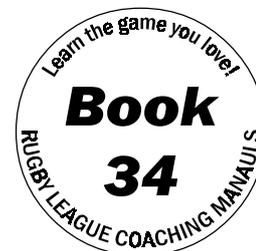




RUGBY
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MANUALS

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1.

A Starting Point For Coaches.

With Dennis Betts
Written by Robert Rachow

ON the field, former Great Britain prop Dennis Betts was hardly one for taking a step back. Yet when it came time to call curtains on his playing career, he had to do just that as he faced life after football. In the back of his mind he'd always wanted to try his hand at coaching, but starting out was easier said than done. Even when presented with an opportunity by Wigan to direct their Under-17s, Betts still had to figure out where to begin. **RLCM** was in the audience at JJB Stadium recently when Betts spoke with other aspiring coaches.

TWO years ago Dennis Betts made the transition from being the barkee to the barker. Over the course of his illustrious career he'd taken orders from some of the best known names in Rugby League circles, the likes of which included John Monie and Graham Lowe. During his 16-years as a professional, Betts also played alongside a handful of players who progressed to coaching at various levels throughout the game. Being a student of Rugby League, the uncompromising forward had ferreted away all sorts of notes on game plans and set plays. He'd stored coaching manuals passed down by his mentors or acquired at different development camps. But Betts looked over them when his career was finished and essentially, couldn't see the forest for the trees.

"Reading back over these things I'd scribbled down, I still couldn't understand what coaching was all about," Betts says. "I had the attitude and aptitude to play well and I'd taken part in all sorts of camps for up-and-coming players. However, the realisation came that I'd never looked after 24 players by my own before.

"There were all these grand plans about defensive patterns and kicking strategies, but 17-year-old kids weren't going to understand what I was talking about half the time. They still needed to learn a lot of the basics. All the things I thought were easy as a player

suddenly became very difficult to teach. I was shocked by the transition, to be honest."

Prior to retirement, Betts had come across the book *Seven Strategies of Highly Effective People*, which he used to streamline his life. When coaching came along, he revisited the book and had his eye caught by one strategy in particular – Put First Things First. Deciding that was what needed to be done, he prioritised the actions needed to reach his goals.

Eventually Betts arrived at the conclusion that he would need to start way back at core skill level. This he says, seemed tedious at first, yet it also made it clearer to him just how neglected these skills had been.

"I worked for three to four months on something as basic as how to hold the ball and what to do with it," Betts says. "It's something when you're playing that you don't think about much. I know most of the guys from my generation were more worried about getting the ball rather than how we were holding it.

"Most of us never learnt how to hold the ball properly, full-stop. All the grand plans I initially had with coaching kids went out the window and I focused on these basics."

Problems arose not only with core skills that Betts had failed to learn himself as a player but another big issue was being re-educated on tactics and techniques, which had changed since his days as a junior footballer. Betts found there were elements of both attack and defence where his concepts had become obsolete. It took realism and a swallowing of pride for him to admit to that and do something about it.

"Basically, I had to re-learn how to tackle all over again," he says. "Although the objective and mindset were still roughly the same, technique had changed a lot since when I first started out.

“I think we all have to come to realise that as important as sprints and strategies are, the main concern should be core skills. Watch the Great Britain or Australian team train and they still spend time teaching catch, pass and carry. A lot of their work is corrective, even at that level.”

Going against the grain of many Southern Hemisphere coaches who now believe natural athletes will dominate the game, Betts says the great players will be those with skill and efficiency. One of his motto's is that fitness, size and speed may be added to efficiency, but never in reverse. Betts contends that even the most gifted sprinters and strongmen have failed when taking up Rugby League. He offers an aptitude for tackling, and the ability to pass and catch as the most necessary assets of anyone hoping for a future in the 13-man game.

After speaking with Olympic coaches in various fields, Betts has come to the conclusion that core skills should be the focus for any sport.

Another realisation which Betts made after progressing through the initial stages was that a coach should formulate a game plan thinking about his own players' strengths as much as he thinks about his own personal style. Sure, players should be encouraged to be well rounded in all areas and develop particular skills to help the team, but for a harmonious and successful relationship, the coach should also concede ground and compromise.

“You have to match capabilities and ideology,” Betts says. “In my case, it turned out that defence was our focus. I'm a big believer that you can't win matches without defence and the team had some skill in that area, but still needed to develop more.”

Again revisiting the mantra of Put First Things First, Betts broke down defence to what he metaphorically considered the centre of the universe, the ruck. To be more specific, he started with the markers and worked outwards, focusing on a “Tight Eight” instead of the typical “Tight Six”. This meant that the players Betts expected to lead the charge were his markers, plus the three interior defenders either side of the play-the-ball.

“The ruck – talking about your markers and A, B and C defenders – is everything,” Betts advocates.

“There are so many options. Does your first marker chase, while the second marker stays? Do you do it the other way around? Maybe you could have split markers or insist on just one marker, so you have an extra man in your line.

“Whatever you decide to do, one of the first steps to playing well is having proactive markers. You can have different defensive systems for different areas on the field or different stages of the game, but that underlying expectation of your markers stays the same.

“If you win the ruck then you have ascendancy and you've taken a big step in winning the game. I say that if players can control the collision zone and then use their core skills efficiently, they are definitely headed in the right direction.

“When things go wrong, always come back to where it starts - at the ruck.”

So up until this point Betts has decided on a starting point with his actual training sessions and then a starting point for games. The third element he needs (and which has been touched on a little already) is a starting point for the type of players he will scout and select. The ex-Lions hard man concedes that while tackling, catching and passing are the three foundations of a promising player, there are another five basic elements that can help a player succeed.

These are size, strength, speed, bravery and skill. But even then, Betts says he tries not to have any preconceived ideas about how the package is presented.

“There is no one body shape that suits itself to Rugby League best,” Betts says. “A lot of people will talk about the tall, rangy second-rowers and centres going around these days, but there are quite a few stocky and explosive ones as well.

“Quite happily I think that our game is a great leveller. There are no archetypal positions. First and foremost, dedication and desire are what you need.

“What I will quite often say to my players is that there is only one person I can't teach to tackle and that is the one that doesn't want to tackle. A kid that jumps out of the way is a soccer player...not for our game.

“Having the correct attitude is something you can put into all areas of your life. You'll go places with the right attitude and it's the only thing that will bring true greatness.

“Clubs will be successful if they can continue to find those type of people and ultimately our game will be successful. Your job as a coach is to develop a lot of these type of players – what I call the milk – and then the cream will float to the top.”

2.

Going Back for Seconds

With Neil Wharton
Written by Robert Rachow

It's widely accepted that, in any sport, one of the toughest tasks is to back-up from a Grand Final win. In truth, targeting successive premierships isn't merely about turning up focused for two big days. The process involves so much more. From the moment the champagne flows after the breakthrough win, a coach must learn to stave off the threat of complacency and devise ways to uphold motivation and dedication. And that's just within himself. RLCM sat down this month to talk to Neil Wharton, the first man in Queensland Cup history to engineer back-to-back titles.

In Rugby League terms, Redcliffe coach Neil Wharton is an ordinary man doing extraordinary things. With a full-time job and family commitments to contend with, Wharton can relate to the predicament of coaches at the very grassroots of our game. Yet unlike most coaches, Wharton is competing in Australia's premier second tier competition, the Queensland Cup. It's not only justified saying the physical education teacher has become adept at juggling on the run. He has made an extraordinary fist of doing so.

The record speaks for itself. Five successive grand finals. Three premierships. Two losses by less than a converted try. Add to that a multitude of representative postings. And somehow amid all this, he's still managed to stay employed.

This year Wharton will be doing it all over again. Having started rank underdog in last year's decider, Redcliffe pulled through for a convincing 31-18 win over Gold Coast rivals Burleigh Bears. Aside from the losses of key men Shane Tronc and Aaron Barba, and the retirement of hooker Jason Campbell, Wharton will be facing up to much the same squad in 2004. What's more, the former utility back will also have to fight off Grand Final hangovers for his Under-19s and

second grade teams, both of which came up trumps last September as well.

When it comes to weapons in the fight against complacency, Wharton has an unwavering belief that altering routines is the key to success.

"We have to contend with that core element; the bulk of the players that won it for us last year are coming back," Wharton says. "The one factor that is very, very important is providing them with variety. I've made a conscious decision that I'm prepared to sacrifice a few other areas just so we can achieve that."

While offering variety is no great secret in sporting circles, it can come from something as obvious as a complete overhaul of the training schedule or something as subtle as aesthetic alterations. It has been said that during his time with Canberra, coach, Tim Sheens, grew his beard simply to throw the players off guard. When the team turned up for the pre-season, a new face awaited them, rather than the same one that had barked orders at them the season before. Wharton shies away from altering his own appearance too much, however he admits to tinkering with the surrounds at Redcliffe.

"We are going to do a number of things that tell the player subconsciously, "Hey, this is different"," he says. "We actually changed the gym around in the last holiday break. It was closed down and we didn't let anyone in. Gym is something the players are all very keen about. They would have kept going through that break. But now they'll come back even more eager and it will be a surprise – a different environment for them to experience."

However, the Dolphins are not just banking on a renovation of their weights room to get them through the start of the season. They have a full book of plot

twists to keep the players interested, both on and off the training paddock.

“We’ve got a few more elements to alter in our off-field structures, things like the change rooms, tackling bags, sand pits. It won’t all be dumped on them in one big go. We’ll introduce them every two or three weeks so the effect is like bang, bang, bang, bang. It’s continuous change.

“Our camp structure will also change. We will go to the same place, but we are running it completely differently. Essentially there will be three camps within the one. We’ll continually look to change things.

“For trials, we are thinking of going interstate or out into the country. On weekends where we don’t have a game, we might just go out into the bush together.”

Redcliffe typically divides its season training schedule into three blocks of seven weeks. The first seven weeks there is plenty of tough slog for players, but enthusiasm and competition is high. The last seven weeks are more slanted towards tapering for finals, but are similar in the sense that they are usually full of enthusiasm. Most players participate with the hope of reaching a Grand Final and once that’s within view, motivation is not a scarce commodity. More troublesome however are the middle seven weeks. This is the period where the grind begins to take its toll both physically and mentally. Players may become bored or distracted and are prone to the onset of niggling injuries. Wharton says it is this time that truly tests your resolve as a coach, particularly when you have the added burden of being reigning premiers, making your side a target for up-and-coming clubs.

“The middle seven are definitely the tough ones,” he says. “They’re what we call The Dark Weeks. As a player or a coach you really need to make sure that you walk through the gates of the training ground every time and be up for it, whether you feel ill or down or whatever. It is certainly a challenge.

“For us, this is also the period where representative footy takes place, so you lose a fair chunk of your better players. Second grade also has a representative scene now as well, so that depletes us even further. The hard part is that you can’t foresee who will get picked or how many will get picked. Realistically, the only way to plan for that is to set yourself in a good position on the ladder early, make sure your structure is solidly in place and that you have a system that counters injury. Your actual training manual at

this time might not look like a typical Rugby League one. At this stage it’s about getting players involved, challenging and enjoying themselves.”

While preaching the virtues of variety and lateral thinking, Wharton is also quick to defend the foundations of Rugby League. He prides himself on being flexible and adaptable, yet there are some areas he is loathe to compromise on. When implementing change to your program, the Dolphins mentor says pitfalls to avoid are being too casual, setting low expectations or skimping on the basics.

“One thing that happens to most clubs come January is that they will have an influx of colts (Under-19s), who are now set on playing grade football,” Wharton says. In our case we’ve probably got 20 or so and then another handful of players who are coming in from other clubs to our system for the first time. While you want everyone to gel together, the thing you can’t do is drop to their level of play. Even though our Colts won a premiership as well, it has to be up to them to catch up to A-grade standard, not for us to slow down so they can fit in.”

Finally, as contradictory as it may appear, the key to making variation successful in your premiership defence is to recognise the importance of repetition. Although creativity may win you the undivided attention of players, this ingenuity must be balanced against a sound tutelage of the game’s fundamentals. It is these skills that will ultimately win matches, even when motivation is waning. In any case, without monotonous tasks, players may even run the risk of growing complacent with the more exciting activities. This point, Wharton says, is worth considering when deciding on the type of players to build a back-to-back campaign around.

“You can’t sell the product the same way, but at the end of the day football is all about taking it up, getting tackled, playing it again, kicking it, chasing and then tackling,” Wharton says. “That is never going to change and you had to coach those skills for the team to earn any sort of honours. Ultimately, the true test of a champion or what separates the good from the very good is the ability to do those mundane, boring things well and continue training.”



3.

Four Foundations of a Good Coach.

With Steve Gough
Written by Robert Rachow

*ONE of the most basic but prevalent questions you are likely to hear at a coaching seminar is “What makes a good coach?” In many ways it’s a question open to interpretation. Cynics might suggest a good team makes a good coach, but then how does that team come together and realise its potential in the first place? Focusing on the facets coaches can control within themselves, Penrith Panthers Premier League coach and New South Wales Under-19 mentor, Steve Gough, spoke with **RLCM** recently.*

The only way to define what makes a good coach without writing an encyclopedia is to focus broadly on the key elements. After all, as a coach you are supposed to be a sporting genius, a psychologist, parent and teacher all rolled into one. There aren’t too many hard and fast rules for these positions, so it stands to reason that coaching itself is a world of ambiguity. What may be right for one person may be wrong for another. What is correct in one instance is not necessarily what is correct at all times. According to Steve Gough, coaching member with reigning NRL Premiers, Penrith, there are four general areas that are essential for every coach to consider.

“In Rugby League there are a lot of things that work, in a lot of different ways,” Gough says.

“But if I had to pick a coach, these are what I’d look for.”

KNOWLEDGE

Gough believes it is only natural that people will critique how effective a coach is. After all, by the time a coach begins their first session with a team, he has been critiqued by club officials and, to a degree, critiqued by himself. Within the first seconds of being around their players, several dozen others will assess them. One of the first aspects that become apparent is a coach’s knowledge. Although it can’t be strictly quantified, it is one of the easier attributes for others to measure up.

“When we speak about knowledge, we refer mostly to knowledge of the game and knowledge of the players,” Gough says.

“My philosophy is to try and increase knowledge all the time. In relation to game knowledge, I try and talk a lot to other coaches. Unfortunately, the way our profession is not a lot of information sharing goes on. However, I find you learn a lot from aspiring coaches, the ones who haven’t established themselves as yet. They tend to think more laterally.”

Knowledge of players; of their strengths and most importantly, weaknesses, can often be the determining factor in how quickly a coach can start improving his squad. A coach will want to know a player’s passing ability either side, their evasive capabilities, tackling strength etc when formulating game plans or deciding on positional play. Furthermore, they need to know who will stand up when the game is on the line, who will take the tough hit-ups and whether the player responds to firm or gentle encouragement.

ORGANISATION

Along with knowledge, organisation is the other facet of coaching which players can easily adjudge. A coach who doesn’t pre-plan and relies on thinking on the run will eventually be caught short. Organisation is the glue that holds a coach’s system together and helps to avoid poor management of time and resources.

“If you don’t have a plan, you won’t do yourself justice,” Gough says. “Being disorganised, I believe, lets down your players and the whole club.”

On surface level, it may seem organisation pertains to formulating drills, timetables and managing equipment. However, while these three are essential on a week-to-week basis, Gough says it is the little extra things which mark the effectiveness of your organisational skills.

“I see providing variety as part of organisation,” he says. “Once I was in a team where we had exactly the same warm-up all season. Within a short time we were treating it as a joke. We actually treated our sessions with disdain.

“There’s definitely more to organisation than simply having the equipment and drills ready, although that’s a good start.”

The benefits of good organisation will most likely be shown at the times when the fortunes of the team are waning. If you can plan ahead to these times and have activities or strategies ready, the pressure will be lessened and player morale will not slump as dramatically. Of course, a team with sound organisation is also one step ahead when it comes to avoiding form slumps in the first place.

COMMUNICATION

Ideas and philosophies are what generally define a coach when their career is over. If a big game is won on a tactical masterstroke, the strategy more often than not goes down as a coach’s hallmark. But what’s the use of having brilliant concepts if nobody can interpret and implement them?

“The problem you have – and I had this when I was starting out as a teacher also – is that when you are learning the trade, the emphasis is all on content and not delivery,” Gough says.

“I guess that’s reflected in a lot of systems in life. How many of us know an out-standing player who just couldn’t make it as a coach because he couldn’t relate his knowledge to players of lesser ability?

“Communication is what allows you to educate your players and emphasise certain things over others. You need to be able to communicate well, both verbally and non-verbally and you should be comfortable in both group and one-on-one situations.”

A common theme you will hear from NRL coaches these days is that they are making their players accountable for certain responsibilities. This allows everyone on the field to know their role and the priorities that go with the position. In reviewing matches, it assists the team to understand the reason why things went wrong. Undoubtedly, the key to this system of accountability is communication. The coach not only communicates their expectations to the squad; they encourage constant on-field communication between players to uphold the system.

“My theory is that if a player goes out and does what I ask and we still fail, well I have failed as a coach,” Gough says. “But if a player changes things around and we fail, they have to wear that as being their responsibility.”

Rugby League’s beauty in many ways can be attributed to its physicality. It should come as no

surprise then that communication in coaching is also largely non-verbal.

“You have to realise you communicate even without speaking,” says Gough. “It’s constantly monitored by the players.

“You communicate your philosophy largely by just being the person you are.”

If successful, a coach’s style of communication will inevitably be mimicked by their players. On match day, when the coach walks the sideline, their mannerisms may also affect the temperament of the crowd. It is important therefore, to set a positive, measured example, particularly at the junior level of the game.

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Linked closely to communication, but even more immeasurable, interpersonal skills are the trickiest to master. In many ways they include elements of the three other foundations, but it is your individual persona which is ultimately the X-factor. These skills can be the most difficult to alter and improve, for they are so ingrained. They are also the most hurtful criteria to be judged a failure on, because it can be interpreted as a rejection of your overall personality.

“You will hear many people talk of man management, which very much boils down to interpersonal skills,” Gough says. “It’s another area where you can constantly improve. You’ll be asked to relate to your players, have empathy and understand where they are coming from.

“But the danger is that man management is subjective. Personality is subjective. They aren’t easy things to read.”

An important thing to remember with interpersonal skills is that although a degree of friendliness will assist communication and allow a team to gel, it will not always equal on-field success. There will be times when you will have to juggle being a confidant and disciplinarian for the benefit of the team. Without some distance from the players, a coach could be perceived as either hypocritical or prone to favouritism. What is most undesirable in this scenario is that it may create confusion and a lack of respect.

“The relationship you have with your players is the most important part of the game,” Gough says.

“Make sure you don’t cross the line and become too close. That said, one of the most rewarding moments of my coaching career was when A-grade won the premiership last year, a couple of players went out of their way to thank me.

“They had needed my faith and understanding on personal issues in seasons before. I think the position boils down to both sides treating the other with respect.”

4.

An Approach to Match Planning.

Written by Ray Unsworth
Director of Coach Education - The Rugby Football League

Match plans - what are they and do we really need them?

Given that most coaches will have a philosophy as to how the game should be played and the principles that underpin it, both offensively and defensively, the answer is yes.

It's also fair to say that most coaches will have goals, aspirations and ambitions for the players and the teams they are involved with.

If that is the case, is there then a simple equation that reads:

Coaching Philosophy + Principles of Play + Goals and Aspirations = Match Plans?

Assuming that becomes the background to our preparation, do we just play, evaluate,

refine and refocus where necessary, then play again?

Is it all as simple as that?

I certainly wouldn't complicate matters if I were working with young and developing players. For example, the game plan for my modified games team would be simple: **Enjoy it and have fun!** How good or appropriate is that?

However, having said that, it is different when working in a full time environment which is results and success orientated.

For example it has not gone unnoticed that:

- Only two teams will contest the Grand Final and likewise the Challenge Cup Final. Currently it's a fair bet that you can pick any two from four or five clubs in Super League who are likely to do just that.
- Four clubs and you can probably name them, will contest and be at the top of the ladder throughout the season.

- Another four or five clubs are traditionally moving up or down the ladder contesting the spots between five and nine. At the other end you've got the dogfight to stave off relegation.
- Should you pick an international side, then it's also a fair bet that **ninety percent** of the players will come from the big four.

But that's life. That's the game. That's the business we are in. So, when formulating your match plans, you can only play the hand you are dealt.

For the purpose of this article, it is assumed the role is that of Head Coach to one of the mid-table clubs, striving for a play off place.

My start point then to formulating my match plans begins the moment I know:

Who we play,

When we play and

Where we play.

So my first consideration is to analyse the fixture roster and honestly evaluate:

The games I feel we can win.

The games we will struggle to win.

The games we must win.



I am aware that most coaches like to plan and in doing so feel that they can win every game. However, that is not the reality in professional sport. There are certain fixtures that try as you may; realistically you are not going to get a result.

So if you are a mid-table club wanting to retain your status in the premier playing league then it is important that you highlight the games you feel you've got a real chance in.

Then focus in on the games against your closest rivals - the teams that like you are probably vying for those play off places and they then become the games we must win. Any other victories along the way [the big four] I would suggest become bonus points.

So my approach to match planning has started. I am now able to plan a training load with intensity and volume that will help us to peak and come into targeted fixtures that we could or must win both fresh, healthy and with fuel in the tank.

Also, if I am smart, not only would my players be fresh going into key games but I would ensure that our selection policy meant that key players were not over exposed in other fixtures and thus available for those major must win games.

What I need to make clear from the start is that I am not suggesting that certain games we are not trying to

win or that indeed we have given up on a result. On the contrary, we always train and play to win, but realistically what I have now put in place is a:

Training load,

Intensity, Volume and

Selection policy.

That will bring us to certain fixtures with more than a fair chance of success.

There are some strategies not readily identifiable in the schedule that run throughout the season and would probably require little or no adjustment whatever the game.

I refer to the:

Mental programmes [adjustable, dependent on goals]

Nutritional requirements [eating plan]

Hydration policy

Goal Setting

We will have set goals for the season and they include both individual and team goals that are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and with a Time Constraint).

Thus there are player goals that centre on improvement, relative to certain aspects of their game.

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
9.0am Physio & Rehab 10.0am Pool session Video work Review cut	9.0am Physio & Rehab 10.0am Review Individual video handout 10.45am Weights 12 0 noon Lunch	9.0am Physio & Rehab 10.0am Player one to ones, individual game tape reviews 12.0 noon Lunch	 FREE	9.0am Physio & Rehab 10.0am Preview meeting & Discussion 10.45am Opposed Tactics 12.0 noon Lunch	9.0am Physio & Rehab 10.0am Meeting Player tip Sheet handouts 10.45am Final run through	 1.45pm Meeting Changing area 2.40pm Warm up 3.0pm GAME
Organise individual game cuts 3.0 pm Football staff meeting	2.0pm Core & Positional specific unit work	2.0pm Skills, agility & speed work Preview video cut	DAY	2.0pm Weights Prepare player tip sheets		

There are team goals that focus on each game or block of fixtures, particularly the must win games or the number of targeted points we can accrue during any given period and seasonally, our major goal which would obviously be to make the **play offs**.

Nutrition

Individual nutrition plans would have been pre determined by appropriate staff and most certainly would have taken into consideration players' eating habits, alcohol intake and body fat readings.

That would then become a lifestyle issue, and undoubtedly, any eating strategy at the club whether it is after training sessions or pre or post game would reflect the club's recommended nutritional plan.

Indeed on the weekly schedule on three or four occasions the players will be provided lunch at the club prior to their afternoon session.

Hydration

Likewise with the hydration policy, player fluid intake runs in tandem with any eating plan. All players need to be able to prepare and perform to optimum levels.

The objective, just as with all other areas of preparation, is to bring your player to competition fully hydrated - the most common indicator being the colour of urine. In a normal person it should be clear. However, athletes ideally should arrive at competition with urine that is a mild straw colour. This is because the medics tell us, **Not to wash away our performance!** Too much fluid intake can adversely affect the essential nutrient levels.

With the fixed policies that run throughout our preparation during the season in place, it is necessary to look at the current week's preparation, which would most certainly have started the week previous.

Staff from the club would have attended one of our opponent's minor fixtures. The benefits of this being many fold, not least of which that we can have a look at and assess:

Defensive and go forward shape

Check on first graders recovering from injury

Assess fringe players who may play against us

Pick up significant, audible information such as elements of team vocabulary that run throughout the club.

Another member of staff would then watch the First Team game and prepare a verbal or written report of information and observations that also is added to the mix.

As on the weekly schedule, the first thing tabled is Physio and Rehab and that is locked into the programme at the same time each day beginning **Monday**. Following on is the post game pool session that consists of walking, jogging, continuous movement patterns for the upper body and gentle swimming. After the game, there is the temptation to do absolutely nothing, but that is not a good idea for it leads to the onset of muscle soreness, which doesn't aid the recovery process.

The second thing on the programme is cutting a video to facilitate the review process.

The actual clips to support this presentation would probably have been identified during Sunday evening, when there is the chance to watch the game for a second time in a more relaxed manner at home.

Individual game involvement tapes for each of the players would also be prepared.

That done, then it is into a weekly staff meeting. Here there are full discussions that take on board information, seek agreement to the weekly programme and outline roles and responsibilities to facilitate the same.

Confirmation is sought from the medical staff on player fitness and availability and further checks are made with the conditioning staff on fitness levels of any player coming back from injury and into contention for a place in the starting line up.

Finally, if possible, the team is selected.

On **Tuesday**, the review is presented so that issues can be recognised and taken on board in order to put the game to bed and move on. Another aspect of review would entail the players being given their personal involvement tapes to look at in preparation for one on one interviews the following day.

The first physical activity would then take place in the gym and the afternoon session would address core and positional specific unit work that would be more than likely review based.

First thing **Wednesday** morning the coaching staff would conduct individual player reviews. This presents us with an ideal opportunity to discuss current



performance, match that performance against individual player goals, refocus or agree on other targets and equally importantly gather some feedback from the player on how they think it's going or indeed present an opportunity to discuss other issues.

The afternoon session would probably consist of agility and speed work, with an opportunity to practice some skills refinement or advancement or even aspects of tactical teamwork that may need revisiting.

Then it is back to the video suite to prepare a tape for the preview session. In doing so, I would probably present something that highlights the opposition's shape, key tactics and current way of playing, whilst also looking at individuals who could present us with an opportunity to exploit.

This is probably the most important coaching duty of the week. Not only will the evidence generated become our playing strategy; it will also shape our final two training sessions.

Thursday is free time for the players, and a chance to relax before the final run in to the game.

Friday morning is straight into our preview meeting. This now is the business end of the week. The information imparted at this meeting really does shape the way you are going to play. The training session this morning will be based on the findings of the video cut. Indeed, one of the coaching staff will already be drilling our second grade to mimic the opposition's style of play.

For example, their hooker, a key player, regularly goes from dummy half, but in doing so he always rolls off to his right.

Strategy: Left side ruck defence always aware and that is what is practised that morning.

Their left-winger suffers from 'mad winger's disease' - he leaves his wing open by jumping in to assist the

centre in making tackles when quite clearly the centre has got the job covered.

Strategy: We will push it wide and run at the space between centre and wing, drawing him in and releasing our winger.

The other winger struggles under the high ball. If he takes one, he'll catch them all day but if he misses one he goes to pieces.

Strategy: Bomb him early. Let's see what kind of a day it is and if it's a bad day, let's keep it on.

All those situations will manifest themselves in the morning's session and will of course become a major part of the strategy for this week's game.

After lunch, there is a final gym session for the players while preparation on additional information in the form of player tip sheets is carried out. This revolves around two or three key points on the opposition playing squad and a couple of key points for each of the players to take into the game with them. This information is distributed at the **Saturday** morning meeting prior to the final team run through.

Game Day: The team will meet around 1.45pm and fifteen minutes will be spent reinforcing the strategies and tactics and reminding players of various pointers agreed on to utilise in this game.

That done, then the coach is almost done.

The team sheet will be prepared and options to cover substitution and injury permuted. Game day staff are briefed and reminded of their various roles and indeed thoughts on any plan B issues.

With regard to the coach's role in the dressing room pre game, then it is perhaps preferred to keep a low profile. This allows the combatants to put the final touches to their own preparation, save for the odd quiet word in someone's ear and maybe two or three key reminders as the players prepare to take the field.

Game on!

Notes

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5.

A Scientific Approach to Gaining Weight for Rugby League.

By Shane Rogerson BHMS (Hons) and
Bruce Rawson BHMS, B.App.Sc (Physiotherapy) Masters of Sports Physiotherapy

In contact sports such as Rugby League, low body mass may predispose an athlete to contact injuries. Furthermore, for some player positions, a large body mass can be a necessity for success. Consequently, many Rugby League players try to increase their body mass in an attempt to reduce the incidence of injury and/or to enhance their performance. Unfortunately, information relating to gaining weight or mass is almost nonexistent in comparison to the number of articles dedicated to weight loss.

Furthermore, for many individuals gaining weight can be a very difficult task. When an athlete aims to increase their mass they generally want to increase their lean body mass (eg muscle) as opposed to fat mass. The purpose of this article is to outline a number of training and nutritional strategies that can be used to assist Rugby League players in gaining lean muscle mass.

WEIGHT TRAINING STRATEGIES

Training Components

Resistance training or weight training is an effective method of increasing muscle mass. However, there is a multitude of factors to consider when designing a resistance training program including the exercise selection, exercise order, the number of repetitions, the number of sets and rest between sets. Each of these variables will be discussed in further detail with specific reference to the goal of increasing muscle size.

Exercise Selection

A recent publication on muscle hypertrophy suggests that muscle recruitment patterns vary between different exercises and that different exercises for the same muscle may produce size increases in different

regions of that muscle. Put simply, while an exercise such as a squat may increase muscle size in one region of the quadriceps, a leg extension may increase muscle size in a different region. Therefore, to maximally increase muscular size, athletes should vary the exercises performed for specific muscles (1). All exercises for a given muscle group do not necessarily need to be performed on the same day and may be cycled between sessions. Given that weight training is only one component of a Rugby League player's total training, compound exercises (exercises using large muscle mass and multiple joints) are probably more time efficient.

Examples of compound exercises for the upper body are bench press, shoulder press, lat pull downs and barbell rows. Lower body compound exercises include squats, lunges and leg presses.

Exercise Order

Traditionally it is recommended that larger muscle groups be trained prior to smaller muscle groups (3). This ensures that all muscles can be trained with the necessary exercise intensity and that fatigue does not limit the intensity of training. While this system has merit, it is the author's opinion that a priority based training order is also beneficial in many instances. A priority system works by training those muscle groups



that display inferior levels of development first, when energy levels are high, followed by those groups that are already well developed.

Number of Repetitions

It is often assumed that the heavier the weight lifted the greater the corresponding increase in muscle size. Although extremely heavy loads and low repetitions may be a potent stimulus for strength, higher repetitions and moderate loads may have a more profound effect on muscle protein synthesis. Although not undisputed, the general consensus in the scientific community is that 8-12 repetitions will result in the greatest increase in muscular size or hypertrophy (9). This may be due to a greater accumulation of metabolites or anabolic hormones associated with higher training volumes.

Number of Sets

The issue of how many sets are required to induce gains in muscle mass is an area of great debate. While a recent scientific publication has suggested that one set performed to failure is as effective as multiple sets (2), this publication and its accuracy have come under strong scientific criticism (5). While the debate continues, recent research has shown three sets to be equated with significantly higher concentrations of anabolic hormones (testosterone and growth hormone) than a single set (4). This research implies that single set training protocols may not optimise the adaptive anabolic hormonal environment. While a single set of high intensity training may be sufficient to induce muscle gains in the initial stages of training, multiple sets are required to produce maximal growth in the long term. This is in line with the opinions of several leading authorities that suggest that once initial adaptations have occurred, multiple sets (3-6) are superior to a single set (3).

Rest between Sets

It is a common misconception that one must fully recover before attempting the next set. In contrast to this perception, research indicates that the development of a high level of fatigue and the accumulation of metabolites in the muscle may be an important stimulus for increasing muscle size (8). Furthermore, a recent study reported that three sets of 10 repetitions with one minute rest between sets was equated with higher concentrations of blood lactate and human growth hormone than three sets of 5 repetitions with three minutes between sets (7). This suggests that higher repetitions with short recoveries between sets may result in a higher accumulation of metabolites and a more favourable anabolic

environment. In a practical context, most strength training professionals generally recommend rest periods of approximating 60 seconds when attempting to maximise muscle size (11).

Nutritional Strategies

While it is beyond the scope of an article of this size to deal comprehensively with all facets of nutrition, there are several nutritional supplements that can be very effective methods of increasing mass.

Weight Gainers

Basically, to gain weight you have to eat more calories than you burn. Many individuals find it difficult to increase their calorie intake without experiencing gastrointestinal distress such as bloating. Unfortunately, the advice given to many athletes wanting to gain weight is “simply eat more food”. However, if you are already eating as much as you can, then this advice can be a little hard to swallow (literally!). This is where a weight gain supplement may be of benefit.

These supplements generally consist of protein and carbohydrate in powder form that is simply mixed with water and consumed as a liquid. Practically speaking, many individuals find they can more easily increase their caloric intake from a liquid meal as opposed to additional solid whole food sources. Furthermore, given that many of these products can contain 300 or more calories in a single serve, they represent an efficient method of increasing calorie intake.

It should, however, be acknowledged that the mass gains associated with increasing calorie intake would consist of both lean mass (eg muscle) and fat mass (6). Therefore, weight gainer supplements are probably best used in players that already carry low body fat and find it very difficult to gain body mass.

Creatine

Creatine has been shown to be an effective method of increasing lean body mass. When combined with a weight training program, Creatine may actually enhance the gains in muscle fibre size to a greater degree than is normally possible through training alone (10). Consequently, Creatine represents a supplement that may be particularly effective for those wanting to increase their lean muscle mass without any associated increase in their body fat levels. An added benefit of Creatine is that it may also benefit Rugby League performance by mechanisms distinct from its

effects on body mass.

Summary

While an article of this size cannot deal with all aspects of program design and nutrition, it has highlighted several practices that may facilitate muscle gains. The practical application of this article can be summarised as follows:

- Train using a level of resistance that can only be lifted for 8-12 repetitions.
- Muscle can be overloaded via an increase in the amount of weight lifted and/or the number of sets and reps performed. When beginning a resistance training program one set may be sufficient to stimulate gains in muscle size. However, as one's training status improves, multiple sets (3-6) are likely to produce the greatest gains in muscle size.
- Train muscles in order from largest to smallest or in order of priority from those that require the most work to those that are already well developed.
- Keep rest periods between sets short (approximately 60 seconds) and remember the aim is to begin the next set in a partially recovered, not fully recovered state.
- Cycle different exercises for each muscle group so as to prevent stagnation and promote increased size within all regions of the muscle.

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6.

Maximising Talent at the Teenage Level.

Bill Sweetenham's philosophy on coaching for perfect performance.
Written by Warrick Nicolson

Mt. Isa is an unlikely location to breed swimming coaches, but the mining town in central North Queensland can lay claim to producing one of the best, in Bill Sweetenham. In November 2003, Sweetenham presented his philosophy on 'Maximising Talent at the Teenage Level' to the 'Best of British' National Rugby League Coaching Conference in Bolton, and RLCM was there to capture it. Rugby League coaches can learn much from Sweetenham on how to bring out the best in a young athlete, and these methods are not foreign to League given Sweetenham has shared many experiences with Wayne Bennett and Don Furner over the years.

Now the Performance Director of British Swimming, Sweetenham is heading up the British assault on the 2004 Athens Olympics. This appointment was preceded by a six-year stint as the Australian Youth Swimming Coach overseeing the buildup to the 2000 Sydney Olympics. Given the success Australia experienced during those glorious two weeks in September, Sweetenham reinforced why he is a valuable coaching commodity.

Sweetenham reminds us that when a new coach arrives on the scene, invariably you will hear the term, 'I'll be innovative and creative'. Commencing his talk with a basic exercise, Sweetenham asked all present to stand. He then posed general activity questions, ranging from whether the coach drove the same way to work every day, ate at the same table every night, or always shaved with the same pattern. When any coach present could answer 'Yes', they sat down. Not surprisingly after five or six questions no coach remained standing, highlighting Sweetenham's point – how can coaches be innovative and creative at training when "their home life is as boring as hell"?

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What does this have to do with coaching players, and in particular maximizing their talent? Sweetenham believes coaches have the sole purpose of preparing their athletes for competition. He defines competition as: "Maintaining speed, an economy of speed through the back end of the event by not compromising technical skills under the presence of fatigue and the pressure of the environment and the opposition athletes. At the same time knowing that everyone you respect is observing you in this difficult situation and in quite often the worst set of conditions, and as an athlete you must be able to win or perform at your absolute best and optimum level."

Coaches need to ask themselves – how can I give the athlete a chance to meet this expectation? Coaches therefore need to understand the psyche of the athlete, the value of preparation, skill development, and finally some blunt coaching realities.

"Do what you love, love what you do and always give more than expected." Sweetenham emphasizes this for both athletes and coaches.

Athlete Psyche:

No matter how qualified or experienced coaches are, the commitment level of their athletes limits them. Even the most committed coach cannot achieve success without athletes of the same frame of mind. Understanding how far your athlete will go to win is the key to being able to set an athlete on the path to victory.

Sweetenham firmly believes that athletes read coaches better than coaches read athletes, and when every coach recognises this the sooner they can get on with the job. "Twenty or thirty athletes can read you individually, but as a coach you are trying to read

twenty or thirty athletes.” So to stay one step ahead of the athletes each coach needs to avoid becoming predictable and stale in their techniques.

“It is not what you do as a coach, it is how you do it, and how you have your athletes do it.”

Working against the coach is the home life of today’s young athlete. Sweetenham says that athletes control their parents, at times simply through their mood. Therefore, coaches need to convey the opposite relationship if they are to instill the discipline needed at training that is lacking on the home front. “Ten years ago parents reinforced at a greater level the discipline you were handing out as a coach. Now this is not the case. Most of the time lessons learned at training are foreign to the home environment, so as coaches we are working against the tide.”

“Athletes today want minimum effort for maximum return.” Sweetenham calls this the era of instant gratification. How does the coach get through this barrier and turn their athlete into a success? Sweetenham says this is all up to the athlete.

“The most important aspect of the relationship is the commitment level of the athlete and not the coach.”

Without that commitment, the coach cannot make a difference to the athlete’s performance.

A coach once had a group of athletes who refused to train, so the next day he gave them bacon and eggs for breakfast. He asked them to tell him what they saw, ‘yellow, fatty, tasty, crisp, unhealthy etc’ were the responses until the coach stepped forward and told them what he saw. ‘I see involvement and I see commitment’ the coach said. The athletes were puzzled, and so the coach explained himself. ‘You see the chicken was involved and the pig was committed’. He then asked them which of the two his athletes identified with. If they were the chicken then he suggested they think about going elsewhere for coaching because he was only after pigs. The moral here is unless each athlete was willing to commit to the coach then Sweetenham sees little point in that athlete training at the highest level and they should go back to social level sport.

Sweetenham had a couple of rebellious athletes in Britain, but once they learnt it was clearly his way or the highway, results followed. His athletes have exhibited open-mindedness and ability to adopt his style and that has led to increased success. The key reason the British swim team went from zero medals

in Sydney 2000 to eight medals at the 2003 World Championships, was not the presence of Sweetenham, but the commitment level of his athletes to his methods.

Without commitment, athletes cannot reach the standard required for winning.

Value of Preparation:

“Performance isn’t talent related, performance is preparation related.” The one underlying message in Sweetenham’s presentation is, without thorough preparation no athlete can simply walk up and succeed. “Even untalented athletes can still be the best prepared.” Every athlete should not only aim to be well prepared; they should aim to be the best-prepared athlete in the world.

Without a perfect preparation, even the most talented athletes fall short in competition.

Coaches must aim to train their athlete for performance under pressure and to achieve that in preparation. Sweetenham believes to perform under pressure an athlete must train above to compete below, and live below to compete high. Sounds simple but give Sweetenham five minutes and he will convince you it is the only way to coach. His Great Britain swim team has the motto: Superior in Preparation, Invincible in Attitude, Train Above, Live Below. Given the strides made by the British since 2000, Sweetenham’s style is clearly working wonders.

Sweetenham’s philosophy includes the 3-2-1 Policy. It involves:

3 - Competing three times at the athlete’s standard; emphasizing continued performance at that level. Coaches should have a high level of expectation, a low tolerance for errors and focus on pushing the athlete to do the task right.

2 – Competing at two levels below the athlete’s standard; putting the athlete in an easily winnable situation. Coaches should tolerate nothing less than perfect performance, be critical of the performance not the athlete, and most importantly, this should teach the athlete to win.

1 – Competing a level above their standard; putting the athlete in a position where they cannot possibly win. Coaches should deliver high praise, offer the greatest support, lift the athlete to a higher performance, and teach them performance under pressure.

All three steps pay dividends, especially when pressure mounts in competition.

The training environment must always reflect competition environments. Training low means there is no chance to compete high. Promote confidence in athletes by training high. As Sweetenham says, “the lowest training denominator is your highest competition denominator”, highlighting the importance of preparation producing perfect performance.

Train above your competition so that if you fail under pressure you drop down to the level of your competition and to win you are not expecting a miracle. During the back end of the event, your best performance reflects your lowest training performance. Top performance practiced at training allows it to be replicated on the day.

Sweetenham points to some startling statistics from Olympic competition when emphasizing the value of perfect preparation. Only ten per cent of all athletes who compete at the Olympic Games deliver their best performance. That is across all sports. The Olympics, is therefore, potentially the softest competition you will face because ninety per cent of competitors will not produce their best performance when it counts.

Preparation is directly linked to commitment from the athlete. As a coach you will get the absolute best performance if the athlete has given totally, held nothing back and left nothing to chance.

Skill Development:

“Always believe you are never the best, but that you can always be the best.”

Sweetenham believes that reinforcing the basic skills set is more beneficial to the athlete than trying to develop a vast array of exceptional skills. “Teach the basics exceptionally well, in preference to exceptional skills basically well. Never put skill acquisition ahead of skill perfection. If you move on all the time you will end up with an athlete with a lot of poor skills instead of an athlete with a few great skills.”

A coach should have ten (10) ways to teach one skill. They should only teach that skill ten times, not spend more than ten minutes on that skill and only teach it to ten athletes at a time. This is what Sweetenham calls the 10x10x10x10 Strategy.

The aim is to keep the skill acquisition fresh. Sweetenham says this is important because constant and lengthy skill teaching methods can bore the top athletes who figure it out quickly, and turn off those athletes who have failed to grasp the skill.

When conducting a drill, do not punish those athletes who prove unable to grasp the skill set by making them repeatedly work at it. Instead, go the extra mile with those athletes who pick it up quickly and stretch them further. Sweetenham’s focus is on maximizing the talent level of the best athletes in this presentation; so do not lose sight of that. Delivering basic game plans not only brings the top athletes down, it frustrates the bottom athletes even more if they cannot grasp it.

Sweetenham says you can always add fitness and skill to an efficient athlete, but you cannot add efficiency to fitness and skill.

Skill development is therefore important, but application to learning those skills on the part of the athlete is even more so.

Coaching Realities:

Sweetenham has an extensive coaching resume and mountains of experience, yet there are certain home truths in coaching that must be recognised.

- You will be unappreciated by some athletes you coach. Focus instead on the positive appreciation from others and do not dwell on the negative. Every day there will be someone who does not say thank you for something you do for him or her.
- You do not have to have a champion athlete to be a champion coach.
- You must demand perfection from those you work with in order to succeed.
- Athletes who succeed want success more than their coach and those athletes they compete against.
- Remember, every athlete you coach is an experiment of ONE.
- Today’s athlete: I want it, I want it now, I want it to be fun, and I want to be paid for it. As coaches, we cannot change that society.
- Compromise is the cancer of achievement.
- Experience can only be acquired you cannot buy it.

With a track record which includes being named three times ‘Australian Coach of the Year’, Bill Sweetenham is quite entitled to an opinion. That opinion when the subject is trying to maximise teenage talent is:

“It is not what you do as a coach. It is how you do it and how you have your athletes do it.”

7.

Recovery for Rugby League

Practical Ideas for Optimising Recovery from Training and Playing

Written by Wayne Goldsmith,
High Performance Manager, Triathlon Australia

There are no short cuts to the top. The attributes of success are now, as they always have been, determination, innovation, commitment, a positive attitude, the desire to achieve and a lot of good old fashioned hard work.

However, Recovery has become an increasingly important aspect of player preparation. The demands of training schedules, competition programs and other related activities have necessitated players and coaches becoming more aware of the use of recovery techniques in planning and programming.

In addition, there is a significant amount of research that has identified the link between training and stress on the body's immune system leading to illness and disease. Ideally, the player and coach would take a preventative approach to illness and be proactive with recovery and restoration practices to avoid or reduce the incidence of these problems.

The challenge is to find ways to train players to achieve their maximum potential without pushing them over the edge into an overtrained or over reached situation with the subsequent health issues.

Firstly, an important message!

Coaches and players need to get over the idea that recovery is somehow a soft option.

A good recovery program will actually allow players to train HARDER AND MORE OFTEN as the recovery process.

1. The limiting factor in the QUALITY (How hard) AND QUANTITY (How much) training any athlete can do is based on their own individual ability to recover.

2. Therefore, the better (and faster) an athlete can recover from training and playing, the more training (and harder training) the player can do.

Recovery has nothing to do with being soft or taking it easy.

How tired is tired? Testing for recovery.

It is important that simple effective methods of measuring recovery are utilised in every training session by players and coaches. One of the greatest challenges faced by all Rugby League coaches is optimising the potential of individuals in a team environment. Players are different in terms of their ability to train and play.

This individual variation also applies to recovery ability. Some players recover quickly – some take more time.

All players, regardless of age or playing ability, can be taught to SELF-MONITOR - that is, to learn how to listen to their body and check it for signs of fatigue and potential injury or over training.

Some simple SELF-MONITORING techniques include:

1. Smiley Faces

Players recording basic self-monitoring information in a training diary or on a training chart.

☺ Draw this face if you feel great.

☺ Draw this face if you feel OK - just average.

☹ Draw this face if you feel really low, slow, tired and fatigued.

2. Taking Basal Heart Rate (BHR)

Just as the heart is an excellent indicator of how hard the body is working, heart rate is also a good indicator of how well the body is recovering from hard training and a tough competition schedule.

Basal Heart Rate is a concept that has been around for a long time. Players take their heart rate every morning just after they wake up.

While lying in a relaxed and comfortable position in bed, the player places two fingers lightly on the outside of their wrist near the base of their thumb. The player will feel a little pulse rhythmically beating away. This is called their BHR Basal Heart Rate.

Teach the players to count the number of beats they feel for 30 seconds then double that number to get BPM (beats per minute).

As players get fitter and stronger from training, their BHR should get lower and slower. This basically means their heart is getting more efficient at doing what it has to do. Fit players will have a consistent BHR every morning that will not vary more than a beat or two.

However, if players are training too hard and not getting enough rest, their resting heart rate will actually increase. It is not uncommon for a player training too hard to experience increases in their resting heart rate of 5-15 beats per minute.

It is important that coaches and players do not put all their eggs in one basket and make variations to training based on BHR alone. There are many other issues that need to be taken into consideration.

3. Mood

Being moody is also a good indicator of how a player's body and mind are adapting to training and competition.

Use the mood scale with a rating scale of ONE to FIVE where ONE is feeling really low and in a bad mood and FIVE is feeling great and fully charged ready to take on the world.

Players who are in a bad mood, feeling flat, negative and angry are often just showing the signs of over training and over straining in the pursuit of excellence.

EXAMPLE OF A MOOD SCALE

LEVEL	TYPICAL PLAYERS' COMMENTS
One	Low, slow, off, dead
Two	A bit off, not great
Three	OK, not bad
Four	Pretty good, no problems
Five	Great, can't wait, pumped

4. Sleep

Tired players, for some reason, often sleep poorly. The short answer might be that the bodies of tired players are still working even when they are resting, ie their bodies are using rest time to repair, rebuild and regenerate and constantly stay in an active state.

Rate the **QUALITY** of their sleep out of FIVE. ONE is a terrible sleep - one of those terrible nights where players tossed and turned and struggled to get any sleep. A FIVE sleep means players fell asleep quickly and slept soundly most of the night.

Rating the *quality* of their sleep rather than the *quantity* makes sense as it is virtually impossible to remember exactly WHEN players fell asleep.

5. Weight

Players should get in the habit of weighing themselves, usually in the morning after going to the toilet, but before eating or drinking anything. The main reason for doing this is to make sure players are not LOSING weight. Fit, healthy, growing players generally keep a fairly even, constant weight. However, sudden weight loss over a 24 hour period can usually mean one of four things:

- Players are dehydrated
- Players are fatigued and their body is struggling to maintain normal functions
- Both of the above.
- Player is not well

Players should get in the habit of aiming to weigh the same just before going to bed as players did just after waking that same morning. Weight loss during the day is generally just water loss - water loss that needs to be replaced.



It is crucial that the coach sell this concept positively to all players as a practice which is designed to assist in the measurement of recovery and not as a daily obsession with body fat and body image.

Practical idea: Have a coach or trainer take an ACCURATE set of scales to a match in the pre season. Weigh the players before the game, again at half time and then at full time. Ideally, do this with the players wearing shorts only.

Each player then gets an idea of how much fluid they are losing during a game which needs to be replaced before they go to sleep that evening and ideally as soon as possible after the game.

With senior players who might enjoy a beer or two, coaches should aim to have at least 90% of game fluid losses replaced by water, fruit juice or sports drinks before the cans come out of the case.

Pre season games are a chance to refine rehydration techniques as well as get into playing mode, practice moves, try new players etc.

This hydration monitoring could also be done at training sessions.

6. Muscle Soreness

When muscles work hard, sometimes they feel tight and sore. Sometimes this soreness will not become obvious until a day or two after a tough training session or following a hard game. This soreness is called **D.O.M.S.** (Delayed Onset of Muscle Soreness) and can literally be a pain in the neck (or butt or arms or legs or somewhere else).

In their diary, players should record muscle soreness. A rating of FIVE means their muscles are feeling

strong, loose and relaxed and a ONE means their muscles feel like they have gone ten rounds with the world heavyweight boxing champion (and lost!).

EXAMPLE OF A DOMS SCALE

LEVEL	TYPICAL PLAYERS' COMMENTS
One	Sore, really tight, stiff, dull aching
Two	Bit sore, a little tight
Three	OK not bad
Four	Pretty good, fine.
Five	Great, feel strong, feel ready.

Passive test data can be summarised in a table or chart to give an overall perspective of the player's recovery status:

Self-Monitoring Recording Sheet (example)

	Smiley Face	BHR	Mood	Sleep	Weigh	Muscle Soreness
Monday:	☺	54	3	4	74kg	2
Tuesday:	☹	55	2	4	74kg	3
Wednesday:	☺	53	3	2	74kg	3
Thursday:	☹	62	2	3	73kg	3
Friday:	☹	64	2	1	72kg	2
Saturday:	☺	69	2	2	73kg	1
Sunday:	☺	58	4	3	74kg	3
Average:		59.3	2.6	2.7	73.4	2.4.

It is important to note that one of these signs **IN ISOLATION** may not mean anything at all. For example, their morning heart rate can be higher than usual if players have drunk a little too much caffeine the night before, gone to bed dehydrated or had a scary dream. However, two or three of the warning signs happening at the same time, may mean players have a problem on the way.

These passive tests provide the coach and player with an overall general perspective of the player's recovery level.

So what can you do about it?

Practical Methods for Helping Players to Recover.

Recovery Nutrition:

Recovery Nutrition is an important part of playing successfully. Recovery nutrition is about planning an eating and drinking strategy that helps your body:



Recover from the physical stresses of playing and prepare for the games to come:

Immediately after training or playing - DRINK. Water is perfect, or other fluids such as sports drink, cordial or fruit juice. Also, players should try to eat something light within 10 minutes of finishing the game. This is the time when your body is best able to absorb and utilise the new foods (fuels).

Recovery nutrition is a technique which provides the player's body with what they need to recover (eg carbohydrates to replace used up energy, proteins for muscle building and repair) and prepare for the next day of training or playing. In between training sessions, recovery nutrition is about replenishing energy stores quickly and effectively so that the next session can be completed at a high level.

Foods that aid in a recovery nutrition program where the emphasis is on speed of digestion and absorption include fruit, blended fruit packs, tinned fruits and sports drinks. These are easy to digest and absorb into the body. To maximise the impact of these recovery foods they need to be eaten or drunk as soon as possible after training and playing.

Practical Tip:

If working with a junior team, the players' parents take turns as MR or MRS RECOVERY for the day.

It is their responsibility to make sure there is plenty of water, sports drinks, fruit and sandwiches available for players after each training session and each game.

The coach then encourages a ten minute RECOVERY session after the game where players eat, drink and stretch together before changing and leaving the ground.

With professional clubs, a designated trainer or assistant coach could fulfil this role.

Hydrotherapy: Water works!

Players, coaches and sports medicine professionals have used hydrotherapy (literally using water in all its forms as a therapeutic aid) for many years even if they didn't know it!

Icing injuries, having spas and taking showers are all part of an effective recovery routine.

Some of Australia's leading sporting teams (for example Triathlon and Swimming) have been using CONTRAST techniques to help players recover from training and competition.

One basic routine worth trying is:

Have a shower to clean off then take a hot shower which is around 39 to 40°C for three minutes.

Immediately after the hot shower take a cold shower (or a plunge into a cold pool) which is cooled to 10 to 15°C for 30 to 60 seconds. Repeat this two to four times.

Take a shower at the end of the session at a comfortable temperature to help relax and to avoid feeling washed out.

Another alternative is to end the HOT COLD session with ten minutes of stretching in a swimming pool or plunge pool.

Practical Tip:

Buy an inflatable kids' pool to take to games and training sessions to place ice in to create your own portable recovery pool! Try a small amount of chlorine as well to reduce the chance of players picking up germs from sharing the same water and ice.

Place the pool in the change rooms next to the hot showers and try the alternate HOT COLD technique (three minutes hot/one minute cold). Great team recovery activity!

Pick up a thermometer as well so you can get the temperature just right!

Massage

Massage can have a very positive effect on recovery – for the body and mind.

Massage can:

- Increase peripheral blood flow.
- Help muscles to relax
- Increase skin temperature
- Provide a short term increase in flexibility
- Make the player "feel" great

Massage can also be used in combination with other recovery techniques, eg hot – cold hydrotherapy technique followed by a short massage.

Practical Tip:

Have a sports physiotherapist come to training pre season and teach the players how to do self-massage. Not only is it a practical exercise to help the recovery

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process but players can learn to “read” their bodies and learn how to identify possibly injury sites.

Stretching

There have been a lot of ideas and theories about stretching. Some recent research has even suggested that stretching before exercise has little real effect on minimizing muscle injury! However, stretching *post* exercise (recovery stretching) has been widely used effectively to help the recovery process.

Once again, stretching is best used not in isolation, but in combination with other recovery techniques, eg stretching in the shower during the hot/cold hydrotherapy, or stretching while eating and drinking recovery foods and drinks.

Putting it all together - How to recover after a game

EXAMPLE 1 of a team recovery routine.

Players come off the field.

As they enter the change rooms they are handed a bottle of water or sports drink and a piece of fruit which they eat and drink.

They then go to the showers and stretch under the warm water while showering.

They come out of the showers and pick up a lean meat and salad sandwich to eat before some more light stretching, led by the team captain who also uses the opportunity to talk to the players about the game.

EXAMPLE 2 of a team recovery routine

Players come off the field.

As they enter the change rooms they are handed a bottle of water and a sports “gel” energy supplement which they eat and drink.

The forwards go to the showers for three minutes then plunge into some inflatable kids’ pools filled with chilled water (around 10 – 15 degrees celsius) for one minute. They do this twice.

While the forwards are in the hot/cold hydrotherapy routine, the backs are doing team stretching of likely problem areas like calves, hamstrings and quads. While stretching they continue to eat recovery foods and drink sports drink.

After ten minutes the forwards and backs swap over.

Recovery Circuits – An idea for recovery after training

Most teams and coaches use some form of CIRCUIT training. An excellent idea is to use the same concept for a RECOVERY CIRCUIT.

Here’s an example of a recovery circuit that can be easily set up using a pool or local gym with a pool.

- Station One: Stretching Upper Body
- Station Two: Spa or shower
- Station Three: Water walking in a pool
- Station Four: Stretching Lower Body
- Station Five: Light exercise (eg exercise bike if available)
- Station Six: Stretching Back and hips

Repeat the circuit three times with two minutes at each station. There are many of variations that could be incorporated into a recovery circuit routine.

Summary:

Recovery is an integral aspect of playing modern Rugby League. It is particularly important during tournaments like ‘SEVENS’ where quite often it is not the best team that wins the Final but the best RECOVERED TEAM who wins.

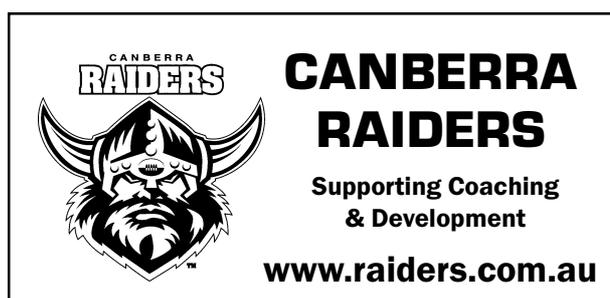
Recovery is a limiting factor in the training and playing of every player and the better educated the player, coach and clubs are on the implementation of effective recovery techniques the greater the opportunity everyone associated with the team has to achieve their goals.

NOTE FOR COACHES, PLAYERS AND TRAINERS.

As with all training and recovery programs, please take care when trying some of the techniques suggested here.

Warnings:

- Make sure players using spas and saunas are well hydrated.
- Players should avoid using hot spas if they have NEW soft tissue injuries – ie immediately post games.
- Players should not use spas for more than five minutes at any one time.
- Players should not use spas if they have been ill – especially if they have an elevated temperature or viral condition.
- Care should be taken to supervise young and inexperienced players when first trying these routines.



8.

Trouble Shooting for Coaches.

With Steve Gough and Glenn Bayliss
Written by Robert Rachow

LEVEL 3 coaches Steve Gough and Glenn Bayliss answered questions from the floor at a recent seminar in Huddersfield hosted by RLCM. We recorded their responses to offer a quickfire reference for other coaches experiencing similar troubles.

Q: What do you do if a player doesn't listen to your instructions, no matter how many times you tell him to do something?

STEVE GOUGH: If a player is working against the team, rather than with it, you should probably sit down one-on-one with him, set some goals and define the boundaries. In this first instance I'm assuming that they want to learn. A golden rule is not to give younger players too much information at once or otherwise they get overloaded and lose sight of the goal. Try and make the tasks a personal challenge or competition for them, so that they feel compelled to respond. You can rate players after each game on whether they've reached their goal or not. In the second instance, where a player is deliberately going against your wishes, well that's when discipline has to come in. Be persistent and fair with your discipline. It might feel like you're being too hard on them, but they actually respond to that type of structure.

Q: When you have a player of great ability who trains poorly and a player of average ability who trains well, who do you pick?

SG: I'd say the one that tries harder. From a development point-of-view, you really want to set an example that your players need to put in effort. That great player may be among the best in the team, but if they want to be the best in the competition or country, they need to push themselves harder. If you don't want to go as far as dropping the player to the bench, start reducing their time and tell them what the problem is. I subscribe to the "Sandwich Theory" when it comes

to getting a point across. Start with something positive, slide the criticism in between and finish with a positive again.

In sport we all want to win, but players should learn that the difference between the guys at the top and the next level is consistency and application. You only show improvement through application.

Q: How important is it to have your players talking on the field?

GLEN BAYLISS: I'll speak about communication in defence. Really, I think it's the cornerstone. When your defence breaks down, more often than not it's due to two players not communicating their intentions to each other. When talk stops, that's when you lapse into confusion and laziness. Speaking to your teammates helps retain focus.

SG: Okay, with communication in attack, it's probably most important at the start of a set to get the required direction and then when you are organising a set play. I emphasise communication both with the ball and without it, but at the same time, you don't want to telegraph your intentions to the opposition. I'm a big one for systems of play. We have what we call "Arrows" in attack, so I want to hear my players using that terminology to communicate. It helps carry the coach's ideology on to the field.

Q: But levels of communication vary as the game progresses. How do you keep them in check?

SG: Sometimes your players will go out there on edge and be screaming at one another. Firstly, that's probably panic or over-enthusiasm, rather than good communication. Secondly, the players will tire themselves out too quickly. So it's best to try and calm your players down in that scenario. On the other side of the coin, I watch for when players fatigue and

their communication drops off. There's that old saying about fatigue making cowards of us all. I try and send a message out late in the half for them to pick it up.

Q: People always talk about having variety in training. What's a typical week look like for an NRL club?

SG: At Penrith we start with rehabilitation, then get in some conditioning early in the week. After that come skills sessions and a review of the problem areas from the last game. I try to end skills sessions with a competitive game, because it's good for game-like situations and players respond to that sort of thing. Examples would be pitting the left side defence against the right side or playing two-ball touch football. Towards the end of the week we will watch some video of the upcoming opposition, focus on ball work and warm up players for the game in a dynamic way.

Q: How much conditioning should involve ball work and how applicable are old fitness regimes to today's game?

SG: Early in your cycle, through the pre-season, I wouldn't blend conditioning with ball work much at all. That's your time for working on technique and making your players become efficient runners.

During the regular season, I would also separate the two early in the week, where you want some straight-out conditioning. The players' focus should then be reducing times and improving recovery between sprints. But other than that I think it's good to combine the two elements. We do plenty of exhaustive ball drills, which challenge the focus of our players, but keep them interested at the same time. Make sure you have offload weeks, where training is less heavy and you utilise these games more. Players will expect to be flogged, but tell them the reasoning and they'll appreciate being treated like athletes.

As far as old-school conditioning goes, I agree in principle with the mental toughness it brings, but for health and morale I probably wouldn't do things like fireman's carries and long mountain climbs. Training is more specific now. We do things like 400m sprints

with jog recovery between and tackling drills to get players moving up and back, while teaching them technique at the same time. They are arguably just as hard.

Q: How important is recovery in the modern game?

SG: Recovery is compulsory at Penrith. The players have to stretch down after a match; they undergo medical examinations, treat their injuries and then are sent for referrals later in the week. Afterwards we have pool sessions and some dynamic stretching sessions.

Q: When you go into a game, what type of goals do you have and how many?

SG: You have macro goals and micro goals. The most recent game I coached in, we had two major goals - good field position and numbers in tackles. Now to achieve both of those we needed to reach lots of smaller goals along the way. For example, with field position that involved kicking well, working to the middle, retaining possession and chasing hard. At halftime you should keep your instructions brief and reinforce the two biggest goals.

Q: Halfbacks are said to be the key to the game. How do you get the most from your playmaker?

GB: Halfbacks are becoming very much like quarterbacks in that everything goes through them. It's their job to direct the forwards and it's their job to get the backs set. A good one will probe for weaknesses all game and wait for the moment of poor reaction from the defence.

You do want your playmaker to stay as fresh as possible for the times of opportunity, but at the same time, you can't hide them in the second line of defence like in the old days. The only reason you need a sweeper now is if somebody chip kicks a lot and then you'd usually instruct someone on the blindside to pull behind as the ball moves across field. To protect your half best, you should probably stand them one or two men in from the side in defence and simply work with them on being effective tacklers.

It's important to remember that your playmaker is not always your halfback. Usually it is the first receiver, but we know that nearly all coaches operate nowadays with one either side of the ruck. You should see what different skills your playmaker has before formulating a game plan as very few would have the full package. Some may be very strong in certain areas, but not so great in others.

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Q: A lot of halves turn into hookers these days. What’s the ideal dummy-half?

SG: As an old hooker myself, I’d say that today’s dummy-halves are a lot more skilled. Running from behind the ruck has become so much more important under the 10m rule. If you look at the job Craig Wing does for the Sydney Roosters, it shows how explosive a dummy-half can be.

Q: How many decision-makers should you have on a team?

GB: I believe all 17 players, including those on the bench. They will all have to make decisions that have a bearing on the game. I teach my props and five-eighths the same things during ball drills and set plays. Keep things as generic and adaptable as possible.

I try to design games that reflect all the variances that may happen in an actual match. Every one of the players will learn to create and monitor weaknesses in the opposition.

SG: Decision-making truly is the greatest challenge at the top level of the game. By the time you get that far, a player has all the necessary skills and determination, but in a game it comes down to who can read situations best. Of all the facets of Rugby League, I think decision-making is one area where we have lost our way a bit.

Q: So with all the structure in Rugby League, what freedom does a player have?

SG: I have played in teams where things were structured from start to finish, as I suspect many of you have. They’re not much fun. I tell my players that I own the 40m coming out from the line and they

can have the other 60m attacking the opposition. I want them to get the ball out to start with, but from there, they can show me what they are capable of. You don’t want to suffocate people, yet you still need a framework.

GB: The saying is “Before you can dance, you have to get on the dance floor.”

Q: What happens if you can’t get your players to transpose a drill into an actual game?

GB: You should probably look at how well you are simulating game conditions in training. I’d suggest opposed training. At first players will be nervous and hesitant, but they’ll get used to it.

SG: Try and make it as realistic as possible. Don’t let players run longer than they normally would with the ball. Make sure they hit the ground for a few seconds and play the ball correctly.

Q: What is the best defensive system out there?

GB: I think before you get carried away with a system, you should make sure technique, aggression and ability on the ground are correct. If I were looking at a defensive system I’d start with making sure the markers were covering their men and then work my way out. The in-close defenders should make it a priority to move up and take as much ground as possible. The outside three on either side should probably come up and adjust outwards.

SG: I tend to have rules, but there are always exceptions to those rules as well. Primarily, I play up and at the ball, whether that is inside or outside. When you defend the opposition coming out of their own 20m, stay compressed, but as you pull back, spread out more.

Notes

9.

Recovery After Lower Limb Injury

Some Tricks and Techniques

Written by Doug King - Sports Nurse

Recovery from injury is an important step in returning to the game situation as an incomplete recovery can lead to further injury. This, on the already injured body part often results in a greater degree of injury and involvement of another injury.

The key to a successful return to playing is a complete recovery using a variety of techniques to assist the player in successfully returning fully rehabilitated.

The use of RICE, RICER, PRICER has been well documented and it cannot be stressed enough how important this is to reduce the injury time away from sports participation. Resting the area immediately and utilising Ice, Compression and Elevation within the first 48–72 hours can have the effect of returning the player to rehabilitation training within days compared to weeks when this is not properly carried out. However, it is the next phase of the recovery from injury that will be covered in this article.

Rehabilitating within a static environment enables the injured body part to recover in a stress free environment but the game of Rugby League is not stress free and the rehabilitation process needs to be progressive from this stress free environment through to mimicking the full demands of the game. This is to enable the body part to be strong enough to handle the rigours of the game.

Functional strengthening is one way to mimic the rigours of the game and is important in that it is able to reduce the risk of re-injury and enables the activity to be mimicked in a low risk environment. To carry out functional stretching it is important that the player has been given medical clearance to recommence training.

As for any training or game situation the player should gradually warm up to enable the body to be prepared for the exercise activity it is about to undertake. It is especially important for the player to do this if undertaking any rehabilitation activity as they are at an increased risk of re-injury due to the weakened state of the body part that has been already injured.

Knee injuries are, statistically, the most common injury to occur within the game and can include a variety of body parts such as the Medial and Lateral Collateral Ligaments, the Anterior and Posterior Cruciate ligaments and the Meniscus ('C' shaped "shock absorbers").

The injury needs to be specifically assessed and then have a specific plan implemented for the rehabilitation. If the injury requires surgical intervention then the rehabilitation will require longer periods off the game, but in all of these injuries the player should have a medical clearance to start training and strengthening.

It is important that this exercise is performed on a surface that will enable some give and assist in the rebound effect of the exercise as a non-"give" surface places undue stress on the lower part of the leg and



increases the risk of over use injuries. This exercise mimics the sudden changes of direction of the game and the faster that the exercise can be performed aids in increasing the strengthening conditioning on the knee ligaments.

Once a medical clearance has been received, the player should practice this under observation before being sent home to do it alone. Correct technique is important, as further injury to the area must be avoided.

Firstly, the player stands with the left foot forward, the right foot back and feet shoulder width apart. The toes of the right foot are placed on a step or block approximately 15cm high ensuring that most of the body weight is through the heel of the left foot (at the front).

Now the player lowers himself so that his left knee is bent to approximately 90 degrees, as in a one-legged partial squat position. Then push up with the left leg and push off the ground and towards the left side making a hop of approximately 15–20cm laterally. On landing they immediately descend into another squat and then again push off and hop but this time to the right and towards the start position. On landing again they immediately drop into the partial one-legged squat again and then hop 15–20cm again to the right and then again descend into the partial one-legged squat. Now they push off again and return to the start position. This is counted as one lateral hop.

The player completes 12 lateral hops on the left leg before changing to the right leg and completing 12 lateral hops as well. This is counted as one set. A total of three sets with a target rest phase of 30–60 seconds between sets is performed.

Another leg injury is that of the pulled hamstring and this can be a long-term problem if it is not properly rehabilitated.

One of the best rehabilitation progressive exercises is that of a bicycle leg swing. This exercise is best done where the leg can swing freely such as standing side on to a step with the leg swinging freely in the air and with a pole in front for both support of the player and for the next phase of the strengthening exercise. This exercise mimics the motion of running and when progressing through the exercise mimics the effect of increasing load on the hamstring and the ballistic action of running.

The player stands with the left leg supporting their weight and the right leg raised by flexing their right hip and the right thigh parallel to the ground. The

right knee should be about waist high. The knee should be flexed to 90 degrees. Once this is achieved, the player extends the right knee by swinging the lower part of the right leg forward, unflexing the right knee until it is nearly straight. The right thigh must remain parallel to the ground while this is done.

Now as the right knee nears full extension the right thigh is dropped downwards and backwards swinging the leg in an arc backwards until the thigh extends behind the body as if the leg was following through on a running stride. The right knee should be near full extension until it nears the end of the backswing when the player raises their right heel by bending the right knee again, moving the heel closer towards the right buttock. Once the heel is near the buttock, the thigh is swung forward again dropping the heel so that the leg returns to the start position. This is one swing completed.

The swing is repeated in a smooth manner so that the hip and leg move through a continuous arc without stopping. Once the player can do this in a coordinated manner the speed is increased so that 10 repetitions are done in less than 10 seconds (the aim should be 12 repetitions in 10 seconds). It should be ensured that the swing is in its entirety and the player does not shortcut in any part of the swing. The exercise should be discontinued if there is any pain.

Begin with one to two sets of 15–30 repetitions on each leg and aim towards increasing over several weeks to one to two sets of 40–60 repetitions per leg. Once the player has accomplished this and is able to complete these easily then it is time to move onto the next step. Use a piece of either resistance band or a pair of stockings to add in resistance to the movement. Attach the tubing to a fixed point at the level of the player's knee and attached to the player's knee. Stretch the tubing at the start of the exercise and ensure that the player remains in control throughout the movement so that the tension is controlled.

Another lower limb injury is the Medial Tibial Stress Syndrome, more commonly known as Shin Splints. Usually this is an over use injury that occurs from a variety of causes such as running on a hard surface,



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10.

Stepping Up.

With Neil Wharton
Written by Robert Rachow

DURING his time with Redcliffe, first as an assistant and later as head coach, Neil Wharton has become accustomed to seeing wave after wave of Dolphins stand tall. It goes without saying that a club does not reach five successive Grand Finals unless it has some ability in developing young talent. But Wharton has not only seen his juniors progress to become First Graders in the Queensland Cup, he's witnessed a good dozen or more go on to National Rugby League level and a select few even graduate to represent their country.

RLCM spoke to the man at the helm of the club, which in recent times has produced Petero Civoniceva, Michael Crocker, Brent Tate and Dane Carlaw.

ASPIRING players should take heart from Neil Wharton's sincere belief that the difference between Queensland Cup and NRL level is primarily a matter of time. Of course there are specific reasons why some players are chosen over others to represent one of the 15 elite teams. However, Wharton is of the opinion that plenty in the second tier possess the capability to succeed, provided they have the application, support and groundwork to help them through the challenging stages.

Full-time professionalism has built what may seem an impenetrable wall around those already established in the national competition. Their experience in the elite environment, particularly in relation to training, certainly puts them on the front foot. Yet, two factors that can never be countered are enthusiasm and ability.

"I am sure... I am positive that there are players in the Queensland Cup capable of playing NRL right now," Wharton says. "I think it is like any job, when

someone gets promoted from one level to the next, they are pleasantly surprised at the change and the responsibilities that go with the new position.

"When you are at our level, we try and train as professionally as we can, but we also have to cater for people who work on roofs eight hours a day. You don't necessarily have those problems at the next level.

"Supposedly you'll be among 25 of the best players in the country if you make the NRL. So you've got good players all around you as well."

The main area, which Wharton contends should be the focus for any player trying to make the NRL, is displaying consistency both in matches and in training. This year the Dolphins have lost hulking prop Shane Tronc and jack-in-the-box winger Aaron Barba to NRL clubs. Tronc's elevation came after he showed marked improvement in consistency throughout 2003, while Barba again dominated the list of leading try-scorers in the Queensland Cup. Still, Wharton says they will have to lift even more to prove their ability in the NRL on a week-to-week basis.

"Consistency is the key at all levels," Wharton says. "I say to my younger players all the time 'Yes you can play Grade. I have no problem with that concept. There's no doubt in my mind you can do it. But to play six or seven or eight games in a row and hold that consistency is very difficult'.

"Unfortunately, the only way for a player to get any experience in that department is to be continually exposed to a certain level of play. That makes it a hard thing for the coach.

"The other thing is that when you bring a player into a good side, it is certainly difficult for them not to

play well. If they can't play well in that situation, there's something wrong with them. The real test is when you come into a team that's struggling."

Redcliffe's strategy for exposing younger players to First Grade and encouraging consistency is to bring them up for three or four weeks and then send them back for a similar period. This allows the player more game time and gives them an opportunity to showcase the benefits of their experience. It also reminds them to continue on honing their skills and not to become complacent. Wharton says a player has not passed the test until they can hang onto their spot by influencing matches, while withstanding pressure and playing through injury.

Of course the other big hurdle that faces players when they step up from one level to the next is the physical intensity of training. If a player is taken aback by the sudden jump from juniors to seniors, they will only be startled more when they enter the NRL environment, where sessions are twice daily and everyone is an athlete.

"The work ethic and demands of training at the next level are so much greater than they are at semi-professional level," he says. "I think that transition period can be a real struggle if the player hasn't done the yards or had the leg work. It's what I call the Kenyan factor. If they haven't got mileage under their belts, whether it is in the weight room or on the road, they will find it hard to adjust with the change in intensity.

"Most will be able to handle the intensity at some stage, but it's a matter of what damage it does to their bodies getting there."

Wharton opines that the players who face real problems are those of a bigger frame. They may have progressed through the ranks based on size, without having the fitness base of players around them. Prop is a position where the pool of exceptional talent is thin; therefore coaches will take risks for a quality big man. Furthermore, larger players are prone to stress injuries on the knees, shins and feet and can be susceptible to the heat.

Although training programs have become a lot more scientific and flexible in recent times, there are still cases of early retirements caused by repetitive strain on the joints and back.

Ultimately however, size is one of the first criteria coaches will look at when selecting players.

Representative teams have long been dominated by massive forward packs and bulked-up three-quarters. What though, are the other assets which will catch the eye of an NRL development scout?

"I'm speculating to a degree, but my thoughts would be that the essential ingredients nowadays are speed, footwork, body awareness and agility," says Wharton. "I just think firstly they look for players with great skill who can do things at X speed. But if you can do all those things at twice the speed, then you're a great proposition.

"The game is getting quicker. It's getting stronger and harder. Athleticism is really coming to the fore.

"I think if you see a footballer with great body awareness in their movement and they can back it up with skills, plus boast an underlying current of courage and commitment, that's really your perfect footballer.

"To me they stand out. They've got that little bit of class about them."

Clearly, it requires a person of exceptional ability to make the cut in the NRL. However, there are no super humans. Although there are plenty of difficulties to be faced along the path, generations of players have shown what is possible with unwavering dedication to the task.

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11.

Duties of the Club Secretary

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Note: This information is provided as a guide. Some of the duties may not apply to every club. The list of suggested duties should be adjusted to suit individual club requirements.

Secretary

The Club Secretary is responsible for the efficient management, coordination, communication and smooth running of all administrative tasks undertaken by the Club.

The Secretary is a key office bearer and is the focus of all communication and activities that involve the Club Committee, sub-committees, officials and all members of the Club. In addition, proper record keeping and the handling of the Club correspondence ensure the existence of a track record of Club operations and the associated decision making processes.

Club Secretaries must have a sound knowledge of sport in general and Rugby League in particular, together with some background on local issues and meetings procedures.

Suggested Duties

1. Provide a communication link between members, committee and outside agencies.
2. Ensure proper handling of all correspondence and record keeping.
3. Clear the mailbox regularly and before committee meetings so the correspondence can be distributed and dealt with at meetings.
4. Record all inward and outward correspondence and acknowledge where necessary.
5. Present lists and clarify all items of correspondence at committee meetings that requires discussion and identify all main points.
6. File copies of all correspondence and retain for at least three (3) years.
7. Represent the Club at all General Committee Meetings.
8. Communicate all matters of importance from the State, District or Junior League, General Committee Meetings and other places and organisations to Club members.
9. Be the link between the Junior League and the Club generally on all levels.
10. Maintain a sound knowledge of Junior League Rules and Regulations, memorandums and minutes from Board and other meetings.
11. Maintain confidentiality on relevant and delicate matters.
12. Have a good working knowledge of meeting procedures.
13. Have a good understanding of the Club constitution, Club rules and regulations and responsibilities of all office bearers.
14. Be aware of the future directions and plans of Club members.
15. Liaise with and assist the Junior League Executive Officer in regard to various training and education processes of Club personnel.
16. Co-operate with and assist the Club Coordinators and other office bearers with their responsibilities.
17. Be the coordinator for the Club's strategic planning initiatives.
18. Support and encourage all Club members to respect and support the Club and Junior League Codes of Conduct.

13.

League Coach Forum.

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

In each edition of RLCM we reproduce some of the questions and answers which featured during the month the League Coach website. Feel free to use our forum link to barter thoughts on coaching and training drills and philosophies. Thanks to all those who contributed during the month.

Question: 1

I am seeking some more ideas for warming up and warming down at pre-season training.

Paul

Answer 1

I use a systematic warmup consisting of four corners and the approach to it is as follows:

- 1st corner jog forward
- 2nd corner carioca right side dominant
- 3rd corner backwards
- 4th corner carioca left side dominant

At the corners we have the following systems:

- 1st corner leg swings x 10 each way; hip rotation x 10 each way; heel/toe, forward/backward rock x 10; shoulder rolls x 10
- 2nd corner PNF hamstring stretch 2x20 secs; PNF calf stretch 2x20 secs; PNF abductor/adductor stretch 2x20 secs; PNF standing quadracep stretch 2x20 secs
- 3rd corner static hip flexer and buttocks stretch 2x20 secs; static hip flexer/groin stretch 2x20 secs; crosscrawling 1x10 each side; cyatic nerve stretch 1x20 secs each side.
- 4th corner PNF shoulder press 1x20 reps; PNF pectoral stretch 1x20 secs; PNF lat stretch 1x20 secs each side; PNF four way neck stretch 1x10 each way

This completes the warm up after specific ball drills.

The warm down consists of:

- static hamstring stretch 1x30 secs
- static groin stretch 1x30 secs
- static calf stretch 1x30 secs
- static lower back stretch 1x30 secs
- static standing quadricep stretch 1x30 secs
- static shoulder press stretch 1x30 secs
- static four way neck stretch 1x10 secs each way.

This completes the warm down for the night.

Rick.

Answer 2

I liked what much of what Rick said. I would however do very little or even no static stretching in the warmup and leave that to the warmdown.

Studies have shown that static stretching prior to exercise will decrease power output.

Chris

Question 2**Kids Attitude v My technique**

I have not been going too long with this club, it was slow to start but then picked up all through this year. We had some success at Under 11 and Under 13, but the club couldn't get any other age groups coming.

But tonight, I was ready to pack it all in, the last few weeks the kids have all been lethargic, arguing with each other, putting sly digs in. I realise it is down to me, as the coach to sort it out. I have tried splitting them into smaller groups so they get more attention which works a little better, but it is still a nightmare.

I have tried following the coaching drills from the

RL and employing the techniques from the manuals and articles we get from here.

Its not all of the kids, maybe 3 or 4 that are disruptive and I am sure they prevent others wanting to join when they come down and the rot is spreading to the rest.

What do I do, can anybody give me some advice.

Rob

Answer 1

Rob, I had similar problems at an Under 10's age group. I found that the better players gradually left the club. So I decided to let the players know that if they wanted to play Rugby League they have to be a lot more disciplined and want to come training to learn.

If they wanted to mess about go and join a youth club. Parents were also told that I wasn't a child minder for 1-2 hours twice a week and if their child messed about and disrupted the session they would be asked to leave.

Within about 2/3 weeks the disruptive element had gone. It left me short of numbers but at least I could concentrate on rugby league skills and enjoyment both for the lads and me.

We gradually built up numbers but the damage had been done and we never got the better players back. Conclusion, give the team very clear guidelines from day one of what is expected from them and stick to it, even when players/parents and club officials complain.

You have to enjoy it as much as the players or you will find that you don't give 100% and you will end up leaving the game.

Gareth

Answer 2

I agree with much of what Gareth has said. I've had similar problems in the past and have found that it is often down to the parents not telling the children how they are expected to behave. I once got parent led apologies, including a note, from a group of "troublemakers" after one particularly difficult session. In many cases the players, even some of the good ones, are only with you because their parents have told them they have to be - you are being used as a cheap form of child minding.

You have to be careful not to lose your temper as this seems to spur some of the more mischievous kids on as they know they can wind you up. You are then on a downward spiral as some of the quieter children will join in the "coach baiting".

Outline your rules (see below) to the children in front of the parents (give the parents written copies!) making

sure that any new recruits hear them loud and clear. If you have keen players then exclude them from the "fun" parts of your sessions for, say 10 minutes, if they misbehave and if you have a big squad you can tell them all that they are playing for starting places in the team - most kids don't want to be a sub!

"Coaching Rules"

- We like players to understand and follow these at all training sessions:
- When the Coach is talking you listen! (THE GOLDEN RULE!!!)
- Don't fool around with the equipment.
- Don't "dig up" the pitch.
- Don't kick balls around unless you've been told you can do so in a safe area - you could hurt someone!
- Don't fight or argue - respect your friends and team mates - you may - need their help one day.
- Respect Coaches, adults and the referee.
- Work as a team - rugby league is a team sport.
- Train well, eat well, sleep well, play well.
- No chewing gum, no jewellery.
- Win without gloating, lose without complaining, HAVE FUN!!!

My team has a weekly 'Coaches Award' alongside Player of the Match, Top Tackler etc and we make it clear that this award is not based solely on performance in a match but that the coaches and helpers/parents will also take into account behaviour, attitude & commitment at training. This allows us to reward less able players, who can win the award by showing discipline and a willingness to help put the equipment away etc.

Having said all this, however, you are dealing with young children with limited attention spans and for many of whom Rugby League is not their prime interest. Accordingly, from time to time, let go a little and allow them to have fun. Ask them what they want to do for the next 15 minutes - bullrush, kicking tennis, Rugby League with a Frisbee - and let them do it to run off a bit of steam then go back to the serious work - you've let them have what they wanted, you should expect them now to let you have your serious training in return.

Answer 3

I coached 15 year olds this year in what was my 2nd year as a coach and will coach 16 year olds next year

along with assisting two mates with the 9s and 12s. It's going to be a frantic time for sure but I have no life outside of football.

I would rather coach kids with a desire to work and learn than a bunch of kids who are talented but don't use it. You can always improve a bunch of goers and eventually get them playing your style of football. It'll take a lot of hard work but the rewards are very beneficial.

Some of my players often commented to me why I like this player and that player so much but have little time for other players. It comes down to attitude, desire

him back. He's now gone from a lower division winger to a first division hooker because of his attitude and willingness to learn.

But on the other hand, I have players who have so much natural talent but just a lazy attitude about them at training. I've been at a loss in what to do sometimes without jeopardising our team's fortunes. Until the final round, we were on the knife-edge all season to make the semis. I'll make sure I have contingency plans in place for people who muckup to sit on the bench and all the positions can be filled.

No player is ever bigger than a team.

Don't let a couple of rough nuts spoil your love of a great game and a fulfilling role as a coach and role model.

and commitment.

One kid I have has raw speed and a fantastic attitude. 2003 was his first year and he broke his collarbone but came back from that with success. He's a big part of my plans for this year and I know he'll go places because of his speed and attitude.

It'll be fun coaching him and he'll be such a good finisher for any team.

Another player just gets out there and tackles, works and leads by example. He could always tackle but never realised he had talent inside of him. Loss of weight, increased pace and me placing confidence and responsibility into him got the very best out of him and he won our Best and Fairest this year. He likes to be smart but does do what he's told and the results are there to be seen because of his attitude and heart.

When I first started coaching in 2002, I was told of a kid who could run and tackle but can't pass and I must use him in the centres. I had no forwards and too many backs, so I threw him into lock with the simple instructions of running the ball into them and tackle all day. It was simple and he loved that but I knew his best spot was hooker. I told him to start learning to pass a ball and he'll go close to making rep sides. I coached Division 3 this year and he'll be playing Division 1 next year.

He had the attitude to succeed and absolute no fear in attack or defence.

That made it easy for me to coach him and I was able to help fix up his major weakness that was holding

My best advice is stick to your guns, get some good trainers who will be extremely loyal and supportive of what you do and lay the ground rules from day one.

If players object, invite the parents to training and see what they do. Try and ignore the parents, I knew I had a couple behind my back but all they did was hurt their kid.

One parent went to my face and the problem with the kid was solved very quickly.

I had two good trainers this year but I know next year I'll need to add 1-2 more to ensure that training runs smoother and we can weed out trouble much easier.

But I'm one who likes to utilise extra resources and ensure I'm at least protected. Use whatever method you feel you're most comfortable with and stick with it.

Don't let any "pretend" coaches tell you that you are wrong as only you know the players and team environment best and it's you and no one else who's in charge.

Matt.

Answer 4

I agree with the advice given - sooner rather than later bite the bullet and be prepared to cut loose someone who cannot support a team ethic. We've all been through it and no doubt will encounter "mavericks" again. Work with them for sure - but as Wayne Bennet himself said at a breakfast I was at this week "Be

prepared to cut loose someone who you can no longer help or who can't contribute to the overall goals of the team/organisation"!

Stick with your personal attitude of trying to teach/coach a great game for the individual AND the team and you'll do well. Don't let a couple of rough nuts spoil your love of a great game and a fulfilling role as a coach and role model.

Chris

Answer 5

Rob, How are you apart from the "little" problems out your way? From what you have said in your letter this can be a problem that alot of coach's can touch on and because of a pre determined guideline within the said club get nipped in the bud very quickly; as long as you have the support/backing of your Executive committee. However if the top half of the pyramid so to speak is a little wobbly and you haven't been introduced to this before it can cause you a lot of stress, depending upon your experience in the coaching field.

I am speaking from experience, I personally have had a couple of situations involving players. Situation 1] I had a team in full harmony with each other and the team was enjoying their league, however one of my players was having personal problems at school and at home. He was hanging around the wrong types at school and as some young lads do when they start to sail close to the wind, he was beginning to get noticed for the wrong reasons. This is where my complacency in observations was to be tested, not only as a coach sometimes 'minding service' but also in this case as the part time 'dad'.

You see I was so engrossed with how the boy's were going in their training/game day that I didn't detect the warning signs of the cancer that was beginning to spread amongst my normally happy league team. The player in question was quietly taking his behaviour problems from the classroom/home and niggling away at the boy's in the team; i.e. Lethargicism at training, general lack of interest in the game/training sessions and coming from behind players and tripping them up etc.

Now don't get me wrong, I had my training disciplines that I put into use in these situations but in the space of about 3 weeks this young fella had gone from 'most improved player the year before to 'out of control' player at that time. This period was also leading into

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the semi's and I was just saying to myself "what am I going to do". I had spoken to his mother on a couple of occasions and so had my manager, but unfortunately she just said "I can't fix the problem, your the coach....you fix it". Well the problem finally came to a head when I had 3 of my players come to me and say "so and so keeps telling the players your a lousy coach".

Learning lesson No2; I blew up in front of my players and then had an unsavory conversation with the mother about little Johnnys attitude etc.

We did play in our Grand final that year but the damage had been done, the player in question had unsettled the whole team. What Iam saying here is that the lesson I learn't here is that you must always be looking at Individual Harmony not only within your respective teams but also the outside influences that can come from nowhere and create havoc.

At that time I was not experienced enough to identify that I had a small problem that with the right kid glove handling may have prevented it from blowing up like it did, but in saying that it may have still gone in that direction regardless. Unfortunately I also had an executive committie that showed no real backbone and the old sweep it under the carpet mentality was always implemented to get rid of the problems.

I now look back at that situation and the two lessons that I learn't from it and I am now ever present of the outside influences that can affect anyone in any sport at any time.

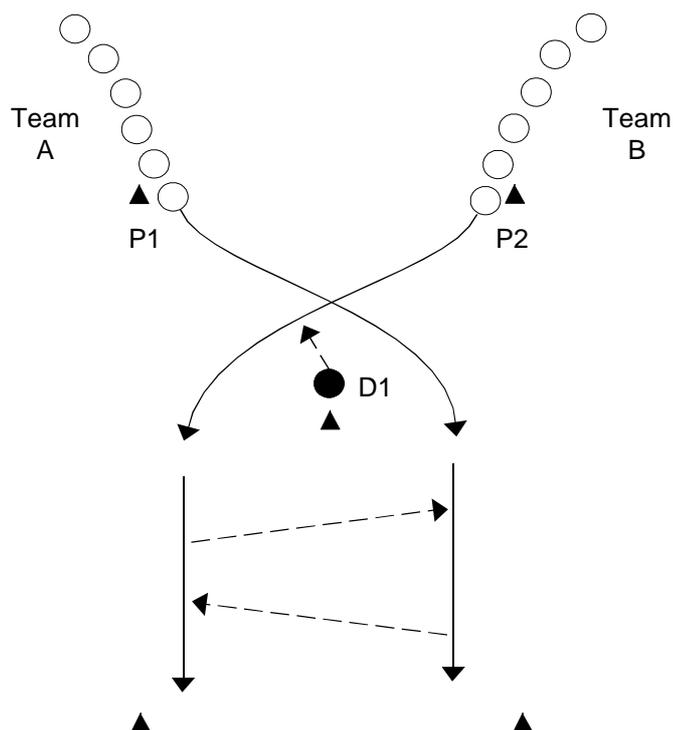
So what I am saying here is that depending on your ability as a coach to analyse and try to keep an 'eye' on the 'outside' influences of these two teams you must also have a strong disciplined executive committie, and if your club is big enough an 'Experienced' Coaching Co-ordinator.

And don't forget little 'Jonnies' Mum and Dad or the Mum or Dad which in my view is where you have to look first because if Jonnys mum and dad are happy then usually the whole team is happy, and results start to come good.

Les



Passing and Receiving (1)



Set Up

- 6 balls, 10 hats, 12 players

The Drill (2 players)

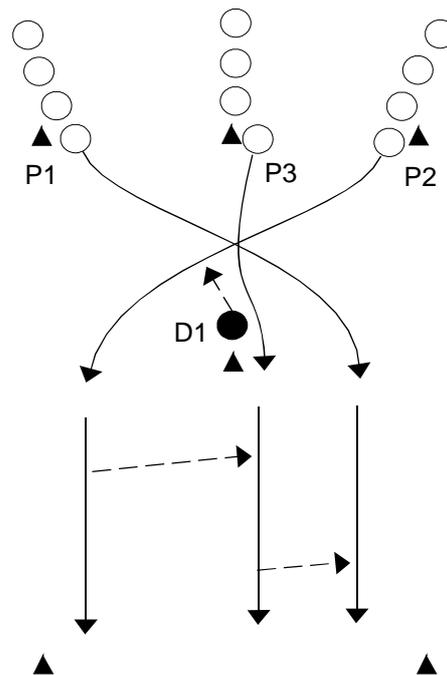
- Players divide into two equal teams
- All players in Team (A) have a ball
- The drill commences when P1 passes the ball to D1
- P1 and P2 then run out and cross each other (P1 always goes first)
- D1 passes the ball to P2
- Within the next 10 metres P2 must throw an onside pass to P1 and P1 must return the pass to P2.

Coaching Points

- Technique correction, balance of runners, quick hands, timing, methods of release and reaction.

The next 3 drills are progressions of this drill.

Passing and Receiving (2)



Set Up

- 4 balls, 6 hats, 12 players

The Drill (3 Players - Progression)

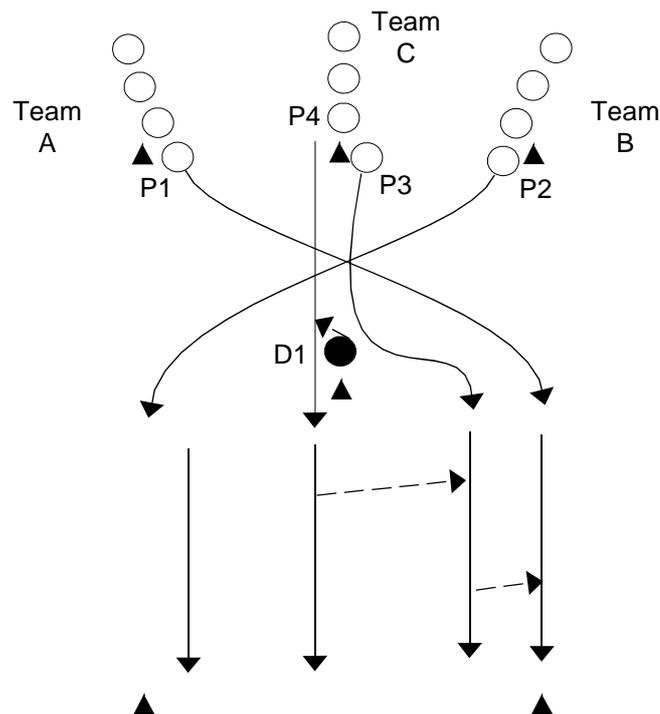
- Players divide into three equal teams
- All players in Team (B) have a ball
- The drill commences when P2 passes the ball to D1
- P1 and P2 then run out and cross each other (P2 always goes first)
- D1 passes the ball to P1, P3 trails behind
- P3 run to the right of D1 and joins the line between P1 and P2
- Within the next 15 metres at least two onside passes must be completed between the players

Coaching Points

- Technique correction, balance of runners, quick hands, timing, methods of release and reaction.

The next drill is a progressions of this drill.

Passing and Receiving (3)



Set Up

- 4 balls, 6 hats, 12 players

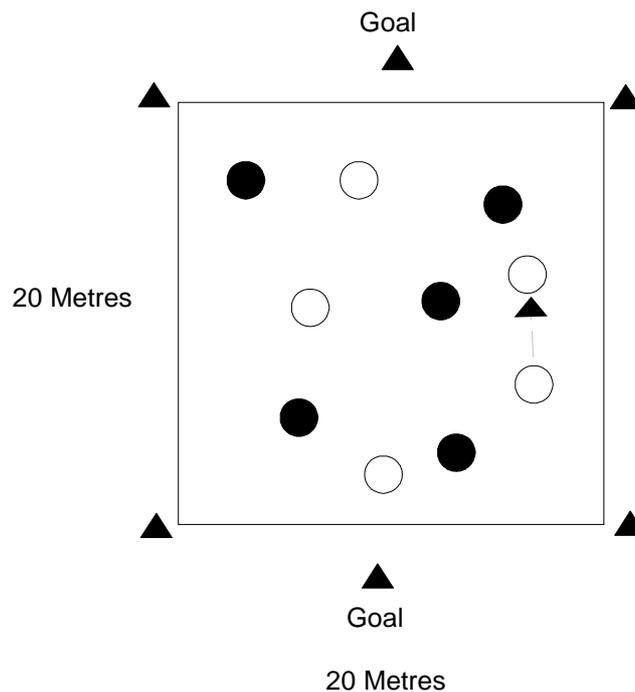
The Drill (4 Players - Progression)

- Players divide into three equal teams
- All players in Team (B) have a ball
- The drill commences when P2 passes the ball to D1
- P1 and P2 then run out and cross each other (P2 always goes first)
- P1 and P2 run through and continue wide, P3 and P4 trail behind
- P3 runs to D1 then cuts to the left
- P4 runs straight and receives either a pass or hand off from D1
- Within the next 15 metres at least two onside passes must be completed between the players

Coaching Points

- Technique correction, balance of runners, quick hands, timing, methods of release and reaction.

League Basketball



Set Up

- Two equal teams, 6 hats, 1 ball

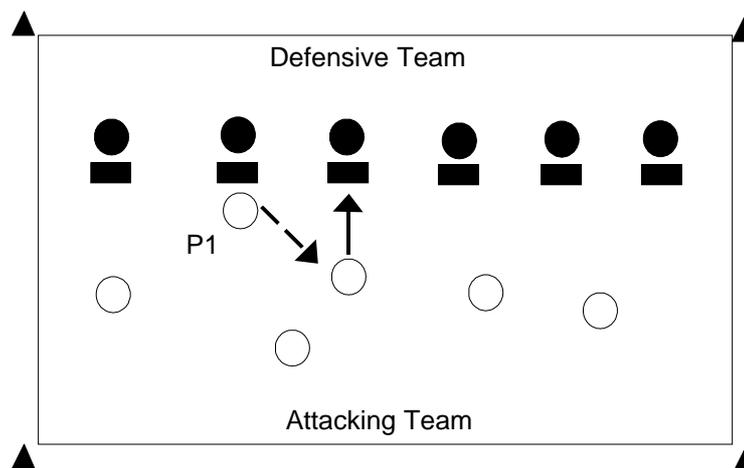
The Drill

- Set up a 20m x 20m grid
- General basketball rules apply
- Players are only allowed to take one step after catching the ball
- Players score by hitting the witches hat with the ball

Variation

- Create your own rules
 - two handed passes only
 - one handed passes only
 - nominate players to use different off-loads

Bump and Unload



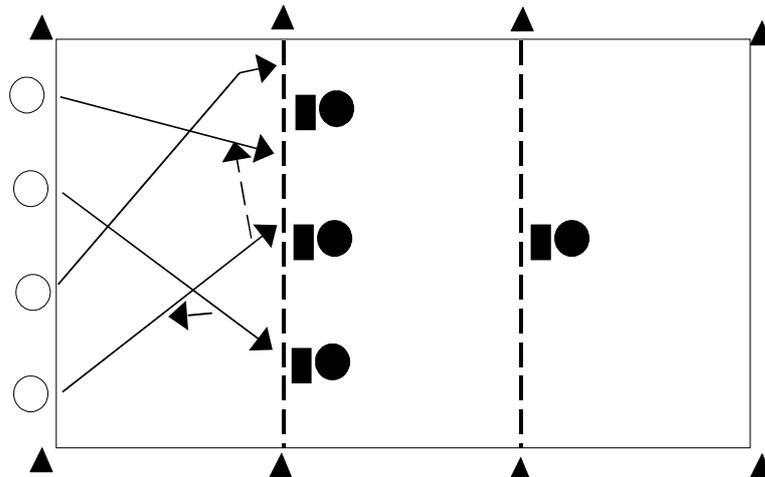
Set Up

- 1 ball, 4 hats, 12 players
- Attacking team attempts to push through the defence and score a try

The Drill

- Players divide into two equal teams
- P1 starts the drill by running at and making contact with a defender
- P1 must offload in a controlled manner to a support player who then runs at another defender
- The attacking team may push through the line if the defence allows, but must off-load to support and then score a try
- The defensive line must stay in a line in front of the football
- Once a try has been scored, play goes back the other way and the attacking team attempt to score at the other end.
- Play continues for a set time
- Knock-ons, forward passes or being forced into touch incur penalties (e.g. push ups, sit ups) for the whole team which reduces their time to score

4 v 3 v 1

**Set Up**

- 1 ball, 8 hats, 8 players

The Drill

- The drill commences with 4 attacking players on the start line
- 3 defending players holding tackle pads are positioned 5 metres back as the first line of defence
- Another player can be introduced as the second line of defence another 5 metres back
- The defenders can only move sideways of the defensive line and not back and forth
- The attacking players are given 30 seconds to create a play using evasion skills that will allow a ball carrier to beat the first and second lines of defence
- If a ball carrier is caught by the defender the attacking team must restart and try again
- Emphasis should be on using evasion skills, communication, back up and timing of pass

Eights

A TRAINING GAME

The international laws of the game apply subject to the following modifications:-

1. 8 per side - 3 forwards, 1 half back and 4 backs. 10 per side if reserves are to be used.
2. Game is played over 2 X 15 minute halves with a 3 minute break between.
3. Unlimited replacement applies if a team of 9 or 10 is used, but only during stoppages in play. All 9 or 10 players of the team must play the equivalent of one half a game (minimum).
4. Game is played across the full sized field between the half way and the goal line. Touch lines of the full sized field are the goal lines of the "Eights" field.
5. The game is one of 4 "tackles". Tackles are made by 'simultaneous two hand touches'. Once tackled, the player must play the ball. At the end of the 4th tackle the ball is turned over and the opposition recommences play with a play the ball.
6. At the play the ball:-
 - (a) No Markers are allowed
 - (b) The ball must be played backwards
 - (c) The dummy half may either pass the ball or run. If he runs and doesn't score, then he must "turn the ball over" if tackled.
7. Scrums consist of 3 players only. They are packed only when:-
 - (a) A player runs (or is forced) into touch.
 - (b) A double knock on occurs.
 - (c) A player is held up in a "hold" tackle over his opponents goal line.
 - (d) An opposition player touches the ball before it crosses the touch line after a penalty kick.
8. Tries are scored in the normal fashion. There are no kicks at goal.
9. Only grubber kicks are allowed in open play, the game is designed to maximise the running and passing aspects of the game. Grubber kicks may be regarded as "passes".
10. At starts of play all distances are halved except for scrums, which are still to be set 10 metres "in". E.g. At kick-off the ball needs to travel only 5 metres and not 10 metres as in international laws.

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