



Discovery Vitality

Junior rugby coaching manual



SPORTS
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Introduction

Many factors in modern society have resulted in children and adults becoming increasingly inactive. This has had an alarming effect on their health. Regular physical activity plays an important role in the prevention and treatment of many lifestyle-related diseases such as coronary artery disease, strokes and type 2 diabetes (non-insulin dependent diabetes). Sports are a great way to encourage children to get more physically active and healthy. That's why Discovery Vitality has developed a series of sports manuals for primary schools in South Africa.



“We wish to change our nation’s children by instilling in them the desire to be more active, not just now but for all their lives. We aim to achieve this by teaching each child a competence in and passion for at least one sport. This we will do by building a sports coaching culture for our children...”

Professor Tim Noakes

The purpose of the Junior rugby coaching manual

This manual provides teachers and coaches with relevant information on how to coach rugby so that children get the maximum benefits from doing the sport – to get physically active, healthy and fit. The focus of the manual is on developing the **basic skills needed** for juniors (up to the age of 12) to be competent on the field. The main focus is on **providing exercises and drills** to help you plan your practice and develop skills, rather than to give a comprehensive framework of the rules of rugby.

Professor Tim Noakes of the Sports Science Institute of South Africa has a dream to make South African children the fittest in the world by 2020. He believes that through initiatives like the Vitality Schools Programme we can reach this goal. You too can play a part in making this vision a reality!

The Junior rugby coaching manual at a glance

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Teach children the exciting game of rugby

Rugby is a team contact sport that appeals to children of all shapes and sizes. It involves running, dodging, pushing, passing and contact with other players. All these movements build fitness of the heart and lungs, and stimulate a balanced muscular development for growing bodies.

Understanding the game

The aim of rugby

The aim of the game is to score more points than the opposition. There are generally two phases of play: attack and defence. During attack, the team in possession of the ball moves upfield and tries to score a try by placing the ball over the opponents' try-line. Defence happens when the defending team falls back and tries to tackle the attacking team to get the ball back and prevent the other team from scoring a try. Players use skills such as catching, passing, kicking, running with the ball and avoiding the opposition.

Safety

As with any sport, there is a risk of injury when playing rugby. Coaching the correct techniques will lower this risk. The majority of rugby-related injuries happen in the contact situation and can be avoided through the use of proper technique. The contact phases of the game include the scrum, the tackle situation, the lineout, and the ruck and maul.

In the tackle situation, players who are not used to being tackled tend to fall, tense up and develop "tunnel vision." The best way to avoid this is to help young players develop confidence in the tackle situation.

The tackle can happen from any direction (in front, behind or from the side of the player), which makes it difficult to prepare learners for all possible tackles. In general, the best method is to accelerate into and brace for the tackle (put the hard part of the body into the tackle), roll into the correct direction and protect the ball so that it is available for team mates. More on this can be found in the unit skills section, along with descriptions of other ways to prevent injury in the contact phases of the game.

Contact is often unnecessary and should be avoided when possible. Whenever players are given the opportunity to play, it is the coach's role to observe players and ensure that they are using safe techniques in contact. The coach should also ensure that all players are wearing gum guards during practice and matches.



Key points on how to lower the risk of injury when entering a contact situation

- Keep the head up (face up and chin off the chest)
- Keep a straight back
- Keep eyes open and focused on the target area.

Planning your practice

Practice frequency and duration

When trying to encourage children to participate in sport it is essential that sessions are fun. Training is not necessarily about quantity but rather quality, so we suggest that you have two one hour sessions a week.

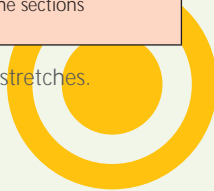
Putting the practice together

As the coach, use your creativity and imagination to get the most out of your practice time. It is recommended that you stick to a framework that will help you cover all the important aspects of rugby training. The table on the next page summarises the framework for how to set up a good practice session:



Phase	Description and principles	Length
Warm up and games*	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Objective is to prepare players physically and ease them into activity• Should be lively, fun, engaging and instructional• Players should be prepared and sufficiently warm so as to engage in higher intensity exercise and physical contact	15 minutes, consisting of 2 - 3 of the available activities
Skills development and training	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Specific attention is paid to individual players and skills training• Skills include specific handling skills: placing a ball, picking up a ball, receiving a pass, catching a ball and passing• Skills also include defensive and attacking skills, such as evasive running and tackling	15 minutes, consisting of two of the available drills for specific handling skills (see individual skills section) 10 minutes, consisting of two drills for defensive and attacking skills
Match / game time	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If the practice is held before a scheduled match, focus on unit work such as mauling and rucking. Also work on scrumming and lineouts for the forwards, and passing down the line for the backline• If there is no scheduled match play, a small game can be organised by dividing the players into two evenly matched teams	15 minutes
Warm down* phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Opportunity to get all players together at the end and reinforce key lessons of the practice• Also helps to ease players out of activity	5 minutes
Total: 60 minutes		
All phases have drills and training games that you can use to make sessions fun and enjoyable for your players while also helping you teach the skills properly. We've explained the drills in the sections that follow.		

*Refer to the General coaching manual for a list of static and dynamic stretches.





Warm up activities

These warm up activities should be fun and ease players into activity. Skills should not be coached during this phase of the practice, and there should be very little talking except to encourage players to perform the drills safely and correctly. Feel free to adapt the drills and create new ones to suit your players.

Backwards passing

Set up

- Divide players into groups of 10

How to do the activity

- Players jog in a line, each one positioned slightly behind the player who will pass the ball to him
- The ball is passed back along the line
- Once the player has passed the ball he must hang back to ensure that he is not in front of the player with the ball

Progression

- Add more balls
- Change the type of pass that is being used

Chasing the ball

Set up

- Mark out a 20m X 20m grid

How to do the activity

- Divide players into pairs
- Each pair has one ball
- The player with the ball has to run evasively in the grid trying to get away from the other player
- The other player needs to try and stay within 1m of the ball carrier
- Allow the activity to continue for 20 seconds and then swap the ball carriers and repeat the activity



Progression

- On the coach's call, the ball carrier passes the ball to the other player who has to evade the original player
- On the coach's command, the ball is placed on the ground and picked up by the other player. Roles are then reversed.

Field runs

Set up

- Divide players into two groups

How to do the activity

- The groups line up on diagonal corners of the field
- The first group jogs the length and sprints the width of the field
- Once the group reaches the opposite corner, the second group starts with their jog
- Continue the activity for 10 minutes

Progression

- The coach names the player who leads the sprint.

Horse and jockey

Set up

- Mark out a 20m diameter circle with 10 cones

How to do the activity

- In pairs of two, place all players around the circle. In the pair, one player will be a horse and the other a jockey. The horses (players closest to the centre of the circle) stay stationary while the jockeys (facing the centre of the circle) shuffle sideways in either a clockwise or anticlockwise direction. While the jockeys are shuffling, the horses pass a rugby ball around the circle
- At the command of "climb", all jockeys climb (piggy back) their horses. Make sure all horses are in a strong body position (legs slightly bent, back straight and feet shoulder-width apart). Assist weaker players who are not able to piggy back their team mates
- A couple of seconds later, command "dismount." The jockeys get off the horses and continue shuffling around the circle. Encourage horses to keep passing the ball around the circle when they get "climbed"

Progression

- Add more balls
- Have horses shuffle around the circle with jockeys on their backs.

Rob the nest

Set up

- Place four cones in a square (20m X 20m). Place four to six balls in the middle of it, and three to five players on each corner

How to do the activity

- On the command of "GO" one player from each corner should run to the middle, collect a ball and place it in their nest (their cone). Make sure the balls are placed down and not thrown or dropped
- When they return, they tag the next player in who goes on to collect another ball
- Once all balls are collected from the middle of the grid, players can steal balls from other groups. Players can't protect the ball in their nest
- The first team with three balls back in their own nest wins

Progression

- The coach can hold balls back to lengthen the game, and add balls to shorten the game
- The coach can also allow the balls to be passed back to the nest, and the next player can only leave once the ball is in the nest.

Rugby ball touch

Set up

- Make a square out of four cones (20m X 20m). Divide the square into grids (5m X 5m) with 10 players in each grid (adjust according to numbers). Use one rugby ball

How to do the activity

- Two of the players will be "ON" and eight players "OFF." The objective is for the "ON" players to touch the "OFF" players with the rugby ball. Once touched with the ball, "OFF" players become "ON" players. The touch can happen by throwing or passing the ball into an "OFF" player, or by touching an off player with the ball in hand

Progression

- Instruct "ON" players not to run with the ball
- Encourage all the other players to keep running and stay in the game.

Skills development and training



Skills development and training should be the focus of your practice sessions so the basic skills of rugby can be taught. The aim with young players is to spend about 70% of the time focusing on skills development and only 30% on competition. This way drills are fun and stimulating and not too competitive. It is important that players don't have to wait in lines where they get bored – you should have a “no queue” policy towards your practices! Make it a priority to teach the skills on both the left and right sides so players become equally capable on each side. Remember to get creative.

Attributes of a good player

A good rugby player has skills that include:

- Speed
- Endurance
- Stability
- Co-ordination
- Strength
- Explosive power for acceleration
- Agility
- Fearlessness

Individual skills

Individual skills include handling skills and defensive and attacking skills.

Handling skills include:

- Picking up the ball
- Placing the ball
- Popping the ball
- Passing the ball
- Receiving a pass
- Catching and passing while running

Attacking and defensive skills include:

- Falling and popping
- Making contact
- Tackling
- Front-on tackling
- Draw and pass
- The side step

Each skill is explained in more detail in the next section.



Teaching correct technique

1. Picking up the ball

In rugby, one should pick the ball up correctly, ensure that the ball is not knocked on and, at the same time, ensure safe body positioning to lower the risk of injury.

- Ask for the ball by shouting: “ My ball”
- Move towards the ball side-on, keeping eyes on the ball
- Bend the knees and present the hard parts of the body to the opposition (eg the hips)
- Place the front foot past the ball
- Create a balanced wide base with the feet
- Secure and pick up the ball with both hands (do not scoop the ball up), and bring the ball up towards the chest
- The same key points apply whether the ball is picked up from the front or from the side.

Figure 1



Notice in the picture that the player's body position is perfect, but he is not looking at the ball. This is a common mistake and needs constant correction.

2. Placing the ball

This skill is important for placing the ball behind the try-line and scoring tries, as well as promoting general skills development and co-ordination.

- Bend the knees and present the hard parts of the body to the opposition
- While staying sideways, place the ball with two hands behind the front foot
- Ensure that the ball is firmly placed and does not move after it has been placed
- Always ensure that the ball is placed with both hands.

Figure 2



3. Popping the ball

When a player is held in a tackle, or when a supporting team mate is close enough to the player with the ball, a pop is often more effective and easier for the supporting team mate to catch than a conventional pass.

- Hold the ball in two hands
- Look at the receiver
- Move away from the contact and then pop the ball
- Flick the wrists and float the ball into the hands of the receiver
- Ensure that the pop is not a conventional flat pass. The ball should be lofted and the supporter should run into the lofted pass
- Emphasise that the player should pass backwards.

Figure 3a



b





4.

Passing the ball (sideways)

To attack successfully in rugby, players should be able to pass to players running to the left and right of them. This skill is unique to rugby, and players new to the game will struggle at first.

Players struggling with this skill will often try and sling the ball with one arm. Emphasise that both hands are equally important in the pass. Ensure that players swing both arms and release the ball at the correct phase in the arm swing so the ball is not looped to the next player. Often young players will also try and spin the ball when they pass. This is an advanced skill only required when passing the ball to players very far away. There is no need for junior players to spin the ball.

- Hold the ball in two hands
- Fingers should be placed parallel to the seam of the ball
- Look at the receiver for more accuracy
- Swing the arms and follow through once the ball leaves the hands
- Pass at chest height to the receiver
- Make sure players communicate with each other
- The timing of the run is crucial – make sure the receiver times the run so that he receives the pass at pace, while still remaining behind the player passing the ball.



Figure 4





5. Receiving a pass

Young players can find it difficult to catch the ball because of its oval shape. They often make the mistake of snapping at the ball, which will result in the ball being knocked on.

- Keep the eyes open and focused on the ball
- Wait for the ball with hands pointing towards the direction the ball is coming from, and fingers relaxed and spread apart
- Catch the ball with soft hands (bring it into the chest gently).

Figure 5



6.

Catching and passing

When the ball is passed down the line it is important to get the ball through all the hands as quickly as possible. This will require players to catch the ball correctly and pass it on quickly to the next player, without running with the ball.

- Keep eyes open, chin up and focused on the ball
- Extend the hands and point the fingers in the direction the pass is coming from
- Catch the ball with soft hands, away from the body. Make sure players do not catch the ball against the body
- If possible, catch the ball with relaxed fingers that are placed parallel to the seam of the ball
- Look at the target area and, in one swing of the arms ("quick hands"), pass the ball to the next player
- Pass at chest height to the receiver
- For this skill, it is crucial that players develop peripheral vision (see the Activities section, page 40).

7

Falling and popping

Although this skill does not intentionally get performed on the field, it combines falling to the ground and popping the ball to a supporting player. Falling to the ground often happens when tackled. Players should get used to falling and hitting the ground. This will help develop safe technique and avoid injury when getting tackled during a match.

- Always run with the ball in two hands
- Twist sideways and fall on the hard parts of the body, keeping the ball in both hands
- While on the ground make eye contact with a player running towards you
- Pop the ball by pushing the ball away from the body towards the target area (chest height) of the receiver.

Figure 6



8. Making or taking contact

Contact is unavoidable in rugby, but the most effective body position in contact is also the safest. Emphasise that if the head is not kept up (“chin off chest”) at all times, and if the back is bent when entering a contact situation, the player is at greater risk of injury.

- Focus on the contact zone of the opposition
- Keep the chin off the chest and eyes open at all times
- Keep a low body position with shoulders above hips and a straight back
- Use small steps on approach
- Take a wide “power” step into contact
- Place the front foot close to the opponent’s feet
- Make contact side-on with the hard parts of the body (shoulders and hips)
- Maintain a low base, chin off chest and eyes open
- Shield the ball away from the opposition
- Make sure players aim low and drive up (a good way to teach this is to get players to touch the ground before the tackle so that they focus on driving up).

Figure 7a



b



c



9. Tackling

If tackling is not performed correctly, players are at a high risk of injury. So it is extremely important to coach a safe and effective tackling technique. Emphasise that the head must be placed behind the player ("cheek to cheek") when tackling from the side. When tackling from the front it is important to look at the player to make sure that contact is made with the shoulder and not the head. Players should be constantly reminded of these key points:

- Approach the ball carrier in a pre-tackle stance (ie sink hips and lean upper body into contact)
- Always keep the chin up and off the chest, eyes open, back straight and a low body position.

Side-on tackling

- Focus the eyes on the target area (the trunk of the ball carrier)
- Do not wait for the ball carrier. Move forward and make contact with head behind the ball carrier's body ("cheek to cheek")
- Wrap the arms around the body of the ball carrier
- Continue with a power drive to complete the tackle.



Front-on tackling

- Focus the eyes on the target area (the soft part of the ball carrier's body, ie his mid-section)
- Do not wait for the ball carrier. Move forward and make contact with the shoulder against the target area (his mid-section)
- Lock the arms around the ball carrier
- Continue with a power drive to complete the tackle on top of the ball carrier. (See Figure 7a, b, c on previous page).





10.

Draw and pass

During attack, contact should be avoided at all times. It is better to beat the defence by distributing the ball to a man in space. To ensure that the defence is not able to tackle the player the ball is getting passed to, the passer of the ball will have to successfully draw the opposition defender. This will allow the team mate receiving the ball to continue the attack without being tackled immediately. Timing is crucial. A correctly timed pass will make it impossible for the defender to touch the player receiving the ball.

- Run straight at a defender while holding the ball in two hands
- Look at the receiver to assist the accuracy of the pass
- Make sure that the defender commits to the ball carrier
- Once the defender commits to the ball carrier, the ball carrier should pass to a team mate in a better position
- Pass at chest height slightly in front of the receiver so that the receiver can run onto the ball without slowing down.

11.

The sidestep

When there are no players to pass the ball to, the attacker should try and avoid being tackled. One of the ways to avoid being tackled, and to avoid contact, is to try and beat the defender with a step. The point of the sidestep is to change direction suddenly, so as to wrong-foot the defender. When this is done correctly players will often be able to beat defenders without being tackled. Timing is crucial in the sidestep, but getting it right comes with practice and experience.

- Run towards a defender with the ball in two hands
- Shorten running stride for timing and balance
- Change direction close to the defender by pushing sideways powerfully off the right foot to go left, and off the left foot to go right
- Accelerate and take advantage of the defender's hesitation.



Unit skills

It is also important that the players are coached on the unit skills required during matches. These unit skills include scrumming, lineouts, mauling and rucking. These are all contact phases of the game and potentially dangerous if not coached correctly.

1. The scrum

When referees blow their whistle for a minor infringement, the game restarts with a scrum. In the 15-man game (U11 onwards) eight players from each side push against each other in a very structured way. For younger players in a 10-man game, the scrum is not contested and players do not push against each other. It is, however, important that they still get taught how to scrum. This will help them when contested scrums are introduced at an U11 game.

At the start of a scrum, the referee must call CROUCH, followed by TOUCH, followed by PAUSE, and lastly ENGAGE. Each call has a specific meaning, which the players have to follow to ensure their safety.

Crouch: All players should be crouched and ready to scrum.

Touch: The two "props" from each team should touch and continue to hold the shoulder of the opposing prop with their outside arms.

Pause: This is to ensure that all players are balanced and correctly prepared to scrum.

Engage: This signals players to come together.

Building the scrum

- The hooker stands on the mark with knees and hips slightly bent. The hooker should lift his arms to allow the props to bind on the shorts at the level of his hips. The loosehead prop (on the left) should bind on the right hip, and the tighthead prop (on the right) should bind on the left hip. Once the props have bound tightly the hooker should lower his arms and bind to the jersey under the armpits of the props



- Once they are comfortably bound, they should square up and ensure that their feet, shoulders and hips are aligned
- The front row should crouch as a unit with their weight on the balls of their feet and heads up
- The locks should bind firmly together while the front row is in this crouched position. Once bound they should squat onto their haunches and put their heads between the props and the hooker, and bind around the waists of their respective props. The locks should be square with feet parallel and heads up (chin off chest)
- At this stage, if an eight-man scrum is being formed (U11-onwards), the three loose forwards (two flanks and an eighth man) should also bind. The flanks bind onto the shorts of the locks and they place their shoulders against the upper thighs of their respective props. The eighth man binds onto the pants of the lock in front of him and he places his head between the two locks.



Teaching young players to scrum

The scrum is a very technical set piece that requires the co-ordinated forward movement of all the forwards. It is best to teach young players to drive forward in the scrum by breaking the skill down and having the players drive against each other. Pair the two props up and get them to assume a low body position (low centre of gravity) while driving against each other. Repeat with each position and slowly build the scrum up (get the front row to scrum against another front row etc).



Pre-engagement

- Players should line-up according to the referee's call
- The front rows should be a safe distance apart, crouched and bound
- Feet, hips and shoulders should all be square
- The knees and hips must be bent
- The shoulders must be above the hips at all times
- The head up and off the chest at all times
- The back straight ("spine in line")
- Eyes should be focused on the target area
- Weight should be off the heels and on the balls of the feet
- Players must bind tightly and the scrum needs to be steady, in a low crouch position. Be aware that young players often neglect a tight bind and a low body position.



Figure 9a



b



Engagement

- Players should drive from a low crouched position upwards
- The loosehead should bind onto the middle of the tighthead's lower back
- The tighthead binds onto the middle of the opposing loosehead's lower back
- Players should bind together tightly with firm grips until the scrum is complete.

Common errors in the scrum often include players not binding correctly and not binding tightly enough. Also ensure that the front row is square and, very importantly, that the hips are below the line of the shoulders. Coaches must emphasise the importance of a straight back ("spine in line") in the scrum.



2.

The lineout

When the ball (or a player carrying the ball) goes out of the field of play the game is restarted with a lineout. Normally the hooker throws the ball into the lineout and the forwards, forming the lineout, jump to catch the ball.

Lineouts can either be uncontested, in the case of U7-U10 players, or contested for U11 and onwards players. When uncontested, the team throwing the ball into the lineout must gather the ball, and the opposition team can't interfere or try and catch the ball. In contested lineouts (U11 onwards), the ball is thrown into the lineout and both teams can attempt to jump and catch the ball. So it is important to communicate where the ball is going (without the opposition hearing or knowing), and to time the throw and the jump correctly.

Throwing the ball into the lineout

When players throw the ball into the lineout, make sure that the ball is thrown into the middle of the lineout and not directly towards their own team's line. This is not allowed and the referee will award a lineout or scrum to the opposition team if the ball is thrown in skew.

- The ball can either be thrown into the lineout overhead or from between the legs. Throwing the ball overhead is very challenging and requires a great amount of power and co-ordination. Throwing the ball from between the legs is easier and should be encouraged for those who struggle to throw the ball overhead
- Use two hands when throwing overhead. Spread fingers on the ball and hold directly above the head. Move elbows forward for the throw. The power is generated by the wrists and forearm
- When throwing using the underarm technique, hold the ball down by the thighs. While leaning forward, move the elbows forward for the throw. The power is generated from the swing of the arms and the motion of the waist.





Jumping in the lineout

- When jumping for the ball it is important to keep the eyes on the ball at all times
- Bend the hips and knees and power upwards at the right time to catch the ball
- Jump with fingers pointing upwards and palms towards the hooker
- Catch the ball with soft hands.



Teaching young players the lineout

The lineout is a very technical set piece which requires the co-ordinated movement of all the forward players. It is best to teach young players this skill by breaking it down and then building it into a full lineout again. Get the loose-head prop, lock and tight-head prop, or the lock and two flankers, to line up and have the hooker throw the ball in. Ensure that there is communication and that the timing is correct.

Figure 10a



10b



3.

The maul

A maul is formed when a player from the attacking team who is carrying the ball is held by one or more opponents. One or more of the player's own team mates also attach themselves to the player so that at least three players from either team are in contact together. For the attacking team, the objective is to move the ball towards the try-line. For the defensive team, the objective is to engage in the maul to stop the attacking team from moving forward. They try and gain possession of the ball through stealing it from the attackers. The difference between the maul and the ruck is that the ball is not on the ground but in the hand.

- When a ball carrier is held he should turn his back to the opposition to assist the formation of a maul
- The first support player should bind onto the ball to help protect the ball
- The second and third support players anchor the maul on either side of the ball carrier
- All support players should assume a low and effective driving position and maintain a strong forward leg drive using short steps
- Ensure there are a balanced number of support players on the left and right hand side of the ball carrier
- Always enter the maul from behind while running parallel to the touchline. Players must always join from behind the hind-most feet
- The ball should be transferred backwards and delivered to the scrumhalf once the maul has lost momentum
- Players should drive first and seek for the ball second
- Communication is crucial for determining the position of the ball and attacking options.

Players should always have “spine in line” and chin off chest when entering or pushing in a maul. Mauls will not be successful if players arrive too late, do not commit to the maul or fail to communicate adequately.

Figure 11



4. The ruck

A ruck is formed when one or more players from each team are on their feet and in physical contact over the ball (with a minimum number of two players). This happens when a player has been tackled. The objective of a ruck is to engage and secure the ball so that the attack can continue. If the attacking team does not secure the ball fast enough by committing players to the ruck, the defensive team will steal the ball.

- Players joining the ruck must approach from behind the ruck and enter parallel to the touchline
- Players should bind with team mates before entering the ruck and then drive forward until they have passed the ball
- Players should stay on their feet at all times
- The ball can be rucked backwards and made available to other players
- Players should always enter the ruck with the chin off the chest and “spine in line”.

The ball carrier must place the ball correctly. The ball should be placed away from the body with the tackled player's back towards the defending team. This will help to make the ball available and to prevent the defending team from stealing the ball. It is also important to remind players that they can't enter the ruck from the side. A ruck can only be entered from the back.

Figure 12

