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RUGBY LEAGUE COACHING MANUALS

Coach Talk

Steve Folkes - Bulldogs Head Coach

Written by Ashley Bradnam

Canterbury coach Steven Folkes has compiled a rugby league resume most could only fantasize about. Grand final winner, New South Wales State of Origin player, Kangaroo. As a member of the revered, uncompromising Bulldogs pack of the 80's Folkes developed a reputation as one of the game's most disciplined players. Tough and hard. Aggressive, but not dirty. Since assuming the Canterbury coaching ranks he has devoted his time to ensuring the current pack of Bulldogs are similarly valued. Folkes considers discipline a priceless commodity.

"I believe discipline comes in many forms and hopefully as coach I am instilling in my players the need to be self-disciplined. I think a lot about this before I decide if the player should come to our club in the first place. When we are looking at a young guy we go into his upbringing fairly extensively because we figure we can learn a fair bit about how he is situated in terms of things like discipline from the way he was brought up. There is no doubt in my mind that a team's fortune can change once they (the players) are individually prepared to alter their attitude. Take this year (2001) for example. Last year we finished well down the ladder, out of the eight and this season we've come second in the minor premiership. I put the turnaround primarily down to the player's attitudes. We didn't like where we finished last year, we weren't used to failing and we decided to takeanother look at ourselves to try to make some positive changes. We got more disciplined, changed our attitudes and changed our standing on the ladder this year".

Folkes is something of a football rarity in these sometimes-selfish days of professionalism. He's one hundred percent Bulldog, always has been. Folkes has just chalked up season number 25 with the Canterbury club as either player or as a member of the coaching staff and appreciates more than anyone the culture of success the club has constructed.

"I have only been away from the club for one year since I joined and that was when I had a season in England. We have been fairly successful since the time I came into grade and I was fortunate enough to be playing with a lot of great players who demanded and fully expected to win. Coming from that background I have found it easier to attempt to instil that desire in my players".

Desire, attitude and discipline are words employed repeatedly from the Folkes coaching command. He had these assets as a player, and now he's looking to find it in his chargers as the educator. Teaching such skills falls into the relatively unknown subject matter called *man management*. The ability to bring together an eclectic group of athletes and transform them into a well-drilled, highly motivated team unit is never easy. But, as Folkes says, it's part of the job.

"I think it's more a matter of them blending personality wise with the other players in the team. I think it's important you don't have too many egos in the team and I think we really haven't had too many problems along those lines while I've been coaching here and even further back probably. ***Man management*** is probably the single greatest asset a coach can have. It is, to me, learning how to get the best out of an individual. They are all so different and so unique. One player needs a bit of a cuddle and a pat on the back and some encouragement that way, while another bloke needs a swift boot right up the behind. It is finding out the balance and trying to work out every individual but there are some I haven't worked out of course. Trying to work out every individual and what excites and motivates them is one of the real challenges of my job I think".

We often hear rugby league players in post-match interviews bemoaning the fact 'they didn't turn up to play', or they 'left their boots at home'.

These clichés often represent a lack of mental preparation on the side of the losing team, resulting more often than not in a horrible thrashing. So what can the coach do to ensure his team will be 'on-song' come kick off?

Folkes says, " I believe a player's mental preparation, as with their physical preparation, can change from week to week depending on who you are playing against and how you went the previous week. There is always a defensive element in our training during the week and if there are areas we need to improve on then we will focus a little more on that. It should go the same way with the mental side of things as well. They key is to stay on top of the player's attitude and address it as soon as it becomes a concern. If you leave it until Sunday, it's too late. The attitude affects everything, but particularly your defence. You need to be defending the way you want to play. We try to defend aggressively and pro-actively".

Folkes also has some tips on what the coach should be looking out for as he watches his team during the opening half of the match.

"Defensively you need to make sure that everyone is doing the little things correctly so they are working as a team and there is good communication between individuals. Sometimes it happens better than others and you need to keep an eye open to address it if bad habits begin creeping in. Primarily while I'm watching the game I think I am watching our players but I'm obviously keeping an eye open for the players from the opposition that are causing us concern. For example, if they were getting some good go-forward from their dummy half that would be something I would give my players a rev up about during the break. I would speak about the need to dominate the ruck, about markers getting quickly to their feet, and working hard without rests. Halftime is generally too late to start introducing new plays. Your planning should be completed before kick off but at halftime you can remind players about some of their personal goals they set. Perhaps they have set themselves the target of making 140 metres during the match, average play the ball time of 2.5 seconds or whatever. It can be helpful to remind them of their individual goal so every time he's running it up or playing the ball in the second half he's going to be thinking about his goal. My halftime routine varies from week to week and depends on how we've performed in the first half. By the time I get down from the grandstand the players have probably been in the shed for two or three minutes and I think they need that time to get their breath and get any medical things seen to. Once that has been taken care of I generally give my messages, short and to the point. If something's drastically wrong, it's probably an attitude thing, and if the game's close, we maybe just need to tweak a couple of things".

Keeping things short and to the point is a tactic Folkes encourages all coaches to try with their team, particularly in the hour or two leading up to kick-off.

"If you give a player too much information he'll get confused. Most times before a game I only talk for about two or three minutes. In the hour or two before that I get around and see the players individually, ask them what their goals are for the day that we would have already discussed earlier in the week, so that I know they have been thinking about their jobs. We might discuss a few things as a team as we get closer to the match but the shorter your messages, the more chance it has of sinking in".

Following on from the Bulldogs less than impressive season 2000, coach Folkes was forced to revaluate not only his team's overall performance, but also his own functioning as the head coach. It's a process he now encourages others to follow.

"After the 2000 season I broke down what was required of me and how I could better utilize my time. I'm the head coach and get paid accordingly, but I realised there was not enough hours in the day for me to do all of the little aspects I needed to be good at. By learning to delegate a little bit I have freed up a lot of my time to focus on what I believe to be essential to the team's progress, areas like *man management*. I really like the hands on responsibility that comes with coaching and as far as I'm concerned it's important that the people who are with you on the coaching staff think the same way you do".

With a magical blend of seasoned veterans and exciting rookies on the player's list, and a hardhead like Steven Folkes in charge, Bulldogs fans should feel extremely confident of watching their beloved club continue to be a force in the NRL competition for many years to come.

ARL FOUNDATION
Developing Rugby League

How to improve your players without stifling their creativity

Matthew Elliott - Canberra Raiders Head Coach
Steve Folkes - Bulldogs Head Coach

Written by Ashley Bradnam

In the contemporary world of rugby league coaches often fall prone to neglecting the game's principle fundamentals in an effort to fine tune their team's more ornamental, or impressive features. Completion rates, possession flows, off-the-ball play. The list goes on. Important sure, but at least two National Rugby League coaches say the pursuit of the perfect stats sheet may come at a hefty price. Canterbury mentor Steven Folkes and Canberra coach Mat Elliott caught up with RLCM recently to discuss this, and other issues. Folkes admitting it's important to remain aware of the real issues affecting a team's performance.

"I think rugby league is a very simple game and I think at times people tend to over complicate things when it's not necessary. Basically, it gets down to advancing the football down the field as efficiently as you can and then putting the ball over the line at the end. When the other teams got the ball, you do your best to stop them. See, it's pretty simple. You appoint players with talent so you should let them use it and not try to over coach them too much".

While admitting that discipline ultimately plays a huge part in determining how successfully the team achieves its goals, there's no doubt that Folkes' philosophy is a welcome relief to coaches struggling to adapt to the sometimes complex, more innovative methods of the last decade. Season 2000 was a perfect example for the Bulldogs, which saw them leading the comp on completion rates but finish well down the ladder and out of finals contention. Canberra's Mat Elliott agrees that while stats do have a role to play, they're not always a reliable indicator.

"Statistics are a good measure of performance in some respects, not in all respects. There are a lot of reasons why you may get good stats when you've performed poorly and poor stats when you've played well. But having said that I think they are an effective way of pointing out some key areas where you need to improve".

The key to stats, both coaches agree, is finding the balance in using them. Says Folkes. "At half time I usually have a look to see who's leading the tackle count, hit ups, that sort of thing. I need to assess what sort of workload the guys have come up with so I can decide who needs a rest.

"Hopefully during the game you can assess that yourself, but sometimes the stats will tell us if we're not positioning up correctly in a particular area of the field or whether we need to swap a player in the defensive line. They have a role, sure, but completions are not the be all and end all in my book".

There are of course other, more straightforward ways to gain feedback on your player's performance. Try asking them. Folkes says, "We have a system at the moment where we are coming up to a game and we get the players to assess their own games from an individual tape and fill in a bit of a questionnaire about different areas of their performance. We get them to asses areas such as their go-forward, passing, domination in defence, marker-play and the like and then get them to fill out a sheet on this weekend's opposition. It's a way of getting the players to look at their own efforts and then start focussing on the opposition this weekend."

Similarly, Elliott encourages his troops to take the red pen to their own weekend endeavours.

"I think the video review is a strong method of reviewing performance. It's visual, and players can see for themselves what you are talking about. But the best form of feedback is balanced feedback, be it from stats or whatever. Basically you're looking to see how your player's react in terms of decisions they make during the match. You might get a stats sheet that looks great and says you've made next to no handling errors, but that might only indicate the team is being too conservative."

Folkes believes decision-making in the heat of battle is something, which, more often than not, decides the winner of the match. It's a key component, sure, but how does the coach assess it?

"One of the things I have tried to do is to get my key players to start thinking about why they are making the choices they are on the field. Why did we take the quick tap here, not go for goal, try that chip-kick in our own 30 metres, this type of thing. We try to get them to think back on what they did and then think about what they might have done. Sometimes the alternative would have been a better option. But having said that I'm not trying to curtail the player's instinct. It's a fine line. I don't think Andrew Johns for example thinks too much about what he does in the spur of the moment. But Andrew Johns and players like him are special. They have a vision that is not normal to most players. They can see things that other players don't see and probably make the right decision eight times out of ten".

When evaluating your team's weekend performance, both coaches argue not to come down too strongly, too quickly. Wait until the following day at least to speak to the player, allowing both yourself and the player to unwind mentally and physically before setting sights on the coming match up the next week.

Matthew Elliott says, "The day after the game is about reviewing the performance so you can move on, whether it's good or bad. You need to be calm and strong and understand why you achieved or didn't achieve a certain performance level and then relate that to a player so he understands where he can improve. And you also need to drip information out so they aren't overloaded with stats and tactics too

"I think decision-making is the biggest art in the game at the moment" Matthew Elliott

Elliott agrees that while decision-making is a difficult aspect to coach, it can be done.

"Oh, most definitely. I think decision-making is the biggest art in the game at the moment. We need to teach players awareness. The player's skill levels are very high - they're nearly all capable of executing tremendous levels of skill in heavy traffic and under contact, which is marvellous to watch. Now the next phase of the evolution is working on their decision-making. To pass or not to pass? Stay up in the line or retreat? It's important stuff. A coach needs to be able to coach awareness".

Says Folkes, "Good decisions often come to the player who is patient. I think it's been shown that if you have the discipline to stay patient say, in attack, and not try for the miracle pass but just opt to run the ball into their in goal and get the repeat set, that eventually you will turn things around. I'm still not sure to be honest if you can coach good decision-making, but what I try to do is instil in them the fact that they don't have to come up with the miracle play, the absolute ball or the absolute kick. I want them to feel free to wear the other team down, provided our ball control is good and our defence composed".

early in the week. It's no good having the boys all fired up and ready to play on Wednesday".

Coach Folkes also adheres to planting of a seed early in the week so it will be right for harvesting on Sunday afternoon.

"With a view to the next game I will go around and speak to a player individually. Having 26 rounds can be difficult getting every player in the right mind set for every game, so I sometimes look for something I can put into their heads early in the week which might help them.

In 2000 we were fairly inconsistent and so in 2001 I made more of an effort to be involved in each player's individual preparation. Some guys you can trust to do it on their own but with others you need to be involved with their whole week, test their attitude to training and things like that. If the attitude isn't right on Thursday, chances are it won't get better by Sunday".

Assessing and reviewing your team's performance is a critical and complex piece of the coaching puzzle. Discovering a way to make stats and videos work for you and not against you, may prove even harder.

Social Cohesion Relates to Task Cohesion

Eddie Jones - Australian Wallabies Head Coach   *Written by Ashley Bradnam*

The competence of the coach in amalgamating and harmonizing diverse individual personalities into a cohesive, successful working unit is frequently what distinguishes the triumphant from the also-rans. The winners from the losers. Perhaps a better way of describing it is the ability to promote teamwork, or team cohesion, among your troops. ***'Man Management'*** has become one of the in-vogue phrases to invade the coaching vocabulary; loosely defined, it means to create a better team environment, both on and off the field. Or, task cohesion and social cohesion.

One man who appreciates the significance of this topic is current Australian Rugby Union coach Eddie Jones. Jones has been at the helm of the Wallabies for one of their most victorious seasons on record, expertly fusing the passion of interstate rivalries and traditions into a unified and focussed force capable of dealing with anything the All Blacks, Springboks or British Lions could throw at them.

"I think social cohesion is very much between the coaching staff and the senior players in dealing with the rules, regulations and what sort of environment you want to have in your team" Jones says.

"Through the compliance of the senior players and the mutual understanding of how you want the team to operate you get the base for team cohesion. You can have team meetings, get togethers or whatever, and they all help, but the basic thing is an understanding of what is right, what is wrong, and what is expected of the team".

Jones is a huge admirer of Australian cricket captain Steve Waugh's leadership style, and admits to borrowing some of "Tuggers" philosophies for his Wallabies.

"You can see with the Australian (cricket) team that Steve Waugh's expectations are that the players are always improving, and if they're not then they're not going to stay in the team. And in that way whilst it might seem to detract a little bit from the social cohesion I think its actually the same thing – to be able to achieve the task you have to be socially right on and off the field and that's what our cricketers are like".

It's not an easy task to have all players in a team mix effectively off the field. Some characters don't agree with others, and often there is a considerable age difference between the rookies and the veterans that can create problems.

"Youngsters coming in need to understand like everyone else what's important to the team and what is unacceptable. I know when I was with the Brumbies we had an orientation camp for rookie players where we were able to take them through all the various areas about what it meant to be a Brumby and what they had to do to comply with that. At Test level where we play a lot of our games with less time to prepare it falls back on the senior players to get the message across, although in recent years we have introduced camps at Coffs Harbour and before that the Sunshine Coast which gives us the chance to control certain areas which makes it beneficial to the team".

In devising the team rules and regulations by which the Wallaby players must comply, Jones states while it is important to empower the players with a voice in the decision making process, the final verdict rests with management.

"We've got a fairly strict process that most things (rules) in the first instance will be coach-driven. Following that, we go to the players and interact with them and between us we come up with the final version of what we are going to do. So it's very much a process that incorporates a strong say for the players although it remains very much coach driven. We have two different groups in the Wallaby camp dealing specifically with the social and task elements of cohesiveness. The social group looks after the day-to-day activities of the team and what we need to do for the team to be in our best emotional condition and the task group is looking after the game plan. We have members in both of those groups and again, the initial agenda for both is set by the coaches of that group and then the players help to embellish that particular topic".

One area of concern identified by Jones is not to allow players to begin running their own agenda. He stresses the value of establishing a set of team objectives and rules that must be placed ahead of any personal ambitions. Giving your players a voice is important, but only in relation to what it contributes to the overall success of the team. The often-indefinable quality that constitutes teamwork is an ingredient every coach is searching for. How to find it, introduce it, and keep it is a mystery that may never be fully understood or solved. Enhancing and cultivating the social and task cohesiveness among your players may be an invaluable step to help unravelling the riddle.

Situational Coaching:

A potential model for player development

By Ray Booker & Rudi Meir - School of Exercise Science and Sport Management,
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Introduction

An examination of the roles and responsibilities of coaches clearly demonstrates that they are in leadership positions. Coaches, as leaders, attempt to influence others and they possess some degree of "managerial authority". To a large extent, coaches are perceived as having the capacity to determine the success or failure of a team or player. Yet, as we know only too well, it also appears that coaches are often the first ones to be fired for lack of success. Recent events in the Australian NRL are clear testament to this.

Perhaps this is appropriate, given that they have the capacity to exert substantial power and influence over outcomes. The question, however, still remains as to what makes an effective coach or leader. Are there particular personal traits that differentiate leaders from non-leaders and good coaches from poor coaches? Or have successful leaders or coaches somehow learned, then implemented the secrets of effective leadership? Is leadership style relatively fixed, or is it possible to change behaviour from situation to situation? If so, what *are* the situational factors that a coach should consider when attempting to become an effective leader?

It has been suggested that to be effective, the coach must firstly appreciate the importance of individual differences amongst those they are attempting to influence. If the abilities and motives of the people under the coach are so variable, he or she must have the sensitivity and diagnostic ability to be able to sense and appreciate these differences. Yet even with good diagnostic skills, coaches may still not be effective unless they are able to adapt their leadership style to meet the demands of their environment. It seems logical that a leader must have the personal flexibility and range of skills necessary to vary his or her own behaviour. In the same way, if the needs and motives of the coach's players are different, those players should therefore be treated differently.

It could be argued that, at its most basic, the performance of individuals within a team reflects their differing levels of *ability* and *motivation*. To a large extent, we can ascribe individual performance to a combination of *"can do"* and *"will do"* factors. Put in simple terms, the player has to have a certain degree of willingness to do the task and the necessary skills for task completion. Of course, other factors, such as levels of organizational support; a person's understanding of what it is that is required of them; feedback from coaches; and appropriate and equitable reward systems will also impact on performance.

"Can do" and *"Will do"* Factors

This paper proposes a model incorporating a two-dimensional map (see Fig. 1) which reflects the determinants of performance outlined above. This model has practical application in the rugby league coaching environment. It incorporates some strategies that coaches may employ, depending on their diagnosis of the abilities and motives of the players in their charge.

The coach should firstly examine the extent to which his players have the ability and the willingness to accomplish a specific task (e.g., to follow and participate in a designated training program). This will result in identifying where the players are placed within each quadrant relative to the two dimensions. Typically, players tend to demonstrate different levels of ability and willingness depending on the task they are being asked to do.
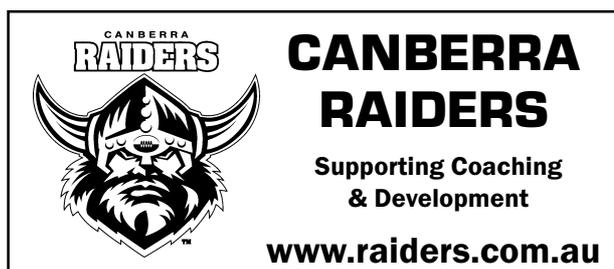
The major components of the model – *ability* and *willingness* – can be defined in the following manner:

Ability is the knowledge, experience, and skill that an individual or group brings to a particular task or activity. When considering the ability level of others, it is very important to be *task specific.* For example, a person who has a PhD in nutrition and twenty years of professional experience analysing the dietary needs of individual athletes, may be of little help in the design of a progressive program of individual and team skill development for a professional rugby league team. In the same way, a good defensive full-back in a rugby league team may not require much coaching or advice in that particular facet of play, but may require constant feedback, direction and encouragement from the coach with regard to his role in attack. It is essential for the coach to focus on the specific outcome desired and to consider the ability of their players in light of that outcome.
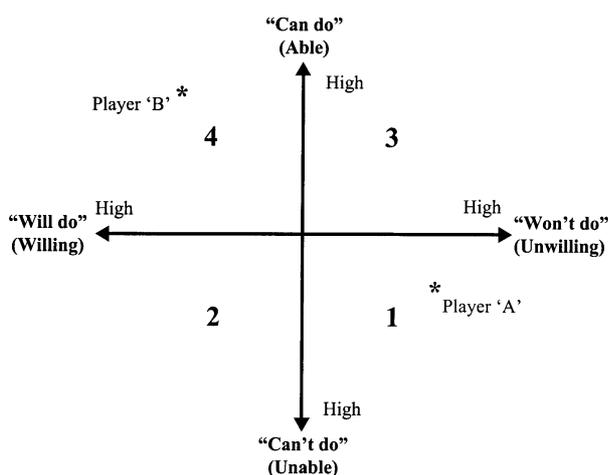
Location	Coaching Strategy
1	Counsel
2	Educate
3	Motivate
4	Delegate responsibility

Figure 1: Hypothetical location of 2 separate players on a Two-dimensional performance map.

Willingness is the extent to which an idividual or group has the confidence, commitment, and motivation to accomplish a specific task. Sometimes, it is not so much that players are really *unwilling*, it is just that they have never done that specific task before. Perhaps they don't have any experience with it, and therefore they are insecure or concerned about the outcome. Generally, if it is an issue of never having done something, the problem is one of insecurity. The term unwilling might be most appropriate when, for one reason or another, the players' performances have slipped, or they have lost some of their commitment and motivation. It might indicate that they are regressing.

Hersey and Blanchard, two American management "gurus", consider that "even though the concepts of ability and willingness are different, it is important to remember that they are an *interacting influence system.* This means that a *significant change in one will affect the whole.* The extent to which followers bring willingness into a specific situation affects the use of their present ability". Players' willingness (or confidence levels) can have a distinct effect on their ability to perform – the self-fulfilling prophecy. Willingness can impact on performance in a positive or a negative manner. In the same way a player's perception of his own ability to perform a task can lead to positive or negative consequences.

"Can't do" and "Won't do": Suggested Strategy - Counselling

If players are assessed as falling into this category they are considered unable to complete particular tasks and they lack the necessary commitment or confidence. Recruitment strategies may have been ineffective and, as a result, the team does not possess the necessary blend of skills and attitudes within the playing staff to be successful. This is the worst case scenario for the coach. There are basically two options. Firstly, it may be decided that, in the best interests of all concerned, the player/s and the club part company. Alternatively, using the *counselling strategy*, the coach works on the commitment and/or confidence level of the player/s. While they may still be lacking in certain skills, at least they are 'willing' to make the required effort to improve on areas of deficient performance. This is the more desirable outcome and moves the player to the next stage in the two-dimensional model.

"Can't do" and "Will do": Suggested Strategy - Education

This category includes players who are still unable to perform as the coach would like, but they are motivated and making an effort. They may be lacking in ability, but they are willing or confident enough so long as the coach is there to provide guidance (e.g., a player with 1 – 2 years' first grade experience learning a umbrella defensive pattern for the first time). Since they basically have the right attitude it is important for the coach to be supportive of their motivation and commitment. This group of players is quite content for the coach to provide high levels of technical advice - in fact these players are most likely expecting it. The coach explains *what* needs to be done, *how* it should be done, *when* it is to be done, and *who* is to do what. The coach not only provides high levels of technical advice and instruction, but uses positive reinforcement to convince the players that they have the ability to succeed.

"Can do" and "Won't do": Strategy - Motivation

Unfortunately, players who possess all the skills don't necessarily perform well. Why? Is it that they are just not willing to use their ability, or that they are insecure or lack confidence in themselves in particular situations? Obviously, it could be either. Coaches often cite poor attitudes amongst some players as contributing to poor performances. Maybe these players – who may once have been highly motivated and positive – are upset with the coaching staff or with decisions taken by team management or even with their fellow players. For whatever reason, their performance may be slipping as they become *unwilling*.

In another situation, however, even though the player clearly has the skills, he may lack confidence in his own ability or he may be insecure about what may be a changing role that he has been given (e.g., team captaincy). Further, a younger, less experienced player may have been promoted to the senior team for the first time and is concerned about his ability to perform in that situation.

Even though the motives are different in the two scenarios described, it is possible that individual performances in both situations will be affected in a negative way. Problems with motivation and commitment can seriously affect individual and, consequently, team performances.

Players in this situation do not require much guidance from the coach in terms of how to complete tasks. It would be more appropriate for the coach to work on 'attitude' via two-way communication and supportive behaviours. Explaining the reasons behind certain decisions that have been taken, sharing ideas, encouraging and collaborating with players, and providing feedback, will be more effective here. If the coach identifies that performance is regressing, and knows that the player has the ability, then feedback may have to be in the form of a reprimand.

The following can be used as a guide in determining how and when to provide *feedback*:

1. *Focus on specific behaviours.* Feedback should be specific rather than general. Avoid statements like 'You have a bad attitude' or 'I was really impressed with your game today'. They are vague, and while they convey some information, they don't tell the player enough to correct the 'bad attitude' or on what basis you concluded that they had had an 'impressive game'. Focus on specific behaviours - telling the player precisely *why* you are being critical or complimentary.

2. *Keep it impersonal.* Feedback, particularly the negative kind, should be descriptive rather than judgmental. Telling players that they are 'stupid' or 'incompetent' is hardly impersonal and usually counterproductive. It can provoke such an emotional reaction that the player becomes defensive - with the result that the performance deviation itself is likely to be overlooked by the player. If things are not working out as expected, avoid using threats. A positive, success-oriented approach is usually much more effective. And, above all, be specific.

3. *Make it well-timed.* Feedback is most meaningful to a player when there is a very short interval between his behaviour and receiving the feedback about that behaviour. A player who makes a mistake during a game is more likely to respond to a coach's suggestions for improvement right after the mistake, immediately following the game, or during a review of that game's video a few days later, rather than feedback provided by the coach several weeks later. If you have to spend time recreating a situation and refreshing someone's memory of it, the feedback you are giving is not likely to be effective. Be warned though that making feedback immediate, just for the sake of it, may well backfire if you have insufficient information at that point in time (e.g., about actual error counts, number of missed tackles, etc.), or if you are angry or emotionally

upset. In these circumstances, "well timed" might really mean "after you have the full picture" or after you've "cooled down".

4. *Ensure understanding.* Remember communication is a two-way process. Have the player rephrase the content of your feedback to see whether it fully captures the meaning you intended. Alternatively, ask the player questions to determine their understanding.

5. *If negative, make sure the behaviour is controllable by the player.* Be fair. Negative feedback should only be directed toward behaviour the player can do something about - over which they have some control. Also, make sure you are not 'dumping' on someone for not doing something they never knew they had to do in the first place! Don't assume the player necessarily understands his specific role.

6. *Tailor the feedback to fit the person.* You should consider the player's past performance and your estimate of his future potential in designing the frequency, amount and content of performance feedback. For high performers with potential for growth, feedback should not be so frequent that it is seen by the player as over-controlling and stifling their initiative.

"Can do" and "Will do": Suggested Strategy – Delegation

These players have the skills and the motivation to succeed – they are gifted, experienced, confident and motivated. Many are looking to take responsibility for directing their own behaviour. An appropriate strategy for the coach to adopt in this instance is *delegation*. While it is important for the coach to monitor what is happening, it is also crucial that he acknowledges the ability and commitment of his players and gives them an opportunity to take responsibility for aspects of their training and competition. Probably the worst approach for the coach is to provide too much direction for these players – constantly telling them what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. Overly close supervision will most probably often result in resentment and a degree of antipathy towards the coach in this situation.

Delegating, however, may be one of the more difficult styles for a coach to use even when individual players or groups of players are exceptionally skilled and motivated. Why? As pointed out at the beginning of this article, a primary reason may be that the coach is held accountable for results and is therefore reluctant to involve players in what he may consider to be "the work of the coach". Delegating, however, does not mean abrogating responsibility; it does mean giving players the ability to make decisions and to function within limits defined by the coach. The coach is there to monitor and observe, and to provide assistance and support – technical or otherwise – as needed.

Summary:

This article has presented a practical model that rugby league coaches can use to enhance individual player development. In influencing the behaviour of others, effective coaches in sport need three basic competencies: (i) *diagnosing* - to be able to understand what's happening in a given situation; do we have a problem? (ii) *adapting* - to be able to adapt your behaviour and the resources under your control to deal with the situation at hand; and (iii) *communicating* - to be able to communicate in a way that players can easily understand and accept.

Successful coaches also need to *match their coaching style with the situation*. Is there time to consult with others? Am I working with a group of players who are young and lack ability and/or confidence? Is this a group whose performance is regressing or improving? Can I delegate this responsibility to a particular players? Should I involve Player X in decisions about game strategy or training? Would Player Y respond better to being told what to do and how to perform his role? *In effect, where do the player/s 'fit' in the two-dimensional map?*

Try it! Sit down with your coaching staff and collectively identify where you perceive each player in the squad is located in terms of the two-dimensional map. Then use this to identify the appropriate coaching strategy as outlined in this article. This was a similar approach to that implemented by an English Super League team during the 2000 season. Using our model presented here, the coaching staff found the results of this exercise to be very enlightening. Of course, ultimately the focus of the situational approach to coaching is to move players through a developmental cycle so that there are as many players as possible functioning within quadrant 4 of the performance model at any given point in time.

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Lies, Damn Lies and Statistics

By Glenn Bayliss ARL Level 3 Coach

The great writer Mark Twain once wrote of lies, damn lies and statistics, pertaining to the fact that statistics are viewed in various ways and collected by different methods, not always giving us a true indication of the reportable outcome. Let us take a journey through the myriad of collectable data and review the importance of what we measure and it's worth to a coach.

A great number of coaches can be seen with a battery of "collectors" who record a large number of attacking and defensive statistics for the coach to peruse at half time and analyse after the game. This is often supported by a video analysis, which churns out more "numbers" for the coach to put some measure to his team's performance. Although statistics can identify specific goals for players and be used as a motivating tool I question that often we are prevented from seeing the real game because of this barrier of statistics…not seeing the trees because of the forest.

Possession Counts

A number of areas are counted to give us an idea of our control of possession; how long we had the ball, how many 'set' completions, time in our half, time in their half, scrums won and lost, penalties for and against, handling errors. We have a comprehensive list of data, but does it tell us everything about our time with the ball.

1. **Completion Sets** – often used as a rule for success based on the higher percentage of completed sets. This may be an indicator of ball security but could it also be an indicator of negative or restrictive play. It was pointed out in a previous article that teams high on the NRL premiership ladder have a season with lower completion sets than those lower on the ladder. This is because the teams that are confident in their ability to create attacking opportunities may not complete a set due to having more opportunity at the right end of the field or making their error after the ball has been carried 80 metres in a set. Less confident teams may be completing their sets with limited ball movement and a downfield kick thus limiting their time and opportunity to score points.

2. **Scrums** – Recording scrum wins with the feed have no importance in today's game. Recording any losses however will give an indication of a serious technique problem that needs to be addressed.

3. **Penalties** – When recording a penalty count we need to ensure that we record the details of the penalty. How many? Was it an individual or a team breach? We then need to note the cause; lack of knowledge, lack of discipline, lack of fitness, poor technique, poor skill. In reality the number of penalties only indicate a problem, the coach needs to know what area needs correction for future games.

4. **Recoveries & Ball Carry** – Statistical data on where we commence our sets and where the ball is carried on consecutive plays can give us an insight into possible technique or skill problems in our team. Disseminate your ball carry information into 'Drives', 'Line Breaks' and 'Offloads' to get an idea of what the team is doing when in possession in various zones on the field. If we just do a tally we do not get the important information about our attack that we require. We need to know that our drives away from the 'red zone' are gaining sufficient metres to allow our kicking game to acquire good field position. If not, we need a deeper analysis of the running style of our 'driving' players, the use of small quick 'scoot' players from dummy half, the time it takes to play the ball, the advantage line running of our players, the pivots role in taking the ball to the line with runners. In the green zone are we still 'driving' or are we having more offloads? Are we having greater success against their left or right hand defence? A simple tally will not indicate all these areas. The game needs to be analysed to find what we are doing successfully and why? And what areas we are failing in to allow for the technique, skill or tactical correction.

5. Error Counts – it is important that information delivered to your players is predominately positive but error counts are a common item on the stat sheet with most coaches. This is sometimes just an error column but more often now we see the 'errors' split into; lost ball, drop ball, bad pass, into touch, penalised, missed tackles. This list of errors is perused by the coach at half-time and later as part of the post game wash-up, but are we doing our job if we are not noting the reasons for the errors. We need to determine the origin of the error. A lost ball could be the effect of an ordinary pass to the player under pressure, a slower than usual play the ball, the lack of support allowing for a solid 'gang' tackle. A missed tackle credited to a player may be due to a defensive error inside causing a two on one situation where the player had to commit to one player then adjust with the pass to attempt a tackle that had no foundation for success.

Tackle Counts

Our interest in tackle counts is one that continues to amaze. The number of tackles made by a player is often related to the amount of effort a player puts in where in reality it is often determined by the attacking plan of the opposition. If the half and five eight have tackle counts as high as your forwards it is not because of the increased effort of these two but the targeting by the opposition on your attacking 'link men'. If you find that your right hand defence is doing twice as much work it is not the fault of your left hand defence, the players can only tackle the ball carrier that comes their way. What we need to gather from these statistics is how the workload can be shared by the timing of our interchange players and the allocation of defensive line positions to suit the defensive skill level of our players. If the right side receives the majority of defensive workload we may have our stronger defensive centre and 'third in' on that side with those we wish to shield from a heavy defensive commitment in our left side defence.

Relevant Facts

Most coaches only record information about the ball carrier and the tackler, yet if we realise the small proportion of time our players actually have the ball in their hands we may start to realise we need to view the game in a broader sense to understand the contribution of the players who are 'running options', supporting the ball carrier, chasing breaks in the

defence, attempting charge downs, limiting the oppositions options by 'in their face' defence. To reinforce this, view the statistics below taken from a junior game of 60 minutes.

Ball in play – 34 minutes

Play the ball – 9 minutes (leaves 23 minutes of actual play)

This, with an even share of possession would give each team around 11 minutes 30 seconds with the ball in their hands.

The average percentage involvement of the players were:

Player	% Attack	% Defence
Fullback	8.6	4.2
Wingers	5.4	2.6
Centres	7.0	7.4
Five Eighth	9.2	7.9
Half Back	7.6	4.8
Lock	6.0	6.9
Second Row	8.6	12.2
Front Row	8.6	11.0
Hooker	9.2	11.0

The information gained from a statistical summary of a game can be useful but also very deceiving if not accompanied by a subjective analysis of why these numbers occurred. When we have a list of 'involvement' and 'error' statistics to view, do not apportion praise or criticism to the players recorded without having a concerted look to see why the statistics read the way they do. Do not be blinded by a folder full of figures but look at your notes that should list the correction required in technique, skill or decision making by your various players. Statistic sheets will not give you the accurate prescription for correction at your next training session. Your knowledge of the game and its skills, your ability to watch the game as a "Developing Coach" and not a "Spectator Coach", will give you the areas required for reinforcement or enhancement.

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PROUD TO SUPPORT RUGBY LEAGUE

Development Squads

Mitch Luka Central West Development ARL Level 3 Coach

Rugby League Development squads are an integral part of Rugby League for a number of reasons.

- Talent identification for N.R.L. clubs & Country Rep. Sides.
- Advanced skill learning
- All round technique.
- Technique to skill phase.
- Physiological profile.
- A smooth progression from junior ranks through to senior football.
- Sport science integration.

With the amount of junior representative sides available, I believe the ideal age for Development squads is U/17's.

By targeting this age group, it provides talent identification and encouragement for these athletes to progress to the senior ranks. ie.U/18's which is the life of league clubs especially in the bush. It also

This is an example on how the Central West (Group 10) Development squad works.

Invitations are sent to every U/16 club notifying training dates normally early November. Apart from the U/16 boys, 6 talented U/15 boys are asked to attend so to give the squad, when selected 4 bottom age boys, who will make the nucleus of next years squad.

The senior league in conjunction with the junior league runs the squad.

All coaching & staff appointments are approved by the Division Committee. The development squad has a staff of.

- Head coach
- Assistant coach
- Manager
- Head trainer
- Assistant trainer

The development squad does not necessarily comprise the best of the best in player ability

gives future representative players a chance to show their skills apart from game time, which is normally a one off game in which the player might not perform to his best ability.

Each Division or Group should run a Development squad. In the Western Division because the Division borders run from Lithgow to Cobar, which is a good six hour drive, the division is broken into two squads a western and a central west squad.

Each squad has the same programme and during the programme will have a number of trials against each other to select a top twenty for a game against a N.R.L. Development squad later in the year.

Development squads should be run in the off season to allow no disruption to their normal competition plus gives representative selectors a chance to look at promising representative players.

Apart from the staff, all junior coaches are invited to all sessions for coaching updates and involvement in skill training. The coaching staff is constantly updating coaching methods through the N.S.W. Rugby League Academy.

The first training session will consist of basic conduct requirements and behaviour expected of the squad. A yearly planner is distributed to squad members, including training dates trial games all rep games and the Groups draw for the season.

After the sign on is completed, the boys are given a fitness test comprising of a beep test, strength testing in push ups and sit-ups and an agility test. All results are recorded.

Up until the end of November, the squad will train every Sunday from 10am to 4pm, consisting of advanced skill training, defence and attack patterns,

game simulation and even a trial game played in that period. This gives all boys the opportunity to participate and benefit from the sessions in their entirity.

The squad is then selected. Normally twenty players are drafted, but can be more depending on the skill level of the boys. The development squad does not necessarily comprise the best of the best in player ability. In selecting the squad other facets of sportmanship including, attitude to the game and other players, attendance at training, fitness level and their willingness to learn, are all incorporated into the selection process.

The squad then trains through December, has January off, and then reconvenes in February.

On their last session before the Christmas break, the squad is given an off season training programme which includes time based runs so the player can monitor his times over the break. The programme is also split into backs and forwards for specific training techniques and applications.

Throughout the December & February training sessions the squad is given sport science lectures in.

- Nutrition
- Drugs in sport
- Strength & Conditioning
- Ingredients of Success

When the squad resumes training after the break, they are tested for fitness and results are matched to their first test. The boys are expected to improve on their initial results.

NOTES

At the culmination of the programme, all players' strengths and weakness have been identified and a technique and skill programme is developed for each individual.

Each player participating in the development programme leaves having had a good introduction into the realm of senior rugby league. They have had a professional evaluation of there technique, skill, strength and conditioning level.

The players are introduced to journals where at the beginning of each session they do a revision of their last session by writing down key points on sessions and lectures.

In the lecture about ingredients of success, we include a session from a current or retired NRL player. His focus is generally on the road to the top, covering social life, training and sacrifices he went through to get there. Usually the player is from that area so the boys can relate to him from the start.

Another important area in the lecture series is nutrition and strength and conditioning. This highlights to squad members the importance of the right foods and specific strength training required for rugby league.

The programme concludes at the end of the season when all participants are asked to tour internationally, usually a week's tour of New Zealand.

The successful operation of the development squad concept is dependant on the support of the encumbant Group Management Committee, the Country Rugby League and if possible an NRL club.

The growth and fostering of junior talent in the Western Division area is due in no small part to the support of the Penrith Panthers Rugby League Club.

Fitness Testing for Rugby League Players: *Are Results Useful?*

Tim Gabbett - Director of Performance, Runaway Bay Seagulls Rugby League Club

Regular fitness testing for rugby league players permits the conditioning coach to monitor improvements (or reductions) in fitness throughout a season. As a result, changes in training intensity, training volume and training load can be made to optimise performance. However, are results obtained from standard fitness tests useful to the coach, the conditioner, and the player?

The Case 'For' Fitness Testing

There are several established benefits of regular fitness testing for rugby league players. Standard physiological fitness tests can be used to:

1. Monitor improvements in fitness throughout a season
2. Predict performance and identify talent
3. Ensure junior players' physical development is progressing at an appropriate rate

1. Monitor improvements in fitness throughout a season.

Conditioning coaches most commonly use physiological testing to monitor changes in fitness throughout the course of a season, and evaluate the effectiveness of an implemented training program.

By regularly evaluating a players' fitness, conditioning coaches can make subtle changes to training intensity, training volume and training load in order to optimise performance. Fitness testing allows conditioning coaches to identify the physiological strengths and weakness of players so that appropriate training programs can be implemented to rectify potential problem areas. Fitness testing may also provide valuable feedback to players following a gruelling off-season training program. In addition, players with poor to moderate skills often receive a valuable confidence boost from performing well in fitness tests.

2. Predict performance and identify talent.

Recent studies have demonstrated a significant difference in the physiological capacities of amateur, semi-professional, and professional rugby league players.

Figure 1 shows the maximal aerobic capacities of amateur, semi-professional, and professional rugby league players, estimated from the multi-stage fitness test (beep test). These results demonstrate that there is a progressive improvement in aerobic fitness as the playing level is increased.

It has subsequently been suggested that rugby league players with higher physiological capacities (i.e. faster speed, greater aerobic fitness, etc) are predisposed to greater performance, and that a high physiological capacity may predict performance. It is unclear if the higher physiological capacity of professional players is due to superior training techniques, greater training frequency, or higher intensity of matches. However, it is clear from this data that a high physiological capacity is a necessary component (among many) for optimum performance in rugby league.

3. Ensure junior players' physical development is progressing at an appropriate rate.

While physiological fitness tests may be used to predict performance and identify talented players, fitness tests are equally useful in ensuring the physical development of junior players' progresses at an appropriate rate.

Figure 2 shows the maximal aerobic capacities of under 13, under 16, under 19, and first grade country rugby league players. In general, there is a progressive

Figure 1. Maximal aerobic capacity of amateur, semi professional, and professional Rugby League players.
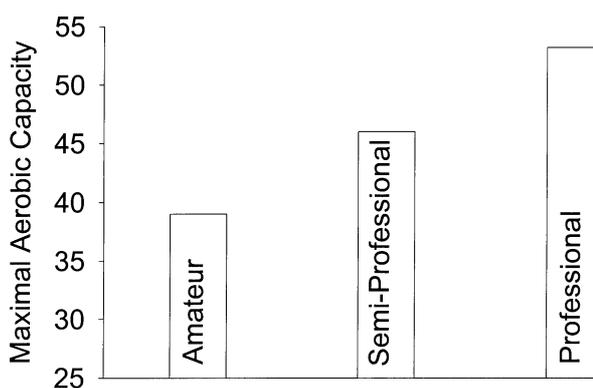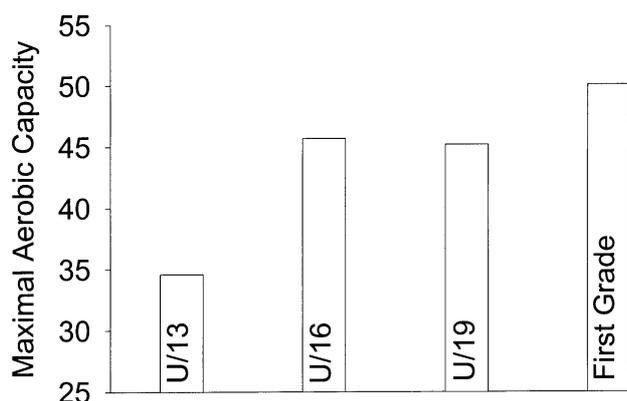
Figure 2. Maximal aerobic capacity of junior and senior Rugby League players.

improvement in the aerobic capacities of players as the playing level is increased. The higher aerobic fitness of first grade players may be due to differences in the intensity and duration of matches and training sessions at the higher playing level.

Alternatively, the differences in aerobic capacities may simply be due to maturational differences between junior and senior players. However, on closer inspection, Figure 2 demonstrates that under 16 players have superior aerobic fitness to under 19 players. These results may suggest that the Under 19 players' aerobic fitness was progressing inappropriately. A greater emphasis on aerobic conditioning may be beneficial to these players. Finally, by evaluating the fitness of all players at a club (i.e. under 13 through to first grade), conditioning coaches can develop performance standards to which both junior and senior players can aspire.

The Case 'Against' Fitness Testing

While the benefits of fitness testing have been documented, there are also several limitations associated with fitness testing. Limitations of fitness testing include:

1. The reliance on players to give a maximum effort
2. A failure to perform follow-up fitness tests or a tendency to over-test
3. The difference between fitness and performance

1. The reliance on players to give a maximum effort.

In motivated players who are prepared to give a maximum effort, physiological testing can provide valuable information on the fitness of the athlete and the effectiveness of the training program. It is reasonable to suggest that most rugby league players are well motivated to *play* rugby league.

However, not all rugby league players express the same desire and motivation to perform fitness tests. As a result, the validity of the fitness test may be limited by the failure of players to perform maximally. It is not uncommon to observe the most skillful and talented players perform poorly in fitness tests due to their lack of motivation to perform such tests.

In addition, some players may intentionally perform poorly on the initial test in order to demonstrate a marked improvement in fitness by the second test! Clearly, a less than maximal effort clouds the interpretation of fitness test results for rugby league players.

Figure 3. Maximal aerobic capacity of first grade and second grade Rugby League players
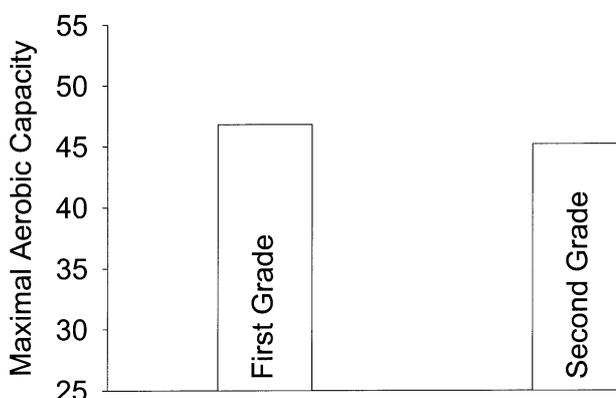
2. A failure to perform follow-up fitness tests or a tendency to over-test.

Conditioning coaches commonly test players at the beginning of the season. However, due to injuries, poor planning, or a lack of time, follow-up fitness tests are often neglected. In this instance, the initial testing session yields data of minimal use to the coach, the conditioner, and the player. Of equal concern is the tendency of conditioning coaches to over-test players. Because rugby league players are required to perform near optimal levels on a week-to-week basis, the game differs considerably from individual sports (e.g. long-distance running), where athletes are only required to 'peak' once or twice in a competitive season.

Additionally, the physical collisions involved in rugby league necessitate an adequate recovery period for players. If excessive fitness testing sessions are scheduled, players may receive inadequate recovery time and playing performance (and fitness test performance) may suffer. A reduction in physical fitness due to excessive fitness testing could have serious implications for the confidence and performance of the player.

3. The difference between fitness and performance.

It is not uncommon to find similar aerobic fitness, speed, agility and muscular power scores between first grade and second grade players. However, clearly there is a difference in performance between first grade and second grade players.

Figure 3 shows the aerobic fitness of semi-professional first grade and second grade players. These results suggest that physiological capacities of players do not influence selection into rugby league teams. In addition, these results demonstrate that regardless of the objectivity of a field test, playing *performance* (and not physiological fitness test results) should be the main criteria when determining team selection. It would appear pointless to improve a teams' shuttle run performance if they can't demonstrate good skills under fatigue, or defend for multiple sets of tackles and then mount an effective counter-attack. Why improve a players' 40-metre speed time if he can't run quickly while carrying the ball, catch the pass when supporting a player, or make the cover-defending tackle after chasing down the opposition winger? Improving a players' vertical jump performance means little if it doesn't transfer to improved play-the-ball speed or greater leg drive in tackles. Finally, a physiological fitness test can not determine one of the most important characteristics that separates first grade and second grade players – decision-making skills. The first grade player will more often than not have the ability to realise when to pass the ball, or when to take the tackle and complete sets. More often than not, the second grade player will lack these decision-making skills.

Clearly, one of the most important attributes required by rugby league players can not be tested using a standard physiological test. It is extremely rare that a coach would use physiological field test results to select teams, and given the significant difference between *fitness* and *performance*, it could be suggested that results from physiological field tests should never determine selection into a rugby league team.

Routine testing is a necessity to monitor the effectiveness of an implemented training program, however, unless the improved physiological capacity transfers to improved performance, then the results are meaningless to the coach, the conditioner, and most importantly, the player.

Summary

Wherever possible, conditioning coaches should be looking for 'the edge' that distinguishes their training program from others. One method of achieving this 'edge' is to regularly test players to ensure the training program is effective. However, the conditioner should be mindful that when interpreting results, improved physiological capacity may not always transfer to improved playing performance.

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Making Nutrition Part of the Training Program

Written By Trent Watson - Clued on Food Nutrition Consultants
Consultant Dietitian to: Newcastle Knights (2000, 2001), Northern Eagles (2001),
The Hunter Academy of Sport (2000, 2001) and Newcastle United Soccer Club (2001).

There are many aspects that affect an athlete's performance, these include genetics, physical training, psychology, and it is commonly accepted that the nutritional intake of an elite athlete is very important for improving performance

Nutrition is one area that is often neglected or looked upon in a more trivial manner when compared to the other aspects of sporting performance. I have played rugby league at a national level for six years and now I work with many individual athletes and elite sporting teams as their dietitian. Throughout this time I have established some key areas in sports nutrition. These areas should assist the coach to point their athletes in the right direction and ensure the athlete eats a diet that is optimal for their sporting endeavours.

Enjoy a wide variety of foods every day.

The first priority for an athlete is to be healthy. A sick, unwell or ill athlete will never perform at their best. To maintain health an athlete must first choose a nutritionally adequate diet. This means choosing foods from each of the food groups; 1) breads, cereals, rice, pasta and noodles, 2) vegetables and legumes, 3) fruit, 4) milk, yoghurt, cheese, ice-cream, and 5) lean meat, fish, poultry, eggs, nuts, legumes.

Consume regular meals based around carbohydrate foods.

Athletes require a high amount of energy to fuel their hard working muscles. Regular meals (4 to 6 each day) will ensure energy requirements are met.

Carbohydrate is the best fuel for exercise and is the only fuel for high intensity exercise. I commonly say that carbohydrate to an athletes body, is like high octane fuel to a formula-1 racing car. Athletes' work at high intensity in training and competition on a daily basis. This means that they continually burn up the relatively small amounts of carbohydrate stored in our muscles and liver. Carbohydrate has to be replaced by eating carbohydrate rich foods at every meal. High carbohydrate foods include; breads, cereals, rice, pasta, noodles, fruit, starchy vegetables (potato, sweet potato, corn), legumes, milk and yoghurt.

Traditional Australian eating habits encourage meals based around meat, which do not encourage an intake of high carbohydrate foods. When planning meals the athlete should be encouraged to choose their high carbohydrate foods first and then choose the toppings, meats, coloured vegetables, salads, sauces and dressing. For example, when athletes are choosing meals from a buffet for their evening meal, make the high carbohydrate foods the first choice (pasta, rice, potato, fresh breads) and the meats, toppings and sauces at the end of the buffet.

Consume fluids on a regular basis to maintain optimal hydration levels.

Approximately 60% of our body is water and as little as a 2% drop in our hydration (body water) level can have a detrimental effect on an athletes performance. If an athlete is exercising at intense levels and/or in a hot climate it is very easy to lose this level of fluid. It should be a priority for the athlete to consume regular amounts of fluid and a priority for the coach to provide regular breaks in training and encourage fluid replacement. Drink water between and/or following each meal and leading up to and during training and competition.

Preparation and Organisation

Preparation and organisation I believe are the two most important points when it comes to healthy eating and eating for optimal performance. To emphasise this point consider the following scenarios.

Scenario 1: If you go on a long car trip and don't pack any food; where do you stop to eat? Most common answers: *KFC, McDonalds, Service Station/Road House.*

Scenario 2: If you go on a long car trip and pack your food; what do you pack? Most common answers: *Sandwiches, fruit, drink, muesli bars.*

A hungry athlete with a big appetite will tend to eat whatever is available and without even trying and with no questions asked in scenario 2 the athlete is provided with a diet that is high in carbohydrate and low in fat. If the athlete or team of athletes are not organised they will probably be left with having to choose low carbohydrate, high fat meals as described in scenario 1.

These scenarios illustrate how important planning and organisation are for an athlete to eat foods that are optimal for health and performance. They certainly do not only apply in a traveling situation. Athletes will find themselves in a similar situation by packing and not packing lunch for work (school) each day. Coaches certainly have a role in encouraging their athletes to be planned and organised. Their role may also carry over into the planning and organisation of meals when their team is traveling.

Consistency.

An athlete that trains and competes day-to-day will use their carbohydrate or fuel stores up day-to-day and these must be replaced. Figure 1 shows a 4-day training week with a competition event on Saturday for two athletes. The only difference between the two athletes is that 'athlete 2' had a slack day on his carbohydrate intake on the Tuesday. This left him with low fuel stores for training all week and on his competition day he ran out of fuel stores and would have become very fatigued. Even on rest days an athlete need to concentrate on a high carbohydrate
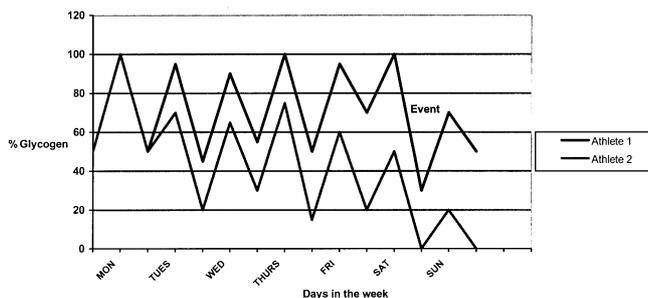
diet to make up for any short falls from previous days where training has been hard and energy stores have been soaked up.

A trap I often see athletes fall into is taking a supplement they believe is the answer to everything and they forget about their basic nutrition requirements. My advice here is that there are no 'golden bullets' when it comes to nutrition. Supplements can certainly play a role in an athletes

training program, however to have their full effect they need to be combined with an optimal daily diet. Athletes certainly have to be consistent with their eating patterns to maintain optimal performance.

Nutritional training regime.

Training provides an opportunity for the athlete to physically replicate and fine-tune their game/competition/race situation. I always say that it provides the perfect time to experiment and fine-tune your eating patterns as well. Training nutritionally will help the athlete find out what works for them and what does not. It will also answer that commonly asked question; "What do I eat before a game/competition/race?"

Training nutritionally requires the athlete to note what foods they are eating and at what times they are eating prior to training. On the training days they feel good and perform well they should reflect back on what they have eaten prior to that training session. They may choose to apply an eating regime a second time to a subsequent training session. If it continues to work they should apply this to their game/competition/race situation. A nutrition regime that works for the athlete will provide a mental and physical edge for the competition situation

Consume foods high in carbohydrate and ample amounts of fluid are some broad recommendations regarding nutrition prior to training and competition however these recommendations will vary widely among individuals. It is up to the individual with the guidance of the coach or a dietitian, to define what works for them.

Conclusion

Training nutritionally is being consistently prepared and organised to consume a diet that is nutritionally adequate, high in carbohydrate, low in fat, with ample amounts of fluid.

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To assist in the education and development of coaches and players LOG ON TODAY!

The coaching discussions on the following pages are extracts from the popular League Coach Website. This website provides a forum for coaches to express and exchange ideas and discuss Rugby League coaching.

RLCM recommends this website to all coaches and has reproduced sample extracts to promote the site. We encourage all coaches to visit the e-group and join in on discussions, all members are prepared to share information and discuss ideas. *Log on today!*

Offload Capacities

Question 1
I'm a young French student, involved in rugby league coaching. I'm looking for exercises which can increase the offloads's capacities of the players (technically, physically or others).

Answer *(Bob Wood)*
The easiest and one of the most effective ways is to teach your players is the Hit & Spin Technique, which is actually poorly named because you actually Spin and then Hit. To teach this technique:

a. Have a player with a bump pad standing 5 metres in away from the play the ball, in the post defenders position (one off the ruck);

b. Have a guts runner come through and take a pass off the dummy half and run straight at the post defender;

- Just before the runner gets to the defender he starts to spin, and here is the critical part:

- If he is on the LEFT side of the ruck he will lead (or hit) with his LEFT shoulder;

- If on the RIGHT side he will lead with his RIGHT shoulder;

- This will ensure that he is able to deliver the pass correctly to his support.

- The dummy half scoots out from the play the ball and while running behind the ball runner, he takes the offload.

- The dummy half then becomes the next ball runner and the drill continues;

c. If looking for offloads, you should also teach the correct ball carry:

- Many players these days are carrying the ball for the spin pass. Get them out of this habit and get them back to holding the ball in the middle, with fingers spread underneath and thumbs on top.

- To demonstrate the effectiveness of this ball carry, have a player turn his back to you and you bear hug him, but holding his arms 'above' the elbow, he can now flick his wrists and pass the ball 5 metres with a wrist flick

There are plenty of other ways of offloading, passing under the arm pits, passing around a defender, the one handed back flick, but most of these are high skill sets. The hit and spin is relatively simple and can easily be taught, you can then build it into a pattern or a play such as the dummy half scooting and dummying to an inside runner, then passing to a straight runner who hits and spins and picks up the dummy half on the loop who fires the pass out to his backline.

Team Defence Performance Indicators

Question 2
I'm a final year sports coaching student, doing an assignment on team defence performance indicators in Rugby League, i.e. the key aspects of a teams defence that determines success.

Answer (A) *(Bob Wood)*

Team Defence Performance Indicators (TDPI), that's a long name. I guess that is a 21st century term for stats. Before using TDPI's or stats it is important to understand their evolution in our game. Stats came in when Jack Gibson started coaching Eastern Suburbs (Sydney) now known as the Sydney City Roosters. Easts previously had only won one game in two seasons. In 1967 Easts signed Gibson and he took them from last to equal third and then proceeded to win two Premierships with them. Gibson was an innovator in many ways and had spent a lot of time studying Gridiron, when he took over Easts he realised that they were among the top attacking teams in the competition, but by far the worst defensive team. Gibson introduced tackle counts as a means of focusing his players minds on defence, he left the attack alone. Gibson talked tackle counts at half time, he posted them in the locker rooms and players competed with each other to get the highest tackle count and thus was born our love affair with stats. They were seen by many as a "magic bullet", but they were simply a tool, like many other tools that a coach uses, and like any other tool, if you don't have any use for the tool then the tool is of no use to you.

Now to your specific question. I am not a student just a coach, and there are a lot better educated coach's in this forum than me so hopefully a couple of them will jump in with some better educated answers.

All defence (like everything else) starts at the play the ball. If you are going to keep stats then you are interested in how your markers work, the first stat would be on individual players, how many times they chase out from marker and how many times they don't (that figure should be zero).

The next stat would be on how your second marker

works, does he hold and then follow or just hang around.

One important stat that a lot of coach's like is doubles and triples and in what situations. Wingers are expected to perform two tackles in a row (a double) on the kick chase, this eases the pressure on your forwards. Triples from chasing wingers is wonderful.

Forwards often have a high work rate and a stat that is helpful is their tackle count, this can be used on game day to allow you to rest hard working forwards.

Your halves tackle count is also helpful on game day, often coach's will direct a lot of their attack at one of your halves, to tire him out so that he is less effective in attack. By keeping an eye on your main attackers tackle counts, you can make adjustments to your defence pattern to keep them fresh during a game.

Tackle assists are also a helpful stat, the first man in is often credited with the tackle while the second player is forgotten, when, the second player is the one who completes the tackle.

Players can only tackle when they are in the correct position, so adherence to your defence pattern is a useful indicator, the number of plays when the player was correctly aligned vs the number of plays when he was incorrectly aligned.

Years ago we always used to target players with head gear on their left shoulder, the head gear showed that they were generally poor left shoulder tacklers, and would get their head in the wrong place, hence the use of the head gear. But head gear is becoming more prevalent so it might not be such a useful guide. Tackling technique is important, another indicator is the number of tackles that each player makes in a specific style (eg front on, side on, behind etc) and how many were effective vs ineffective on each shoulder, this gives you a corrective training program for each player.

Working forward off the line is important, shutting the gate, working the inside defence, working the up & out (or in) pattern, all these are important.

Most of these indicators will have to be gained via video after the game but some can be used during game day, eg tackle counts, doubles and triples. The game day stats help you adjust your play during the game, the video analysis stats allow you to tailor your training regime to meet the specific requirements of your team.

Answer (B)

I have thought long and hard about your query - I have come to the conclusion that there is no one single defensive performance indicator. Rugby League is an unpredictable open skilled game that relies on many variables interacting together, resulting in an outcome. What may indicate defensive success against one team may not against another. I hope this hasn't confused you but it may provide some ammunition to use in justification of this matter to your lecturer.

Half Back Play

Question 3.
I have been trying to find information on how to play the halfback position in Rugby League. I am 15 years old and selectors have indicated they would like to see me play halfback as they think I have the skills to play the position well. But the only problem is that I don't now how to play halfback. So I hope you can help me here.

Answer (Bob Wood)
There are a number of elements to playing halfback:

1. You should be taking the ball to the defensive line (about 2-3 metres before it) and putting support players through gaps. Your support players should be able to gap run - but what you need to do is to help create that gap, usually by sucking in two defenders

2. Control the game, generally the 5/8 will be responsible for looking for defensive weaknesses, while the half drives the forwards forward and calls the plays, until the 5/8 has spotted a weakness you control the game plan or vary it according to what is happening on the field. You need to be a talker, non-stop talker, push your defence up, remind the markers to work, remind players to shut the gate, remind forwards to keep it tight for the first three tackles etc

3. Take the line on, late in the halves, you should be prepared to take the defensive line on, and be able to penetrate a tired defensive line.

4. Defence, as mentioned previously you have to control the defence, but you should be a good leg tackler and a good cover defender (depending on your coach's defensive pattern).

Beating Slide Defence

Question 4.
We had our first loss of the season to a team we will meet in the semi-finals and really couldn't counter their slide defence. They chased hard from the inside out and pretty much snuffed out our big go forward players. Has anyone experienced this type of defence and what patterns/plays do you reccommend?

Answer (Bob Wood)
Some basic things to beating a slide defence:

1. Change angles - run scissor plays, look at turning the ball back inside, use run arounds etc

2. Quick Play the balls - quicken up the speed of your play the balls this starts from the tackle and players freeing themselves from the tackle. If they are tackled around the chest, then they bring their chest 'back' to their knees and pull free. If they are tackled around their legs, they pull their knees 'forward' to their chest to break the tackle.

3. Dummy half scoots after a line break (full or partial)

4. Tactical kicking - a good kicking game can hold the defence back

5. Second Phase play - get you halves passing to a forward who takes the ball to the line, hits and spins and offloads to the half on the loop around.

Player Confidence

Question 5
I'm coaching an Under 14 side this season, they're a very good side and keen to learn the finer points. I have one problem, there's a side who they have never beaten and when we played them the other week we were a completely different side.

It's a mental thing, how can I change their way of thinking? It's not winning that I am aiming towards, it's getting confidence in them individually to go out and play the way they can.

Any suggestions as to what I can do?

Answer *(Bob Wood)*

Winning is a confidence thing and if this other side keeps beating you, then they are high on confidence, while your guys are down on confidence. You may not be aiming to beat them but I bet your guys are keen on beating them.

At the moment your teams focus will be on the result, 'they are going to get beaten again'.

You have to change the focus and need to be doing it for awhile. What you need to do is sit down with your team and talk this thing through. How much did they beat you by last time? Let's say they beat you 32-4. You're focus should be to reduce their 32 points and increase your 4, but that is pretty much a "pie-in-the-sky" type goal.

So how are you going to achieve that goal, well I don't know, where are they busting you? If it is around the ruck, then you need to work on your ruck defence and your team has to have a focus of controlling the first three tackles around the ruck. You have to decide how they are going to do that and discuss it with them, they have to commit to that cause, 'control the ruck' (if that is the problem).

Then you have to look at playing field position, that is your attacking game plan, working field position, if they are strong in the forwards then you have to play them on the fringes of the ruck with inside runners to hold up their defence. You and your team have to commit to that goal and work out plays to achieve it. Perhaps your dummy half has to run out a couple of paces to hold up the markers.

Once you have put this together and your team has committed to it then you can go into the game focusing on the process. The score at this stage is irrelevant, it is the individual processes that are the focuses . The in goal talk is important too, everytime they score the talk must focus on the processes for the next set of six.

If they beat you 30-6 then you have won. But even if they flog you, if your players have achieved the processes then you have still won. What you have to do then is to take those processes back to the training paddock and fine tune wherever they let you down. Possibly you weren't controlling the ruck area, they got a quick roll on and your defence line wasn't set. Possibly your play the balls were too slow, practice knees to chest for a tackler around the legs and chest to knees for a tackler around the top of the body.

I hope that makes some sort of sense and you get the idea. It took me three years to beat a team that kept beating me and when I beat them, I flogged them. Of course this year I lost a lot of my key players and they flogged me 10-52, they still remember those beatings last year so now I am back to working on processes.

2 Step Tackling

Question 6
Can you explain the 2 step tackling?

Answer *(Bob Wood)*

Short history - I was looking (years ago) at why some people couldn't tackle. There were, in my opinion, a number of factors:

1) Positioning - sprinted out of the line, hung back, not in the defensive structure - got stepped;

2) Fear of body contact;

3) Lack of technique.

I decided that I would attack defence from two angles - Firstly from the defensive structure point of view, if the player wasn't in the right position (or wasn't there at all), then he couldn't make the tackle. Now I explain and drill various elements of a defensive pattern.

Secondly from technique (including fear of body contact). Have a look at any player who flings his arm out, or who tries to tackle bent at the waist and reaching forward with his arms (very common in Juniors), they are scared of body contact (or just been stepped .. in the case of the arm fling).

So I picked the brains of many coaches (who had coached at a Representative Level). I learnt from one coach the Two Step Technique. He would have someone with a bump pad and players would step in (from Two Steps away) and execute a tackle, emphasising the foot placement, the Shoulder turn, the impact and the Leg Drive. Players were not allowed to start more than Two Steps away (no run up), they had to get the force from the last Two Steps. Everything else in the defensive line is just closing the distance between the defence and the attack i.e. if your are ten metres away from the attack, then the first 5 metres (considering that the attacker is also running) is just to meet in the middle, the TACKLE is only performed in the last couple of steps. Most drills had players sprinting varying distances and diving at tackle bags, all this was doing was teaching them how to run and play Superman.

The I came across a Gridiron drill for tackling, it had a lot of similarities to what this other coach was doing and so was born The Two Step Tackling Technique.

The Two Step Tackling Technique (for Right Handed Tacklers - swap Left for Right and vice versa for Left Handed Tacklers).

Best in small groups initially, so if you can split your squad up so that they do station work (with other people working the other stations) it allows you to work with smaller numbers. If not then just two lines facing each other (if odd numbers, then the tackling line slide left after each tackle and the odd player comes in at number one).

Attacker stands still for these first stages and drops his elbows in front of his stomach.

The tackling player assumes the perfect front on tackle position against another player:

a) Bent at waist with (right) shoulder in attackers stomach;

b) Right arm around attackers back (in the small of the back);

c) Left hand behind the attackers thigh (attackers right thigh);

d) Knees bent;

e) Right foot in between attackers feet;

f) Left foot outside attackers right foot (the one that the left arm is under the thigh);

Get the tacklers to initially lift their left hand and at the same time straighten their knees and push up with their back and shoulder, the left hand should be twisting the player slightly. The result should be that the attacker should be on one leg and twisted slightly, it is very easy then for the tackler to complete the tackle.

Next get the players to assume the perfect tackle position again and then step back with their Left Foot and then bring their Right Foot back level with their left foot, get them to see the distance away, now step forward with the Right Foot (in between the attackers feet - Step One), now step forward with the Left Foot (note how the right shoulder goes back and is cocked (Step 2). The tackle is then completed with the arms, left hand behind the thigh and lifting, legs straighten as right shoulder is unleashed into the players stomach, pushing forward and up, the right arm comes around behind the attackers back, all of this is done slowly at walking pace.

After a couple at walking pace, you can get a bit of speed into it by getting them to step in quickly.

Swap groups over.

Next Stage - take players back a couple of metres (attacker still standing still). Defenders now have to jog a couple of paces to get into position to execute the last two steps, here watch for footwork (little baby steps at the end) and for the Two Step Technique.

Next Stage - take tacklers back 5 metres and have attackers SLOWLY jog towards them. Tacklers jog towards attackers and then baby steps and Two Step technique, timing is starting to come into it.

Keep working the stages up until you get to full game speed and full game distance, take the technique back to previous stages as techniques, timing etc. drops off.

When you have got it at full game speed work it in a fatigued situation, or in a small sided game, start to test it under game conditions.

Back Line Running

Question 7

I've noticed with my team that I'm not getting full efficiency of my back line towards the end of the tackle count. We play a very good power game in tackles 1-3 and end up 2/3rds across the width of the field ready for wide attack. But the problem recurrs that we have alot of lateral movement and end up losing momentum and any chance of breaking out wide.

Now I've heard the theory that the players in the backline each run a straight corridor (is this a gap between players?) and your pivot is the only one who runs laterally and picks up the best runner? Is this how we set up for Unders and Overs? Any comments and any drills that will help me sort out this part of the game is greatly appreciated.

Answer (A) (Tony Marshall)
One method we use is to set out markers for the backline to use as guides for their line running. This includes the pivot/playmaker. We change our lines a lot out wide and find it very beneficial if the pivot/playmaker goes forward first in his 'track' or 'corridor' before he makes any lateral movement. The tracks or corridors we like to point out are usually at defenders rather than between them. By this I mean running at

the player in the first instance, then taking him off that corridor, either in or out and then changing the line again in the last few strides before the defensive line. This is how we teach the 'unders and overs' plays.

Answer (B) *(Leighton Karawana)*

For what its worth, you should look at using decoy runners, so that your backs can have gaps to run thru. By having decoys, your pivot can do two things.

1. He can take the ball to the line and then have the options of passing to any runner, or taking the ball himself. Brett Kimmorley and Andrew Johns are good examples. This places the defence into two minds of whether to take you or the runners that are running towards them. You can also use the left shoulder attack to better the chances of making the break.

2. The second option is a long ball out to the backs and then they can either skip pass, or flat ball, using the decoy runners. The backs can remain deep and know that the decoys are at least going to take players off them. The key is the execution of the move ie: from the fast play, a quick pass to the pivot, the running of the decoys and finally the backs receiving good ball. Also by having decoys or extra runners, your team has the option of changing angles or bringing the ball back to the blind side again. Now to get the decoy runners, you can either use some of your backs or like most teams, use the left over forwards, that either had a run previously or are doing nothing for that set.

Answer (C) *(Bob Wood)*

The pivot who has to attack 'straight' at his defender, if your pivot is not running 'straight' then your whole backline will start crabbing across field. Start at your pivot, focus on getting him 'straight' first.

Darren's options are also good options and you can build those sort of options into your play. But unless you can get that pivot running 'straight', then all the angle options will fail.

Realistically it is the same as any other skill. It is a matter of practising it.

1) Practice it slowly;
2) Practice it at pace;
3) Practice it at pace under pressure;
4) Practice it at pace under pressure and in a game like scenario.

I have (and will probably go back to doing it) used the analogy of tracks and corridors. I have set our cones for where the backline players start and where they pass and where they finish. It can be boring and

time consuming but it shows the players specific running lines that I am looking for. Each week I would run these lines for 5-10 minutes, until they could do it at full pace. Then I would stand defenders on the defence line cones and keep going until they could attack stationary defenders at full pace. Then I move the defenders back 10 metres from the play the ball, and allowed them to walk forward slowly, each time the backs could attack correctly, I would increase the defenders speed until I had them at game speed. Then finally I would have three ruck plays with all sorts of options and the backs would have to repeat that 4th tackle option, from wherever the 3rd tackle finished. I could see how well they could adapt to a game situation.

The other area that you could look at is how much space and time your backs have to operate. Ever since Melbourne won that Grand Final everyone has gone to the flat attacking line which simply denies the attack time and space (yes it does have some benefits but requires a high level of skill). All my teams have always been used to my pacing out a backline. Have a look at your backline, if they are flat, then they are operating under pressure and will automatically crab to the outside. At training run your first three tackles then stop the play. Your backs should be lined out ready to use the ball on your 4th tackle option. Start at the play the ball and step five big paces laterally out towards the open side of the field. Turn towards your backline and step five big paces towards the backs, that is where your half should be standing. From there five big paces laterally, turn towards your backs and five more big paces 5/8, keep going 5 and 5 and position players where they should be. Have a look at the width and depth that you now have in your backline. This will give them more space and time to operate in, but you will have to keep doing it because they will flatten out again. These days (with the team that I currently coach) the minute I stop the play and start pacing the backs suddenly fall into position, but not on the field, yet!

With regards to your question of running Unders and Overs, do they run at players or at gaps. The answer given by the other correspondents is correct run 'at' the defender, the idea is to hold him in position. The support players also run at their defender to hold them in position, when the ball carrier changes his line to the gap between the players, the support runners also change their line 'at the same time'.

Taking points described Answer 'B' about decoy runners, you can utilise their lateral movements by giving them several options. Remember that whatever

you practice this year, you will get the benefit from next year, so you will practice all year this year and you probably won't get a lot of benefit until next season. Keep practising this year, but set up some angled runners coming back into the ruck, sometimes you pick them up, sometimes you don't. One of the options that I like (although my players haven't used it on the field yet) is the double cross, the 5/8 pass to the centre, the centre comes back into the ruck and scissors with the 5/8 as the 5/8 comes behind him, the 5/8 then scissors to the fullback who is coming back into the ruck (and then straightens). This at least gives you some nice angles and allows your players to still attack while crabbing across field, the scissors will also get some players to 'straighten' the attack. Any or all of the scissors can of course be dummied to add variation and create the decoy runners.

Answer (D) *(Daryn Reeds)*

This might sound really obvious, but sometimes the best ideas are the simplest. Get yourself a huge stack of cones and mark across the field 5m channels, working out from the posts. That should give you around five channels each side of the uprights. Start these from the 0m line to the halfway line. Set up your team just outside 20m so that the backline is roughly around the 0m line. Walk them through a set of six, with each backline player identifying his own channel. If you use the option of only the half running latterally, give each other player and attacking channel. The players must stay in these channels. Run through your usual attacking set at walking pace.

Repeat a couple of times, moving left and right, and varying the metres being made on each set. Then repeat but bringing the players up to a jogging pace. Once they are staying in channels, remove the cones and see how they go. I think part of the trouble that young or inexperienced players have (sometimes experienced players too!) is that they have trouble visualising their channel. Ask five players to place two cones 5m apart and you'll usually get 5 different distances. So using cones on the field gets the width of the channels fixed in their minds.

Slide Defence

Question 9

Could anyone provide me with the advantages of one of these forms of defence over the other ie when would one be used in lieu of the other.

Answer *(Daryn Reeds)*

Slide defence covers both 'up & out' and 'up & in' so I guess that you really are looking for the advantages associated with the two varieties.

The more commonly used version is the up and out slide, where the defensive line moves firstly up towards the attacking side, and then slides out towards the touchline. The aim here being to force the ball carrier into either passing wider where space is already being reduced by the slide, or to try to break the line. Provided the line is straight it will be almost impossible for the runner to break because it means running 'around' the potential tackler and even if that is successful the time it takes allows the outside defender to get back inside.

I don't know how the other coaches feel but this is my favoured 'amber' defence using traffic lights. It's the mainstay of most defesive systems although it does take time and extensive practise to get the step right in terms of it's timing. It's best to go through this at walking pace and using cones to mark defensive channels first. Get the players used to their own space and then try it at jogging pace.

The 'up & in' slide involves the defensive line moving up and then instead of stepping towards they touchline, they step towards the ruck. The idea being to create pressure on the ballplayer, the defensive line coming infield denies space to the man in possession who must instantly then decide if he's going to take on the line, kick or send a pass wide of the incoming line. The pressure caused will create a lot of turnovers and a lot of very short metre gains. The risk is that wide players all sliding infield, quick handling can get the attacking teams winger outside of the defensive winger. It contains that element of risk, which has to be weighed up. It's a good choice for defence in the 'green' zone of a traffic light defence where the pressure and turnover opportunities can hand your team some easy points.

Opposed Passing DRILLS

The aim of fully opposed passing drills is to develop
- Reaction skills of support players
- Reaction skills of defenders
- Tackling skills
- Evasion skills
- Handling skills
- Communication skills

RLCM would like to thank Dave Ellis, Digi League and John Dixon, Brisbane Broncos for their assistance in compiling these drills.

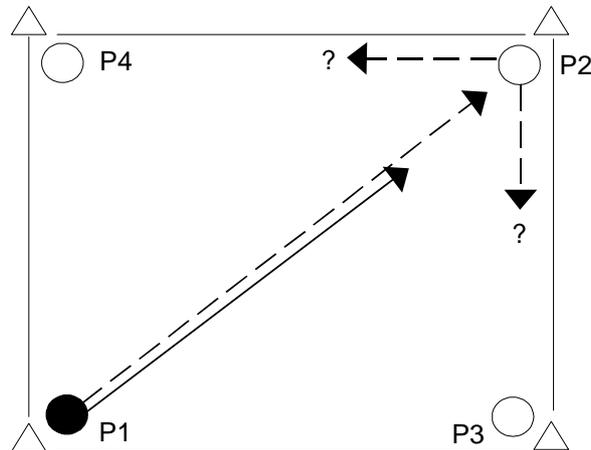**Visit the RLCM website to order Drills Handbooks www.rlcm.com.au**

1. Defence Grid
2. 2 on 1 in Channels
3. 2 on 1 Continuous
4. 3 on 2 Zone Defence
5. 3 on 2 Attack Support
6. 3 on 2 Up & Turn
7. 3 on 2 Roll Out
8. 3 on 2 Trailer
9. 3 on 1 on 1
10. 3 on 2 Reaction
11. 6 on 4 (2 Zones)
12. 6 on 4 (3 Zones)
13. Attack / Defence Reaction Drill
14. 3 on 3

Defence Grid 1

Setting

4 Players, Grid 5m X 5m

- Drill begins with 4 players each postioned on a corner marker
- P1 starts the drill by passing across the grid to P2 (this is the only time the ball is passed across the grid)
- P1 then follows the ball to apply pressure on P2 who must quickly pass the ball on to eith P3 or P4
- Should the ball be passed to P3 then P4 as the opposite player runs across to apply the pressure
- It is the player opposite the receiving player that applies the pressure
- In the meantime P1 must realign to be in a position to receive a pass from P3
- The drill should continnue at full intensity for a duration nominated by the coach

2 on 1 in Channels
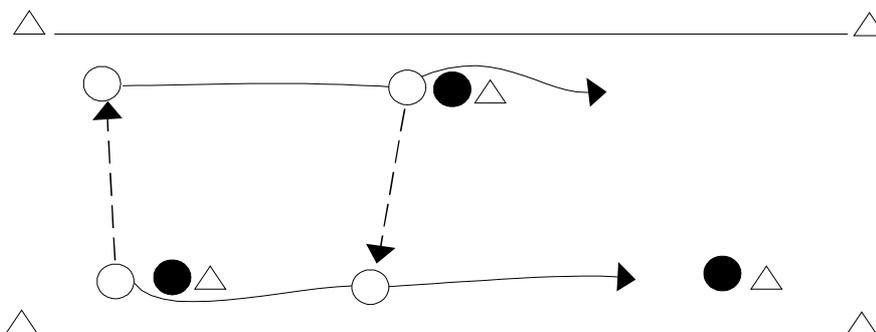
Setting

Grid 20m X 10m

- A minimum of 3 defenders position themselves in a staggered formation approximately 5 metres apart facing the remaining players
- The remaining players are paired up, each pair with a ball, they proceed down the grid attempting 2 on 1 on each defender

Stage 1

Defenders may only move sideways and not advance on attackers

Stage 2

Defenders can move across onto and tag the receiver if the ball has been passed too early or the defender has not been drawn properly

Stage 3

Defenders can advance on attackers applying maximum pressure. Once a pair has beaten the first defender the next pair may start. When all pairs have gone through, defenders face the other direction and the attackers go again

Variation

- Progress to have defenders standing directly behind each other

2 on 1 Continuous (1)
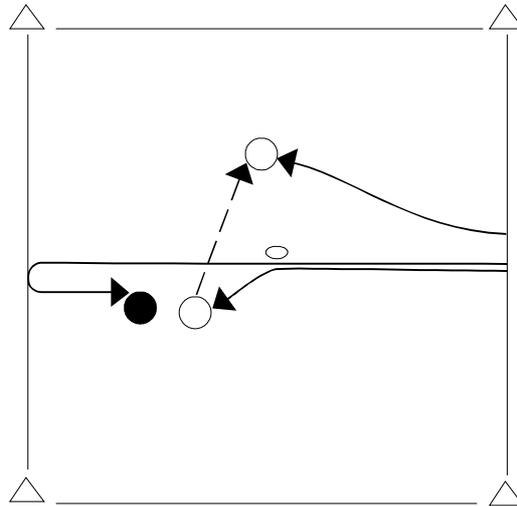
Setting

3 players, Grid 10m X 10m

- All 3 players start the drill from the start line
- One player is nominated as the defender, the other two as attackers, the defender is given the football
- The drill starts with the defender running across the grid, placing the ball in the centre of the grid and then proceeding to the other end where he turns to defend against the attackers
- The two attackers may not leave the line before the ball has been placed on the ground
- After regathering the ball the attackers must attempt to beat the defender with a draw and pass or dummy pass and then proceed through to to the other end of the grid
- The ball is then given back to the defender and the drill continues
- Attackers must take turns as the player picking up the football, work at least 6 plays before rotating the defender

Progression

- Can be 3 on 2

3 V 2 Zone Defence

Defence Zone
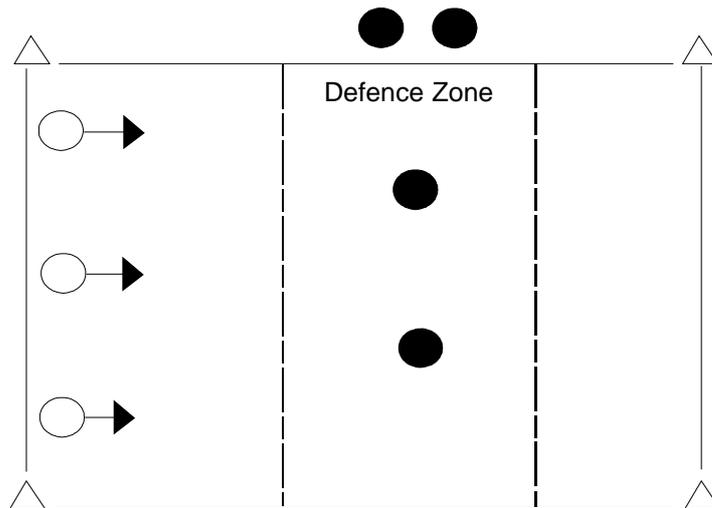
Setting

Minimum 5 Players per group, Grid 25m X 15m

- This is a competitive drill which should run for a duration of 5 minutes
- 3 Attackers set of down the grid with the aim of beating the 2 Defenders and scoring at the opposite end
- Defenders may only work in the specified area and must attempt to wrap the ball or force an error
- After each play, the 2 defenders are changed in readiness for the next attack, the attackers must immediately reform at the opposite end of the channel once they have scored or a breakdown has occured and then attack again
- Attackers and Defenders should be rotated after 5 minutes

3 on 2 Attack Support
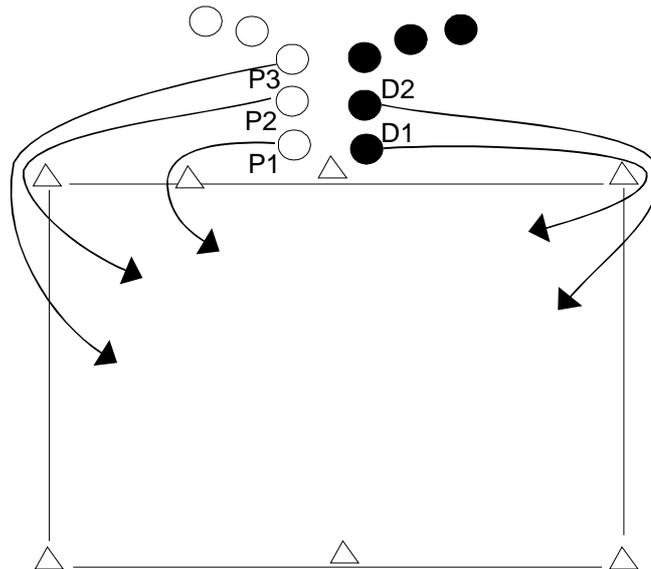
Setting

2 Teams, Grid 20m X 15m

- Players are divided into 2 teams and positioned as shown in diagram. The attacking team must attempt to score at the far end of the grid
- On coaches command 3 attackers (P1, P2, P3) and 2 defenders(D1, D2) run around the markers as shown
- P2 and P3 run around marker 2 while P1 with ball in hand enters the grid by running around marker 1
- P1 will enter the grid first to start the attack forcing D1 and D2 to react quickly and creates urgency for P2 and P3 to move at pace into support positions

3 on 2 Up & Turn
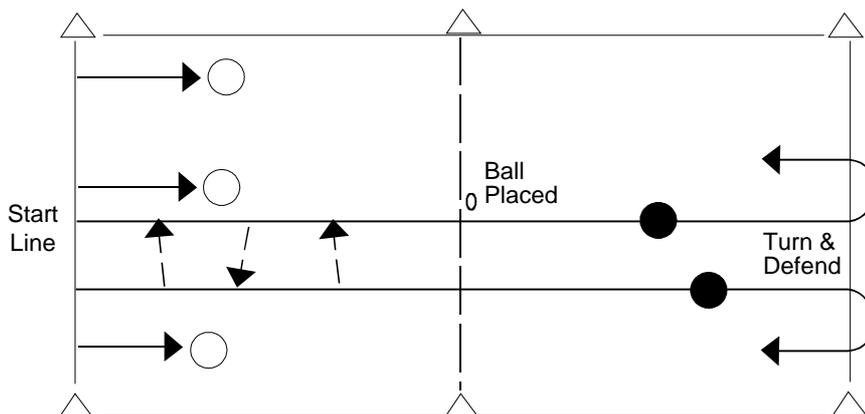
Setting

5 players, Grid 30m X 15m

- All 5 players commence the drill from the start line
- On the coaches command the 2 players run down the grid passing the ball back and forth
- Upon reaching the centre line of the channel, the ball is placed on the ground, the 2 players then sprint to the end of the grid where they turn to become defenders
- The remaining 3 players proceed down the grid once the ball has been placed on the ground, the middle player picks up the football and they proceed to attack in a 3 on 2 situation

Variation

- Defenders place the ball on the centre line but at the side of the grid creating a 3 on 2 ball at the end situation
- Defenders place the ball anywhere on the centre line

3 on 2 Roll Out
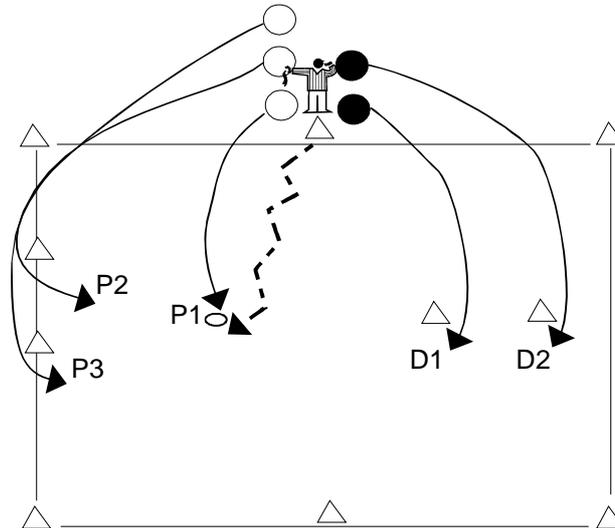
Setting
5 Players, Grid 30m X 20m

- The drill provides a variation to 3 on 2 Attack and Support
- Players are divided into 2 teams, the attacking team must attempt to score at the far end of the grid
- One marker is placed in the centre of the far end of the attackers side of the grid and two markers on the defenders side
- The coach holding the ball should be in a central position on the side of the grid
- The drill commences with the coach rolling the ball to the centre of the grid, immediately, the 3 attackers (P1, P2, P3) and 2 defenders(D1, D2) run around their respective markers.
- P1 will go directly to the ball to start the attack, P2 and P3 will become support players
- D1 and D2 will separate and run around their designated marker before confronting the attackers
- Drill can be played as 'touch', '2 handed grab', 'wrap up' or 'tackle'

3 on 2 Trailer
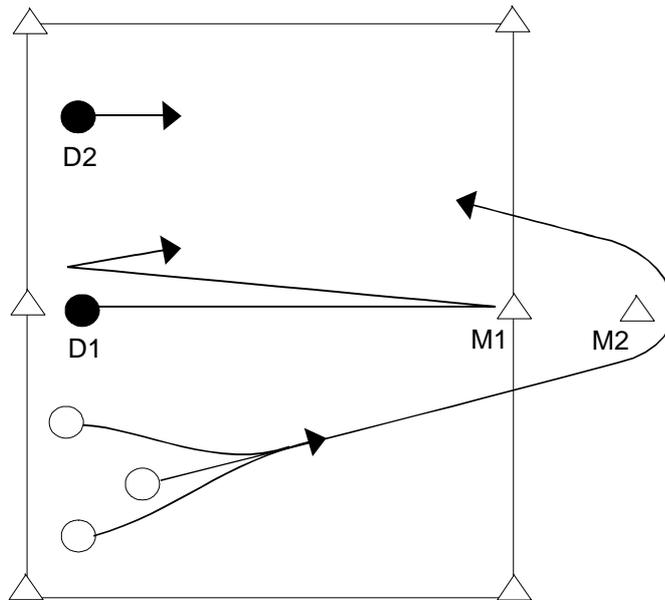
Setting

5 Players, Grid 20m X 30m

- Attackers and Defenders start beside each other on te start line
- To start the drill attackers run with the ball across the grid and around a marker (M2) that has been placed outside the grid
- After rounding M2 players turn and form an attacking alignment
- From the start one defender D1 runs with the attackers to the opposite end of the grid (M1), touches the ground and then runs backwards linking with D2 to defend their line

- To introduce the drill to beginners move M1 closer to D1

3 on 1 on 1
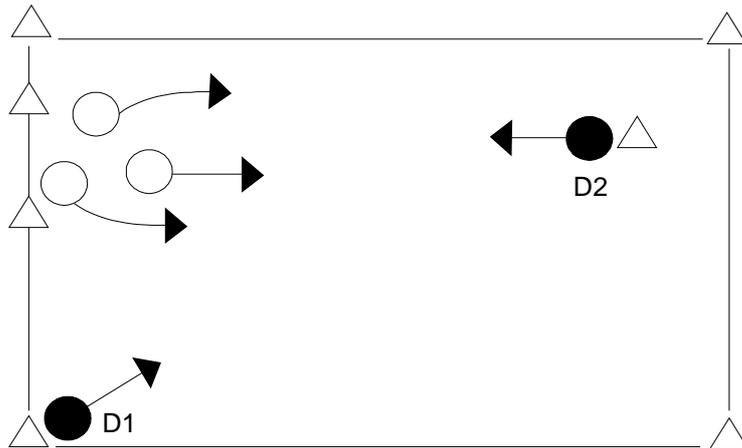
Setting

5 Players, Grid 40m X 20m

- Drill commences with 3 attacking players running between 2 markers placed approximately 1.5 metres apart at one end of the grid
- 2 defenders start from designated areas and must attempt to prevent the attacking players from scoring
- D1 acts as a cover defender and commences his run from the corner of the grid as the attacking players pass between the starting markers
- D2 is a front-on defender and starts from the far end of the grid
- Defenders must communicate to prevent the try from being scored and attackers must attempt to manipulate the defence in order to put a player into space

3 on 2 Reaction

Coach '1 & 4'
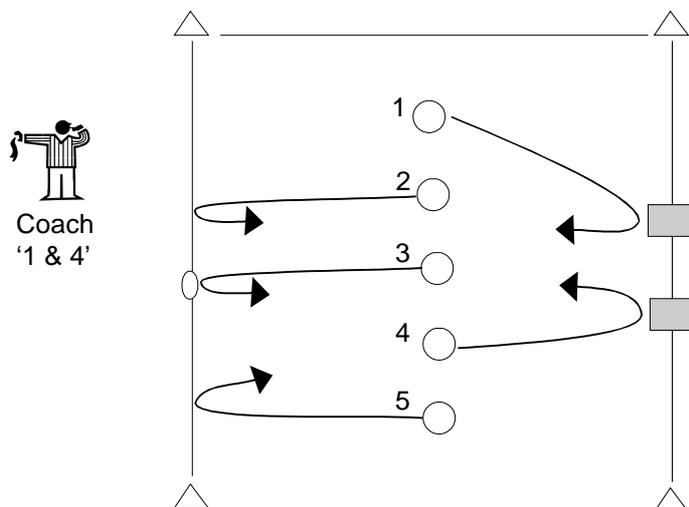
Setting
5 players, Grid 10m X 10m

- The 10m grid is set up with 2 hit pads at one end and a football at the opposite end, markers should also be placed on the side of the grid marking the half way.
- All 5 players line up on the half way facing the hit pads, each player is given a number from 1 to 5.
- The coach calls out 2 numbers, this is the command for those 2 players to sprint and pick up the hit pads and the remaining 3 players to return to the other end and regather the football
- The 3 players with the ball are now attackers and must attempt to avoid the hit pads and score at the opposite end.

Variation
Players start lying on the ground
Position hit pads in different area within the grid
Increase the size of the grid and the number of players

6 on 4 (2 Zones)

Setting

10 Players, Grid 30m X 20m

- 6 attackers line on the long side of the grid with 1 football
- The 4 defenders holding hit pads position themselves approximately half way down the grid
- The rules for the defenders is that the middle two (D2, D3) may roam anywhere they wish however the outside two (D1,D4) are restricted to their half of the grid and may not cross the centre line
- Any player in the attacking team may start the drill which is a 6 on 4 competition
- The remaining 6 players are the attackers and must attempt to score as many tries as possible in 3 minutes
- The attacking team must restart play from the start line after each try or breakdown
- A breakdown occurs when the ball is knocked on, when the ball has been passed forward or when a defender performs a solid hit on the ball carrier
- Two handed grab may be used when hit pads are not available

6 on 4 (3 Zones)

Setting

2 Teams, 10 players, Grid 40m X 30m

- Grid is divided into 3 channels
- 4 players with hits pads must attempt to defend the try line however they must remain within their allocated channel
- D1's channel is the 10m on the left, D2 and D3 is the 20m in the centre and D4 is the 10m on the right of the grid, defenders may roam anywhere within their channel

Attack/Defence Reaction Drill
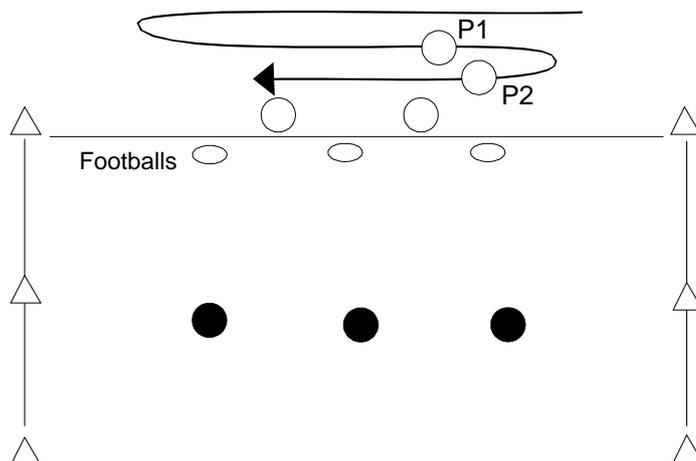
Setting
2 Teams, 7 players, Grid 20m X 40m

- Players are divided into 2 teams, one team is the attackers the other becomes defenders
- The defending team is positioned along the middle line of the grid
- 2 attackers position themselves close to the centre of the 40m side of the grid
- 3 balls are positioned between th attackers as shown in the diagram
- On coaches command the 2 remaining attackers (P1 and P2) move back and forth behind the stationary attackers.
- At any time P1 or P2 may pick up a ball and start the attack
- On the pick up both teams come into play and the attackers must attempt to score on the other side of the grid
- Teams swap roles after each play

Variation
4 x 4.

3 on 3
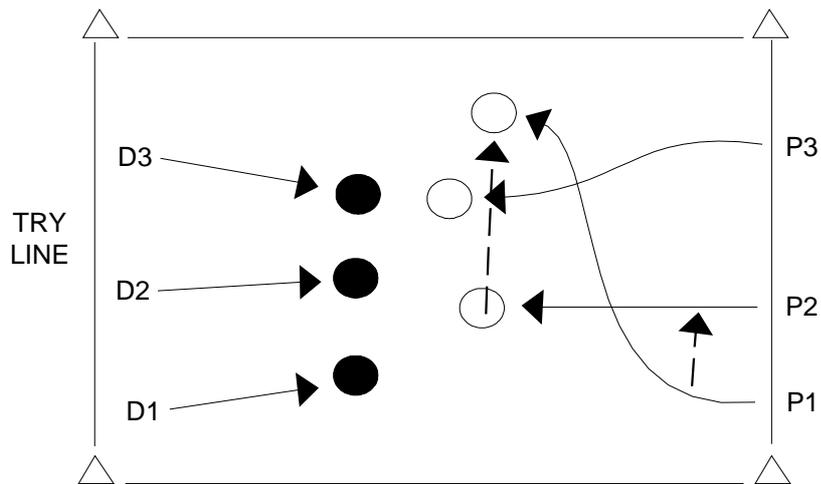
Example 'P1' passes and then runs a loop to the outside

Setting
6 Players, Grid 20m X 15m

- 3 Attackers and 3 Defenders start at opposite ends of the grid
- The aim of the drill is for the attackers to beat the defenders and score a try, players may make own decision as to what play to perform and skills to be used

Stage 1   Defenders to stop attack by a successful two handed grab

Stage 2   Defenders stop attack by performing a successful full contact tackle below the waist

Stage 3   Play stops when the attacking team scores or committs an error, full contact tackles are made with no tackle limit

This drill is best practiced on soft surfaces e.g. beach and in small areas

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