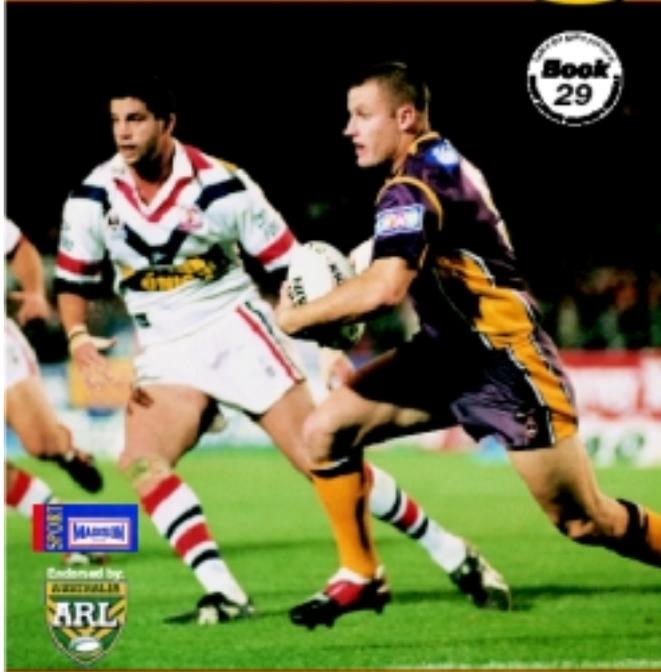


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RUGBY LEAGUE COACHING MANUALS

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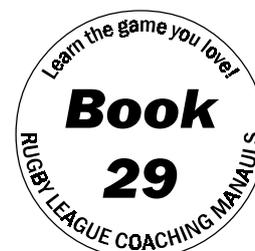
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# Coach Talk

## *Good Decision Making is Critical to a Players Success*

With Rod Patison, written By Gary Roberts

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*Rod Patison was an Illawarra Junior who represented NSW Schoolboys and was a player with the inaugural Australian Schoolboys Tour of Great Britain in 1972-73 he began his senior career in the Illawarra district. He has coached Junior and Senior sides for a continuous 30 years.*

*Rod is a member of Wayne Bennett's coaching panel at the Queensland Academy of Sport shaping the future of Queensland's junior elite rugby league players.*

*A schoolteacher by profession at Palm Beach Currumbin SHS [PBC] on Queensland's Gold Coast, the school is a benchmark for all rugby league schools in Queensland and New South Wales. During the past six years teams from PBC have won four Queensland Championships and one National Championship.*

*The school has produced 13 Australian Schoolboys Representatives, 30 Queensland Schoolboys representatives and at present has ex-students contracted with 10 of the 15 NRL clubs.*

*RLCM spoke recently to Rod about one of the major skills in the game, 'Decision Making'. NRL and SL teams have champion players who make correct decisions on the run, at top speed, under pressure, under fatigue. But how do schoolboy coaches introduce this important skill to young players.*

*Rod Patison explains how Palm Beach Currumbin SHS [PBC] produces 'decision makers' that keeps his school at the top level of the Australian schoolboy rugby league competition.*

### **Q. What are your thoughts on decision making in Rugby League?**

The ability to make effective decisions is the bridge between an athlete and a footballer. Good decisions give power to skill, athleticism, combinations and teams. They give the best players, the edge, 'on and off the ball' in both attack and defence. Rugby League is continuous decision making; what line will I run?, where will I support?, how will I defend? It is a team game 'we' decisions as well as 'I' decisions are to be made, no decision will hold up under pressure unless it is automatic.

So, if a coach wishes an impact on the type and quality of decisions being made by his team the training must reflect the particular challenges of the game. Specific decision-making drills and adapted games will assist the coach in developing players who can read and execute successful options consistently.

From a player's perspective, great athleticism or silken skills are not enough. Being a good decision maker is essential to become a top-line player. It is that critical!

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### **Q. You were quoted as saying "my coaching is directed to helping players become better decision makers." Why the focus?**

I believe in coaching options and developing players who can read the game in attack and defence, before and during every effort, decisions are made, that is where I want to be involved.

Players love the contest, they do not wish to be robots. They want to operate the game. I have no wish to steal that. It is empowered players that will bust defences and breakdown attack.

My belief is in coaching options and developing players who can read the game in attack and defence.

Give the players responsibility, insist on a player and coach evaluation of the what, where and why and pretty soon we will playing more football with more coaching going on.

Success at the contest motivates players, so give them contests and empower them with better options.

Page 3

Decision-making can also be the catalyst for other player developments. If a player is selecting good options, but is unhappy with his impact on the game, he will realise a need for further skill or athletic improvement.

If the coach also perceives that need, the game has provided a new platform for development.

The game is a great teacher.

**Q. How can we teach young players the art of decision-making?**

Firstly, I do not believe in telling players what to do. That method does not help in their development.

I believe in placing them in situations where they use their decisions thousands of times over, working on different options within the situation. Eg: attack inside shoulders, outside shoulders, play from an offload, etc. Allowance is made for some mistakes and I let the contest provide for feedback and promote the self-evaluation. The desire for success and effective guidance will give the player a bigger range of decisions that will become automatic to him under pressure.

Player and coach together examine why, when and where the options are more or less successful, then re-examine the skills and attributes, which assist. Then vary the shape, the numbers and the qualities in attack and defence to foster the players' ability to read the game. Asking questions of the players' decisions arouses in him a hunger to play and discover, evaluate and find answers.

If the drills are effective and the guidance astute then the player should develop into a self-learner.

Adapt the situation to modified games where the player is rewarded for making decisions that the coach wishes to encourage. The ultimate test is game day.

The coach needs to assess; has the way the team played been an extension of training? If not the training needs to be more specific. The coach needs to read the challenges of the game and give the players feedback and guidance with regards their decisions.

Be aware of the team's 'on and off the ball' situations. Sleepers or lazy players seldom get to the contest and rarely arrive well positioned, well timed or well supported.

**Q. How do you foster the player who continues to make errors in the same situation?**

The job of the coach is to develop players, few players wish to upset the coach and they all wish to succeed, but even talented players can read a particular situation poorly and repeat the error.

If this happens the coach should firstly question himself as the source of the problem and examine how he prepared the player for the particular situation and;

1. Consider the game sense drill,
2. The adapted games,
3. The communication,
4. The players skill and physical attributes,
5. Re-examine the cues the player is working from,
6. Re-enforce shared responsibility to preserve honesty and player confidence.

With the results of that knowledge at hand, re-drill and refine his training then re-evaluate. On his return to the game he should be better prepared for the particular situation that was a problem.

**Q. Will new innovations in coaching produce more big decision makers in the game?**

I doubt it. The Johns, Langers, etc read and execute on a level of their own. Big decision-makers who control field position, team patterns and the big plays for the best teams will always be the elite and fortunately their superb decision-making seems to assist their longevity. The more time they have on the job and thinking above the speed of the game makes them even better. It is a very special player who can establish and deliver an opportunity at the elite level.

I do believe modern coaching techniques are producing teams with better role specific and base level decision-making, hence the great quality product rugby league is.

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# Does a team develop a ‘team instinct’ or ‘team discipline’?

With Brian Smith written by Gary Roberts

Remember the great Canberra Raiders side that comprised of Stuart, Daley, Meninga, Belcher, and Clyde? All those players had knowledge of each others’ plays and they had a sense of what each might do on the football field.

Was that a ‘team instinct or a ‘team discipline’?

Brian Smith thinks it was a team discipline. “When Stuart took one step to the right sometimes all the key players went that way; if Daley went right, there was always a key player trailing on his left. At times when Stuart went to the right the players did not move but waited for the next play.

“There can be cues as in that sort of structure. For instance, players may say, ‘when we get to this part of the football field, these are the things that we should be looking for from each other.’

“So if they are well coached, well drilled, well prepared and are disciplined they could seemingly be in a position where they are already communicating with each other on another level.”

Smith continued, “ Part of the challenge to coaches is to develop communication or decision-making drills that allows for the players to know where another player is going to be. You see it happen with players who have played together for some time. They develop a sense of knowing what each other will do under pressure.

“The Newcastle Knights have developed a team instinct involving plays off Andrew Johns. The players have played together for some time, so it is fair to say that they are all aware of Andrew’s capabilities. He may just glance at them and they get the idea from his body position that something is on. It maybe from the

oppositions’ markers or the field position but they have a sense of what he is about to do. So the team is well in front in anticipation.

That one glance might mean ‘Be ready, I am going to do something’,” said Smith

Is that team instinct or team discipline?

Does Auckland’s team instinct revolve around Stacey Jones and PJ Marsh?

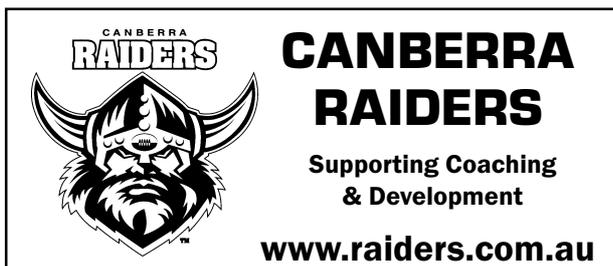
Coach Daniel Anderson says that he wants is Stacy Jones to have the most ball carries in the game. The opposition coaches are aware of this also, but everything the Warriors do could start with Stacey. Is that team instinct or a team discipline?

Allan Langer during his years with the Brisbane Bronco was the catalyst for plays in the oppositions ‘red zone.’ Team instinct or team discipline?

Brian Smith says that team discipline leads to instinctive play, but believes it starts by making better decisions.

He says of Parramatta’s 2001 team, “ I think they did become instinctive. It was born out of discipline, because we did things repeatedly at training and they became so relaxed at what they were doing. They were constantly making good decisions. They got to various stages during the year that they were seemingly all on the ‘one page’ in almost everything they did, and they were doing it for long periods in the game.

“Everything went so smoothly, but it didn’t happen in terms of team instinct. It was because we had practiced, where we wanted to go on the football field, over and over for several years, and they just got better at making decisions instinctively.” Said Smith.



# NOTES

Developing 'instinct' in a team takes time, and the players must be allowed to mature as footballers together. This development stage can be upset easily by injury or by a key player leaving the club. The cycle must begin immediately with the newcomer given team decision-making drills, leading to the on field discipline and hopefully leading to the new player able to slot in the 'team instinct' situation.

We have seen where, players that have a natural instinct, become the key players, but is that enough or can it be hindrance to the development of the team structure?

Preston Campbell is a brilliant instinctive player. He was the 'Player of the Year' in 2001, and after playing most of 2002 in the second team, Cronulla advised him there is no place for him in 2003.

Penrith, now coached by the previous Cronulla coach John Lang has picked him up. So why was he of no value to Chris Anderson's Cronulla Sharks team of 2002 or in the future.

Apparently the structure that Anderson plays is not possible with an individual brilliant instinctive player such as Campbell.

Anderson decided to go with another instinctive player in halfback Brett Kimmorley to develop and build a team instinct that revolves around him.

The star halfback recently signed a long-term contract, so it can be presumed that 2003 will see the start of Chris Anderson further developing an instinctive team ethos as he did with Melbourne in 1998 – 99?

So, what is the answer Instinct or Discipline?

There is no correct answer. One most likely leads to the other. One thing that is correct though is to be successful at both, it begins on the training fields with repetitive skill drills involving repetitive decision-making drills under constant pressure. The initial decision-making on game day appears to revolve around a 'smart' halfback.

Successful teams do have a 'team instinct' that is developed by having longevity with their players. This has allowed them to have matured and gelled together as a football team, but in saying that, Melbourne in 1999 is an exception.

Before a 'team instinct' can be developed a 'disciplined team' must be established.

# Decision-making skills can be learnt

By Gary Roberts

Remember Wally Lewis' tackle on Michael O'Connor in a State of Origin at Lang Park, 'Alfie' Langer's field goal Game 2 State of Origin 1992, Brett Seymour's kick on the 3rd play 10 - 15 m out from St George Illawarra's line in 2002.

They were all instinctive plays by players who, before they implemented them, knew that the play had a very good chance of being successful.

One of the major contributions a champion player brings to a team is that their decisions are normally correct and they seem to have all the time in the world to make a decision.

Elite NRL and SL players do have certain qualities that can separate them from the park player and some of their assets are size, strength, speed, agility, reflexes, endurance and intelligence.

How do these players have this skill but ordinary players struggle with making decisions and having the time to perform it correctly?

The champion player or game breaker has a natural instinct in his game to be above the other players and continually make the correct decision and being in the right place at the right time.

Premiership winning coach Ricky Stuart believes that a form of decision-making can be taught to all players on the training fields.

He said players must ask themselves questions whilst they are under pressure and mentally fatigued on the training field to develop a decision-making technique.

"You have to coach the actual thought process into their minds. The question should be 'what am I doing' and an answer could be 'what should I be doing and what should I be thinking now'

"The more you talk about it to the players and the more you bring it up in training, the more it gets into their mind and the more likely they will take it from the practice field to the football field.

"It is then, that it becomes instinctive.

"I know some players would never think during the game about 'where am I now' and 'what should I be thinking now' but the game breakers know those things.

"The team's halfback, hooker and five-eight must always know the tackle count, what the score is and how long is left on the clock." Stuart concluded.

By doing these mental exercises and asking questions of themselves in training, players start to think of other possible playing or field positions that they should be putting themselves into.

A coach must re-enforce a constant thought process in the minds of his players and have them asking themselves possibly three simple questions.

If this is done correctly a pattern of taking the correct options will be developed.

To reiterate Ricky Stuart's thoughts, the questions the player could ask during training are:

1. Where am I?
2. What should I be doing now?
3. What should I be thinking now?

These three questions should advance to a normal thought process on the training field. If reinforced correctly, with the coach questioning and searching for feedback from his players during a training session, it may lead to being a natural characteristic in a player's mind. Thus when they are in the heat of battle during a game one decision can sometimes win or lose the match.



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# Let's Talk Tackling

By Gary Roberts

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The game of Rugby league consists of two main principles and from these two principles the game evolves -

Attack and Defence.

RLCM spoke recently to Brisbane Broncos' John Dixon on how the Broncos want their younger players to tackle as they move through the grades.

Firstly the legendary coach Jack Gibson explains about defence in Roy Masters' Book 'Inside League' about Defence training sessions during the 1970's.

*"Now the modern coach is really conscious of defence.*

*"In past days selectors were only worried about whether a player could run the ball. It did not matter if he couldn't tackle as long as he could advance it.*

*"But with our defence the boy who could run the football wasn't so successful because week after week we would jam our defence.*

*"We made that our number one priority. We gave recognition to players who went well in defence. I'd read it out 'He made 17 tackles', 'He made three in a row'.*

*"We drilled at it because, in the old days, not that long ago, if you went to football training there was no such thing as spending one minute on defence.*

*"They would spend one and a half hours running the football, but on Sunday you are lucky to have the ball 50% of the time.*

*"In reality, at training the coach should spend 50% of the time on defence and 50% on attack. That is what happens on game day." From the book 'Inside League' by Roy Masters printed 1990.*

Jack Gibson back then may have been the first Rugby League coach in Australia to pick up on the importance on defence in the game and spent equal time on the training paddock involving defence and attack during the same session.

Now back to the present, we hear of footwork, fast feet, same leg same side, head in close, ball and all, smother tackles, edge defenders, ABC defenders all terminology that refers to the art of the tackle and

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tackling, a terminology that is reasonably new to the modern game.

NRL coaches are always looking for a slight edge to get their club a win in the tough world of NRL football, thus the terminology and jargon has evolved.

But, is the defensive game that is played at the NRL level and the jargon used starting to get in the way of teaching the game at the junior level, and does this assist in the development of players at the junior level?

John Dixon, an assistant coach in the powerful Brisbane Broncos organisation explains it simply, he advises that the systems and patterns that are played in the professional game should be left up there with the super coaches with Bennett, Smith, Chris and Daniel Anderson and the like, as they strive to find a small advantage.

The junior game is about developing and educating players, for the long term and a correct technique must be showed at a junior level before young players move on to the senior level.

John Dixon explains, "I think the tackle is important. But coaches have gone away from the tackle and we have got very much involved in defensive systems and patterns and all sorts of things, and I think the basic tackle, which is the 'One on One' tackle, has been neglected.

"One of the reasons that 'One on One' tackling does not receive enough attention is that it is difficult to produce game-like tackling at training. Tackling hurts, so a lot of coaches at junior and senior level give insufficient time to teaching and practising the fundamentals skills of 'One on One' tackling. Ways need to be found to include basic tackling techniques [no matter how brief] in most sessions.



“It does not matter how big players are, or how small they are, small players will have to tackle big guys and the big guys will tackle small, elusive guys.

“If a player cannot make a tackle ‘One on One’, then I know he is in strife. Here, [Broncos] we make a great emphasis on making the tackle and being able to tackle everybody, whether they are big, fast, slow, little or whatever.

The method of tackling had changed over the years, in past days all children were taught how to do ‘front on’, ‘side on’ and ‘rear’ tackles all around the legs, beginning with arms and hands around the buttocks area with the head behind or at the side and bringing the player to the ground by sliding down his legs with clasped arms, and the game saw great tacklers develop and mature through this method. Possibly the best ever at this type of tackle was the great cover defender Johnny Raper. A tackle around the chest area ‘front on’ was rarely contemplated.

Nowadays figures indicate that only 10% of tackles are around the legs and 90% are around the chest area, the aim is to stop the ball being advanced.

Dixon differs with the method in vogue today, of using the high tackle to stop the ball first; he states that at junior level the first action is to stop the ball runner.

“I look at it differently, maybe at the Broncos we coach the junior players different to most. I don’t see a tackle that way [chest high, first] some people do emphasise stopping the ball initially, but we work on primarily stopping the ball runner first and then secondly we stop the ball.

“The majority of tackles nowadays are front-on, in the days gone by, we had more emphasis on side on tackles and later we taught blocking tackles when the players began coming more forward.

“So, for today’s game, the players need to be strong with their head lead and strong with shoulder contact for all tackles whether front on, side on, or rear and they have to be very good at it. All tackles stem from the players ability initially to make good shoulder contact in a one on one tackle.

“At the Broncos our primary target zone is from the belt line up and below where the ball is carried [midriff] and that is for all tackles. The midriff area is a part the body that the player moves the least.

The proof of the target zone of where to tackle is emphasised by the magical ex Bronco ball runner Steve Renouf, who repeatedly when attempted to be tackled low by a defender showed what a swerve of

the hips and a strong fend could do for an defending player who came in too low to tackle the champion centre.

“The beltline down to the knees was the traditional area target zone in the past for a ‘side on’ tackle, but a player still has movement there, they can open their body up or they can swivel their hips like Renouf would do and beat you with a fend if a defender is committed to that lower target area.”

Footwork is another really key part of being a good defender; it can be underestimated in tackling.

Although some great Bronco players such as Trevor ‘The Axe’ Gillmeister and Gavin Allen could launch at a tackle with two feet planted firmly on the ground it has been proven that this is not the footwork technique used commonly in the modern game.

Dixon continues, “Many tackles are missed because players don’t use their feet ‘to get to the tackle’. Players will plant their feet or place their feet wide apart and waiting for the ball carrier to come to them, this is not good technique. As a general rule the best defenders are on the balls of their feet and have their feet fairly close together and have one foot up and one-foot back.

“A defender is normally at the mercy of the ball carrier if the defender plants his feet too early. The defender can get bumped, run over, have no drive or cannot move laterally. This is where the ‘jumper grabbers’ come from, or the tackle is only shoulder contact with no leg drive or an arm outstretched attempting to implement a tackle, rather than moving the defenders whole body into the tackle.

“The defender should take short steps to the tackle, so that if the ball runner does shift, the defender can take his feet to where he wants to go”.

“We [Broncos] don’t over emphasise which leg the defender should have forward in the tackle, whether it is same leg/same shoulder or opposite leg and shoulder. The key is to get the front foot in close to the ball carrier. Weight distribution is needed through the leg drive, so if it is the near leg or the off leg it does’t make much difference to us.”



# Should junior coaches indulge in the mindset of ‘Teaching’ or ‘Winning’

By Gary Roberts

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Few would deny the taste of victory is indeed sweet. However, is the role of the junior coach to indulge in the mindset of ‘winning the game’ or should they be there to educate young players for the future?

There is so much for a young athlete to absorb that once a coach begins on the track of ‘winning’, his concept of how the game should be played becomes clouded.

Malcolm McMillan of the QRL Southern Division Coaching Panel says:

“I do not stress before a game about winning. I have never told my players to go out and win the game. I tell them game day is when they can have fun.

“We only lost one game last year. Unfortunately it was the Grand Final, but I had no problems with it; we had a great year and the kids played great football.

So, how does a coach teach children to play the game and how does he develop a coaching procedure to adhere to on training days?

“Training should be about players enjoying learning the game, the coach is there to teach and correct player technique.” Says McMillan.

But where does it begin?

One method could begin by watching the previous game. The coach will see problems and situations confronting his team that the players are unable to understand.

He will see team weakness or technical errors with some players and undertake to correct them at the next training session.

Effectively, the negativity of an error in judgment or skill can be turned into something positive by making it the focus of your ensuing practise.

Junior players have a small concentration span, so in order to correct problems it is recommended to limit the focus of sessions to two major points.

Before training begins the coach must be prepared for the practise so that no time will be wasted once it commences. The session starts with the ‘warm up’ and should take about 5-10 minutes; don’t waste precious time with slow jogging exercises.

The coach should implement a warm up drill that will assist in the correction of an immediate problem.

After having a drinks break and a brief chat the ‘drill

practise’ begins. Allow about 20 minutes (divided into two ten minute sections) specifically for correcting the major problems that were identified during the previous game. Explain to the players why they are doing the drill, then explain it again. Encourage players to ask questions, explain the drill again if necessary and show them how you want it done.

Hopefully they will start asking questions, allowing you to reinforce why the drill is being practiced and enabling the fine-tuning of certain aspects.

Only one or two players may have the technical problem that you are trying to correct, but involve the entire team in the learning process. Do not make it too complicated; give them information they will be able to absorb and comprehend.

Practise continually, correcting and amending, and ask the players their thoughts on the drill. Evaluation is needed to confirm that the players understand the drill and its purpose. Has the problem been solved and have the players improved? Did they understand the error? Did all team members comprehend why the correction was needed?

Another drink and talk break is encouraged before moving to the next section.

With the players understanding the drill and its purpose, move the session to a game-related situation played at speed with pressure.

This is the next step in the training session and should last for about 15-20 minutes.

Practice the drills in a game type situation in both attack and defence. The plays should be evaluated by the coach, watching the players making their decisions as they adjust to what is put in front of them. The coach should question his players of what they have learnt. Legendary coach Jack Gibson once said about questioning players:

“The coach might be surprised with the answers.”

A 5-10 minute warm down follows, with the coach still communicating to his players.

The described training session can be completed in 45-60 minutes. If the session was enjoyable, the players feel they are learning about the game from a coach who is interested in them.

Winning will follow. You do not have to talk about it.

# Preparing the Junior Player on Match Day

By John Dixon, Brisbane Broncos

Preparing a junior player on match day is a task for all coaches and although there is no definite procedure to follow a course of action should be planned.

Every coach will have differing views on how to perform duties on match day. Outlined below are some ideas for coaches to think about. Included are some quotes from Jack Gibson's book "Played Strong, Done Fine". Discussion is invited, especially from coaches at mini / mod level through to coaches at elite junior level eg Colts or U/19.

To begin with:

- (1) Winning needs to be placed in perspective. It should not be the primary source of motivation at junior or recreational levels. While acknowledging the desire to win is a natural one, the coaches main emphasis should be on the players enjoying themselves and performing to the best of their ability.

The emphasis on winning also needs to personally be resolved by the coach within his own coaching philosophy eg. Is winning more important than giving each player the equal opportunity to play (not token involvement but genuine participation)?

- (2) Each team is comprised a set of individuals not a set of clones. The aim for the coach is to get the best from each individual, from the most talented and dedicated player to the least motivated and least skilled.

*"You coach individuals not teams. If you can do this a side will emerge." - Jack Gibson*

- (3) Game day is the culmination of a week's preparation.
- (4) Establish the routines that govern match day and ensure that you, the players, your support staff and the team's supporters know and follow them.

On match day there are three times that a coach has contact with the team as a whole and with individuals within the team: pre-game, half-time and full-time.

## (A) PRE-GAME

*'The coach's job in those days was to assemble a good team. Once he had done that he just let them go out and play. There was none of this blackboard nonsense you hear about today. Team talk? Johnny (Cochrane, the coach) used to stick his head around the dressing room door just before a match, smoking a cigar and smelling of whisky, and ask, "Who are we playing today?" We'd reply "Arsenal, boss," and he'd just say "Oh well, we'll beat that lot," before shutting the door and leaving us to it.'*

*- Raich Carter, on playing soccer for Sunderland in the 1930s.*

### • Know Your Players

The NRL and SL games often show a peek preview of the dressing room prior to a game and you will see players doing various things whilst getting ready to play. Some are getting a rub, others are already suited up, some are still fully clothed in their ordinary dress. The coach should respect each players pre-game ritual and give the players the space they require as long as it doesn't interfere with other players.

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Spend this time talking to each player as an individual, ascertaining and establishing his state of preparedness and covering any aspects of the game specific to that player.

*“ I never give a footballer a job he can't do. Encouragement and giving each footballer a job which isn't beyond him often produce outstanding results.”*

- Jack Gibson

The expectation of this pre-game stage is that at a designated time prior to kick-off all players are ready (dressed / strapped / rubbed) to go to warm-up at the same time – no stragglers.

- Warm Up

A few thoughts:

- (1) A regular routine where players feel comfortable and know what is expected and they can best prepare within those parameters.
- (2) A varied routine that focuses on the particular team goals for that week.
- (3) A combination with the initial stages as part of a regular routine and the final stages focusing on team goals.

Warm-ups should prepare players for contact, include some decision-making processes and culminate in vigorous activity.

## **The player's task is to act positively, to carry out the tasks he has set, to play to the best of his ability**

- Pre-Game Team Address

Ensure that while when you talk all players are seated, can see you and you can see them and that they are listening. Your address should be short. Therefore the expectation within the room is that for that time the dressing room is still and the focus in the room is on you, the coach.

There is a tendency in many dressing sheds for many people / players to have a say.

These players would be better served internalising these thoughts and carrying the actions out onto the field with them. Best practice would indicate messages should come from the coach, team captain and if invited to speak, senior players.

The focus of the address should be on:

- (1) The specific goals that the team / coach has set for the week. Often one 'team goal' in

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attack and one 'team goal' in defence are enough. These goals have been the focus of the week's training and the challenge for the team on match day is for each individual within the team to do his best to see the goals are achieved.

- (2) Positive thoughts and positive actions.

One negative thought created in the players' minds can blow away a week of positives.

No matter how the players are feeling, what the weather conditions are like, who the opposition is, the player's task is to act positively, to carry out the tasks he has set, to play to the best of his ability.

### **(B) HALF-TIME**

Half-time is a break and should be used as one. Players should be given a chance to recover physically and to regroup their thoughts mentally. An injury check should be carried out on each player and all players should be re-hydrated.

The coach should then spend some time with each player, this includes bench players who may not have taken the field. As a coach you are expected to understand what is happening on the field and be able to provide answers but players are often able to provide explanations or insights that stem directly from their on-field involvement. Encouragement is better than

derision no matter what your personal feelings about the effort the individual has put in during the half.

*“You don't roar and shout at a player for making a mistake - you tell how to avoid the mistake next time.”*

- Jack Gibson

Any team address, irrespective of the score, should retain a positive theme and should retain the team goal as the main focus. The team goals are what the team





# Hey Coach! - Did you keep a diary?

By Gary Roberts

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The season is over, the premiership has been won and the presentation night was a resounding success.

Junior coaches could look back and think one of two things: “did a good job with the kids and I will improve them next year” or “Maybe I could have done better.”

But did he keep a diary of the year? Did he evaluate and test the players and keep a report card on every player they had in their charge for the past season?

Did he record the skill, fitness, strengths and weakness at the start of the season and where the players finished, in regards to those attributes under his coaching?

Just as importantly did he evaluate his own performance as a coach?

Peter Corcoran, Education Director of the ARL Foundation, said in RLCM Book 14 it is necessary to realise that there are three aspects of coaching to consider with self-evaluation - managing, teaching and communicating.

## **1. Corcoran outlined that managing is the spine of coaching:**

“Just as the backbone keeps you erect, management is the support structure that you need to do the job well.”

In this area, coaches need to ask themselves, ‘Was management involved and if so, how did I manage the situation?’

## **2. Teaching can be seen as the heart of coaching:**

“If you teach players the skills they need, assuming that they are basic essentials of good performance, the learning of all these things will make them better.”

In this case, ask, “How did I perform when teaching the players? Did they understand me?”

## **3. Communication can be seen as the soul of coaching:**

Corcoran views communication as ‘the indefinable, invisible thing that allows you to bring it all together’.

Such questions touch on all the pivotal points of a particular action and therefore lay the foundations for strong performance assessment and rectification.

Coaches should thus note the underlying importance of regularly reflecting on their performances. They should also document in a diary or a report card format where their players are at now and how far they

progressed during the past season.

Malcolm McMillan of the QRL Southern Division coaching panel explains: “Although it is not really necessary to test the ‘Mod’ player, it is essential for the ‘International’ junior player. It will assist in the learning and teaching process.

As there is so much for the players to learn. There are all types of tests and evaluations that can be carried out. Keep the tests simple, create a competitive game to watch a skill that the players possess, maybe even stand back and have another coach run the skills session while you are evaluating and correcting the players. Record their ability with the basics; tackling, passing, catching, kicking, play-the-ball, agility and speed.

Children these days are not as naturally fit as they were in days gone by, so some type of fitness testing should also be applied during the year. They will react to the tests the same way senior players do and they will want to know their individual results.” McMillan said.

This is an opportunity for the coach to develop communication with his players by discussing the tests results.

The current coach’s report of all the players for the season can be previewed at the start of the next season. If a new coach takes over, the diary/report card will be an invaluable source of information for the incoming coach, ensuring a pattern of continuity for the particular team.

Records of the player’s strengths and weakness, the improvement that was made during the past year is all vital information that assists in the development of young players.

The timing of the testing is up to the individual coach or club, but it would be suggested early season would be appropriate time to begin with a maximum of another three times during the year.



# The Triangle & Stages of the Game

Daniel Anderson - NZ Warriors Head Coach

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*Daniel Anderson discusses with Keith Hookway (RLCM) a possible player triangle of the 9 - 7 - 6 and other combinations, and, the importance of the start and finish of the game.*

## ● The 'triangle'

**D.A.** I assume this represents the three players who handle the ball the most in each team. The Warriors have the current Queensland State of Origin hooker and one of the world's best halfbacks so both handle the ball more than anyone else.

I like the halfback (if he is good enough) to have the most carries in the team and Stacey Jones is definitely good enough to carry this expectation.

There does not appear to be a distinct 'third' of the triangle in our team. With a dominant halfback and hooker, the stand off can play a link role with the players outside of him or a running role to the players inside him. The stand off plays an unstructured role.

Other teams have what you would call 9-7-6, 7-6-13 or 9-7-1 combinations. Darren Lockyer carries the ball the most for the Broncos and the Bulldogs have a few combinations.

If you have three or more players who play a ball carrier role then it is difficult for the defence to shut down the attack but in saying that, Andrew Johns, Brett Kimmorley and Stacey Jones dominate their team's attack so their team, the opposition, the media and the spectators all know who will be carrying the football but these players are so good you still have to deal with the threat.

**RLCM Could you advise your thoughts on various stages of the game**

## ● Ideal start to the game

**D.A.** In the first 10-15 minutes, coaches like their teams to set an attitude that will carry them through the game. In addition, to obtain some rhythm in both attack and defence is very helpful.

Momentum is not as important in these early stages because your motivation and energy levels can help you withstand an opposition's attacking advances.

## ● Creating dominance

**D.A.** Dominance will be determined by your mental application. If you can sustain a tough mental attitude for the entire 80 minutes or a large portion of it, then your team invariably will create some form of dominance and even if the bounce of the ball or some refereeing decisions goes against you, the mentally resilient teams will fight back at some stage.

## ● Little men early in the game

**D.A.** It will always be hard for the little men to get involved directly early in the game, but seriously I'm not sure if I want them involved directly anyway. The big men like to 'put a stick in the sand' early. So apart from kicking duties, the little men can be involved with 'off the ball' actions like kick chase, support play and communication.

## ● Interchange

**D.A.** Interchange has become part of the strategy of coaching rugby league teams. I have in my mind a rough idea of the possible rotation of my forwards for the first 60 minutes. Injuries to players who play 80 minutes means modification to your strategy, but this is something that you train for (in case of emergencies).

## ● Four players on the bench

**D.A.** The use of your bench players is very important. These players will either lift the tempo of the game simulating the levels that accompany the start of the game or they will consolidate (late in the game). I along with most coaches would love to have some strike players on the bench and can change the momentum of the game when they come on and usually when the opposition 'starters' are having a rest.

## ● Halftime

**D.A.** I'm not sure if any footballer can recall a half time speech, so the aim for me is let the players both mentally and physically have a break.

A couple of tactical, technical or strategically points at most will be provided along with positive feedback on the first half and then attempting to bring the players back up to arousal (after the 2 minute bell) so they are ready to play. (This is not necessarily by me, but can be from the senior players)

## ● The finish

**D.A.** I would always like to have my team finish strongly, be it in defeat or success but I would prefer they battle it out in the middle stages of the game and come up short than get blown away in the middle and score some late tries to make the score line look respectable.

The best games are usually the teams that battle for various stages and then take advantage of opportunities that rarely come. The classic example is State of Origin games.

# The Psychology of Winning

## How to Develop a Winning Attitude in Rugby League

By Wayne Goldsmith

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*Wayne Goldsmith has written over 200 articles on topics such as talent identification, sports science, sports education, coach development and the testing of elite athletes. His articles have been published in several countries and in five languages and focus on bridging the gap between current sports science / sports medicine research findings and the practical application of this knowledge in sports training and competition programs. In 2000 he was awarded the Eunice Gill Prize for Outstanding Contribution to Coach Education in Australia and in 2002 was an invited guest speaker to the Global Coach Education Conference in Colorado Springs USA.*

*Wayne is currently the High Performance Program Manager for Triathlon Australia and he is working on several innovative sports education / sports science projects in Australia and overseas.*

Grand Final Day.

The team gathers in the locker room. This is an intense, high pressure environment that few experience and even fewer survive. A former player – one of the nation's greatest - walks into the changeroom. There is a respectful hush as he starts to speak.

He talks about pride.

He talks about spirit.

He talks about commitment – about attitude.

He talks about winning – the history of the club in Grand Finals.

With tears in his eyes he begins to recite the names of the great players who have gone before.

He asks players to stand and link arms and to join him in the Club song.

He has done a great MOTIVATIONAL TALK.

This is the perception many people have about the word motivation as it applies to high performance sport: a one off emotion charged lecture from a professional speaker or motivator or sports psychologist.

Effective motivation is not a one off talk by a high powered speaker. It is not the promise of a present or gift or bag of money. It is not a single temporary burst of emotion.

Effective Motivation is a lifestyle. Motivated people live a lifestyle where they are motivated to achieve excellence in everything they do. Every task, every activity, every challenge is an opportunity to set a goal, to try something new and to achieve.

Try this simple exercise.

Have several players sit together before their next training session. Ask them to perform a simple task – making a paper plane. Demonstrate how you would like them to make the plane.

Now give them three minutes to perform the task and observe the players performing their task.

Some players will fold the paper so that it looks roughly like the demonstration version.

Others will fold and bend the paper so that it is identical in most ways to the demonstration version but with small variations in the shape and size of the folds here and there.

Perhaps one player will ensure that every fold is even and smooth. They will make certain that the left and right sides of the plane are balanced and symmetrical. They may even put in a couple of extra folds on the wing to try and make a more advanced design.

And that's the attitude coaches and players should aim to foster – the attitude to do every task – regardless of its nature - to the best of their own ability.

Where the other players have asked of themselves "Can I do this" or "How can I do this", one player has asked "How can I do this well and maybe even do it better than expected". The player has challenged himself and been motivated to complete a relatively simple task to the best of his ability.

Consider the above example in terms of a **training activity**.

The coach asks the team to perform a basic drill – in

this case running and carrying a ball while side stepping through a set of “cones”.

The coach demonstrates the skill, discusses the aim of the activity, asks for questions, demonstrates again and then steps back to allow the players to try the activity.

As with the paper plane, the coach observes a range of behaviours from his players as they try the drill several times.

**Player one** performs the drill correctly.

**Player two** also performs the drill correctly but adds an element of speed into the activity to test their skill level when moving faster.

**Player three** also performs the drill correctly. He also tries to perform the drill at speed but adds an additional element by starting the drill with a step off his left leg the first time, then starting with his right leg the next time to learn to step off either leg with equal skill.

How do coaches turn this **INVOLVEMENT** into **COMMITMENT**?

Much of the success of these motivated players comes from their ability to set challenging goals and to manage the process of achieving their goals.

The great news is that goal setting and goal management is a simple concept for players to learn because that is the way we all work every day in everything we do.

For example. Goal – I want a cup of tea. Solution – I will make one.

Goal: I would like to earn some money. Solution – I will apply for a job.

Our brains work in terms of setting goals and achieving them. Goal setting is a very natural process and humans are by nature very goal orientated.

In high performance sport, the challenge for coaches and players is to set high performance goals and to

## The key to this approach is: **TRAIN AS YOU WOULD COMPETE**

This is the challenge for coaches. There is nothing wrong with what Player one did. He followed the instructions of the coach and performed the activity as required. However, Player two and Player three challenged themselves to perform the task to a higher standard than what was required.

For some reason they were **MOTIVATED** to perform a simple task given to them by their coach to the best of their ability. They decided to set a more challenging goal and then worked to achieve it.

Player one was **involved** in the activity. Players two and three were **committed** to the activity. They approached a relatively simple task with the commitment to do it well.

achieve them through high performance practices and attitudes.

It has been said that the key to success is to develop “the will to win”. However, **the will to win** is not worth anything without the daily commitment to do what it takes to **prepare to win**. It is common for players to want to win – but how many support this desire to win with focus and concentration and determination in everything they do?

There is a sign on the door of the United States Olympic Training Centre dining room. The same sign is on the gym doors and on the doors to other training venues in the Olympic Training Centre. It is all over the Centre so that players, coaches, sports scientists



and administrators can see it and be reminded of it constantly. It says:

**NOT EVERY FOUR YEARS: EVERYDAY.**

This simple sign reminds every individual involved in high performance sport that excellence comes from things practiced and mastered in every training session, every day: that Olympic success every four years comes from the little successes achieved every time an athlete runs, swims, lifts weights, stretches etc

**Being above average**

Group training activities by their nature often mean that individualised training is difficult for the coach to establish. Different levels of fitness, maybe different ages, different levels of ability and so on mean that often training activities can not be set precisely for each player.

Most commonly in these situations, the coach prescribes training activities at an “average level”. That is the training tasks are not too demanding for the players of lower ability nor are they too easy for the talented players.

However, it is not the task, but how the players attack the task that makes all the difference.

**It is not what you do, but HOW you do it that matters.**

Discussions on the topic of training programs, of variations in volume and intensity, of percentage of training done in the various training zones, of the types of exercises and drills to do etc are important. Coaches, players and sports scientists regularly debate the positives and negatives of **WHAT TO DO**.

However, it is the **HOW THEY** (the players) do it that is vital to the success of the training program.

Leading USA Swimming Coach Mark Schubert (coach of World record holder and Olympic Champion Janet Evans) said recently, “A coach told me that he

had a poor taper and subsequently his swimmers had performed poorly at their state championships. I replied, “You didn’t have a poor taper – you had a poor season of training”. “It’s the little things your players do everyday in training, their attitude to every training session and their commitment to every task they attempt in their program that determines how well they do in competition. A great taper will not save you from a poor training effort”.

Successful people (and players) rely heavily on setting and achieving goals – little targets to achieve in their daily lives that provide focus and motivation. The cumulative effect of setting and achieving these small daily goals can be enormous and lead to success at the highest levels.

For example in the Rugby League drills practice:

**Coaches instruction:** Perform the drill correctly.

The players then interpret the coach’s instructions in one of several different ways:

**Player one** – Goal: Perform the drill correctly.

**Player two** – Goal: Perform the drill correctly as fast as I can.

**Player three** – Goal: Perform the drill correctly as fast as I can without making any errors and start off alternate legs to develop the skill to step off either leg at speed.

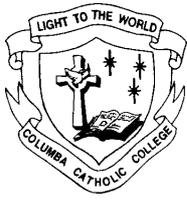
Each player has set a goal and aimed to achieve it. However, each player has set different goals based on their level of ability, confidence, past experience and other factors.

**Make it Happen – Let it Happen**

Many players suffer from “nerves” – being anxious and nervous on the day of competition.

**This is because 90% of all STRESS comes from not doing things when they were supposed to be done!**

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Supporting Rugby League Coaching  
Website: www.burleighbears.com  
Email: bears@burleighbears.com



One of the great challenges coaches and players face is allowing training to be completed at a standard lower than their expected competition performance.

Many players muddle through training doing the minimum standard of effort and application only to find that their competition performances are also lack lustre.

Why? In training they have **LET IT HAPPEN** – they have allowed training to become a place where sub standard skills and poor habits become acceptable practices. Then when they go to the competition and try to **MAKE IT HAPPEN** (i.e. force a successful performance to occur) they find they lack the skills, fitness and abilities to produce a winning effort.

Conversely, successful players have an attitude that **MAKES IT HAPPEN** in training. They apply the same focus and intensity in training that they apply in competition. As a result, on competition day, they can **RELAX** knowing that they can **LET IT HAPPEN** – success is more likely to occur because of their attitude in training.

Leading Australian Swimming Coach Laurie Lawrence once said of confidence in competition, “Nothing gives an athlete confidence like knowing they have done everything they possibly could have done to their best of their ability in training and preparation”.

The key to this approach is: **TRAIN AS YOU WOULD COMPETE.**

If players learn to commit to achieving excellence in everything they do in training and to apply the same focus and determination to training well as they do to competing, they create an **environment of excellence**

in their club or training group. This attitude can make a significant difference to all the players in the group or squad.

As a wise coach once said, “**Attitudes are contagious – is yours worth catching?**”

### Summary

Successful training programs help players develop a wide range of skills and abilities. Over a training season, players develop the characteristics they require to achieve their best in competition through a logical sequence of periodised training activities.

It would not make sense for a sprinter to wait until the morning of their first race of the season to start practicing speed development techniques.

It is not logical for a Rugby League player to start practicing kicking and passing techniques on the morning of the first game of the year.

It therefore is not sensible to wait until the day of the big game to try and develop mental skills. Mental skills need to be developed in every session, every day and in every training activity. By establishing and reaching training goals every day in practice, players develop the confidence and belief that anything is possible in competition.

If success in High Performance sport is as many people suggest, “99% mental”, then neglecting daily mental skills training is to neglect the key to competition success.

In many ways **success is a choice** – as it comes from the decisions and choices players make in every training and competition situation.

## NOTES

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# David Waite Leads the UK Charge

## Providing a positive result for the improving British game

Written by Ryan Ellem

*Two years after heading for the northern hemisphere, former St George and Newcastle coach DAVID WAITE has found himself juggling three integral roles in the Great Britain game, and leading the Old Foe on a charge to the international rugby league summit.*

THERE were plenty of pats on the back within Great Britain's coaching fraternity this season.

Coupled with an encouraging Test Series against New Zealand, three decades of history was turned on its head with the inaugural victory by Great Britain's Academy side over the Australian Schoolboys.

Like the entire British rugby league establishment, David Waite welcomed the result as a positive measurement of the improving British game.

In the third year of his British appointment, Waite juggles the hats of Great Britain coach, technical director and acting performance director, in an exciting timeline in the game.

"We are in the second year of a program that has secured Lottery funding (in principle for 9 years).

"The game is following a world class plan which was written by Nick Halafihi and Joe Lydon, and was the catalyst for the original grant. This plan is now constantly being evaluated and fine tuned."

While choosing to keep the intricacies of the program under wraps, Waite said the fundamentals lay in a holistic player environment which begins sculpting players even before they enter their teens.

"The plan operates at a Start, Potential and Performance level. We have talent identification of players as young as 12-years-old, bringing together a pool of 4000 kids, and developing a process of systems and structures that identifies the best 40.

"We have a national database that allows us to monitor these players as they progress through their junior grades."

These elite players rise through the ranks of 25 geographically defined 'service areas'.

From the service areas, players are selected to go onto regional camps, then further regional carnivals to national camps then to international representative games at 15, 16 and 18.

"In dealing with the game to create a holistic environment for kids, we look to work with the players full network of influence made up of their clubs, their rep teams, schools and families.

"It's important to touch 12, 13 and 14-year-old players with quality information and quality people."

But with a thorough chain of command comes the need for uniformity and moderation within the game for the best possible player development. Thus, concentration on equipping elite level coaches in Great Britain's plan was paramount.

"We've made it a seamless progression for the players and coaches.

"We have regional Development Managers who head the service areas. There is a major trust for a combined approach from both the schools and the amateur competition at that level.

"Coaching has had changes - not major ones - just developing a bit broader understanding - greater attention to detail, if you like.

"With something like situational coaching, we've looked at different methods that could be employed, there are some very intelligent coaches over here with a great appetite for ideas and information.



# NOTES

“It’s great to have smart players, but they don’t get to that point without smart coaches.”

Peter Roe, coach of English National League side Swinton, commended Waite’s emphasis on grooming the coaching staff of feeder clubs.

“A few of the clubs outside of Super League do it tough, but David’s brought the elite coaches together to establish a unified structure,” he said.

“At one point, we were going nowhere - there was no association of coaches.

“But now the coaches attend training camps, and I think David’s brought a style that’s positionally and situationally specific ... he’s given the game a lot of shape.”

Waite has stepped into a culture where rugby league doesn’t enjoy the level of popularity it does in Australia.

Similar to Australia, Waite said there were instances of elite league players traversing to rugby union and fast-tracked along their coaching programs on the face of their core skills.

However, recent achievements by Great Britain’s top side is strengthening its player numbers.

“No British sport will make severe inroads into soccer. In the northern areas, league has its biggest profile.”

Parramatta coach Brian Smith, who enjoyed a coaching stint in England in the mid-1990s, said a discernible difference between the English and Australian competitions rested in the comparison of the elite players.

Waite admitted differences existed at both a player and coaching level half a decade ago.

“But you have to realise, the game only become professional in 1996, and it has come a long way in that time,” Waite said.

“We now have Under-18 and Under-21 players competing in a professional environment. But overall, there has been significant improvement at both the senior and junior level.

“But there are a number of teams like Bradford and St Helens who no doubt would be very competitive in the NRL.

“The intensity of (State of) Origin is stronger, and it is a big advantage for Australian players as a school for international representation.”

# Strength Training for Football

Noel D Duncan, Ph.D., C.S.C.S. and Gordon S Lynch, Ph.D., FACSM, C.S.C.S.

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*Dr. Noel Duncan is Head Conditioning Coach at Richmond Football Club in the AFL. He is co-founder and executive director of fitness2live, a company offering online personalised fitness and nutrition programs and cutting-edge information on health and sports performance.*

*Dr. Gordon Lynch is Senior Lecturer in Physiology at University of Melbourne. He is co-founder and research manager of fitness2live.*

## Summary

Strength training plays an important role in the overall conditioning of athletes for all football codes, but little information is available to coaches regarding the principles underlying the design of suitable training programs. This article from *The Coaches Edge* ([www.coachesedge.com.au](http://www.coachesedge.com.au)) presents some guidelines for designing and implementing a strength-training program for your players.

## Introduction

Football places unique physical demands upon its participants. As a “stop and go” sport, athletes may be walking or jogging at one moment and sprinting or grappling with opponents the next (1).

Strength training is now considered an integral training component for most football teams, from the elite level down to serious amateurs.

Scientific research into strength training has been carried out in many “stop and go” sports including rugby league, rugby union, soccer and American football (2,3), providing a solid knowledge base to develop recommendations.

## The Importance of Strength Training

Strength conditioning has the potential to assist footballers by enhancing core strength i.e. strength and control of the trunk and pelvis, muscle size, speed, overall strength and power, balance and coordination. (See [Figure 1 Page 23](#))

At the elite level, footballers are becoming taller and heavier, and the speed at which the ball moves is increasing. However, the time that players are directly involved in play is diminishing, allowing longer rest periods between higher-intensity periods (4).

Increased speed means players are colliding with much greater impact (4,5). For players to be able to run fast the entire game, they need to increase strength and power, yet maintain a lean body weight. Therefore, increasing a player’s power-to-weight ratio is the primary goal in strength training, regardless of gender or level of competition.

## Strength Training Exercises

Coaches should always choose exercises that mimic what happens on the field.

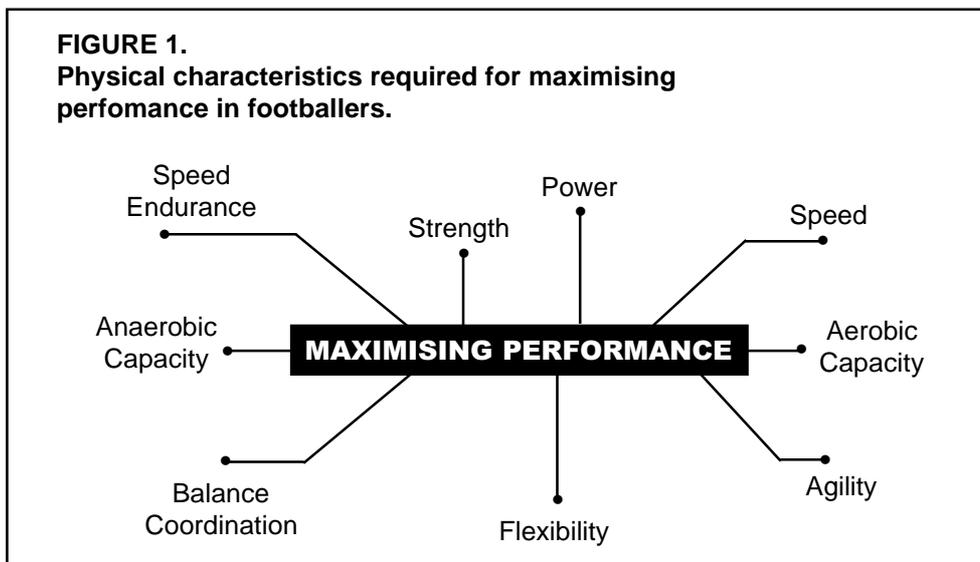
Preference should be given to multi-joint or compound exercises, which use all the major muscle groups; these include the squat, lunge, clean, and push-press exercises. Free weights should be used instead of machines to maximise the use of stabilising muscle groups (see [Table 1](#)).

**Table 1: Example strength training exercises commonly prescribed for football.**

Trunk	Upper	Lower
Deadlifts	Chin ups	Forward and Side Lunges
Back Extension	Dips	Step-Ups
Cleans	Prone Row	Squats
Abdominal Training	Medicine ball push	One-Legged Exercises
Hang Cleans	Push-Press	

‘Closed kinetic chain exercises’ - where both feet remain in contact with the ground - promote joint stability and activate large muscle groups, with optimal muscle recruitment. Introducing controlled degrees of instability can also enhance the effectiveness of the program. The use of low balance beams and wobble boards also force athletes to use their stabilising muscles to control their balance and movement.

**FIGURE 1.**  
**Physical characteristics required for maximising performance in footballers.**



### **Speed Strength**

Explosive, controlled movements are vital for football. Dynamic exercises which assist with this include weighted jumps and jump squats using lighter loads, Olympic-style lifts such as snatch, clean, hang-clean and jerk, as well as throwing movements using weighted medicine balls.

Although the squat is a good general exercise to develop basic strength, the lunge is more appropriate for football since it closely resembles what happens in a game. Single leg exercises should also be incorporated to add variety in a strength session and allow a greater training effect without the need to add heavier weights. These will, however, need a longer recovery time.

Core strength training, through a variety of abdominal and trunk exercises, is also important, and the safe and effective use of 'fitballs' is encouraged.

### **Sets and Repetitions - How Much to Lift and How Often?**

A major topic of debate among applied physiologists relates to whether performing one set of an exercise is sufficient to produce similar increases in strength as performing multiple sets. Although it appears that performing single sets of different exercises can produce significant benefits for athletes, two or three sets are usually recommended for football; the first being a warm-up set and subsequent sets representing the training load.

When starting a strength-training program, bodyweight should be the only "load" and the focus should be on compound exercises such as squats, lunges, dips, push-ups, and chin-ups. As strength and techniques improve, players should incorporate light Rugby League Coaching Manuals (RLCM)

free weights. The intensity can be gradually increased by increasing the loads, the number of repetitions, the number of sets, and the amount of rest between sets.

A strength training session should last no more than 45 minutes so that training is maintained at a high intensity and energy levels are not depleted excessively.

In pre-season, up to four strength training sessions can be completed per week as long as there is sufficient recovery between each. More than four sessions per week could impair muscle recovery and adaptation. During this phase of preparation an emphasis should be placed on developing strength and power and improving identified weaknesses. During the competitive season, it is difficult to program strength training more than twice per week because of the recovery time needed. In planning team workouts, the quality of strength training should be emphasised over the quantity of training.



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# Skill assessments chart for young players

From League Coach FORUM

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

Below is a set of skills assessments which Andy Stuart has put together to test INDIVIDUAL skills right through the Primary school age group.

“There are many reasons for putting this together but the main ones are so that it acts as a motivational tool for the youngsters, a coaching reference for the coaches and a guide to the effectiveness of coaches.” Stuart adds.

## Level 1 Skills Assessment (for 5-7 year olds)

Catching  
Hands up  
Fingers up  
Palms out  
Call for the Pass  
Take it early  
Ball Carrying  
Ball in Two Hands  
Holding the fat bit  
Thumbs on top  
Basic Passing  
Look where passing  
Pendulum Action  
Single movement  
Flat/behind  
Ahead of the receiver  
Sympathetic Pass  
Score a Try  
Ball in Two Hands  
Hand / Ball / Ground  
Beating a Player  
Inside  
Outside  
In ‘n’ Out  
Stop ‘n’ Go  
Side on Tackle  
Low body position  
Quick - Slow - Quick  
Arms “Ready”  
Head behind  
Hit with shoulder  
Wrap Arms around legs  
Drive with Legs  
Pull with arms  
Maintain grip till on ground  
Get to feet quickly

## Level 2 Skills Assessment (For 8 - 9 year olds. Assessment would include ALL of the above + section immediately below)

Pop Pass - to the Right  
Look where passing  
Step to the Left

Arms Drop  
Raise the ball Vertically using  
fingers and wrists  
Ball hangs at reciever head height  
Support the new ball carrier  
Pop Pass - to the Left  
Look where passing  
Step to the Left  
Arms Drop  
Raise the ball Vertically using  
fingers and wrists  
Ball hangs at reciever head height  
Support the new ball carrier  
Falling on the ball  
”Baseball slide”  
Pull’s ball into the chest  
Get to feet quickly  
Turn to face attackers  
Break left or right  
Pick up  
Low body position  
Step over the ball  
Most weight on front foot  
Two hands on the ball  
Break left or right  
Stay Low  
Fast feet away  
Head on Tackle  
Low body position  
Arms “Ready”  
Set position  
Head to one side  
Hit with shoulder  
Wrap Arms around Waist  
Drive with Legs  
Pull with arms  
Maintain grip till on ground  
Get to feet quickly  
Pass out of the tackle  
Raise the ball  
Take the tackle  
Pass while falling  
Pass accross the back of the tackler  
Arms “Ready”

**Level 3 Skills Assessment (For 9 - 10 year olds.  
Assessment would include  
ALL of the above + section immediately below)**

Clearing Pass - To the right  
Place Left foot next to the ball  
Point the Right foot towards the receiver  
Left hand to the rear of the ball  
Right hand at the front of the ball  
Weight transfer to Right foot  
Single movement Lift / Pass  
Spin the ball with Left hand  
Follow the pass  
Clearing Pass - To the left  
Place Right foot next to the ball  
Point the Left foot towards the receiver  
Right hand to the rear of the ball  
Left hand at the front of the ball  
Weight transfer to Left foot  
Single movement Lift / Pass  
Spin the ball with Right hand  
Follow the pass  
Timed Pass  
Run at pace at first  
Slow down as approach the defender  
Deliver a pass at a given distance  
from "defender"  
Flat Pass  
Follow the pass  
Move between Defender and ball carrier  
Grubber Kick - off the right foot  
Hold the ball near the ends  
Drop the ball onto the Right Foot  
High Right Knee  
No follow through  
Drive the ball into the ground  
Hit the target  
Grubber Kick - off the left foot  
Hold the ball near the ends  
Drop the ball onto the Left Foot  
High Left Knee  
No follow through  
Drive the ball into the ground  
Hit the target  
Rear Tackle  
Low body position  
Arms "Ready"  
Head to one side  
Hit with shoulder  
Wrap Arms around Waist  
Slide down legs  
Pull with arms

**Level 4 Skills Assessment (For 10 - 11 year olds.  
Assessment would include  
ALL of the above + section immediately below)**

Catching a high ball  
Watch the ball  
Turn towards the attacking players  
Jump towards the ball  
Lift Knee nearest to the attacking player  
Hands above head  
Fingers up  
Palms out  
Take it early in two hands  
2 V 1  
Move the defender away from the support player  
Deliver a timed pass to the support player  
Punt - off the left foot  
Hold the ball near the ends  
Place the ball onto the Left Foot  
Whip the lower half of the leg through the ball  
Drive straight through the "gate"  
Hit the target box  
Punt - off the right foot  
Hold the ball near the ends  
Place the ball onto the Right Foot  
Whip the lower half of the leg through the ball  
Drive straight through the "gate"  
Hit the target box  
Defence  
Point to opposition player being marked  
Name the target  
Keep the line  
Keep the Pattern  
Make the Tackle  
Taking a Head on tackle on your terms  
Raise the ball  
Step away from the tackler  
Keep going forward  
Take the tackle  
Free hands  
Land on the ground  
Basketball style pass to support player



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**Level 5 Skills Assessment (For 11- 12 year olds.  
Assessment would include  
ALL of the above + section immediately below)**

- Long Pass - to the Right
- Look where passing
- Plant Right foot
- High Left Elbow
- Spin the ball with Left hand
- Flat pass
- Weight transfer to Right foot
- Follow the pass
- Long Pass - to the Left
- Look where passing
- Plant Left foot
- High Right Elbow
- Spin the ball with Right hand
- Flat pass
- Weight transfer to left foot
- Follow the pass
- Switch Pass
- Run diagonally
- Turn towards the support player
- Give a Pop Pass
- Continue Diagonal line
- Straighten up to support the ball carrier
- Taking a Side on tackle on your terms
- Swing hips towards the tackler
- Attempt to Stay Big
- Bump 'n' Burl (Spin out of a tackle)
- Turn sideways
- Big step into the tackle
- Spin out backwards
- Fast feet out of contact
- Accelerate away

**NOTES**

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**Reply from Bob Wood**

Wow! ... did something similar myself a few years ago although I only limited myself to 20 skills. I found that the assessing and record keeping outweighed the advantages. Skill based assessment is great but you need time to keep the records up to date.

I've looked over the skills and they are very good, they would be wonderful for a coach to have as a check list. If you were to run an offensive training session and to mentally check off each of the skills required for that session BEFORE the session, then you could watch for those skills during a session and correct as the drills progress. AFTER the session, sit down and review the skills to check that you monitored them all during the session.

Then isolate two or three that really need improving and devise your next session around those two or three skills. Probably in 3 months time, run your first offensive training session again and hopefully you would see an improvement in some areas. You may then be able to focus on other areas to work on.

# Injuries to the Abdomen, what can happen beneath

Doug King RCpN PGDipSportMed

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Typically the game of Rugby League involves a lot of physical contact and collision. This has seen the players required to undergo physical conditioning and strength training to reduce the risk of injury to the body from the pounding that ensues from any contact sport. A lot of courses and information is aimed at the care of the injured player who has sustained a knee, ankle, shoulder or head injury but there are other parts of the body that can also be susceptible to injury during any contact sport.

One area that has not really been discussed is that of the abdominal region. This area typically starts from just below the lungs and continues down to the hips and contains many body parts that all can tear, rupture or be damaged from a blunt blow typically found in a collision sport. This area is also the focus of the basic tackle and can be expected to be hit in the game from any direction sometimes many times throughout a game so awareness of the possible injuries and their immediate treatment is important for the team trainer/medic.

The main components of the abdominal region is the gastrointestinal and urinary tracts. These consist of the Stomach, Pancreas, Spleen, Liver, Gallbladder, Kidneys, Ureters, Bladder, Prostate and the small and large Intestine (the appendix is included in this). As well there is also the reproductive organs (for the female player these are largely protected by the bones of the pelvis) and these should not be forgotten as any injury to these usually requires immediate medical supervision from advanced medical services.

Surrounding these organs, and holding them into place, is the peritoneum which can also be injured by trauma. The top layer of this area is covered over by the abdominal muscles and then the skin, and it is often not easy to quickly identify what exactly is wrong and what has been injured so a knowledge of the mechanism of the injury (i.e. how they were injured on the field - hurt during front on tackle, hit from behind over the kidney area etc.) can often lead the initial assessment into the general area that may have been injured.

In the scenario where the player is tackled and unable to stand, or slowly rises to their feet, the primary assessment should be to eliminate the potential injuries and to localize the area in which the injury has occurred. Typically the player will have pain to the general area but a methodical process in the assessment will help to quickly identify what area within the abdominal space has been injured. If the pain is general then it would be recommended to have the player removed from the field and continue on with a secondary survey elsewhere.

Any sudden blow to the abdominal region usually results in a generalized reaction and the player typically is doubled up grasping their abdomen and may be also short of breath due to the blow direction also involving the diaphragm and the associated loss of breath. There may also be associated symptoms of abdominal pain such as feelings of nausea and vomiting and the player may be shivering and this could also be related to shock. All players with any abdominal injuries or suspected injuries should be observed for these signs and if they occur they should be referred on to a medical facility for further assessment and monitoring.

For ease of assessment it may be best to divide the abdominal area into three parts. The top portion is taken from the top of the abdominal area (in the middle of the body from the highest point at the bottom of the rib cage closest to the sternum) and extends down to an imaginary line drawn across from the bottom of the rib cage just above the area of the "belly button". The middle portion is from this line down to another imaginary line drawn across the abdominal area from the top of the pelvis bones. The bottom portion of the abdominal area is from the line drawn across from the top of the pelvis bones to the pubic or groin region of the player.

Using this three part assessment ask the player to point to where the pain is. If they indicate that it is in the top part of the abdomen this can indicate that the stomach, duodenum (upper part of the small intestine), biliary tract, pancreas or spleen may be involved.

If they indicate that the pain is in the middle part of the abdomen then the possible cause of the pain may be related to the small intestine and the proximal third of the colon and appendix. Pain in the lower part of the abdomen may indicate the cause to be of the distal two thirds of the colon, the reproductive organs or the bladder.

Any further examination of the abdomen should be undertaken by a qualified medical practitioner and it is best to not push and prod around as this may cause further trauma to the player.

If the player has received an injury to left lower chest area or upper left side of the abdomen it is important to check if there are any broken ribs as this could indicate further injuries beneath the area. The spleen is located beneath these ribs and can be injured by trauma to this area. Watch for any left sided upper abdomen pain and distension and there may be some left sided shoulder pain due to irritation to the diaphragm.

Signs of shock usually follow with this injury and the player should be sent to a medical facility for further assessment and observation. Trauma to the right side of the upper abdomen area may include injury to the liver and this can be associated with broken ribs on this side of the lower chest area. Injury to the Liver usually presents with upper right sided abdominal pain, tenderness over the area and changes in the blood pressure and pulse rates.

Any direct blow to the abdomen such as those “big hits” on the opposition player may also result in ongoing trauma to the abdominal wall. Even with conditioned abdominal muscles there is still the risk of injury to the musculature that can result in bleeding within the muscle. The injured muscle usually swells very quickly due to this bleeding and there may be some visible signs of this especially if the superficial epigastric artery is torn. This injury may require some surgical intervention and the injured player should be sent onto a medical facility for further assessment and observation.

Blows to the kidney areas are usually sustained with hits directly over the immediate area and even minor injuries can result in some bruising or tear in the kidney capsule. If this occurs the player may present with tenderness over the immediate area, some swelling around the area of the injured kidney, guarding when the area is touched and sometimes bruising may be present. These injuries usually require a period of rest but should be assessed and managed through a medical facility.

Injuries to the pelvis and underlying organs (bladder, urethra’s, rectum and prostate) are usually associated with high speed sports and not likely to be seen within Rugby League but anyone suspected of having this should be immediately sent to a medical facility as there may be damage to these organs which needs urgent medical treatment. Any injuries to the external genitalia may also require urgent medical treatment and also should be immediately sent to the nearest medical facility for further assessment and care.

When removing the player from the field with a suspected abdominal injury it pays to get the player to support their injured part when they move. It is best to also let the player move themselves and not be pulled up off the ground by the trainer or team-mates. By getting the player to move themselves you can also assess how severe the pain is and you are also able to reassess for dizziness, nausea or other symptoms that may occur. At this point the player may decide not to move and the assessment may indicate a more severe injury than initially suspected.

Sideline care for the player with a suspected abdominal injury requires that they are monitored for any signs of shock, rested fully and apply RICE directly over the area injured. This will help to alleviate the pain of the player and can aid in supporting the area directly.

If you have a medical professional on hand at the venue get them to assess the player and this enables you to remain concentrated on the game and the rest of the players out on the field. If there is no one to supervise the injured player get someone to call for an ambulance to transport the player to a medical facility and ensure that someone stays physically beside the injured player until they are placed in the ambulance, or transported to the medical facility. Never let the player go to the medical facility on their own or drive themselves to the medical facility as the injury could become worse.

The basics for the care of the injured player are similar for all aspects of the body irrespective of the area. Remember to carry out a methodical assessment and always look at preserving the injury from becoming worse. If in any doubt about what to do stop there and call for further medical assistance. Don’t worry about holding up the game as the players medical condition is more important and certainly don’t be rushed into making any decision about moving the player.

Remember as you approach the player that is injured you are responsible for their care so simple steps, safe strategies and sound decisions will ensure that the player remains safe and can return to activity again.

# Cramps and Stitch

Just about everyone who has ventured out to do some exercise has experienced either a cramp or a stitch at some time in their lives. These complaints can range from mildly uncomfortable to severely debilitating but there is no question that they are a great source of frustration to everyone from recreational exercisers to serious athletes. Unfortunately, scientists know very little about the two conditions and how to avoid them. Consequently, there is a lot of folklore surrounding the topic, making it difficult to know exactly how to deal with these problems.

## WHAT IS CRAMP?

Cramp is a sudden, tight and intense pain that most commonly occurs in the leg muscles especially the gastrocnemius (calf), hamstrings (back of thigh) and quadriceps (front of thigh). It can range from a slight twinge to an excruciating pain, and may last for a few seconds or several minutes. A cramp can be a one-off occurrence or repeat several times before the muscle relaxes and the pain goes away.

## WHAT CAUSES CRAMP?

Cramp is caused when a muscle involuntary and forcibly contracts and does not relax. While this seems to be due to an abnormal stimulation of the muscle, the exact mechanism is unknown. Cramp is more likely to occur in tired muscles therefore poor fitness or exercising at high workloads can increase the likelihood. Inadequate stretching may also contribute.

Dehydration may contribute to cramp especially when fluid and sodium losses are high. Sodium is involved in initiating nerve signals that make muscles contract. A deficit of sodium and fluid may “irritate” muscles causing them to contract uncontrollably.

Cramp has been attributed to the depletion of potassium and minerals such as calcium and magnesium. However, this idea does not have strong support as very little potassium, calcium and magnesium is lost during exercise. Also deficiency is rare as these substances are abundant in the diet. It has been suggested that magnesium is relocated in the body during exercise rather than lost in sweat. Therefore, a magnesium imbalance in relation to other electrolytes (sodium and potassium) may be involved. Further evidence needs to be gained in this area.

The use of creatine has been linked to cramps, based on anecdotal reports from athletes, and the hypothesis that a creatine-loaded muscle cell may become so “full” with the storage of creatine and fluid, that the integrity of the membrane is disrupted. Although this theory is interesting, studies which have followed the cramping and injury outcomes of groups of athletes have not found any difference in the prevalence of problems occurring in creatine users and non-users.

## HOW CAN I AVOID CRAMP?

Allow adequate recovery and rest for muscles after hard training sessions.

Increase strength and fitness. Stronger, fitter muscles are more resilient to fatigue and therefore cramp. Be cautious when changing speed or intensity especially during the later stages of exercise. Fatigued muscles take longer to adapt to increased workloads.

Wear comfortable, unrestrictive clothing and footwear.

Stay well hydrated during exercise by drinking appropriate amounts of fluid. Sports drinks are a good option as they help to replace sodium losses, especially when sweating at high rates. In most cases, salt tablets are not recommended. However, during **ultraendurance** exercise (particularly in very hot weather or when sweat losses are high) it can be necessary to be more aggressive in the replacement of sodium. Sodium intakes of approximately 0.25-0.7 gram per hour may be necessary for ultraendurance exercise lasting more than 3-4 hours. This may require the use of salty foods (i.e. Vegemite sandwiches, crackers, pretzels, potato crisps) or special products such as electrolyte powders or tablets to keep pace with sodium requirements. Speak to a Sports Dietitian if you think this applies to you.

## HOW SHOULD CRAMP BE TREATED?

Stretching helps to decrease the muscle contraction and allow the muscle to relax. Massaging the area may help to alleviate pain. When cramps are severe, applying ice can stop the spasm and help to relieve pain. Rest and replacing fluid losses will also bring improvement.

## **DOES CRAMP INDICATE A MORE SERIOUS PROBLEM?**

In most cases, cramps are a temporary event and do not lead to serious problems. However, sometimes cramps can indicate a more serious medical condition. You should always see your doctor if cramps are severe, occur regularly, fail to improve with simple treatment or are not related to obvious causes such as strenuous exercise.

## **WHAT IS STITCH?**

Stitch is a localised pain usually felt on the side, just below the ribs. It is sometimes accompanied by a stabbing pain in the shoulder joint. The pain can range from sharp or stabbing to mild cramping, aching or pulling. Sometimes people can exercise through the pain however, usually the sufferer is forced to slow down or cease exercise. The pain usually eases within a few minutes after ceasing exercise however some people experience some residual soreness for a few days, especially after severe pain. Stitch seems to be more prevalent in activities that involve vigorous upright, repetitive movement of the torso. Activities such as running (particularly when going down hill) and horse riding may be more prone to causing stitch however it can occur in any type of activity.

## **WHAT CAUSES STITCH?**

Scientists are unsure of the exact cause of stitch. For some time, stitch was thought to be caused by a reduction in blood supply to the diaphragm, a large muscle involved in breathing. It was thought that during exercise, blood was shunted away from the diaphragm and redirected to exercising muscles in the limbs. This theory has now lost favour with scientists. Both the diaphragm and the limb muscles need to work harder during exercise so it is unlikely that an inadequate blood flow is directed to the diaphragm.

Another popular theory is that stitch is caused by organs pulling on the ligaments which connect the gut to the diaphragm. Ligaments which support organs such as the stomach, spleen and liver are also attached to the diaphragm. Jolting during exercise may cause these organs to pull on the ligaments and create stress on the diaphragm.

A more recent idea is that stitch is caused by irritation of the parietal peritoneum. Two layers of membrane (peritoneum) line the inside wall of the abdominal cavity. One layer covers the abdominal organs. The other layer (parietal peritoneum) attaches to the abdominal wall. The two layers are separated by lubricating fluid, which allows the two surfaces to move against each other without pain. The parietal

peritoneum is attached to a number of nerves. It is thought that the stitch occurs when there is friction between the abdominal contents and the parietal peritoneum. This friction may be caused by a distended (full) stomach or a reduction in the lubricating fluid.

Eating and drinking inappropriately prior to exercise may exacerbate stitch by causing a full stomach or dehydration. Poor fitness, an inadequate warm-up and exercising at high intensity may also be factors. A sudden change in biomechanics such as increased stride length or frequency may increase the risk of stitch by affecting the way that the torso moves.

## **HOW CAN I AVOID STITCH?**

Eating too closely to exercise or consuming inappropriate foods and fluids seems to exacerbate the stitch. High fat foods, and foods and fluids with a high sugar concentration are more likely to cause problems. The likelihood of stitch occurring may be reduced by allowing 2-4 hours before exercising after a large meal and choosing high carbohydrate, low fat and moderate to low protein options in the pre-exercise meal. For further information see Eating Before Exercise.

During exercise, it is possible that a full stomach contributes to stitch. Concentrated fluids such as soft drink and cordial empty slowly from the stomach therefore are likely to lead to a fuller stomach. Water and sports drink empty more quickly and are a better option. It is also preferable to adopt a pattern of consuming small amounts of fluid at frequent intervals during exercise rather than trying to drink large volumes all at once.

Stitch may also be minimised by following a training schedule that progressively increases in intensity and duration. Sudden increases in intensity are more likely to cause stitch. It is much better to start at an easy level and slowly build up.

## **HOW SHOULD STITCH BE TREATED?**

Sometimes the stitch eases if you slow down and drop your intensity for a period. However, the most common way to alleviate stitch is to bend forward while pushing on the affected area and breathing deeply. Sometimes this can be done while exercising but usually the pain eases more quickly when exercise is ceased. Another option is to lie down while elevating your hips.

## **DOES STITCH INDICATE A MORE SERIOUS PROBLEM?**

The stitch is rarely a sign of more serious problems. However any pain that is persistent and does not ease when exercise ceases should be investigated by a doctor.

# Supplements in Sport

## Why are they so tempting?

Supplied by Australian Institute of Sport, Department of Sports Nutrition

[www.ais.org.au/nutrition](http://www.ais.org.au/nutrition)

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The sports world is filled with pills, potions, powders, bars and drinks that promise to give the athlete a winning edge. The claims are emotive – better recovery, improved endurance, increased strength, loss of body fat, an enhanced immune system. If you are striving to be at the top, how can you afford to miss out on these miracles? And can you afford for your competitors to have these advantages if you don't? These are some of the feelings that make athletes an easy target for supplements and special sports foods. The following two fact sheets will provide answers to some of the questions most frequently asked about supplements.

***Surely if a supplement or sports food makes a promise to improve performance it must be true?***

Most people believe that government laws would prevent supplement companies from making outrageous or untrue claims about their products. In other words they believe that if a company makes a claim, particularly in writing, it must be correct. Unfortunately this is not the case.

In Australia, supplements that belong to the pill, potion and powder category fall under the control of the TGA (Therapeutic Goods Administration). Most fall within

number of claims to be made on the product package.

While the TGA and ANZFA expect manufacturers to avoid making wild claims about their products on labels and packaging, these regulations are not heavily policed. More to the point, it is almost impossible to keep tabs on the prolific flow of articles and advertisements for supplements that appear in sports magazines, brochures, the Internet or other points of communication. The bottom line is that supplements can be marketed with very little control over the claims and messages they provide, and many companies appear to take full advantage of this.

***But many famous and successful athletes take supplements. Doesn't this show that they work?***

Testimonials from athletes provide a key form of advertising used by manufacturers of supplements and sports foods. The athlete associates their recent success with the use of a product or product range – as part of a sponsorship or paid advertising by the manufacturers, or sometimes simply as 'word of mouth' around the sporting world. Obviously this is a persuasive argument to other athletes – we discussed the mindset regarding supplements in the introduction to this fact sheet.

## Sports foods are often well worth the expense

the 'listable' items category, the most lightly regulated category of the TGA, and are required only to provide proof that they don't contain ingredients that are banned by our custom laws. The TGA has no requirement that a product must have proof of its benefits to be accepted at this level. Sports foods, including bars and drinks, fall under the control of ANZFA (Australia and New Zealand Food Authority). ANZFA provides regulations about the ingredients and labeling of sports foods, and permits a limited

Sports scientists, however, are sceptical that the association between the supplements and the athlete's performance is anything more than circumstantial. Performance is the result of many factors - including talent, training, equipment, diet and mental attitude. In real life, an athlete will be unable to pinpoint how much each of these factors is contributing. In some cases, when the athlete has lots of these factors working well, the supplement may get all the accolades even when it fails to contribute at all! In other cases,

any boost to performance that comes with taking a new product is simply the result of a 'placebo effect'. If the athlete feels that they have received something special, or that they are suddenly receiving more monitoring and attention from their coach or other people, they will be motivated to do better. Thus better performance can come from a psychological belief rather than a real effect from the new product.

***So are supplements all the same? Are they all a waste of money?***

The answer to this is definitely not! Some supplements and sports foods are valuable in helping an athlete achieve their nutritional goals and optimal performance. However, there are literally thousands of supplements and special sports foods targeted at athletes, with new products appearing on the market each month. To try to sort out the confusion about supplements, it is useful to divide them into two main categories. The first category is dietary supplements (Table 1), which play a role in providing a practical alternative to food.

**Table 1. Dietary supplements for athletes**

- Sports drinks (eg Gatorade, Isosport, Powerade)
- Sports gels (eg Powergel, Clif shot, GU, CarboShotz)
- Sports bars (eg PowerBar, Clifbar, Maxim bar)
- Liquid meal supplements (eg GatorPro, Sustagen Sport)
- Carbohydrate loaders/high carbohydrate powders (eg Gatorlode, Maxim)
- Iron supplements, calcium supplements, multivitamin/mineral supplements used under direction of a sports physician or dietitian to prevent or treat a dietary deficiency

***How do sports foods and dietary supplements work?***

Athletes may find these products valuable in helping them achieve their nutrition goals in a busy day or during an exercise session. Sports nutrition guidelines provide specific goals for intake pre-event, during a prolonged session, or for post-exercise recovery. Products such as sports drinks provide a tailor-made way to look after these nutritional needs. They are an alternative to everyday foods, which might need to be juggled to produce the same nutritional composition, or which might be too impractical to consume directly before or during intense exercise. Sometimes, the convenience factor is the selling point – it is easier to grab a bar or gel to take on a long ride, rather than worry about squashing a sandwich. And these products can sit in a sports bag or car for after training without spoiling or needing special preparation.

Occasionally, when an athlete is unable to meet all their nutrient needs from food, a vitamin and/or mineral supplement may be prescribed by a sports dietitian or physician to treat or prevent a nutrient deficiency. These scenarios should be left to the advice of the experts who can put together a total management plan, rather than rely on the pill alone.

The issue with dietary supplements is knowing when and how to use them so that they assist with sports nutrition goals. When used in the right way – the right amount at the right time on the right occasion - they can help an athlete train and compete at their best. In many cases they can be shown to directly enhance performance – for example, there are many studies that show that sports drinks improve performance in prolonged exercise sessions, and more recently, in high-intensity events of about an hour.

***Aren't sports foods more expensive than everyday foods? Aren't they just for elite athletes?***

Sports foods generally cost more than a similar everyday food. This reflects the specialised marketing, and the research and education program that may support the product. But when used correctly to achieve the nutritional benefit, sports foods are often well worth the expense. Contrary to popular opinion, they aren't just for the elite. An athlete who is playing a long and sweaty game of basketball can expect to play better by drinking a sports drink to replace fluid losses and take in extra fuel. This is as true for someone playing in an under 16 game as it is for Michael Jordan. By meeting nutritional goals, the athlete will be able to meet the true level of their talent – whatever level that is.

Some athletes (and non-athletes) use these supplements outside the conditions in which they are likely to achieve a direct sports nutrition goal. For example, some people eat sports bars as a snack, or have a sports drink with their lunch. In these situations sports foods may simply be a more expensive version of food. Overconsumption of any sports foods (for example, eating sports bars to replace meals on a regular basis) can lead to dietary imbalances as well as an unnecessary burden on the wallet. Sports nutrition education should make the athlete aware of the best uses of these special sports foods.

**For more information visit  
[www.ais.org.au/nutrition](http://www.ais.org.au/nutrition)**

# **RLCM Drills**

## **Off-Load Drills**

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The New Zealand Warriors perfected their ball off-loading skills over the past two years. This skill was part of the ammunition that took them to the 2002 NRL Grand Final. Along the way they created pressure to opposition teams with their ball off-load ability.

Successful offloads can turn a set of six plays into a possible set of seven, eight or even possibly nine plays, think about the pressure that creates on the opposition.

Off loading inside and outside balls are major skills of the game when a team is in possession of the football.

So, how do you practice your offloads?

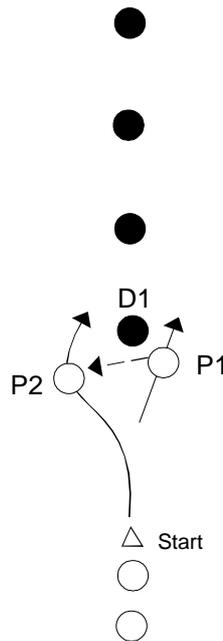
In this edition we have produced seven offload drills with the courtesy of Dave Stores and the Penrith Panthers. RLCM wants coaches to study and put them to practice, add variations and progressions to suit your players.

Begin a off-load drill at training, create a game related situation, review it, evaluate it, refine it. Take it to the game, if it doesn't work, start over again.

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## OFF-LOAD (*Drill 1*)

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### SET UP:

Minimum 8 players

### THE DRILL:

- 6 defenders line up in single file
- P1 runs at D1 moving to the left or right shoulder
- D1 tackles P1, while falling to the ground P1 off-loads to the support player P2
- P2 then continues down the grid with P1 becoming the support player
- Regularly rotate attackers and defenders

### COACHING POINTS:

Attacker must attempt to move the defender off the line, both to the left and the right. When taking the tackle the player must pass the ball slightly upwards. The ball must be carried in the opposite arm to the side being tackled. Support player must receive the pass and run close on the opposite side to where the attacker has gone.

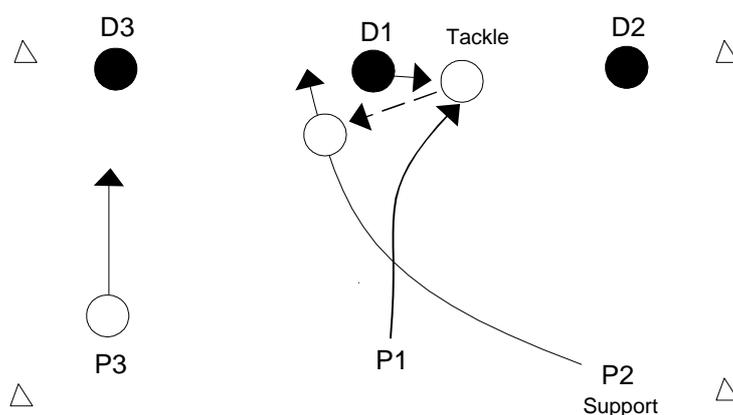
### VARIATIONS:

The attacker can draw the defender and pass instead of taking the tackle

### BENEFITS:

Communication between players, support play, tackling technique

## OFF-LOAD (*Drill 2*)



### SET UP:

Minimum 6 players

### THE DRILL:

- P1 runs to D1 moving him to the right
- D1 attempts to tackle P1
- P1 off-loads to P2 in support while falling to the ground
- P3 acts as a dummy runner and keeps D3 out wide to open the gap

### COACHING POINTS:

Attacking player must learn to pull defender out of the line and open up the gap. The deep support player must time his run depending on whether the attacker takes the tackle or passes before the tackle. The outside support must move up and call to sell the dummy play to the defence.

### VARIATIONS:

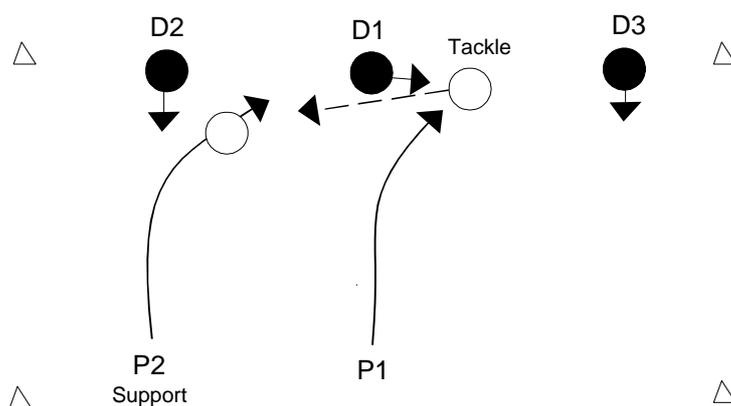
Switch sides so P2 becomes dummy runner and P1 becomes deep support and attacking player can practice off-loading from both sides.

Attacking player can draw defender and pass to deep support player.

### BENEFITS:

Communication between players, support play, tackling technique

## OFF-LOAD (*Drill 3*)



### SET UP:

Minimum 5 players

### THE DRILL:

- P1 runs towards D1 and then moves to the right
- D1 attempts to tackle P1
- P2 who has been running straight towards the defence then cuts sharply to the right and moves into support P1
- P1 then off-loads to P2 while falling to the ground
- P2 receives the pass and runs through the gap

### COACHING POINTS:

The attacking team performs the drill with a flat line attack. Timing is the most important aspect of the drill.

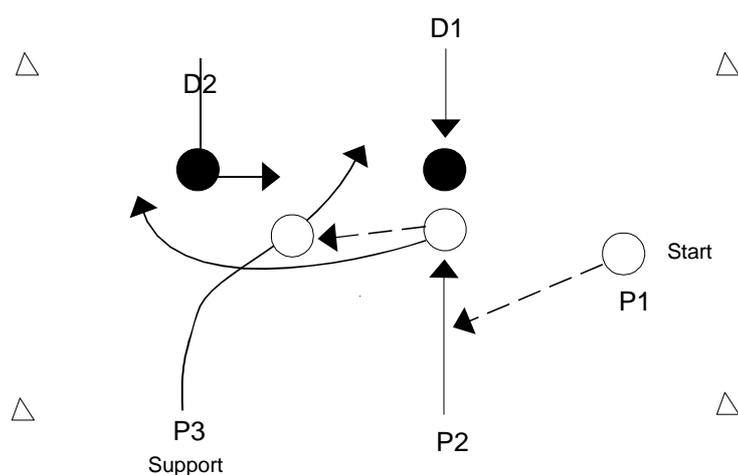
### VARIATIONS:

Perform drill with attack moving to both left and right sides.  
The attacker can off-load without taking the tackle.

### BENEFITS:

Communication between players, support play, tackling technique

## OFF-LOAD (*Drill 4*)



### SET UP:

Minimum 5 players

### THE DRILL:

- P1 passes to P2
- P2 runs straight towards defence D1, drawing the player for a short pre-off load to P3 who runs for the gap
- D2 attempts to tackle P3
- P1 doubles around into support and receives the off-load from P3 if the tackle is made

### COACHING POINTS:

P1 must draw the first defender, P2 must run short and into the gap and be ready to off-load, P1 must react quickly and communicate to let P3 know he is in support

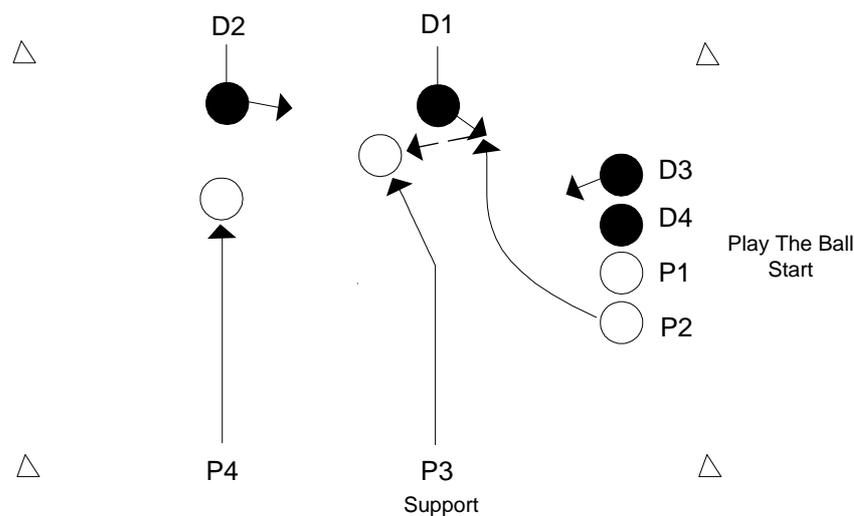
### VARIATIONS:

Use a second outside support player(P4) to support P3 rather than P1  
P1 can throw a cut pass to P4 and P3 can support

### BENEFITS:

Communication between players, support play, drawing the man, passing

## OFF-LOAD (*Drill 5*)



### SET UP:

Minimum 7 players

### THE DRILL:

- P1 plays-the-ball P2 (dummy half)
- P2 runs wide, draws the defence (D1) and pre off-loads to P3 who is the first support and running short for the gap
- If P3 gets tackled he can off-load to P4 who is the second support

### COACHING POINTS:

P2 (dummy half) must run an arc quick enough to beat the marker, support runners must run short and for the gap, dummy half must look to open the gap.

### VARIATIONS:

P2 (dummy half) can take the tackle and off-load to P3.

P2 (dummy half) can throw a cut pass to P4 and P3 becomes the support on the inside or doubling around.

### BENEFITS:

Communication between players, support play, dummy half play

## OFF-LOAD (*Drill 6*)

**SET UP:**

Minimum 7 players

**THE DRILL:**

- P1 with ball in hand runs towards D1 who is holding pad
- P1 hits and spins and off-loads to P2 who is the first support player
- P2 then continues down the grid
- D2 runs across as a cover defender and tackles P2
- P2 off-loads while falling to the ground to P3
- P3 runs towards D3 drawing the defender before passing to P4 in support

**COACHING POINTS:**

Support players must run in close support, communicating with the ball carrier.  
 Players learn to beat first, second and third line of defence.

**VARIATIONS:**

Players to off-load from both sides

**BENEFITS:**

Communication between players, support play, decision making

D3 Draw & Pass



Cover Defender

D2



D1



Hit, Spin & Off-Load

P1



Start



P2



P3

Support Players



P4



# Cabramatta

## *Rugby League Club*

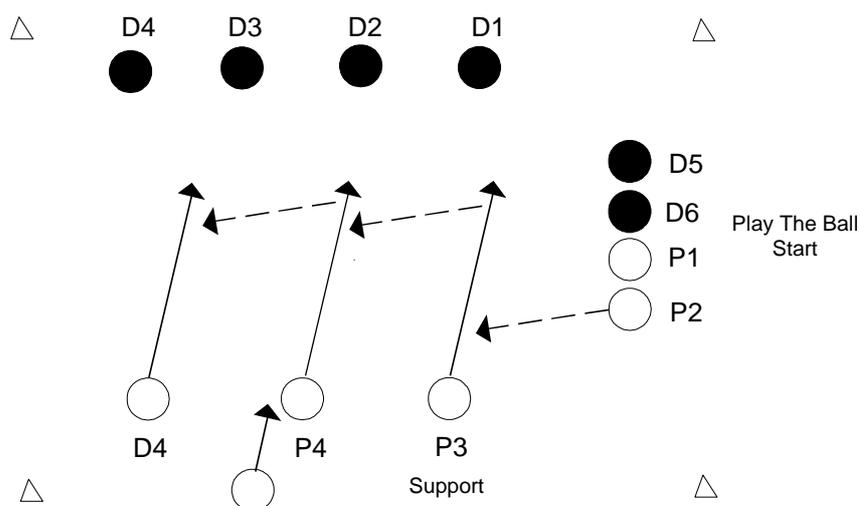
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## OFF-LOAD (*Drill 7*)



### SET UP:

Minimum 12 players

### THE DRILL:

- P1 plays-the-ball P2 (dummy half)
- P2 passes to P3 who is standing wide and running an angle back to the ruck
- P3 off-loads before being tackled to P4 who is in support running the same angle
- P4 then off-loads before being tackled to either P5 who is running the same angle or P6 who is trailing as a second man support. This will depend on whether the defence come off the line to make the tackle.

### COACHING POINTS:

Pull the defence in tight to the ruck and use the second man support aimed at the edge of the ruck.

### BENEFITS:

Communication between players, support play, decision making, passing

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The publishers wish to thank the Australian Rugby League and contributors for their assistance in compiling this publication.

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## **References**

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- (2) Inside League - Roy Masters

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Published by Senior Scene Pty Ltd  
T/A Shamrock School Books  
ABN 82 050 409 268

Rugby League Coaching Manuals  
ISSN 1446-3628

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