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RUGBY LEAGUE COACHING MAGAZINE

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# The Defensive Line

By Alex Corvo

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**A**n ex-Australian coach often used the following saying to motivate his players “if you tackle soft you play soft”. Anyone that has played Rugby League would likely agree with this statement. Other comments commonly heard include; “defence won them the game” and “if they don’t score we can’t lose”. It is also useful to note that when a team stops talking players have stopped tackling.

The most simple description for defence is “the time when a team is not in possession of the ball”.

Defence is the act of halting attacking players through effective tackling, delaying play or controlling the attack through positioning-either of support or the ball carrier.

The primary aim is to stop the forward movement of the ball.

On this basis, it would be fair to say that defence forms a vital part of Rugby League and can be assisted by applying some basic principles which include the:-

1. Tackle
2. Straight line
3. Defensive line
4. Advantage line

In addition, these “principles” are supported by:-

1. Forward movement
2. Communication
3. A high level of fitness

The basis of any team’s defensive pattern must be the ability of each team member to tackle. Minimising ineffective tackling is an absolute must.

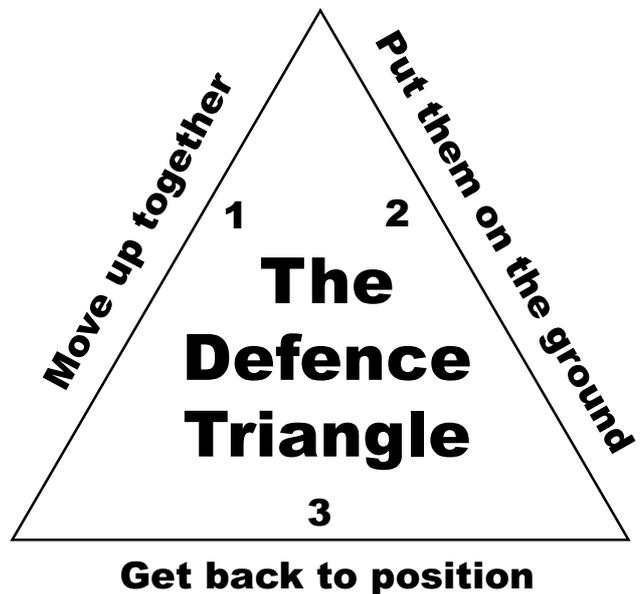
Players who are able to perform one-on-one tackles and put the attacker on the ground are invaluable members of any team. In the reverse situation attacking players who are able to draw two or more defenders when in possession of the ball will create space and attacking opportunities for team mates, hence the importance of defenders being able to tackle in a one-on-one situation. Communication assumes vital

importance in the one-on-one situation and requires some consideration to covering defence.

Thirteen good tackling players do not necessarily make a good defensive team unless they work together as a unit. A straight line of defence combined with players that can tackle will limit the attacking opportunities of the opposition team. A defensive line that is not straight is more readily open to penetration.

It is with this in mind that attacking players prey on defenders who move up and out of the line early or who have been “lazy” and not moved up, in both instances failing to keep the line “straight”.

The “straight line” for this purpose is the formation of defending players in a straight line in front of the attack. In this case it is formed on the 10 metre mark at a ruck.



This straight line of defence will be more effective if it moves forward.

The defensive line is simply the straight line that moves forward and assumes a new mark. It is the action between the formation of the straight line and before the tackle. In reality the defence line can move forward, back and sideways. It takes the defence to the attack and denies it time and space and therefore, options.

Penetrating the defence line amounts to breaking “the defence”.

As a game based on territorial advantage, the closer the defence executes its tackle to the advantage line, the greater will be its effectiveness.

The advantage line, sometimes referred to as the “gain” line, is an imaginary line across the field and drawn between the man playing the ball and the marker.

Once the attack passes this line the defence loses ground.

It is possible for a team to “attack” when defending by aggressively meeting the opposition when they are in possession.

Coaches should base their defensive line as close as possible to this line. “Meet them and beat them” is one example. This forward movement of the defending team can limit the momentum of the attacking team. It will also decrease the time in which the attackers have time to think and plan their options as well as limit the space in which to move. The forward movement of the straight line is critical and will also assist a tackle. Given the opportunity, attacking players will attempt to position defenders to their advantage. This is made more difficult with the forward movement of the defence.

The width of the defensive line must be considered. By width, we are talking about the distance any two defenders in the line are from one another as well as the total distance covered from each outermost defender in the line. Variables such as the one-on-one defensive ability of the team, the speed of the line, the part of the field that the team is defending as well as the attacking team will influence the width of the line.

The coach should also consider whether or not to use a second line of defence. This second line will give better opportunity to cover breaks in the line but can reduce the width of the front line.

Also to be considered is the individual positioning of players in the line and how rigidly the coach expects his players to remain in their defensive positions in the line.

Underpinning the principles of defence mentioned is communication amongst players. Communication is the major factor in team work and organisation. A poorly organised defence will not perform to its potential. Messages must be clear and to the point resulting in swift responses. Good communication will remove confusion. Constructive communication will result in increased team morale and confidence, helping concentration on the task at hand as well as committing team mates and delegating responsibility.

Forward movements has already been mentioned when discussing the action of the defensive line. Forward movement crowds the opposition for the time available to select options and the space necessary to do things. It also interferes with the co-ordination and timing of the attack. Moving forward introduces pressure.

Tackling and the “up and back” movement under the 10 metre rule places an enormous strain on fitness levels. Fitness levels are a part of the defence performance and must be trained with that in mind.

In simple terms teams must Form-Up-Move-Up and make the Tackle.

A useful paradigm and one easily remembered is the Defence Triangle.

The principles of defence discussed will be the foundation of any team’s defensive system. To be successful, whichever defensive pattern is used must employ these principles of defence. This is founded by the forward movement in the line of each defender. The player’s ability to tackle proficiently and communicate well will contribute to the success of the team’s defence.

## NOTES

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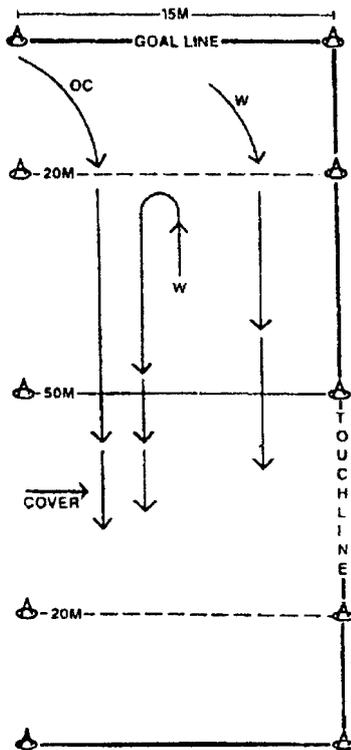
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# Practices for the Wing Three-Quarter



The wing three-quarter is one of the true individualists in the game. Together with the fullback and the outside centre he is often on his own when he receives the ball in attack. Many times the winger is one against the rest and top wingers endeavour to equip themselves with every trick in the book. Speed, change of pace, fend, bump, in and away, kicking, determination and courage are all prerequisites for good wing play. The wing position is one of the most important in today's game. He is instrumental in the kick and chase, as a retriever, a returner, the first line of defence and is the fullback's best friend.

The first practice involves defence and is in two parts:

## Some Practices for the wing three-quarter.

(a) requiring the winger to chase and cause a breakdown in the attack.

(b) to tackle and close down the play immediately.

(a) This part of the practice is over 70-80 metres of the field in a side-line corridor approximately 15-20 metres wide. Two attacking players confront the defending winger i.e. a 2 on 1 situation.

## Objective

(a) To prevent the opposing outside centre providing an overlap for his wing.

(b) Forcing an error or an incomplete play for the attack.

## Situation

The attacking outside centre has crossed his opposite centre and made the inside shoulder of the defensive winger. The attacking winger has an overlap.

## Mechanics

1. The defending winger has moved up with the rest of the line.
2. As the attacking outside centre moves towards the defensive winger, the latter commences to retreat backwards while facing the attacking outside centre.
3. As the attacking outside centre moves closer, the defensive winger stays between him and his winger.
4. The defending winger commences to turn in field and as the centre gets closer he briefly runs side-ways before fully turning to straighten up and run with the centre.
5. The winger continues to face in toward the outside centre and remain between the outside centre and wing.
6. In this position he can see his cover and the ball carrier.
7. This allows him to lay off the outside centre and not be drawn to commit his tackle until he judges the point of "no return".

8. His positioning in-between the two makes it difficult for the outside centre to pass to his wing and slows the outside centre down as he attempts to manoeuvre for his winger. It also allows the defending winger to see and communicate with cover defence.

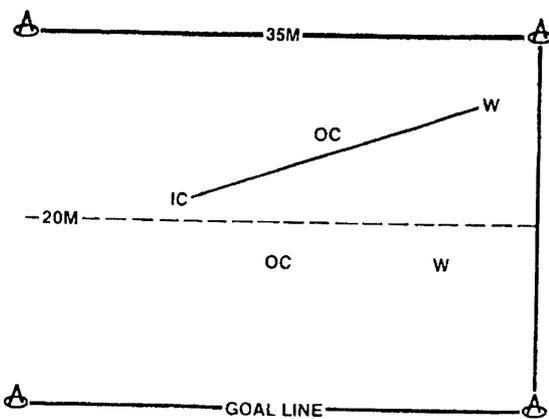
9. The defending winger stays alive until the cover arrives (who will often tell the defending winger what to do) or he attacks the outside centre at the point of no return, attempting to close down the ball or force the error.

10. The second defence situation occurs when there is no time to chase and the tackle must be immediately made on the ball. This is more likely to occur the closer the attack is to the goal line. Anticipation is a key factor for the tackle is to be made on the attacking outside centre.

## Objective

For the defending winger to tackle the opposition centre “ball and all” or effectively cause play to break down.

## Situation



The attack is no more than 35 metres away from the defending team’s goal line. The defending winger is faced with an overlap. The objective is to immediately move in, make the tackle and stop the ball.

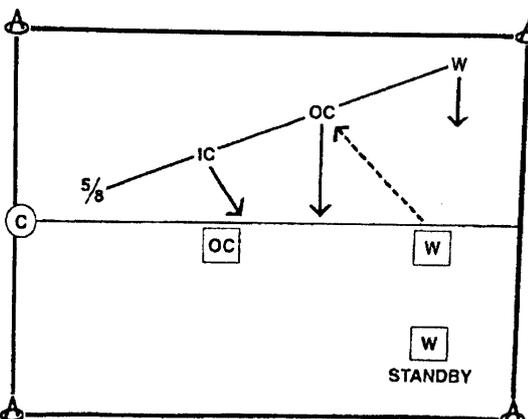
Vision and anticipation are two required factors for the defending winger. He should look first at the space between himself and his nearest inside support player, and then at the number of opposition players on the outside of his own nearest player. This should tell him whether or not he is in a vulnerable situation.

If the opposition outside centre is on the outside of the defending wingers nearest inside player there is a likelihood that the player can get across to and draw the defending winger and then send his own winger away.

**Mechanics** Timing for the tackle on the opposing outside centre by the defending winger should commence on the opposition 5/8 but he synchronises his final movement on the inside centre. He contacts the outside centre the moment that player receives the ball or is in the early stages of passing to the unmarked wing. In this regard he is dependent on his own outside centre so as to reduce time for him to use his vision and throw the cut-out pass.

A further opportunity to tackle presents itself if the attacking centre looks away from either winger, towards the defending centre or back infield.

The defending winger must practice developing wide angle vision.

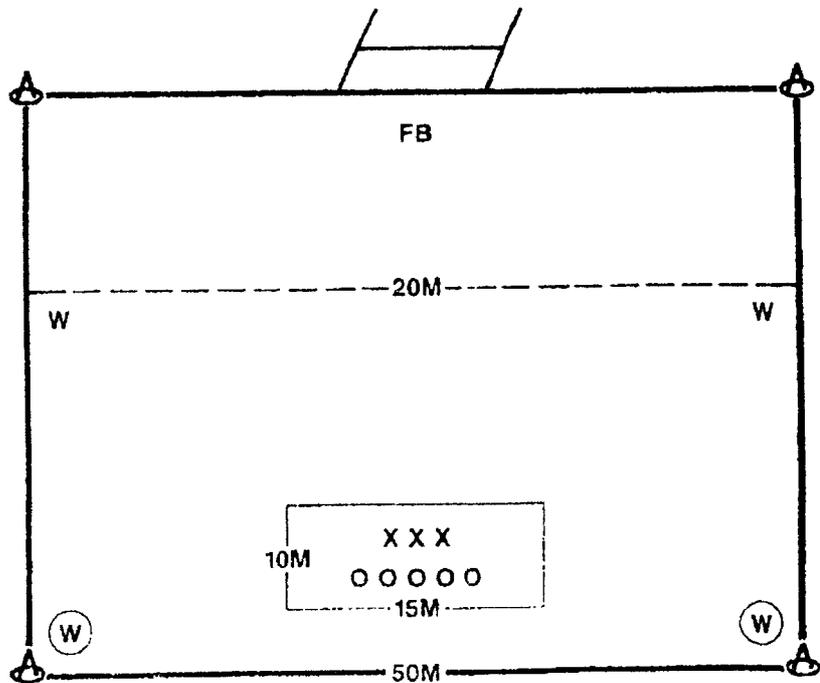


## Practice Drill

The coach passes the ball to the 5/8 for movement along the line.

The defending winger, first scans the opposition line and the centre inside him. Continued momentum by the defending winger is an important factor for timing and the winger should synchronise his final movement with the attacking inside centre for his tackle on the outside centre.

For the practice, the three defenders, (made up of wingers, outside centres and fullbacks) simply rotate as does the attacking backline.



## Objective

For wingers and fullbacks to successfully defend against their attacking opposites.

## Mechanics

Use one half of the field. (Try to use two coaches).

Group 5A v 3D in a boxed area approximately 15 x 10 metres. (If five attackers are too many, move one to fullback as a supporting attack player).

(From the boxed area) the attack attempts to break through the defence.

Defensive players are not to adopt a cover role until the attack is out of the box.

A winger links with the attack and attempts to score. He can only be supported by his other wing team mate and the forward who breaks from the box (or the extra fullback).

Wingers can attack any part of the field and are allowed to kick the ball.

Defending wingers and the fullback aim to prevent the score.

Vision, on field communication, positional play, anticipation and judgement are key coaching factors for defenders.

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## INDIVIDUAL RUNNING PRACTICE

### Objective

For practising wingers to run at speed and evade cover defence.

### Mechanics

Construct a channel 25 x 5-10 metres. Cover defenders are spaced at 5 metre intervals down the channel.

Defenders are placed at the distances indicated from the edge of the channel.

Defenders run in the order indicated by the numbers, 1-2-3-4 and on the back run, 1A-2A etc.

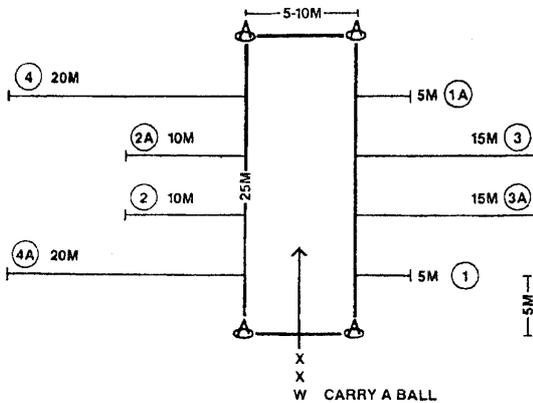
Defenders commence to move when the attacking winger starts to run.

The attacking winger can manoeuvre anywhere across the channel to avoid the cover.

A tackle is effected by striking the attacker on the hip with the hand.

Attacking wingers should employ fends, change of pace and direction, swerve and sheer pace.

Change the distances for the covering players to suit the practice.



## 2 ON 2 WITH OPTIONS

This is a practice where all four players select and execute a skill as a result of their interpretation of events in the opposition.

The practice is difficult and successful execution to the point where wingers continually make clean breaks is low. Innovation play that is incomplete but ends safely can show sound judgement skills and be considered successful.

Ideally two coaches are required. One to assist with the defence, the other with the attack.

### Mechanics

Form attacking and defending centre wing pairings.

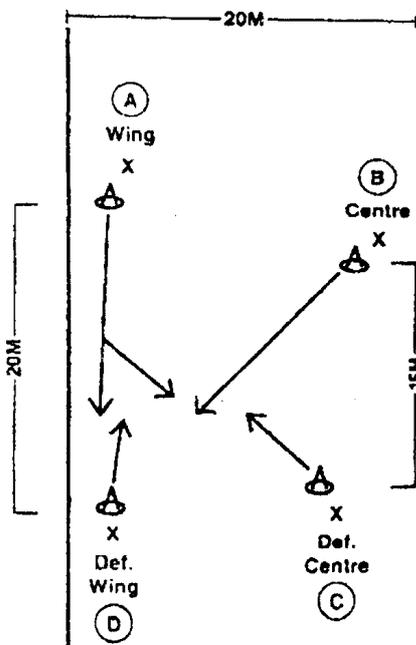
B runs toward D and C.

Depending on the response of D and 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 for a close pass
- (iii) A can angle behind C

If kicking is introduced, include a defending fullback.



# Receiving The Kick-Off

By Don Oxenham ARL Level Coach

This aspect of the game is one which doesn't receive the attention it should from coaches, and as a result it is not coached to the extent that it should be.

If we look at the kick off, and recognise its importance and what can be gained from it to the benefit of the receiving team, many opportunities can be identified. Most teams playing at the top level do have a pattern of play to return the ball after receiving it from the kick off. However, many teams below this level would not have a pattern. If they do have a set play it is copied and has little thought as to why teams are running where, and the subsequent five rucks.

Coaches must firstly be able to understand the importance of this aspect of the game. To assist in this understanding, there are points which the receiving team need to consider for positioning of players in reception, then in establishing a pattern of play, to control the next six rucks and to return the ball up the field.

## The Kicking Team

Objectives of this team would be:-

(a) **FIELD POSITION** - Kicks are normally aimed at a particular area of the field to allow the kicking team to gain maximum advantage for field position. This accounts for most kicks being placed deep into the receiving teams area and preferably the in-goal corner area. Trying to put a ball dead is a priority.

(b) **OPPORTUNITIES** - The intentions of kicking teams is to hold the opposition in a defined and confined area where the defence can severely limit the attack.

## The Receiving Team

Objectives of this team would be:-

(a) **POSITIONING OF PLAYERS** - Players should be placed in field position to cover all kicking possibilities particularly to prevent the ball going dead and to ensure that maximum advantage can be gained.

(b) Gaining maximum advantage in field position by having a play to return the ball on the first touch.

(c) A series of follow up plays for the remaining tackles

to ensure maximum advantage by reducing pressure on the players and team again by having a pattern of play for the ensuing six(6) tackles.

(i) Advancing the ball forward.

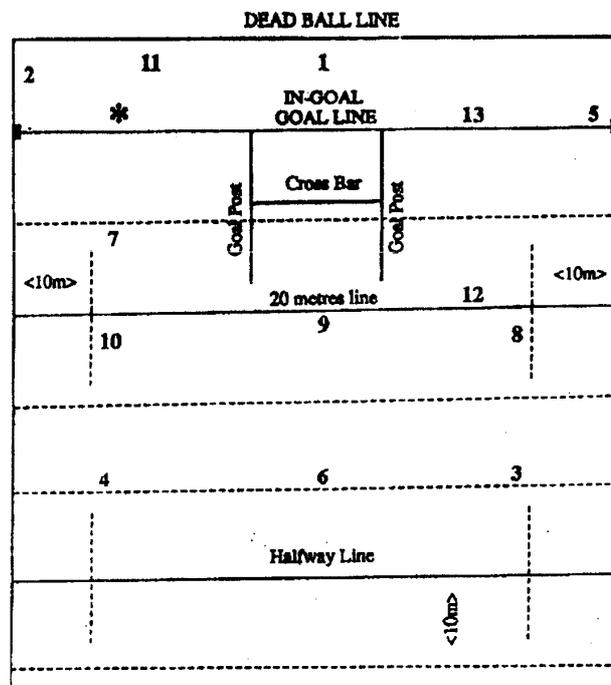
(ii) Controlling the ball - combination of skill and the game plan.

(iii) Conserving energy.

The following field positioning for reception is a 3,5,5 player placement and is offered as an example for consideration and discussion. There is no suggestion that this pattern provides the answer to all possibilities but it does not account for most of the objectives the receiving team needs to consider.

All players are positioned for special tasks from the kick off.

Players 2,11 and 1 anticipate the ball being kicked in





# Using Kick Play to Attack the Oppositions Line

By Bruce Wallace

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**T**he following discourse is focused on kicks in general plays such as “taps” or penalties.

The aim of kick plays is to:-

1. Force a better field position by
  - (a) Finding touch
  - (b) Restricting play territorially
2. Applying pressure (chase or challenge)

The aim of kicks in the opposition 20 metres:-

1. As for the above BUT
2. Create the opportunity to regather or score
3. Have the ball returned to your team from the opposition goal line for another set of six
4. Maintain defensive pressure on the opposition close to their own goal line.

When to kick will depend on the following aspects:-

1. Tackle count (i.e. 3rd, 4th, or 5th tackle)
2. Game plan (some coaches may prefer to run the ball rather than kick)
3. State of the game (is the team in front by one point or are they six points behind - by a particular margin? Is there only seconds left in the game?)
4. Field position (in front of the posts or near the touchline)
5. A players assessment of opportunity.

Several types of kicks can be used under such circumstances and include:-

1. “Bombs”
2. “Grubbers”
3. The “Chip”
4. Or a field goal attempt

Which ever kick is executed will depend on the team strategy, the kicking skills of players and should reflect one of the five points mentioned above. This leads to the question who kicks?

All players should be coached to be able to respond with the appropriate kick.

However, most teams have designated “kickers”. These players tend to be most skilled at kicking and are able to produce the appropriate kick under pressure and have a keen sense to read play.

Obviously circumstances arise where the perfect kick is a reflex action and its success will be a direct result of the skill of the kicker and the response of the chase by himself or his fellow players. BUT most kicking in the attack part of the field is usually premeditated and thoroughly practised. Most teams have “a call” which indicates to the team that a particular kick is about to occur and this gives the chasing team a cue to prepare to get in to position and challenge the football.

## So Who Does Kick?

Some coaches prefer their acting half to kick as it puts all players on side. Players such as Kerrod Walters have exploited this skill with great success.

Will the first receiver change the direction with a pass and a second receiver on the opposite side of the ruck put in a rehearsed kick?

Will a receiver run around a pivot player and then kick on the run? This type of play commits the defence to move up and once the kick has been executed defenders must turn and chase, putting them on the “back foot”.

When kicking in this part of the field the purpose of out-manoeuvring the defence is still of paramount importance.

Where is the ball landing? The answer to this crucial question will reflect the tactics of the coach and/or the state of the game.

## “Bombs”

The height of the “bomb” will determine the extent of the challenge for the football and “bombs” must be challenged.

1. "Bombs" which land in the IN-GOAL necessitate a committed challenge because if the opposition field the ball on the full they have been given "a gift" 20 metre up-field and 6 tackles to play.
2. "Bombs" which land in THE FIELD OF PLAY, near the try line, require the same urgency of challenge. The four possible scenarios which can result are:-
  - i) The opposition field the ball and are under pressure on their own line;
  - ii) The attacking team receive the ball and are prevented from scoring. If the 6th tackle, a hand over occurs near the try line or if an earlier tackle, the opportunity exists to exert more pressure;
  - iii) The attacking team successfully challenges for the ball and scores;
  - iv) The opposition contacts the ball and the kicking side regains possession with an ensuing six tackles.

### **Positioning of the "Bomb"**

Field position and pre-planning will often determine the placement of the "bomb" i.e. is the kick directed at the goal posts or towards the side line?

In recent times certain teams are having great success with the cross-field bomb i.e. kicking to the wingers on the fringes of the field near the try-line. Others prefer to kick the ball so that it might hit the goal posts or cross bar causing difficulty and distraction for defenders.

It is useful for challengers to play behind the main defender and attempt to knock the ball back toward following players.

Bombs should also be placed so that defenders are required to run backwards or sideways to gather - preferably not forward to the ball where balance and vision are likely to be better.

Good in very wet or windy conditions and against the sun.

Whatever the tactic, any kick is only as good as the challenge.

### **Grubbers**

The grubber kick is usually a short kick along the ground which is placed such that it rolls in behind the defensive line and the chasers have a better than average chance of retrieval.

Scenarios 1,2 and 3 as mentioned in the "bomb" section are common outcomes if the ball is recovered in the field of play. BUT, other than number 3, the outcome

of tackling the opposition within their own in-goal is a preferred option as the opposition must now return the ball to the attacking team via a goal-line drop out.

Best when you need the ball back (e.g., line drop out). Very heavy conditions where chasers have momentum to run on.

Kicks should always be for "others" i.e. have numbers of close chasers. Easily "soccered".

Best place, in behind the line at about the fringes of the ruck, length around 5-7 metres.

### **Chips**

The chip kick is usually a short kick over the heads of the opposition and in behind the defensive line so that it gives the chasers a better than average chance of fielding the ball either on the full or on the bounce, at speed.

Definitely to land in the field of play, best on dry days. Requires numbers for close support. Best time-tackles 1 to 3 or when the defensive line is still up. More difficult when the defensive line is uneven.

With grubbers or chips, the further the kicker is from the defensive line, the more he can be over the ball when he kicks and is running forward.

The kick is for the kicker as well as others. He is therefore more able to be a "chaser". Conversely, if the kicker wants to get really close to the defence and draw the man forward, the kicker needs to lay back - putting his upper body away from the defence and "laying" the ball on his foot. He is less likely to be a "chaser" in this instance and the kick is for others.

### **Field Goals**

The field goal is a drop-kick that scores one point when successful. It can be carefully and deliberately set up with progressive plays towards the goal posts or be spontaneous. If unsuccessful, the opposition usually end up in possession and often with a 20 metre tap kick.

The field goal creates the score "buffer". It can take the score from a six point to a seven point lead, creating the circumstances where the opposing teams needs to score twice. It can break a dead locked, tied score. Whatever the circumstances it is a low score option, so it needs to be determined mindfully whether the one point is what is required in relation to the other kick options and the state of the game.

### **Remember:**

**Players must stay inside i.e. behind the kicker or the kicker should make every effort to ensure all**



# Breaking Through The Defensive Line

By Glenn Bayliss ARL Level 3 Coach

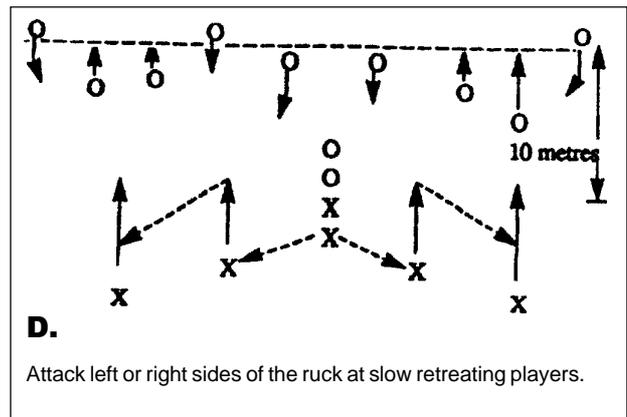
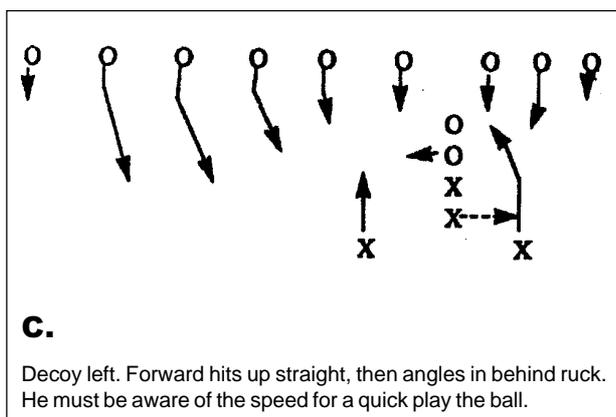
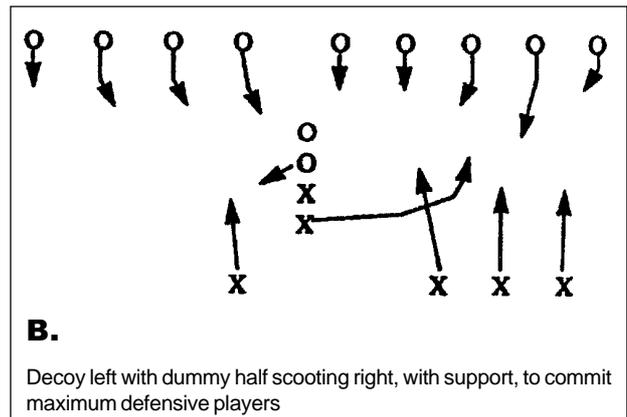
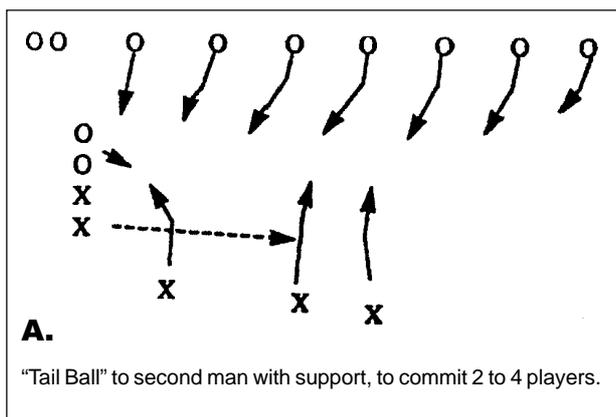
The eighties saw the balance attack and defence shift to the side of defence. Coaches like Gibson and Ryan, who accented the importance of defence were successful with the great Parramatta and Canterbury sides that dominated the NSW competition. Terms like: Umbrella, Sliding, Compressed, Turtle, Peel Off, Tight Spot, Advantage Line became part of the coaching vocabulary.

The nineties have been the emphasis shift back to attack, even though the structure of team defence is more formalised, coaches have had to do their homework on opposition teams and prepare attacking strategies to overcome their defence. The old saying “Why run at brick walls when you can run at paling fences? Simply means run at a team’s defensive weaknesses not their strengths.

**Now let’s look at a few defensive systems and how to attack their weakness.**

## 1. Umbrella Defence (Up and In)

A team that employs an “up and in” or “umbrella” type defence can be exploited by “rolling rucks” across the field (forwards keep wrapping, taking play across field) and targeting players slow to return the required 10 metres.



Play has moved across field with all the attack directed at defenders who are forced to move up and “take their 10 metres”. The defender forced to sprint up 10 metres then retreat 12-15 metres on three or four occasions will tire and eventually not be able to move up and take his 10 metres or pressure the attack.

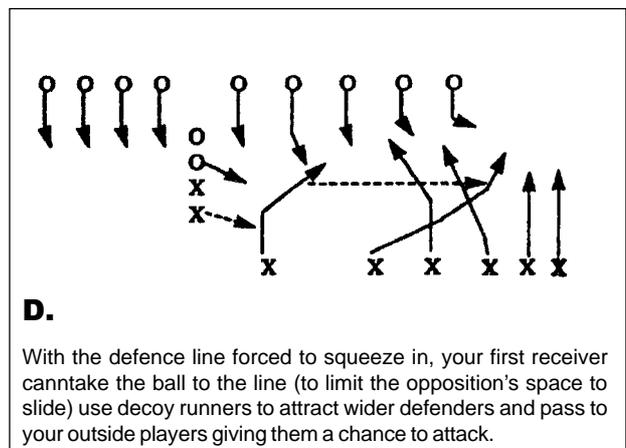
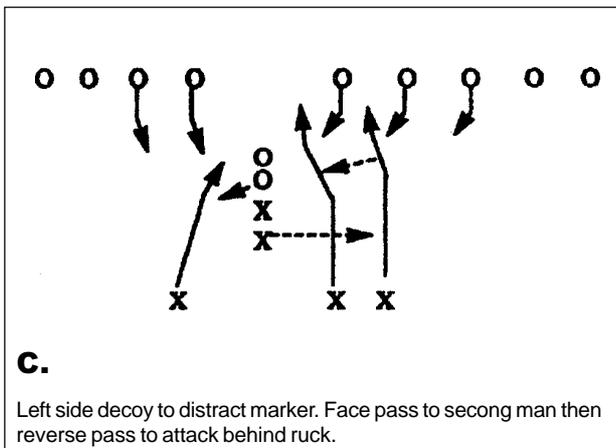
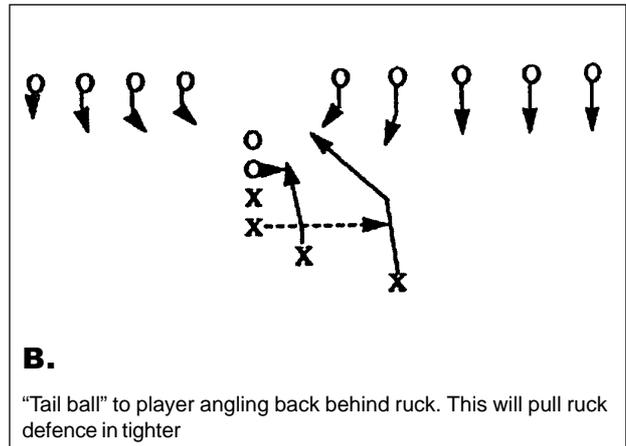
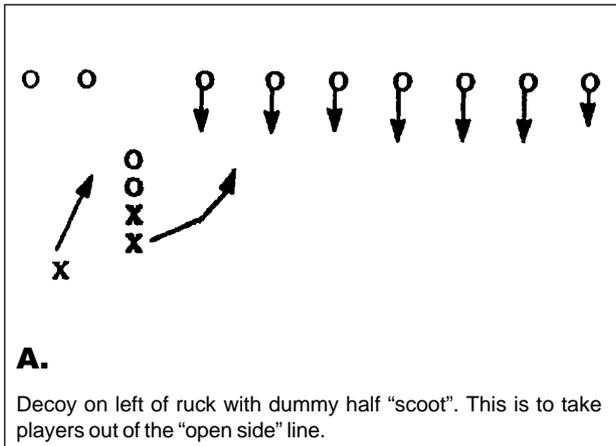
Attack is then directed at players slow to retreat. This will increase your chances of “breaking the line” or securing a penalty from the referee if the defence is unable to retreat their 10 metres.

## 2. Sliding Defence (Up and Out)

The “Up and Out” or “sliding” defence normally works off a compressed line, players verbally support each other and “slide” across from man to man as the ball is passed wide by their opponents.

To put pressure on their defence you have to stop and have a look at the “basic weakness” of a lot of sliding compressed defences.

Because of the shortened line, the first player off the ruck (“post” or “tight spot”) stands a metre or two wider than in an umbrella defence, giving an extra metre or so to the outside edge of the defensive line. By changing the angle of the attack and targeting the area behind the ruck you can “jam” up the close-in defenders, putting pressure on their wider defenders to adjust when you mount a back line play.



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# Vision

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By Don Oxenham ARL Level 4 Coach

Rugby League as a sport, has advanced over recent years in many ways.

There have been many new practices and methods in teaching motor skills and techniques of the game as well as coaching the use of these skills in game situations. Much progress has also been made in the fitness of players, particularly at the higher levels of competition. Many of these improvements to the physical aspects of player performance are the result of sports science research and practices.

As improvements continue in these areas, and reach a limit, coaches will continue to look for a “winning edge” or some other factor which will produce elite player performance.

Complimentary factors associated with the physical performance are the mental skills and it is probably in this area that the extra factor could be found.

How many times have people watched elite athletes perform at the very highest level in their sport and wondered why the very best are able to perform skills at a much higher level than other players around them.

In Rugby League, the great players over the past ten years, have stood out because they had the ability to perform their skills at a high level under pressure, as well as seemingly having plenty of time in which to perform them.

The capacity to do this is associated with the individuals mental attributes, an ability to effectively “read the play” and being able to react appropriately to the situation.

A player’s capability to “read play” depends on a number of factors. One of the basic and most important of these is the ability to anticipate. A player’s ability to anticipate depends on a number of capabilities within the broad process of decision making. To arrive at a particular decision during a players performance, a sequence of events takes place mentally.

Players must be continually processing information concerning what is happening around them in order to choose a future (anticipatory) action. For this to happen, information processing must occur in advance of the predicted or critical event. These lead-up anticipatory skills have frequently been advanced as an important prerequisite in the sport.

Players receive messages or cues from the environment around them and this happens through vision i.e. in Rugby League Coaching Magazine

simple terms, what the player sees.

The presentation of cues is the next step. The player must then be able to recognise and give meaning to cues, so as to process the information and reach a decision before finally reacting to that decision, i.e. take and option and perform an action.

Players with different levels of ability, or at different stages of learning, recognise cues differently and attach different meanings to these cues.

Those who can identify more meaningful cues earlier can arrive at an earlier decision and react quicker to the situation.

The vision associated with these cues is the same for all but the experience and training of players will determine their ability to detect some cues earlier than others.

In teaching players to read the game, they must be made aware of these cues and the information the cues give. Vision is a major factor in this teaching and it is suggested that this ability can be learned from an early age. (e.g. Mod-League)

Teaching and developing vision can be incorporated into training drills and the first important aspect is simply making players aware of vision skills and how best to train them.

Apart from normal vision used in day to day living, another called peripheral vision is most useful in playing rugby league. The simple and easy way to describe peripheral vision is what is seen “out of the corner of your eye”. Players trained to develop and use this type of vision could become more competent in performing basic game plays. There are many situations where this type of vision is used in the game and comments such as “he took his eye off the ball” suggests that in this particular situation the player was not trained to use peripheral vision and awareness and had to turn his head and actually use eye contact to allow him to perform his task.

A few drills have been included so that coaches can help young players become aware of and train in the use of vision. These drills will also benefit players’ concentration which is necessary to ensure the drills are carried out efficiently and effectively.

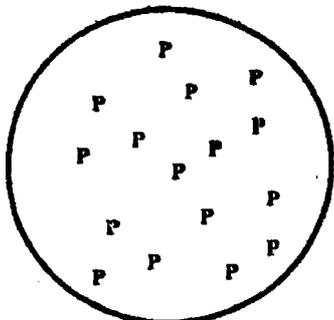
Coaches are encouraged to make players aware of the use of all aspects of vision and include this in their skill drill work.

# VISION DRILLS

## 1. PLAYER AWARENESS

(All Age Groups)

SETTING: Circle, 7.5 metre diameter, 10 markers, 16 players, 1 football for each (P) player.

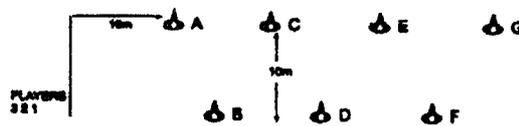


- \* All players inside the circle
  - \* Players move about the circle at pace with eyes fixed on the ball
  - \* The ball can be thrown high, bounced and dribbled along the ground with the feet.
- Players attempt to avoid colliding with other players by using their ability to see off the ball, and as they move around the circle.

## 2. LOOKING OFF LINE

(All Age Groups)

SETTING: Channel 80-100 metres, 2-16 players, with footballs. Markers are set out every 10 metres but every second marker is staggered 10 metres to the side.



Markers represent 'sight' points to be initially directly focused upon and secondly, kept in 'awareness' by using peripheral vision.

The runner should always focus on the second marker away, and change his direct focus when he reaches the marker in front of his current focus.

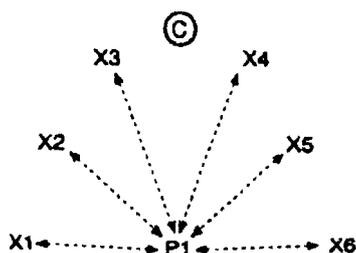
- \* P1 focuses on B and run around A
- \* At A, focus on C and run around B
- \* At B, focus on D and run around C
- \* At C, focus on E and run around D

If necessary rearrange the placement of markers to suit the needs of the group and exercise.

## 3. Pepper Ball Formation

(All Age Groups)

SETTING: Semi-circle of players, 1 football. A number of players form a semi-circle around one player - the passer and receiver.



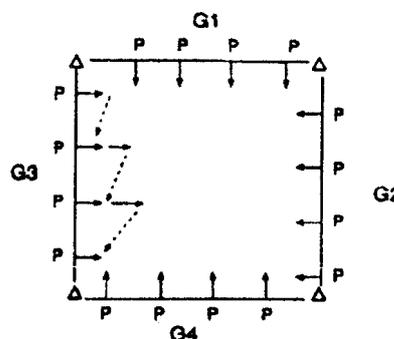
- \* P1 looks directly at the coaches head or focuses his sight on a set point.
- \* X1 has the football and passes the ball to P1.
- \* P1 passes to X2 etc.
- \* Passes can be exchanged between P1 and other players in any order.
- \* The coach can nominate any X player to receive the pass from P1.
- \* When players become more efficient, 2 balls can be used, but a ball should not be passed to any player who already has the ball.

## 4. Traffic Passing

(All Age Groups)

SETTING: Grid 20 x 20 metres, 4 numbered groups each with 3 or 4 players, 4 footballs.

Groups run across the grid, at 1 second intervals, passing the ball. Increase running and passing speed for added difficulty. To vary drill, call new start sequences e.g. 3,4,1,2.



The drill is continuous with players moving back and forth across the grid.

Players should focus their eyes exclusively on the ball (passing and reception) and to use peripheral vision to locate and to avoid other players.

# Weight Training

By Alex Corvo

---

**T**raining with weights has become very popular in rugby league as coaches, trainers and players realise the benefits of this form of exercise. There are four fitness components with weights.

These are:

1. Strength
2. Speed
3. Power
4. Cardiovascular and muscular endurance

Weight training can also improve muscle hypertrophy (increased muscle size).

It is only in the past four to five years that many of the top level clubs have seen the need to incorporate weight training into their overall training program. Virtually all clubs now employ full time strength and conditioning coaches.

Coaches often ask “What is the best age for a junior player to start weight training?” There is no easy answer to this question, and there are a few variables that need to be taken into consideration when answering.

These include:

1. The age of the player
2. The skeletal age of the player i.e. the development of the player’s bone structure

There may be up to four years variance in there when comparing two 15 year-old boys, i.e. one may have the skeletal age of 17 while the other a 13 year-old.

Most exercise scientists believe that at about 15 years of age most children are “ready” to commence light weight training. Initially it is recommended that no resistance be used for specific strength training exercises. Once the player has mastered the lifting technique gradual loads can be introduced.

The coach must stress the use of good form, body alignment and technique. At this age the player training should be directed toward high repetitions and sets and

## Is it an important part of your training program?

lower loads. All exercises must go through the complete range of motion. Thirty minutes of weight training, three times a week, with a day of active rest between training sessions is recommended. In addition to strength training work with free weights or machines, the coach should remember to include exercises using the player’s body weight as resistance. Exercises such as chin ups and dips could be used. Ensure a thorough warm up and warm down of up to 15 minutes each.

When training with weights it is vitally important that the specificity training principle is adhered to. Many rugby league players venture into gyms and train using programs designed for body builders. Ask yourself this question, “how many body builders do you see playing rugby league?”. Put simple, body builders should train for body building and Rugby League players should train for rugby league.

Most coaches would agree that power, strength and speed combined with endurance are the most important fitness components for a rugby league player to develop. Olympic weight-lifters and throwers (athletics) have been shown to produce the highest power inputs. A major part of their training program consists of explosive body movements such as the power clean and the overhead jerk. These power movements are combined with less dynamic (absolute strength) exercises such as squats and bench presses. Add to this routine some plyometric exercises and the result is maximal power (speed/strength) development.

In a broad sense the speed, strength, development principles can be applied to our game.

Strength coaches use the term R.M. or repetition maximum when discussing weight training. A 1 R.M. is the maximum weight a player can possibly lift on any particular exercise for 1 repetition. This figure is then used as a guide in determining the training loads for a workout. For example best gains in strength are achieved when using loads between 70% and 100%

of one's maximum. Studies have suggested that increases in maximal strength occur with sets of no more than 8 repetitions. With 1-6 reps per set the optimum. A player seeking muscle mass increases (hypertrophy) should be working in the 8-12 repetition range at 60% - 80% of the 1 R.M. For best power gains the athlete must attempt to move the weight as fast as possible in the 70% to 100% of 1 R.M. range on specific total body movements, e.g. the power clean. This explosive movement only occurs on the concentric (effort) phase of the movement.

For best strength gains two to four minutes recovery between each set is advisable. Between workouts at least 48 hours and up to 96 hours is necessary to enable full recovery. Three to five workouts per week is recommended. A player's other training requirements must be considered, i.e. how much other training is the player doing besides weights work? Adjustments need to be made so as not to overstress the player.

The term 'training age' refers to the number of years that a person has been undergoing this type of strength training. An individual needs one to two years of weight training experience before using repetitions in the 1 to 5 R.M. range (85% - 100% of maximum).

Four to six sets per exercise have proven to be the most productive for strength development. Most sessions should not include more than 20 sets in total.

An important variable for consideration when designing a weights program is the choice of exercise.

This is related to: 1. Specific muscular movements related to the sports activity, and 2. Those areas of the body most prone to injury.

An exercise can be classified as either: 1. Body part exercise 2. Structural exercise

Body part exercises involve the isolation of a muscle e.g. a bicep curl. A structural exercise involves the use of many muscles. Analyse the needs of the sport, in this case rugby league, and the needs of the player.

The preparatory or pre-competition stage of the season is the time of the year where the player should strive to maximise his strength and power development. Once the season commences it would be unfair to expect any gains in these areas. The competitive phase of the season is where the player attempts to maintain his gains from the preparatory phase.

The word maintenance is used to describe this. To maintain these gains during the season a player should dedicate himself to approximately two sessions of weight training per week.

During the transition stage (or as it is more commonly known the "off" season) most players decide that they will have a complete rest from all forms of training. Consequently they experience large decreases in most fitness components. As a result they will start the following season's preparatory phase at a level very similar to the previous year not showing any real net gain. If the player was able to maintain one or two weekly weight sessions during the "off" season it would mean that all the gains in strength and power from the season could be maintained and then built upon.

As the game of Rugby League continues to develop it is the responsibility of the coaches and trainers to do likewise. A good coach needs to recognise this and hence educate players on the benefits of weight training and program this into the team's training schedule.



# Warm - Up and Stretch

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**N**o sportsman wants to be sitting on the sideline watching someone else playing in their position in the team.

Many injuries can be prevented with a correct approach to warming up and stretching.

## The Warm-Up

The warm-up phase should consist of 15-20 minutes of light jogging and ball work involving similar skills to that of the game.

The warm-up gets the blood moving through the muscles in readiness for the game. It helps to get the joints loosened and mentally the athlete starts to focus on the game. A thorough warm-up enables the player to fire from the instant the game commences.

The warm-up should begin 30-40 minutes before the game and taper 10-20 minutes before the game starts.

A light sweat should be reached (on a hot day a little more than light). There are no magic potions or heat rubs that can prepare the mind and body in the same way.

Between the warm-up and the game the athlete should maintain their body warmth by wearing a tracksuit if it is cold.

## Stretching

Stretching is important for any age group but often even more so for the adolescent sportsman.

As bones grow and the body grows taller it is very important to stretch to avoid muscle imbalances and excessive tightness. During periods of rapid growth more stretching may be necessary.

## How to Stretch!

Stretching can begin with some slow gentle movements through range and then some slow static holds. Static stretches are when the stretch is held still with no jerking or bouncing. The holding period should be about 15 seconds. The stretch should be taken to a feeling of tension in the muscle - not pain.

Ballistic (bounce) should not be undertaken as this may cause small muscle tears.

Rugby League Coaching Magazine

Stretching should be balanced, in other words muscles on both sides of the arms or legs should be stretched.

Good flexibility gives performance. The athlete can "stretch out" into a powerful sprint if his legs are mobile.

Lack of stretching can cause serious acute injuries such as torn hamstring or groin muscles.

Lack of flexibility can also cause what we call "overuse" injuries. These are injuries that come on gradually because there is for some reason too much stress or jarring the area. Often the reason can be traced back to tight muscles. Such examples are:-

**Back Pain** - This can occur if the muscles at the front of the hip, called the hip flexors are tight. These tight muscles pull the low back into an exaggerated arch, causing a lot of stress on the joints in the lower part of the back.

**Shoulder Pain** - This can be due to tight muscles in the front of the chest (pectorals). Tight muscles here can pull the shoulder too far forward and this causes pressure on tendons in the shoulder.

Many injuries can be prevented with a correct approach to warming-up and stretching.

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# Junior Player Development Programme

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The concept of a junior player development programme has been mentioned in previous editions of this magazine.

The following programme is put forward as a guide to encourage clubs to use it and produce a base from which to work.

The overall development of skills in junior players should be uppermost in the thoughts of their coaches. This development must commence in the mini-footy ages and progress as the players go through the age groups. To achieve this development it is necessary to work to a syllabus so that each age group coach will know what should be taught. A syllabus will outline and identify the appropriate skills for each age group.

The coaches role is to apply this syllabus and ensure the players under their control learn, practice and become proficient at the skills. As each age group achieves its aims and goals the players can progress into the next year with a well established skill base.

The aim of the development would be to produce a skilful player at around age seventeen to allow and encourage them to proceed toward senior football.

Players who have developed good skills and possess a wide range of skills will become more confident to play at a high level.

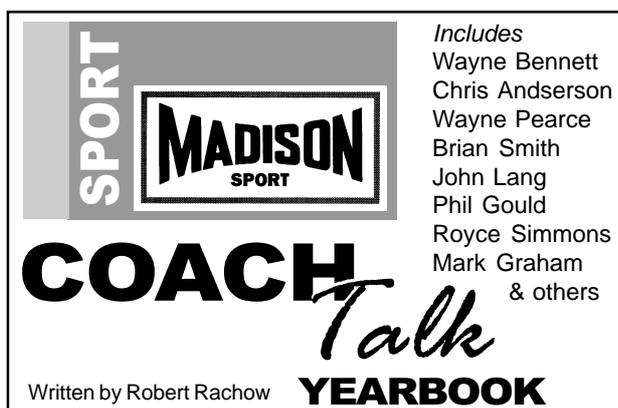
The overall goal in this programme is to produce players who are able to play an attractive style of Rugby League that gives them personal satisfaction and produces a good spectacle for the spectators.

The functioning of such a system lies within each club to implement it and then encourage its coaches through the club coaching director to ensure its success.

The choice of drills to use in teaching each skill will depend on the coaching sessions at the time and there are numerous resources available to access the drills for inclusion in the coaching session.

A coaches ability to plan the coaching session will ensure the success of a skills development programme.

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## JUNIOR PLAYER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

SKILL	SUB-SKILL	GAME STAGE	METHOD OF TEACHING	KEY POINTS OF SKILL
<b>HANDLING</b>	Holding a football	Mini footy Mod	Technique - Handling Exercises and Practices	- Hand position on ball - Correct ball grip - fingers - Co-ordination - hand & body
	Picking up a football	Mini footy Mod League	Drills & Technique Practice	- Hand & leg positions - Co-ordination - hand, eye, body, ball
	Falling on a ball	Mini Mod	Drills & Technique Practice	- Vision on ball - Body position & protection - Arm position & protection - Arm position over ball - Ground contact
	Catching a ball	Mini Mod  Junior	Drills Practices	Mini - Eyes on ball Legs spread - body positioned Mod - arms cradled Juniors - (Off the ground) How to jump
	Scoring a try	Mini Mod Junior	Technique Practices Drills	Ball control - hold properly Ground contact - body & ball
<b>PASSING &amp; RECEIVING</b>	Standing pass	Mini Mod Junior	Drills Technique Practice	- Holding ball - Leg position - Arm swing - Accuracy
	Running pass	Mini  Mod  Junior	Technique drills (No pressure drills)  Technique drills with Gradual pressure Drills with pressure	Holding ball Arm swing Leg position Target area as above  as above Plus positioning and timing, When to pass - judgement of speed & distance of support

## JUNIOR PLAYER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

SKILL	SUB-SKILL	GAME STAGE	METHOD OF TEACHING	KEY POINTS OF SKILL
<b>PASSING &amp; RECEIVING</b> <b>CONTINUED</b>	Scissor pass	Junior	Drills with pressure	Body Position Vision Positioning of passer and receiver Timing of run
	Off the ground pass	Mini  Mod Junior	Technique instruction and practice As above as above	- Leg position - Arm swing - Eyes to target Timing of pass - target, accuracy Judgement
	Passing variation Reverse - Spiral - From tight situations standing in tackle	Junior 15 - 17	Drills & Technique Practice	Situation when pass can be affected Timing of pass Judgement of when to pass considering speed Speed & distance of support
<b>TACKLING</b>	Front on blocking  Front on Driving	Mini  Mod Juniors	Techniques Instructions  As above As above	- Position of head, arms, body - Contact - Eyes Open - Ground contact
	Side on	Mini Mod Junior	Technique	As above As above plus - positioning and timing in conjunction with defence pattern
	behind tackle	Mini  Junior	Technique  Drills	- Position of head, arms, legs Speed of ball carrier - Positioning and timing
	Smother	Junior	Technique drills	- Position of arms, body, legs in relation to ball carrier Positioning and timing in conjunction with defence pattern

## JUNIOR PLAYER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

SKILL	SUB-SKILL	GAME STAGE	METHOD OF TEACHING	KEY POINTS OF SKILL
<b>KICKING</b>	Punt - orthodox  - torpedo - drop	Mini Mod Junior  Mod Junior Mod Junior	Technique practice  As above As above with field position	Holding ball correctly Eyes on ball Ball dropped correctly Lg moves straight through Contact point Timing Balance } Co-ordination
	Drop Kick	Mini Mod Junior	Technique Practice Drills	As above - Angle of ball to foot Contact ball after it comes back off the ground
	Grubber Kick	Mod Junior	Technique Practice Drills with pressure	As above - Ball kicked on high part and into the ground - When to use in game
	Chip Kick	Mini Junior	Technique practice Drills with pressure	As above - When to use in game - Holding ball - Leg swing to weight kick
	Dribbling	Mod Junior	Technique Practice	- Control of ball with feet - Body over ball - Pushing ball along ground with feet
<b>EVASION</b>	Footwork (stepping)	Junior	Technique drills Exercises	- Balance - Use of feet - Agility - Co-ordination - feet and head
	Side step	Mod Junior	Technique practice and drills	- Balance - Use of feet - Agility - Co-ordination - feet, body (lower) - Running style
	Change of pace	Mini (8 - 9 year old) Mod Junior	Technique practice	- Agility - Speed - Co-ordination

### JUNIOR PLAYER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

<b>SKILL</b>	<b>SUB-SKILL</b>	<b>GAME STAGE</b>	<b>METHOD OF TEACHING</b>	<b>KEY POINTS OF SKILL</b>
	Fend	Mini (9 year old) Mod Junior	Technique practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ball carriage</li> <li>- Use of feet</li> <li>- Agility</li> <li>- Ball control</li> <li>- Arm placement</li> </ul>
	Hit and spin plus bump off	Mod (12 year old) Junior	Technique Practice Drills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ball carriage</li> <li>- Feet placement</li> <li>- Body contact point</li> <li>- Balance</li> <li>- Making ball available</li> </ul>
	Dummy Pass	Mod (12 year old) Junior	Technique Practice used in some drills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Good passing technique</li> <li>- ball control</li> </ul>

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