

THE CHALLENGE TO COACHES

“A DISCUSSION PAPER”

Peter Thorburn (updated May 2008)

Some thoughts and ideas to provoke positive and imaginative coaching and validating much of what you are familiar with

1. YOUR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A lot depends on the level of team you are coaching. Easiest at top level (but the expectations are higher) as you can pick from the whole player pool to suit your required style of play. Hardest is at club or school level where the limited numbers and talent available means you have to **adapt your game plans—patterns of play**, etc to suit.

Selector 25%: Eye for ‘talent’ - use assistants?

Coach 35%: Be humble. Get assistance for key or specific areas- no-one knows it all.

Man Management 20%: To get the best from your players, know them - what makes them ‘tick’ and how to get through to them.

Motivator 20%: Are you a ‘Carrot’ or ‘Stick’ coach.

Your Style: Earn Respect—hard to earn—easy to be lost

Are you a ‘shouter-yeller’?

Do you use ‘FEAR’ as a motivational tool?

Be wary of playing ‘mind games’ with players

Be consistent and honest

BE AN INNOVATIVE—IMAGINATIVE-- PROBLEM SOLVER

Encourage input from team (competitions, suggestion box, etc)

NEVER discuss players, negatively in bars or outside the team

Always tell players who are **not** playing before they read about it

Try to be as consensual as possible BUT the ‘buck has to stop with you’

YOU have control over most that happens in the team—if something goes wrong - LOOK at YOURSELF first

- Responsibilities:**
- To facilitate the players and management in reaching their potential.
 - To produce the performance and results expected or agreed to.
 - To be 'head' of the family.
 - To be the catalyst for all the group enjoying the experience.
 - To encourage the 'PROTOCOLS' around which the whole organisation functions ('THE RULES').

2 MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE

Assistant Coach

A compatible person with complementary positional skills.

Manager

Can take so much 'pressure' off to enable you to 'coach'.

Fitness – Strength – Skills Trainer

Ensure that with your input, **the 'trainer' is implementing drills etc that are game specific, and that they have your agreement. Many coaches in the recent past have abdicated** their role with this. **Consequently many of the 'drills for skills' are not rugby specific.**

Use of Judo—Karate, Pilates, Yoga, TM, Hypnosis etc to improve techniques, attitudes and pressure handling.

Medical

Access to doctor, physio, rubbers etc—have an open mind and encourage same from “medical” team

Public Relations (PR)

WHO talks to media, etc

WHEN and at what level of information

Avoid mixed messages.

Notes:

3. PLANNING THE SEASON

Goals for Season

Must be REALISTIC but CHALLENGING TO ALL.

Conditioning

Ensure the basic aerobic work is carried out before the concentrated anaerobic and hardening processes are actioned.

RUGBY IS STILL PREDOMINANTLY AN “AEROBIC” GAME.

Pre-season Trials and Games

Playing trial and pre-season games is the best method of achieving match fitness and observing players.

The Competition

Probably out of your hands, but plan for breaks, increased efforts, key games etc.

The Pitfalls

Have a mentor to turn to if insoluble problems occur—or just to talk and asses where you are at, especially if times get tough.

Learn to read the signs of tiredness, boredom, over training, cliques or negativity developing—nip in bud early.

Notes:

4. PATTERNS OF PLAY – STYLE OF PLAY – GAME PLANS

Patterns and style of play is really dependent on the ability levels of the players available to you. You will have to cut your cloth to the situation, but always be working to improving the weaker areas (longer-term improvements).

Game plans are the **options** that are created and trained. The skill is getting the '**shot callers**' to use the appropriate options at the appropriate time in a game.

The game plan must be **flexible**, and the confidence given to the shot callers to call the best option, e.g. weather changes prior or during games, opposition actions, strengths or weaknesses that were not expected - train for these situations so that the appropriate 'options' can be called.

There are many ways of playing winning rugby - **the art is getting ALL your team knowing and producing the agreed action at the appropriate time.**

The advent of coaches being linked to the players through radio etc has enabled a lot of 'cop-out' by players, expecting 'someone else' to do their thinking.

Player buy in seems to be the modern (and mostly successful) way. It is essential for harmony and consensus, and taps into a bigger pool of knowledge, creating a positive feeling that, because “we had input” we need to make it work. Manage the process judiciously. Remember you are the Chairman of the Board—and players DO look for direction (not dictatorship).

Player empowerment – The modern way, it has great potential to delve into a wider pool of knowledge, to get consensus and therefore less need for ‘dictatorial’ decision making. Players feel part of something they have bought into. Handle it skillfully and ‘manipulate’ to get the best result for ‘the team’. Remember. you are the coach—the ultimate responsibility lies with you.

Notes:

5. MOVES – CALL – OPTIONS

Leadership – Ownership - Responsibility

This is not to be confused with captaincy but is about developing **individual, mini unit and team leadership--ownership and responsibility.**

This helps to develop what I consider some of the **key** positions in the team – ‘**The Shot Callers**’ also called “**nerve centre players**”

It can start by giving **every** player ownership of one or more moves, then mini units for a group of moves - and backs and forwards for a mix of back moves and forward moves.

It is the individual responsibility to ensure the move is understood by all, and that any new players are familiarised. At trainings, when appropriate they prompt the ‘nerve centre’ players “what about this option?”

It does build **pride – ownership - confidence** and is invaluable and enjoyable. You will find that players put ‘the acid’ on teammates to know what’s on and to try and get the **shot callers** to ‘use my move’.

It also encourages what I call ‘**pull thru**’ move calling. **Rather than waiting** till just before the ball comes back into play, e.g. at awarding of a scrum, the tight head prop calls to the ½ (or whomever) “what’s on???” If the call comes back early as to the direction the ball will go, the scrum can set early to promote the direction, and then get on with the technique required—also helps to get to the next phase and what role to play. **The whistle** is the **trigger**. Encourage this ‘**pull thru**’ attitude in all phases of play.

Notes:

6. TRAINING

Training is a set of **repetitive actions** to **commit conscious acts to the sub-conscious** - so that when called on, they are **able to be re-produced, usually under stress or duress**.

It does not need to be **boring or dull**.

As with fitness training, it is like a **'bank account'**, to be **drawn on when needed**. If you **don't make the deposits—it is not there when called on**.

It is beneficial and **necessary to train for many of the phases of play when team or players are under duress (tired)** as this is **when teams often falter during games**, e.g. lineout practice, scrum practice, set moves, skills etc.

THE TRUE TEST OF OUR CAPABILITIES IN MOST SITUATIONS IS WHAT WE ARE LIKE 'UNDER PRESSURE'.

Notes:

Learning/Teaching/Coaching

All people learn in one or a combination, of four different learning processes, i.e visual, audiological (listening) reading or kinesthetically (touch, feel, walk through). VARK

We are inclined to teach in the way that we learn and very often the recipients miss the message.

Players will nod that they have picked it up when asked, as they don't want to look 'slow' in front of the team. Create the learning environment that ensures all players are given the best chance of comprehension—it **is** worth the extra time needed.

Notes:

Training – Physical Fitness

Rugby had changed from a **predominantly aerobic game of dynamic go forward ball** to the more **anaerobic static, flat line defence**, go to ground of the recent past. (due almost entirely to the "USE IT OR LOSE IT" law brought in mid 1990,s

With the advent of the **ability to maul and generate more dynamic play,through the introduction of the 5 second law, aerobic fitness will become more predominant.**

Nobody EVER died of EXHAUSTION playing or training Rugby.

Early season training is the time **to test the physical and mental hardness** of your players.

Do a guts test to see how far each individual can go till '**tossing in the towel**'.

Especially effective when dealing with an influx of 'new' players. Then you will know who is going to keep 'giving' when the games go down to the wire.

Create variation of environment for early season training, e.g. at the beach (in water for resistance work), hill work for leg power and body position and ball carriage etc. But always have specific goals of achievement from the training exercise.

Notes:

Training Mental

An area of great potential improvements.

We talk of mental hardness, mongrel dog, NGI (never give in) bravery.

Look at what makes the Steve Gurney's, Rob Hammills, Ed Hilary's, etc keep going.

Some of the BRAVEST persons in history were puny, little nondescript PHYSICAL specimens, who had something inside that said 'NGI'. Use role models.

GAME PREPARATION MENTAL and INDIVIDUAL

Very few players are doing real beneficial **individual pre game planning**, i.e. methodically, at some time (times) before match day - **play HIS role in every perceivable phase of play, in his head**—go through all phases - what are the potential options, etc. Takes 15-20 minutes to play a full game in the head.

Training Disciplines

Rugby is a game of 'self discipline'. We can **train for discipline** as readily as we can train for anything, e.g. do several actions each day that we do not enjoy too much. **Do the dishes, mow the lawns, get up 20 minutes earlier, walk to the shops or up stairs, never take 'short cuts'** when on a run or training.

Do or go the extra yards - it becomes second nature.

Notes:

7. SKILLS AND UPSKILLING

Ball Skills

The area of greatest need at ALL levels of the New Zealand game.

EVERY player should have a ball—it should become an extension of his arms.

Carry it everywhere to do with rugby

Generate ball skill competitions amongst team—role models and ‘best practice’ used as benchmark.

It helps with self-discipline - it encourages and gives confidence and the benefits carry through into team performance.

Notes:

The Key Areas of Weakness Are:

Passing

Especially off weaker hand - also short/long—long/short feint passing skills, passing accuracy - passing under pressure –putting support players into gaps - understanding the benefits of putting the ball into the correct ‘catching zone’.

Ball Carriage and Ball into Impact – ‘The Tuckers’

There are **only two occasions when ‘TUCKING’ is preferable** and **five to six GOOD reasons NOT to:**

The fallacy that “I can run faster with the ball tucked” has been disproven,**except beyond 20 metres.**

Kicks to recover ball, eg grubber, stab kick chip etc.

General dexterity of ball handling is very poor.

Notes:

8. OTHER AND GENERAL

Includes Team Talks – When – Why – How Long – By Whom – To Whom

Opposition Analysis

Important to know something about **strengths and weaknesses in opposition.**

Charge individual players to research and **SHARE the knowledge** gained, e.g. handy for a loosie to know which foot a 9 or 10 prefers etc - **BUT don't over concentrate on opponents—get your own game in order. BEWARE OF PARALYSIS BY ANALYSIS.**

A liitle “fear” of the opposition is of value.

Team and Individual Debrief

Team

Based around **particular game plans used**—use sub groups and units to critique actions relative to plan.

With the advent of analysis systems, players have at times **become ‘lazy’** and just look at their game and **only at the play immediately prior and post the action they are individually involved in.**

They must **identify a situation**, look at **what were the available options**, was their **action correct or effective**, and **replay in their mind, several times, the correct action.**

Encourage ALL players to go right through every point scoring movement by either team to see what they DID or DIDN'T do for the points to be scored.

Notes:

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