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1. Football Parents, Support, Smiles and Sporting Success.

By Wayne Goldsmith

Parents love their children and want nothing but the best for them. Behaviours that others may see as “pushy”, sporting parents see as “lovingly supportive”. What a coach may interpret as “sticking their noses in”, sporting parents see only a genuine interest in their child’s development. This difference in perspective and the difficulty in being able to be objective where their kids are concerned often lead parents into a conflict situation with coaches, other parents, officials and eventually their own children.

I have done hundreds of talks to sporting parents around the world. Many times parents have approached me after a talk and said “*I hear what you say, but you don’t know my child. He is different*”. Whilst every child is indeed an individual, what all children have in common are parents who have high opinions of their child’s ability to do everything.

It starts early – **the first day home from the hospital.**

“Here is a picture of my baby. He is the most beautiful baby I have ever seen and I am not just saying that because he is mine”.

Then around two years of age:

“My child is much more advanced than the other children – talking and walking before other kids, and I am not just saying that because he is mine”.

Then at school.

“He is well advanced for his age. He can do things that most five year olds can’t. I’m not just saying that because he is my son”.

Then naturally at sport.

“He is the best full back in the district. He really is. I’m not just saying that because he is my son”.

The football parent is merely extending their natural feelings of love and support for their child into the sporting environment.

This article aims to help parents of young Rugby League players (and the coaches who have to manage those parents) deal with some of the critical issues in sport and parenting.

Footy Parents have **five** things in common:

- They love their children
- They want the best for their children
- They are incapable of being objective about their children
- They believe there is something special or unique about their children (that no one else can see)
- And.....They don’t believe people when they tell them every parent has the first four things in common

This is where coaches and parents run into problems.

Coaches see kids as athletic, confident, skilful etc based on their objective analysis of the child’s ability to perform tasks at training and in games. Parents on the other hand see a child who is wonderful, brilliant and gifted because they share the same genetics.

Times are not getting easier for coaches. Coaching is a tough job.

Ask any parent what the three most important things in their life are:

- **THEIR KIDS**
- **THEIR TIME**
- **THEIR MONEY**

Rugby league coaches coach **KIDS**, often at inconvenient **TIMES** and parents have to pay **MONEY** to be involved (i.e. boots, jerseys, training gear, travel to games, game entry, registrations etc etc). So it is little wonder that rugby league coaches and parents often end up in conflict situations.

However kids today are a little different owing to the nature of society where education and training are increasingly dependent of their entertainment qualities.

Kids today:

- They want it all
- They want it at a younger age
- They want it now
- They want it to be fun
- If they can't have it all, have it now and if it is not fun they don't want it.

And in that same environment, the coach is trying to develop the players' skills, physical abilities, game sense and core values like integrity, humility and honesty.

The question is often asked, why Rugby League (and all other sports) struggles to keep kids involved after their mid teens.

Sport is often seen as focusing on traditional values of dedication, the development of a strong work ethic, commitment, team work and instructing players how to deal with adversity and pressure.

These values are (unfortunately) often interpreted as being out of step with many of the "fast food" attitudes of today's kids.

The challenge for all coaches is to use sport to teach and enhance the traditional values which apply to all people in all walks of life, but....encourage kids to take part in sport and "sell" sport in a way which appeals to their world – where *entertainment* is as important as *education*.

This is a dilemma for every coach: How to make training and preparation interesting, stimulating and entertaining yet remain true to their coaching philosophies and core beliefs about coaching young players: that is, not compromising on coaching standards but still responding to the changing demands of today's teenage footballer.

It is here that coaches and parents should work together. The life lessons young players learn working together in a team environment can provide a positive experience and an advantage for them in their academic and business lives.

A young player who has worked together with team mates to achieve their goals learns a life lesson about team work and goal setting.

A young player who learns to execute skills in the pressure of a final learns a valuable life lesson about dealing with pressure and stress.

Rugby league is teaching valuable life lessons to kids and as such, parents should support coaches and clubs in reinforcing and supporting this learning experience.

By working with coaches as an integral part of the club and team structure and by supporting and endorsing the coach's words and actions at home, parents can play a vital role in the career and personal development of their children.

Education of parents is the key!

Rugby league clubs and coaches should schedule time to hold parent education sessions on a regular basis to inform and educate parents about the key elements and philosophies of their program. Success comes when:

THE VISION OF THE COACH and

THE COMMITMENT OF THE PLAYERS and

THE SUPPORT OF THE PARENTS all come together focused towards achieving a common goal.

Sporting Parents are keen to learn as much as they can to help their kids achieve their sporting goals.

These are the most common questions asked by sporting parents:

QUESTION 1:

How many times should a child train each week?

This is without doubt the most common question asked by sporting parents.

Answer.

There are several approaches to answering this question including:

As many as they can recover from – if two training sessions makes them tired and sore, then doing six will not help them.

As many as their goals determine – *the higher the goal – the higher the price.*

Players aiming to be the best and play First grade as senior players need to spend more time training than other players aiming for social level competition.

As many as they enjoy – the key to it all. Kids play sport because of three key reasons – they enjoy it – they love being with their friends and they love learning. If the kids are not enjoying their football, forget keeping them in the sport.

There is no magic number of sessions for players to complete each week that will guarantee success.

Key comment – It is an individual thing!

QUESTION 2:

When should a child specialise in a sport, event or position?

Answer:

There is no such thing as a ten year old champion winger or lock or hooker. The “child champion” is merely someone who for reasons of growth and development plays one position a little better than another. However this year’s winger could be next year’s fullback and in two years the same player might be a second rower.

The tendency is that when a child is bigger and stronger than the other players at the same age, parents and coaches sometimes place unreasonable expectations on them. All coaches have stories to tell about the 12 year old who scored 100 tries in a season, yet didn’t ever make it to top grade.

This year’s champ is often next year’s chump. As size and strength factors even up in the mid to late teens, often these early maturers are frustrated by the fact they can no longer dominate teams the way they did when they were younger.

In the long term, size and strength are not the key determinants of success. Look at players like Sterling, Lamb, Langer, Stuart, Toovey etc who have been outstanding successes at all levels of the game.

The key elements of success in the long term are:

- Skills
- Confidence
- A positive attitude
- The ability to deal with adversity and tough times

Key comment: LONG TERM ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT is the key to success.

QUESTION 3:

Do young Rugby League players need a special diet?

Answer:

No. Not unless they have special needs or health issues which require dietary control, e.g. diabetes.

Providing they eat a balanced diet of carbohydrates, proteins and fats it is unlikely that a young, developing player needs a special diet. The important issue is to encourage young players to develop eating practices which become lifetime healthy lifestyle habits.

Importantly, kids should be educated on the key elements of a healthy, nutritious diet (i.e. low on salt, low on saturated fat, low on processed sugars) as early as possible.

Parents are often tempted to try short cuts like buying muscle building powders, high protein sports drinks and glucose tablets to help their child achieve their football goals. It must be said that none of these products are likely to make a difference to the child's playing and taking them may even be counter productive.

Key comment: Vitamins and minerals do not make champions.

QUESTION 4:

How do kids balance school and sport?

Answer:

School comes first. There is no getting away from this. No player plays for ever and at some time in their life, having the basics of a good education will be important.

However, success at Rugby League and success at school is possible. There are literally hundreds of first grade footballers who have also completed university studies.

High achieving players are usually high achieving students as they learn time management skills, dealing with stress, team building, communication skills and other important skills in their training and preparation for football.

Key comment: School and sport DO mix

QUESTION 5:

When should my kids start strength training?

Answer:

It does not matter what age..... it depends on what they do and how they do it.

Body weight exercises and light exercise with perfect technique are ok at most ages. Where young players (and parents) get into trouble is when they start lifting heavy weights too early and with poor technique.

Weight training is a great way to get strong and help develop the power to play great rugby league in the senior grades. However, the introduction of weight training should be systematic and done progressively with the development of perfect lifting techniques being the most important part of the process.

Key comment: Technique before tonnes!

QUESTION 6:

What types of exercise are best for young (i.e. pre teen) athletes?

Answer:

Ages 6-12 are the perfect time to learn techniques and skills – the foundations of sporting success in later years. In fact, it has been suggested that players who do not develop and master the basics of the game in those years may never achieve their full potential.

Young players should be encouraged to learn their **A – B – C’ S (Agility, Balance, Co-ordination and Speed)** during these important developmental years.

When a child attends school, they learn basic arithmetic, then progress to equations and eventually to calculus.

The basics of the game – running, passing, kicking and game sense should all be learnt, refined and mastered by the young player before moving on the more advanced playing techniques.

Key comment: Where young players are concerned, Patience is a true virtue.

QUESTION 7:

How do I choose a good coach for my child?

Answers:

Qualifications, experience and coaching record are all important when selecting a coach for the young player. Younger coaches who may lack coaching experience but who have an infectious enthusiasm for the game and a passion to succeed may also be a good option.

However, they key question for parents to ask is:

Can the coach provide a safe, ethical, positive, skills based, stimulating training environment?

The reality for most parents is that they will choose the coach who is best situated on their afternoon “drop off circuit”, ie mum drops Julie to swimming, Billy to piano and Johnny to football, then goes back to pick up Julie to take her to netball etc etc.

Key comment: Does your child like the coach AND do you have faith in the coach – enough to give them 100% support?

QUESTION 8:

What are the common characteristics of champion players?

Answer:

- Confidence / self esteem / self belief
- The ability to deal with tough times and adversity
- A love of what they are doing – the passion for the game will carry them a long way.
- Strong core values: courage, discipline, humility, sincerity, honesty – these things make an impact on their playing career and their lives.
- A positive attitude

Key comment: Champion athletes are champion people first.



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QUESTION 9:

What can I do to help my child achieve their goals in Rugby League?

Answer:

Be patient with progress.

Be tolerant of mistakes and poor performances.

Be calm and dignified at sporting events.

Learn to accept wins or losses graciously.

Allow (the players) plenty of breathing space.

Offer praise with success.

Encourage involvement in other pursuits.

Encourage independence and self-sufficiency

Above all, keep football in perspective.

Be supportive rather than intrusive.

Key comment: Love them.

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QUESTION 10:

How can I tell if my child is doing too much?

Answer:

There are several signs to look for in the over trained or chronically tired sporting child:

- They seem tired all the time and generally lethargic.
- They may appear irritable, quiet, moody – maybe even sad
- They develop a minor illness or health problem that doesn't seem to go away, e.g. repeated occurrence of sinus problems, cold sores that don't clear up, consistent gastro intestinal / upper respiratory problems.
- They don't seem to sleep well.
- Their weight fluctuates considerably
- They develop social problems with school, friends and or family.

Key comment: Just like you when you are tired!

Summary

In this century, sport can provide an opportunity for kids to learn important social and personal skills that they may not be able to learn in any other institution. Health, fitness, movement and activity are life long habits.....and habits for a long life.

Rugby league is a challenging, fun, skills based game that provides the opportunity for young players to develop physically, mentally and emotionally PROVIDING the goals of the three key elements of the team program – THE PLAYERS – THE COACH AND THE PARENTS are all working together to achieve the same things.

Kids don't care how much you know, they want to know how much you care. Coaches and parents play a vital role in the development of every player.

The single most important thing parents can give their kids is unconditional love and support AND the single most important thing coaches can give parents is education on how to be a better rugby league parent.

2.

Innovation and Foresight for Modified Levels of the Game

With Greg Bannister
Written by Robert Rachow

EACH time Rugby League attracts another junior coach the game receives another custodian of its future. While the men at the top have the task of refining today's elite stars, the junior coach has the more varied job of grooming not only tomorrow's elite players, but also tomorrow's coaches, administrators and fans.

What's more, when it comes to taking the field on the weekend, a junior coach is expected to go beyond merely producing a team of winners on the day. It is expected they nurture a batch of kids who can win for years down the track. Naturally this requires a degree of foresight and attention to genuine development of the individual. As is stated so often, relying on one season's (or even one player's) dominance can bring grave long-term consequences.

However, in saying that a junior coach needs to look to the future and think outside the square, the league fraternity doesn't always give clear instructions on where to start. As always, a coach will put their own personal stamp on their regime, yet it helps to be pointed in the right direction.

Newcastle's **Greg Bannister** spoke at the ARL High Performance Camp at Narrabeen recently about implementing good habits at a young age.

ONE of the most interesting facets of Junior Rugby League has been the advent of Mod League programs for the pre-teen years. Since its inception we've seen many positives brought about by the rules which differentiate it from senior football. Greater emphasis on skill and increased involvement from all players are two of the more prominent benefits.

On the flipside though, the mere fact that the laws have been altered means some coaches face consternation in mentoring their players. Do they encourage a tactic that works at Mod level, but has little benefit past the age of 12? How can they establish good habits while playing in a different atmosphere? Where are the key skills that transpose most readily from one age group to the next?

Bannister is a fan of breaking things down into groups of five. Indeed, he lists the five vital elements of Rugby League as Passing, Kicking, Tackling, Running (including evasion) and skills at the Play-the-Ball.

PASSING

One of the best things about Mod League is that it eliminates what happened in years gone by where the biggest kid or best runner would receive the ball straight from dummy-half, run the length of the field and score. Sure it was an effective way of racking up points, but it did little to develop the skills either of the dominant player or those who stood back and watched. At least now with a set number of enforced passes, there is an opportunity for others to get involved, while creating facets of teamwork and ball distribution. Yet, balancing this equation is the knowledge that coaches can still teach their biggest or fastest player to stand one wide of the pivot and charge ahead much like in the old days. It's against the spirit of the game and an exploitation of the rules, but it can be seen from club to club.

Bannister says a tactic of his is to play out the set like you would in a first grade game, but with minor tinkering to suit the rules. The first ruck sees a prop take the ball over the advantage line and tip-on to a supporting second-rower. The second ruck is much the same, although the positions can be swapped around. Starting the set this way not only gets the team going straight ahead, but challenges the forwards to learn how to offload as well. Without the pass, the team has breached the rules.

Not until the third tackle does the halfback touch the ball, bringing another runner underneath him. There are no simple two-pass shifts through the pivot. On play number four, it's the halfback's opportunity to feed his outside man. Bannister enforces that he must play going forward at the line and must get the ball past the five-eighth. For tackles four and five the team can create what it wants.

KICKING

The rules of Mod League state that no bombing kicks are permitted. This is already a good rule for future years, because it encourages tactical kicks to build pressure rather than forcing errors straight away or relying on maintaining possession. For this reason and the innovation children naturally use in regards to kicking, Bannister does not interfere greatly with tactical modifications to their game. However, he does remind children of one thing. “The most effective way to get over the white line is to get down the (opposition’s) end of the park,” Bannister says. “And the easiest way to get down their end is to start from there.” Sacrificing a few opportunities in attack to kick early can pay off with sustained defensive pressure down the other end.

TACKLING

A vagary that arises from Mod League rules is that tacklers, particularly in close to the ruck, tend to defend in a manner totally disconnected from senior grades. When the opposition is consistently using the bland two-out play as mentioned above, the line tends to creep wider to stifle the attack from finding gaps on the fringes. Several negatives come of this, mainly that players start pointing their feet outwards in defence, rather than forward, you lose the concept of condensed defence around the ruck and markers eventually drop off from chasing. As time progresses, Bannister says that it leads to an exposure of the defender’s inside shoulder.

With this in mind, Bannister reminds his players about correct positioning and technique and, in attack, directs his players into the centre where defenders are unused to being tested. One might expect that a team would score less points this way than constantly running around the line and then straightening upfield, yet Bannister contends one of his teams scored 385 points in a season, but only conceded three tries.

RUNNING

A large portion of the tactics of running patterns has been addressed above in the passing section. One element that is ultra-important is making sure that first receivers hit the advantage line and make ground forward rather than sideward. A point to remember in Mod League is that defenders cannot move until the first receiver has the ball in-hand, allowing the attacker the comfort of hitting the line consistently without worrying too much about being tackled. Bannister says another key area of running in league, which

3.

Four Foundations of a Good Coach.

With Steve Gough
Written by Robert Rachow

*ONE of the most basic but prevalent questions you are likely to hear at a coaching seminar is “What makes a good coach?” In many ways it’s a question open to interpretation. Cynics might suggest a good team makes a good coach, but then how does that team come together and realise its potential in the first place? Focusing on the facets coaches can control within themselves, Penrith Panthers Premier League coach and New South Wales Under-19 mentor, Steve Gough, spoke with **RLCM** recently.*

The only way to define what makes a good coach without writing an encyclopedia is to focus broadly on the key elements. After all, as a coach you are supposed to be a sporting genius, a psychologist, parent and teacher all rolled into one. There aren’t too many hard and fast rules for these positions, so it stands to reason that coaching itself is a world of ambiguity. What may be right for one person may be wrong for another. What is correct in one instance is not necessarily what is correct at all times. According to Steve Gough, coaching member with reigning NRL Premiers, Penrith, there are four general areas that are essential for every coach to consider.

“In Rugby League there are a lot of things that work, in a lot of different ways,” Gough says.

“But if I had to pick a coach, these are what I’d look for.”

KNOWLEDGE

Gough believes it is only natural that people will critique how effective a coach is. After all, by the time a coach begins their first session with a team,

he has been critiqued by club officials and, to a degree, critiqued by himself. Within the first seconds of being around their players, several dozen others will assess them. One of the first aspects that become apparent is a coach's knowledge. Although it can't be strictly quantified, it is one of the easier attributes for others to measure up.

“When we speak about knowledge, we refer mostly to knowledge of the game and knowledge of the players,” Gough says.

“My philosophy is to try and increase knowledge all the time. In relation to game knowledge, I try and talk a lot to other coaches. Unfortunately, the way our profession is not a lot of information sharing goes on. However, I find you learn a lot from aspiring coaches, the ones who haven't established themselves as yet. They tend to think more laterally.”

Knowledge of players; of their strengths and most importantly, weaknesses, can often be the determining factor in how quickly a coach can start improving his squad. A coach will want to know a player's passing ability either side, their evasive capabilities, tackling strength etc when formulating game plans or deciding on positional play. Furthermore, they need to know who will stand up when the game is on the line, who will take the tough hit-ups and whether the player responds to firm or gentle encouragement.

ORGANISATION

Along with knowledge, organisation is the other facet of coaching which players can easily adjudge. A coach who doesn't pre-plan and relies on thinking on the run will eventually be caught short. Organisation is the glue that holds a coach's system together and helps to avoid poor management of time and resources.

“If you don't have a plan, you won't do yourself justice,” Gough says. “Being disorganised, I believe, lets down your players and the whole club.”

On surface level, it may seem organisation pertains to formulating drills, timetables and managing equipment. However, while these three are essential on a week-to-week basis, Gough says it is the little extra things which mark the effectiveness of your organisational skills.

“I see providing variety as part of organisation,” he says. “Once I was in a team where we had exactly the same warm-up all season. Within a short time we were treating it as a joke. We actually treated our sessions with disdain.

“There’s definitely more to organisation than simply having the equipment and drills ready, although that’s a good start.”

The benefits of good organisation will most likely be shown at the times when the fortunes of the team are waning. If you can plan ahead to these times and have activities or strategies ready, the pressure will be lessened and player morale will not slump as dramatically. Of course, a team with sound organisation is also one step ahead when it comes to avoiding form slumps in the first place.

COMMUNICATION

Ideas and philosophies are what generally define a coach when their career is over. If a big game is won on a tactical masterstroke, the strategy more often than not goes down as a coach’s hallmark. But what’s the use of having brilliant concepts if nobody can interpret and implement them?

“The problem you have – and I had this when I was starting out as a teacher also – is that when you are learning the trade, the emphasis is all on content and not delivery,” Gough says.

“I guess that’s reflected in a lot of systems in life. How many of us know an out-standing player who just couldn’t make it as a coach because he couldn’t relate his knowledge to players of lesser ability?”

“Communication is what allows you to educate your players and emphasise certain things over others. You need to be able to communicate well, both verbally and non-verbally and you should be comfortable in both group and one-on-one situations.”

A common theme you will hear from NRL coaches these days is that they are making their players accountable for certain responsibilities. This allows everyone on the field to know their role and the priorities that go with the position. In reviewing matches, it assists the team to understand the reason why things went wrong. Undoubtedly, the key to this system of accountability is communication. The coach not only communicates their expectations to the squad; they encourage constant on-field communication between players to uphold the system.

“My theory is that if a player goes out and does what I ask and we still fail, well I have failed as a coach,” Gough says. “But if a player changes things around and we fail, they have to wear that as being their responsibility.”

Rugby League’s beauty in many ways can be attributed to its physicality. It should come as no surprise then that communication in coaching is also largely non-verbal.

“You have to realise you communicate even without speaking,” says Gough. “It’s constantly monitored by the players.

“You communicate your philosophy largely by just being the person you are.”

If successful, a coach’s style of communication will inevitably be mimicked by their players. On match day, when the coach walks the sideline, their mannerisms may also affect the temperament of the crowd. It is important therefore, to set a positive, measured example, particularly at the junior level of the game.

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

Linked closely to communication, but even more immeasurable, interpersonal skills are the trickiest to master. In many ways they include elements of the three other foundations, but it is your individual persona which is ultimately the X-factor. These skills can be the most difficult to alter and improve, for they are so ingrained. They are also the most hurtful criteria to be judged a failure on, because it can be interpreted as a rejection of your overall personality.

“You will hear many people talk of man management, which very much boils down to interpersonal skills,” Gough says. “It’s another area where you can constantly improve. You’ll be asked to relate to your players, have empathy and understand where they are coming from.

“But the danger is that man management is subjective. Personality is subjective. They aren’t easy things to read.”

An important thing to remember with interpersonal skills is that although a degree of friendliness will assist communication and allow a team to gel, it will not always equal on-field success. There will be times when you will have to juggle being a confidant and disciplinarian for the benefit of the team. Without some distance from the players, a coach could be perceived as either hypocritical or prone to favouritism. What is most undesirable in this scenario is that it may create confusion and a lack of respect.

“The relationship you have with your players is the most important part of the game,” Gough says.

“Make sure you don’t cross the line and become too close. That said, one of the most rewarding moments of my coaching career was when A-grade won the premiership last year, a couple of players went out of their way to thank me.

“They had needed my faith and understanding on personal issues in seasons before. I think the position boils down to both sides treating the other with respect.”

4.

Qualities Required by the Junior Player

Chris Fullerton - Junior Kangaroos Coach
with Ashley Bradnam

Who are the stars of the future and where will they come from? Flicking back through decade-old team lists of junior rep sides reveals a discrepancy between the numbers of boys who excel as youngsters, and those who stand out as men. One person well credentialed to have a word on the topic of junior development into senior ranks is Chris Fullerton, the current Junior Kangaroos coach and coaching and development officer for Melbourne Storm feeder club North's Brisbane. Fullerton has been involved with coaching kids on the periphery of senior football for well over a decade – he knows what's required to take the extra leap into the 'big time' and he understands that it takes more than an adroit left foot step to make it into the NRL.

According to Fullerton, attitude is the number one criteria coaches look for when recruiting a player to their club. It even surpasses talent.

“I started coaching Colts (Under 19's) back at Ipswich in '93 and '94, and since then I've worked as a Development Officer and moved over to the Colts at Logan City and the Queensland and Australian Under 19's as well”, says Fullerton. “It's hard to pin-point just one area that you need to possess as a young bloke coming through but if I had to nominate one, I would say it's in the attitude.

The personal attitude of the player is the major contributor to whether or not he will have a lasting future in the code at elite level, yet it's also a difficult topic to define in a sentence or a paragraph”.

“Gifted does not mean good. Not always anyway”, says Fullerton. “A player can have all of the talent in the world but unless he is prepared to pay the price and conform to the standards and structure set out by our coaching department, his future is not going to be with us. The first two questions most coaches will ask when they are looking at a possible recruit are, what is his attitude like? And, is he coachable? By coachable they mean will he listen and is he prepared to learn”?

“With the senior game becoming faster and more tougher each year, the tackling technique required to compete at this level differs from what most kids learn as they are growing up. The proper technique to tackle (i.e.: what kids are taught as juniors) is not an effective way to stop attacking runners in the NRL. We now need to know that the young kids coming through will be able to learn to tackle a little higher to wrap up the ball and stop attackers – and the only way they can learn that is to be open to learning. That comes down to attitude. If they want to learn, they'll become better players and progress. If they aren't prepared to learn and listen, they will fall away and not make it”.

Another aspect Fullerton looks for in his youngsters is toughness. Not angry toughness, or spiteful toughness – real toughness. According to him, it's a rare commodity these days.

“I guess I look at Canterbury and probably Brisbane as well as clubs that have been good at bringing players with genuine toughness to their clubs. They recruit that, and it breeds itself through the club. I think sometimes there is a price to pay for growing up in the city areas today – perhaps our social structure is a little softer than it was twenty years ago and that has perhaps contributed to kids

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coming to us straight from school who haven't learn to be tough yet. It's in there – you just have to unearth it. On the other hand I have found country kids are a little harder at a younger age but the down side to their development is that they have missed out on some of the elite coaching the city kids have. The fact is that our game is a highly demanding physical sport, and you will not survive it if you aren't tough. We have to consider this when we recruit – not just the attacking ability or the speed and power of the athlete – but the toughness as well. That, combined with the correct attitude and desire, can overcome deficiencies in the former categories. It won't work the other way around though, that's for sure”.

Attitude... Toughness... Defence...

Another area that Fullerton believes is often overlooked by recruitment officers is defence. It's something else he searches for in his rough diamonds.

“When I look at a young kid one of the first things I want to know is, can he score a try one on one? And, can he stop a try one on one? To me, the stopping of a try is equally important to being able to score a try. It's easy to identify the kid with the power and speed to burn off defenders in attack, but the defence contributes to 50% of the game as well. You take the tackle Jason Taylor made on Ben Kennedy in the 2001 Grand Final. Technically speaking, that was a copybook junior tackle, low and around the legs – but at senior level it was ineffective because Kennedy just took him with him over the line. You can't afford to have a technique like that at senior level because it will be exposed sooner or later. So when we recruit a player and notice is tackling technique is not up to senior standard we need to know that if the style is not right than the attitude is”.

Fullerton's words should send a message to coaches of junior rugby league. Your team's star today may not shine forever – but the kid quietly improving season after season could burn a trail to NRL level. Take time to improve aspects, which will help them get there – attitude, toughness and defence.

5.

Knitting a Junior Representative Team

With Shane Flanagan
Written by Robert Rachow

Having played first grade with St George, Wests and Parramatta, Shane Flanagan comes from a more than respectable background in rugby league. Yet like many, Flanagan reckons his real education in football did not accelerate until after retirement. It was then, with an interest in coaching that he researched and finally grasped the finer points of the game. On one hand it was a case of too-little-to-late, yet on the other hand it provided him with the impetus to pass the knowledge on. Flanagan moved into junior representative coaching, eager to give young players the best foundation for their future career.

However, one facet of tutoring at the SG Ball, Harold Matthews, Jersey Flegg or Mixwell Colts level is that it is vastly removed from other styles of competition. Underneath these levels are regular underage competitions where not all coaches and players have long-term ambitions in the game. On another level, there are one-off junior representative fixtures, such as interstate or regional exhibitions. These may be played at a similar pace, but require different planning and emphasis. Then, if we are to take a step up, there are the senior grades, where training demands and structures are longer, more intensive and already established.

Flanagan, now Sydney Roosters Premier League coach speaks about managing a junior representative program, played over a dozen or so weeks. His advice and insight is not only beneficial to those interested in the aforementioned styles of competition, but also to those in school and other specialised leagues.

It's like you start off with acres of free-roaming sheep and a vision in your head of the perfect woollen sweater. The materials are there, the inclination is there, but thinking about it is so much easier than turning it into reality. First you're going to need to select the sheep with the best fleece, protect them from pesky rustlers and herd them in a similar direction. Better organisations may give you staff to help but then again, their taste may vary from yours. Once the sheep are corralled, you must get their full attention and develop an understanding in a short time if that fleece is to come off smoothly, without snicks and scars. Then when the wool's on the floor, there's a job to be done removing rough flaws and melding multiple fleeces into one seamless product. It's not just one sweater you're after either. You want a range, consistent, yet individually vibrant.

It may be a touch abstract, but coaching a junior representative team through a season goes a little something along these lines.

Shane Flanagan believes that even prior to knowing who is among the flock, a coach should have some things already cemented in their mind. There are certain elements that every team needs, regardless of its components. Good managers and support staff are a start. A thorough understanding of the season schedule and highlighted, pivotal matches are also useful. Then there will be core skills that the coach plans to focus on, thereby maximising player development.

“When I was at Parramatta they were big on the catch, grip, carry and pass elements, so it's important for us to be across that,” Flanagan says.

“We did have individual skills (training), but we promoted block skills that were considered necessary and which perhaps the players haven't thought about before.

“Teaching a player how to catch at different angles is an example there. How do they catch at the six o'clock position as compared to other angles?”

Commonly, teams playing in junior representative seasons will spend more time training through the pre-season than actually competing. In the Sydney-based leagues, squads may slog it out in the gym and on the training paddock for up to 18 weeks before their first game. Yet the season could be as short as 10 games. Therefore, players are going to be spending a lot of time – not always enjoyable time either – in each other's pockets. That's before the team even gets to the season proper, where match pressures and injuries mount on continued conditioning. Developing and maintaining team harmony is certainly something that needs consideration and forward planning.

“I guess something that’s kind of unique to this level is that you get kids coming together who have played against each other in local junior teams for maybe nine or 10 years,” Flanagan says.

“They won’t always be dirty on each other, but there’s a fair chance they’ll at least be a bit wary. It’s important to break down those barriers.

“At the very start it’s probably just as important to oversee players as it is to coach them. You want to arrive there before training and stay afterwards to see who is talking and what cliques are formed or forming.

“In a session you might even ask one of the assistants to run a drill so you can stand back and observe the interaction.”

There are myriad tricks of the trade when it comes to fostering a healthy level of morale. Changes of venues and social outings can be helpful, but a coach can also pique interest and chemistry in less obvious ways. Training in smaller groups before Christmas is one such beneficial method. Looking forward to the season, it helps to target specific areas for specific players and increases communication and understanding in certain dynamics.

Furthermore, it keeps players from spending masses of time around each other where they are being physically and mentally punished. Eventually, players will eagerly anticipate the time when they come together as a team, much the same way they can’t wait to finish running sand dunes and pick up a football.

Through the tough pre-season months, every member of the team should face hardship if they are to physically improve. However, the introductory curve is also important to consider when accounting for team harmony. In the mid-to-late teens, not all players are accustomed to rigorous training. Similarly, not all are physically comparable. Although senior grades are usually stocked with athletes across the board, some standout junior players may have hulking physiques and appalling fitness. Others may have fantastic evasion, yet have never seriously lifted weights before.

“The days when you throw everyone in together and run long distances should be long gone,” says Flanagan.

“It was always a bit ‘sink-or-swim’ before. Chances were there was always a big kid or two lagging behind and that would sour things until they eventually lost interest and left the team.

“We have to accept that kids mature at different rates physically and mentally, not just from one to another, but within themselves. In the elite grades, we have coaching programs to suit individuals, so why not do it for kids who arguably need it more?”

“It’s funny that when it comes to skills and gym work, we make concessions for certain people depending on their position, but when it comes to conditioning we’ve usually put them all in the same basket.”

As far as supplying variety in training while maintaining fitness goes, drills and conditioning games are valuable tools. Although drills work on repetition (necessary for development), there are usually a handful of different drills that can interchange for the same skill. Emphasising pace, effort and concentration will have most children completing the tasks without being mindful of cardio-vascular stress. Among the conditioning games Flanagan likes to use is offside touch football, where forward passes are allowed, but every team member must cross halfway for a score to be recorded. Another is a soccer game, using OzTag flags. Once a player has a flag ripped off they must run around a set of markers before returning to the game. They can lose their flag either with or without possession of the ball. A third idea is to have games that reward field position. Each time players pass a certain mark, they get a bonus of some type.

When in-season, it is imperative that the coach be mindful of the precise circumstances of each player. By that stage rigorous testing and extended observation should have presented an accurate overview of players’ strengths, weaknesses and attitude. Just as valuable however, is knowledge of the commitments outside of football, which face each team member. Work, home and school will all require energy and time from the player. What separates the first two of these environments from the last is that rarely does work or home life demand further athletic exertion. Conversely, in many cases your club player will be asked to represent their school in rugby league or other sports to the point where adverse conflicts of interest may arise.

“Not only is your own draw important, but you should be aware of clashes with games and training from the kids’ schools,” says Flanagan.

“It can be a bit of a problem. Guys you have in your team might be bashing each other up twice as much in school footy.

“There doesn’t seem to be a lot of sense to it and it’s been difficult to deal with in the past, but I will say the co-operation is improving.

“It’s not just the games either. Some days we’ve had kids get flogged in conditioning at school, then two hours later they show up and get flogged more by us. They may as well go home because it’s not doing them any good.”

In line with Flanagan’s theory about targeting certain games in the season and tapering schedules in accordance, players may be rested if demands get too great. Then again, with other commitments bearing down on them, players may be looking for something rare and valuable to pick them up – encouragement. Praise can often be overlooked and undervalued, but for children in this situation it is often what they require most.

The above point leads us back to a fact, which can never be ignored at this level. Ultimately, as a junior representative coach, you are not dealing with adults. You are handling people who are developing at a rapid rate in all areas of their life. Therefore, assisting development is essentially your role. As Flanagan is wont to say: “You don’t measure your success on trophies at this age. Concentration should be 70 per cent on the individual and 30 per cent on the team. Once the whistle goes, your attitude to winning can change, but the rest of the week should be about development. It’s as if you’re putting the building blocks in place for the skyscrapers to rise in the future.”

Or maybe shearing sheep...

Finish with professionalism and development over trophies and praise and encouragement.



6.

Drills

RLCM has been including drills in each edition since Book 12. These drills have now been compiled into three books which are available to coaches in printed, electronic and CD formats.

Drills Book (1) is a passport size book which fits into the back pocket and can be easily referred to while on the training field.

Drills Book (2) is the same size of the existing RLCM books and contains a selection of 64 training drills and games.

Drills Book (3) is only available as an electronic book and contains a selection of drills from RLCM Books 20 to 24.

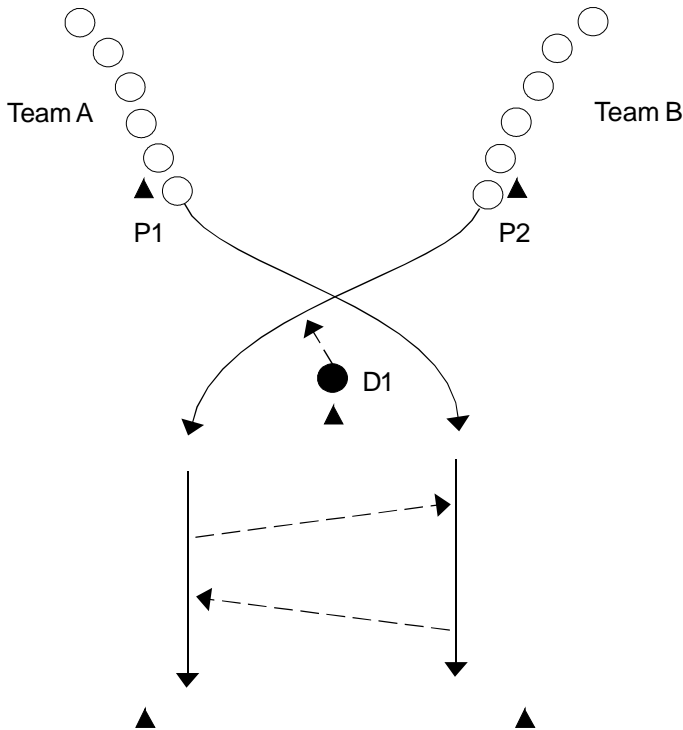
The comprehensive collection of all drills is available on CD. The benefits of the CD are, it can be saved onto numerous computers, multiple copies of the drills can be printed and distributed to other coaches and the drills can be easily saved for future coaches of the club to refer to for many years.

Visit the website for to view book contents and order your copy today. (www.rlcm.com.au)

233 Training Drills **CD** **ORDER YOUR COPY**

Collection of Drills from RLCM Books 12 - 30

Passing and Receiving (1)



Set Up

- 6 balls, 10 hats, 12 players

The Drill (2 players)

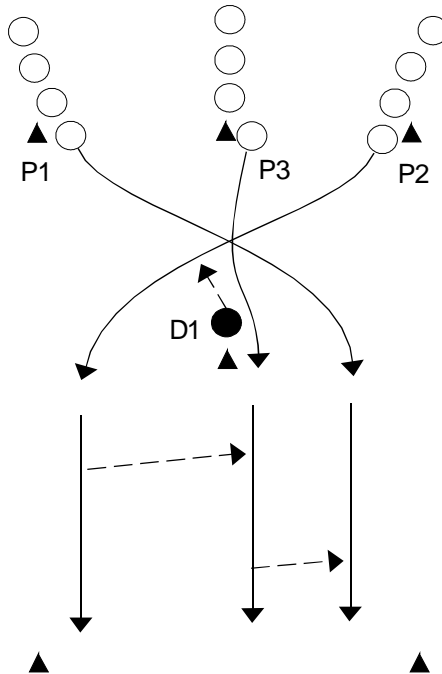
- Players divide into two equal teams
- All players in Team (A) have a ball
- The drill commences when P1 passes the ball to D1
- P1 and P2 then run out and cross each other (P1 always goes first)
- D1 passes the ball to P2
- Within the next 10 metres P2 must throw an onside pass to P1 and P1 must return the pass to P2.

Coaching Points

- Technique correction, balance of runners, quick hands, timing, methods of release and reaction.

The next 3 drills are progressions of this drill.

Passing and Receiving (2)



Set Up

- 4 balls, 6 hats, 12 players

The Drill (3 Players - Progression)

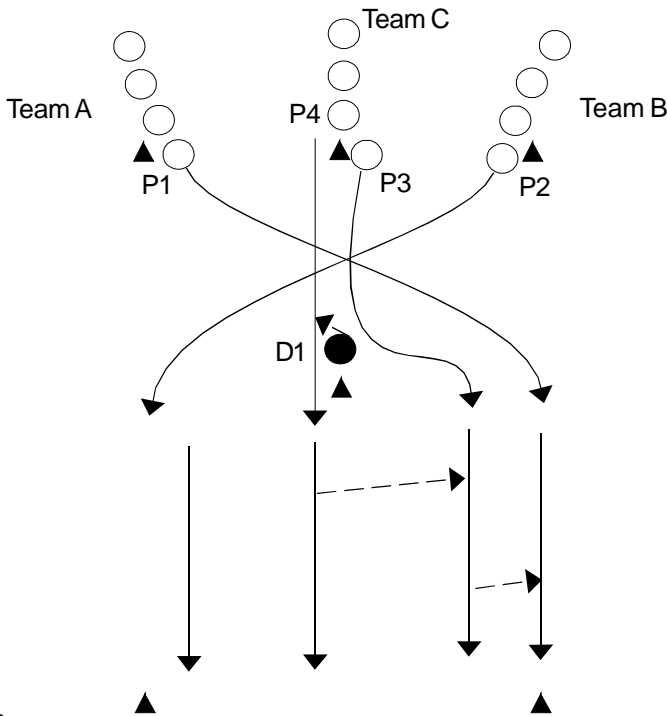
- Players divide into three equal teams
- All players in Team (B) have a ball
- The drill commences when P2 passes the ball to D1
- P1 and P2 then run out and cross each other (P2 always goes first)
- D1 passes the ball to P1, P3 trails behind
- P3 run to the right of D1 and joins the line between P1 and P2
- Within the next 15 metres at least two outside passes must be completed between the players

Coaching Points

- Technique correction, balance of runners, quick hands, timing, methods of release and reaction.

The next drill is a progression of this drill.

Passing and Receiving (3)



Set Up

- 4 balls, 6 hats, 12 players

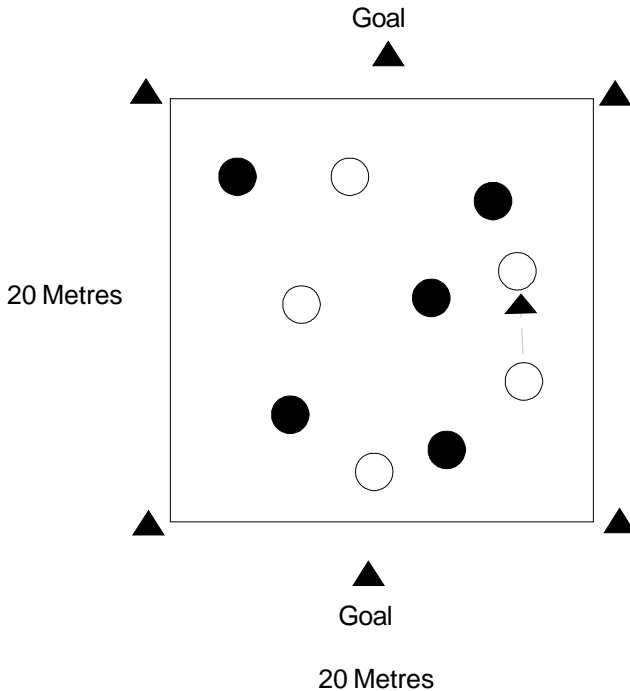
The Drill (4 Players - Progression)

- Players divide into three equal teams
- All players in Team (B) have a ball
- The drill commences when P2 passes the ball to D1
- P1 and P2 then run out and cross each other (P2 always goes first)
- P1 and P2 run through and continue wide, P3 and P4 trail behind
- P3 runs to D1 then cuts to the left
- P4 runs straight and receives either a pass or hand off from D1
- Within the next 15 metres at least two inside passes must be completed between the players

Coaching Points

- Technique correction, balance of runners, quick hands, timing, methods of release and reaction.

League Basketball



Set Up

- Two equal teams, 6 hats, 1 ball

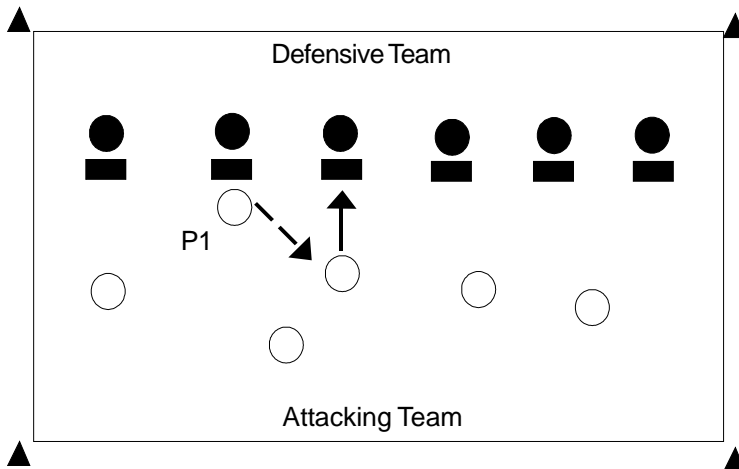
The Drill

- Set up a 20m x 20m grid
- General basketball rules apply
- Players are only allowed to take one step after catching the ball
- Players score by hitting the witches hat with the ball

Variation

- Create your own rules
 - two handed passes only
 - one handed passes only
 - nominate players to use different off-loads

Bump and Unload



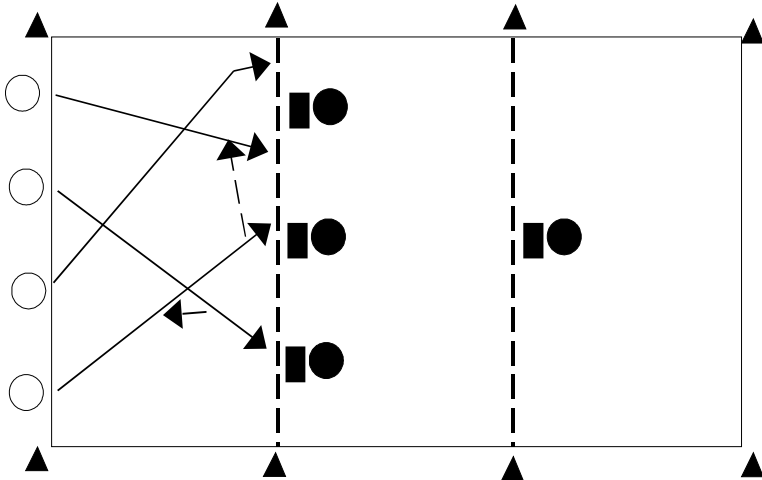
Set Up

- 1 ball, 4 hats, 12 players
- Attacking team attempts to push through the defence and score a try

The Drill

- Players divide into two equal teams
- P1 starts the drill by running at and making contact with a defender
- P1 must offload in a controlled manner to a support player who then runs at another defender
- The attacking team may push through the line if the defence allows, but must off-load to support and then score a try
- The defensive line must stay in a line in front of the football
- Once a try has been scored, play goes back the other way and the attacking team attempt to score at the other end.
- Play continues for a set time
- Knock-ons, forward passes or being forced into touch incur penalties (e.g. push ups, sit ups) for the whole team which reduces their time to score

4 v 3 v 1



Set Up

- 1 ball, 8 hats, 8 players

The Drill

- The drill commences with 4 attacking players on the start line
- 3 defending players holding tackle pads are positioned 5 metres back as the first line of defence
- Another player can be introduced as the second line of defence another 5 metres back
- The defenders can only move sideways of the defensive line and not back and forth
- The attacking players are given 30 seconds to create a play using evasion skills that will allow a ball carrier to beat the first and second lines of defence
- If a ball carrier is caught by the defender the attacking team must restart and try again
- Emphasis should be on using evasion skills, communication, back up and timing of pass

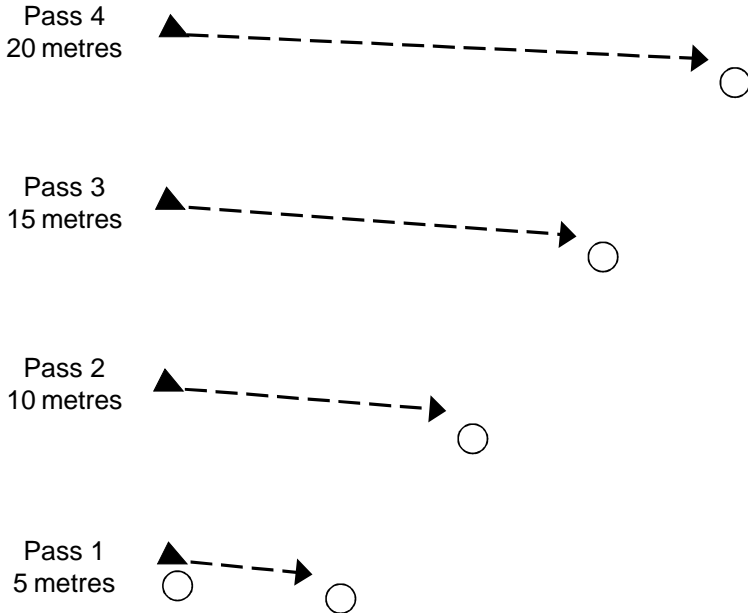
Eights

A TRAINING GAME

The international laws of the game apply subject to the following modifications:-

1. 8 per side - 3 forwards, 1 half back and 4 backs. 10 per side if reserves are to be used.
2. Game is played over 2 X 15 minute halves with a 3 minute break between.
3. Unlimited replacement applies if a team of 9 or 10 is used, but only during stoppages in play. All 9 or 10 players of the team must play the equivalent of one half a game (minimum).
4. Game is played across the full sized field between the half way and the goal line. Touch lines of the full sized field are the goal lines of the "Eights" field.
5. The game is one of 4 "tackles". Tackles are made by 'simultaneous two hand touches'. Once tackled, the player must play the ball. At the end of the 4th tackle the ball is turned over and the opposition recommences play with a play the ball.
6. At the play the ball:-
 - (a) No Markers are allowed
 - (b) The ball must be played backwards
 - (c) The dummy half may either pass the ball or run. If he runs and doesn't score, then he must "turn the ball over" if tackled.
7. Scrums consist of 3 players only. They are packed only when:-
 - (a) A player runs (or is forced) into touch.
 - (b) A double knock on occurs.
 - (c) A player is held up in a "hold" tackle over his opponents goal line.
 - (d) An opposition player touches the ball before it crosses the touch line after a penalty kick.
8. Tries are scored in the normal fashion. There are no kicks at goal.
9. Only grubber kicks are allowed in open play, the game is designed to maximise the running and passing aspects of the game. Grubber kicks may be regarded as "passes".
10. At starts of play all distances are halved except for scrums, which are still to be set 10 metres "in". E.g. At kick-off the ball needs to travel only 5 metres and not 10 metres as in international laws.

Dummy Half Passing



Drill

- P1 becomes the acting dummy half and runs to the first football
- The first pass to a support player is 5 metres away
- He then runs to the next football and passes to another support player who 10 metres away
- The third pass is 15 metres and so on
- All players to attempt passes left to right and right to left

Variation

- 6 o'clock pass
- Spiral pass

Dummy Half Passing & Basic Catch

Drill

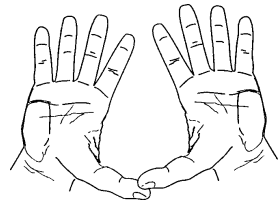
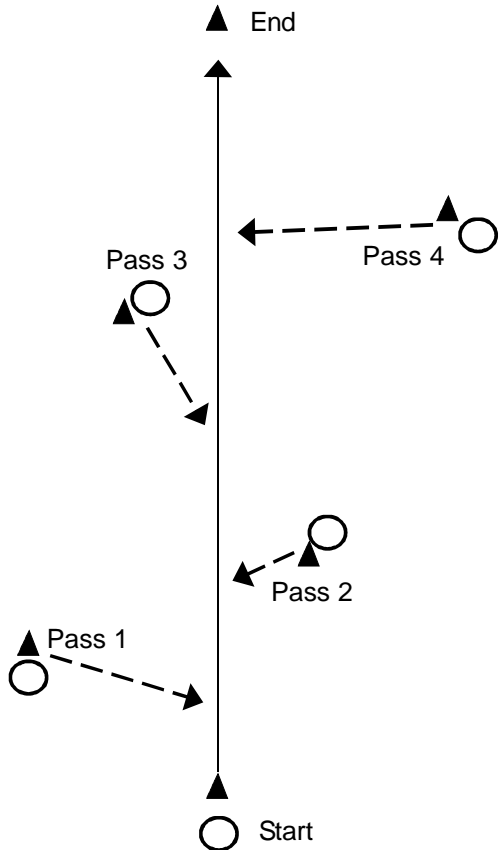
- A series of play the balls (PTB) are set up at various distances and spacing
- The receiver is to run a straight line receiving a pass off the ground from each dummy half
- The dummy half pass will vary in distance giving the receiver - short balls, long balls, deep balls and shallow balls
- Receiver drops ball, places ball or goes to ground after each pass

Variations

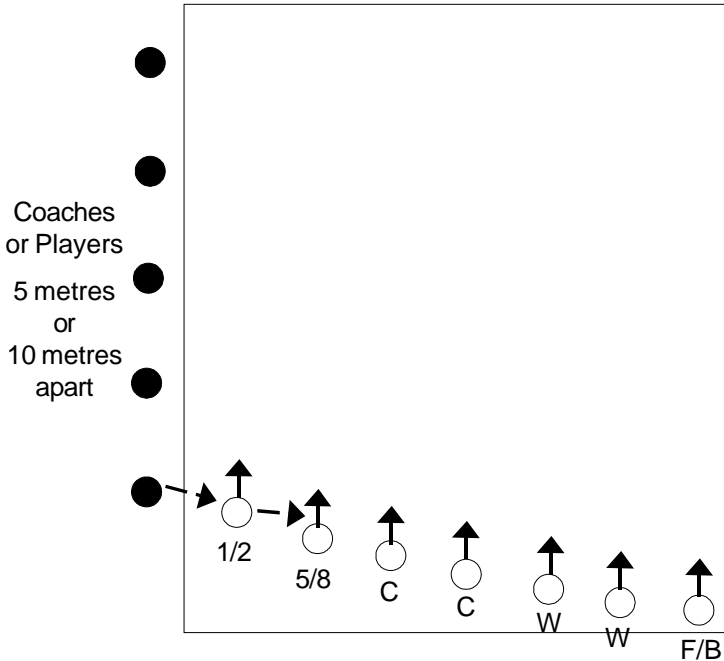
- Use a different type of ball at each PTB (e.g. tennis, soccer, golf etc)
- Allow dummy half passes to roam and pass from different locations

Skills

- Receiver - Eyes on ball, arms extended (not fully), hands ready to catch (see diagram), rotation of upper body at hips (facing the ball), outside foot, calling for football
- Dummy Half - Passing from ground (not standing), at eye height, in front of receiver



Backline Passing Drill



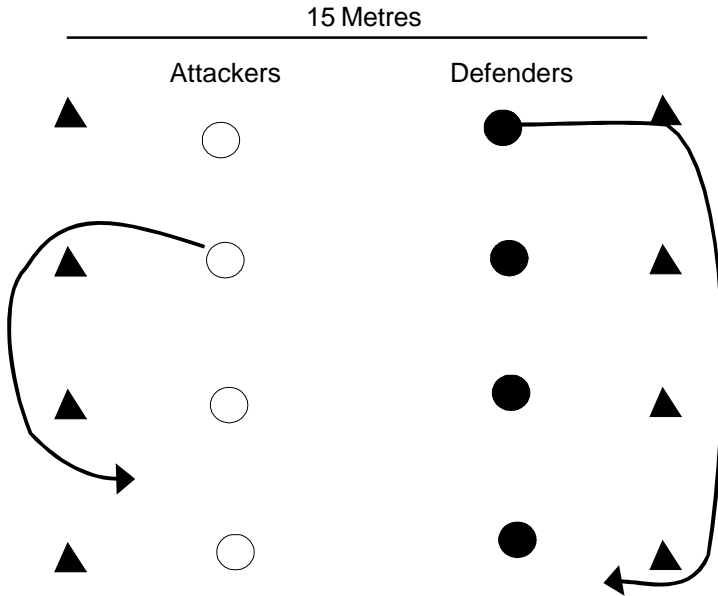
Drill

- Backline forms with blindside winger and fullback joining in.
- As they run down the field they receive a pass from a coach or player every 10 metres
- Each ball is passed along the line
- Once they have received all the footballs and passed down the line, the players move back down the field receiving passes from the opposite direction

Variations

- Coaches stand 5 metres apart so the players are receiving the ball much quicker.

Adjusting in Defence



Drill

- Divide players into 2 equal teams - Attackers and Defenders
- The game is played for a set period of time or if the attackers make an error the ball is changed over.
- Defenders are to make a two handed touch
- After each touch the attackers must retreat to their markers with the ball carrier running around two markers before play can resume
- The defenders must also retreat with the end defender running to the opposite end before they can advance in defence

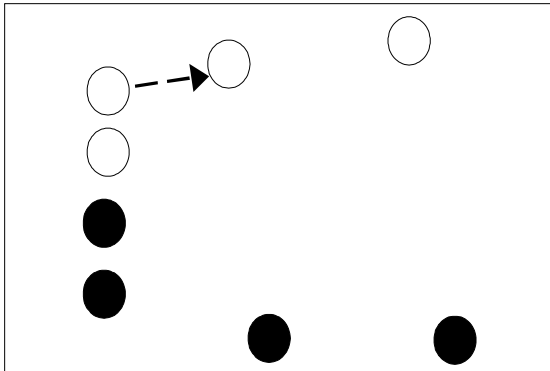
Variations

- Number of attackers and defenders

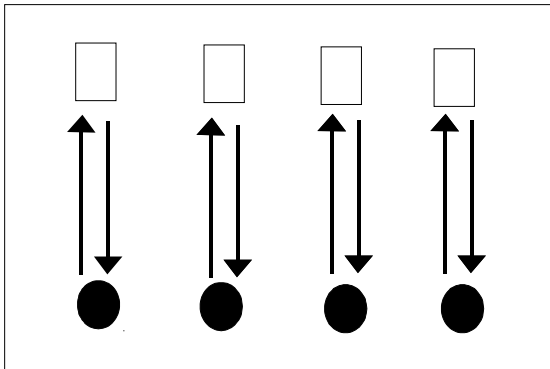
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Fatigue Defence

GRID (2)
Attackers
versus
Defenders



GRID (1)
Tackle Bags



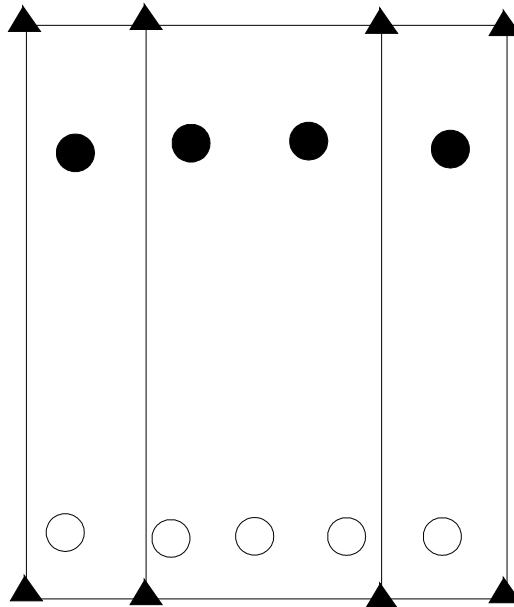
Drill

- Divide players into 3 teams
- Two grids are set up, 1 grid is set up with tackling bags the other is an attackers versus defenders zone
- Defenders perform a set number of tackles on bags and then proceed into the next grid to defend against actual attackers
- The teams rotate between tackle bags, defending and attacking

Variations

- Number of tackles made
- Number of attackers or defenders
- Number of plays attackers have to score
- Two handed grab or tackle

Defence Corridors



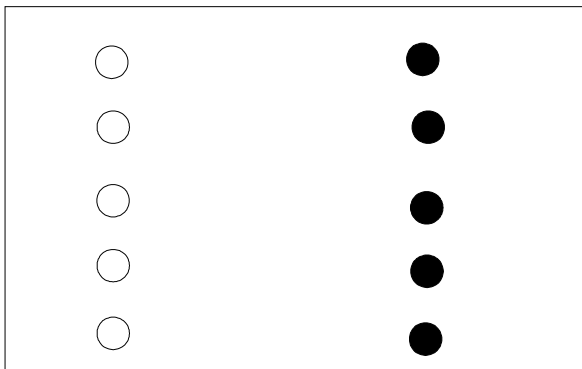
Drill

- Divide players into Attackers and Defenders
- Attackers start the drill by moving down the grid and attempting to score at the opposite end
- Attackers can roam wherever they like around the grid
- Defenders are restricted to their corridor which is marked, they may advance forward but must remain in their corridor only

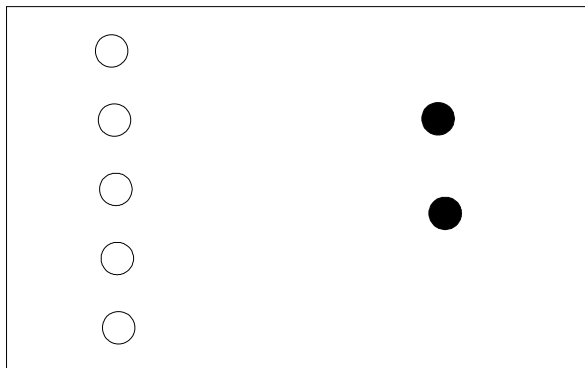
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Five and Two

Play 1
5 V 5



Play 4
5 V 2



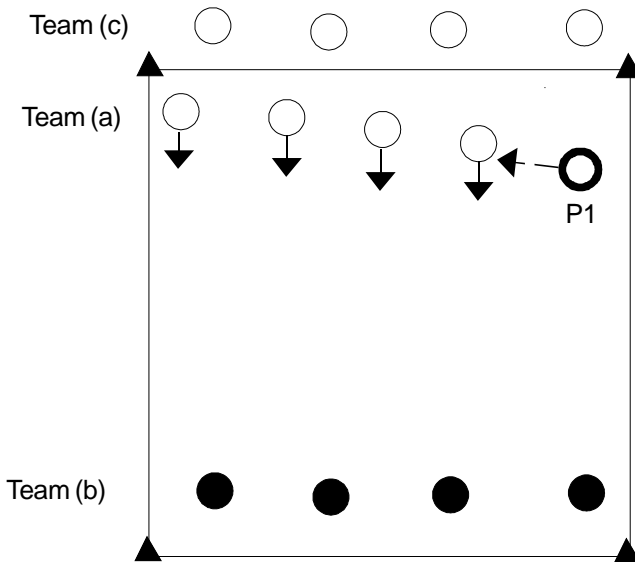
Drill

- Players are split into 2 equal team of 5.
- The drills start with 5 Attackers versus 5 Defenders
- The Attackers have 5 plays to attempt to score
- After 5 plays or a try is scored the ball is returned to the 5 attacking players for a restart, the defensive team is reduced to 4 players
- The attacking team only has 4 plays to attempt to score now
- The drill continues with 3 Defenders and 3 Plays down to 2 Defenders and 2 Plays to score.
- The maximum amount of tries available is 4
- After 4 sets the teams swap roles

Variations

- Number of attackers
e.g. 6 versus 2 / 7 versus 2
- RLCM - JUNIOR COACHING BOOK (3)

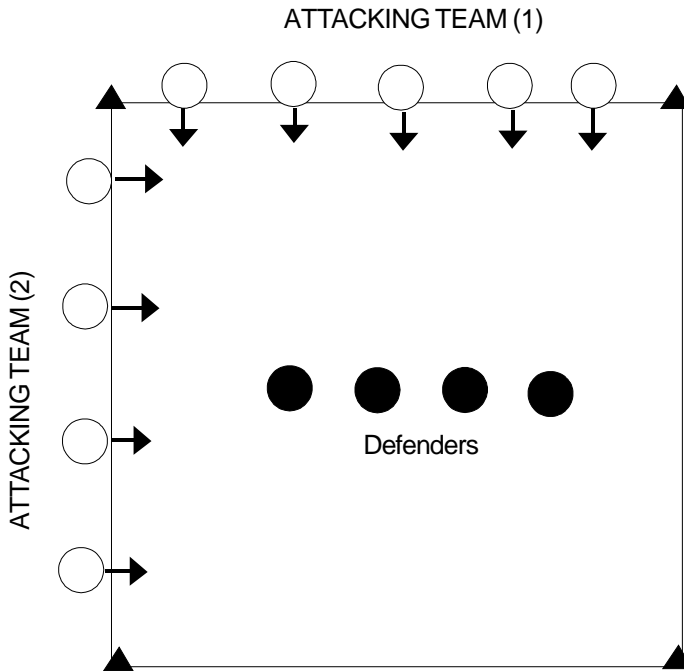
Decision Making Drill



Drill

- Identify 1 Player (P1) as an Attacking player and divide the remaining players into 3 equal teams Team (a), Team (b) and Team (c)
- Set up grid as shown in above diagram, this is a continuous drill with P1 remaining in play at all times
- P1 starts the drill by passing to a player in Team (a)
- P1 then joins Team (a) and they attack Team (b) who become defenders
- The attacking team must attempt to score at the opposite end
- The play is completed when a two handed touch, tackle, mistake or try is made
- The next play starts immediately
- P1 joins Team (b) who now becomes the attacking team
- Team (b) attacks Team (c) who now become the defenders
- At the completion of the play P1 joins Team (c) and they become the attacking team and Team (a) now defends
- P1 remains in all plays, by joining each attacking team he creates a 5 v 4

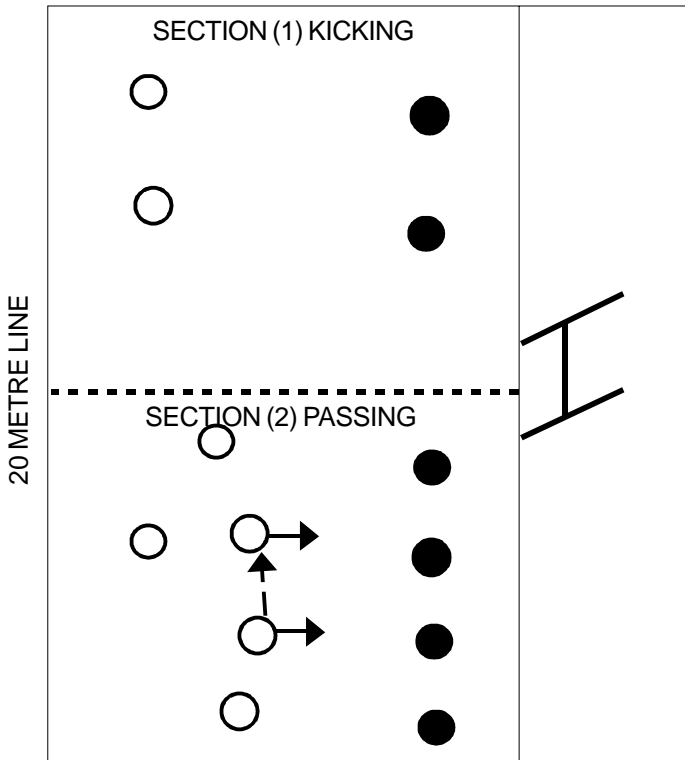
Scrambling in Defence



Drill

- Divide players into three teams - two attacking teams and one defensive team
- Line up teams as shown in diagram above
- Attacking Team (1) starts the drill by attempting to score at the opposite end of the grid
- After scoring or making an error Attacking Team (2) proceed to attempt to score at their opposite end
- The Defensive team must scramble to defend against the two teams who are attacking from different directions

Twenty Metre Attack (Kick & Pass)



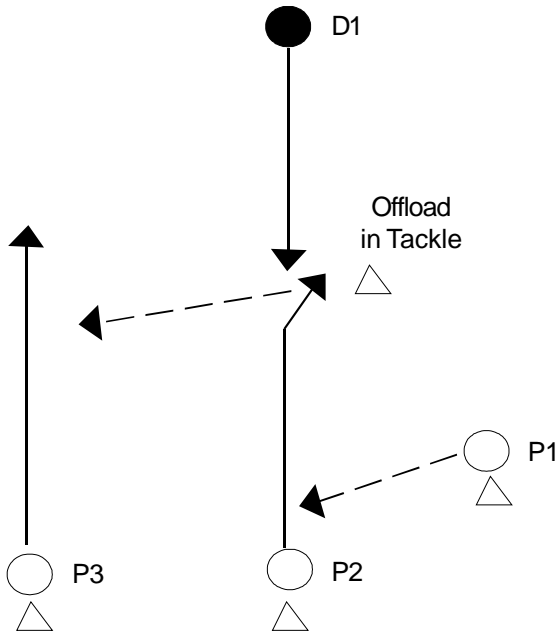
Drill

- Players are split into attackers and defenders, the field is divided into 2 sections
- In section (1) a try can be scored only by the way of a kick
- In section (2) a try can be scored only by the way of passing
- The ball can move between the two sections
- Allocate points depending on the emphasis of importance by the coach
e.g. kick try - 2 points, pass try - 6 points

Variations

- Allocate players to a section
- Set a time limit to score (e.g. 5 mins), or, a set number of plays.

Offload Going to Ground (A)



Set Up

- 1 ball, 4 players

The Drill

- P1 passes the ball to P2
- P2 runs directly at D1 who is going to make the tackle
- P2 can step and fend but can not run away from D1
- P2 must offload to P3 during the tackle

Coaching Points

- Ball should be held in the opposite arm of the one being used to fend
- Ball should be transferred into both hands when the player is falling and then pass to support player
- Players rotate positions

Progression

- To make this drill more game like defenders should start with a low blocking tackle thus allowing easy release of the football

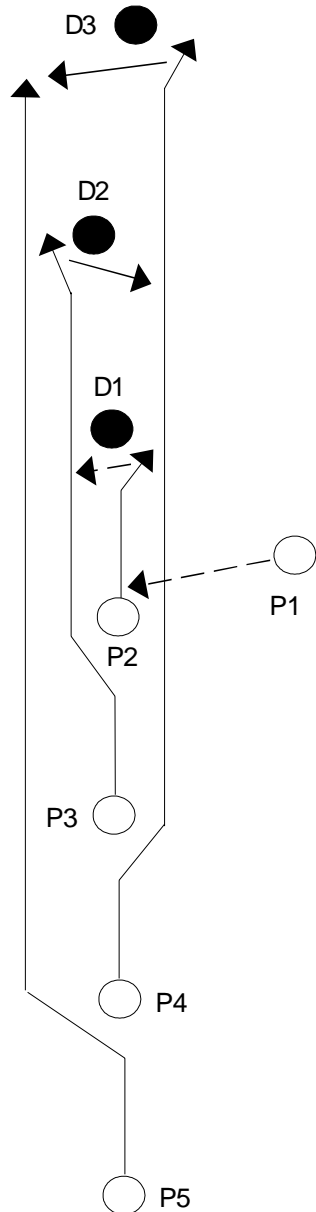
Progressive Offload (B)

Set Up

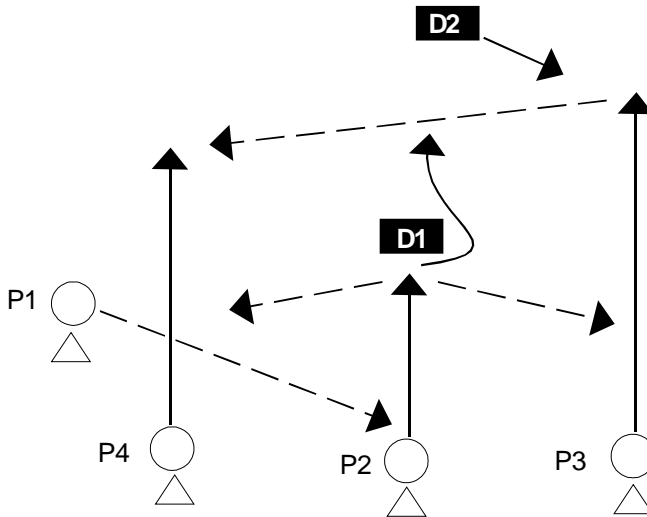
- 1 ball, 8 players

The Drill

- All players line up in one line with approx 10 metres between each player
- Defending players should face the attacking players
- P1 passes the ball to P2
- P2 runs directly at D1 and fades to the right or left
- P3 being the first support player receives an offload from P2
- P3 continues down the line to D2, P3 fades and offloads to support P4
- P4 continues, fades from D3 and offloads to P5



Hit and Spin Offload (C)



Set Up

- 1 ball, 2 hit pads, 6 players

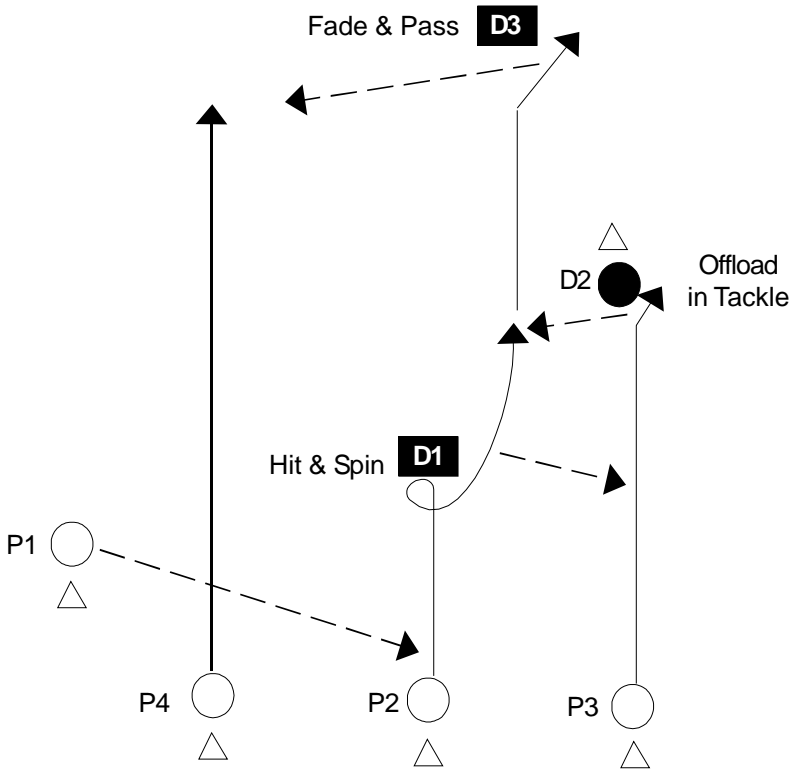
The Drill

- P1 passes the ball to P2
- P2 runs forward, hits and spins off D1 and passes to either P3 or P4
- The player that receives the ball continues down the field and must attempt to draw D2 and then pass to the support player

Coaching Points

- Player hitting pad should use the same foot and shoulder
- If off-loading to the left, the player should (1) aim to contact defender on the right side of his body (2) keep feet driving using short steps (3) spin vigorously to the left as to rip the impact arm and shoulder away from the defending player

Combination Offload (D)



Set Up

- 1 ball, 1 hit pad, 7 players

The Drill

- A combination of the three previous offloads drills
- P1 passes to P2
- P2 hits and spins off D1 and offloads to P3
- P3 runs forward and is tackled by D2, as he is falling he offloads to P2 now running in support
- P2 runs towards D3, fades and passes to support player P4

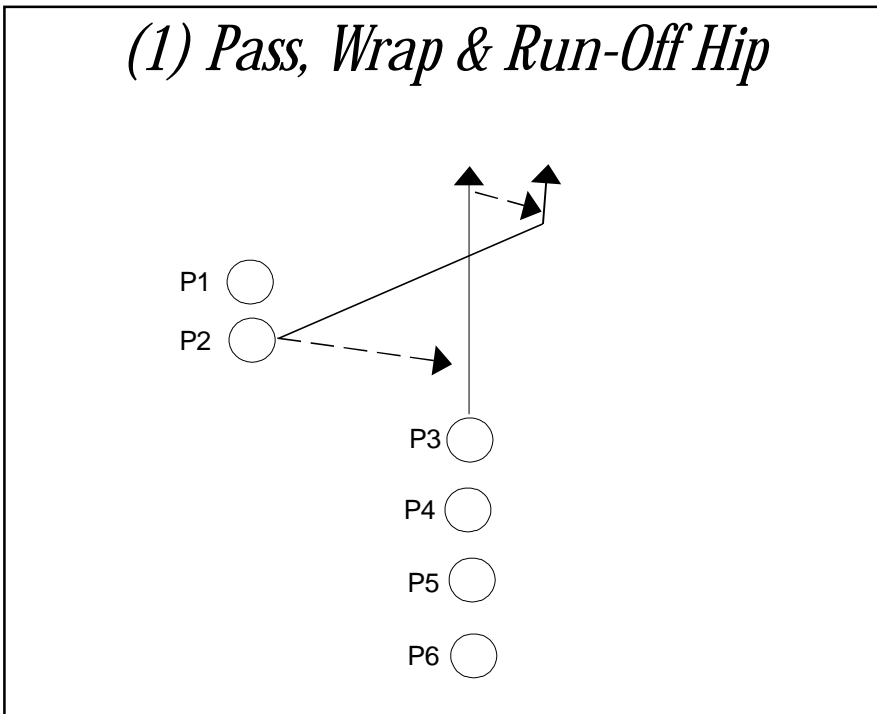
Ruck Play Development

Set Up

- 1 ball, 6 attacking players

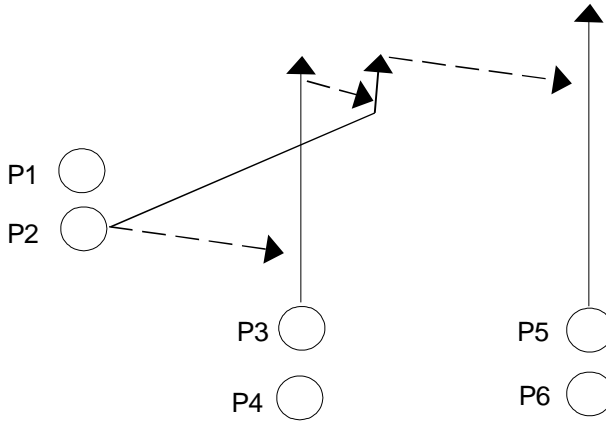
The Drill

- All drills commence with a Play the ball on the ground
- Players should concentrate on the line of run and the width of the attack

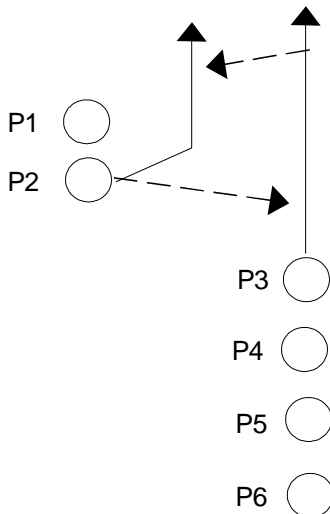


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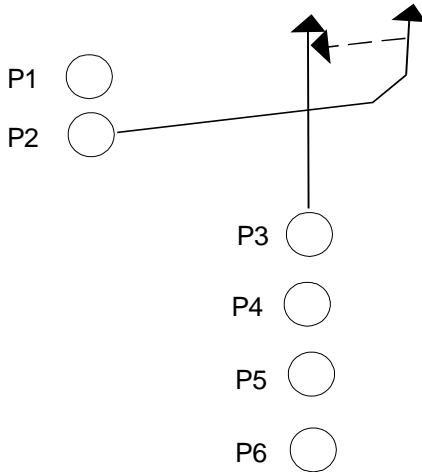
(2) Pass, Wrap, Pick Up



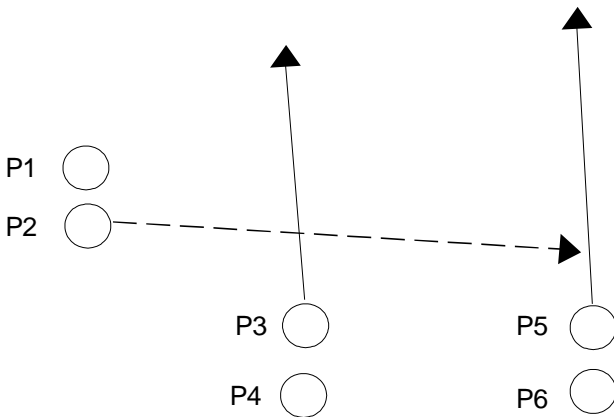
(3) Pass, Play & Pick Up from Behind



(4) Run and Reverse

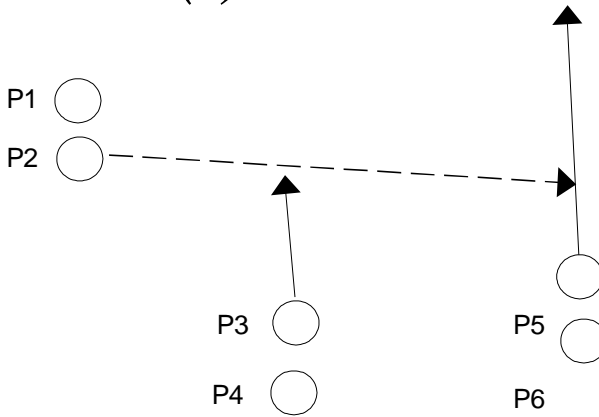


(5) Second Man with Block



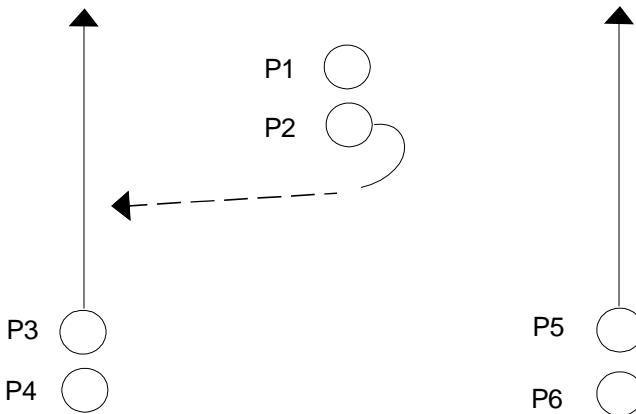
- P3 runs through as a dummy runner
- Pass is made behind P3

(6) Face Ball



- P5 starts slightly in front of P3, this gives P2 a clear line of pass

(7) Over Calls



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