

CORE SKILLS AND AGILITY COACHING (POSITION SPECIFIC ADAPTION)

CORE SKILLS

Skill coaching is generally divided into 2 main areas – core skills and position specific skills.

Core skills are generally regarded as

- Catch and Pass
- Tackle (defensive tracking)
- Contact Skills (at the breakdown)

Position specific skills includes examples like

- Lineout throw
- Halfback pass

This paper will concentrate on discussing the coaching of core skills and agility and suggest that we can extend or adapt the coaching of these skills to make them more specific to different playing positions.

It will also give examples of how we can program training or adapt drills to achieve this.

All coaches want every player in their team to be effective in the core skill areas eg props should be able to make a pass and wingers should be efficient at the breakdown.

To take the team skill to a new level we could look at the drills we use to coach these core skills to different positions i.e. make them more position specific and relevant.

To do this I believe there are 2 main points to consider

- There is a non negotiable coaching technique for each core skill (eg – how to pass a ball, complete a low tackle or cleanout at a ruck) but the situation players use these skills in varies due to position
- The 3 core skill areas can be dissected to look at what variation is used predominantly by each position (eg – low tackle v tackling an opponent doing a pick and drive)

STEPS TO IMPLEMENT AT TRAINING

- Decide on the non negotiable coaching techniques
- Dissect the core skill areas into smaller groups eg – Different types of passing and tackling
- Look at what type of activity is most relevant to each position
- Initially use core set of drills for standard non negotiable technique
- Vary standard drills to cater for position
- Design drills specifically for each position
- Plan sessions to cater for this
- Remember that the technique used for each skill may remain the same but the situation it is used in may vary (context of the game)
- Look at allocation of training time given as opposed to game relevance eg – in an ideal world all props could throw a 10 m pass but how often would they do this in a game / does it warrant devoting large amounts of precious team training time.

DISSECTION OF CORE SKILLS

- A starting point would be to look at the 3 main areas and as mentioned above dissect them into the variations that may exist

Catch and Pass

- Standard lateral pass
- Spiral pass (wide pass)
- Pop pass
- Clearing pass
- Pass from lineout sweep
- Switch pass

Tackle

- Head on low tackle
- Side on low tackle
- Impact tackle
- 2nd man in tackle
- Pillar defence
- Pick and drive defence

Contact (going to ground)

- Footwork precontact (can vary due to situation)
- Ball carry into contact (can vary due to situation)
- Ball presentation
- Supporting roles

Contact (staying on feet)

- Footwork precontact (can vary due to situation)
- Ball carry into contact (can vary due to situation)
- Ball presentation
- Supporting roles

GENERAL COACHING IMPLICATIONS

- This will depend on the coaching environment (professional / amateur), staff, time and resources
- There are obviously many drills that will coach the non negotiable core skill
- How ever after a base level is reached we can extend players
- The same drills could be used for a skill but varied to cater for different positions by changing the width and size of grids and channels (this could still run simultaneously)
- The same skill may be practised at the same time for all the squad divided into positional groups and with different coaches running specific drills for each group
- This can then be put together in a culminating drill or game which will have players use skills in situations that are most relevant
- Specific positional groups could be asked to do extras (eg clearing passes for props)
- Extras could be timetabled for every week or on a rotational basis
- Design drills that cater for different positions all in the 1 group eg – start drill with a props throwing a clearing pass to a ball player plus loose forwards attacking a phase defence structure then play on another phase which involves backs with decision making component and wide space
- Practice skills in team run type situation not just drills

CATCH AND PASS (Skill and Drill Requirements For Each Position)

Props and hookers

- Need to be efficient at lateral pass (3m – 5m)
- Need to be efficient at clearing pass and pop pass
- Hookers may need to throw a long pass after sweeping from a lineout
- Must practice short passing in traffic

- PSS must be timetabled for hookers
- Clearing pass drills must be done as PSS or allocated props this role in general drills at times

Locks

- Need to be efficient at lateral pass (3m – 5m)
- Need to be efficient at clearing pass and pop pass
- Must practice short passing in traffic
- PSS must be timetabled for hookers
- Clearing pass drills must be done as PSS or allocated props this role in general drills at times

Loose forwards

- Need to be efficient at lateral pass (3m – 5m)
- Need to be efficient at clearing pass and pop pass
- Need to be able make a wide spiral pass (5m – 8m)

Halfback

- Strong clearing pass on both sides vital
- Must practice all general passing drills
- Must have big PSS focus

Flyhalf / Centres

- Must be efficient at all passing types
- Must be able to make wide spiral passes (5m +) on both sides
- Bid decision making factor in all passes
- All drills should involve pressure

Wingers / Fullback

- Must be able to make wide spiral passes (5m +) on both sides
- Must be able to make a wide pass in a counter attack situation (after receiving a kick / running across field)
- Pass back inside (with 1 arm while fending) when running next to side line
- Must practice passing while off balance and at full pace

Specific Implications To Coaching Catch Pass for Different Positions

- It is obvious that all players must be proficient ball handlers and must do a lot of practice at lateral passing
- After a base standard is reached players can be extended by using different widths for grids and channels (players can be doing the same drill but with different circumstances)
- Time allocated for different positions can be different
- Allocate players certain roles in passing drills eg – drill may be started with a halfback making a clearing pass
- Timetable PSS sessions

TACKLE / TRACKING (Skill and Drill Requirements for Each Position)

Props and hookers

- Dominant defender in tight situations
- Good foot speed in order to readjust in both defense and attack situation
- Can cover players 3/4m wide of the ruck
- Must be good from phase defense (Pillar, 1) positions
- Must be able to defend the pick and drive
- Must be good low tackler

- Must be good at front on defense
- Must be good at being 2nd man in (gang tackle)
- Must practice pick and drive tackle
- Must practice defending (tracking) and tackling from pillar
- Tracking drills should be smaller grid and involve attack coming from head on

Locks

- Dominant defender in tight situations
- Good foot speed in order to readjust in both defense and attack situation
- Can cover players 3/4m wide of the ruck
- Must be good from phase defense (Pillar, 1) positions
- Must be good at impact tackle
- Must have good front on defence
- Must be able to defend the pick and drive
- Must practice pick and drive tackle
- Must practice defending (tracking) and tackling from pillar
- Tracking drills should be smaller grid and involve attack coming from head on

Flankers

- Must be good defender in tight situations
- Must be able to defend a wide situation
- Low tackle
- Impact tackle
- Front on tackle
- Cover tackle
- Must practice tracking in different widths of grids
- Must practice tracking from different starting positions including off the ground
- Bid emphasis on tackle / reload / jackal

Halfbacks

- Must be good defender in tight situations
- Must be able to defend a wide situation
- Low tackle

Flyhalves / Centres

- Must be good defender in tight situations
- Must be able to defend a wide situation
- Low tackle
- Impact tackle
- Front on tackle
- Cover tackle
- Big decision making component
- Must practice tracking in different widths of grids
- Must practice tracking with attack coming from different directions
- Bid emphasis on tackle / reload / jackal

Wingers / Fullbacks

- Must be able to defend a wide, deep space
- Must be able to cover defend
- Low tackle
- Big decision making component
- Important that tracking drills use a wide grid and include cover defense opportunities

- Must also include tracking activities that include attack coming from depth
- Bid emphasis on tackle / reload / jackal

Specific Implications To Coaching Tackle / Tracking for Different Positions

- When coaching tracking thought should be put into width of grids and starting positions of both attack and defence
- Outside backs must have practice of tracking in wide space where tight forwards generally work in tight
- Same drill may be used with different grid for each position group.
- All players must be able to low tackle but different positions must have time practicing different types of tackles eg – pick and drive tackle
- Tackling drills should extend to include decision making
- Tackling practice for backs must be extended so that they are in a defensive backline situation tackling an attacking backline

CONTACT SKILLS (Skill and Drill Requirements for Each Position)

Props / Hookers / Locks

- Must have good footwork in close quarters confrontation to fix defender then target shoulder (get head and shoulders through)
- Ball carry and body height must be good in heavy traffic
- Ball presentation must be good
- Hammer skills important
- Cleanout skill in close quarters important (as well as flop cleanout)
- Mauling skills must be good
- Good pick and drive skills

Flankers

- As above
- Must have very good jackal skills
- Must be able to run with ball in more open field situations and still have good ball presentation when tackled running at speed
- Supporting roles must be good when supporting out wide

Halfbacks / Fly halves / Centres

- Must have good footwork to get win contact situations out wide
- Ball presentation must be good
- Must have good tackle / jackal skills (10 and 12 particularly)

Wingers and Fullback

- Must have good footwork
- Ball presentation must be good
- Must be able to buy time waiting for support using good leg drive and ball presentation
- Must be able to support at breakdown

Specific Implications To Coaching Contact Skills for Different Positions

- Technique of breakdown skills for all players would be the same but the game situations are different
- Standard generic drills must be used to coach technique
- Once proficient different breakdown drills should be used for position specific groups
- Groups should then come together for culminating game like drills in which they would use breakdown skills in situations they would find themselves in during a game

- Tight forwards should practice in a heavy traffic situations as well in situations where they come around the corner and straighten (as in a same way pattern) as this is one of the more common situations they will find themselves in
- Backline players should practice breakdown skills in formation against another backline (so as to replicate their role as a primary supporter and the angles they come from)
- Loose forwards can combine in the above drill with backs starting from designated breakdown
- Outside backs should also complete drills in wide grids and running at full pace to simulate situations like being caught by a cover tackle or while trying to beat a man on the outside

AGILITY / EVASION

- S and C coaches and Rugby skill coaches should work together to design Rugby Specific Agility sessions
- Sessions progress from General Agility work to Rugby Specific requirements and then progress to making drills position specific

STEPS TO IMPLEMENT AT TRAINING

- Dissect aspects of agility into categories listed below then plan a progression of these aspects into program
- **General Agility (Core Skills)** would teach change of direction skills (to reduce movement time)
- **Rugby Specific Agility** can transfer skills in game situations (helping improve game sense and decision making time)
- **Position Specific Agility** would be position specific

Evasions Skills

- Should progress from agility skills to emphasis on evasion (ability to beat a man)

Drills

- Drills would include ball in hand attacking skills as well as defensive skills
- Drills should progress to situations where attacker must beat a man
- Evasion skills can be combined with ball / passing drills
- Decision making should play a part in drills
- Special Agility (Position specific) drills should be designed by profiling specific movement patterns used by different positions

Programming of Sessions

- As in core skills there should be a progression from general agility to position specific
- All players can do key drills and then work in position specific drills in smaller groups
- Different groups can at times still work simultaneously

POSITION SPECIFIC AGILITY

Props and Hookers

- Running around the corner (as in a pattern of play and straightening)
- Footwork in heavy traffic to win contact
- Getting off the deck and driving hard
- Moving in a line out to stay with jumpers and help lift

Locks

- Running around the corner (as in a pattern of play and straightening)
- Footwork in heavy traffic to win contact
- Getting off the deck and driving hard
- Lineout movement
- Jumping

Flankers

- Running around the corner (as in a pattern of play and straightening)
- Footwork in heavy traffic to win contact
- Getting off the deck and driving hard
- Lineout movement
- Jumping
- Stepping
- Acceleration forwards after moving backwards

Halfbacks

- Must be agile in all directions
- Darting runs with low body height
- Movement around lineout

Fly halves / Centres

- Good stepping off both feet
- Ability to change angle
- Running lines – fix defender than run an angle

Outside Backs Specific Agility / Evasion

- Outside backs must be good in one on one situations
- Must be able to make instinctive decisions
- Fielding balls behind and running ball back is an important skill
- Changing direction while running at full pace
- Swerving (in and away)
- Change of pace
- Should have specific sessions for these players

SUMMARY

All players must be competent at the core skill set but we should also look to coach variations of these skills players from different positions require.

These particular skills should also be coached in game like context and situations.

(Programmed in a relevant progression)

As mentioned at times the same skill must be used in quite different circumstances.

The same drill may cover all positions by changing the dimensions and rules but there is also a need to design different drills and plan player groups used in sessions.

The important part in planning is to combine different groups in culminating drills or games (put it all together)

Agility can also be considered a skill that must be taught in a progression.

There is a common set of skills that all players need but we can then extend players by looking at the different situations they are most commonly in.

The implementation of the concepts mentioned would vary depending on the rugby environment the coaches operate in but with thoughtful planning this approach could be used with most teams.

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