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Penetrating The Defensive Line

By Glenn Bayliss ARL Level 3 Coach

To score a try in Rugby League you have to break through, run around or over the opposition defence.

In previous editions we have looked at the foundation of running, correct lines and the development of 'Under' and 'Over' plays. We will now examine some possibilities of capitalising on the 'extra man'.

The Strength of 'Up and Out' Defence

If a team is only able to 'shuffle' the ball through hands, when they have numbers over, a disciplined defence will 'adjust' and shut the attacking raid down (Fig. 1).

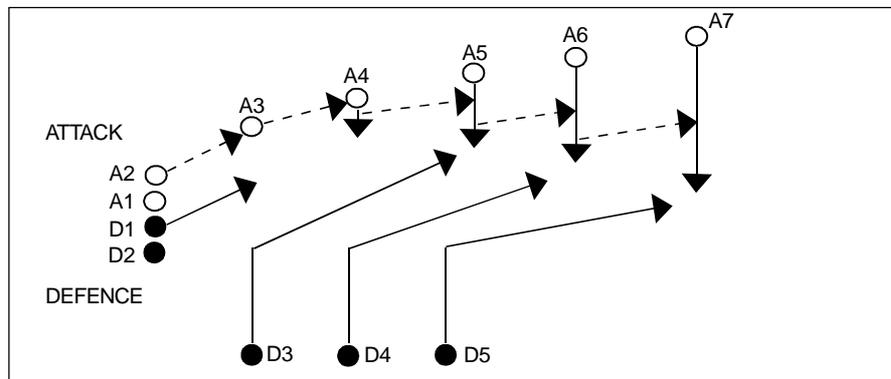


Figure 1 "Up and Out Defence" (5 defenders against 7 attackers)

As a Coach you have to construct practices, that simulate the teams attack against disciplined 'Up and Out' defence, and provide 'cues' for your players to execute the correct decision dependant on the movement of the opponent's defensive line.

Practice 1 (Holding the Slide)

Set Up: Position players on a section of field bordered by the touch line and a grid 30 metres by 20 metres long.

4 markers, 9 players 5 attackers (A+4 support), 4 defenders (D1-D4)) Optimal play the ball.

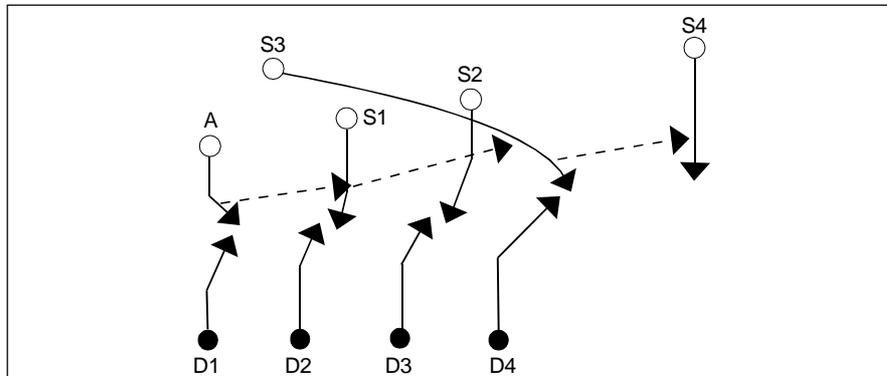


Figure 2

Attacker (A) runs to the line and runs an 'Over Play' early on (D1). (S1) and (S2) angle their runs at 'holes' near (D2) and (D3), holding them both in the compressed line and thus isolating (D4). The pass from (A) goes behind the decoy runners to (S3) who draws (D4) before passing onto the unmarked (S4).

COACHING

- Attacking player (A) must first run to the line to commit his player. Running an 'over line on (D1) will assist with:
 - a) his ability to throw a strong accurate pass to (S3)
 - b) run through the line if (D2) 'slides' early over-reading the play.
 - c) Opening up the option of passing to (S1) or (S2) if the defence does not commit to either of these two players.
 - d) Possible chip kick into space for (S4) to run onto
- Players (S1) and (S2) run at 'holes' expecting the pass.
- Player (S4) stays wide to 'pressure' the slide of the defence.

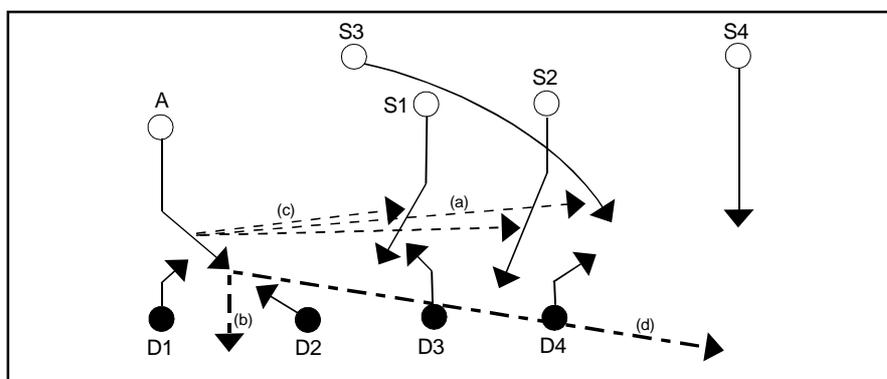


Figure 3

PRACTICE 2 (Runner to the line)

Set Up: Position players as per previous drill but now S1 and S3 remain deeper than S2 and S4.

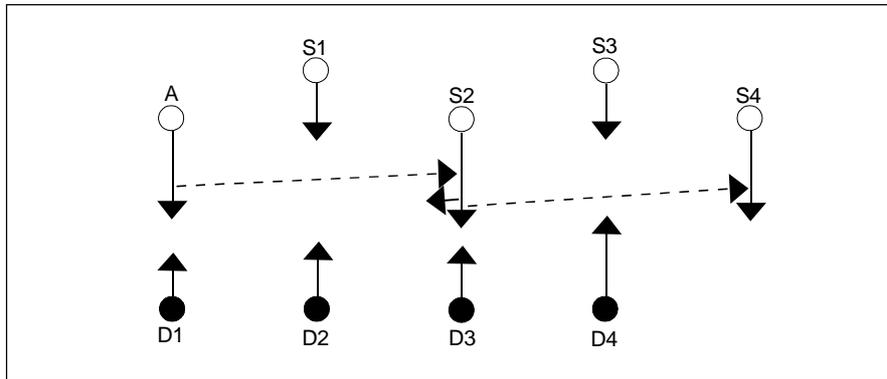


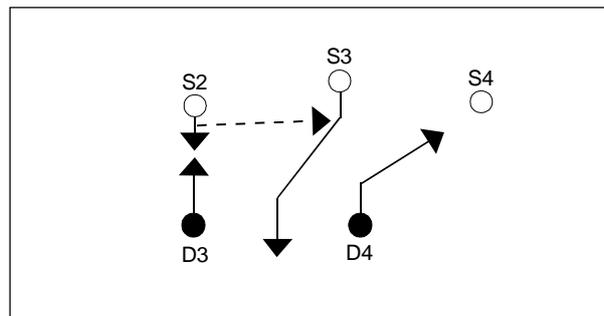
Figure 4

Attacker (A) runs towards the line to commit the defence, holding their 'slide'. Support player (S2) receives the pass from (A). He takes it to the line, 'shows' it inside to (S1) to hold defender (D2) then face passes to (S4) who is unmarked.

COACHING

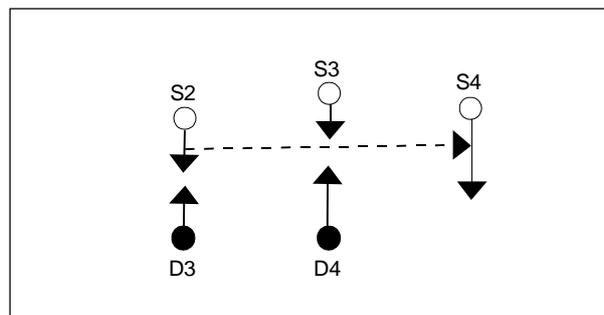
- (A) must judge his run and pass. He must run far enough to commit (D1) but allow enough time to pass to (S2) without putting him under immediate pressure.
- (S2) would run an 'over' line on (D3) and 'sell' his dummy inside to (S1) before passing to (S4)
- (S4) stands 'shallow' outside of (S2) with both (S1) and (S3), standing 'deep'.
- Coach player (S2) to read the following 'cues' to decide action.

a)



If (D3) is drawn to (S2) and (D4) over reads and 'slides' to defend on (S4) then option is PASS to (S3).

b)



If (D3) is drawn to (S2) and (D4) commits to (S3) then option is FACE PASS to (S4).

Coaching the Mini Mod Team

By Matt O'Hanlon
ARL Level 3 Coach

For some, coaching the mini mod team may be their first appointment. Often this is a result of being a parent of one of the players or even being a local senior player, giving a hand. Very soon your thoughts may shift to, "Why did I ever choose this job". But if you are prepared to tough it out, this type of coaching can be very rewarding. Mini mod coaching can be divided into three main groups. These groups could be loosely regarded as Beginners - Under 7 & 8's; Intermediates - Under 9 & 10's; and Seniors - Under 11 & 12's. The coaching of these groups requires the development of a number of skills that the coach might not normally associate with Rugby League. The following points may give some ideas to the coach of appropriate activities that can be used to develop skills but using a game oriented approach.

players will be of a very mixed ability. By the end of under 8's the coach's aim would be to have all players at a basic level of competency. Mini football is designed in such a way that both training and games allow skill development. In Under 7's & 8's I use the following techniques.

Initially, I make sure communication is very clear and lacking ambiguity. Instructions should be concise and reasonably loud to the group in a close huddle. When using markers I write a number on each one. Kids are directed to that marker number. It then becomes a game of musical chairs. Each kid finds their number and rotations are very simple - "You! Go to your next number". Along the same lines, use the jersey number at the order for having a run during the game. This

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

The Beginners - Under 7 and 8's

Young children are only interested in one thing - having fun. If an activity is not seen as fun, you will lose players. As coach your responsibility is to structure a program that not only develops the rudimentary skills but also develops an ability to understand the game, and generates a lasting desire to want to play. It is important at this early stage not to focus on winning. If you have a winning philosophy your judgement will be clouded as to equitable development of our beginners. In terms of your players - 5 minutes after the game all they are worried about is whether mum or dad will get them a pie and a drink. The end result of the match does not have a lasting influence. In skill development there are a number of key areas. The following are most important, tackling, passing, catching, and falling. At the start of the Under 7's,

stops the incessant shirt pulling of kids wanting a run, and ensures all get a go. Try and develop the key areas above by playing games. Where I see a child, deficient in a particular skill they are withdrawn and given specific skill development. It is pointless coaching skills in static situations when the game is very dynamic. The biggest problem is in tackling and this is on two fronts. Firstly, kids have a fear of being hurt, and in return they fear hurting anybody. Lots of tackling should take place to build confidence and allow players to recognise that the game is a contact sport. In training ensure every player does 20 tackles. In a game this is impossible so for some players, if they don't tackle at training - they don't tackle. The other problem is in the two pass rule which tends to see coaches getting players to hand off in a junior "ball game" style. Try to encourage your players to run.

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

Activity 1 - Two Handed Chase (Warm up game)

Equipment - Footballs and Markers
Set Up - 10m x 10m square grid, group of 4 or 5 in each square
Instructions - 1 player has the ball and carries it in two hands and tries to tag as many others as possible in the allotted time. (about 15 secs) When tagged a player goes out of grid.
Verbal instructions - Stop, Change, Go
Skill Element - perception, deciding where to move, finding space.

Activity 2 - Tackle Red Rover

Equipment - Footballs, channel (area = width of field by 30m wide)
Set Up - As per Red Rover, runners carry footballs
Skill Elements - Perception, finding space, avoiding defenders, dodging, weaving, tackling.

Activity 3 - Ruck Play

Equipment - Footballs, numbered markers, channel 25m by 10m depth
Set Up - Place numbered markers in order of a ruck. Formation 1 - attacker, 2 - pivot, 3 - dummy half, 4 - PTB, 5 - attacker, 6 - attacker, 7 - 10 defenders. If you have more or less players adjust accordingly. 6 players per group works well.
Instructions - Each player stands at a marker. When all are in position you call 'play the ball'. At the completion of the ruck, you call 'rotate'. Each player moves to the next number and then you start again. As beginners progress you can add a range of different activities to this.
Skill Elements - Develop game situation, passing, tackling, finding space, movement execution.

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

The Intermediates - Under 9 and 10's

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

Activity 4 - Ruck Runner

Equipment - Football,
Set Up - Channel across field by 10-20m, depending on the number of players.
Instructions - Set up a normal ruck play. However dummy half must run and try to pass either as he is tackled or just prior to reaching the defence. Initially give teams 4 tackles and bonus tackles for 1 or 2 passes. As players get better effect a turnover each time a pass is not completed. Make sure defenders go forward as soon as the ball touches the ground, and defend as a unit so as to stop passes being thrown. Drop balls or other mistakes result in a changeover.
Skill Elements - Decision making, finding space, passing, tackling, evasion, communication.
Variations - Make the game 1 pass or use different numbers of attackers and defenders or make 4th ruck a must kick and chase.
Activity 5 - Marker Defend (U/10 drill)
Equipment - Football, markers
Set Up - As for Activity 3 (use numbers if required)
Instructions - Use marker to chase once ball is received and try to tackle low on receiver. If receiver passes, marker is to fall back into line that is coming up and defenders tackle as per normal.
Skill Element - Tackling, communication, teamwork.

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

The Seniors - Under 11 and 12's

Once again the same principles apply to this group as to the two previous groups but now because of greater skills and a better grasp of the rudiments of the game, a your responsibility shifts to a new dimension. Whilst still refining techniques and skills the coach now has to increase exposure for team members to the demands of the game. With the younger age groups try to provide the basic skills but with varying degrees of opposition. The young, or new player is required to make a number of responses in a short period of time. Often in a game this time is too short for a considered decision. For these players, and most players in these age groups the game presents many uncertainties through your program, and its development it is important to use and control your opposition in training. Opposition is used in many of the drills. With younger players it is introduced gradually and increased from token, to controlled and finally full competitive. As your opposition develops to full competitive you need to be aware of working both your attack and defence. An example of this could be shown in drawing the player, your strategy would first allow the development of player anticipation so that the supporter can learn and recognise the cues leading to the execution of the pass. Likewise the defender can do the same. This can be further enhanced by the development of functional practices that have a sequence of movements from the game. Three on two plays, with at first token defence moving through to contact, and fully competitive, is an example of using all players in a decision making game simulating activity. Finally in training the players are further tested in the development of the skill, by the development of the games that require this play to be used. Development of these conditioned game allows for the coach to fully evaluate the development of these game skills. The benefit of this approach is that the players are gradually exposed to the various demands of the game and hopefully develop anticipation for suitable responses as situations present themselves. The time

of the response will also shorten as the players develop a memory store or association for a response and its matching game cue. Below is an outline of the development of exposure to the demands of the team game, using drawing the player.

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

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



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Coach Talk

**Wayne
Pearce**

Balmain Tigers
Head Coach

Our interview this edition is with current Balmain Coach Wayne Pearce. Throughout his career he has shown tremendous loyalty to be associated with the Balmain club as a junior player, through the grades to first grade and representative level, and now as coach of the only club he has ever played for.

Wayne has overcome many physical and personal hurdles to become one of the most dedicated and respected players at all levels including NSW State or Origin and Australian representation.

His ideas and thoughts on coaching are well worth reading and are equally applicable at all levels of coaching.

Q1 What are your ideas on today's coaching?

A. Like most coaches it is basically trying to make average players and good players great. As far as my philosophy is concerned, I try to provide my players with the knowledge and environment to be better and that involves a whole range of things, it is a wholistic view. Looking at not just their skills and fitness but also their character, which will hopefully flow on to mean that they are better people in society as well. An old Jack Gibson quote from years ago "You can't be a mug 6 days a week and a great player on the 7th" and I really believe that.

Q2 What do you consider are your strengths in coaching?

A. Preparation and positivity. I believe in the more work and preparation you put in as a coach and as a player, makes you better. I like to cover all angles as far as preparation is concerned. That includes everything from making whatever we are doing enjoyable, providing variety, through to looking at all the positives in any given situation. I think positivity is an underrated point. One of the fundamentals of being a coach and extracting the most out of your players, is to see the positives in any given situation rather than look immediately at the negatives. For example, it is easy to look at a game when you lose and say our kicking game was terrible, but from a positive point of view you might say, on occasions when we were under pressure our kicking game was terrible. This approach makes it a lot more positive because it was only "terrible" in certain situations which means then you can attack that situation, rather the entire kicking game full stop which will have you tearing your hair out and saying 'where do I start'.

Q3 Where do you see skill training in today's programmes?

A. The basis of the game is skills, what separates a good athlete from a good footballer is skill and a sound temperament. We incorporate skills into all our sessions as part of the warm up and as a core part sessions. Our on-field fitness component is integrated most of the time with some sort of skills component e.g. a lot of our fitness work involves an agility component with a skill component using a football.

Q4 Do you concentrate on any special skill work?

A. Each session is different and that is one of the arts of coaching. Certainly at this elite level, it is such a long season and you have to put the variety in so every session is different, in the way it is structured and the skills you do. Periodisation is also used by my staff in terms of working on certain skills at certain times of the year so that it compliments the other programmes of fitness and strength that we are doing.

Q5 How important are game plans and patterns in your style of play?

A. It depends on the definition of a game plan. From my point of view a game plan is a structure that provides a foundation for the game. That structure may vary from team to team to compliment the players in my team and to try to identify the weaknesses an opposition might have. We have a basic plan and structure that underlies the whole season, and then for each game certain areas of play would be identified e.g. kick receptions would be dealt with in a certain way.

Q6 Could you give me an opinion on what I call 'impulse' play, that is players reacting on the spot to situations in play.

A. That is what football is all about, it's about reacting to the situation. It is not like a 100 metre race where you only have to react to the starting gun and then basically go until the finish line. Rugby League is all about reactions and reacting to what you see. From that point of view we certainly do a lot of training in terms of skill games, modified games that are a major component of the game. Unless a player can react to a situation he will never succeed as a quality player at the top level and so my point of view is that this is what Rugby League is all about. It is about reacting to what you see and every situation in the game is different and never ever do you see two games that are identical in terms of the way that they flow and events unfold. Better quality players can make decisions under pressure, they can also make decisions quickly and more often the right ones. Anyone can make a decision quickly but it is a different matter as to whether it is the right decision in the right situation.

For example - off loading. Some players will engage in a tackle and offload in a most ridiculous situation and the ball will go to ground, off-loading to a player who is in a worse situation than they are. They have reacted to a situation but have reacted in the wrong manner and if you work on that particular skill under pressure at training and over a period of time they can adapt and make the right decisions.

It is totally related to skill work and it doesn't just happen on the field unless you put players in that practice pressure situations at training.

Q7 How important is the mental aspects of players to achieve performance?

A. I think this aspect is a real priority, and yet it is an area that is still largely uncharted as far as preparation is concerned. We have a sports psychologist that we use extensively at Balmain. I got him involved during my first year with the club and has been with us right through working in a range of areas from building players self esteem to helping players perfect self hypnosis and visualisation. I think in the past there has been this perception that the head coach is automatically a sports psychologist as well. I had three years involved with Psychology at University yet I still think it is worthwhile getting a specialist in that area to work with the players. Sometimes the players are prepared to reveal some of their problems with an entrusted sports psychologist in preference to speaking to me or other members of the staff. There are a whole range of reasons why I

think it is better to have somebody independent of the coach who can work exclusively in that area.

Q8 Players are expected to perform at their peak each week, how do you ensure this performance?

A. First and foremost I try to prepare them as best I can in regards to varying their programme, to monitoring their energy and fatigue levels. We have charts for players when they come to training, which have on them a smiley face, a pretty bland face or a sad face. Players tick one of these as to how they are feeling and that gives us an idea of how the players are feeling. If players are constantly feeling flat and if you have a lot of players like that then maybe the work load is too heavy, so it enable sus to chart that a little bit better. Variety is very important in terms of keeping players mentally stimulated and it is about providing challenges and setting goals with the players

Rugby League is all about reactions and reacting to what you see.

individually and collectively each week. The challenge is really what drives the players on, if somebody has achieved everything it is understandable that it would be on their mind they have achieved everything and there is nothing left to achieve. That is when players are likely to lose any real incentive or motivation, but everyone can be given a new challenge. That is one of the arts of coaching, presenting players with new challenges.

Q9 What type of player best suits your style of play

A. Unless they have attitude they are wasting their time with me. I demand a fair bit in terms of their commitment to excellence. I want players to be the best that they can be, I give my players a list of my expectations at the start of the year and there are 18 points on my list that I ask all the players to live up to and to fulfil.

What I often do at different stages during the year is talk to players if I think they are not performing up to scratch and ask them to rate themselves out of 10 for all those points and when I get the responses back and they are not 10 out of 10 for all the points then I will ask them why. It puts the responsibility back on the players which I think is important.

I don't stand over any of my players with a big whip. The responsibility is on the players and I made my hand quite clear when I took over as coach. Because I was given the coaching role late in the year I was required to adopt a bunch of contracted players whether

is not based on this skill, something taken for granted in Australia. These players were great athletes, very powerful and quick with great footwork but their catching and passing skills was learnt when they were young so the psycho-motor skill links were not there. A lot of time was put into their training and whilst they did improve over the summer, gains were not marked. I believe there is so much room left for improvement in the skills area because there has not been enough skills done in the junior ages, so that when players come into grade as young men it takes a lot of time to develop a lot of their basic skills. This time is

just starting to become available with the move to full professionalism. Overall you need a good blend of skills and physical fitness.

There is huge benefits in video use

I wanted them or not. At the end of the first year we didn't perform at all, we came last and of the 50 contracted players we terminated 38. We try to do our homework on players before they are signed but if there is a player who we do sign who does not have the right attitude they are not with us for very long.

Q10 The game requires physical fitness and skill. What sort of balance do you see between these two attributes. Is one more important than the other?

A. It is a blend of the two. The skill component is the area where I think there is most room for improvement. The physical fitness area as far as strength and aerobic capacity is concerned is fairly even in terms of different clubs and even different individuals and the effort they are putting in. The agility aspect is an area where there is still room for significant improvement, and we are certainly doing a lot of work in this area in terms of footwork and basic skills. We have this as a core component of our programme and if you watch any of our forwards they have developed good foot work. As far as the skills area is concerned there are still enormous gains to be made in that area because it takes so long to develop a particular skill if you haven't been raised on that skill the link between the brain and the muscles isn't there and hasn't been conditioned to be there. E.g. 18 months ago we had four top American College Gridiron players. One had played professionally and was in Australia for the Sevens Tournament to represent America. They were placed with us to train through the summer with a view to trialling for a contract. The fact was, that although they improved, they had a problem with the catch and pass, because their game

Q11 How have you handled the transition from player to coach?

A. My last playing season was 1990, I had a three year break, where I was primarily involved in the media and the opportunity arose for me to move into First Grade coaching. I had to think about it, and I spoke to people that I respect, and they agreed that I had what appears to be the necessary ability to do the job but I have found it to be a lot harder than I thought it would be. In fact the club hadn't recruited all that well and had been on a slide for a while, making that first year very tough. In that initial year I did all the strength work, co-ordinated the fitness, did all the recruitment myself as well as coaching. We bottomed out as a team but every year since then we have improved and on a limited budget I think we have done very well. Last year was pretty good but this year the feeling is really good, it was very difficult mainly from the point of view that as a player you determine your own destiny basically because you are the one out there performing the tackles making the breaks, but as a coach you can do all the preparation you think necessary for a game yet there are certain days when things don't click and that is frustrating.

Q12 Does video have a place in your team analysis and preparation?

A. Yes. There are huge benefits in video use. I take my hat off to coaches pre-video who did all their work without them. It would be so much more difficult trying to rely on memory to improve the team and player performances. We use them frequently, in a number of areas - pre-match in terms of assessing the opposition, post-match in terms of review of our game.

We also use it in two ways for skills development. One is in the game situation to break down a players skills showing what a player does under pressure and secondly at training, taping a player to help correct errors and allowing players to see themselves from outside their own mind. We use a lot of video work both as recording ourselves and also for analysis. Tackling techniques for example, we do full contact work at training so you can identify bad techniques such as, target area maybe too high, some players drop their head at point of contact, close their eyes or not dipping their hips low enough etc.

Q13 Does Balmain have a plan for talent development and identification?

A. They're are two separate issues but any successful club must have a plan for identifying talent and recruiting talent. We don't go out with a big, long drift fishing net and scoop up everything we can, we are quite selective. We usually don't get involved with players before they are 16 or 17 years of age in terms of recruiting and bringing them through we try to concentrate our resources on the older recruits. Talent identification involves a network that we have, it involves educating the people in the network, as to what our requirements are and what we are looking for in terms of ability and character, and maintaining those standards. So far as developing the talent we have in our own district we try to impress upon young players in our junior representative teams, the same philosophies and the same methods of preparation as for the First Grade players so that there is a common theme right through the club.

Q14 Has there been any person who has been a key influence in your coaching development?

A. As a coach I have picked the best of anyone who has coached me and then thrown in my own ideas. I have had some good coaches through juniors as well as First Grade and Representative level. I wouldn't say there has been anyone who has stood out but I have certainly picked the eyes out of what I believe have been the good coaches who I have had.

Q15 What are your coaching ambitions? Do you see yourself at Balmain for a lengthy period?

A. I don't have any aspirations to coach anywhere else. I love the club, I played for one junior club in Balmain and I played for the senior club all my life and it is the only club I have ever wanted to coach. I enjoy it at the moment, it is a challenge for me and it gives me an opportunity to try and win a competition which I didn't as a player. Whilst I am enjoying it and remain enthusiastic about it I would like to continue

and I don't know if that will be another 12 months or ten years.

I believe in quality of life and if I am enjoying it I really want to keep going. The reason I finished playing was that my body was starting to get a little bit worn and also my enthusiasm was starting to wane.

Q16 What do you see as a prime denominator a coach at any level must have.

A. You have to be patient, if you are impatient in wanting results straight away that can lead to frustration and knee jerk reactions. You have to be very positive, ooze confidence which comes from being positive and have the courage of your convictions. There will always be some body telling you one thing, and someone else telling you something else and you have to have a concept of what you want to achieve and how you are going to get there. You might make a few changes along the way but I believe that if you keep chopping and changing what you are about then that sends a signal to the players that you are a bit sloppy in your preparation, and you are not sure what you are doing, they become less confident in you.

Q17 Have you any advice for coaches who wish to reach the highest level.

A. You have to have a desire to improve you knowledge. There is no book you can pick up that will tell you everything you want to know about coaching and different coaching styles require different methods to address a situation. You must have a desire to want to help other people and the capacity to seek out knowledge and be your own best critic.

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

A. I still believe that one of the biggest blights on the game is inconsistencies as far as referees are concerned. I don't blame the referees so much as the system because there is too much on the referees plate. Sure he gets some assistance from touch judges and the video camera at the moment, but the problem with refereeing when there is only one on-field referee he is expected to keep defence back ten metres and at the same time police the ruck area and he can't do both. I really do believe that the best way to clean up the dramas is to have a second on-field referee who is basically an assistant referee. The person in charge has got the whistle, the other person maybe marks the ten metres, and the referee in charge watches the play the ball and they communicate through signals for offside play. I think that would be a huge improvement and it is only a matter of time for this to happen otherwise we are going to perservere with inconsistencies, basically because they can not control both areas effectively.

Defensive Systems

"Slide" versus "Up & In"

Kurt Wrigley

Defensive systems are a topic of much debate within Rugby League.

Depending on the philosophy of the coach, the thoughts and experience of the key players in the team, and with consideration to the attacking abilities of the opposition, a choice can be made between the two systems of "slide" and "up and in" defence. These systems have distinctive purposes and basically allow the defence to control the oppositions attack.

Slide Defence can be best described as a Reactive waiting type system where the width of the defence line players is compressed. This encourages the opposition to move the ball wide where the defenders slide to the edges of the field. The sideline is then used as an extra defensive barrier.

In contrast **"up and in"** defence can be described as a Proactive pressure type defence. The width of the defence line is stretched wider and the emphasis is on the defensive line to move off the line quicker and move up and in on the attackers for a few reasons.

- To reduce metreage
- To force errors (cut down the opposition think time with the football)
- To reduce attacking options by controlling attack to centre field.

When selecting the type of defensive system to be used, individual and team characteristics should be considered. Identified players and team strengths and weaknesses can assist the coach in this decision.

Generally speaking both systems tend to suit teams with players having the following traits.

SLIDE	UP and IN
Smaller and Lighter	Larger and Heavier
Agile and Speed	Less Agile
Speed	Aggressive
Low Contact Affinity	High Contact Affinity
Lower Physical Strength	Good Physical Strength
Good Communication	Good Communication
	High Aerobic Fitness

Rationale

The theory behind the "slide defence" is to allow the opposition to perform their attacking moves and then react to control the attack. To do this the defensive line first compresses its width toward the ruck area, to encourage the opposition to move the ball to attack out wide. The defensive line then moves up together at an even pace, ensuring that the first movement is forward then reacts to the oppositions attacking movement of the football by sliding outwards onto the ball carriers, and ensuring that all defenders have nominated and numbered up on their opposition.

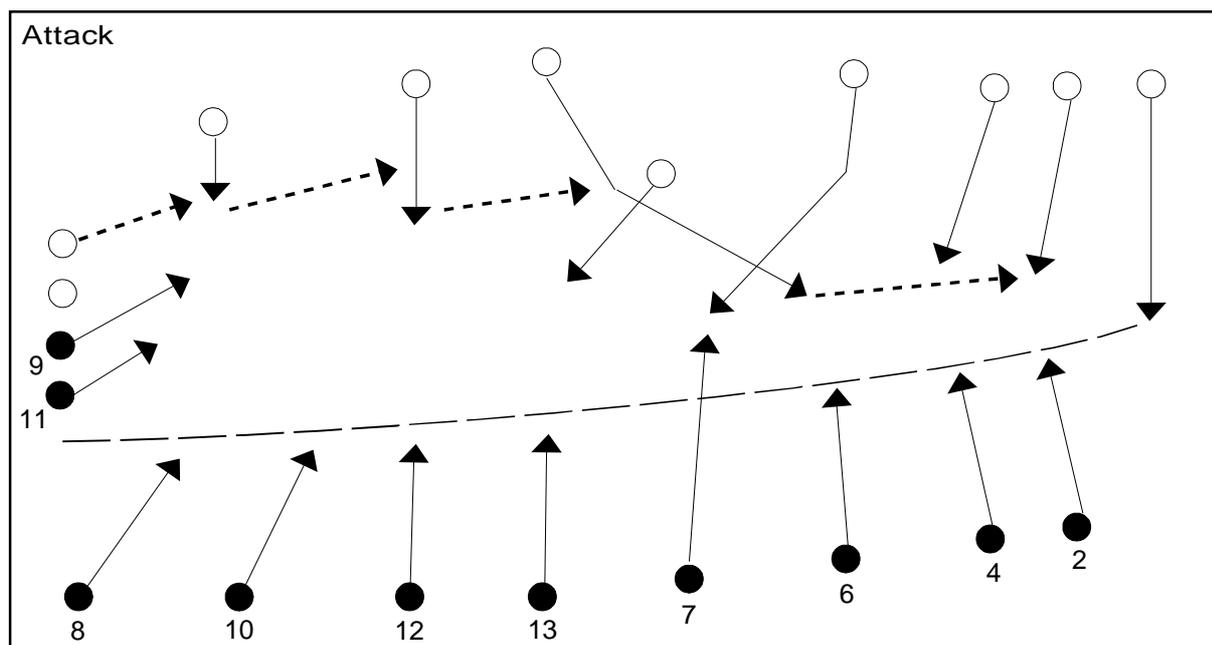
The intended outcome is to reduce the number of line breaks out wide at the expense of the metres gained. Also

the team is thought to use less energy from the reduced distance and speed of the defensive line moving up and back. Having said that if the opposition is willing to move the football wide on successive tackles a lot of energy is expended by the defence on the lateral movement of the defenders in their "slide."

"Up and in" defence is justified by the belief that few teams have the attacking ability/skill to handle pressure defence. More energy is used with this system but the reward for the defence is usually poor timing and execution of attacking plays resulting in increased handling errors, as defenders approach attackers from their outside or blind side and pressure ball carriers and their support players.

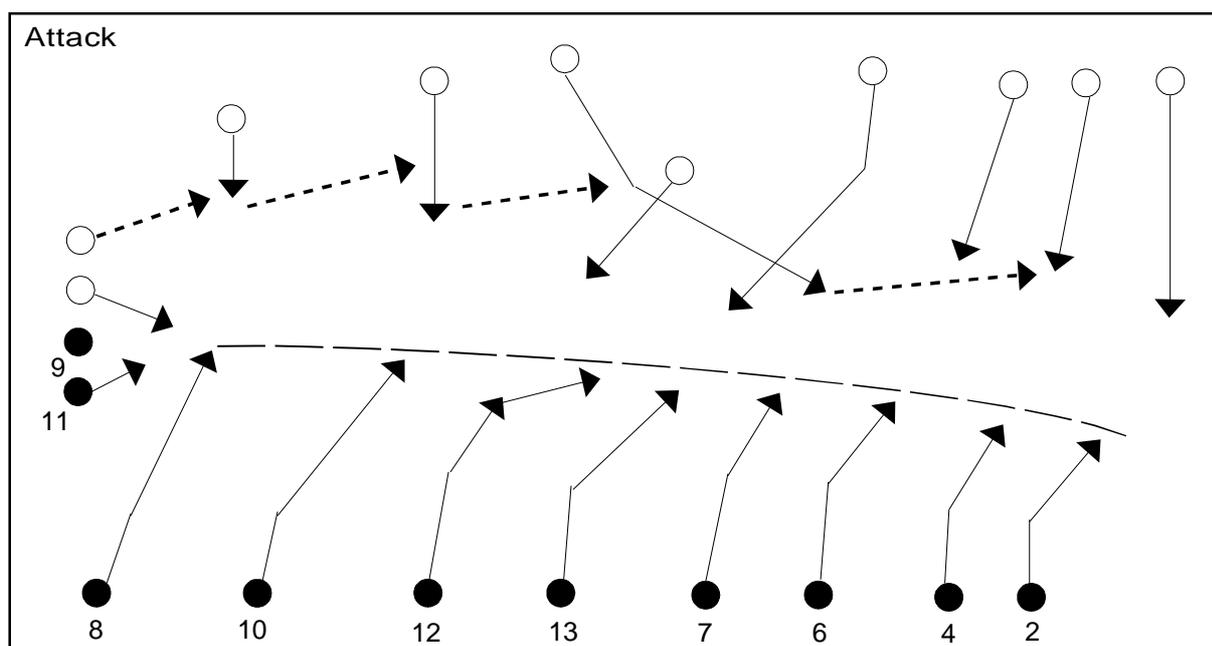
It is important to note that with this type of defence it is vital for players involved in the tackle to control the speed of the play the ball. This will allow time for fellow defenders to reform the defence line on side so as to move quickly off their line again.

UP and IN



Defence

SLIDE



Defence

Easy To Train Strength Exercises

By Alex Corvo Level 2 Strength and Conditioning

This article was submitted by Alex Corvo as an indication of strength exercises that can be performed where minimal equipment is available. The article will be presented over two editions with four(4) exercises in each issue.

Strength and other related components of fitness such as speed and speed/strength (power) are essential requirements for all Rugby League players. While it is agreed that players should possess a high level of skill, the player's performance of these skills will be influenced to a degree by the level he has attained in those important physical fitness requirements of the game.

For various reasons, players may find it difficult to access a well equipped gymnasium and hence may believe it not possible to make the fitness gains required in the relevant areas.

This article over two editions will outline 8 exercises that can be performed using a minimum amount of equipment whilst also having a positive effect on strength.

Warm Up

Each strength training session should commence with an adequate warm up. The warm up should consist of 5-8 minutes of aerobic activity, predominantly working the large muscle groups. Activities such as jogging and cycling are recommended.

Once core temperature has been increased (normally determined by the onset of a light sweat) a stretching routine should follow. These stretches should target the muscle groups that are to be trained during that particular session.

Safety Considerations

- Ensure adequate time is taken to learn the correct movement patterns for each lift.
- Always train under the supervision of a qualified strength coach.

- Train with a partner. This person can assist with spotting (if necessary) and in ensuring good technique is used while exercising.
- The risk of injury is greatly reduced when exercises are performed in the proper manner.
- Correct breathing is important. players should never hold their breath while performing any strength exercises such as those outlined in this article.
- Never increase the weight or resistance in an exercise to sacrifice good lifting technique. When a players' lifting technique begins to deteriorate the set should be stopped immediately.

Split Squats (1)

Muscles Worked

- Quadriceps, hamstrings, gluetus maximus (buttocks), erector spinae (lower back), gastrocnemius (calf), soleus (calf) and abdominals

Method of Execution

- bar resting across shoulders
- feet should be placed 1 running stride length apart, in line with shoulders
- eyes focused on a point on the wall. Slightly higher than eye height
- the descent commences with the hips flexed forward, front foot flat on ground and back foot on toes
- start the decent by bending the front leg so that the knee moves over the line of toes. At the same time the back knee is moved towards the ground. The back knee bends slightly during the movement
- the descent is completed as the back knee contacts the ground lightly. This position is held for a brief second prior to commencing the return to the starting position.
- the ascent commences with a smooth, controlled movement.

- breathe in during descent and breathe out when ascending
- keep hips under bar and torso straight and upright during movement
- perform equal sets and repetitions on both sides of body

Safety

- do not bounce during the transition to the ascent
- keep shoulder blades back, torso strong and upright throughout movement

Variations

- dumbbells held in hands will increase the contribution of the lower limb muscles
- place the back leg on top of bench. This will cause an increased load on the quadriceps muscles of front leg

Step Ups (2)

Muscles Worked

- quadriceps, hamstrings, gluteus maximus (buttocks), erector spinae (lower back), gastrocnemius (calf), soleus (calf) and abdominals

Method of Execution

- bar resting across shoulders
- non-preferred leg starting on bench
- eyes focused on point on wall slightly higher than eye height
- using the muscles on the front leg (on bench) the player steps onto the bench moving the back leg forward. The back leg moves towards bench but does not come in contact with bench
- the working legs stop just short of the lockout position
- To commence descending the player bends the knee of the front (step up) leg
- breathing: exhale on descent, inhale on ascent
- be sure to perform equal sets and repetitions for each leg

Important Points

- torso should be held as erect as possible throughout movement
- keep hips under shoulders
- the descent must be controlled
- keep the knee of front leg pointing slightly outward

Safety

- player should keep eyes focused slightly upwards during performance of exercise

- do not perform the exercise if the lower back and abdominal muscles are in a state of fatigue from a previous exercise or workout

Variations

- dumbbells held in hand in preference to bar across shoulders will increase the involvement of the lower limb muscles
- hold bar across top of chest for a greater overload of quadriceps muscles
- a higher bench height will increase the contribution of the hamstring muscles as well as increase the load on the gastrocnemius (calf) muscle on landing
- a lower bench will increase the load on the lower, inner quadriceps muscles around knee joint. This variation is useful for improving knee stability

One-Legged Calf Raises (3)

Muscles Worked

- gastrocnemius (calf), soleus (calf)

This exercise is useful in assisting with strengthening of the muscles below the knee required for sprinting and jumping

Method of Execution

- the player stands on top of a stair or high block holding a dumbbell on the same side as the working leg
- eyes focused on a spot on the wall slightly higher than the head
- the height of the step or platform needs to be high enough to allow the ankle to move through the full range of motion
- the non-working leg is bent 90°, resting foot on back of knee of lifting leg
- ball of foot on lifting platform
- the movement is commenced by lowering the heels as far down as possible
- the upward part of the movement is commenced in a slow and controlled manner and the body lifted as high as possible onto the toes of the lifting leg

Important Points

- hold the bottom position for 1 or 2 seconds to allow a good stretch
- exhale during ascent and inhale during descent
- hold trunk as erect as possible throughout movement
- perform equal sets and repetitions for each leg

A Psychologists View

Our interview is with psychologist **Dr Roger F Peters** an occasional contributor to RLCM, I asked him to reflect on the ten years he has spent working with Rugby League teams and coaches.

Roger was team psychologist to

South Newcastle 1985-1987

Newcastle Knights Rugby League Club 1987 - 1994

Hunter Mariners Super League Club 1996 - 1997

In addition Roger has worked in many other sports assisting athletes reach their goals.

Q What caused you to become professionally involved with Rugby League?

Well firstly, I was never much of a footballer, (too slow) but I was brought up in Balmain so I suppose it gets into your blood and I have always loved the game. It wasn't until about 1985 that I had any inkling that my university studies in psychology, more specifically "stress and performance" may be relevant to Rugby League. There are four aspects to sport that should be coached. The first three are obvious and include *physical preparation*, ie strength and stamina, secondly *tactical skills* such as match plans and strategies and thirdly *technical aspects*, ie scrummaging, kicking, tackling etc. Coaches spend almost 100% of their time training these three principal areas. The fourth area that we often talk about but do little about, is what is called the "affective" or psychological skills, eg communication, team work, courage, commitment, concentration etc. It was about that time I was suggesting that anxiety or in simpler terms "worry" could clearly affect performance and bring individuals or teams undone, perhaps now such a conclusion would seem self evident, but at the time rarely understood and even less acted upon.

Q What should a coach look for in a sports psychologist?

Sports psychologists generally refer to themselves as sport (singular) psychologist and to be frank I am not regarded by my peers as one. These days we psychologists tend to be professionally driven by academic achievement and thus a sport psychologist is generally a person who has attained at least registration and a masters degree in the applied field of sport. However, there are two important issues in

choosing a psychologist. The first is that qualifications and competence are not necessarily equivalent and while a person may or may not have a degree specifically in sport psychology, they at least should be a registered psychologist. The question then becomes more, "will my team relate to this person?" "Will my team understand this person?"

The second feature of a good sport psychologist is that the work they do must involve only useful and practical strategies that can be demonstrated to impact on performance. In simple terms, I think the two essential criteria in selecting a psychologist are competence and user friendliness.

Q What do sport psychologist's look for in a coach?

This is a hard question but a good one. I guess all coaches have their own style, although if pressed I could pigeon hole them, some of these may include the bully, the teacher, the friend or confidant, etc. Most of the coaches I have worked with have outstanding qualities but like all of us can be affected by stress, anxiety and especially insecurity.

I enjoyed working for David Waite and his analytical approach to the game.

I look for sophistication in understanding the principles of psychology and certainly in how they can be applied. It simply will not work if the coach uses me as a "priest" a motivator, or a lucky charm. Having established that, I suppose like any coach I want some time with the players. I recall one coach putting my session at the end of some fairly heavy ball work at 9.00pm and when I went into the session he said, "Now what are you here for again". Not only demotivating for me,

but obviously putting my work as little more than an appendage in the minds of the players.

Q What is the ideal mental preparation program?

Well before getting into that I should just point out that psychologists seem to be used in two principle ways, ie firstly an appendage, an add on, or a rev up, sometimes simply to fill a hole. This is clear when there is no coherent program in place with objectives and performance indicators. A coach may say the side is a little flat, saying "we are uncommitted, we better get so and so he was good". After a session the "specialist" goes back to wherever and the team continues on its way. Given another opportunity I would like to explain how that approach can even do more harm than good, even though it is no doubt done with the best intentions.

The second way is to encompass the notion of affective skills training and seek ways to develop a program that covers several important areas. These I would define as team building, skills acquisition, player assistance and player development.

Players vary in their needs and certainly what motivates them.

Q Could you explain these further?

First - team building. Obviously completed by the beginning of the season, this is a purposeful strategy to develop sound camaraderie and may include team building exercises in a camp type situation. It may include the development of a mission statement in the same way that corporations do. It may also include describing the teams values and standards. The Newcastle Knights had the most memorable in 1988 when they decided that they would choose the same standard as the Brandenburg Orchestra, ie "To be the player that every other player wants to play with". The Mariners in 1996 "Where extraordinary is the norm" was another example. These values help galvanise a club and a team. Care has to be taken not to over do this approach and thus devalue it. Likewise the players not the coach should decide, what is important, simply trust the players, usually you can depend on 20 or so

young men to be exceedingly creative.

The second area is in skills acquisition.

Communication, Concentration and Commitment are the three big "C"'s of effective skills training. These can be trained for and developed, and I have found it more effective as a one on one program rather than in groups. Players vary in their needs and certainly what motivates them. Threatening a player that he will be pulled off for poor performance may work well with one player, but do exactly the opposite in the case of others. Coaches, it must be remembered have the opportunity to find the "green button" and they can find this in co-operation with their sport psychologist and develop ways of coaching players rather than just teams.

Thirdly player assistance. Taking a leaf from industry more sport clubs are taking on what are referred to as Employee Assistance Programs. An EAP as simple as I can put it, is a program or intervention aimed to assist players and their families who may be troubled by personal problems. These include but are not limited to drugs and alcohol, marital problems, gambling etc. We know from research that problems such as these

can affect performance and of course there are some memorable examples which such problems have caused a club to become embroiled in controversy, even crisis. Thus an EAP becomes an essential third strategy.

Player development program is the fourth factor.

This programme should be aimed at assisting players develop not only their football skills but other more general life skills. This can be accomplished in two ways, ie, informal and formal. Formal programs are those that are conducted through TAFE or university and where the player can utilise spare time between games and training in a creative way. The second type of development program is more informal where players are taught a wide range of skills that may assist them as professional footballers off the field, eg etiquette, financial planning, media communications, etc may be all part of a program. We can all agree that players, idle time and large incomes, are a

A Coaches View of Psychology for Rugby League

By Mick Aldous
NSWRL Coaching
and Development Officer
ARL Level 3 Coach

The basic premise underlying any discussion on the topic of psychology is that Everybody is different

It is this fact alone that makes the task of coaching Rugby League at the elite level such a complex task. Within any one group there will be absolutely no similarity of players at all. This is all because of genetics and child-rearing practices. We cannot tamper with this. Alter one and it is difficult to change the others. A coach must work with the existing group, educate them to create harmony, care for each individual and ultimately influence all behavioural reactions of that player in a manner that is conducive to team success.

Without some training how do we do this?

Let me tell you a few little secrets employed by successful coaches. (Building a winning team).

The most successful coaches agree on one thing. They are heavily involved in creating an environment that suits every team member, and is designed for successful performance.

Building Psychological Skills

The creed for successful coaching is one simple word

Responsibility

Making a player responsible for their own actions. Responsibility for discipline. Responsibility for concentration. Responsibility for self-image. And ultimately, a personal responsibility for the mental toughness that distinguishes successful athletes from failures.

Talent does not necessarily equate to success. But, a coach can assist in building the bridge between the two. The framework of success lies in developing personal qualities and psychological capacities. We will look at the building blocks of personal best performance.

There are six main skills needed for success.

Self Image - How you see yourself reflected in your endeavours. Your mind will act on the image you present it. Be realistic in assessing your own ability. Footballers of high self-image not only feel they are people of dignity and worth, they act the part. High v low achievers.

Concentration - In the face of distraction to be sufficiently relaxed to perform at your best.

"If you keep your head whilst those around you lose theirs, then you will be a man my son." (Rudyard Kipling)

It is the ability to control thoughts and actions so that attention remains fixed (focused) on the factors that lead to efficient performance.

The ability to ignore distractions

Motivation and Goals - If purpose is the engine that drives our lives, then goals are the petrol. Goals provide the stimulation and incentive to direct activity. Make them realistic. Everybody will have different goals. Goal setting achieves motivation.

Conquering Stress - Most stressful situations exist when a person is confronted with the unknown. The key to overcoming trepidation is to de-focus on the outcome and concentrate on the moment of action. There are techniques used to relax and control bodily reactions.

Visualisation - Preparation for demanding tasks can be made without exposure to the event. By painting a realistic picture, full of positive outcomes, an individual is capable of improving performance.

Confidence - This is acquired from hard work. Achieve one small thing each day. Gain from positive reinforcement. Gain from doing.

Skill Scene

A player's ability to offload a football in a tackle is a useful skill in today's game. This skill is best used when the ball carrier has committed defenders to him in a tight situation, whether by being in the defence line or slightly through it.

The success of this play will depend on a number of factors.

- The skill (ability) of the football carrier to perform the technique properly requires that player to maintain ball control. Have good vision to assess the situation, make the decision of when to pass and pass the football at the right moment.
- There must be support players well positioned to receive the football as they run into space. This space may be at any reasonable distance from the football carrier but most times it will be close.

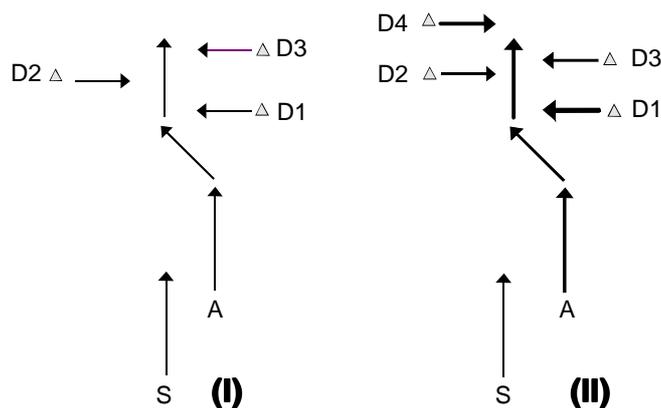
This particular skill is best learned and refined through game related practices.

The following practice could assist the development of this skill.

BLOCKING ARMS AND OFFLOADING

Setting: Groups of five (2 Attackers (A) and 3 Defenders (D)), to commence then progress to 2A and 4D. Only ever 2 attackers.

- Objectives are to keep eyes open, head up, have secure ball carriage, good running posture and arm use
- Close in work (protect, recover, unload)
- Defence is to "tackle" high (with one arm)
- Then advance to two arms (from side), high
- Defenders should aim from chest to shoulders and can obstruct late, low or high during run by A.
- Attackers (A) could wear face masks to encourage eyes open



Progression:

- Add in bump pad as well as arm guards to defenders. Arm guard players can vary the height of tackle anywhere from low to high.
- To formation (ii).

Attacker(A) runs forward supported by (S) support player

"A" negotiates traffic area created by D1, D2, D3 and D4, then passes to S (support player). □

Eating for Peak Performance

Judy Bauer

B Sc, Grad Dip Nutr & Diet, MHlth Sc, MDAA

Nutrition Consultant

"The Food Advantage" - A guide to food and nutrition for optimal sporting performance was written by experienced sports nutritionists and accredited practicing dietitians Judy Bauer, Trudy Williams and Deborah Richards. Topics covered include:

- Calculating your individual carbohydrate requirements
- How much fat and protein do you need
- Bulking up
- Losing excess body fat
- Pre-event meals and recovery
- Alcohol

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Everyone is looking for the edge in their sport and fitness - that little bit extra will take them comfortably to the end of the game. Whether you are playing State of Origin or the local fixture, you can have one of the easiest edges there is through eating great food. What you eat and drink significantly influences your performance. Many players think that improving their diet a week or two before an important match is enough, but it's really the year round diet that is most important. An adequate diet in terms of quality and quantity before, during and after exercise will maximise performance. Nutrition is the bridge between your ability and your maximal performance.

For most sports people the ideal eating plan is very high in carbohydrate (60-70% of total kilojoules), moderate in protein and low fat. Your muscles and liver store carbohydrate as glycogen and if you don't have enough glycogen stored, you simply won't be able to play well, either in training or during the game. With a high carbohydrate eating plan you'll train to your max, last longer, perform better and recover quicker.

Tips for packing in the carbohydrate.

1. Start the day with a great breakfast. A simple bowl of breakfast cereal topped with milk served with fresh fruit is a high nutrient way to start the day.
2. Snacks are essential for all players. The right snacks will top up glycogen levels before and after training or a game, help you control your body weight and boost performance. Quick convenient snacks include breakfast cereals and bars, dried fruit, muesli bars, fruit, muffins, yoghurt, rice and pasta.
3. Make carbohydrates the focus of each meal. Fill up on plenty of bread, pasta, rice, couscous, noodles or potatoes. At your main meal your plate should contain at least half carbohydrate containing foods.
4. For maximum glycogen synthesis consume carbohydrate within 10-15 minutes after your training session or game and continue with a high carbohydrate diet for the next 24 hours. The best snacks in the immediate replenishment phase are quick acting carbohydrates such as sports drinks, cereals, honey sandwiches, jelly beans, creamed rice and watermelon. □

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