

LEVEL III ASSESSMENT

TASK 12

Written Assignment

**“Developing Tactical
Decision Makers”**

Due: Saturday, 30 September 2000

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Developing Tactical Decision Makers

Introduction

The role of the modern-day coach is to develop appropriate coaching techniques that will answer this question: “How can I help my players know and enjoy the game?”

Bunker and Thorpe (1982) argue that too much emphasis has commonly been placed on the development of physical skills and too little on players’ awareness of game strategies and their decision-making capacities. If there is only an emphasis on the technical skills at the training sessions, then how do the players develop the more important game sense concepts, such as:

- Decision-making – “Where is the open space?”
- Risk-taking – “Should I throw or hold onto the ball?”
- Problem-solving – “How can I evade my opponent?”
- Thoughts about time and space properties – “Can I score now?”
- Perception – “Where am I in relation to others?”
- Tactics and strategies – “Will I fake a pass?”

Bunker and Thorpe (1982) believe that if the emphasis is shifted to tactical considerations in a game situation players will recognise that the game can be interesting and enjoyable as they are helped and encouraged to make correct decisions based on tactical awareness. At this point the players should see the need for, and relevance of, particular technical techniques as they are required in the game situation.

The need for a changed role for the coach

Unlike the traditional game, the modern game relies far less on the structured Elements of Rugby such as Set Plays and more on the unstructured Elements of Rugby such as General Play. It is this changed focus that demands players are skilled decision-makers.

Coaches tend to work within the limits of their experience and to concentrate on what they do most successfully – concentrating more on the teaching of technical skills (physical component) to the detriment of tactical skill (mental component) development. As many coaches have played the traditional game with its emphasis on structure, they are used to a coaching model that develops technically skilled players through error correction and feedback. However, the tactical skills required to be proficient at playing the game of Rugby are left to be developed by trial and error through playing the actual game over a long period of time. This model does not allow the holistic development of the player.

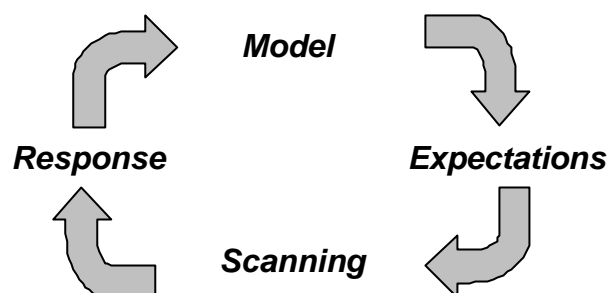
Greenwood (1986) states that decision-making is the most characteristic element in games-playing and the critical factor in maximising the return on our physical abilities and team possession. The teaching of decision-making is an aspect of coaching that that coaches must embrace if they are to adequately prepare their players for the modern game.

The Tactical Decision-making Model for Coaching

den Duyn states that most educators (coaches) would agree that finding out the answer for oneself is far more effective for long term learning than being “told” the answer (in this case by the coach).

The implication therefore is that the coach must be able to act as a facilitator. Their role is to question the tactical decision-maker to identify the processes that the tactical

decision-maker is employing to justify the outcome. The coach's ability to formulate the appropriate questions is crucial to their effectiveness as a facilitator. The development of the tactical decision-maker will be achieved through using the following approach:



As each situation (**model**) presents itself, the tactical decision-maker must be aware of the suitable options available (**expectations**). Having recognised the situation, they will then be checking a small number of cues (**scanning**) that will guide them to choosing the appropriate option from the suitable options available at that moment (**response**).

Is there a need to alter the process of learning for the tactical decision-makers to develop their tactical skills required in the less structured Elements of Rugby such as General Play compared with the structured Elements of Rugby such as Set Plays? The answer to this question is no. It is the learning tool that will be changed to develop the tactical awareness of the players.

Application of the Model to the Structured Elements of Rugby

Each Element of Rugby has an aim – what has to be achieved? For example, the aim at a lineout is to win the ball in a controlled fashion so that the team has the greatest range of options with which to go forward. To identify whether the aim of each Element of Rugby is achieved, the coach can evaluate if the Principles of the Elements of Rugby have been applied. These Principles identify what actions have to be performed, mainly from a unit perspective, to achieve the aim. This allows the coach to evaluate the outcome goal – Was the aim achieved? The performance goals – Were the Principles of the Elements of Rugby achieved? – can be evaluated by analysing the fulfilment of the functional roles of the individual player. Therefore, by applying the key factor checklist to analyse the relevant player's performance based on the functional roles as a decision-maker, the coach is able to assist in developing the tactical awareness of the relevant players (IRB Level Two Course). The key factors for the functional roles of the decision-makers are listed in Appendix A. When the player does not perform a role correctly, the coach is able to identify the area(s) that need to be addressed to improve the decision-making process.

The coach can provide in written form numerous scenarios that may occur in the match, for example,

A centre-field or slightly to the right scrum, within the opposition 22, our feed, in which we are not being wheeled (**model**)

The player will be questioned as follows:

(expectations) What are our left-hand-side options?

What are our right-hand-side options?

(scanning) What signals will the opposition provide or have provided that will assist in choosing the preferred option?

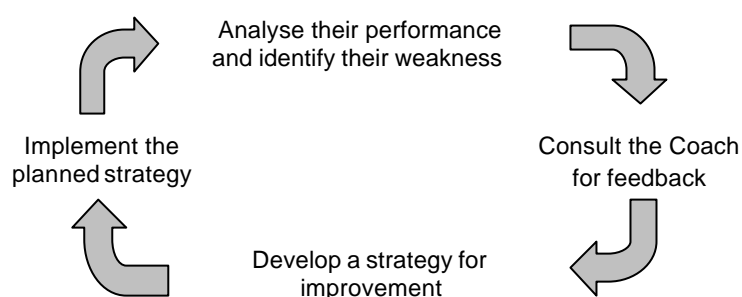
What alternative plan is there if the chosen option is not successful?

Through this procedure the tactical decision-maker will be developing a set process as a mental checklist to refer to (**response**) as follows:

- “A provisional decision – what we’ll do if things work out
- Communication – calling to others
- A provisional alternative – what we’ll do if things don’t work out” (Greenwood, 1986)

These scenarios will be re-enacted during the tactical training session. The tactical decision-maker must be directly involved in tactical training sessions by being given the role of calling the play, directing operations so that the coach can analyse their performance, provide appropriate feedback (the most important variable the coach can contribute to the learning process), etc.

Post-match assessment can be achieved by the use of video analysis. An adaptation of the Video Self-Analysis Six Step Process (ACC, 1996) provides the form of a cyclic process whereby the player will:



The decision-makers will be able to analyse their performance (**model**) and identify their strengths and weaknesses by considering the following questions:

- (**expectations**) Was the aim of the Element of Rugby achieved?
- (**scanning**) Were the Principles of the Elements of Rugby achieved?
- (**response**) Were the key factors of their role as decision-makers applied?
- (**response**) Was the best option chosen for that particular situation?

They would then consult with the coach for feedback to ensure that the player is on the right track in improving their tactical awareness. Together they will develop a strategy to enable the player to reinforce their analysis prior to implementing it in the future.

Application of the Model to the Unstructured Elements of Rugby

Due to the less structured aspect of General Play it is imperative that all players are competent in tactical decision making. The tactical training sessions will therefore focus on the tactical aspects of The Principles of Team Play.

From a team viewpoint, every player must have a total commitment to the application of the **Principles of Team Play** as follows:

*In attack, gain possession to **Go Forward** with the **Support** of team-mates to maintain **Continuity** exerting **Pressure** to score points and in defence to **Go Forward** to apply **Pressure Supported** by or in **Support** of team-mates to regain possession and (counter) attack. (Lee Smith)*

All players must have an understanding of the tactical skills to implement the Principles of Team Play effectively. Without this total commitment, the technical skills that are most worked on will have little relevance.

As stated previously, it is the learning tool used to develop the required tactical awareness in the less structured Elements of Rugby that will be changed rather than the learning process. Player-centred Guided Discovery learning is most applicable in this scenario. The following conditions must be adhered to for the learning tool to be effective:

(a) Learning environment

The activity must be an exact replication of the micro-component of the game environment that needs to be addressed. This will enable the players to address their individual roles with respect to their tactical awareness required in the micro-component. The dimensions of the playing area and the number of players involved for the micro-component must be the same as in the game environment.

(b) Critical conditions

In designing the appropriate tactical model, it is essential that the playing conditions of the activity are structured so that there is a bias towards the desired outcomes. This biased development is critical to enable the players to consider how to address the question - What tactic must I employ to succeed in this situation? – rather than focusing on what are the technical skills necessary to succeed in this situation. This approach will increase the probability of the players being able to identify the appropriate tactic required for the particular activity and hence increasing the success rate of consistently performing the desired outcome. To assist in the learning process the players must be allowed to develop these tactical skills in a progressive manner i.e. from simple to complex scenarios.

(c) Questioning

Having set up the activity, the quality of the coach's questioning is the key to fostering the players' tactical thinking. McInerney and McInerney (1998) point out that the quality of the questions themselves (i.e. their clarity and relevance) is very important to their effective use. Effective questions are clear and brief, and identify the aspects to which the players are expected to respond. It is important that the questions asked by the coach are open questions to allow the players to demonstrate their understanding. This questioning technique ensures that the players are cognitively active in their own learning. The questioning process should be structured to lead the players to understand the following:

- The desired outcome of the activity
- The tactical skills or movements they must use to achieve this outcome
- Why these skills or movements are appropriate

An example of this approach is as follows:

Micro-component: A 3 v1 situation with possession 10m inside their 22m zone, 15m from the left-hand touchline. The outcome was a kick into touch 30m down field. This was not considered to be the best option to take under the current circumstances.

The activities will be centred around developing the players tactical awareness to enable them to achieve the desired outcome which is to maintain possession and capitalise on the "plus one" situation (**response**). The tactical awareness required for the 3v1 situation can be developed in a staged approach by beginning with a 1v1 situation to identify the role of the ball carrier (**model**). An example of an activity for the 1v1 application is included as Appendix B. The next stage would involve introducing a 2v1 situation i.e. a "plus one" situation to identify the role of the ball carrier and role of the support player (**model**). With the appropriate questioning, the players will then be guided to understand the tactical commonality between the 2v1 situation and the 3v1 situation.

At selected intervals during each activity, the coach will probe the players by asking “open” questions to guide the players’ experiences (**expectations & scanning**). Further examples of this type of questioning are:

- “Is it better to run with the ball or kick the ball in this situation?” “Why?”
- “What is the role of the ball carrier?”
- “What is the role of the support players?”

Conclusion

The implication for the coach is not about starting totally afresh. It is not about forsaking your favourite training activities but re-focusing on why the activity is being used or how it could be used in relation to its tactical application. The coach needs to focus on the outcome, analyse the processes the tactical decision-maker employed to achieve this outcome and provide feedback involving the tactical decision-maker to develop specific activities to improve their tactical skill level. This changed emphasis of coaching will lead to the development of players who are both technically competent and makers of good tactical decisions. The coach has to work a bit harder but the reward is enhanced status for the coach and a team that understands the game and enjoys playing the game.

Is this the statement all coaches want to hear?

“Coach”, he whispered, his voice shook just a trifle, “I found it coach, the thing you wanted me to learn for myself” [Scholz, “Split Seconds: Tales of the Cinder Track”, 1927]

References:

1. Australian Coaching Council (1996) *Video Self Analysis – A lens on Coaching*
2. Bunker, D. and Thorpe, R., *A Model for the Teaching of Games in Secondary Schools* in the Bulletin of Physical Education, Volume 18 No. 1, Spring 1982
3. den Duyn, N. (1996) ACC Coaching Consultant *Game Sense: Why it makes sense to play games*
4. Greenwood, J. (1986) *Think Rugby: A guide to purposeful team play*. London: A & C Black (Publishers) Ltd.
5. IRB Level Two Course, *Functional Role Analysis*
6. McInerney, D. M. & McInerney, V. (1998) *Educational Psychology: Constructing learning* (2nd Edition). Frenchs Forest NSW: Pearson Education Australia Pty Limited
7. Smith, L. *Selection Methods: Team Profile Analysis Form*

Appendix A

Functional Roles Analysis – Decision Makers

Element of Rugby	Aim of the Element	Key Factors
Scrum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Win the ball to a protected position while going forward so that the team has the greatest range of options with which to go forward 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Know the preferred option ◆ Be alert to option changes resulting from the actions of the opposition ◆ Coordinate the delivery of the ball ◆ Decide on the best option and execute it
Lineout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Win the ball in a controlled fashion so that the team has the greatest range of options with which to go forward 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ The position of the jumper ◆ The type of throw ◆ The attacking option and the delivery of the ball ◆ The time of delivery
Phase Play: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Ruck ◆ Maul 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ To win phase ball when you want to receive the ball quickly or when the ball carrier has become isolated and must fall to the ground and place it in order to retain possession ◆ To deliver the ball when it is necessary to vary the speed and position of delivery 	Forward <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Maintain the drive ◆ Organise the transfer of the ball and the attacking options ◆ Deliver on demand Back <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Determine the time of delivery ◆ Organise the formation ◆ Control the situation

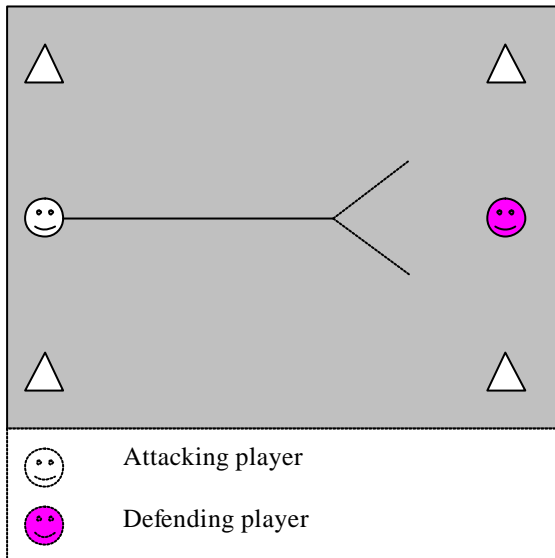
(IRB Level Two Course, Functional Role Analysis)

Appendix B

Tactical Skill

Go Forward

One v One Activities



#1

Drill Organisation:

Players work in a group of 2 in a 10 metre by 10-metre channel with one ball in each group. Both players commence on opposing goal lines. The attacking player will attempt to gain as much territory before being stopped by a double-handed tag on the waist by the defensive player.

The attacking player will mark their success by way of a marker placed parallel to this position on the sideline.

Attacking and defensive roles will then be reversed.

After a pre-determined time or series of alternate attempts the play will cease.

Players will score 1 point for each successful touch down however the marker should only mark the best non-successful attempt.

Coaching Points:

At the end of the initial series the coach should question:

Q. "Disregarding attempts on which you scored, what did you do on the attempts where you got further in the channel before being tagged?"

A. *Ran straight forward quickly initially.*

Return to the activity with a single emphasis on this principle. At the end of this series the coach should probe further:

Q. "Where did the defender tag you on your better performances?"

A. *Side on or behind.*

Q. "What did you do that made them have to tag you from side on or behind?"

A. *Changed angle.*

Return to the activity for reinforced practice. Provide feedback as to how the players implement the two key points.