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COACH TALK



Mal Meninga - Canberra Raiders Head Coach

RLCM Your transition from player to coach was quick. How did you handle that? Was the transition hard?

MM I always had faith in my ability to make the transition but I knew it was going to be difficult, but not as difficult as it turned out. I came to a club in a time when the game was going through some turmoil. I found that difficult and I think a few of the players found it difficult to make the transition from semi professional to professional Rugby League. It is about three years down the track, and I have started to get on top of things. I guess towards the end of last year and as seen in my performance this year, I'm on the right path, but it has been a long and traumatic, sometimes tragic path.

RLCM How do you use game related skills? Is it a large part of your coaching?

MM It is a very important part of the game, and a mix of a lot of things. The groundwork is the most important part of players' skill development. You have to be very creative with your skills sessions, if you keep the boys interested and occupied then sessions become more enjoyable. We have separate skills sessions for the backs and forwards, as well as additional skills session. It is important you get the mix of what you do. For instance you'll do the team as a whole and then do positional, individual, the back three, centres and five eighth. It is also important to work with your back rows, as they work with the back line and need to mix in.

RLCM How do you get the best out of your players each week?

MM You rely a lot on preparation, you rely a lot on the feedback you give to players to improve their game, and you rely a fair bit on the feedback you give to the team to improve the overall performance of their football. Your preparation has to be fairly intense, and has to be specific to the game that week and all the things that need improving from the week before. Obviously, you need to play with their minds a little bit and try and help their mental preparation. It is difficult week to week, and we set ourselves some standards where we play good, very good or excellent.

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RLCM Sometimes individual players don't mentally prepare for a game, is that the reason for the big scores lately?

MM All the teams are fairly equal on paper, training methods are very similar and the coaching methods are similar. You have got 17 guys running around a football paddock, but you may have two guys that haven't come to play, that makes it difficult. We need the whole team performing really well and doing things together. If you can get a roll on, you can be extremely ruthless with the momentum, and with that momentum the opposition will struggle.

RLCM How do you work on the players' 'off the ball' skills, and make them aware of where they are and what they are doing in a game?

MM I think it's important a player knows what they're doing 'off the ball' whether it is support player, decoy work, movement, or shutting the gate. If you perform the 'off the ball' skills well you can hurt the opposition. It is easy nowadays to show the players through statistics and through video analysis where they are 'off the ball.'

RLCM What are your thoughts on captaincy? Do you go along with the Australian Rules philosophy where most of the clubs use co-captains?

MM I think in our case, we have got Laurie Daley who is our captain and does a wonderful job in that role. David Furner is our forward leader and he does a great job as well, but from our point of view Daley is a stand out captain and he wants the job. So we are very lucky. There could be a case like Parramatta however, where there is no stand out leader, you might have a couple of players that do a really good job. With the interchange rule if you have a forward as the captain for example, he is going to come off at some stage and you need someone else to take over.

RLCM Do you tend to use more forwards on your bench?

MM Definitely, they are doing all the work in the middle of the park, particularly the front rowers. Under the ten-metre rule you have got to be fairly mobile and fit, and some of our bigger guys struggle with it and you have to keep them going.

The players need to be told how well they are going, how poorly they are going, they need to understand what they need to do to improve their game, whether it is mentally or physically.

RLCM How important are impulse or reactionary players?

MM Very much so, but also very important are good all around players. I mean Laurie Daley is a really good example to that end. He can be a game breaker with a football but I don't think there is any better defensive player in the game, and he has got a kicking game as well. He is a real integral part of our machine. We have got a couple of young kids now who are impulse players but they are getting better because they are becoming all round players. They can run the football and also tackle and kick. Simon Woolford our hooker is another all round player. He has got good speed out of dummy half, he has got a kicking game, and he can also tackle. If a player can run, tackle, and kick I think that is a really good way of judging a player's ability. I think you have got to have good vision to, an aspect of training the players is that they have got to be able to read a situation when it does arise. I would like to think that my centres and my full back are the eyes of the football side and are able to read a situation when opportunities arise. It is ideal to have guys with vision, and good communication right across the paddock, so that opportunities are taken.

RLCM Do you find 'the footballer' is more skilful now at all?

MM Yes and no, some players are robots and will do a very good job for you, and some guys are skilful. It is going to sound like sour grapes but I think that the skill has gone out of the centres. I think that we have got to get back to junior league and through the grades, so you can come to First Grade and know

how to draw players and kick a football. At the moment we have got some very steady defenders, but not a lot of creative centres in the game.

RLCM The statistics showed Canberra was down on its defence last year, now you have turned that around. How do you work with the players to improve defensively?

MM We had the same philosophy last year and we have just improved on that. We improve our thinking on how to defend better and the simple solution was to do it together. You can't solve problems by yourself nowadays, you can't come out of the line to try and solve problems. You have got to keep hanging in together and doing it together. If you do it together teammates can help you. We have got a different strategy coming off our line and when we are in the middle of the park, and line speeds are an important part of that. We have worked pretty hard on it and have come up with some solutions for up and down the paddock. It is not hard, the simple solution is do it together.

RLCM Do you get a chance to look at the kids coming through your development program?

MM Kids that we think may play in First Division or our senior grades will come and train with us in the off season. We have club sessions as much as we can during the week with the kids, and we have optional extras as well during the week for kids to come along and hone their skills.

RLCM What do you look for in young players?

MM I think it varies. I like to think that we look at mobility and ball skills, but I think the most important aspect is attitude. If you haven't got the right attitude, it is going to take a younger player a long time to turn it around. Upbringing becomes an important part of that. During recruitment you see what Mum and Dad are like, and all sorts of things about how the player reacts.

RLCM What advice would you give to coaches coming into the game?

MM If I had my time over again I would have asked the club to give me a couple of years in the lower grades to develop my coaching philosophy, and to develop my thinking about how I want my players to play Rugby League. So I think you've just got to get the experience before you dive in the deep end.

RLCM Second Phase Play is an important part of the game now. How do you work that into your training drills?

MM Support play, attacking the inside shoulder, ruck work, I think you have got to work a bit wider of the play the ball so you can attack the edges. We encourage it all the time, when you do it at training it is done with intensity, under game situations.

RLCM Is there any reason why you don't have a psychologist?

MM We had one last year and it worked very well, but I had a chat to the players at the end of last year about attitudes. Their attitudes have been tremendous this year and because of that I felt there was no reason to employ someone full time. If we do need it, we will send the players along to part timers. We have got a lot of experience in our coaching ranks to help players get through week to week, and I think the players realistically prefer to talk to the coaches about things. Players are naturally inquisitive this day and age, and they need constant feedback. The players need to be told how well they are going, how poorly they are going, they need to understand what they need to do to improve their game, whether it is mentally or physically. I guess Wayne Bennett was my mentor with that aspect of Rugby League. Under him, I knew that if my game was down I had to work on the things that were letting me down, and funnily enough by working on those areas my entire game improved.

RLCM What are your thoughts on bench coaching as opposed to watching from the grandstand?

MM I think it is a good idea, I mix it up if I possibly can. I think you have got to have a general perspective on how the game is going but you need to get down to the touch line and see how the players are

thinking. From the side line you can hear them talking and see what type of things they are talking about. If there is little talk, you know there is a problem, and you need to send someone out on the field that is going to try and gee them up. It gives you a general feel on how the guys are thinking and reacting to the football game and I use both methods, which is probably the most suitable situation.

RLCM When you are looking at replacing a player? Are you looking at his defensive effort?

MM No, we are looking at their body language, looking at whether they can retreat and get off the line to help others or whether they're slow to retreat and becoming ineffective. We look to see whether they are walking, not shutting the gate, not going across, not covering the inside, not working from marker, not involved in the kick chase, or not getting back to help us get out of the red zone. There are a lot of things that come into play when making a decision on which player you need to replace.

RLCM Can you see squads becoming larger so that you can rest your best players?

MM Yes I can. I don't know whether it is good or not for the game. If you are going to go 26 rounds and play the 10-metre rule, there are going to be times where you may have to rest players. So you need a deeper squad. I believe around 30 is probably a good number, maybe 35 to get through a year. I think you need to have more players than 25, because you have to be very lucky to get through a season with only 25 players.

NOTES

TRAINING

SPEED - AGILITY - STRENGTH - POWER



ASHLEY JONES
Strength and Conditioning Coach
Northern Eagles RLFC

Written by Robert Rachow

Ashley Jones has travelled a career path that has taken him on a journey via Newcastle and Parramatta, eventually leading to the newly - merged Northern Eagles. Just like his career path he believes an eclectic multi facet approach to training is important.

In Jones' book, the basics are the essentials. If you cover all your bases and 'don't shirk the work', then the season should be fine sailing. Whatever you put into the tank prior to Christmas you draw on in September.

A typical week for the Eagles resembles something like this:

First day after recovery: Maximal velocity session incorporating game conditioning exercises and, drills incorporating agility.

Second day: Functional athletic strength training session looking at total body strength and power.

Third day: Extras or rest. The extras sessions are for those with below par fitness or for players seeking specialised training for a particular area such as tackling or kicking.

Fourth day: Short sharp speed session after skills.

Obviously, for non-professional outfits in suburbia and rural regions, such a program would be impractical. However Jones says teams with limited time together can condense the five major elements - speed, power, agility, ball work and endurance - into their desired number of sessions through the use of modified games. The underlying theme is that when compacting the various elements, the full spectrum of skills should be maintained. And within each of those skills, a full array of components must be covered.

For instance, a gym session would only cover one-fifth of the week's training, but that session in itself should be as comprehensive as possible. The logic is to balance out all the individual capabilities into one overall complete package. An example of an overall

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workout could be - three leg exercises (one Olympic movement, one squat and one hamstring exercise), one lower back activity, two upper body pulling exercises, one upper body pushing exercise, grip work, and abdominals. Even then, within each activity it can be broken down further. Leg squats alone can be performed by explosive Olympic squats, back squat, front squat and/or one-legged squat, just to name a few.

"Basically I believe that what ever you don't use, you lose," Jones states.

"When you get in the gym - or even out on the track - you should be looking to cover everything; move through all the movements. Maintaining overall strength and fitness is the key, not just concentrating on one area until it is super special.

When it comes to testing the fitness level of players, Jones is again a fan of sticking to the basics. His simple endurance test is a 2.4 kilometre course, with timed goals for each player with the beep test during the season more specific because of the shuttle nature of the test. However, for more specific information he recommends timing players over a variety of distances such as 100 metres, 400m and one kilometre in order to judge each energy system relationship.

This enables you to judge the metres covered per second or velocity(distance divided by time). Some players may register very low speeds over the shorter distance, but be able to maintain fairly high velocity over the longer target, or vice-versa. This then allows you to target a specific element of their running that needs improvement.

In terms of power output, most players these days can claim to bench press in excess of 140kg. Many can go higher than 180kg. Other tests such as power clean and squat will reveal similarly startling figures. But to set a standard weight target that is applied across the board would be fraught with folly, says Jones.

"Fitness tests are like everything else in your training regime, they should be open to variation and be positional specific," Jones warns.

"Setting generic tests and goals that are cast in stone is of no value to anybody. A veteran player who has been battered and thrown around won't be able to perform at the same level as most of your squad. It is a fact of life that his impairment will stop him from reaching that target. Similarly another player might not push himself to his fullest capacity if the generic goal is too low. This is a reason I'm a fan of Billy

Johnstone's ideas of putting players into various training groups particularly in the off season.

"In the weights room, your middle men should be concentrating on strength in the area surrounding the torso, e.g. bench and power clean. The outside men, on the other hand, should be focusing on strength above their shoulders for things like catching high balls, e.g. push press and power snatch. Squats are a given for both groups. In essence, fitness tests should cater for the needs of the individual and take outside factors into consideration."

Another hugely important test for a game such as Rugby League is calculating a player's maximum momentum. Momentum (velocity multiplied by mass) is the single greatest factor at the point of impact with the defensive line.

"Recovery elements are essential, especially at the business end of the season"

Calculating this figure is imperative to the overall fitness regime of the player. A small, quick winger who increases his weight may well lose speed as a result. But when is the point to tell them to stop adding mass? It is when their momentum starts to decrease.

If a player who originally weighs 90kg and runs 9.2 metres/second bulks up by 5kg, it may do them more harm than good. Say they now run at only 8.62 metre/second. Then their momentum, and therefore impact, has decreased.

An integral part of applying that momentum is in reference to what Phil Gould labels as the player's 'work space'. While maximising the momentum of a player, it is also of benefit to think about their environment on the paddock.

"A lot of training nowadays is in reference to 'pattern running'," he says.

"By 'pattern', I mean running within specific areas, with specific speed and skill objectives. It is based on the characteristics of the individual positions and, as a conditioner, it allows you to more effectively cater for the player's on-field needs. A prop needs a more explosive, straight running style, while a back should be able to maintain speed over a set distance and have the ability to run around objects quickly. The concept isn't really new to Rugby League, but it is becoming more specified as we learn more and more from sports like the NFL.

"Running styles can be adapted also. An activity like pulling weights on a sled performs two functions. Not only does it give the player a specific strength workout,

but it also teaches them to drive with their legs and run in an inclined position. You don't want your players to run upright because they'll get smashed and driven back. When you do an activity like sleds, you should vary the weight used over different distances, we sometimes work up to 80% of a player's body mass. Other non-football sports only use around 5-10 per cent of the athlete's mass, because they want to maintain upright running and not alter running technique."

Jones is not a great believer in periodisation techniques. For a competition such as the NRL, it is almost impossible to develop a team charter. With a squad of 25-35 players to consider, it would be a miracle to have all team members primed at the same level consistently throughout an entire season. Essentially, periodisation works best for individual sportspeople aiming towards a clear goal such as the

Olympics. But the week-to-week contest of League and the physical battering players take inevitably throws any set plans out of whack.

However the experienced conditioner says there are some merits to period planning, and at the Eagles he incorporates a 'three up, one down' system. For three weeks of a month the team is in the loading phase of their fitness cycle, building and bettering their physical capabilities. But on the fourth week the team trains lighter than usual to give their bodies time to refresh. It is much the same theory as when a crop field is left to fallow.

Another area where prior planning can be a bonus is in the department of rest and recovery. Although Australia still trails British soccer in the practice of rotating squad members (regardless of injury) to give each player a guaranteed rest, recovery remains a crucial factor in the NRL title race. The onset of rationalisation and subsequent intensity of matches means correctly balancing the health of a squad will be even more valuable than in the past.

"Recovery elements are essential, especially at the business end of the season," Jones reveals.

"You only have to look at last season to realise that. St George-Illawarra handled their players brilliantly. They timed their run to perfection and I was told that at least two or three Dragons players did personal bests in the gym leading up the Grand Final. In terms of confidence and the credibility of your fitness program, that is just amazing. The team that best manages their recovery and player depth will ultimately win the NRL this year."

Create *an ethos in your club*



GREG PIERCE - Sharks Football Club Operations Manager

Written by Gary Roberts

We often hear about the perennial performers - clubs rarely submerged in inner turmoil and failure through on field performance. Canterbury, Manly and St George were such clubs, and more recently Brisbane, Canberra, Melbourne and Cronulla have forged similar standards, laying the platform for a successful club infrastructure. Traditionally, a successful club is gauged by the players it has on its roster, rather than the culture seeping through its walls. Greg Pierce, assistant coach of the Cronulla Sharks believes the standards set by any club are important, particularly those of the head coach in building an ethos for a club. "The coaches at successful clubs play a big part in the club's culture, by the formation of a coaching structure that brings information and successful coaching techniques to the coaching staff and to the players," Pierce said.

While Cronulla was a proud club before Lang's arrival, Pierce believes the general atmosphere of the club has been fine tuned. "We were never expected to win the Premiership," he said. "Now the fans expect us to be more and more successful." He attributes the club's newfound success to Lang's rigorous work ethic, strong desire for success and a proven training regime. As Pierce explains, a coach's role is essentially to lead from the front and focus the team's objectives. "A coach has to show the players that he and his staff are prepared to work hard to achieve results," he said.

Pierce says it is imperative coaches are always available to players at training and for one on one meetings. "Players that are really training hard and doing all the things that are asked of them will be disheartened if they go to see the coach, and discover he is off playing golf or fishing," Pierce said.

We don't vary our skills much at all and we work on minimal number of very game specific drills but we aim for 100% efficiency on the drills that we are doing.

It has taken a long time for Cronulla to be recognised as a formidable and consistent Rugby League unit, capable of beating top sides consistently. Pierce believes the transformation of the Cronulla club is a direct result of John Lang, and the 'successful culture' he has brought into the club. Since his appointment as head coach in 1994, Cronulla has appeared in all but two final series, with the 1997 Super League Grand Final appearance being the pinnacle of the Sharks' success. "Seven years ago when John Lang took over at Cronulla, the club was going through a stage where the team would win a lot of games at home, but wasn't consistent away from home," Pierce said. "The Club could never maintain a high level of consistency, and apart from the two years they made the finals, Cronulla were an inconsistent club."

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"Whenever the players come to training John or one of his staff will be there. If two sessions are on at the one time and he can't be at both, he will make sure one of his assistants is at the other." Pierce believes it is important that the players feel the coaching staff are putting in as much effort as they are. "It creates an ethos, and the players realise they are not the only ones doing the work," he said.

Currently running seventh, and only four points adrift of second place, Pierce says the players are far from satisfied with their early season form, a trait he believes was less evident in the Sharks' sides of yesteryear. "Players in the past were quite happy to go along and be a middle of the road type of club, a club that never finished at the bottom, never finished at the top, and occasionally caused a few upsets along the way" he said. "That has changed, and the new ethos has evolved with John Lang being at the club."

As Pierce explains, Lang has instilled high expectations in the players - expectations he doubts were in place before Lang's arrival. "When John came to the club I think the players didn't have the goals and high expectations of themselves that they have today," he said. To highlight the devotion of Cronulla's players, Pierce cites the example of training, and how rare it is for players to be late. In the odd occasion a player is late: "They make a donation into our players fund, it might be \$20, there is never a need to have that \$1000 fine or drop a player for a game," he said. "I think it is a mutual respect thing. John has a respect for the players as people and the players have respect for John, and therefore they are on time for work."

Lang also promotes success through the careful selection of his coaching staff. As Pierce outlines, Lang is a stern believer in his staff specialising in what they do. "John oversees the whole operation, but he lets everyone do their job that they are assigned too," he said. Pierce feels employing specialists increases harmony within the club, as coaches are less likely to 'step on each other's toes.' Lang uses the services of a full time assistant coach, strength and conditioning coach, head trainer and skills coach. Each of Cronulla's coaching staff is responsible for different areas of the players' preparation. As Pierce explains, Lang endorses the use of a variety of coaches to enable his players to seek a different perspective on the game.

"When players are doing a drill session or doing a weight session, John allows the coach in charge to run that particular activity," he said. "The Sharks do 11 sessions a week. John has them for five of those sessions, Paul Watson in strength and conditioning, Steve Milne in rehabilitation and myself in skills and games also put them through sessions... So a variety of specialised coaching in techniques of the game is needed."

John Lang's reign as Cronulla's coach has coincided with the club's most successful on-field period. In seven years at the Sharks Lang has instilled a winning ethos, which has flowed through all levels of the club. Perhaps the best summation of Cronulla's transformation is their fans. Instead of worrying about whether Cronulla will win, the fans worry about how big the margin will be in the Sharks' favour.

DRILLS



Game related drills are an essential component of a coach's armour. However, having too many skills at your disposal can be a hindrance. While it is important to amuse players with a variety of drills, players need time to learn drills and hone their skills accordingly.

Greg Pierce explains this concept further:

I learnt a valuable lesson as coach of an Under 13's team some years ago. I was a coach who had every skill's manual available. In my 20-week season I never did the same skill twice. I'd go to training and I would give them up to three new drills every night, and I thought I was doing a super job. Well, looking back now it was probably the worst thing that I could have done with those kids. They were only 12 or 13 and they weren't learning anything. They were spending all their time trying to learn the drill, trying to understand the drill. They would learn it one night, and the next night I'd come with three more. I thought I was providing variety and the kids were having a great time. In actual fact, it was like going to school again (for the kids).

At the Sharks we have some variety in our warm up activities and thus we don't vary our skills much at all. We've changed our warm-ups this year to be more skill orientated, aiming for 100% efficiency on the drills that we are doing. We begin at an introductory stage, and at the end we are doing them at a very highly competitive pace and there is competition between the players, trying to simulate game situations.

The lesson for coaches at all levels is not to make drills overly complicated. Enable time for young players to familiarise themselves with a drill and as Pierce explains, repetition is an effective way to improve a player's overall skill development.

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The Specifics of Planning



BRIAN CANAVAN - Sydney Roosters Football Manager

Written by Gary Roberts

Brian Canavan is currently Football Manager at the Sydney Roosters. Previously Brian's experience has been as a Coaching and Development Manager (Brisbane Broncos and Queensland Rugby League), Strength and Conditioning Coach (Brisbane Broncos and Queensland State of Origin), and Assistant Coach (Cronulla and Sydney Roosters).

Effective planning can help coaches and clubs, enabling them to get the best out of their players and themselves. Brian Canavan, Sydney Roosters Football Manager, applies a unique analogy to explain the importance of planning. "Planning gets you on the road," he said. "The road might have six lanes in it and you will have to change lanes every now and again but do not change the direction of your destination, as remaining on your planned track will assist in your all round success as a coach."

Following are excerpts of suggestions he puts forward to educate and assist coaches with their planning:

PLAN ASSISTANTS

Coaches have strengths and weaknesses, maybe you have a background in strength and conditioning, and you are not so strong in skills or vice versa. So, if you want to be successful as a coach, identify your weaknesses, improve your knowledge, and enlist support staff in those areas. There are always people who will help.

PLAN SPECIFICITY

The principles relating to physical fitness components and development of these are specificity, progression and revision. Plan to make drills/activities/games as specific as you can. Obviously there has to be generalised training in the pre-season block.

PLAN PROGRESSION OF DRILLS

How often do you progress your drills, fitness, skills and games? How long do you stay with them? Your group could be an advanced group enabling rapid advancement or it could be an inexperienced group, which means you have to advance very slowly and with caution. A general rule is to stay with a drill for two to three weeks, allowing players time to adapt and progress, and then move on. Keep it simple so

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that your players can learn at their own rate. You don't have to over-coach, because the majority of players will advance by themselves through experience.

PLAN REVISION, COMPREHENSION AND RETENTION

Consider the comprehension and retention rate of your players. You might deliver a drill and start feeling quite confident. But players learn from experience. What is taught to a player on day one, may not be retained for game day. It may not be retained in two or three weeks time. Constant revision of the drill is

If you can start to plan and reach goals that you have set for your players and yourself then you are on your way to becoming a better coach.

the key to this retention, so you have got to plan for that reinforcement. Recording statistics will show you their retention rate and progression.

PLAN YOUR GOALS

In order for goals to be of value, they must be stated quantitatively and they must be measurable. Goals can be planned for individual training sessions, blocks of time in the season (eg 4 weeks), and for the longer term. When asked about season goals, everybody in team sports will say that they want to reach the finals. But if you are appointed as coach of a 'cellar dwelling' team perhaps your goal might be: 'Over a 20 week season I want to ensure we win 8 games, anything

else is a bonus.’ Establish goals and plan how you are going to reach them.

Plan what your goals are going to be in blocks of time - gain input from your players.

Plan a training description. i.e. progression

Plan how you are going to monitor it. i.e. statistics

Plan their training drills and performance expectations:

Eg: • Play the ball time

- How to teach your players to score from kicks

- How to teach your players to defuse bombs

PLAN COACH FEEDBACK

A valuable exercise is to gather outside feedback. Have a knowledgeable person (possibly an ex player or coach) who doesn't address the players, but advises you in a one on one situation. He doesn't have to be at training, a phone call once a week may be enough.

This is worthwhile because not all former players make great 'people' coaches, but they know the game and have game experience. Because former players may not progress into the coaching world it doesn't mean they can't give feedback.

PLAN COACH MEETINGS

Plan coaches meetings. Formalise them and you will get far greater productivity and effectiveness from your coaches.

PLAN VIDEO ANALYSIS

View the video of the game yourself, and add to your knowledge of your team's performance and your game statistics. For your players, edit the game rather than show the full tape.

PLAN PLAYER INTERVIEWS

Player interviews are highly recommended. There are different ways of interviewing players, one is a pre-season player audit [see graphic]. Players rate themselves privately, then you as coach rate them on the same items. Discuss the comparisons and results with the player which will yield useful feedback for both you and the player.

PLAN PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT BUT BE REALISTIC

Psychological development covers concentration, competitiveness, mental toughness, desire and focus. These are worked on daily at home, at work and in relationships. But as you may only get two hours with your players two or three times a week, you cannot change a great deal in that short time period. Their peers, their family, their school will influence them.

Just because a former player hasn't developed into the coaching world doesn't mean he can't give feedback.

So be realistic in what changes you are going to bring about in such a short time period. Stay with the education of these traits for the long haul. Direct significant people in your player's lives to assist, reinforce and redirect them in this area.

Other planning issues - 'away' games and tours.

1. GENERAL RESEARCH

Do some research prior to the game, look at the climate, the facilities, the training venues and the playing venue.

2. PLAYING ARENA

Inspect the playing arena. Check the facilities warm up area, the size of the dressing rooms, location of the medical room, enquire about the crowd -(are they going to be a parochial, intimidating crowd?)

3. MEDICAL

What is the medical support at the game? Where is the nearest hospital, X-ray clinic, ambulance, transport?

If players are injured and unable to travel with the team, what arrangements do you have to get the player home? If a player suffers concussion, is it safe for the player to travel?

4. PLANNING TO PLAY IN THE HEAT

Coaches who do not address the heat could be negligent. To accommodate players in hot conditions coaching staff should plan for plentiful supplies of water.

Water breaks at the 20-minute mark in games and at training is imperative. Players should consume at least 250ml of water at each break. It is not satisfactory to simply pour water down the back of player's necks, it must be swallowed by them.

When players come off for a break, place ice packs on the major circulatory spots which are the groin, the arm pits, the back of the neck, as this will assist in cooling.

5. ACCOMODATION

- Room arrangements - made prior to travel
- plan for compatability
- between room mates
- physical location of the
- rooms e.g. proximity to others, team
- room, dining room
- Meals - plan for appropriate eating
- times - send dietary requirements
- prior to arrival
- remove mini bars, but leave
- water bottles

6. PLANNING TRAVEL

There are some very important details if you are planning to travel, whether it is air travel interstate, overseas or bus travel to another town for your team.

• FLIGHT TIMES

Plan for time differences for overseas games/tours. The effect on sleep and bodily functions needs planning and education, particularly if you have to play a couple of days after arrival. N.B. Ask the airline to stock more water than normal for the flight to reduce dehydration.

• AIRPORT CONSIDERATIONS

Is someone going to meet you at the airport? Has the bus been confirmed? Do you have a contact if the bus does not arrive, breaks down or is late?

• FOOD

Food and water consumption will be different when travelling overseas. Seek advice from a dietician and educate the players before departure.

• TOUR SELECTIONS

If you are on tour and you are a representative team, handling selection issues is important. Confirm your selectors, consider the team manager, medical person. Include them as part of the ‘selections’ group. Remember someone is always going to miss out on selections to plan for some counselling time.

• MEDICAL

Your club’s medical specialists will assist in locating medical staff in the host city. Plan specific times for medical treatment during the day in order to decrease interruptions to training and have consideration for medical staff.

It must be stressed that you as coach must plan thoroughly before departing for away games or tours. Consult other experienced people to assist in your planning.

If you can start to plan and reach goals that you have set for your players and yourself then you are on your way to becoming a better coach

NOTES

PLAYER AUDIT

NAME:

Players are to rate themselves from 1 to 10, Ten being the highest. Give both a fair but realistic answer to receive full benefit from the player audit.

TECHNICAL PROFILE

Passing

Catching

Kicking

Speed of the Play the Ball

Advantage Line Running

Hit and Spin

Drawing the Man

PHYSICAL PROFILE

Endurance

Strength

Speed

Power

Flexibility

ATTITUDE

General Health

Coachability

Personal Skills

Nutrition

Injury Rehab

Committment

ORGANISATION

Lifestyle Plan

Football Career Plan

Work Career Plan

List 3 aspects which you think you could do more work on, or things you would like to see change.

1.
2.
3.

Assessing the Behaviour and Performance of the Rugby League Player



BY STEVE ANDERSON
Assistant Coach Melbourne Storm

Recap

In the first section of this three part programme the performance monitors and player evaluations dealt with how the player responded to specific areas of fitness. The primary focus and uses of the observational data assists the coaching staff to isolate components of the players physical deficiencies with the intention to improve through programmed goal setting. The areas measured covers responses to flexibility; strength; power; diet; endurance; speed and injury management.

Part two of the discussion covered areas of group work and team dynamics where measures are used to gauge the players ability to adjust to specific demands in the training environment. Areas which are evaluated include: group work; game plan; encouragement; organisation; skill; concentration and timing. These areas of observational evaluation have a significant influence on how the player develops in terms of combining skills and the ability to use those skills in various team situations. The data obtained from this area, as an example, can assist the young inexperienced player to hone and develop maturity in decision making processes, to the experienced player understanding that his game is never complete in terms of focus, concentration or responses in demanding areas of his game.

The final area for discussion deals specifically with attitude where evaluations are discussed in terms of negativity; pressure; discipline; aggression and coach-player relations. Although this area requires close scrutiny and a qualified professional to interpret the findings with regard to purpose and function, there are more simplified versions which can easily provide material for specific uses. Throughout this section I will discuss the various uses and methods of evaluation and how to implement the findings to further develop

the individual. Each area will be discussed briefly to display the various benefits of the information but more importantly why such information is necessary when dealing with professional athletes.

1. Negativity

Professional athletes irrespective of the personality of the individual will unfortunately cross this ground in some form or manner in the various stages of his career - our job as coaches is to identify, monitor and offer the player the various means to detect and convert such responses into positive forms.

So what is negativity? In the terms and environment I am discussing, it can mean various things. For example reaction to instruction in the training field in not only how he converts the instructions to activity but the behaviour and responses. This means any adverse behaviour to training components needs to be recognised and recorded so that the player understands that negative responses can cause error. This needs to be translated in simple terms - in particular how it will affect his game performance. Personally I consider this area as one of the most important observational evaluations, conducted purely because of the significance negative reactions can have on the individual in both training and game situations.

2. Pressure

Two questions readily come to mind which can challenge the coaching staff in approaching this process. Although the relevance of pressure and how the player handles such situations are obvious, measuring and formatting relevant processes are not. The central theme to performance monitors and their applications need to be revisited to provide the necessary mechanics for the training environment. Simple questions such as "Why do I require to know how the player deals with pressure?" and "How best

do I programme observational measures and applications in the training environment”? These questions should trigger the basic ‘tools’ in setting down relevant drills in specific game oriented situations. Recording responses, reactions and outcomes should form the basis of your measures.

3. Discipline

Without discipline in any elite sporting environment, decay of quality standards and performances would result. Coaching ‘discipline’ may seem an easy process but athletes have many ‘vices’ which reject the demands for consistency and continuity of standards in their performances. Our role is to identify and isolate those ‘vices’ not only as a component to our coaching roles but to ensure the player is firstly aware of his strengths and weaknesses in this area but to ‘coach’ the player to fully understand the significance of discipline in their routines as professional athletes.

Aggression is not to be confused with temper or violence, but more in the vigour in which he conducts and responds to his training.

One of the main tools for ‘discipline’ to grow and develop in the player is the respect coaches convey in their work including all tasks and applications in the coaching environment. Preparation and quality in work ethics and standards will provide a visible basis to the player which include the manner and expectations set down by the coaching staff in the performance of training.

Measuring performance in this area will be easy for the coach in this respect due to the standards which are a part of a well prepared coach-education of the inexperienced and ‘casual’ athlete are the real challenges in this component for obvious reasons. All areas of the training environment must become the testing field to attain a representative measure in this process as various aspects of their training applications are varied due to the likes and dislikes of the individual. Your task in measuring the observations is to draw contrasts between his applications to identify the inconsistencies in his standards. In most cases these inconsistencies are obvious particularly in the make-up of the inexperienced athlete where results should help to lift the lower performances to those that he works well in. Positive feedback is a necessary ingredient when identifying an athletes inconsistencies

toward discipline in work. Negative measures should be noted, as education is still the main theme of performance monitors, but ensure his positive approaches are not affected by the information supplied.

4. Aggression

This is not to be confused with temper or violence, but more in the vigour in which he conducts and responds to his training. The areas for observation in this application is geared toward how failure or error are received by the player - this basically means “does the player care about the outcomes of his performance?” Obvious areas where this is more prevalent is in the inexperienced professional player and the player nearing the end of his career.

The inexperienced player will often display inconsistent reaction to error due to various group pressures and it must be a focus of the training staff to

work on setting the player into the routine of training with minimal fuss. Pressure of being in a professional environment will be daunting and invariably leads to inconsistent responses to various demands of training - the coaches job is to identify those responses which aren’t consistent with the individuals make-up and help the player feel at ease with his responses to error.

A contrast to this is the experienced player who is going through the motions of training without any real emotion to his work. These are obvious responses to familiarity with his training environment and new demands and challenges should be set for the individual. Measuring ‘aggression’ must be placed into context dependant upon the various variables that are present in your group but the basic component to measuring is recording the obvious - is the player applying himself to the task?

5. Coach - Player Relations

This area of observation and measure should ideally develop over a period of time where both player and coach become more at each with each other’s individual work and personalities. Obviously success of any coaching method is dependant on the interaction

processes between the coach and his players and it is the processes which invariably require constant review. Personally, a good indication or measure of coach - player relations can be observed in the ability of the player/s to interpret and convert instructions. An invaluable tool to improving these processes is a basic review of each session noting: a) indecision b) continuity c) precision d) tension and e) conversion within the group and the activity. Diary entries and recordings in this context contrasting sessions and blocks of training sessions should be kept and reviewed with the intention of improving your own communication lines between players and the assigned activity.

Conclusions

Throughout this series of discussion I have attempted to highlight the benefits of performance monitors in the coaching environment. It should be noted that although I am professionally trained in psychology it does not require professional methodologies or research techniques to be applied - all that is needed

is an understanding to firstly the demands on professional athletes and secondly that your role as a coach demands a thorough evaluation of all aspects of the players' game.

Although it has taken me ten years to develop these processes I am still continually reviewing and evaluating the techniques incorporated in gathering, interpreting and reporting and conveying the information to the players. Because I have witnessed the benefits of measuring performance I cannot reinforce enough that the specifics of your methods must be relevant to your environment and must form the basis to your monitors.

Finally as a concluding note coaching Rugby League, at any level of the game, requires us to be mindful of the fact that we are all teachers and the basic principal of teaching is to know your material and to impart that knowledge in a method that is both practical and suitable to your environment. All that I have conveyed is one of many methods in understanding how best to isolate, evaluate and convey the information.

NOTES

Coaches Insight

Rick Stone – Burleigh Bears Coach

A bit more professionalism!

Written by Ryan Ellem

Taking on your first senior coaching role at the inexperienced age of 24 is an intimidating thought for most. Expecting to win the competition a few seasons later only compounds the problem.

But that is what Burleigh Heads coach Rick Stone did when he captain/coached Nambucca in the Group 2 competition in the early '90's.

This was Stone's first accolade in a coaching career that hit its highpoint last year when he coached the Burleigh Heads side to the Queensland Cup Premiership, rated by many as Australia's second strongest competition.

Still relatively young in coaching terms at 33, we asked Stone to share some of his thoughts on coaching and the modern game.

RLCM: Do you see the possibility of a captain/coaching role in The Queensland Cup?

Stone: Not at this stage.

With the unlimited interchange, it's just too hard. You may have a fantastic assistant, but just trying to get the best out of your players off the bench can be straining - sometimes they can think it's a bit unfair under your system.

RLCM: What do you think you have brought to the Burleigh Heads club?

Stone: I'd like to think I've brought a bit more professionalism.

My brother played here in '93, the year before I came, and said there were a few in house problems that probably had an effect on the field.

I've had run-ins with a few whilst setting some standards - I let them know exactly what I wanted.

RLCM: Do you think the fact that you have not had to chase players says something about the club?

Stone: It's a product of success, I suppose.

There was a period when about four players from the Chargers came across and they've been the mainstay

of our side since '98. They had cemented their lives on the coast, it was just a matter of getting them out of the "I'm too good to be playing in any second tier competition" frame of mind. It took a bit of time for them to realise it wasn't a 'two bob' competition, and that it was actually quite hard to succeed.

RLCM: We all see the good and bad points in players - what do you look for in particular players?

Stone: Basically, a decent athlete.

If he has got good hand-eye coordination and can move well passing the football, he's a very valuable player. You look for these traits, but also for players that get good body position at the play the ball, play the ball quickly, and can tackle head-on.

Players like Mundine and Peachey who can score tries and make something for themselves or the people around them, are rare. If they do come along, well that's excellent, but you can't think they'll always turn up.

RLCM: Explain the partnership set up between the Burleigh Heads Club and the Newcastle Knights.

Stone: I kicked it off with Paul Harrigan, who is a good mate of mine who I played a lot of junior footy with in Newcastle.

Currently there is a lot of Queensland Cup clubs getting involved with NRL clubs. We're all looking for information on recruitment, football management, coaching ideas, marketing and promotion of the game and so on.

Negotiations were slow for a while, but I think Michael Hill, the Knights' Chairman, really sat up and took notice of us when the Queensland Cup was getting exposure on Fox Sports at the end of the year and we won the competition. Obviously Melbourne won the NRL competition, and we beat Norths, the Melbourne affiliate side, in our competition, so Michael must have thought we were producing some sort of results.

RLCM: How much do you rely on your staff and assistants?

Stone: On game day, I'm usually on the walkie-talkie and Mark Gee usually controls the bench. I don't often replace players, either Mark will or they'll take themselves off. Mark has basically been here with me since '94 and he understands the game as well as anyone. Grant Adamson, our captain, is an extension of the coach once he gets out there. I feel pretty confident with them around me.

RLCM: Explain a typical training session?

Stone: It's dependant on the situation.

On a Monday, we'll look at some basic stats off the tape, then look at highlights of the tape for no longer than 10 minutes; our training time only allows a 10 minute viewing, and that's about how long you can keep them concentrated.

All the theory in the world won't give you that hands-on feel to know if the boys need a bit of a light run or to be worked a bit harder.

We then briefly talk about the good and bad aspects of our performance.

So Monday's a 'tidy-up' session.

Ex-players Tony Priddle and Danny Burgess control our conditioning and strength training. We work out at Miami Fitness. The facilities are excellent. We can slide a few players over to Tony and do some work on a bike or machine or maybe some boxing, while the other players do something else, like use the pool. Conditioning is planned in terms of when our games are.

A fair amount goes into planning training. All the theory in the world won't give you that hands-on feel to know if the boys need a bit of a light run or to be worked a bit harder. You detect it in their attitude and how enthusiastically they approach training.

RLCM: Are players comfortable giving feedback?

Stone: We ask them about their team goals, their individual goals, and what they thought about the game.

It's good to sit down and talk to them about their game and where you and they think they can improve.

It's also important to know how your players are coping away from football; have they got financial www.rlcm.com.au

problems, or is there wife or girlfriend driving them up the wall? There are a lot of ingredients that go into keeping a player happy.

(See player feedback sheet page 44)

RLCM: How close is the situation between you and your players?

Stone: At certain moments it is very close, but sometimes you've got to distance yourself, or else things can be very difficult. If you spend a lot of time with the players, hardcore decisions like dropping them can be an ugly situation. But in saying that, you still have to communicate well and often with them.

RLCM: How much emphasis do you place on game related drills?

Stone: I would have to say a lot.

Most of our training is done with the ball in the hands. I like challenging myself and coming up with different things. I always try to keep the competitive spirit involved.

I normally involve a fitness component in drills because I think concentration under fatigue is very important. All these things combine when doing game related drills with the ball in your hands, or defending or attacking; it's all about communication, concentration, and being able to push yourself when you need to.

RLCM: Do the coaches within the club keep a basic structure so that when players come through they settle in quicker?

Stone: Yes, but each coach puts their own individual stamp on their team.

Not necessarily all our coaches are the same, but maybe our ruck calls and structure in attack and defence are. It's a simple fact that our top side is a little bit more efficient than our reserve grade, thus, the reserve grade coach makes allowances in his side's structure.

RLCM: So when players come through, is the transition pretty smooth?

Stone: Yes, it's very smooth.

When we played the English side we got 28 players together in the squad; three from U/19's, four from reserves, eight from A grade and the rest from the Queensland Cup side.

We had three weeks of training before the game. The first week we just played touch and had fun, and the latter weeks we got a bit of a pattern together.

I think all players benefited from that night, especially the players from the lower grades who've taken a little bit of knowledge back to their respective sides.

RLCM: How do you manage to structure communication in defence ?

Stone: My defensive patterns are structured a little bit on David Waite's when he was at Newcastle. Our first three defenders outside the ruck are up and in defenders, and when the ball gets outside there they are up and out defenders, so it's a combination of up and in and up and out.

It obviously takes a bit of communication, but our first defender off the play the ball, (A), and (B) and (C), those outside him, are up and ready to smash the player that is just hitting it up off the ruck. When the ball gets outside there, we've got what we call an edge defender outside (C) and he'll control an outside four who will generally be a winger, a centre, a lock or five-eight, and a second-rower. Once the ball is past them, we change from our up and in defence to our up and out defence, and that's when the outside four on my left and right hand sides are fairly rigid. When we get the ball, generally we're in the same position to attack, which obviously makes it a bit easier.

RLCM: Do you have special plays for attack?

Stone: Our hooker controls the middle third, halfback controls the right and five-eight has the left. The halfback has got the lock, a right second rower, a right centre and winger. The five-eight has got the full back, left second rower, left centre and left winger to play with.

The front rowers basically get the ball to the centre of the field.

When we're attacking in the 70 on the wide end side, the half back would be in dummy half, the hooker is at first receiver, and the five-eight would be at second. When we're in the third on the left hand side, the five-eight is in dummy half, the hooker is still in first receiver, the half back would be second rower, so basically, they don't swap thirds at all. The hooker gets to save his legs a bit this way.

RLCM: How often do you utilise the short side?

Stone: We like to play it a lot. The dummy half cues it, checking the short side - Nathan Brown is a perfect exponent.

If there are two or less players defending down the short side, Brown will take two of his boys with him, creating the three on two situation.

Basically for us, it's about keeping shape when we are attacking, everyone pulling off the ball and stretching their defence.

RLCM: Where do you think talent comes from? Does it stem back to a player's genes, their parents or the coaches?

Stone: I think the super-talented players are initially born that way. But recently, the development side of Rugby League has definitely played a part.

Kids coming through at the moment can pass beautifully off both hands, tackle well, kick, and are evasive. The skill factor amongst the kids has increased a hundred fold since I was that age.

Andrew Johns and Brad Fittler were destined to be great players because they were natural athletes and who could grasp the highest level skills. These type of players were born to play Rugby League.

NOTES

Battle of the Hastings

GROUP 2

A LOCAL DERBY FIXTURE BETWEEN TWO COUNTRY RUGBY LEAGUE CLUBS, THE PORT MACQUARIE SHARKS AND WAUCHOPE BLUES

Written by Ryan Ellem

There is no disputing the enormity of the beloved 'local derby' fixture in country Rugby League.

So when the Port Macquarie Sharks made an application to move from the Group 3 competition to Group 2 for the 1995 season, the Wauchope Blues, had little choice but to follow.

As Wauchope Club President Troy Terp explains, the aura that surrounds the legendary 'Battle of the Hastings' is something that Wauchope could not afford to forsake.

"Wauchope applied to enter the Group 2 competition partly because the quality of Group 3 was waning, but primarily because the Sharks were joining it," Terp said.

It's tremendous how much the younger players improve with quality players around them

"Financially, the 'Battle of the Hastings' is a prominent source of revenue for us, pulling our biggest crowds regardless of how either team is performing. From the traditionalist perspective, the Blues' players and supporters are always keen to see us knock off our bigger neighbours, and this rivalry is very important for both clubs.

"There has been some positive and negative aspects to the move, as was expected.

"We're slightly worse off financially and have to travel a lot more, but we are now playing in a much stronger competition. When we left Group 3 there was six sides left, and one of the Manning sides looked like going under. Now we're playing in a competition with 10 sides."

Moving to another Group is by no means a simple operation, but both Wauchope and the Sharks made the transition varelly smoothly.

"In our first year in Group 2 we aimed to make the semi-finals, which was a realistic goal after winning four premierships in a row in the 90's," said Mick Lang, Port Sharks Secretary.

"Our overall goal was simply to improve, which we have, winning the First Grade competition in 1998 and taking out the Club Championship last year," Lang said.

The ease, with which both clubs have stepped into Group 2, lies partly with skill of the teams, but also in the camaraderie within both clubs.

"To play first grade for Wauchope is still regarded as an honour," Terp said.

"We've recently had one of our first graders, Allen Lewis, play his 200th game for the club. He and some of the older heads instill the Club's pride and tradition within what is one of the youngest first grade sides in Group 2.

"All our first grade players, with one or two exceptions, have come through our junior ranks. It's a relatively young first grade side because we promote our younger players rather than having them running around with players they're more skilled than in lower grades. You soon realise when a player reaches 17 or 18 whether they're going to play first grade or not, and we give these players that opportunity. It's tremendous how much the younger players improve with quality players around them," Terp said.

Lang believes Port Macquarie's success has been built on the Club's excellent junior base and the commitment of coaching staff to teaching the correct skills to players during their formative years. Port's success is even more impressive when taking into consideration the Club nearly folded in 1997.

"The Club was struggling for numbers in '97 due to factors beyond our control. Luckily enough, we managed to survive on the back of our junior players, and also managed to cull a few new players from here and there.

"Our success isn't surprising to us - we've got the players, along with an excellent administrative, coaching and training staff to support them," Lang said.

The Sharks have arranged a 'Sister' club partnership with their namesake, the Cronulla Sharks

The talent circulating in both clubs was displayed this year with both first grade sides featuring strongly in representative selections.

The Group 2 side included Wauchope's Chris Worth and the Sharks' Kristian Murphy, Dave McAnally, Michael Fitzgibbon, Trent McKeough and Anthony Hill.

The Sharks are currently fielding arguably the strongest U/18 side ever seen at the club, with many officials from other clubs conceding the unlikelihood of them being toppled this year.

The Under 18 Group 2 side included the Sharks' Shane Joyce, Jordan Macey, Richard Russell, Chad Ferrett, Brett Firman and Peter Cook. Firman has already earned himself the halfback spot in first grade, with Ferrett and Russell acting as key interchange players.

The annual City vs Country match previously acknowledged the sea of talent from the country area in the national competition. Despite the abandonment of this fixture, the importance of the country acting as a nursery for the NRL competition has not lessened.

The Hastings area has produced many players that have made the ranks of the national competition during its various personas. The Blues reared inaugural Dally M Medallist Rocky Laurie, 1975 Kangaroo Ian Schubert, and Mark Laurie (Parramatta, Leeds). The Sharks were the home of current Wests Tigers' Jarred McCracken and Joel Caine, and Neil Cowley (Wigan, Great Britain). With country clubs producing talent of this calibre, it is understandable that NRL clubs are taking an interest in their country counterparts.

The Sharks have arranged a 'Sister' club partnership with their namesake, the Cronulla Sharks.

"I formulated a plan with their officials which sees Cronulla assist both our juniors and coaching staff with coaching sessions in Sydney and Port.

"They (Cronulla staff) keep a close eye on our junior talent, and when they notice potential from a player, they offer him the opportunity to spend some time at Cronulla during the off season to see what the training and lifestyle is like. We currently have Dan Ninnes,

James Collins and Jarrod Taylor from last year's U/18's playing for the Cronulla U/21's, and Brett Firman will join them next year," Lang said.

In explaining the program, Lang is eager to praise its social aspects, and the high morale it rubs off on juniors.

"We held a social golf day not long ago where Cronulla first graders came and mingled with our players and supporters. It was evident the 14, 15 and 16 year olds really enjoyed the experience by just looking at their faces. They're encouraged to see that an NRL club is taking an interest in them."

Wauchope is hoping to secure a 'Sister' club in the near future, with the club tossing up a few possible alliances.

"Logically, Newcastle would be the right club for us. We share the same club colours and geographically, they're our nearest NRL neighbour," Terp said.

"There needs to be some serious restructuring within the bowels of the CRL. The finances and numbers in the country areas are depreciating, and the NRL really needs to intervene.

"In light of the fact that such a large portion of players in the NRL are from the country, the NRL should protect the region. I think they would go along way to ensuring this by allocating a higher proportion of development officers and promoting the 'Sister' club concept more. Perhaps the NRL could assign each Grade club to a country Group, and network in that manner.

"It's in the interests of all involved," Terp said.



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Country Rugby League with a Strong Future

GROUP 2

Written by Ryan Ellem

Like a fine drop of aged red, New South Wales Group 2 is a competition which manages to savour the traditional flavour of country football, while at the same time offer the buzz of a fresh contest.

Sponsored by local distiller Cassegrain Wines for the past two seasons, the vibrant North Coast League melds the atmosphere of the surf, the city and surrounding hinterland together into one exciting package. Historically the area has bred rough and ready recruits in the form of loggers and cattle farmers, but nowadays tourism, industry and education are likely to supply just as many troops to local teams as the labours of the land.

Presided over by a man with Rugby League in his veins, Glenn Shipman, the Group's constant development along the Coast in many ways reflects the endeavours he has taken throughout his own life. Having played the sport since he was seven, Shipman progressed from representing now-defunct Glenreigh to pioneering the foundations of the Coffs Harbour club and then into a variety of administrative roles. He now stands as Group secretary.

The origins of League in the Group 2 region date back to the early part of the twentieth century, although the present format of the competition was not settled upon until the inclusion of Wauchope and Port Macquarie in the mid 1980s. Both transferred from nearby Group 3, having already established reputations for steady success.

Perhaps the only blight that remains on the competition is that they have never had the chance to lift a Country Championship trophy as part of the North Coast representative side. Finalists on three occasions, the Division has recorded a trifecta of unfavourable results, including last season's loss to Monaro at Tamworth.

However that is not to say the communities of Group 2 have failed to produce their fair share of talented footballers over the years. At present in the NRL, the area boasts St George-Illawarra stars Nathan Brown (from Woolgoolga) and Wayne Bartrim (Smithtown) as well as Cowboys' Mark Shipway (Sawtell). Adam

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MacDougall, arguably the most powerful winger in the game and an established Blues' player, represented Group 2 as a teenager while studying in the region. Interestingly, he was coached by Shipman at Coffs Harbour.

This year's regular season competition has already produced some lively encounters, as an array of proud teams struggle to assert their ascendancy and claims on the 2000 title.

Forerunners and favourites for the minor premiership, Port Macquarie, appear strong across the board. Their skilful and speedy backline is more than equalled by

Group Two League constantly attracts gifted footballers from all walks of life and forms a unifying interest for the decidedly diverse population.

a tough and relentless forward pack. Depth doesn't appear to be a problem either, with Reserve Grade and Under 18s also performing encouragingly through the opening rounds. The Sharks are directed by a highly knowledgeable coach in Paul Douglas and boast former Parramatta big man Phil Mann as their club president.

Already, Port has established their authority by securing seven spots in the 2000 Group Two side. Not surprisingly forwards Trevor McKeough, Cave McNally and Anthony Hill were among the first picked, having stamped their dominance on the competition from the word go. Playing out of Port Macquarie Stadium, the Sharks have close ties with their NRL namesakes Cronulla and their exciting brand of football is sure to catch the attention of tourists as they filter through the area.

Country Rugby League with a Strong Future

Conversely challengers Macleay Valley arise from a more agricultural background, with timber and farming considered hallmarks of their community. The Mustangs have bought well this off-season, adding on to an already impressive team which includes Paul Sprague, brother of fellow representative Ben Sprague. Former South Sydney star Shane Wilson is the coach at Verge Street Oval, while ex-Australian coach Jim Murphy fills the position of club president.

Bellingen-Dorrigo are another team expected to compete well in 2000. An unashamedly traditional club, the Magpies origins stem from the days of local park football. Despite boasting an exciting backline which includes two Fijian imports, Bellingen's side also sports many surnames that have carried on through the generations. A physically strong team that likes to dominate, Bellingen unsurprisingly play out of Bellingen Park. The town is situated at the bottom of the Dorrigo Plateau and although considered a fertile farming area, has transformed over the years to cater for more of a tourist market.

Coffs Harbour Comets are another team which rely heavily on a constant stream of visitors passing through the region. A powerful team in the lower grades, the Comets have had limited success in A-grade since the mid-1980s. However, they are the only club in the competition to have the backing of their own Leagues club and are continuing to build into title contenders. So big is the banana producing shire, that many have called for another team from the city to be added to the competition. But Shipman, the founding member of Coffs, says with so many other teams bordering the city it may be unwise to expand just yet. Although lacking in terms of past premiership success, the Comets are always competitive, especially at home at Advocate Park. The club is coached by former Country representative Daryl Rando.

The late Rex Hardaker, stalwart of Group Two and devoted League man, is credited with conceiving fellow tourism-reliant club Sawtell. A very popular man who worked hard to entrench the code on the North coast, Hardaker passed away 12 months ago. Although Shipman labels his passing as a 'massive loss' to the competition, the Panthers continue to bloom in his absence. This season the club boasts class across the park, even though there are no big signings in their line-up. In the past Sawtell was home to NSWRL legends Noel and Les Cleal, with the tough-as-nail brothers helping the club to an all-important premiership.

Rugby League Coaching Magazine

Timber town Wauchope has also established a tough Rugby League team that have been competition pillars since arriving from neighbouring Group Three along with Port Macquarie. The Blues are yet to win a premiership, but are always among the leaders come finals time.

Macksville have given their supporters hope of changing fortunes in years ahead, starting the 2000 season with confidence and renewed vigour. Having battled for the past few seasons due to a number of problems, the Sea Eagles have looked to capture the spirit of their moniker and soar to the competition lead through the early rounds. A small team dependant on the local Midco Meatworks, Macksville may finally have a chance to match it with the big guns of Group Two.

On the other side of the coin, the previously dominant Nambucca Heads Roosters are struggling after years of being among the competition's favourites. It seems the blow of being relegated to runners up in 1998 - after leading in the grand final convincingly - has had a long-term effect on the Roosters. Built on foundations of tourism and industry, Nambucca will hope to turn their current fortunes around and restore some joy to the Coronation Park faithful.

Similarly Orara Valley are closer to the bottom of the ladder than the top after starting the season slowly. However, with a talented crop of youngsters rising through the ranks, predictions are that the Axemen could be a force in the near future. Led by Group representatives Matt Donovan and Brett Davis, Orara play out of Coramba Sporting Complex in the North Coast hinterland.

Sadly Woolgoolga are another team finding things tough as the competition moves into the next millennium. The Seahorses, or 'Woopies' as they are also known, don't have the luxury of being able to rely on a reserve grade team and consequently struggle for depth at times. Behind the scenes, officials are working hard to rectify the situation and the ethos of 'hanging in there' has been spread throughout the club. A beautiful beachside town, Woolgoolga is renowned for its ability to attract sightseers.

The commitment of organisers and importance of Rugby League to the North Coast region can never be underestimated. While in general the area suffers through problems with unemployment and subsequent lifestyle issues, Group Two League constantly attracts gifted footballers from all walks of life and forms a unifying interest for the decidedly diverse population.

Coaching Individual Positions

Reproduced from Coaching Rugby League - 4th edition

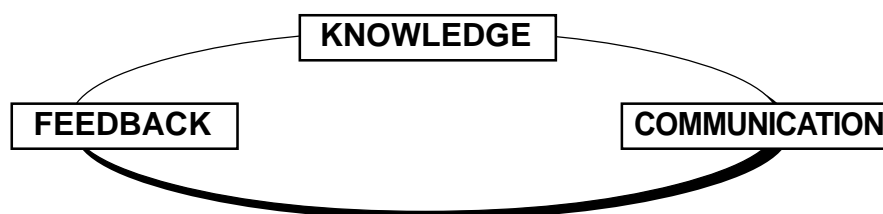
Prior to attempting to coach the necessary skills of the nine different positions within a Rugby League team, the coach must possess the following qualities.

- (1) A discerning knowledge of not only the position, but of the game in general.
- (2) The communication skills to impart this knowledge.
- (3) The ability to observe and provide the necessary feedback in order that the player can learn and, in fact, improve.

As the subject suggests, coaching positional play must take an individual approach. It requires time and patience.

It is encouraging, however, to ensure all players have a basic understanding of each others roles, particularly when zoning of attack and defence takes place in the International Laws of the Game.

The qualities mentioned above from an outgoing process as the diagram below suggests. The imparting of knowledge, through effective communication skills, in order to effect a positive change, never ends.



The individual requirements and skills necessary for each position are listed on the following pages. The information relates, predominately, to the International Laws of the game.

The outlines that follow are too-in-depth for players at Mini Footy and Mod League standard. These youngsters need only basic instructions. Complicating their lives with all the information would be to grossly over-coach at their level.

POSITION	POSITIONS NUMBER	GENERAL SKILLS/ QUALITY REQUIRED	CONSIDERATIONS - IN ATTACK	CONSIDERATIONS - IN DEFENCE
Fullback	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe under high ball (side-on positions) • Speed off the mark • Determined defender & runner of the football • Effective Communication skills • Vision (peripheral) • Kicking skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anticipation & vision to join in attacking plays • Bring ball back from kick reception strongly • Chase bombs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use sideline effectively when last line in defence • Communicate to teammates • Recognise shortages in defensive line • Ability to make "ball and all" tackles • Keep an "eye" on opposing fullback, particularly from scrum defence
Wingers	2 & 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speed • Strong communication • Committed defender • Safe handler • Opportunist • Evasive skills • Complete understanding of defensive system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depth to ensure receipt of ball at speed • Assist fullback on kick receives • Prepare to work as extra forward in some circumstances • Ability to centre kick for inside support • Read kick effectively in support play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Captains" of defence - responsible to ensure defenders "come" or "push" across to cover shortfalls and manage area to be defended (i.e. shortened line) • Use sideline effectively to force opposite number over it • Enthusiastic chaser of kicks

POSITION	POSITIONS NUMBER	GENERAL SKILLS/ QUALITY REQUIRED	CONSIDERATIONS - IN ATTACK	CONSIDERATIONS - IN DEFENCE
Centres	3 & 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thorough understanding of positional requirements depending on patterns of play • Speed • Evasive skills • Good ball skills (carry ball in both hands) • Good defender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding left and right attacking systems • Attempt to beat opposite number on outside • Take ball at speed in attack (i.e. depth) • Try to stay on feet in order to back up after passing • Cohesiveness with 5/8, wingers and attacking players • Precision/timing of support play 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand left and right defensive requirements • Understand fully centres role in either sliding or up and in defence • Do not let opponent get on your outside • Need to ensure opposition does not get ball away (i.e. "ball and all" defence) • Communicate loudly in defence (slide etc) • Defend at 5/8 when opposition scrum feed in your defensive zone • Chase kicks
Five - eighth	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organiser/architect • Catch and pass ability • Precision/timing in support of halfback • Intelligent kicking game (all types) • Good evasive skills • Good handler and defensive mover • Punishing defender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perfect understanding with halfback • Vision to attack either open or blindside from scrum with added ability of changing point attack (run angles) • To ensure backline functions effectively and quickly, should be able to catch and pass in the one movement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defend on opposite zone to lock forward • Must keep opposing 5/8 on inside at all times (from rucks) • Modern day 5/8's defends between centres when opposing scrum feeds • Must move quickly to ball carrier to cut off any impending backline movements • An adjustable part of the defensive line

POSITION	POSITIONS NUMBER	GENERAL SKILLS/ QUALITY REQUIRED	CONSIDERATIONS - IN ATTACK	CONSIDERATIONS - IN DEFENCE
Halfback	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organiser/architect • Quick • Evasive • Nimble • Ability to vary attack • Strong communication skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speed and accuracy when delivering the ball from ruck or scrum • Positioning so as to be in place as first receiver • Support play (for all) • Take the defensive line "on" • Perfect understanding with dummy half (hooker) and 5/8 • Understanding field positions requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depending on ability/ opposition strengths may be required to defend either near ruck, out wide or as a second line of defence • May also be required to drop back for chip kick in later tackle count • Cover the blindside from scrums
Lock Forward	13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobility/evasive skills • Speed/strength • Strong defender • Tireless • Support ball carrier • Good hands • Aware of role in scrums 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Like the 5/8 can provide a line for attacking players outside of him • Form close understanding with half back for all attacking movements around the scrum base • Support ball carrier 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defend opposite zone to 5/8 in left and right pattern • Like the 5/8 i.e an adjustable part • Defend open side on a scrum (breaking quickly) • Keep opposing attacker on the inside at all times • Understand sliding and up an in defence and play the correct part (often to block up holes on the inside of the "slide")

POSITION	POSITIONS NUMBER	GENERAL SKILLS/ QUALITY REQUIRED	CONSIDERATIONS - IN ATTACK	CONSIDERATIONS - IN DEFENCE
Second Rowers	11 & 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobility • Speed / strength • Strong defender • Support ball carrier • Although less emphasis on competing for ball in the scrums should be aware of correct method for binding into scrums 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With zoning in attack possibly position as a centre according to left or right • Anticipate and time support play to perfection • Be prepared to do some of the "tight work" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cover respective sides after breaking from scrum • Ability for ball and all defence • Move to ball carrier quickly • Understand role in sliding and up and in defence more often to block up holes on the inside of the slide
Front Rowers	8 & 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toughness • Mobility • Ball and all defender • Good hands • Effective communication skills • Although less emphasis on competing for possession in scrums should still be aware of correct formation/ technique 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain the hard yards • Ability to offload and keep arms free in the tackle • Clean up loose balls around ruck 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defend the centre of the ruck • Prevent opposition forwards moving over the advantage line • Lock the ball up in tackles preventing the offload • Put attackers on their backs as often as possible • Slow the play-the-ball-down

POSITION	POSITIONS NUMBER	GENERAL SKILLS/ QUALITY REQUIRED	CONSIDERATIONS - IN ATTACK	CONSIDERATIONS - IN DEFENCE
Hooker	9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobility/speed off the mark • Tenacity • Accurate and precision-like passing game • Ability to stay tuned with calls of play • Strong communication skills • Although less emphasis in today's game should control the packing technique of the scrum to his satisfaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure field position is achieved • Get to dummy half as frequently as possible • Pass accurately off the ground from both sides of the body • Support the ball-carrier • Encourage tackled player to get to his feet quickly to play-the-ball 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With front rowers hold centre of ruck area • Understand fully, marker play requirements • Put ball carrier on ground as quickly as possible, endeavour to slow down the play-the-ball process

SUMMARY

- Often, coaches spend more time on tactics and moves and fail to ensure each player has a sound knowledge of his playing position.
- It is the coach to ensure the normal responsibilities of each positional role are clearly known and understood.
- A big difference in the modern game is the versatility required of all positional roles and the broader need for mobility across all Positions as the game becomes faster.

The Unipro Endura System

Scientific studies have consistently shown that athletes such as rugby League players are not able to meet their energy demands from a normal high carbohydrate diet. This can lead to premature exhaustion and reduced performance during a game.

The Unipro endura System can change all that.

Consisting of two drinks, **Endura and Endura Optimizer**, The Unipro endura system is one of the most effective endurance systems available in Australia.

Endura for rehydration and muscle recovery

As sweat rate increases during a game, water loss of 1-2 litres over hour can occur. Fluid replacement is critical if poor performance due to dehydration is to be avoided. Once water loss exceeds 2-3% of body weight work capacity, output and performance decreases.

Prevents muscular cramping

Endura replaces electrolytes such as sodium, potassium, magnesium, calcium, phosphorous and chloride in ratios similar to that found in muscle cells, helping to ensure that dehydration does not occur.

The activated mineral complex in Endura is absorbed via a mechanism similar to amino acids which unlike many other sports drinks, does not cause water loss and intestinal irritation.

The specialised form of high potency magnesium found in Endura prevents muscular cramping and assists in the uptake of potassium. Poor utilisation of potassium, due to inadequate magnesium replacement in sporting drinks, essentially means that athletes are taking a dehydrating sugar and salt solution.

Endura is one of the only sports drinks scientifically designed to deliver the right balance of electrolytes and polymers that Rugby League players need for sustained performance.

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During strenuous or prolonged exercise, muscle glycogen and blood glucose levels decline, which leads to an increase in muscle degradation.

Research has shown that this type of exercise induced muscle damage can be minimised by taking certain types of protein and carbohydrate in specific ratios.

Increases muscle mass and strength

Endura Optimizer is designed to do just that.

Containing lactalbumin, a protein which boasts one of the highest biological utilisations in humans, Endura Optimizer is absorbed quickly during exercise and helps muscle recovery.

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Rapid glycogen replenishment in muscles after exercise is a major factor in determining performance recovery in athletes doing repetitive high intensity sporting activities such as Rugby League.

The Winning Edge

The Unipro Endura System is one of the most dynamic and advanced electrolyte, endurance and rehydration formulas available for the serious athlete.

If your team is serious about wining, then you need the winning edge.

You need the Unipro Endura System.

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Rugby League Coaching Magazine

SPORTS PHYSIOTHERAPIST PROGRAM

A WORLD FIRST

The title APA Sports Physiotherapist distinguishes members of the Australian Physiotherapy Association (APA) who have achieved academic and clinical excellence in the field of sports physiotherapy.

The APA Sports Physiotherapist Program was developed by the Association's Sports Physiotherapy Group (SPG) and its Academic and Clinical Standards Committee. It was several years in the making and involved a wide consultation process.

The Program was formally launched at the Sports Medicine Australia Conference in 1998. It was an initiative greeted enthusiastically by physiotherapists, referrers and the community, and a world first for quality assurance in sports physiotherapy.

PROGRAM AIMS

The overall aim of the APA Sports Physiotherapist Program is to develop, maintain and promote the highest standards in sports physiotherapy in Australia.

The Program achieves this by actively promoting postgraduate studies, specialisation, research and participation in sports physiotherapy.

PROGRAM STANDARDS

The SPG considered that well-rounded practitioners who had achieved excellence as well as contributed to their profession in the area of sports physiotherapy should be worthy of APA Sports Physiotherapist title. This is now reflected in the standards which form the basis of the program. To be eligible for the title physiotherapists must demonstrate that they have:

- postgraduate qualifications in sports physiotherapy or SMA fellowship/having completed or lectured on the NSPG Level 3 course.
- at least five years of clinical experience in sports physiotherapy.
- extensive continuing education in sports physiotherapy and related areas.
- experience in sports or team coverage and have:
- contributed to the profession in terms of teaching/lecturing, public relations activities, community education, committee work and so on.

All applicants meeting these minimum standards must then pass a written evaluation of their clinical competency in the field of sports physiotherapy.

MANDATORY CONTINUING EDUCATION AND PARTICIPATION SCHEME

To keep the title APA Sports Physiotherapist, members are required to maintain the excellent standards they have set by participating in a mandatory continuing education and participation scheme.

The scheme currently involves attendance at courses, conferences, teaching, sports or team coverage and participation but eventually will evolve into a more competency-based program. It runs concurrently with a similar but less stringent mandatory continuing education program that has been developed for all APA members.

CURRENT TITLE HOLDERS AND APPLICANTS

At the time of printing (May 2000), 215 APA members from across Australia had already achieved the title APA Sports Physiotherapist and another 150 were in process of applying.

The benefits of the APA Sports Physiotherapist Program were readily identified in a survey of SPG members around the time of its launch. These included:

- Recognition by peers and the community
- Personal satisfaction and professional development
- Quality assurance
- Access to a more comprehensive and structure education program
- Opportunity to participate in the advancement of sports physiotherapy
- Greater employment opportunities
- Greater recognition by sports teams and event organisers
- Leadership in the field of sports physiotherapy

The level of interest is most encouraging and has far exceeded expectations. A solid foundation is now set for the successful future of the program and its objectives.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Meeting the needs of titleholders

Now that a group of APA Sports Physiotherapists has been established a more formal structure for this group will be developed to further the objectives of the program and meet the special needs of the title-holders.

The structure will encourage APA Sports Physiotherapists to meet, discuss and share ideas with their peers and foster research in Sports Physiotherapy.

Raising awareness

Various initiatives are under way to raise awareness about the APA Sports Physiotherapist title within the community and among health professionals. A brochure explaining the title was launched at the 1999 SMA Conference and articles are now appearing in a wide range of publications.

It is anticipated that in the future practitioners with the title APA Sports Physiotherapist will be a widely recognised as experienced clinicians who have achieved and maintain advanced standards in Sports Physiotherapy and who contribute to their profession in the exciting field of Sports Medicine.

For more information about the APA Sports Physiotherapists Program or APA Sports Physiotherapists in your area, please contact:

APA Sports Physiotherapy Group
 PO Box 6465,
 St Kilda Road Central, 8008
 Ph: (03) 9534 9400



AUSTRALIAN PHYSIOTHERAPY ASSOCIATION

Sports Physiotherapy Group

DEFENCE

A TEAM RESPONSIBILITY

With Frank Endacott and Chris Anderson

Written By David Haynes

When Australia and New Zealand locked horns in the ANZAC Test this year, two of the most astute coaches in Rugby League went into battle. While history suggests the Chris Anderson coached Australian side dominated the Kiwis, few coaches have experienced success against Australia like Frank Endacott. In recent years New Zealand has been on a par with Australia, leading many pundits to predict the teams will meet in the World Cup Final at Wembley later this year.

Rugby League Coaching Magazine asked the two coaches to share their thoughts on defence in the modern game.

On the surface it would seem Frank Endacott and Chris Anderson are worlds apart in coaching philosophy. One coaches the defending NRL premiers in a thriving competition, the other, a giant in the English Super League competition. Competitions and player personnel aside however, both coaches have similar coaching ideals, particularly in regard to defence. While Endacott and Anderson endorse different defensive patterns, both men share the same objective in defence - to pressure the opposition and cut down their time and space in attack.

According to Endacott, a significant difference between Rugby League in Australia and England is the standard of defence. Unlike most Australian players who are abreast and competent in all facets of Rugby League, Endacott believes English players still struggle with the fundamentals of the game, namely defence. "The one thing I've tried to work on since I've been at Wigan is defence," he said. "The one on one tackles were ordinary, but their improvement over the last four games has been fantastic."

In stark contrast, Anderson is in charge of one of the most powerful defensive units in Rugby League, the Melbourne Storm. "Communication is the everything in defence," he said. Anderson, an advocate of the up and hold defensive pattern, feels the fullback is the

linchpin in any defensive line. "Fullbacks are probably in a better position than anyone to see where the opposition is," he said.

"I've always said defence is a team responsibility, tackling is an individual responsibility," said Endacott. Anderson also believes it is imperative team mates work together in defence. "It is important a player works with the guy beside him," he said. "It is like a bit of rope, if one player goes, the other player goes with him." While both coaches agree on the basics of defence, they couldn't be further apart in their views on slide defence. "I wouldn't teach slide defence because I don't believe in it," Anderson said. "I'm not a big believer in slide defence because I think there's too much one on one defence, and it lets the attacking side dictate where they're going to run."

As Endacott explains however, sometimes coaches at junior level teach slide defence incorrectly. "The first thing you do when you slide is take the yards off them, and move into them," he said. "Sliding is the last resort. You only slide from the fringes out, because everything around the ruck needs to be 'up in your face' stuff. If they spread the wide ball that's when you slide, but not before you go up."

Anderson has moulded the Storm into a defensive fortress, which repels opposition's attacking raids time and time again. Anderson's up and hold defensive strategy is designed purely to put the opposition off their game. "What we are trying to do with our defence is dictate to them (opposition) where to run," he said. "We cover from 10-metre to 10-metre." Like Anderson, Endacott believes it is important to attack in defence. "You have to cut their thinking time down," he said.

"We use the same defence all the time, we move up and take ground off them," Anderson said. "We move at pace for about four steps and then hold our line and keep our line as straight as we can, so anything they're going to do with the ball they normally do before they get to our line." As Anderson explains, the only variable in his defensive pattern is where he lines up

the halfback. “The only moving part in our defence in terms of where he lines up is the halfback,” he said. “We keep him away from the blind side so people don’t run at him. We either keep him on the open side and drop him back when the opposition comes to the line, or put him on the opposition’s most dangerous side, where we think they’re going to attack us.”

Both coaches agree that timing is an essential part to an effective defensive strategy. “Defence is all a matter of timing,” offers Endacott. “If the first player comes in high and shuts the ball down, the second player has to go low,” Anderson said. While both coaches adopt different defensive patterns, both stress the need to start the defensive line from the inside. “We get our width from the inside not the outside” said Anderson. “With the slide, the defence starts from the inside not the outside,” said Endacott.

Despite being at the helm of two of Rugby League’s most professional clubs, Anderson and Endacott believe simplicity is the best way to approach defence. “I try and keep it simple,” said Endacott. “At the end of the day, you can come up with all the fanciest defensive plans in the world, but it’s a missed one on

one tackle that wins or loses the game,” he said. “We keep our defensive pattern very simple,” Anderson said. “I think it’s too hard to change your defensive pattern throughout a game.”

Anderson believes it is more beneficial to teach junior players’ defensive techniques, rather than in-depth defensive patterns. “If I was teaching kids I would teach them technique in defence and how to tackle properly,” he said. Endacott, (still ranking an Under Ten’s side as one of the most enjoyable teams he has coach yet), believes teaching younger players the fundamentals of the game is far more worthwhile than an ‘elaborate defensive plan’.

For opposing National coaches who have served contrasting apprenticeships, Endacott and Anderson share remarkably similar coaching philosophies. While communication, timing and pressure are essential elements to defence, they are fruitless unless players are capable of making one on one tackles consistently. As Endacott and Anderson suggest, perhaps it’s more beneficial to teach players basic tackling techniques before presenting them with an intricate defensive pattern.

“I believe all clubs and all coaches at all levels should have a copy of this magazine as a coaching resource.”

***Wayne Bennett
Brisbane Broncos Head Coach***



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COMPLETION RATES

Something Doesn't Add Up!

By Gary Roberts

Rarely can you watch a game of football without being bombarded with statistic after statistic. Whether it is tackle counts, hit ups, line breaks or offloads, coaches are using statistics increasingly to analyse games and review the performances of individual players.

'Completion rates' are one such statistic, with many pundits suggesting a high 'completion rate' is likely to pave the way for victory.

But how valuable are 'completion rates'? Are they an accurate indication of the game? Parramatta coach Brian Smith believes 'completion rates' are misguided: "Completion statistics are quantity statistics not quality statistics," Smith said.

"A forward may make 15 hit ups in a game, but did he take on the line? Break the line? Offload?" Broncos' Assistant Coach, John Dixon said. "You have to see the quality of the statistics until you can comment on them."

Current 'completion rate' statistics published in Big League Magazine tell an interesting tale. The Broncos, currently first on the NRL Premiership ladder, are ranked 12th out of 14 teams on the 'completion rates' ladder.

Similarly Melbourne, who Smith labelled as one of the benchmarks of the competition, are running 14th and last on the 'completion rates' ladder.

Ironically, the Auckland Warriors who are currently 13th on the Premiership ladder and widely tipped as likely wooden spooners, are the most successful club in 'completing sets'; despite having one of the worst defensive and attacking records in the League.

"The quality of the completion is more important than whether you complete the set," said Smith. "To use an old analogy, it's not what you've got, but how you use it" he said.

As Smith suggests, completion rates fail to recognise the quality of a team's set. Auckland may be the most efficient team in completing sets of six, but where are these sets being completed? Auckland's poor record tends to indicate

opposition sides are dictating where their sets are taking place.

The recent Anzac Test is a further example, highlighting that a team who has completed a majority of their sets may not necessarily be in front on the scoreboard.

In the first half of the Test, New Zealand had the ball 20 times and 'completed' their sets on 17 occasions. Despite managing to complete 85 percent of their sets, they trailed 22 - nil at halftime.

New Zealand kicked the ball only once in Australia's 'red zone', five times from Australia's 50m-40m area, and eight times from deep in their own half. As these statistics illustrate, New Zealand have completed a high percentage of sets, but a lack of field position meant their completion rate was relatively ineffective.

"What is completion?" Smith asks. "If you get to the six play and put up a poor bomb, have you completed the set? If you kick the ball dead in goal and the opposition gets a restart from the 20-metre line, have you completed your set?"

"You're better off making an eighty metre break and making an error on the third tackle than completing a set sometimes," Smith said.

As Smith indicates, there are alternative ways to successfully complete a 'set of six' than just kicking the ball on the 5th tackle.

Running the ball on the 5th can be a good option for sides with strike power out wide. Also, as Brisbane and Melbourne demonstrate, turning the ball over in a corner without scoring can sometimes be more effective than kicking.

"This (turning the ball over in a corner) is the second best option to kicking the ball in goal and hoping for a restart from a goal line drop out," Australian and Melbourne Storm coach Chris Anderson said.

Does a statistician record a 'set of tackles' that finished similar to this as an uncompleted set,

just because the ball was not kicked on the 5th? The coach would be happy, the players would be happy, as they have completed a part of the game plan to perfection. Providing the rest of the game plan is adhered to, the team is likely to score within the next 6 or 12 tackles.

Brisbane and Melbourne score many tries from the ensuing sets, by having their defence contain the opposition in the corner for 1,2 or 3 tackles, which limits the opposition's field position and the length of their kick on the 5th tackle. [Refer to Anzac Day Test]

If a team is unable to get to the 50m mark to kick on their 5th tackle, the opposition has an immediate territorial advantage.

The big play, which rewards a team's solid defence, is when the opposition is forced to kick on the 5th tackle from within their own 'red zone', and the ball only reaches the 50m - 40m mark.

Does the statistician record a 'completed set' for the attacking side? When in reality it is a successful set for the opposition, who have taken control of field position and consequently the

game through good defence.

"Basically, we record a positive as opposed to a negative," said league statistician David Middleton. "If a team has achieved an objective then it is consider a completed set...If a team makes an error then the set is deemed incomplete."

"It is more important to achieve your goal and objective rather than complete a set," said Queensland Rugby League's Glenn Bayliss. "There are three different styles of sets: defensive, field position and scoring."

"I see junior coaches jotting down the number of sets their teams have completed," Bayliss said. "But junior coaches should forget about statistics, and observe whether their player's heads are in the right position when they're tackling, or whether they're passing off the right foot."

Perhaps too greater emphasis is placed on 'completion rates'. After all, a game of football is not won on who holds the ball for the longest, but rather, which team can capitalise on the amount of ball they have.

RUGBY
LEAGUE
COACHING
MAGAZINE

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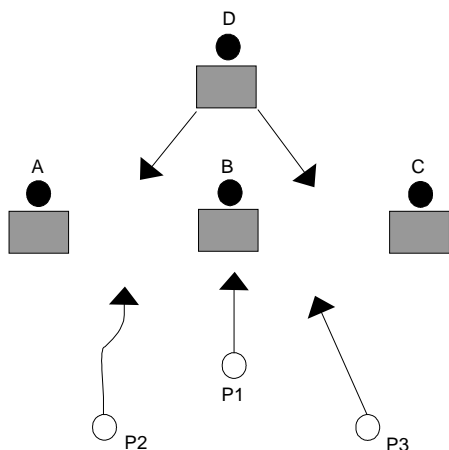
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FIND THE GAP

- 3 players using bump pads line up as indicated in the diagram
- A gap of between 1 and 2 metres is provided between 'tacklers' A and B, and B and C
- A fourth 'tackler', player D stands behind player B and moves across his own line to close one of the gaps as the ball carrier (P1) runs towards tackler B
- Support players P2 and P3 receive a short pass from the ball carrier who has created a gap for these players by drawing the tacklers.
- Tackler D attempts to stop the movement by closing the gap created by the ball carrier.



ATTACKING FROM SCRUMS

1. USING AN EXTRA PLAYER

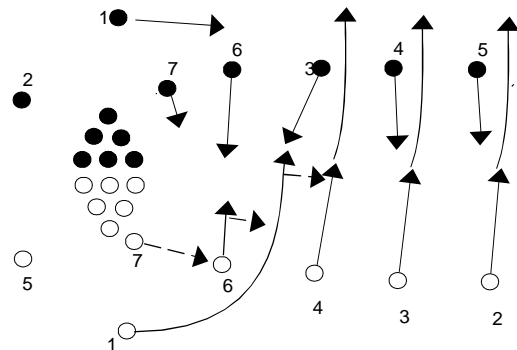
The players introduced into the line most frequently are:

- (a) the fullback
- (b) A blind side attacker
- (c) The loose forward

(a) THE FULLBACK

He is able to time his run and select any option, and can join the line to the open side or blind, and in between any of the players. The art of a good attacking fullback is to arrive in a space before his opposite number. The fullback enters the line between the five eight and inside centre. Alternatives are to (i) enter the line in a catch-pass situation and create extra men out wide, or (ii) be used as a decoy.

It is important for the blind side winger to cover behind from a scrummage.



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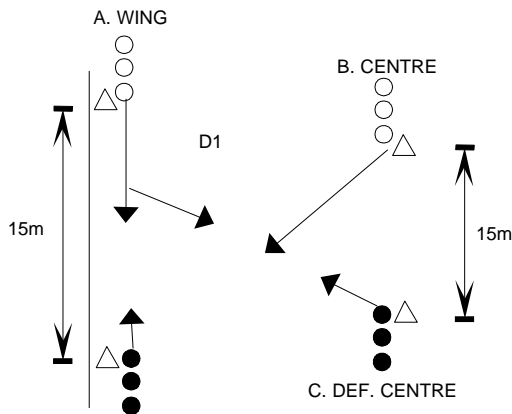
2 ON 2 with ANGLE

Setting: 15m x 20m, 5 markers, 8-16 players, 1 football

A number of options exist in this practice

- B runs across between D & C
- Depending on response of D & C
- A has the option to angle in or run the line
- B can present
 - (i) An outside pass to A
 - (ii) A can cut in on B & receive a close pass
 - (iii) A can angle behind C

Rotation: D to C, C to A, A to B, B to D



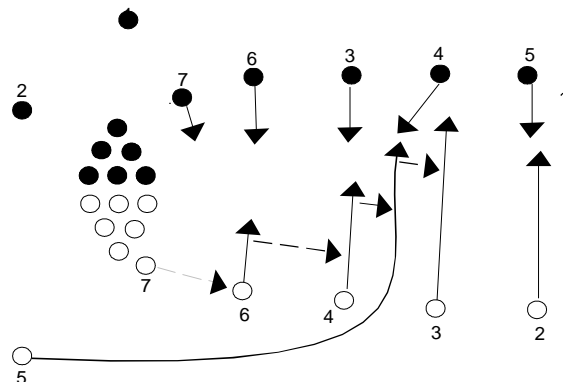
ATTACKING FROM SCRUMS

1. USING AN EXTRA PLAYER

(b) THE SHORT SIDE ATTACKER

An extra man can be introduced into the line by using a winger or centre from behind the blindside. The extra man can either loop round and try to break the line himself, or join the line early and try to create the gap for someone else.

- (i) The blind winger, A5 times his run, and arcs off the inside centre breaking the line himself.

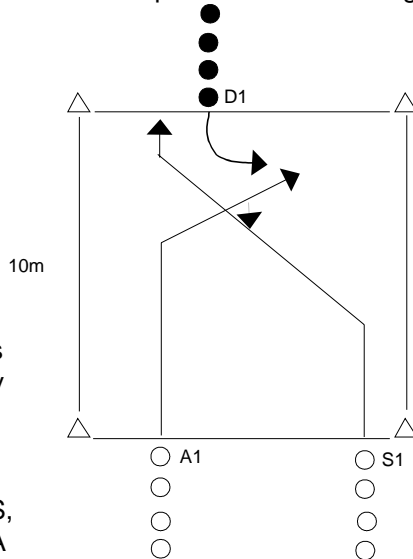


ANGLES

Setting: Grid 10m x 10m, 4 markers, 8-16 players, 1 football for each A player

- A runs out and cuts across the grid to draw D so that D cannot take S
- S moves out on a straight line, angles back to cut in behind A1.
- S times his run to occur when A has drawn D and runs as close to A as possible without being tackled by D

Rotation: S to A,
A to D,
D to S



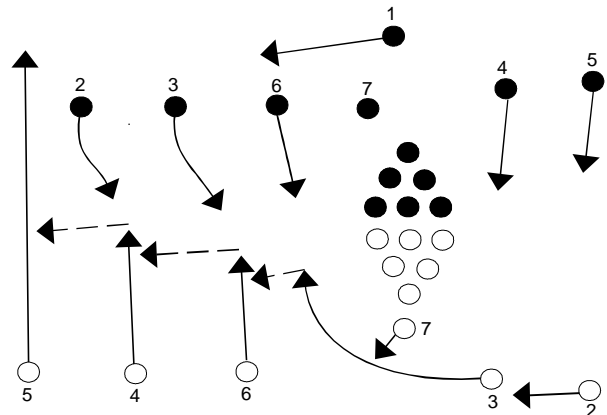
Progression:
Defender stands opposite, slightly inside of S

Rotation:
A to D2, D2 to S,
S to D1, D1 to A

ATTACKING FROM SCRUMS 1. USING AN EXTRA PLAYER

(b) THE SHORT SIDE ATTACKER (continued)

- (ii) The blind side centre, A3, receives the ball on the open side from the scrum half. By slick handling the open side winger, A5, is given an overlap.

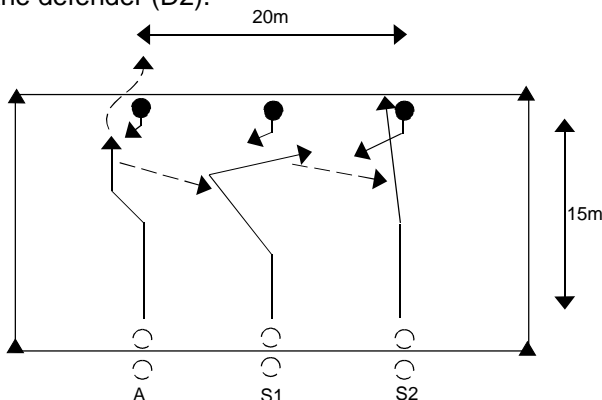


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THREE ON THREE (SWITCH OVER)

Setting: 4 Markers - 20m x 15m grid
9 players - 3 as defenders
3 spin pads (optional)

Attacker and support players move to defenders. Attacker (A) 'draws' Defender (D) and passes 'under' to support player (S1) who has changed his angle to run under his nominating defender (D1). Once in possession of the football, (S1) changes angle to run 'over' and across his defender (D1) into space and to draw (D2). Support player (S2) receives a pass from (S1) and runs in space on the outside left vacant by the defender (D2).

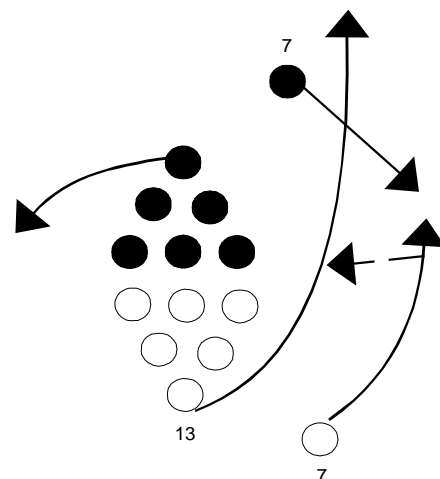


ATTACKING FROM SCRUMS 1. USING AN EXTRA PLAYER

(c) THE LOCK FORWARD

The loose forward is perhaps the only other player who can enter the line from a scrummage and create an extra man.

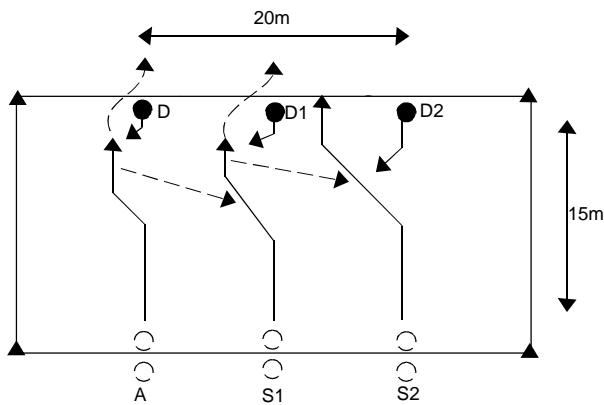
The scrum half carries the ball forward, and offloads to the loose forward on his inside, after first committing the defence.



THREE ON THREE (UNDERS)

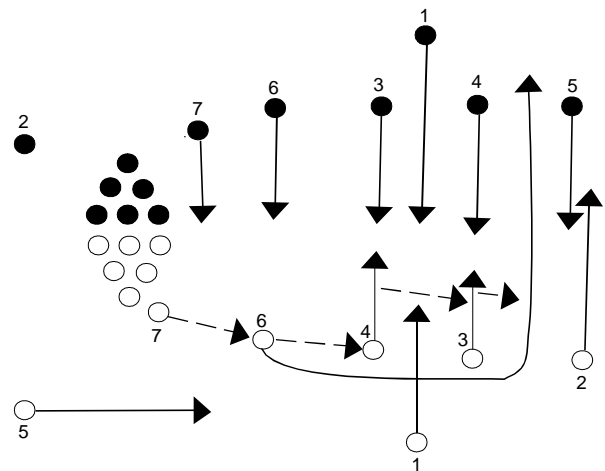
Setting: 4 Markers - 20m x 15m grid
 9 players per grid - 3 as defenders
 3 spin pads (optional)

Attacker (A) and support players move to defenders with attacker (A) drawing first defender (D) away from the support players (S1) who times his changing angle run into space receiving an on-side pass 'under' his defender (D1). S1 draws D1 then passes to S2, who has held his opposite player D2, inside by running a line on D2's outside shoulder, before timing his change of angle into space.



ATTACKING FROM SCRUMS 2. USING A PLAYER TWICE

The five eight (A6) runs around both centres, while the fullback runs as a decoy between them. The aim is to move the ball wide to the five eight in space, after having brought the defensive full back into the line. The blind side winger covers for the full back

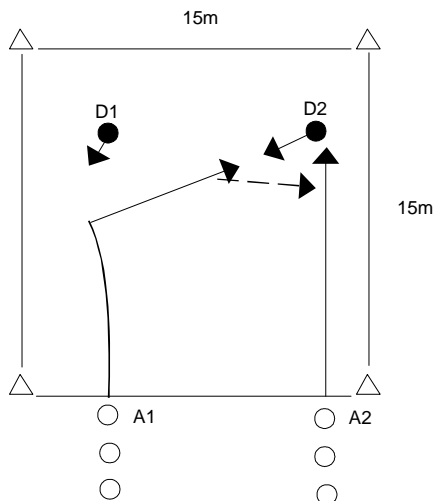


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ATTACK DEVELOPMENT "OVERS"

Setting: Grid 15m x 15m, 4 markers, 6-12 players,
 1-3 footballs

- A1 runs curve line to D1 cutting across or over D1 drawing D2
- A2 runs a wide line in support of A1 holding his line to stay outside of D2

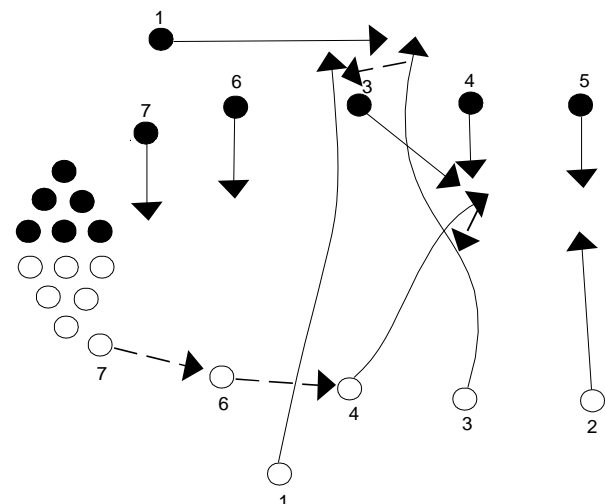


Progression: 3A v 3D

ATTACKING FROM SCRUMS 3. CHANGING ANGLE OF ATTACK

Ball is quickly passed to the inside centre (A4) via the half back (A7) and five eight. He runs at speed across field towards outside centre, (D4), taking inside centre (D3) with him.

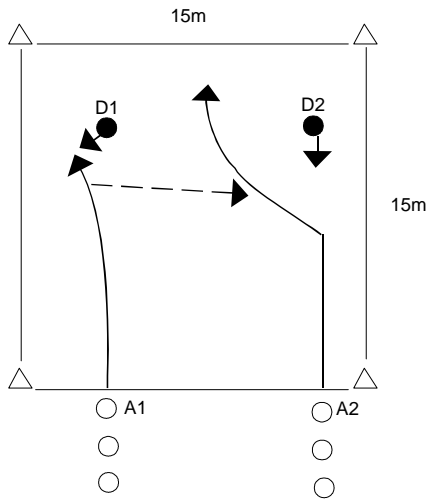
Both centres are drawn towards A4 who makes a drop off pass to (A3).



ATTACK DEVELOPMENT "UNDERS"

Setting: Grid 15m x 15m, 4 markers, 6-12 players, 1-3 footballs

- A1 runs line to D1 inside shoulder drawing D1 and passing to A2
- A2 runs a wide line in support of A1 holding D2.
- When A1 sets to pass A2 cuts "under" D2 into hole.



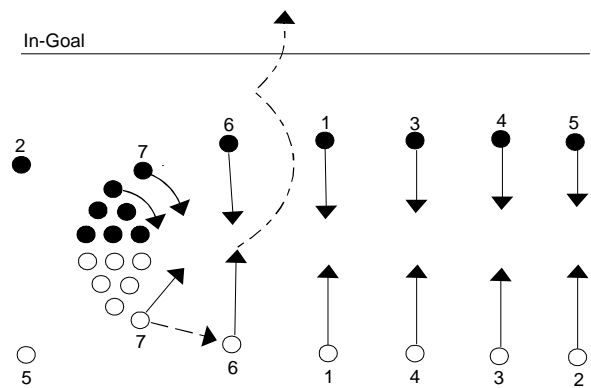
Progression: 3A v 3D

ATTACKING FROM SCRUMS 4. A KICK

It is policy with some teams defending from a scrum to position their fullback in the defensive line.

When this occurs the defenders have no last line of defence and are susceptible to a kick either through or over them.

A1 stands in the line from the scrum, between A6 and A4. D1, moves up into his defensive line to mark him. On winning the scrum, A7 passes to A6, who carries the ball towards the opposition, committing them, but before being tackled chips over their heads. The rest of the team are onside, and chase the ball.



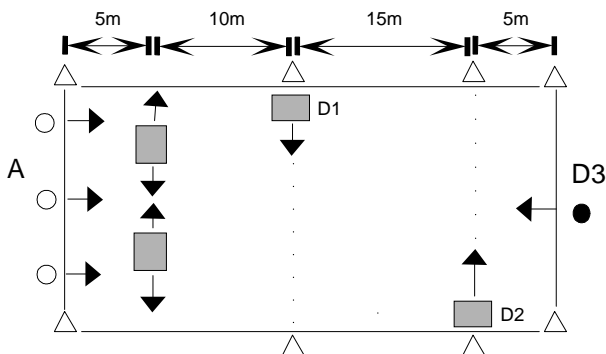
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SPONTANEOUS SUPPORT

Setting: Grid 10x 35m, 6 markers, 4 pads, 8 players, 1 football

- A players commence with the ball and attempt to break through the 2 defence padmen who can only move laterally.
- D1 cover defends across the grid but only after A breaks the first line.
- The second cover defender, D2, moves into the grid to cover after the A has beaten D1.
- D3, the full-back, moves in to defend after A passes D2.
- Beaten defensive players sprint to base line (by running outside grid)

D1 and D2 can finish their tackles

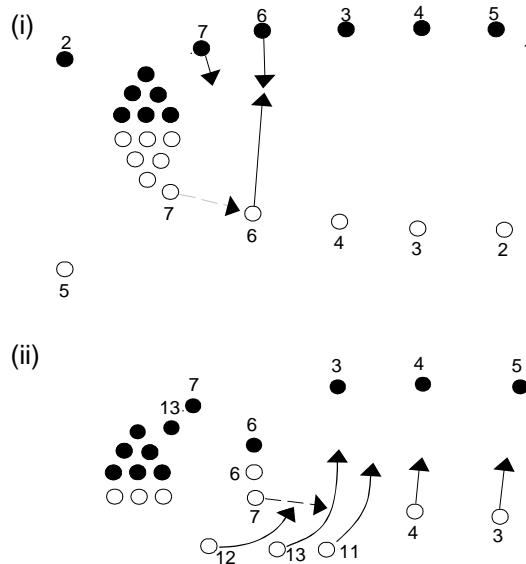


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ATTACKING FROM SCRUMS 5. FIRST TACKLE FORWARD RUSH

A back row which breaks quickly from a scrum can often attack from the first play the ball, before the opposition arrives.

From the scrum, the five eight (A6) takes the ball hard into his opposite number. Once tackled he plays the ball as quickly as possible. The scrum half moves into acting half back, while the back three forwards (11, 12 and 13) loop around and attack on the first play.



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