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COACH TALK



Matthew Elliott - Canberra Raiders Head Coach
Written by Ashley Bradnam

The 2001 year was an unpleasant season for the Canberra Raiders. The once customary premiership heavyweights failed to make their mark on the competition table, struggling to field the same starting thirteen week after week, and experiencing a curious coaching structure with Mal Meninga and Matthew Elliott sharing the responsibility. In 2002, Elliott will have sole ownership of the Raiders' reins; and as he tells us in this edition of RLCM's Coach Talk, it's something he's looking forward to with relish.

"I always had an ambition to coach, it's something I've had pretty much my whole life in fact. I've always been keen to investigate new ways to get a message across and to teach and now that I have the opportunity to employ that knowledge here in Australia it's fantastic".

I actually believe that decision-making is the most important art in our game at the moment, both offensively and defensively.

Elliott has become something of a Rugby League nomad. Born in Townsville he played football in Lismore and France before spending six years at St George where his playing days were ended following a serious knee injury. In typical fashion, Elliott refused to let the set back keep him away from the game he loves.

"When the knee exploded for the last time I was devastated because I was only 28 and I thought I still had a few good years left in me. I played under Craig Young and Brian Smith during my time with the Dragons. I have no hesitation in nominating Brian as my chief mentor; I learnt so much of him as a player but a lot more as a coach. He knew I was keen to stay involved and luckily for me Geoff Carr gave me the job as the coaching and development officer as well

as the Under 21's. It was a great job because I learnt so much in those early days and it gave me a taste to learn more and more.

Since turning coach Elliott's passport has continued to be covered in ink. He has spent time plying his trade in England and now finds himself in the nation's capital. Elliott has used his travels as a method to be trained by some of the world's top coaches.

"I have never been afraid to say I don't know it all. One of the good things about the time I spent in England was its proximity to the USA. I went over there three or four times and was able to spend time with the Denver Broncos and the Philly Eagles. I also got to see a few ice hockey organisations and a few football clubs in England. All in all it gave me some

fresh ideas and helped to expand my knowledge".

One aspect of the coaches' role that Elliott considers to have increased in significance is the issue of 'man management'. It has become something of a buzzword in coach's circles over the last few years and Elliott expects it to become an art all aspiring coaches will soon have to master.

"In the USA the American football teams have a coaching staff that extends to about fifteen people. We don't have that luxury here so you have to be careful with the way you deal with the players now that we are all full time professional. I don't think you should be spending eight hours a day with the players or letting them spend that much time with each other. It's about getting the right balance and depending on whom you talk to the balance is always

different. Some people will say that the game is ten percent physical and ninety percent mental while someone else will say it's the other way around. I'm not sure what the percentage really is but there is no doubt that there is a balance and you need to find it in order to become successful. Physically there are plenty of studies and customs you can use to get the players into peak condition, but when you start dealing with the mental side of a player's make up it becomes a lot more scarier. There will always be a lot of arguments about how that should be carried out and how it should be addressed. My personal way has been to develop a routine so that the players become aware of what is going to be required from them physically before they step onto the park. There is no painless way to play our game and the players need to prepare for each match as if they were going into battle. I'm not saying that the players have to learn to overcome fear but just that they have to be ready to put their bodies on the line".

Despite Elliott's fascination with physiological procedures he steadfastly maintains that Rugby League is a simple game that can fall victim to over-complication from interfering coaches. Elliott has a penchant for technique and basics and says he won't stray from that principle.

"I think basic skills are and always have been the core of our game. How you actually carry the ball, how you pass it and your general tackling technique. The way you do those skills may have evolved over the last fifteen years but the principles stay the same. I think kids do need to be exposed at some time to some of the more technical aspects of the game but up until about, say fifteen, I think they should engaged in areas which are simplistic in their nature. Things like the spiral pass irk me. It wasn't that long ago that only a few players used a spiral pass and now everyone does; but I still believe that the spiral pass isn't an effective pass over a short distance, certainly over ten or fifteen metres it is, but percentage wise it's not good to use over a short distance. But because children are taught nothing except the spiral pass from a young age that's all they seem to do".

True to Elliott's preference for players to have a mastery of the basic aspects of Rugby League is his desire for the way he wants his Raiders outfit to execute their game plan each week. It's doubtful the Raiders will fall into a trap of trying too much too early in a game - but Elliott does hope to instil a belief in his troops that good things will happen if they back their hands occasionally and do the little things correctly.

"This might sound strange but I believe that movement is the key to success. That might sound like a business statement to some but it's a performance statement for me because I believe if you have movement (i.e. in attack) with the ball then you will firstly create opportunities for yourself and also put pressure on the opposition's defence. If you have movement it allows you to make more off-loads and quicker play the balls. There has to be some form of rhyme and reason but it is effective if it is used correctly because it can create so much opportunity. The flip side is that in order to create movement you have to lay the platform of getting the simple things in order first - you cannot have one without the other. While it might sound easy to carry out it is actually one of the harder things to implement because it taxes so much energy to have continual movement - players are carrying fatigue, duress and also a bit of adversity, so that's one of the great things about our game. If movement was easy to ensure then we'd all have nil-all score lines every weekend. It will never happen because mistakes will always happen and that will stem from many different areas.

"I actually believe that decision-making is the most important art in our game at the moment, both offensively and defensively. A decision not to pass or to pass can decide the outcome of a match - to stay up in the line or retreat. Some of the responsibility for that rests with me, the coach, because I have to make sure I am coaching awareness into my players. Some coaches are very good at coaching players' awareness in their skills but the next phase of the evolution is to work on their decision making. For me, that's what makes someone like Andrew Johns so special - he just understands what is happening in front of him. He spends a minimal amount of time making people around him work because wherever he goes his team tends to congregate and he can spend a lot of time watching the opposition and making decisions based on what's best to beat them. He's just a marvel to watch. I'm not saying that Andrew Johns is great simply because of his decision-making - it's just an important part of what makes him good but it's something I would like my players to improve on this year and in the years to come.

After a lifetime of criss-crossing the planet in an attempt to carve out a coaching career, Matthew Elliott finally hopes he has found a permanent home with the Canberra Raiders. History will determine his fate, but if perseverance and commitment count for anything, the Raiders appear to be on a good thing.

Individual Coaching

Written by Ashley Bradnam

The Rugby League player is a peculiar breed. There is no concrete formula that dictates the attributes compulsory for achievement. Just like motor vehicles, the Rugby League player comes in different shapes and sizes – some in the vein of an Italian sports car; sparkling to the eye, diminutive and evasive, while others are more reminiscent of an old tireless bulldozer; they don't look flash, they don't go fast, but you can bet your last dollar they'll go hard all day and get the job done. With such a broad disparity between individual players' sizes, shapes, skill levels, interests, temperaments and natural abilities, it is essential a coach recognises and instates diverse coaching techniques designed to reflect his team's

While performing such drills, the astute coach should also be devising strategies aimed at working out what his team's mode of playing should be. Former Brisbane Easts frontrower Shane McNally who has just taken over as strength and conditioning coach of Wakefield in the English Super League, believes position specific training can be a valuable asset in your team's overall make up. 'If you keep a keen eye on what happens in specific drills, particularly in defence, you can rectify problems which would have been glaring deficiencies. Things like pairing players on one particular side of the ruck to compensate for, say, a problem with one tackling on the left side for example – it's a lot easier to recognise and rectify

“What you really have to do is forget about the other sides and have a real good look at what you have on your playing roster”.

Matthew Elliott

eclectic make up.

Most coaches today ensure their weekly timetable includes drills which are position related; eg forward and backs, or wingers and fullback, backrowers, halves (including lock and hooker). In this edition of RLCM Brisbane Broncos junior development coach John Dixon reveals Wayne Bennett also embraces this style. Canberra coach Matthew Elliott also agrees.

'Take your hooker, halfback and five-eighth for example' Elliott says. These guys are obviously key members of your team because they touch the ball more than any other player out there, so it's obviously important that they develop a good combination. Having said that there is no one way you go about coaching it – different players have different strengths and weaknesses and you have to take this into account and then build these variations into your overall structure'.

these problems when you get them working together. And it also helps build a sense of teamwork and also personal confidence within the player'.

Coaching is largely about experimentation. What works for one team won't necessarily work for yours because your personnel is different. Focussing on your team's strengths and building confidence within the club is easier said than done, but remains essential to the ultimate accomplishments that can be attained.

Matthew Elliott says 'What you really have to do is forget about the other sides and have a real good look at what you have on your playing roster. Assess their abilities and then from that work out the style of football you are best suited to playing. I believe in Rugby League everything is circular; just because a certain way of playing has changed doesn't mean to say it won't come back again. At the moment we seem to be concentrating on the physical prowess and

abilities of the players, pushing them to an extreme level which really came into vogue in the 1990's, but I'm also seeing a return of the skill aspect that was required in the 60's with the likes of Beetson and co. I think we are in an exciting phase at the moment because different clubs are working out what works for them and the result is all these different styles and philosophies. I believe the defensive aspect of the game will definitely return shortly and it won't be too long before we see consistently tight matches which will be reflected on the scoreboard'.

Parramatta coach Brian Smith acknowledges the boomerang nature of the game, confessing the Eels have delved into the archives to create something seemingly 'new-fangled' for today. 'Rod Rocket Reddy has been great for our club' says Smith, 'not only because of fresh things he has picked up in the past couple of years, but from things he learnt a long, long time ago. Rocket first played with St George back in 1971 when guys like Langlands and Smith were still in their prime and so not only did he learn from what they had to offer, but also from what Langlands and Smith had picked up from the previous generation of great players who were a part of the eleven straight Grand Final victories. The Norm Provens' and the

Ken Kearneys' and the like. The old time basics are often just as relevant today as they were back then – don't be fooled, there is a lot of stuff to learn from back then, a heap of knowledge is there waiting to be picked up and we are very lucky to be able to partly tap into it at Parramatta through Rod Reddy. I consider it to be a grounding in basic football. Another example is what the British described way back in 1960 coaching manuals as 'early hands'. It wasn't too long ago that we all were taught to catch the ball in our breadbasket to increase safety, but today if I hear a ball slap into a player's chest I'll be screaming out for that player to get his hands into position earlier so he can off load it quicker. People may think this is a new innovation but the Poms were doing it way back in the 60's and somehow it just fell out of favour for a while'.

Be willing to explore new avenues and techniques in an effort to get the most out of your team. Be it through specific position training, looking to the past for answers, or creating something innovative for the future. If something doesn't work, try something else, and if something does work, continue to look for something better. Remember the different qualities that individual players bring to the composition of your team and adjust your game plans according to it.

NOTES

UK Coaches Sourcing NRL Coaching Information

*John Dixon - Brisbane Broncos RLFC
Peter Roe - Wakefield Trinity RLFC (UK)*

Written by Ashley Bradnam

The once colossal chasm separating player's standards between the Australian and English games has thankfully closed noticeably over the past decade. The English Super League appears now only a step behind the weekly grind of the NRL; a far cry from the days it lingered miles off the pace. The reasons? Well, take your pick. Player professionalism, healthier pay packets and a move to the summer months have undeniably contributed – but the significant swelling of numbers in skilled and competent coaches has perhaps been the driving force behind the game's Old Dart reawakening.

Peter's problem will be recognizable to many coaches – so many things for the players to learn, so little time to teach. However, now he faces fresh challenges.

“Everything has always been rushed – trying to get myself and the players to training on time for starters – and then cramming as much in as we possibly can before it's time to head home. I always would find myself driving home thinking, did I spend enough time on this area or too long on that. I won't have that problem anymore because we are all full-time and professional at Wakefield so I don't have access to that excuse anymore. But I still need to ensure I use

The game's most exciting players own what appears to be an instinctive ability to find both the gaps and more importantly the time to exhibit their god-given brilliance

To put it bluntly, Australia has been miles ahead of it's northern league neighbour in terms of coaching acumen for years. But the Poms are fighting back boldly, tapping the brains of some of Australia's sharpest League institutions and minds to bridge the disparity in countries once and for all. It is a lesson many coaches can learn from.

In this edition of RLCM we bring together two people from opposite sides of the fence to thrash out some of their differences. From the Australian corner, John Dixon from the Brisbane Broncos and from England Peter Roe has just taken over as the head coach of Wakefield in the Super League, having spent his apprenticeship coaching Featherstone in the NFP competition. Peter couldn't move quickly enough to find out what it is that makes the Broncos the force they have become in the world's toughest playing market.

“Basically, up to this point I have always been a part time coach” says Peter. “I've always had to fit in coaching and training around a full time job – the biggest change for me now I'm with Wakefield will be to learn how to organise things so they are structured on a day to day basis”.

Rugby League Coaching Manuals

the time wisely and teach the players all they need to know”.

After observing master coach Wayne Bennett at the helm of the Brisbane Broncos for so long, John Dixon has learnt a thing or two about training protocol. He proffered Peter some advice on ensuring training remains an enjoyable exercise for the players.

“Wayne's a marvel in that each session has a newness and a freshness about it that seems to have the players coming to training wanting to train. I still remain staggered by that because even though you need to employ repetitious techniques to make them automatic for the players in games, Wayne can somehow teach them in a fresh and exciting way” John says.

One trap coaches can fall into when they suddenly find themselves with more time on their hands is overworking the players on the training paddock.

Dixon says, “I think there are a few areas in which we differ to the way the English approach things and one of those has to do with rest. At the Broncos, we don't believe we train as long as some of the other sides, but we believe we train better.”

Peter was eager to learn how the Broncos attain this belief, and asked John for a copy of the club's weekly training routine.

"If we're working on a Sunday to Sunday roster, that is we play on Sunday and we have a full seven days to prepare for our next match, our schedule would be something like this. Monday morning would be a rehab session, and that would be it for the day. Tuesday would be what we call a double day. The players would have to be here by about ten and split into forwards and backs – the forwards would head straight for the weights room and stay there for forty five minutes while the backs would be on the park spending the same amount of time doing specific skill loaded material for their area of play. After the forty-five minutes is up the two groups will swap – backs to the weights room and forwards onto the park. Now sometimes we will interchange among the groups and have say, the halfback run with the forwards or place a wide running forward with the backs – something to spice it up a bit. This session finishes about twelve and is followed in the afternoon by a series of meetings, which focus on the game last Sunday. After that there is another training session on the oval at about two. This session would comprise of a fitness program and then some team related skills. Wednesday we train in the morning only; a session focussing on skill related techniques. Thursday is another double day but this time the forwards would start on the paddock and the backs in the weight room, and then in the afternoon it's our first major team run of the week. We put the players through a little bit of fitness at the start of the session but this is the session where it's spelled out to the players where we are headed for the weekend. Friday would be a day off. Saturday morning is a video session at the club where we'd analyse our opposition and pinpoint key players followed by a thirty minute run which is taken mostly by the team captain. We finish off with a team barbeque and then go home.

The crucial elements to the program listed above are that the players must train the day before they play and that the players get a full day off somewhere during the week to avoid staleness setting in. The Broncos believe fresh legs lead to a fresh brain, which translates, into better performances.

Peter subscribes to the belief that inter-club jostling and competition between players is a healthy way to conduct training, a notion supported by Dixon and the Broncos.

"Decision-making and ability to think correctly under pressure is best learnt by competition itself," says Dixon.

Both coaches agree that it's more important for the coach to have a prearranged and well thought-out map of where he wants the team to be going, rather than focus on changing things weekly to suit different oppositions.

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Dixon says, "Wayne has a monthly goal on something he wants to concentrate on leading to the advancement of the team and his main desire in training is skewed towards achieving that. But within that there needs to be the flexibility to strengthen certain weaknesses that can creep into the side".

Part of the enormous appeal of Rugby League is it's room for unstructured creativity – the game's most exciting players own what appears to be an instinctive ability to find both the gaps and more importantly the time to exhibit their god-given brilliance. And while its impossible to make every member of your team an attacking star, there are coaching drills that can help individuals reach their personal best. Dixon explains the way the Broncos approach this element "Impulse play is really what footy's all about. That's why we play a lot of games at training – lopsided games giving players the exposure to work on their attacking skills".

Peter believes the Australian game is far more structured and polished than the style enjoyed on English soil. Perhaps he was trying to hint that the Aussie game has become predictable and a trifle boring perhaps – mistake free play can sometimes be dreary to the eye. John Dixon concurs it is a fine line. "Certainly when coaching juniors I think it's important for the coach not to introduce set patterns of play. Give the kids a couple of tools and then let them go out there and see what happens. And similarly for the seniors you have to be careful not to overdo the structure. If you are set in stone with what you will be doing on each play then the players can sometimes be on their heels during the match because they know they're not needed for another two tackles or so. You want them alert on every play so they are always looking to get involved".

One thing Peter is grateful for in England is the strategies being used by the Super League to foster improved coaching.

"David Waite has organised meetings between some of the country's elite coaches to thrash out new ideas and implement plans to make the game stronger. It's great because when people open up there is so much you can learn just by being exposed to these people. Already we are noticing players that would previously have been lost to the game are staying in there a little longer because they feel as though they are learning and getting somewhere".

A great coach won't always win the premiership. A great coach won't always have the answers either. The coach who is getting the most out of his players on a week-in week-out basis is doing his job. To achieve this the coach has to be prepared to get the best out of himself. Be willing to ask questions, to learn, and to listen. Like Peter Roe, the more you are willing to learn from others, the bigger the pay off for your team.

Coaching a Country Football Team

Ken Kennedy with Ashley Bradnam

When the local supporters of the Ivanhoes club in Cairns peeked in on new coach Ken Kennedy's initial training sessions with the club, few of them predicted the perennial also-rans to be in for a successful season. 'Who is this bloke?' they would quip behind not-so-subtle muffled snickers, 'I've never seen anyone train a team like this before'.

Success has a canny knack of altering a fan's perspective. In his debut season with Ivanhoes, Kennedy steered the club to the Grand Final; not a bad feat considering they finished the year before with the wooden spoon. The obvious question is how did he do it?

"It's not so much a question of how I did it", says Kennedy, "It's more a case of looking at the way country Rugby League clubs operate as a whole and then making the necessary changes to introduce a successful culture into the club".

According to Kennedy, one of the most important disciplines a coach must possess is time management. With most country clubs operating on a restricted time frame (two or three training sessions maximum per week) the organised coach will have a better chance to get the most out of his players. Correct and thorough planning and preparation starts with the head coach, who in turn is responsible for the men under him.

"You need to ask yourself, what role am I going to play at this club? Some coaches decide to only take control of the top team, where others elect to be responsible for all senior teams, which I think is a lot healthier. In my current position I have the role of Director of Coaching, and that gives me responsibility for the development of the club as a whole from the Under Sevens through to the A Grade. To be in such a big role, it is absolutely imperative that I have a good reliable support staff in place".

Kennedy concurs with the theory that a strong club is built from the ground up, and while the A Grade enjoyed terrific on field triumph in 2001, Kennedy says one of his most satisfying achievements has been watching the juniors develop.

"The junior coaching has been my number one priority. We have introduced and carried out a number of coaching updates focussing on player's skill development and ensuring there is a good flow of skilled players moving through the grades. In a way it is insurance for the coming years. By teaching the players the correct aspects and skills as juniors, you don't have to go through it again when they reach senior level, when quite often the players have been taught incorrectly".

Kennedy implemented a thirty man A Grade squad and hired an assistant coach who he relied on for overlooking skill development, a weight coach for strength and power development and a Level One strength and conditioning coach to cover fitness. All lower grade coaches were able to join in on the top squads training to provide advice and to help them learn finer points.

"It was a genuine team effort and that's the way it needs to be", explains Kennedy "The role of the coach is a very demanding one, with responsibilities that go way beyond just turning up to training and on game day. The role of the country coach can be very rewarding. Over the years there has been many great players come out of the country competitions and make a name for themselves in the big leagues and with the guidance of qualified and well prepared coaches there should continue to be many more."

Every competition has clubs that struggle through the season, going from one demoralising loss to another. Ken Kennedy is proof they don't have to stay there, despite what the locals say.



Today's Referee

Peter Louis and Brian Grant
Written by Ashley Bradnam

The role of NRL referees has changed considerably over the last five years. With the introduction of NRL referee's boss Peter Louis and Brian Grant the game's finest whistle blowers now face rigorous coaching and conditioning instruction in order to bring them in line with competition's professionalism. RLCM spoke with Peter and Brian ahead of season 2002's kick off.

RLCM: Season 2001 saw plenty of rule changes introduced which took some time for players, coaches and fans to adjust to. Has there been any rule changes made ahead of this year?

Probably the only change introduced this year concerns the play the ball area. At the CEO's meeting last December there was plenty of discussion given to the blow out's in scores, and it was agreed upon, almost unanimously by the coaches who were present that the refs were going back eleven and twelve metres, and creating too big of a gap between the play the ball and the defensive line. So we have decided to begin marking the ten metres from where the player was tackled; not from where he plays the ball. In recent times we often see the tackle completed and then the player take one or two steps forward before playing it. Now if the player takes those couple of steps forward he will be losing the advantage of the ten metres for his team. Obviously the refs will now be able to monitor how far forward they are moving off the mark and can penalise them accordingly.

Was that something that you were made aware of through your communication with the CEO's and Coaches?

Peter Louis: Absolutely. It was probably the most significant point raised through our discussions so we decided to act on it. The only grey area from it will concern if the player gets up to play the ball and there is only a nine metre gap and the defensive team leaves too early it will bring them into an area where they would be penalised, so we will really need to be strict with the clearing of the ruck. We also need to ensure the fans are made aware of this change so they are educated as well.

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What avenues are available to coaches to talk with a ref, before or after a game?

Peter: The coaches are not allowed to talk to the ref after a game – but my role here is to have liaison with the coaches, usually after we have assessed the performance of the refs. I will normally wait a couple of days before speaking to the coaches because the first few days of the week are very busy for them while they dissect their own team's performance – but on say Wednesday I will make contact to discuss any issues they might have. If there is any contentious points that the coaches are concerned about then the avenue to talk directly to the ref is there. Sometimes we go out to the training session to meet with him, or they communicate through other mediums.

What are some of the things you have introduced in training techniques to help improve refereeing standards?

Brian: One thing we have changed since we have been here over the last couple of years is to make the refs more professional. A lot of the guys are full time now and we access to all of them so we spend plenty of time analysing videos and certain passages of play. We look at problems that are shared by the refs across the board and then we start working on them with a view to finding a resolution. It's a little bit like brainstorming the situation and then trying to find the answers to them.

What is the usual week of a referee in the NRL in terms of preparation?

Peter: Usually after the weekend game the refs come in and meet at the Football Stadium for a recovery session. They go through some physical training,

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running or rowing machine or whatever and then they turn up in the afternoon to go through an assessment of their own performance from the previous match. We have a room with a number of videos set up and they sit there taking notes. Brian and I would have already done that and we then go and sit down with the individual ref and have a one on one where we look at both sets of notes. On the Tuesday they turn up and go through more preparation for the next week's match and then in the afternoon we generally have a discussion that lasts for a couple of hours which covers different trends we have identified sneaking into the game or ways we can combat problems.

We hear of talent scouts recruiting players to their clubs, how do you ensure the best refereeing talent makes its way to the NRL?

Brian: We have just put together an Academy that is a big help. I should mention that the control of the refs falls under the umbrella of the NSWRL and the NRL then selects the refs it wants to come into our competition. However, to make the transition from any tier; be it New South Wales or Queensland, we have introduced this Academy which comes under the control of the full time referees. We have asked them to identify the best talent from that academy and they then become the next wave of refs who will get their chance to make it into the NRL.

What direction is the role of the referee heading? Do you believe that we will have two refs on the field at the one time in the not-too-distant future?

Peter: Last year we had two different trials. One saw us have a look at two refs on the field at the one time, and the other saw two refs interchange throughout the course of a match. It's our plan to continue trialing those models, however having said that we might find that the system we currently use is the best. I still think

it's important to continue trials though because it reinforces that. Last year was the first time we were able to trial those models in an NRL game. Normally we are forced to trial systems in metropolitan matches or in trials but last year the clubs allowed us to trial them in games involving teams that were out of contention for the finals.

What is the chief problem that the referees have identified as the most difficult area of the game to police?

Peter: We are doing a lot of stats this year which will hopefully reinforce this but I would say the biggest area is in and around the play the ball – things like, was the ball stolen, did he lose it as he got up, were the markers square, did he stay on him too long etc. We have given more power to the touch judges in policing the ten metres and that takes an enormous amount of pressure of the ref so he can focus on the play the ball area. That would be the area the refs have the most gripes with and we are working hard on rectifying it.

Since you both took over the control of the referees a couple of years ago you have introduced an element of competition to the refs. Why did you do this?

Peter: Our main role when we took over was to do that. When we first came here there was a group of seven referees who did the games week in week out. Since then we have given another five opportunities to refs to show their wares in the top company. This had never been done before and what we are trying to build a group of refs who are capable of doing NRL and providing them with as much of a pathway as we can. Also we felt that Rugby League is a competitive game and the players are placed under the pressure where by if they don't perform they will be dropped and we felt the refs should be under that scrutiny also.

NOTES

Coaching With Computers

With David Perry

Written by Ashley Bradnam

The advent of video has revolutionized the way the game is analysed. Most NRL coaches spend countless hours each week perched firmly in front of the box, searching to exploit opposition team's weaknesses and looking to rectify their own. With the advancement and society acceptance of computers, Rugby League statistics looks set to go through a similar uprising.

David Perry is a rare combination – half rugby league fanatic, half computer whiz. As a player David spent three years with Parramatta during the 1980's, managing to reach First Grade before retiring to the NSW central coast where he began coaching. In 2002, David will be in charge of the Erina Under 17's, dividing his time between the training paddock and the computer screen, where he works full time as a computer programmer. The dual interest has lead David to the creation of an application program aimed at making the collection and analysis of game statistics easier.

"I basically just wanted to make things easier for myself", says David. 'the old pen and paper method of collecting the statistics is antiquated, time consuming and can be eliminated by someone with a basic knowledge of Excel macros. Microsoft Excel spreadsheets provide a simple vessel for storing data and an extension of this for people more familiar with computer software is to store this spreadsheet information in a Microsoft Access database. The amount and type of data stored in these databases is almost endless.'

The beauty of introducing a sytem similar to David's is that you will begin securing knowledge which normally wouldn't show up on the tradition stats sheet.

"Normally all you get as far as stats go is the tackle count, the hit ups and maybe something like a drop ball count or who made mistakes. But they can be so misleading; for instance if someone just flops on top of a bloke after the tackle has almost been completed, he often gets credited with a tackle. Or someone might lazily ruck the ball up and be smashed backwards but they come off looking good because their hit-up count is high'.

David's application is almost endless in the way in can record different stats that typically would pass by unnoticed.

Things like:

- Touches of ball per game
- Yards made after contact in hit ups.
- Player involvement; who is the instigator in tackles and who is only assisting
- Passes leading to tries
- The quality of kicks in play; distance and effectiveness
- The quality of winger/fullback returns from kicks
- Amount of decoy runs; extra efforts off the ball
- Possession flows; amount of time spent in your own half
- Effectiveness inside the opposition's red zone

Once the game has been transferred from video into your personal computer there is literally hundreds of different stats which can be used. With all your statistics "tagged" against the video file, it is possible to return to any particular portion of the game allowing you to do multiple passes of the video, perhaps each time adding a more complex level of analysis.

It is also possible to nominate a player and build a file of every time he performed an event in the game, perhaps a tackle or a carry and record these instances one after the other onto a video tape for additional feedback to players. Easily available video editing programs allow you to split out small sections of the game and each of these small clips can be labeled and recorded against a player in a similar way as you may catalog your CD or LP collection. Alternatively you may wish to catalog events that relate to a particular opponent or a particular referee.

The data that can be chronicled is limited only by the amount of time you have to set up the application and enter the statistics. While not for sale at the moment, David has not ruled out the possibility of taking his application to the market place, but in the meantime insists it's something every coach can put in place either by himself, or with the help of someone with a general knowledge of computers.

The Pre- Season

A race against time!

Terry Gilogley B.Ex.Sc.; ARL Level 3 Coach.

Terry Gilogley has been involved in coaching & conditioning with National Rugby League (NRL) teams for over seven years, both here in Australia and overseas in Great Britain (St.George Illawarra Dragons, Warrington Wolves, Parramatta Eels & Illawarra Steelers).

The purpose of this article is to examine the period between November and Mid February (Pre Season Phase - approximately 16 weeks). It will be looked at mainly from a coaching perspective as opposed to physical development. This is the foundation time, which will provide structure for the rest of the season. It is not the overriding priority of this article to scrutinise every macro or micro cycle, but to take a pragmatic view of what a head coach and his coaching staff have to deal with throughout this purgatorial time period. Then to look at things which need to take place for it to be a successful campaign.

Putting things into perspective

To take a step back for a second and quantify an NRL year, the following distinctions have been made: - Transitional Phase (From last game of the previous year to the start of training for the following year); The Pre - Season Phase (early / mid / late); The Competition Season (Early / Mid / Late); The Finals Series (Semis / Grand Final). Outlined further in Table 1.

In years gone by the pre -season was preceded by the off-season. Nowadays there is no longer room for a laid back off –season, which was the exclusive right for physical development e.g. cross training and hypertrophy development. Because of the competitive professional nature of NRL clubs, sport specific preparation must begin from day one. This can also be addressed in the weight room as well as in land and water based activities. This is this reason the off - season has been eliminated from this proposed model.

TABLE 1

Training Periods for NRL Clubs.

Period	Months Covered	Weeks	Special Focus
Transitional Phase	Oct - Nov	4-6	Recovery
Pre Season (Early)	Nov - Dec	5-7	Team bonding
Pre - Season (Mid)	Jan – Early Feb	5	Mini Camps
Pre - Season (Late)	Mid Feb- Mid March	4	Trial Games
Competition Season	March - September	28	Winning
Finals Series	Sept-Oct	4	Grand Final

The Basic Pre-Season Requirements

To the uninitiated, sixteen weeks (November - Mid March) would seem sufficient time to prepare a team for the new season. However, there is an abundance of facets to cover.

Coaches need to approach this phase with a basic plan, a coaching method and an on going evaluation of this process. For the enhancement of the whole athlete the following should be considered:

1. Physical (conditioning / hypertrophy /speed)
2. Technical (technique / skills)
3. Tactical (basic team ploys and attack / defence patterns)
4. Psychological (mental preparation / group dynamics)
5. Theoretical (Rational behind team strategies)

The astute Head coach would then apply management coaching principles to incorporate these basic elements. Some of the above can run concurrently while others are phased in at different stages in the pre-season period.

As if this wasn't enough, time is also taken out of this period for club commitments i.e. fan days, corporate sponsorship, community obligations and junior clinics. Considering there is approximately 16-20hrs coaching time a week available to the coaching personnel, any incursion into this precious time could be crucial lost coaching opportunities.

How are your time management skills functioning, head coach?

Team Bonding

Team bonding can occur as basically as players' daily pushing themselves & each other to their physical & mental limits. Many coaches rely on this strategy in the early weeks of the pre-season. Quite often utilising the 'good cop, bad cop routine'. Gelling as a team also relies on three main ingredients from the players 1. Hard work; 2. Good thinking; and 3. A Habit of mutual respect between teammates & coaching staff (and the opposition in the competition phase).

The coach is also looking for players who display the following attributes, mutual striving, unselfish behaviour and players who do all the little things correctly. This will build an attitude and atmosphere of trust between players. Throw in honest communication and feedback from coaching staff and you have the platform for a successful campaign.

Some clubs introduce "buddy systems". This could be as simple as all the fullbacks in the club having a meal together once a week and so on for all the various positions in the team. Another method could be allocating time for all the front rowers in the club having their own training session (interesting session).

Can the Pre - Season Phase be too long?

How much time do you need? The preparation Daniel Anderson had with the New Zealand Warriors for the 2001 competition was minimal to say the least. They finished in the top eight for the first time in their short NRL career. However, if they had had more time would they have been more successful? With the unfortunate ill health to Chris Anderson, will he have enough face-to-face coaching time to instil his coaching philosophy on the Cronulla Sharks?

On the flip side boredom or overuse injuries may occur due to prolonged or repetitive sessions. Some coaches plan too long term, working back from a projected Grand final appearance. That is every team's ultimate goal, but every journey begins with a small step. Each phase of the season has its own priorities and should be addressed accordingly. There should be a certain amount of flexibility in the program to adjust for setbacks even including the weather.

Even though there are intense training times during this period, recovery is paramount. Overuse injuries can occur in as short as three training sessions, yet may take three weeks or more to recover.

Training Approaches

Basic skills cannot be underestimated. What is the use of being 100kg and able to run 100m in 10sec if you cannot catch a ball or make a one on one tackle? From week one, a training day should not pass without some or all of the basic elements required in a rugby league game being incorporated into drills or conditioning games.

Coaches may also apply small group coaching with players in similar positions (e.g. outside backs), or on a cross sectional basis of players in different positions. A third approach can be opposing left and right side field players. When taking the small group line of attack, a tabloid approach can save time (See Figure 1).

Many coaches now employ a game centred approach, as both a conditioning tool and for skill enhancement. Another area many NRL coaches are instructing players in, is "off the ball" awareness, this can then be linked with statistical data during the season. If numbers allow, planning games as close to match conditions as possible can prove very advantageous. A typical set-up would be to furnish one team with different goals from the other and place one group under excess pressure to gauge their reactions (sounds like a real game).

Empowerment of players is a buzzword in NRL coaching circles at present. This simply means not telling players what to do all week and then expecting them to think for themselves on game day! The penultimate coaching scenario is however, one on one coaching. Surprisingly, the group of players who would benefit more from one to one coaching are the teams game breakers or leaders.

Figure 1.

Typical Mid Pre-Season Weekly Schedule

(Monday –Thursday using four groups in a rotational sequence)

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1. Skills/Games	1. Skills/games	Rest Day	1. Skills/Games	1.Game
2. Weights Break	2. Running Break		2. Weights Break	Conditioning Training
3. Skills	3. Skills		3. Skills	
4. Running	4. Weights		4. Running	

By the time the mid phase of the pre –season arrives, approximately 60% of the total training time available should be devoted to skills and game centred training. With the other 40% being devoted to physical & mental preparation. Unfortunately not enough time is spent in the mental skills training area.

Rugby League is one of the most physically demanding sports in the world. To be successful, you have to play the mental game. It can be as simple as, being prepared for training or playing; to conquer the physical demands required for the sport; to give 100% and go beyond initial signs of discomfort and; to play intelligently (e.g. taking risks, making quick decisions, knowing your strategy and anticipating moves of your opponents and team mates).

Conclusion

It is very easy to under coach or over coach players during this phase. The coach must maintain a balance of seriousness with enjoyment. In the end it is still a game played by men who take pride and pleasure in their accomplishments. Therefore, constantly reviewing both the process of coaching and how the coaching is delivered is critical. The coach must be constantly observing; continually experimenting; forever analysing and providing frequent feedback to staff and players.

Throughout this stage the coaching staff must be constantly reflecting and asking the following questions of their coaching methodology:

1. Have the players athletic qualities improved over this period?
2. Have they raised their levels of proficiency in skills and technique?
3. Is the coaching

philosophy being put into practice?

4. Are our goals and objectives being achieved individually and as a team?

If the answer is no to any or all of the above, then the coach must ask questions of himself and be able to circumvent problem areas with alternative strategies.

A good coach will continually manipulate the training environment to get the best out of his players and empower them for on field decisions. Coaching is all about educating, paying attention to detail, setting high standards and putting players into decision-making situations. At the end of the day, it could be how a coach has structured his pre - season training that becomes his self –fulfilling prophecy!



Pre-Season Training

Some Other Considerations...

By Doug King - RCPN DipNg PGCertHealSc(SportMed) Sports Nurse

Now that all the off season checks have been completed (RLCM Book 20) its time to plan for the preseason training. Considering the other aspects of the preseason period can assist you in your efforts in season. These considerations are wide and cover a lot of possibilities but can be brought down to three main broad area: Assessment, Education and Injury Awareness.

ASSESSMENT:

The assessment phase of pre season training may include medical examinations, injury assessment and fitness evaluation. These areas are important as they can identify any shortfalls in the players that may well become a problem later on in the season and usually when the team least needs to have any one player out due to old injuries recurring or causing further injuries.

Medical Examination / Injury Assessments. It would be fair to say that all the professional teams undergo a form of a medical examination to ensure that medically the players are fit to take to the field and fully participate, so why not all the other grades of the game?

The Pre Season assessment should cover all medical aspects of the player but also it should assess the players for past injuries. Old injuries not fully rehabilitated can reoccur with a slight bit of stress on the joint or ligament but, these may also cause another injury to occur and this can result in the player having to spend more time away from the game that might be expected.

A simple way to have these players screened is to get the team Sports Medic / ARL First Aid Officer to put all team members through a simple screening test (These are often easily available through the national organizations contacts) and by reviewing the past years medical history that the organized team Sports Medic has kept records of and assessing for the past injuries. Keep in mind that all medical history is Medical-In-Confidence and the Club, Coach or Manager cannot directly see this without written consent by the individual players.

Now most teams playing in the amateur grades often cannot afford to have a doctor assess all the players fully, but usually the regions have a Medical Officer that is appointed by the District League or by the Club and some arrangement can be organised with them to assess those players screened as being at risk especially if any injury has not fully rehabilitated.

Fitness Test: There are a vast amount of pre season fitness tests available that are designed to test the players aerobic, anaerobic, agility and power levels, but why not also look at including an injury assessment component to these as well. Many times a player will return from injury, train then take to the field in a competitive game without fully completing the rehabilitation programme assigned to them.

By placing all players through the pre season fitness testing programme have the Coach or (if you have the luxury of two trainers) have one trainer assess the fitness levels while another trainer watches and assess for injury status. For the upper body look at how the press ups (shoulder, elbow, wrist), chin ups (upper back, shoulder, elbow, wrist), bench press etc. are being done in quality (depth, symmetry and amount) versus the quantity (total completed) and the same for the lower body in sitting stretch test, agility tests (figure "8", "L" tests, etc.) one legged hopping (good to assess the ankle and knee), power jumps (also knee and ankle as well as hip), Squats (really tests the knees out) and burpees and again assess for symmetry, depth and amount completed. These tests can identify those players masking an injury, not stretching properly or those players that have a potential for injury later on into the training (poor sit and reach test results usually indicate a lower back, glutes and hamstring imbalance which can result in lower back or hamstring injuries further down the year).



EDUCATION:

There is usually a lot of educating going on throughout the year on game tactics, prevention strategies as well as other applications presented to players, but how often are players taught recovery strategies, nutritional information and hydration awareness. There are numerous posters, handouts and educational programmes available to support any ongoing programmes and little time is often not dedicated to sitting the team down and discussing these aspects, exploring the myths and identifying correct and sound advice for all these areas. One special educational area that all players could benefit from is how to maximize their recovery.

Maximizing the recovery of players is just as important as ensuring that they have their game plan awareness and needs to be fully considered as part of the training and match day planning to ensure that whenever the next event occurs these participants are fit, able and fully charged to once again perform at their optimal level of participation. Failure to plan for this can often see the participant not able to fully train or compete at their best and a continuation of this becomes compounding and can lead to the player requiring a longer time off or running the risk of developing "Burn Out".

The recovery plan needs to consider the restoration of energy and nutritional levels, rehydration and the return of the players to their normal physiological level of functioning. As well there is the need to consider a lessening of muscle soreness from the activity undertaken, the dissipation of any psychological symptoms (i.e. irritability, inability to concentrate and disorientation) that may be brought about from extreme fatigue.

Cool Down. Following any activity a reasonable time period should be set aside to allow the players to cool down and slowly recovery. Players should not just listen for the full time whistle and walk off to the changing rooms and stop altogether. This "Cool Down" should be one that is carried out after all training and competition activity and ideally it should consist of a routine that the players are familiar with and trained in carrying out. Include in this a ramping down of the activity such as slow jog down the field and then tapering down to a fast walk and then normal pace back to the Trainer / Coach. This activity should ideally take about 5 - 10 minutes and be monitored to ensure all who participate in the game also participate correctly in the Cool Down.

Stretching. Next would be a stretching routine that covers all major muscle groups and this should be done

ensuring that the players do not over stretch but take the stretch to the point of minor discomfort and then again taper off. Again the stretching should be supervised and it is best that the routine that the players go through has been thoroughly taught, supervised and corrected at prior training so that there is no risk of incorrect stretching or causing further damage if they are injured.

Fluid. Once the players have ramped down and stretched the next consideration is to rehydrate. This can be done concurrently while they cool down. At the least the players should be consuming small but frequent amounts of water and this should be followed up with some nutritional intake once they return to the changing room. Ideally the players should have some fluid with a sodium and carbohydrate (CHO) (6 - 7%) content. The commercially produced products (e.g. Gatorade or PowerAde) often contain these in the correct amounts but check the package labelling before you buy on bulk as some may not have these in them although they advertise them as "Sports Drinks" and this can prove to be a costly decision.

If the players are playing or training more than once a day, then the fluid intake should be adjusted to allow for small but frequent amounts and should contain sodium and carbohydrate, as well as encouraging the players to stay active with some form of low level activity and continued stretching. Players who finish the game and just stop might not be able to fully "switch on" for the next game, especially if they have taken bulk amounts of fluid and food.

Food. Some considerations for the nutritional intake following any activity would be to consume a serving or meal that consists of Protein, CHO, some fat and trace elements of vitamins and minerals. Ideally use high glycaemic index (GI) foods to rapidly restore the bodies' requirements but also consider the frequency of eating following the activity. One high GI nutritional intake after the game and nothing for a few hours is not sufficient to allow the players body to fully recover. Have the players eat something before they shower as the Coach etc. has a post match chat, then let the players shower and then have some more food following the shower.



It's well known and documented that the body utilises carbohydrates (CHO) as its main energy source, protein for muscle repair and rejuvenation and requires trace elements to function properly so consideration of these should be undertaken in the types of nutritional sources. Some recent research has identified the beneficial effects of pre loading with a protein source especially if incorporated as the pre-match food source before the activity. This has been shown to be better in counteracting muscle protein loss than post activity protein supplement.

Some food ideas may consist of a pasta tuna dish (but go easy on any sauces as they invariably have a high fat content) as 200 gms of this contains about 50 gms of carbohydrate, 80 gms of raisins is also 50 gms of CHO, ham & cheese sandwiches on white bread (this has a high GI content and contains around the same amount of CHO) an energy bar or a Sports Drink. If the players are to compete again in the same day limit the portion size of the food as this can impede their performance level.

Other considerations for post match nutritional recovery are the incorporation of antioxidants such as Vitamin E. These can be found in most fresh fruits and vegetables and are good at counteracting the effects of those "free radicals" that can have a detrimental effect on the body. Supplemental antioxidants are an expensive avenue to pursue and the incorporation of fresh fruit and raw vegetables are a cheaper but just as effective source.

Other Ideas. Other post activity recovery helpers lies in the areas of relieving those aches and niggles, caring for any injuries appropriately and rest. These are easily undertaken but require the players to be disciplined in their recovery activities and they must be aware that although the games finished, the teams all gone their separate ways they are still required to care for themselves.

Try using some ice on those niggling joints, or use alternating hot and cold immersions in water, use some homeopathic remedies for these as well (Arnica is one such alternative remedy but check with your local alternative health shop and a certified homeopathy practitioner) or massage (as long as there is no underlying injury as this can aggravate the injury).

The importance of sleep cannot be stressed enough as poor sleep leads to poor performance. Try to encourage the players to get enough adequate quality sleep pre and post activity and this will assist in refuelling them in their recovery.

REMEMBER:

- Stretch after warm up and warm down. Don't overstretch and go through a well-practiced routine to enable all the players to know how to stretch properly.
- Rehydrate thoroughly and appropriately. Fluids with a sodium and CHO content are best, but water is essential.
- Food intake needs to incorporate appropriate CHO, protein, sodium and other trace elements. High GI foods aid in recovery and should be taken within 90 minutes of the game/training stopping and again two hours later.
- Look after those aches and pains and treat all injuries, no matter how small.
- Get sufficient rest and sleep following all activity.

INJURY AWARENESS:

The preseason is not exempt from injuries occurring and all members of the team need to be aware of the potential for these as well as how to reduce the severity of them. Some of the injuries that can occur are growth plate injuries (skeletal immature players), overuse injuries, "burnout" related injuries and the usual range of contact sport injuries.

Growth Plate Injuries: These injuries can occur as a result of any collision style impacts, overuse or increased levels of physical activity to the skeletal immature player. A good guide is to suspect this style of injury in any player less than 20 years of age.

Any player who reports a pain that is ongoing, tenderness over any joint or is not able to meet the standard set for the training program may well require a full medical check-up to eliminate the possibility of a growth plate injury. The common areas that these "pains" occur are in the foot, ankle, just below the kneecap, the hip, elbow and shoulder. It is important to have these players assessed properly as any injury to the growth plates may result in life long complications for the player.

Over use injuries: Overuse injuries are the most preventable of all injuries and should not occur at all with prior planning and preparation. These injuries can result in the player not being able to train, onset of secondary style injuries such as infections or an increased risk of further more serious injuries.

A typical overuse injury that is easily prevented is blisters. The skin where the blister has occurred possibly has not been properly prepared or the item surrounding the area where the blister has occurred

may not be correctly fitting or a combination of both. This can occur when the players take to the training with new boots, poor conditioned boots (missing sprigs etc.) and/or training with no socks or protection to the skin.

Causes of overuse injuries can range from extrinsic factors such as a sudden increase or doubling of training volume, intensity, quantity; poor footwear or subtly by running on a cambered surface, or by Intrinsic factors such as a biomechanical abnormality, a muscle imbalance, muscle weakness, lack of flexibility and body composition. So planning the training amount and frequency can assist in reducing the risk of any overuse injury.

These type of injuries can also be prevented with a proper assessment made of the individual players that may identify any biomechanical imbalance or abnormality.

“Burnout” related injuries: Burnout can occur at any time within the training year, it is not just an in season problem. With a combination of factors the players can burnout or become stale very quickly and this can lead to non-attendance at training, increased risk of injury. The factors that the Coaching staff needs to be aware of are negative mood states, an inability to maintain usual training targets, increased muscle soreness and heavy legs, disturbed sleep, repeat chest infections and loss of confidence.

In the Burnout state the player is at increased risk for overuse, contact / collision style injuries due to inattention, poor technique and tiredness, but while training the burnt out player will only add to the cycle of the burnout and lead the player to a state of staleness. If any player appears tired, unable to cope with the training or seems down or negative then it may pay to schedule some white board sessions or an educational time for all players to allow for a restful period. By not singling out any one player who may be burnout you increase the possibility of team cohesiveness and allow all players to recover.

Collision/Contact style injuries: We all know the risks of playing the game and the associated injuries that can occur from this, but how many people are prepared for an injury preseason that can limit the players’ chances of making the team or even starting the season. How many teams do a base line preseason fitness test to enable a benchmark to be made of the players, so that when an injury does occur the fitness guideline has been established for them?

These type of injuries are your typical body part injuries that occur throughout the game and although the players are only training preseason they should undergo a full rehabilitation program designed to maintain their current fitness level and to bring the injured body part back up to full optimal working level.

The other injuries that usually occur preseason are the grass burns, sunburn and dehydration injuries. Grass burns can be quite nasty as they can become infected if left untreated and may limit the players training while they wait the healing process to complete. Sunburn is totally preventable with training scheduled around the peak hours of sunlight (between 12 pm and 4 pm) and by ensuring that all players apply sunscreen prior to taking to the field whenever they train outside.

Dehydration is also preventable by breaking the training sessions into 15 minute blocks and having scheduled water breaks ensuring all players have access to room temperature water (this is more rapidly absorbed than chilled water) or to a sports drink solution made to the correct concentration levels. Sports drinks usually contain carbohydrates and sodium that assist in energy levels and fluid absorption.

Other areas to consider are within the strength training where the players usually concentrate on the “glamour” muscles (biceps, front of the shoulder, pectorals etc.) and forget the muscles behind the shoulders, those of the upper back and the neck and the lower back. By strengthening these muscles as well the players reduce the risk of “Stingers” or “Burners” when they do occur, or of injuring other areas surrounding these, as they have to compensate for the muscle imbalance that has occurred.

Preseason is not only about getting the team together, training them to play together but also of ensuring that they stay together throughout the season.



League Coach FORUM

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

In each edition of RLCM we publish some of the responses to questions asked on the league coach website. This month a bounty of responses was received to an inquiry by Dave from South London who wrote:

QUESTION

I coach a U14s RL team in South London and, although they are pretty successful in terms of their attacking game, in defence their line work could be a lot better. In training I run a lot of defence drills/mod games and they perform pretty well, but come match day they seem to forget everything and we get a mix of people moving up at different paces, some not moving at all, others moving backwards! They are a mixture of abilities with some very good players and some relatively inexperienced players, tackling wise most are fairly sound and confident; some play union at school too - which may not be helping a great deal. It seems to be a mental thing as much as anything else... Does anybody have strategies for sorting this out?

The replies to Dave's plea for help came thick and fast. Here is a selection that was received.

ANSWER 1 - Bob Wood

The short answer to your question "strategies for sorting this out" ... is no. This is the standard defence line for most junior teams. It has to do with confidence ... a mental skill. The blokes moving forward, they know what they have to do and how to do it. The blokes standing still, they know what they have to do, but don't have the confidence to do it ... or aren't sure of how good their skills are. Give the kids a specific target in a game ... 2 tackles per half. Teach them your defensive pattern and what their job is in that pattern. Then practice their part of the pattern, possibly Left Side vs. Right Side etc. And encourage the boys, this is most important. Whenever they even get close to getting it right, praise them - it goes a long way. Best of luck.

ANSWER 2 - Phil

I think one of the main problems may be due to fear. I am one of the coaches of a U14s team here in the UK and we have the same problem as Dave. I wonder

what you feel about the fear factor, when you come up against a physically big side or a very aggressive team, they will hang back hoping someone else will make the tackle and then move in. At this age you start to get a lot of players questioning why they are playing the game, some have grown others haven't and wonder whether they ever will. How do you think this affects them? Is it fear or as you have said previously down to experience and knowing what to do? If you don't have a big squad how do you promote a team ethos, it's hard to get a group of lads of varying levels of skill and experience to want to work for each other. We have found that our team will work together much better against weaker opposition but when we come up against the top of the league sides then it falls apart.

ANSWER 3 - Bob Wood

Fear is definitely a major factor. You can overcome that (sometimes) or reduce it by giving players confidence in their tackling, but that will depend on the players own make up - some players have it & some don't. I was talking to another UK coach and was saying that we have to work with what we have got, and if a player is going to be scared, then there is little that we can do, other than try to keep working with him and get what ever we can out of him. Although you may be able to get something out of a player of this ilk, one thing for sure, he will never be a star. Players make great coaches. We are only as good as our players make us. We can improve them with our skills as coaches, but we can only improve them to the maximum of their own ability or physical structure. I can't make a big fat kid into a flying winger. I can't make a small skinny kid into a big line-busting prop. We do the best we can with what

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DRILLS BOOKS

we have got. Fear is a mental thing, it can be irrational and because of that it can be hard to defeat. We can however look outside the square; try to teach players how to tackle. Falling apart against the better teams is again a mind thing (a very difficult to overcome). Here you need to work on small goals; narrowing the gap each time ... if the better teams are full of monsters ... well then it is a long term goal ... there aren't too many 6 foot high kids running around ... so it will all even out in the long run ... some kids are early developers and some late developers ... but by U/15 or U/16 you will all be about the same height ... so it is a matter of working on what you can at the moment ... trying to improve your skills ... until you can match them in size ... then you can belt them.

ANSWER 4 - Matty

We have found that we are tiring the better players out quicker because they are working harder in their new units and losing their potency in attack because they tend to stay in the defensive formation. We have caused confusion within the team and they are still losing so it's going from bad to worse so we are reverting back to the favoured positions for each player and work more towards goal setting for the weaker players on a match-by-match basis.

ANSWER 5 - Anonymous

The important thing is to try to get them to do one step and then give them the next step. You may only be successful 5% of the time and unsuccessful 95% of the time, but if you are only successful 5% of the time ... then you have gained a 5% improvement in your defence. Will you still lose? Yes you will. Will big monster teams still flog you? Yes they will. Will players still leave the game? Yes they will. But that is not the intention of coaching - the intention of coaching is to improve each player (and the team) as much as you can to help them gain their own maximum potential. If you can do that then you have succeeded. If you get your players and your team to achieve their maximum and get flogged 50 nil, you have still won as a coach. You can't squeeze any more out of the lemon, than God originally put in there.

ANSWER 6 - Phil

Thanks for all your comments re my posting on line defence in games. There are definitely things I can take from this and work on with the players. We are just about to end our winter season, but everything starts again in April as the Service Areas are moving to a summer structure, so plenty more opportunity to work on them this year!

Thanks to all of the people who responded to questions and remember, you too can take part simply by clicking on to the website at:

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

Notes

Flying Kangaroos:

The impact of jet lag on performance

By Rudi Meir - MA, CSCS - School of Exercise Science and Sport Management, SOUTHERN CROSS UNIVERSITY

International travel is nothing new in sport and nor is jet lag but its affect on performance is still unclear, in spite of the large body of research into this issue. Jet lag produces a range of symptoms in people travelling across multiple time zones and appears to also have an effect on sport performance.

Last year's Kangaroo tour produced one notable game when Australia was beaten by Great Britain in the first match. A match played by the Kangaroos with less than ideal preparation and only a few short days after arriving in the Old Dart. Unfortunately, this was a result more likely attributable to jet lag than any rejuvenation of English rugby league pride. A harsh assessment perhaps but one that seems to have been supported by the results of the remaining two games of the tour.

There was a time, not so long ago, when the thought of travelling as part of a Kanagroo touring party meant a long trip by sea. A round trip taking many months to complete. However, the advent of air travel has now cast such methods of travel to the pages of history and Kangaroo nostalgia.

The rugby league team of the 21 st Century and all that goes along with it in the form of logistical support, thinks nothing of jumping on a plane and travelling in relative comfort, quickly and (usually) efficiently to their chosen destination. The London Broncos have made the trip downunder as part of their pre-season training for the past two years. The Leeds Rhinos spent part of January in South Africa and our own Brisbane Broncos recently travelled to Fiji.

For the Kangaroos, as has been the tradition of the past few Australian touring squads to England, travel has been elevated to the relative luxury and comfort of business class. Most professional touring teams playing rugby union and league pamper their players with this far more comfortable and civilised standard of travel. Yet, while a wide range of creature comforts are available during the course of travel the vagaries of jet lag still take their toll on even the most seasoned traveller.

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Symptoms of jet lag

Jet lag's most common and widely experienced symptom is the feeling of fatigue that is experienced when travelling across a number of time zones. Jet lag is often characterized by disruptions to the body's normal circadian rhythms which are commonly referred to as our 'body-clock'. The circadian system is synchronised primarily by the light-dark cycle of the earth's 24-hour rotation. Typical symptoms of jet lag include disrupted sleep, changes in mood state, loss of appetite, gastrointestinal disturbance, disorientation and discomfort, which are all linked to the desynchronization of the circadian rhythms. Age and level of fitness can also influence the severity of these symptoms but irrespective they will be more pronounced and will last longer when travelling in an easterly direction and will also be influenced by the number of time zones crossed. These symptoms are not generally experienced when travelling north-south or south-north within the same time zone.

Jet lag is experienced by everyone travelling across international time zones. The most significant and obvious of these is likely to be the changes that will occur in the individual's normal sleep patterns. This is particularly pronounced when travelling from one hemisphere to another while also crossing time zones. For example, when travelling from Australia to England. Such a trip from the southern hemisphere's summer will produce an 11 hour difference (defecit) in time (referred to as the phase adjustment). In other words when it is 7.00 am in Sydney, it will be 8.00 pm on the previous night in England. This clearly



causes a major disturbance in the player's normal sleep habits. For example, if arriving in England early in the morning the body would normally be preparing to sleep.

These time differences produce transient deteriorations in sleep and mood. It has been suggested within the research that resynchronization of the body-clock takes approximately 1 day for each time zone crossed with exposure to the light-dark cycle of the new environment considered the primary stimulus for re-setting the circadian system. However, the scientific evidence supporting these changes is neither consistent nor compelling. Notwithstanding individual variations, regaining "normal" sleep patterns will typically take 3-4 days but will be influenced by the number of time zones crossed. To some extent this

in the afternoon or early evening. In contrast, training involving the learning of motor skills and decision making should take place in the morning.

Logically, extended international travel across time zones might negatively impact on sport performance due to a shift in the circadian peak window. Taking the above into consideration it's possible that a poor performance result may be attributed to a coach not taking into account these circadian variations and the peak time for optimal efficiency. For example, extended air travel across multiple time zones may mean that the player's body clock is significantly out of sync with the real time in the new location, thereby causing disruptions in the circadian system. Taking these circadian rhythms into consideration could produce significant improvements in performance. In

International travel is now commonplace in competitive sport and yet another one of the many factors that the coach must manage if he is to get the most out of his players

might help explain the Kangaroos performance in the first test. Obviously under normal circumstances the team would have played a number of "warm-up" games in England allowing the players time to adjust to the local time zone. However, this wasn't the case. In hindsight, and given time and money, a lead time of approximately 10 days would have been ideal prior to playing the first game of the series.

What the research says about jet lag

The various elements of sporting performance (eg flexibility, muscular strength, etc.) exhibit rhythmic daily variations peaking in early evening and close to the daily maximum in body temperature. While these can differ between individuals the peak-time of day for participation in most sports appears to be between 4.00 pm to 10.00 pm. Generally, peaks in reaction time, isometric hand grip strength, elbow flexion strength, back strength, total work performed in high intensity constant exercise, lactate production, lowest levels of joint stiffness and pain perception all reportedly occur at this time of day. On this basis it appears that implementation of training programmes for endurance and strength should ideally take place

fact, research has suggested that selecting the best circadian time might produce a 10% increase in performance and benefit tasks involving endurance, physical strength and mental function.

Research in America examining win-loss records for 27 NFL teams during 1978-87 found that teams travelling from west to east, producing a 3 hour time advance and with games commencing at 1.00 pm EST, showed a decrease in performance compared with intra-time zone away games. A similar result was reported for when teams from the west competed in the central time zone where the time advance was 2 hours. It has been suggested that these results were consistent with the deleterious effect of jet lag on performance. However, west coast teams appear to



have an advantage when games played away in central or eastern time zones are played at night and therefore closer to their normal afternoon peaks in performance. Other research examined data from the 1996 NCAA college football season and reported that eastward travel teams crossing at least one time zone scored fewer points, conceded more points and had a greater margin of defeat in each quarter of play than compared with westward travelling teams.

Anecdotal evidence exists supporting the notion that travel across multiple time zones has an adverse effect on mood state - primarily induced by a lack of (quality) sleep. East-west travel across 6 time zones has been shown to adversely effect mood states for 1 day. As a result, and given the role of mood state in sport performance, it would appear reasonable to assume that any adverse effect on mood state resulting from air travel would contribute negatively toward sport performance.

As indicated above disruption in normal sleep habits plays a major role in mood changes resulting from a desynchronization between the circadian system and the sleep-wake cycle. However, the scientific evidence within the literature supporting the effects of sleep deprivation on performance is unclear and inconsistent. Some researchers conclude that there is little evidence showing that sleep deprivation of up to 72 hours impairs sport performance and that the high levels of motivation usually associated with major sport events is likely to counter any adverse effects associated with sleep deprivation. However, while gross motor performance may not be adversely effected by partial sleep deprivation of up to 2-3 days the same is not true for tasks requiring mental decision making which can be adversely affected by one night of sleep restricted to 3 hours.

Research into strategies for minimising jet lag

Pharmacological and behavioral interventions have been utilised in an effort to speed up the resynchronization of the circadian system after translocation to a new environment. The literature cites work showing that simple behavioural changes can promote sleep during air travel over multiple time zones. These include encouraging individuals to sleep as much as possible during the flight, preventing caffeine consumption, keeping the cabin window shades down and turning the cabin lights off until 1 hour prior to arrival in the final destination. In addition, the (medically supervised) administration of *l*-tryptophan (an amino acid) during the flight and at

10.00 pm each night for the first three nights in the new environment promoted sleep on the first night in the new environment. However, subjects did not sleep any longer during the flight or on the remaining two nights when compared with subjects taking a placebo.

It has been suggested that slow-release caffeine and melatonin might be used to diminish the consequences of jet lag and faster resynchronization of circadian rhythms. Using these pharmacological interventions static physical performance (hand grip strength test) was maintained after eastward travel across 7 time zones with slow-release caffeine actually increasing static performance (dominant hand) from day 1 in the new location. In contrast placebo produced a decrease in static performance with the dominant hand during the first 4 days of resynchronization. Melatonin, which plays a role in hastening the adjustment of circadian rhythms, has also been found to improve the subjective feelings of jet lag. However, melatonin has a hypnotic effect that may be deleterious to sport performance.

Other hypnotic agents (eg benzodiazepines) have been administered on travellers crossing multiple time zones but the hangover effects of such substances makes them questionable with athletes.

Adjusting the sleep-wake cycle prior to departure appears to be largely ineffective due to the practical problems associated with trying to manipulate the environment (eg light, social influences, work, etc.). Taking long “naps” during the day in the new time zone may delay adaptation in the new setting because it will tend to “anchor” the circadian rhythms to the home time, thus slowing the rate of readjustment to the new local time. As a result these should be avoided if at all possible once arriving in the new time zone.

Exercise has been clearly demonstrated to improve mood. It has been reported that the symptoms of jet lag can be reduced following a systematic exercise regime immediately following disembarkation after air travel. However, timing of exercise in the new environment needs to be planned giving due consideration to the changes in body temperature associated with the new light-dark cycle of the new



time zone. Exercise can also play a role in reducing the effect of drowsiness and transient fatigue experienced in the early part of adaptation to the new time. Some research has used bright light to try and advance the readjustment of the circadian system but this has not been used on athletes and there is still some doubt about its effectiveness as a strategy.

It has been suggested that a high carbohydrate and low protein meal may induce drowsiness and sleep due to the brain's uptake of tryptophan and its conversion to serotonin. Conversely, a high protein low carbohydrate meal may increase arousal levels due to the enhanced uptake of tyrosine (another amino acid) and its conversion to adrenaline. This seems to suggest that it might be useful to promote high protein meals in the morning (to help elevate arousal level) and high carbohydrate meals in the evening (to promote sleep). Similarly caffeine ingestion in the morning might be helpful but not recommended in the evening prior to going to bed. The diuretic effect of alcohol is also problematic since it might promote broken sleep. The pressurised cabin of the plane will accelerate dehydration. Players should try and keep a full glass of water in front of them whenever awake and take frequent sips throughout the flight. Dehydration is a major contributing factor in the symptoms of jet lag. These

include feeling disorientated and light headed. Maintaining hydration will minimise these effects and will also help maintain normal blood viscosity.

Conclusion

It's likely that Chris Anderson and his support staff are very aware of the role played by jet lag and its possible effect on performance and have gained considerable experience in dealing with it. Monitoring such things as resting heart rate, hours of quality sleep each night, general feelings of wellbeing, fluid intake, daily fluctuations in body weight, food intake and the like are all areas that need consideration when travelling on a tour. Simple strategies like planning the inflight sleep of players to coincide with the day-night cycle of the new location, ensuring adequate fluid intake (with a strict limit on drinks that might contribute to dehydration), timing of meals, appropriate scheduling of training and exercise upon arrival, and resynchronization of sleep can all play a part in reducing the negative impact of jet lag on the team.

International travel is now commonplace in competitive sport and yet another one of the many factors that the coach must manage if he is to get the most out of his players. Performance at training or in competition can clearly be influenced by many factors. If the team is required to travel over multiple time zones to compete then the coach will need to plan a strategy for minimising the likely deleterious affects of jet lag.

NOTES

Evasion DRILLS

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 Books www.rlcm.com.au

1. Side Step 1
2. Side Step 2
3. Side Step 3
4. Side Step 4
5. Side Step 5
6. Swerve
7. Fend
8. Change of Pace
9. Side On Evasion
10. Evasion Grid 1
11. Evasion Grid 2
12. Evasion Grid 3
13. 1-on-1 Offensive/Defensive
14. Pick The Gap
15. Evasion Channel 2
16. Evasion Channel 3
17. Run The Gauntlet

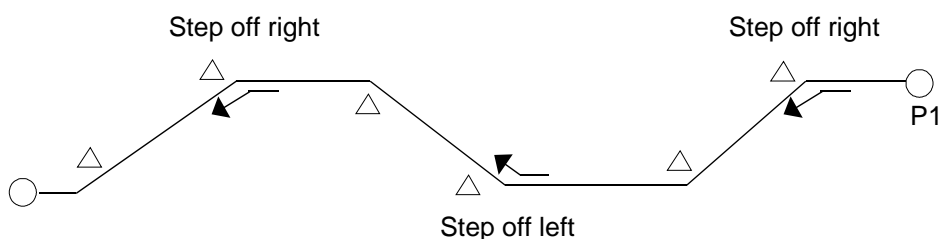


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Side Step 1



Setting

Any number of players, area 20m X 8m

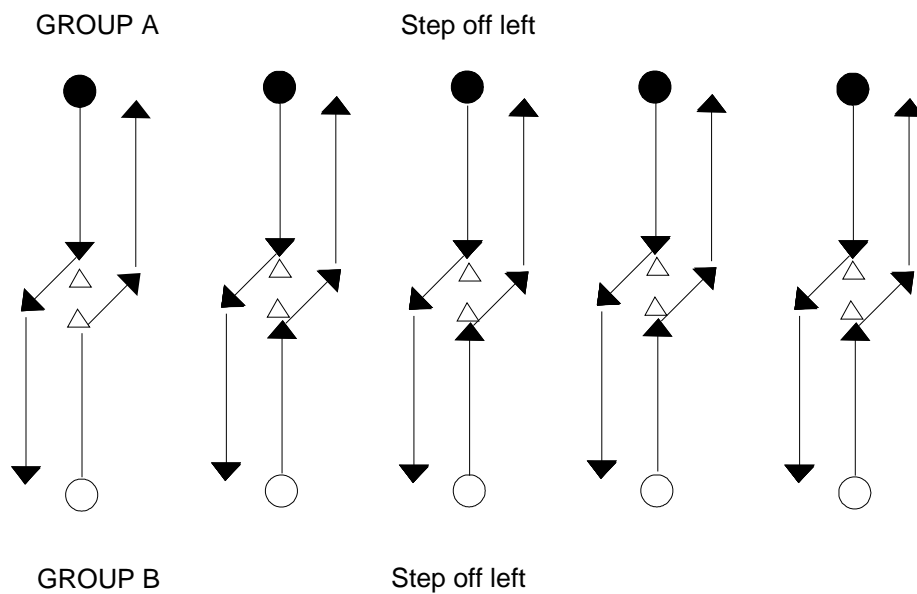
- P1 carrying football in two hands moves down the grid
- At first set of markers player steps off the right foot
- At the next set the player steps off the left

Progression

- Add static and then active defenders positioned at the markers
- Player transfers the ball to outside arm, allowing the inside arm the fend if required

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Side Step 2



Setting

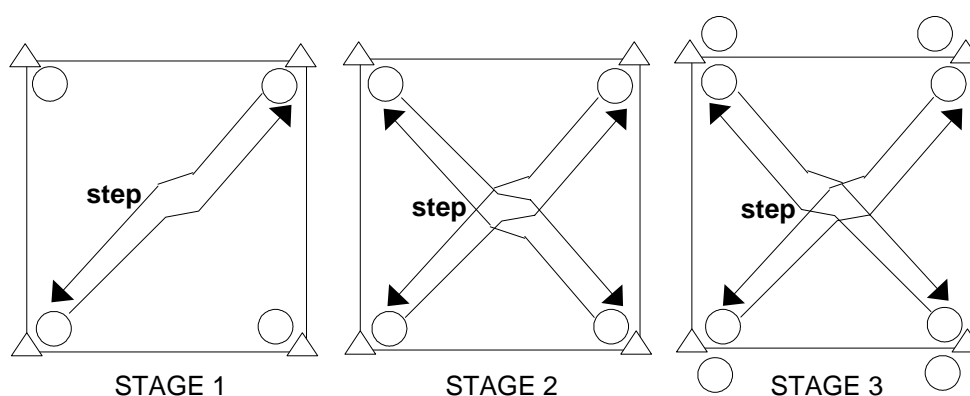
Any number of players, area 20m X 10m

- Players divide into two even groups facing each other across the grid
- Players run toward each other and as they approach step and then accelerate past their opposite
- All players need to step off the same foot to avoid collisions, start with left and the right
- Once all players are using correct technique, coach should start to call left or right as players approach each other

Progression

- Add football with one team being the attackers who should attempt to evade the oncoming defender

Side Step 3



Setting

Minimum of 4 players, area 10m X 10m

- This drill has three stages
- Players start from each corner of the grid

Stage 1

- 2 Players on opposite corners simultaneously run towards each other, stepping to avoid each other and then proceeding to the opposite corner

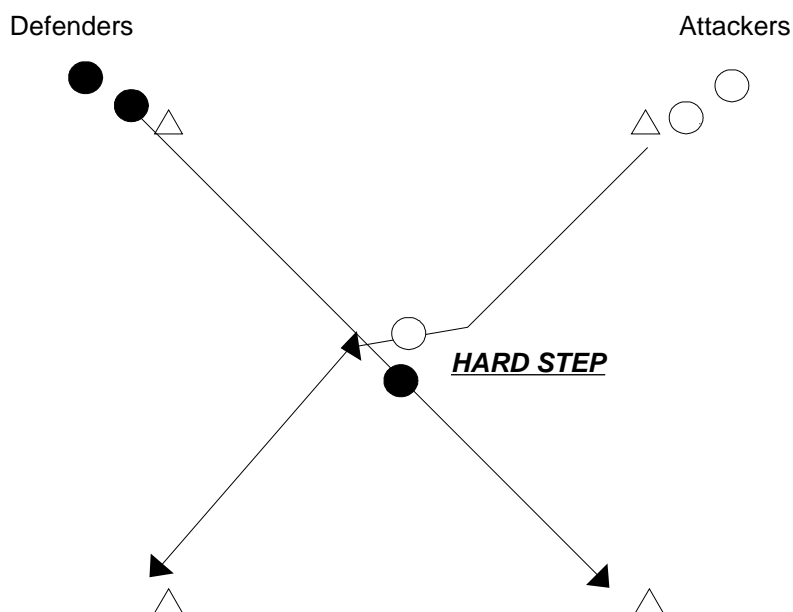
Stage 2

- Players from all four corners start at the same time, stepping as they approach each other

Stage 3

- As in stage two, however 2 players should carry ball in hand, progressing from a two handed carry, to a one handed carry to a one handed carry with fend if required

Side Step 4

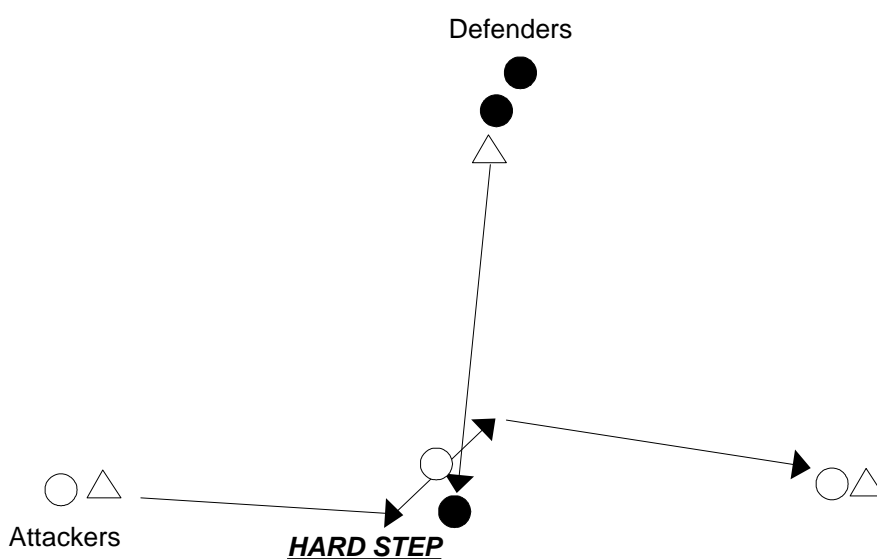


Setting

Minimum of 4 players, area 15m X 15m

- Players divide into two equal groups at adjacent corners of the grid
- Each player in one group has a football they are the attackers the other group is the defenders
- When the attacking player begins his diagonal run, the opposite defender reacts by running his diagonal line
- The defenders job is to act as a moving target for the attacker. He should not attempt to grab or slow down the run of the attacker
- The attacker steps the defender with an explosive step and then accelerates to the opposite end of the grid.
- Once all players have run through they should return running the same lines, after at least 4 run throughs the groups should change roles

Side Step 5

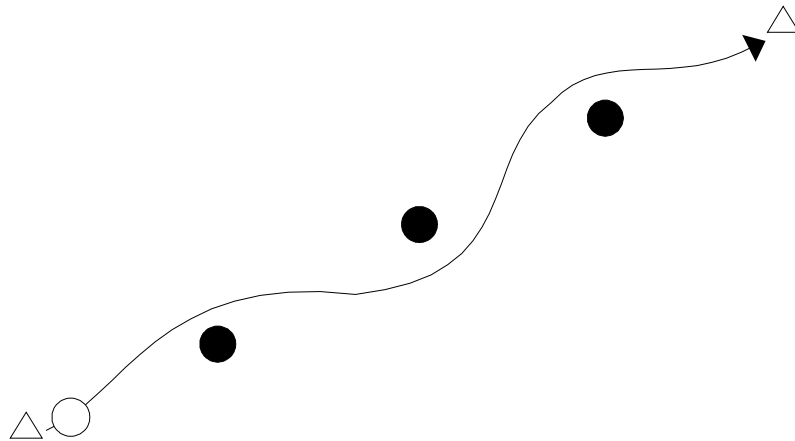


Setting

Minimum of 4 players, area 20m X 15m

- Players divide into two equal groups
- One attacker and one defender move out from the starting marker
- The attacker drifts his run a little to the right before stepping back on the inside of the defender
- He then accelerates to the marker at the opposite end of grid where he hands the ball over to the next attacker who moves in from the opposite direction perform a 'left to right' step
- Defenders should attempt a two handed grab on the attacking player and then returning to the starting position by going around the outside of the grid

Swerve

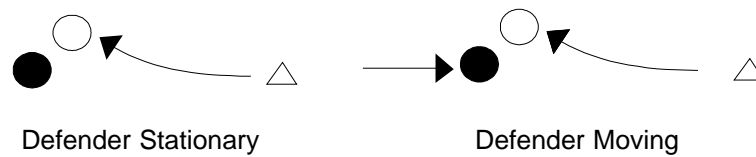


Setting

Minimum of 4 players, area 5m X 20m

- Drill begins with players swerving around markers that are placed approx. 5 metres apart
- Defenders are positioned on the markers, they can not use their arms and are allowed to take only one step sideways, forcing the runners to widen their swerving run
- Progress by widening the distance to approx 8 metres between defenders. Defenders are allowed to use their arms now as well as the step and attempt to tag the runners
- Next progression is defenders can take one step to the front, back or side and can use their arms to make it more difficult for the runners

Fend 1

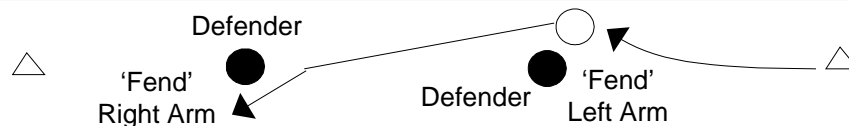


Setting

Minimum of 2 players, area 5m X 20m

- Attackers are split into 2 groups with a defenders between them
- An attacking player with ball in hand moves down the grid and fends the defender away before offloading to the next attacker
- Initially the defender should remain stationary, and then progressing so the defender is allowed to move in on the attacker

Fend 2

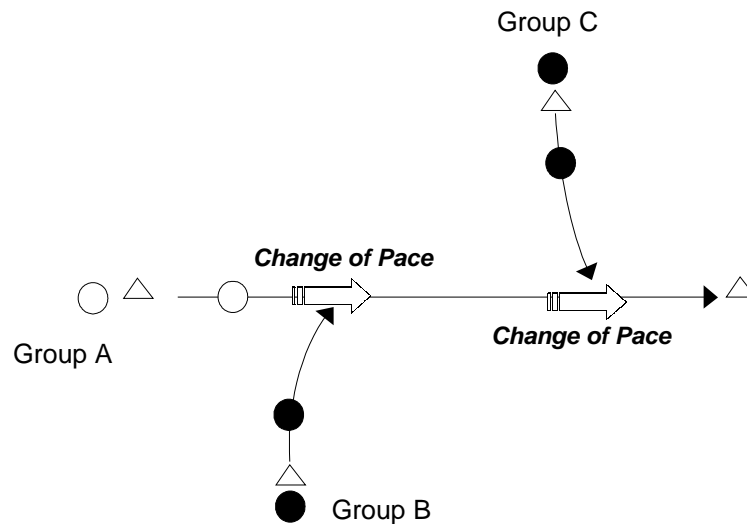


Setting

Groups of 6 to 8 players, area 40m X 10m

- All attackers start at one end of the grid
- 2 defenders are placed 10 metres in the grid
- Each attacker runs with the football and performs a left handed fend on the first defender and then a right handed fend on the second defender
- Attackers then return repeating the exercise in the opposite direction

Change of Pace

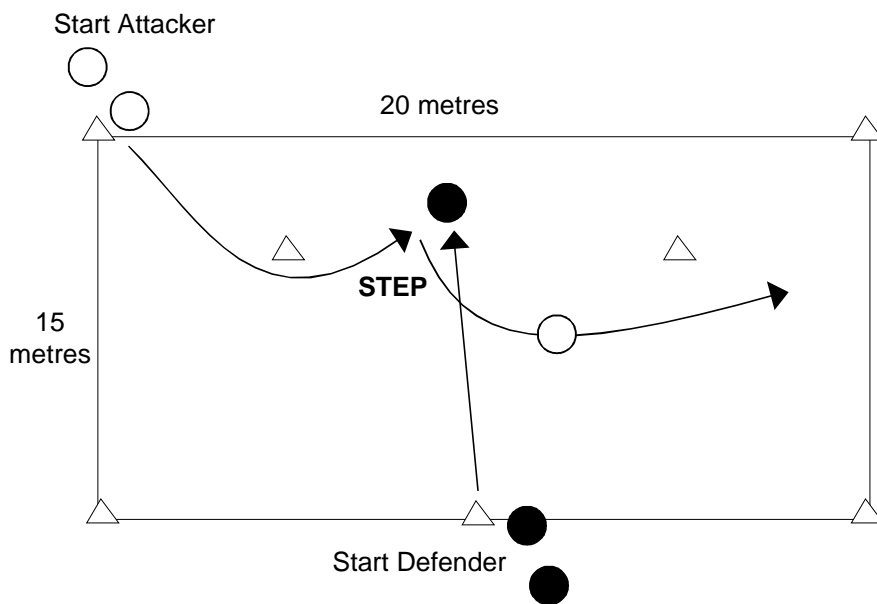


Setting

Minimum of 3 players, area 40m X 40m

- Players are divide into 3 groups A, B, C
- Group A runs the change of pace and groups B and C act as defenders positioned on opposite sides of the channel
- The attacking player should carry a football, or, if balls are not available a marker or shoe will suffice
- Attackers runs down the grid, if the defender gets too close the ball should be transferred to the outside arm and the inside arm should be used to fend
- There should be at least 20 metres distance between the defending groups, allowing the attacker to accelerate away from the first defender and then readjusting to take on the next defender
- The drill can be made continuous by rotating the players after each involvement. Players from A joins C, C joins Band B joins A
- If the defender has mis-timed his run and come to far across the attacking player can step to the inside or position his body for an imaginary bump off

Side on Evasion

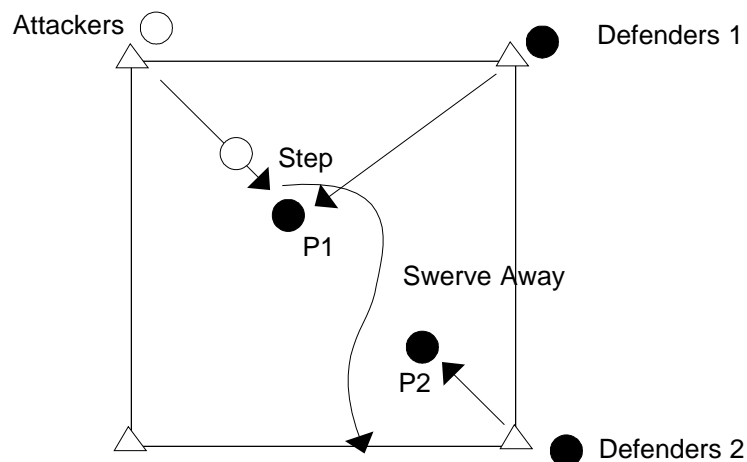


Setting

Area 15m X 20m

- Grid should be set up wide enough to give attacking player a fair chance of successful evasion
- Attacking player moves from start position holding ball in either two hands or the arm furthest from defender
- After rounding first marker the defender must react to the movements of the defender
- If the defender has come across too far the attacking option may be to step him on the inside, if the defender has not come up far enough the option may be to accelerate away from him using the sideline
- This drill is both evasive and tackling, if the attacking player is tackled he should get to his feet quickly and play the ball

Evasion Grid 1

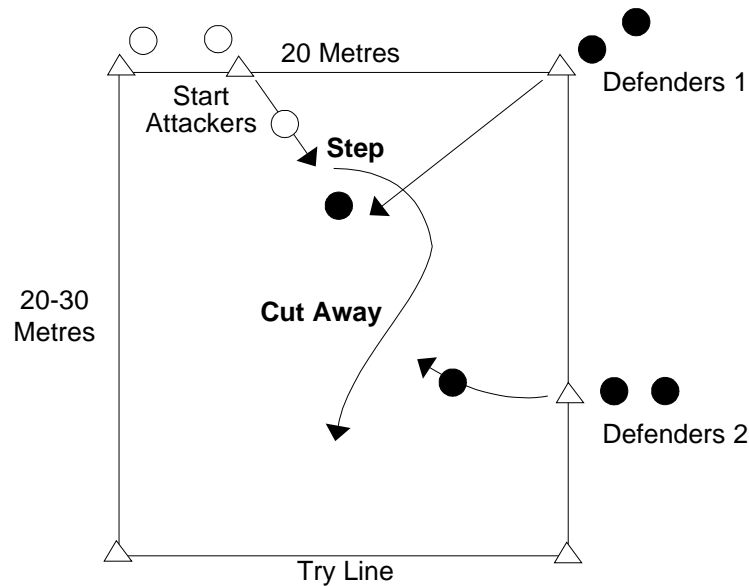


Setting

Minimum of 3 players, Area 15m X 20m

- The aim of this drill is to develop swerve and side step skills
- Equal numbers of players are positioned on three corners of the grid
- The first attacker runs out on a diagonal line across the grid
- The first defender (P1) runs out at the same time from the other diagonal and acts as a moving target for the attacker to practice his side step
- The attacking player should step the defender on the inside and then quickly adopt a line that gives him the best chance of beating the second defender (P2)
- The attacker should be encouraged to beat the second defender on the outside
- There is no try line in this drill, the attacker should simply attempt to evade the two defenders and develop good footwork

Evasion Grid 2

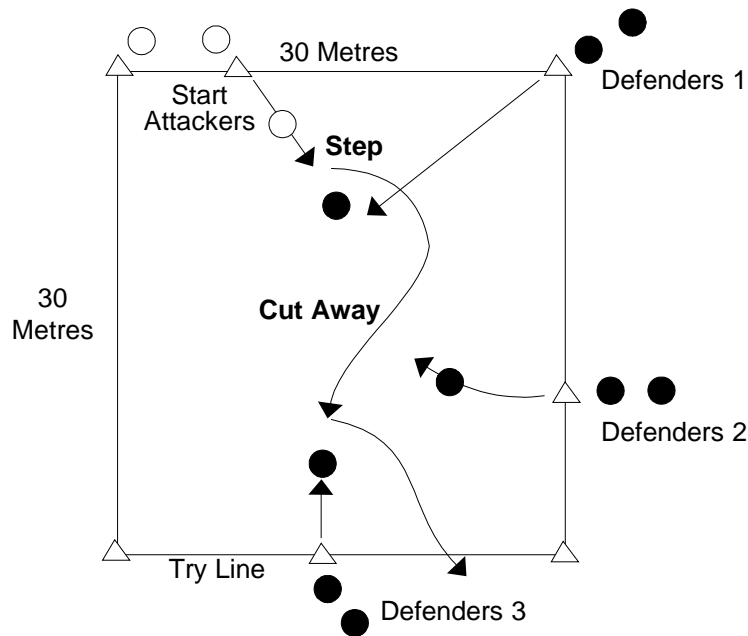


Setting

Minimum of 3 players, Area 20m X 20m

- Continuation of 'Evasion Grid 1'
- Players are divided into 3 groups and positioned on markers as shown in the diagram
- The aim of the attacker is to score a try at the opposite end of the grid (try line)
- Attacker runs from start line and must evade first defender coming in from the side and then second defender from a more front on position
- Attacker must use either acceleration, swerve or inside step if the defender as come across to far
- Second defender can only move once attacker has begun evasive action on first defender, or, on the coaches signal
- Players should rotate after each involvement, attacker joins defender 1, defender 1 joins defender 2, defender 2 joins attackers

Evasion Grid 3

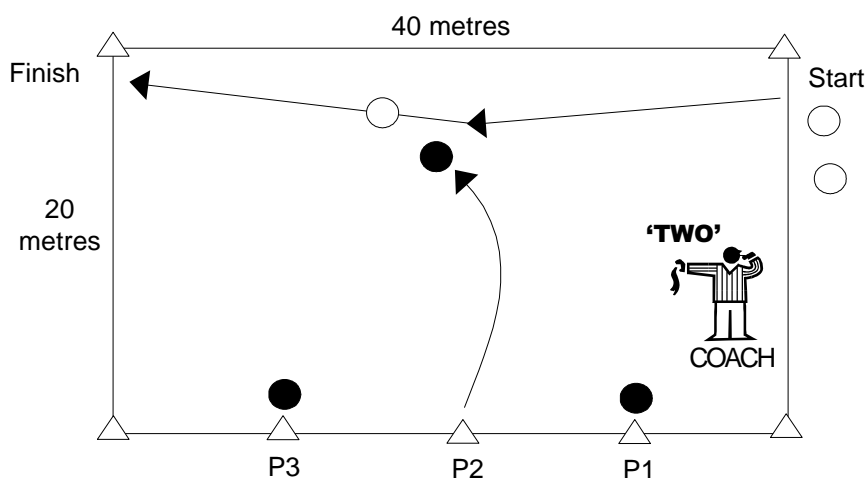


Setting

Minimum of 4 players, Area 30m X 30m

- Drill is continuation of 'Evasion Grid 2'
- Players are divided into 4 groups and positioned on markers as shown in the diagram
- This drill is the same as 'Evasion Grid 2' however there is another group of defenders added at the end of the grid who advance towards the attacker from a front on position
- The attacker must use acceleration, swerve or step and defenders can only move when the evasive action has begun on the defender before them
- Attacker must attempt to score a try
- Players rotate as previous

Evasion Channel 1

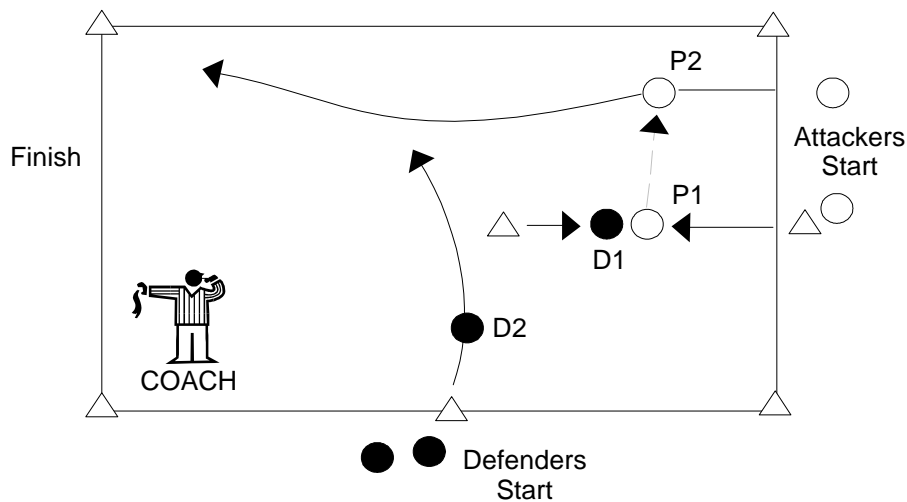


Setting

Minimum of 6 players, Area 40m X 20m

- Players are divided into 2 groups with defenders positioned on markers and number P1, P2 and P3
- Coach begins the drill by calling either One, Two or Three
- On a call of Two, the first attacker would accelerate down the channel and the defender who's number was called would move across and attempt to perform a two handed grab on the attacker
- As the defenders are positioned differently the attacker is confronted with a single defender coming from different positions and angles
- The aim of the drill is to develop evasive skills and decision making on what evasive action to take
- Coach can experiment with position of defenders for variation

Evasion Channel 2

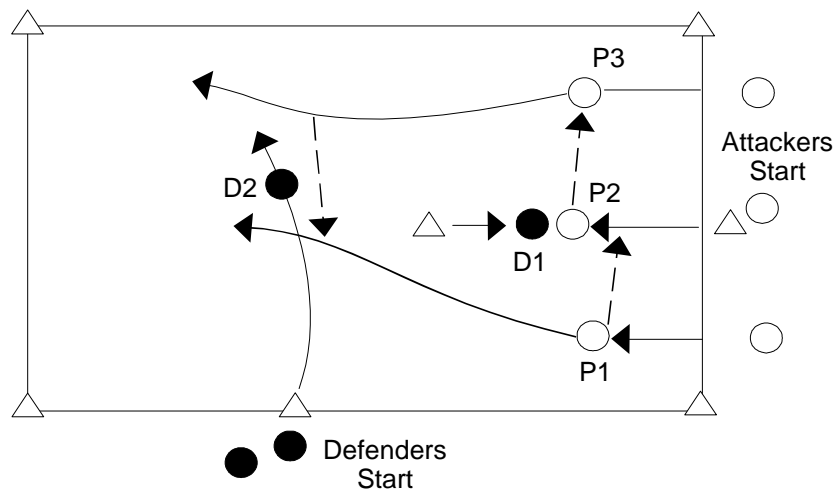


Setting

Minimum of 8 players, Area 40m X 20m

- Drill is continuation from 'Evasion Channel 1'
- This drill can be performed with 4 players, however, it works better with a larger group or full team. We will assume we have 13 players
- One player is nominated as the Defender (D1) and is positioned near the middle of the channel
- The remaining players are divided into 6 groups of 2
- 4 of the groups are positioned at the attackers start line and the other 2 (4 players) are positioned at the defenders start
- On the coaches command the first pair of attackers (P1 and P2) move down the channel, P1 draws D1 before passing to P2
- At the instant P1 makes the pass, D2 moves across and attempts to tag P2 with two hands as he tries to score at the other end of the channel

Evasion Channel 3

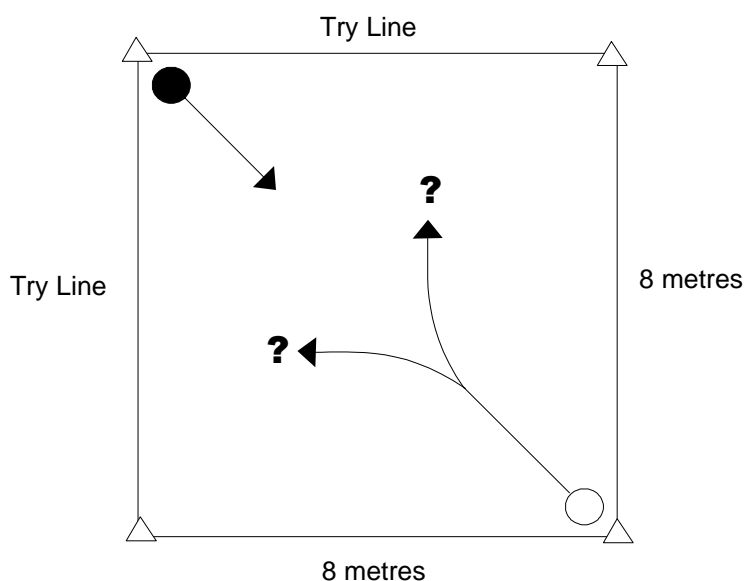


Setting

Team, Area 40m X 20m

- Drill is continuation from 'Evasion Channel 2'
- This drill works well with 5 players however it works better with a larger group or full team. We will assume we have 13 players
- One player is nominated as the Defender (D1) and is positioned near the middle of the channel
- The remaining players are divided into 4 groups of 3
- 3 of the groups are positioned at the attackers start line and the other group is at the defenders start
- On the coaches command the first trio of attackers (P1, P2, P3) advance on D1
- P1 passes a late pass to P2 who is now under pressure and must quickly move the ball on to P3
- At the instant P2 makes the pass, D2 moves across and attempts to tag P2 with two hands
- P1 moves into a support position and in most cases will receive an inside pass from P3

1-On-1 Offensive/Defensive

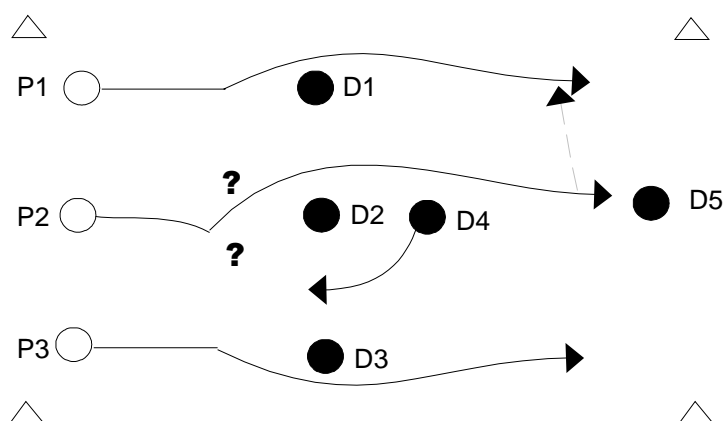


Setting

2 players, Area 8m X 8m

- Players work in pairs alternating between defender and attacker
- Each player starts on a cone diagonally opposite each other
- On 'GO' players run out from their corner directly towards each other
- The attacking player runs straight for approx. 3 metres and then performs an evasive action
- The attacker has the option of attacking the left or right side of the grid diagonally opposite his starting corner and must attempt to score on the selected side
- The defender attempts a two-handed grab on the attacker before he crosses his nominated try line
- Attacker should carry ball in two hands until making a decision on whether to attack the left or right

Pick The Gap

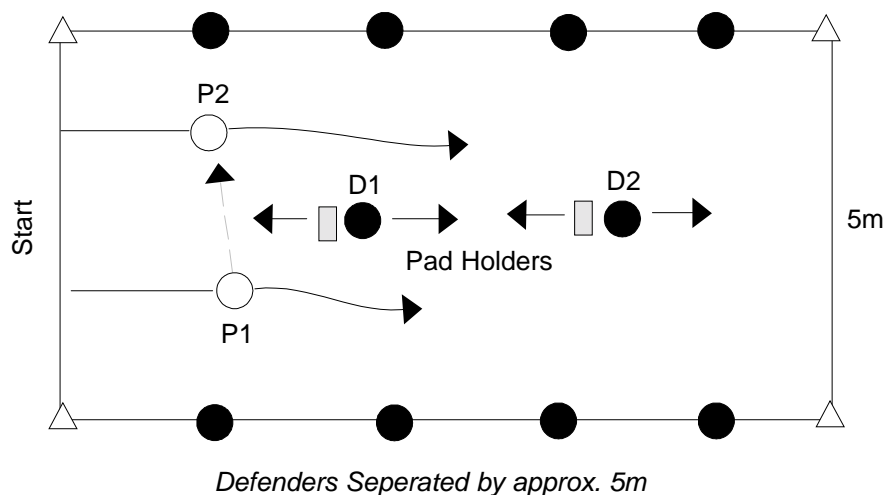


Setting

8 players, Area 30m X 20m

- Players are divided into 2 groups (3 attackers and 5 defenders)
- Attacking group (A1, A2, A3) move down the channel attempting to score at the other end
- Three defenders (D1, D2, D3) line up across the channel with a fourth defender (D4) positioned just behind them. The fifth defender (D5) is at the far end of the channel
- As A2 approaches the defender in the middle of the defensive line, D4 moves into the gap Between D2 and D3 or D2 and D1
- P2 must react and step D2 moving into the gap that is available
- P2 then accelerates forward and draws D5 before passing to either A1 or A3 which are in support

Run The Gauntlet



Setting

Approx. 12 players, Area 20m X 5m channel

- Channel is set up with two attackers (P1 and P2), two pad holders (D1 and D2) and remaining players positioned equally along the side of the channel
- P1 and P2 work down the channel using evasive skills and must avoid being two hand tagged by the players on the side or being hit by D1 or D2
- The defenders along the side can only take one step into the channel and must keep the other foot planted firmly on thesideline
- D1 and D2 positioned in the middle of the channel can only move back or forward and NOT sideways
- After reaching the end of the channel the attackers turn and repeat the exercise in the opposite direction
- Add competition by giving a point each time the attackers are tagged or solidly hit by the pads, the team with the lowest points wins

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