insulin therefore helps the body to burn more fat. The diet involves avoiding pasta, rice, bread and cereal, and eating more meat, eggs, fish and protein drinks.

Ryan decides to give the diet a go. For the next few days, his intake consists of:

Breakfast	3 eggs protein shake
Lunch	tuna + salad protein shake
Dinner	chicken breast + salad protein shake
Snacks	protein bar

By day five, Ryan is feeling very ordinary. He is tired, lethargic and grumpy and finding it difficult to make it through training sessions. Ryan is starting to get bored with the foods he is eating and is starting to crave breakfast cereal and bread. After 2 weeks, Ryan has lost 5kg but his skinfolds have increased slightly. He is starting to wonder if his high protein diet is all it’s cracked up to be.



# 11.

## Injury Prevention

### Some Training Ideas

Written by Doug King - Sports Nurse

Having the players fit and well for the season is the ultimate goal of any Coach and Management team within the game. There is nothing more frustrating than having players injured within the team and knowing that there is a time factor to getting them back fit and well. But what if there was some way of reducing the risk of the player becoming injured?

Injuries within Rugby League can be classified as occurring in two main groups. These are those that are not preventable and those that are preventable (muscle imbalances, lack of fitness, decreased agility). If we were to stop those injuries that are not preventable then the game would not be the same as we see it now but it's the preventable injuries that we can target and work on to decrease the risk of injury to all levels of Rugby League. Below is a suggested eight-week rotating programme that can be incorporated into any training routine, or else the players can do this either at home or in the gym. This routine is not designed to take over from any training routine but is designed to compliment the training ongoing and should be adjusted to suit the individual player.

To do this routine you should have access to some dumbbells or similar weights that can be held in each hand and are able to be increased in weight as the program goes on. As well, have access to a stretchable cord or tubing approximately 2 – 3 metres in length and either a wobble board or a "soft" medicine ball that can be depressed when you stand on it. The better medicine balls are the "live" balls that have the ability to bounce when thrown but check that you can stand on these before you use them. The use of a knee-high bench is also advantageous as this can give you some variability. The use of a training diary and a stopwatch can be handy especially if you want to monitor your progress as well.

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The routine is based on four stages where you progress from stage 1 through to stage 4 over the eight weeks and do the exercises three times a week. Once you have completed this you return to week 1 starting again on these activities but measuring your progress to see how much you have improved. These exercises should be done before any other training activities as they require a high degree of coordination to be completed and fatigue tends to restrict the coordination and reduces the good form required to be utilised with the exercises. It is suggested that players do these exercises after their warm up, but before their other training as these exercises stimulate the nervous system and can assist in the challenges of other workouts.

**Stage 1:** This stage consists of six exercises all aimed at strength and balance of the legs, but also indirectly help the upper body with co-ordination as well. This stage takes two weeks (wks 1 – 2). The six exercises are:

1. One leg balances.
2. Forward backward leg swings.
3. Forward backward leg swings with knee extended.
4. Toe walking.
5. Heel walking, and
6. Cross body leg swings.

After doing an appropriate warm up, but before doing any other form of exercise activity, begin the programme by doing One Leg Balances. This is done by standing on one leg in an upright position supporting your body weight and the other leg in a flexed position at the knee, hip and ankle. Simply hold this position for up to 20 seconds and then swap to the other leg. Do this for another 20 seconds and then rest for 30 seconds. That is one rep. Complete three reps for this exercise.

Next is the Forward Backward Leg Swings, which is done with one leg fully, supporting your weight and the other leg hanging loosely to the side. The forward backward leg action is done by bringing the non

weight bearing leg up towards the waist bending at the hips and rising it until the upper leg (quadriceps) is parallel to the ground, and your knee is bent to 90 degrees or a little bit more. Now swing the leg downwards and backwards until the non-weight bearing leg is extended behind your body. Make sure that the knee is completely extended at the end of the backswing and then bring it again forward and up to the start position so that once again the knee is again in front of you and the upper leg is parallel to the ground. This is one repetition. Do this 30 times and gradually increase your speed with each swing. It often pays to do this near a wall so that those who are not able to independently balance can use the wall to brace themselves. Now change your legs and complete a set on the opposite leg and this is one rep completed. Rest for 30 seconds before starting the second rep. Do this exercise for three repetitions.

Try to coordinate your arm activity with your legs as you would if you were running.

The third exercise is the Forward Backward Leg Swing with the Knee Extended. This is the same as the previous exercise except that this time you're raising the non-weight bearing leg up to waist level with the knee extended and your lower leg becomes parallel to the ground. Don't stiff leg your leg. Again swing your leg downwards and backwards behind your body and then return it to the start position. Do this 30 times and again increase the speed with each swing. Also include your arms into the movement to simulate a running posture. When you have finished one leg, change to the other leg and complete 30 swings and then rest 30 seconds. This is one rep. Do two reps of this to complete the set.

Next is the Toe Walking. This should only be undertaken once you have completed the last activity and rested for 3 mins. This activity requires the player to walk on their toes but should be done over a 20-metre distance (it is also very good for testing out the ankle rehabilitation). There are three versions to do with this activity and these are toes straight, toes in and toes out. Start off with the player up on their toes and walking with the toes pointed straight forward for 20 metres, now rest for a moment and then walk 20 metres on their toes with their toes pointed outwards. Make sure that they have their legs turned outwards as well. Once they have done this, rest for a moment and then walk 20 metres again on their toes but this time with their toes pointed inwards. Again make sure the legs are twisted inwards as well. Once you have completed this rest for 30 seconds and then repeat this again.

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Now onto the opposite end of the foot and into the Heel Walking. Again over a 20-metre distance and again do it with your toes pointed straight ahead. Now rest for a few seconds and then repeat the 20-metre heel walk but this time point the toes outwards, again making sure the legs are turned outwards as well. Now rest and repeat the exercise again on the heels, but this time point the toes inwards. Again make sure the legs are turned inwards when walking on your heels with your toes inwards. Once you have completed this, rest for 30 seconds and then repeat the exercise again.

Having completed the heel raises now it is time to move onto the Cross-Body Leg Swings. These are done standing up facing the wall and using the arms to support the body. Placing the body weight on to one of the legs (ensure that this leg has the toes pointed straight forward) swing the opposite leg out away from the body as far as possible, ensuring that the toes remain pointing forward, and then bring the leg down through its arc of swing and then upwards across the body until it reaches the full extent of its swing.

Once this has occurred, bring the leg down to the start point and then continue on with the swing a further 14 times. Once you have done this, swap legs and repeat the routine again on the opposite leg for 15 times. Now rest for 30 seconds and then repeat the whole exercise again.

Do these exercises three times a week for the two weeks before moving onto stage 2. If it is found that you're unable to do the exercises without recruiting other supports or having to stop through the exercises, then add on another week to the exercises before progressing onto the next stage.

**Stage 2:** The next stage is aimed at advancing the balance; strength and agility already developed in the first week and again consists of seven different exercises. As for stage 1, this stage takes two weeks to complete and should be undertaken three times a week after an appropriate warm up but before any other training activity. These exercises are:

1. Advanced One-Leg Balances
2. Maximum Forward-Backward Leg Swings with Knee Extended.
3. Toe Walking.
4. Heel Walking
5. Raised Foot Lunge
6. Runner's Poses
7. Bicycle Leg Swings Without Resistance

First up is the Advanced One-Leg Balances, which is an extension of the One-Leg Balances, carried out in stage 1. Do the exercise the same as in stage 1, but

this time swing the arms back and forth vigorously, mimicking the arm action of a person running hard. Simply hold this position for up to 20 seconds and then swap to the other leg. Do this for another 20 seconds and then rest for 30 seconds. That is one rep. Complete three reps for this exercise.

The next exercise is the Maximum Forward-Backward Leg Swings with Knee Extended that is the same as the Forward-Backward Leg Swings with Knee Extended except add in one more part to the exercise. Instead of bringing the leg forward and up to a parallel level with the ground, think as if the leg is punting a football and swing the leg through to achieve a maximum possible follow through. It sometimes pays to start with gradual swings until you have achieved maximum swing range, but don't start counting the swings until you have reached this. Do this 30 times and again increase the speed with each swing. Also include your arms into the movement to simulate a running posture. When you have finished one leg, change to the other leg and complete 30 swings and then rest 30 seconds. This is one rep. Do two reps of this to complete the set.

Once you have completed this continue on with the Toe Walking. Do these the same as for stage 1, but now increase the pace that these are done. It may be useful to time the 20 metres covered and compare these each workout. Again, do the Heel Walking as they were done in Stage 1. But now increase the pace that these are done. It may be useful to time the 20 metres covered and compare these each workout.

The next activity is the Raised Foot Lunge. These are done like any other lunge with the feet shoulder width apart and one foot forward with the foot directly on the ground, and the other foot behind the body but place the rear foot on a block or ledge that is 15 – 20 cms high. Begin the exercise by placing all the weight through the front foot and bending the front leg and lower the body until the front leg reaches an angle of 90 degrees between the thigh and the lower leg. As the body lowers itself down swing the opposite arm forward and when raising the body upwards to the start position swing the arm back to the start position.

Ensure that the upper body remains in an upright position throughout the lunge. Complete this 15 times and then swap legs. Again complete this exercise 15 times and then rest for 30 seconds. To increase the difficulty of this exercise include dumbbells in the arm swing. It is best to start with lightweights and increase them each workout. Ensure that correct posture and flow is maintained over the use of the weights.

Once you have recovered from the Raised Foot Lunges, you can get into the Runner's Poses. These are carried out with the body standing up and the feet shoulder width apart. To start the exercise begin by bringing up one leg until the thigh is parallel to the ground and the opposite arm is swung forward as well, as would happen when running. Once the leg is parallel to the ground, and the lower leg is pointing to the ground, hold this position for a count of 10 seconds ensuring that the balance and stability of the body is maintained in an upright position. Once the count of 10 seconds bring the leg back down and return to the start position at the side of the body. That is one pose. Continue on with these on one side for 15 poses then rest for 30 seconds and begin on the other leg and arm. When this is completed rest for a further 30 seconds before starting again for the second rep. Complete this and then rest 30 seconds before doing the next activity.

The next activity is the Bicycle Leg Swings without Resistance. This exercise again need the player to be standing and use the wall for stability if they need it. Flex one leg at the hip and raise the knee up to waist height ensuring the thigh is parallel with the ground. Ensure that the knee is flexed at 90 degrees and once the thigh is parallel, swing the lower leg forward un-flexing the knee but ensure that the thigh remains parallel to the ground. As the knee reaches full extension, drop the leg downwards and backwards until the leg is fully extended. As the hip nears full extension, raise the heel by bending the knee upwards and taking the heel towards the buttocks. As this occurs bring the knee forward towards the start position of the thigh parallel to the ground.

Repeat this entire sequence in a smooth manner and ensure it continues through a continuous arc without stopping. Do this at a rate of at least one swing per second and aim towards 12 swings per 10 seconds and complete 50 cycles per leg. Complete two sets of 50 reps per leg.

Do these exercises three times a week for the two weeks before moving onto stage 3. If it is found that you're unable to do the exercises without recruiting other supports or having to stop through the exercises, then add on another week to the exercises before progressing onto the next stage.

**Stage 3:** The next stage is aimed at advancing the balance, strength and agility again and consists of six different exercises. As for the previous stages, this stage takes two weeks to complete and should be undertaken three times a week after an appropriate warm up but before any other training activity.



These exercises are:

1. 'Blind' Advance One-Leg Balances
2. Bicycle Leg Swings with Resistance.
3. Partial Squats.
4. Toe Skipping.
5. Heel Skipping.
6. High-Bench Step Ups.

The first exercise within this stage is the 'Blind' Advance One Leg Balance. This is the same as the one leg balance from Stage 1 except that the eyes are kept shut while standing on one leg. If possible do Stage 3, week 1 without any arm swinging, but when going into Stage 3, week 2 try and add in the swinging arms while standing on one leg as was done in Stage 2. Again do this for 30 seconds per leg and complete two sets.

The next exercise is Bicycle Leg Swings with Resistance. These are the same as the Bicycle Leg Swings done in stage 2, but add in a flexible stretch cord that is tied to an object about 1 metre in front. Standing facing the flexible cord that is secured, complete the Bicycle Leg Swings but make sure that the flexible cord accelerates your leg swing in the forward motion and resists the movement in the backwards stage of the motion. Ensure that a smooth form is maintained and quality is preferred over speed. Perform two cycles of 50 reps per leg.

Having recovered from that exercise, the next activity is the Partial Squat. This is an advancement on the one leg balance as is carried out with the use of a bar or some other weight placed on the shoulders (If you have young kids use them on your shoulders as they feel very much a part of the training and enjoy being a part of it). Stand with one leg directly underneath the same side shoulder and the other leg bent so that the foot remains off the floor whilst doing the squat. Most of the bodyweight should be directed through the heel towards the middle of the foot. Go down into a partial squat so that the angle between the calf and the thigh is about 135 degrees and hold for a count of two then return up towards the start position. Continue this for 10 repetitions. Now once you have completed the 10 reps, go down into the partial squat position and hold for 10 seconds. Once this is completed go back up to the start position and recommence 10 more partial squats without any pause between the reps. When this is completed go back down into the partial squat position and hold for a further 10 seconds. Once you have completed, recommence the partial squats again for 10 more reps then go into a partial squat in the down position for another 10 second hold (remember to do this on one leg). This is one set and looks like this:

1. 10 partial squats
2. 10 second hold in the down position.
3. 10 partial squats.
4. 10 second hold in the down position.
5. 10 partial squats.
6. 10 second hold in the down position.

Once this is completed, swap legs and recommence the sequence. Once this is completed rest for 2 minutes before going onto the next exercise. If at any stage you reach failure in the exercise, reduce the weight until you can complete the exercise without going into failure.

Once you've recovered from the partial squats, commence the Toe Skipping. This exercise is the same as the toe walking except that the activity is carried out by skipping the 20 metres not walking it. Again do the toes straight, toes pointed outwards and pointed inwards. Ensure that the legs are also twisted into the outwards or inwards positions depending on the exercise and quality over speed is essential here. Do 20 metres of each position (straight, inwards, outwards) and do it twice.

The next activity is Heel Skipping and this is recommended to be done on a forgiving surface such as grass or sand, soft dirt etc. Instead of walking on the heels for 20 metres, skip the distance again with toes pointed straight, then inwards then outwards. Do this twice and progress from a forgiving surface through to a hard surface, but ensure that your footwear is able to cope with the impact without causing injury.

The final exercise in stage 3 is the High-Bench Step Ups. Starting off standing on a bench or step that is knee-high carries out this activity. Standing, facing away from the edge of the bench, place the body weight on one leg and have the other leg dangling just behind the bodyline and away from the edge of the bench. Now lower the body on the one leg and as soon as the other leg touches the ground, drive the weight free leg through to become parallel with the ground, and simultaneously drive the body upwards again to the start position. This is similar to the forward backward leg swing. As well, swing the arms as if running. This will bring them back to the start position where they hold it for a count of three before recommencing the exercise again. Complete 12 of these on each leg before resting for 30 seconds and then complete a second set. Ensure that an upright posture is maintained throughout the entire movement. Try to avoid the temptation to lean forward as the leg lowers towards the floor.

Do these exercises three times a week for the two weeks before moving onto stage 4. If it is found that

you're unable to do the exercises without recruiting other supports or having to stop through the exercises, then add on another week to the exercises before progressing onto the next stage.

**Stage 4:** The next stage which incorporates the use of some added equipment to further improve upon the balance, strength and agility, consists of six different exercises. As for the previous stages, this stage takes two weeks to complete and should be undertaken three times a week after an appropriate warm up but before any other training activity. These exercises are:

1. One Leg Balances on a Medicine Ball.
2. Partial Squats on Medicine Ball.
3. One Footed Heel Raises.
4. Medicine Ball Lunges.
5. One Leg Balances with Perturbations.
6. One Leg Squats with Lateral Hoops using the Balance Board.

The first exercise in this stage is the One Leg Balance on a Medicine Ball. This requires the use of a Medicine ball that can be easily stood on (such as a 3 – 5 kgs ball or use a wobble board). Carry out the One Leg Balance as in Stage one and two. Stand on the Medicine Ball on one leg and hold that position for at least one minute. Don't swing your arms until you can stand on the ball for the full minute. Do this for three sets of one minute each leg. To advance these exercises try standing on the medicine ball by increasing the difficulty in stages. Stage 1 is with the arms at the side, stage 2 is with arms swinging, stage 3 is with arms by the side and eyes closed and stage 4 is with eyes closed and arms swinging.

The next exercise in this stage is the Partial Squats on Medicine Ball. Again these are similar to the Partial squats done in Stage 3, but these are done on the Medicine Ball and should be commenced in stages increasing the weight from none to the amount completed in the Partial Squat in Stage 3. Standing on the Medicine Ball is excellent in increasing the proprioception of the ankle and can aid in increasing the strength around the ankle, but should not be done if there is any indication of instability in this area. Do the same exercise routine as for the Partial Squats in Stage 3.

The One Footed Heel Raises are the next exercise to be undertaken. Standing upright in an erect, relaxed posture, lift one leg off the ground and bend the knee so that the lower leg is parallel to the ground and the toes are pointing downwards. The hip, knee and ankle of the other leg should be slightly flexed and not locked straight. Contract this leg's calf muscle as much as possible so as to raise the heel off the ground and rock the body forwards onto the toes. Hold this

position for two seconds and then slowly lower the body down again until the heel touches the ground. Once the heel touches the ground, explode the heel upwards again raising the body up onto the toes into a tiptoe stance. Do this in a rhythmical motion and without hesitation trying to maintain a good balance, posture and stability at all times. Do this 15 times before swapping over to the other leg and doing the same again. Once this is completed rest for 30 seconds before recommencing the whole exercise again. To increase the difficulty of the exercise start the exercise on a flat surface and gradually increase the angle of the surface as you progress during the stage.

Once your calf muscles have died and returned again it's time for the Medicine Ball Lunges. Start off standing on a bench about knee high and have the medicine ball about 30 – 40 cms in front of you. Start by stepping out onto the medicine ball with one foot and as soon as the foot touches the medicine ball shift the body weight to the front foot and go into a lunge squat position. Hold this position for a count of two and then return to the start position by driving the foot on the medicine ball down to push off and stand back on the bench. Do this 15 times per leg for two sets. Remember quality over speed and ensure ankle and knee safety at all times.

The next exercise is the One Leg Balances with Perturbations. This exercise is similar to the One Leg balances but adds in the use of a stretchy cord tied from around one knee and connected to the opposite leg at the ankle. Now while standing on the leg with the stretchy cord attached to the knee, bend the other leg up with the thigh parallel to the ground and the knee flexed to 90 degrees. Now swing the bent leg backwards and forwards slowly at first so that the stretchy cord pulls on the knee and perturbs the balance. Once you have completed 20 swings backwards and forwards (north-south), try swinging the leg across the body to enable the body to deal with lateral instability (east-west). Now alter the direction so that the leg is swinging in a diagonal direction (northeast-southwest) and then change direction again (northwest-southeast). Do this 20 times for each direction (80 in total). Now change the legs and start all over again. Repeat the whole procedure twice.

The last exercise in this stage is the One-Leg Squats with Lateral Hops using The Medicine Ball. This exercise requires some precaution. When using the medicine ball ensure that it can be partially squashed, but if this cannot be done use a rocker wobble instead. These are similar to the one legged squat except that the support leg is on the medicine ball and the rear foot is lightly placed on a bench, chair or step.

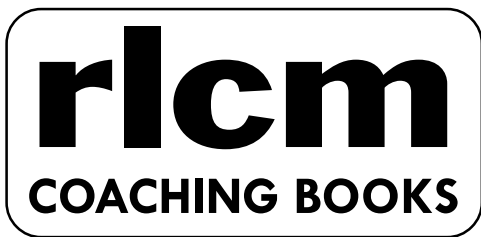
Commence the exercise by lowering the body down bending the knee of the leg on the medicine ball. Once the knee of the leg on the medicine ball reaches 90 degrees, hop off the medicine ball leaving the rear foot where it is and go to the ground. When the foot touches the ground immediately go into a squat position to 90 degrees with that leg and then push back up and hop onto the medicine ball. Once on the medicine ball immediately go into the squat and then hop off the board. If using the right leg go to the left of the Medicine Ball and if using the left leg, go to the right side of the ball. When the foot again hits the ground immediately go into a 90-degree bend and again push off returning to the starting point. This is one rep. Complete 10 reps for each side and then stop. This is the end of Stage 4.

Once completing Stage 4 the player can either go back to Stage 1 and try to improve on the initial times or goals throughout the four stages, or else just return to a stage they are comfortable with and use these as part of their training programme. Ideally it is best to commence this programme in the off season/preseason period, but commencing it in-season can and will see some results such as better balance, strength and a reduced susceptibility to injury.

At all times throughout the stages, remember safety first. If the player hesitates in the exercises then don't let them do it, or modify it to their needs to enable them to complete it in stages. The overall goal of these exercises is to reduce the risk of injury to the players not injure them in the process.

Notes

Horizontal lines for taking notes.



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## 12.

# Drills for Decision Making

By Glenn Bayliss  
Queensland Rugby League  
ARL Level 3 High Performance Coach

## Channel Vision

### Set Up

- Grid 20m wide X 30m long. 13 players for drill
- Divide grid into 4 x 5 metre channels with markers every 10 metres
- 4 Attacking players stay in their channels passing ball to support players
- 3 groups of 3 defenders at edge of channels

### The Game

- Attackers must move through channel by passing to player in 'Free Channel'
- Passes must be thrown backwards
- Attacking 3 players can not move backwards
- Score by beating all 3 lines of defence
- Defence, on start signal, enter grid and take up space in 3 of the 4 channels
- Ball can not pass through an unoccupied channel

### Coaching Points

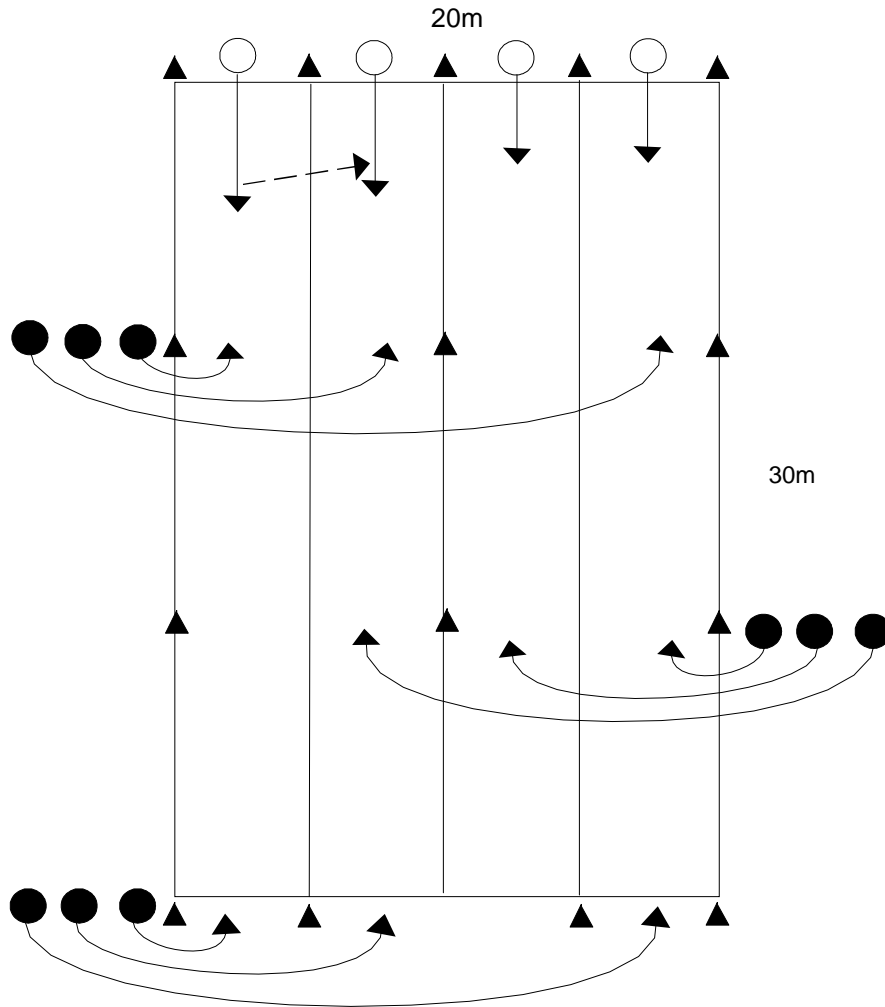
- Using vision to scan all three moving lines
- Communication between players
- Players timing their run

Drill continued next page.



By Glenn Bayliss

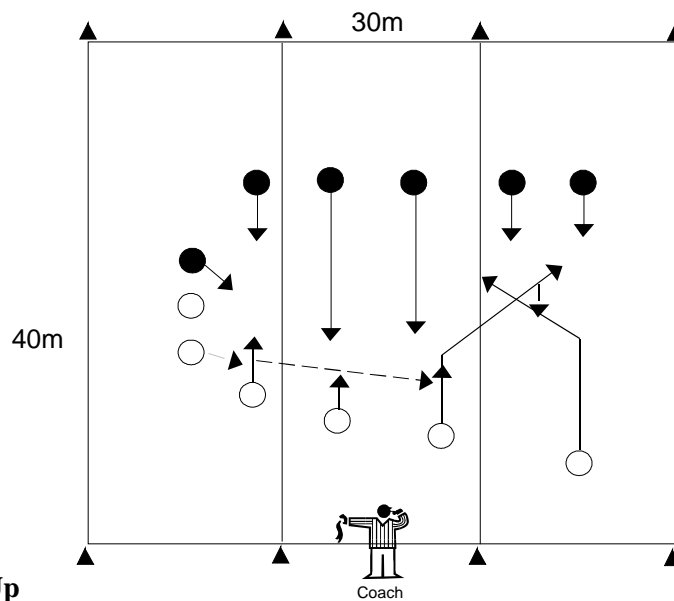
# Channel Vision



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## Hangers & Flyers



### Set Up

- Grid 30m wide X 40m long, 6 to 9 players per team.
- Divide teams in to 'Attack' and 'Defence' Squads.
- Defence is allocated to channels and must remain within.

### The Game

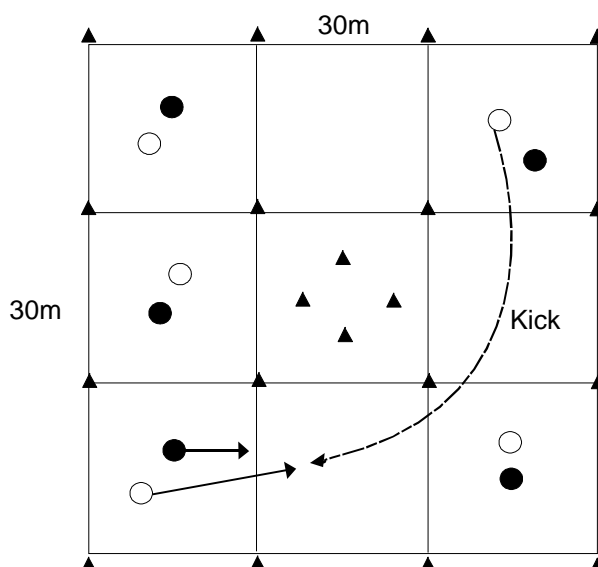
- Attacking team gets 6 tackles to score a try.
- Defenders touch-tag-tackle (determined by coach) the player with the ball.
- Coach standing behind 'Attack' team, indicates by hand signal at each play the ball, to 1 channel of defenders, the 'speed off their line'. They will be told to 'Fly up' in defence quicker than the other channels, or 'Hang Back' and move up, slower.

### Coaching Points

- Keep the game at 'Game pace' with players going to ground and then performing a correct play the ball. Keep defence back 10 metres.
- Change first receiver around regularly to give all players a chance to test their vision and decision making skills.
- Encourage players 'Off The Ball' to 'Read Play' and run the appropriate lines giving the ball carrier successful options.

By Glenn Bayliss

## Kick - Tac - Toe



### Set Up

- Grid 30m wide X 30m long, 6 to 10 players.
- Divide into two teams

### The Game

- Team with ball must chip/drop punt to team mates.
- Ball cannot be kicked to an adjoining square or back to the player who kicked it to you.
- If three kicks are successful, player 'Grubber Kicks' through markers in centre square to gain a point.
- Play restarts with the opposite team with ball.
- Players may enter a vacant square but only one player from each team is allowed in any square at any time. A breach is ruled a 'Handover'
- Defenders can contest the 'Catch' but must not deliberately 'Spoil' the 'Catch'. Coach will count this as a rule breach.
- Dropped catch or 'Out of Bounds' kick is a handover.

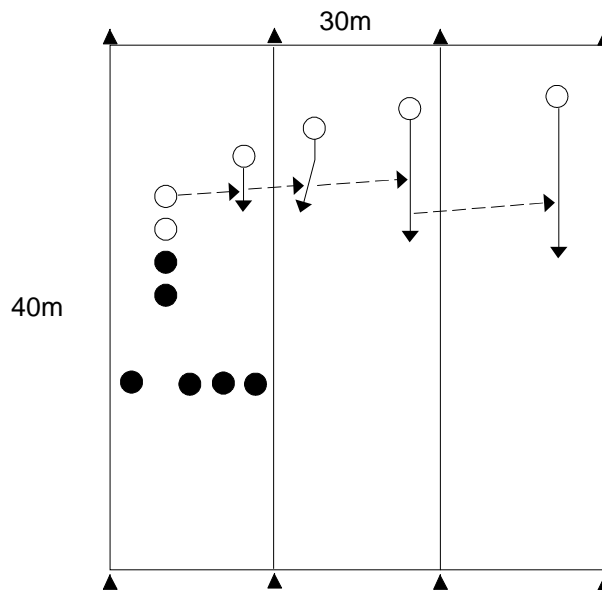
### Coaching Points

- A game to enhance kicking and catching skills under pressure.
- Players to communicate with kicker, use vision to detect free space and make quick decisions.



By Glenn Bayliss

## Scramble



### Set Up

- Grid 30m wide X 40m long, 6 to 8 players per team.
- Divide teams into 'Attack' and 'Defence'.

### The Game

- Attacking team gets 6 tackles to score a try.
- Defenders touch-tag-tackle (determined by Coach).
- At each play the ball, ALL the defence must be in the channel where the ball is played.
- The defence to 'Scramble' to save a try.
- Defence must employ two markers.

### Coaching Points

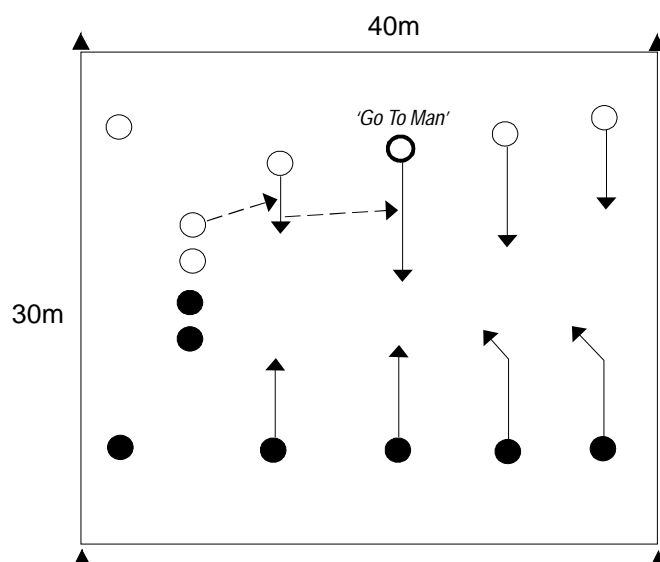
- Game at 'Game Pace' with correct play the balls and 10 metre rule.
- Attack to explore opportunity created and make decisions to beat 'Scrambling' defence.
- Defence to communicate and shutdown attack that has a width advantage.





By Glenn Bayliss

## Go To Man



### Set Up

- Grid 40m wide X 30m long. 6 to 8 players per team
- Divide teams into 'Attack' and 'Defence' squads
- One player in attack wears 'bib' or coloured shirt
- This player becomes the 'Go To Man', the 'Gun' attacker

### The Game

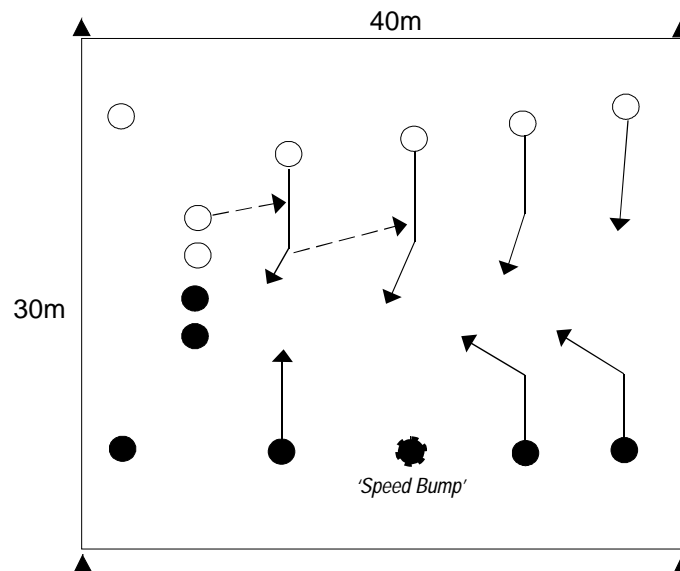
- Attacking team to score try within 4 tackles
- Defenders touch-tag-tackle (determined by coach) player with ball
- The 'Go To Man' can only be stopped by two tacklers
- Defence must adjust to cover 'Go To Man'
- Attack to work the defence to create space

### Coaching Points

- The game is to enhance vision and decision making skills
- 'Go To Man' to work defence to create space for support.
- Support players to 'Run Lines' in space created by defensive adjustment

By Glenn Bayliss

## Speed Bumps



### Set Up

- Grid 40m wide X 30m long. 6 to 8 players per team
- Divide teams into 'Attack' and 'Defence' squads
- One player in defence wears 'bib' or coloured shirt
- This player becomes the 'Speed Bump', a non-defender

### The Game

- Attacking team to score try within 4 tackles
- Defenders touch-tag-tackle (determined by coach) player with ball
- 'Speed Bump' cannot affect a defensive action. Other defenders must adjust to cover the 'Speed Bump'
- 'Speed Bump' can intercept or knock down a pass

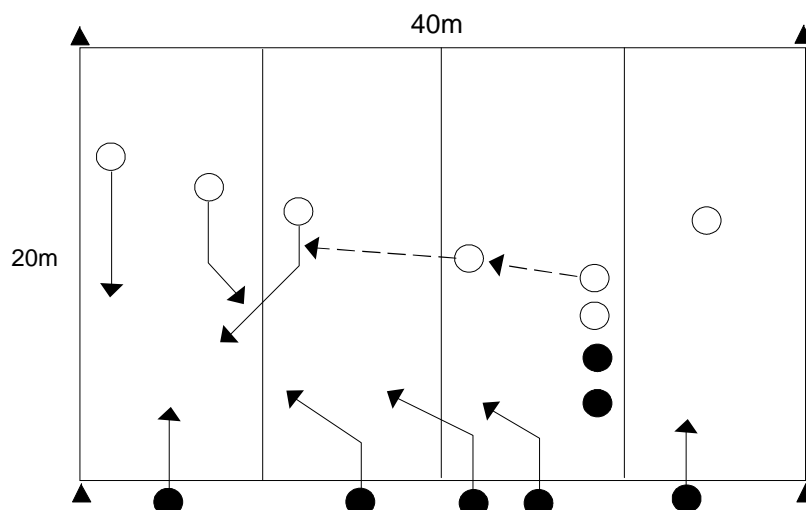
### Coaching Points

- The game is to enhance vision and decision making skills
- Attack to target 'Speed Bump' to create space for support
- Support players to run into space created by adjustments
- Defence to cover for 'Speed Bump'
- 'Speed Bump' cannot position himself at a 'Marker' role



By Glenn Bayliss

## Tryline Trouble



### Set Up

- Grid 40m wide X 20m long. 5 to 8 players per team
- Grid marked into four 10 metre channels

### The Game

- Attack team gets 4 tackles to score a try
- At each play the ball defence must have only 1 player in the other channels and the rest of defenders in the channel of the play the ball
- Defence must retire 10 metres or be behind tryline
- Once ball is played they may occupy any channel until next play the ball (when rule applies again)
- Change over occurs after 4 tackles, knock on or ball goes into touch
- Kicks to an in-goal area may be a progression to game

### Coaching Points

- Defence communication while adjusting and scrambling
- Attack to work the defence, hold up 'Slide' and create space.

### Progressions

- Kicks to in-goal area
- Nominated channel free of defenders when ball is played
- Throw in 'Speed Bump' or 'Go To man' (see previous drills)



By Glenn Bayliss

## Break -a- Way

### Set Up

- Grid 30m wide X 30-50m long. 6 to 10 players divided into two teams
- Grid marked into three 10 metre channels that have 3 segments. The first is 10 metres, the next 2 can be 10 or 20 metres

### The Game

- Attack team gets one tackle to 'Break-a-Way' and score a try at the opposite end.
- Ball carrier in middle channel has sole use of the 10m in front of him and no other player can enter that space
- After he exits that space the field is free to play and he may off-load to support players
- The defence lined up with support may move immediately
- Defence on sides and on the try line may only move when the ball carrier leaves his protected space.

### Progressions

- Vary defence structure and rules
- Hold defence back longer
- Defence has one player less
- Restrict defence to channels or areas
- Specify attacking goals
- Number of passes before scoring
- Restrict try scoring area to particular channels

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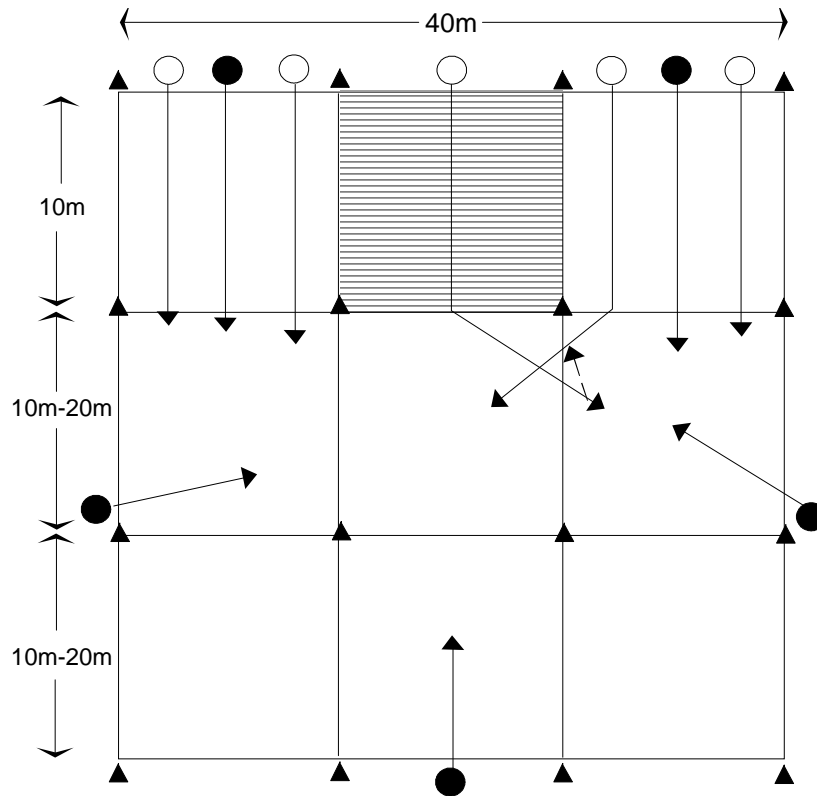
Lynn Kidman

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By Glenn Bayliss

# Break -a- Way



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## **Queensland**

Suite 1F, Trust House  
3070 Gold Coast Hwy  
Surfers Paradise  
QLD AUST. 4217

## **Mail To:**

PO Box 259,  
Surfers Paradise  
QLD AUST. 4217  
Ph: (07) 5538 9377  
Fax: (07) 5538 9388

## **New South Wales**

Locked Bag 18/111  
Newtown  
NSW AUST. 2042  
Ph: 1800 18 14 14  
Fax: 1800 18 14 15

## **United Kingdom**

The Conifers  
1 New Lane  
Skelmanthorpe  
Huddersfield  
West Yorkshire  
UK HD8 9EH

## **New Zealand**

132 Victoria Road  
St Kilda, Dunedin  
New Zealand  
Fax (03) 456 3498  
Email: rlcmanz@ihug.co.nz

## **Publisher**

Gary Roberts  
rlcm@rlcm.com.au

## **Research**

Keith Hookway  
keith@rlcm.com.au

## **Editor**

Terry Prindable  
editorial@rlcm.com.au

## **Production**

Reagan Roberts

## **Photographer**

Matthew Roberts

## **Writers**

Terry Prindable  
Ryan Ellem

## **Contributors**

John Lang  
Chris Fullarton  
John Dixon  
Glenn Bayliss  
Michael Crawley  
Ray Unsworth  
Shane Rogerson  
Joseph Carey  
Richard Johnson  
Doug King  
Mullins Lawyers  
A.I.S.

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