

## “START THINKING SEVENS”

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As the IRB World Sevens Series enters its third consecutive year, and with more domestic tournaments popping up in the annual rugby calendar even the harshest critics of the hybrid game could not deny its increasing popularity.

Sevens Rugby is fast, furious, skillful, and provides a carnival type atmosphere that is conducive for families. It possesses global marketability (tournaments can be conducted in little or non-playing rugby countries) while spectators can appreciate its virtues without having to understand the complexities involved with Rugby fifteens. At elite level of competition Sevens encompasses the ultimate rugby athlete, who must be endowed with speed and equipped with all of the essential rugby skills and techniques (barring scrummage), while also catering for players who could be considered too physiologically small for international participation in its traditional big brother game.

With the advent of professionalism in Rugby and this increasing popularity, Sevens like its counterpart has evolved in the past decade. Its evolution has seen progression through playing an unphysical to physical game, and unstructured to structured play. The need for high level cardiovascular endurance and strength has become a prerequisite for athletes competing in the international arena, as has specific skill training and game structure or pattern.

Recovery training has also become an integral part of the process, with athletes striving to overreach in successive high intensity training sessions, arduous travel, limiting player numbers per team, and consecutive tournaments. To prepare a Sevens team, the coach must be aware of the simplistic foundations of the game.

### **Sevens Principles**

- **Possession:** It is logical to assume that the team who wins and maintains possession the longest for the duration of 14 minutes should be successful with the outcome. Due to this short time frame, victory can and has been achieved by weaker teams on numerous occasions. There is the absence of grinding down a team over an extended time (80 minutes). Therefore in attack it is imperative that primary and secondary support are always reactive to consolidating possession in contact, while not over committing numbers to the breakdown. Two players securing the ball is an ideal scenario if quick recycling can take place. Another option is to avoid contact altogether (committing defender and then pulling out). The ball should always be cleared from congested areas as quickly as possible, either laterally or too a player in depth, and support players should always offer inside and outside options to the carrier.

- Width and Depth: In attack these two sevens fundamentals need to be constantly reinforced, as bunching occurs with too much regularity. The wider and deeper the alignment is the more time and space available to create a full or half break. The attacking side can manipulate defensive lines, by creating one on one situations, and the correct execution of fundamentals. The alignment should always be set off the halfback, who is vertically 2-3 meters in depth behind the breakdown, and acts as a pressure release valve in congested areas.
- Changing pace: Is a variable that provides deception in attack, and the ability to buy time if under pressure. As with “width and depth” in alignment, defense can be maneuvered into susceptible positioning with deceleration and acceleration of the individual ball carrier and his support. Constant pace is not advisable for effective Sevens play.
- Defense: This is an area that has become very structured, collectively and individually, with six players in the line and a sweeper behind, thus allowing the attacking side a continual overlap. From the collective strategy, inside players have to be half a meter forward of their outside team mates and work the hardest pushing up and across (not laterally), using constant communication, and only sliding onto the next attacker after the second pass is in motion. The sideline is used as the extra defender to counter the numerical overlap, and the defensive alignment should resemble a 45-degree gate running of the touchline. The defense must remain up even after the third pass in case there is a switch or reverse of play, and not corner flag cover run. Defenders are trying to isolate the ball carrier and force a turnover in contact, or pressure the attack into throwing low percentage passes, which could lead to a change of possession. If the attack is going backwards or under pressure, then a “blitz” call should be activated, where the entire defensive line accelerates up and pressures their respective counterparts. Otherwise the collective line should move in synchronicity (inside out) but not at full pace (defender is less agile and easy to evade if running at top speed). The sweeper occupies space behind the defensive line and must be in a position where he can retrieve a short kick or long kick before the attack does. He also acts as the last line of defense and visionary for the front line. Other methods of defense are an “umbrella” or outside-in defense, which requires great combination and practice, but offers tactical options against a side that has great pace on the flanks; or a zone defense where players are responsible for their own specific space across the field of play. The onus on the individual defender is to stay on the attacker's inside shoulder, move on the balls of his feet (flat footed defender is a beaten defender), and execute an effective 1 on 1 tackle; return to his feet and contest for possession.
- Communication, Calculation, Composure: Constant constructive communication is an essential ingredient of all the Sevens principles mentioned. Individual and collective peripheral vision is accomplished through communication, and is a prerequisite for instant problem solving on the field

(e.g., width and depth, numerical overlaps, defensive alignment, support play, tap penalty sequences, set pieces, restarts, etc).

Calculation refers to the options and strategies a team utilizes on field.

Successful calculation incorporates timing, vision, combination, and a great deal of practicality on the training paddock.

Remaining calm and in control whilst suffering from adversity or pressure on field is the sign of a composed team. From composure stems self-belief and confidence, which contribute to turning a negative result into a positive one.

## **Sevens Player Type**

The general make-up of a squad of 12 players (IRB standard tournament) will include 4 forwards, 1 swinger (forward or back), and 7 backs. The team composition for any given match are 3 forwards (2 props and a hooker) and 4 backs (halfback, 5/8, center, wing) with 3 reserves. Three quarters in fifteens can be selected in the forwards for Sevens, although it is advisable to have at least 2 backrowers in the composition, as the highest level games can be decided through dominance of the breakdown. While athletic physiological attributes are generally sought, they are not definitive, where as high level cardiovascular endurance, speed, and skill are. Athletes capable of performing at the elite level should register a score of 13 and upward on the standard beep test. Mental concentration or focus, and high skill levels are maintained with less fatigue.

## **Strength and Conditioning**

To obtain a high level of cardiovascular endurance a Sevens athlete needs to supplement his normal club training with 1 or 2 extra specific running sessions per week while maintaining and developing explosive power through specific weights programs. If the player is in the off season and wishes to concentrate solely on endurance, then 3-4 cardiovascular sessions would suffice (LAT and Vo<sub>2</sub> max work).

Fartlec or interval training (LAT training) with decreasing recovery times is effective in building a strong aerobic base. Once achieved, a LAT program inclusive of short (10-40 meters) to medium (50-70 meters) distance sprints can be integrated into x time cycles (programs are dependant on seasonal periodisation and other constraints), always with the intention of reducing recovery time through progression. Conditioning can also be achieved with ball games such as "Offside touch" and "D ball".

Footspeed and agility exercises (hands up, fast feet – sprint; slalom running) should also be incorporated into the athletes training regime (and can be incorporated into warm-up).

It is also recommended that 1 pure speed session be performed per week with maximal recovery between sprints for speed maintenance and improvement. Specific weights programs aimed at explosive power also need to be addressed by athletes. However, the athlete must first obtain core stability and correct technique before progressing to explosive movements.

It is advisable that coaches collaborate with their respective strength and conditioning trainers to design suitable programs pertinent to their athletes.

## **Sevens Training**

Once players have achieved suitable fitness levels the battle can be considered to be 50% won. It is then a matter of training to achieve the principles mentioned above, as well as seeking combination and effective game pattern or style.

The former can be achieved through many drills (quadrant or game specific assimilation) that will promote the athlete to be reactive and proactive in skill execution under pressure (emphasis should be “no mistakes”).

The latter can be achieved through playing Sevens consistently against quality opposition. There is no substitute for “real” game time.

There are a myriad of moves or sequences which can be utilized in Sevens play which will be successful given right timing, and execution, however; simplicity can override complexity through doing the fundamentals correctly and always offering the ball carrier an option on the inside and out.

Scrum, lineouts, restarts, and tap penalties should be allocated sufficient time during training as they are important platforms for attacking variants. Attacking scrums should always be stable for quality possession, while defensive scrums can be also considered an attacking or unsettling option through violent wheeling or shunting. Props should always try to hold their opposition in the scrum for a limited time period. The hooker should exit as quickly as possible for support or defensive blind side cover.

Effective lineout possession can be obtained through, 1 jumper, and 1 lifter, or 2 lifters and 1 jumper. The hooker should receive the ball off the top from the jumper and distribute to his backline.

Contesting the air ball off a short kick off requires rehearsal, otherwise the ball can be kicked long into the pockets with a structured defensive line moving forward and pressuring.

## **Recovery**

It is imperative that coaches integrate recovery training during practice, travel, and tournaments. This starts with simple re-hydration during and after practice with sufficient water and electrolyte beverages, and carbohydrate consumption after strenuous activity.

Pool or water sessions are always conducted after national training sessions as is “hot and cold” therapy. Athletes weight (scales), quality of sleep, and general well being are monitored every second day through the use of a simple questionnaire. The ideal scenario is for the player to monitor himself outside the confines of assembly with a logbook or diary.

Whilst participating in tournaments under extreme conditions (heat-humidity), ice baths, ice vests, and ice massage have proved very effective in lowering body core temperature after games.

Psychological recovery is also addressed leading into tournaments by providing fun team activities on structured days rest or evenings after training. "If the player is content his performance will increase".

## **Conclusion**

This document is an overview of Sevens Rugby and acts solely as a guideline for respective Sevens coaches. The amount of professionalism and detail applicable to a Sevens team will always be governed by time, fiscal health, and the understanding of the games importance as a development and talent identification tool for 15`s rugby. With respect to the games own entity, it has already manifested itself as a high light of the Commonwealth Games, and would be a valid and justifiable inclusion in forthcoming Olympic Games.

## **Acknowledgements**

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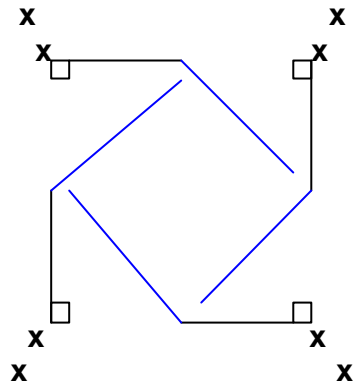
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Recovery Training: Angela Calder AIS

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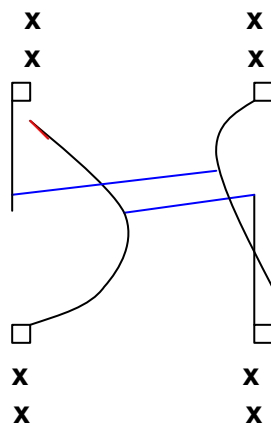
## APPENDIX 1

### SEVENS RUGBY DRILLS



#### Diamond Passing

This is effective communication and passing quadrant drill. Player's (x) start from their respective cones and run in the direction of the black arrow. The pass is then delivered half way between cones and the flight of the ball follows the direction of the blue arrows. After the player receives the pass he delivers straight away. Receiving players should run onto the ball, and the pass should be executed from the outside of the player's body (not inside). The drill can progress to using 2 balls that start on the cones diagonally opposite, and direction should change therefore training the left and right pass. Quadrant size: 10x10 meters

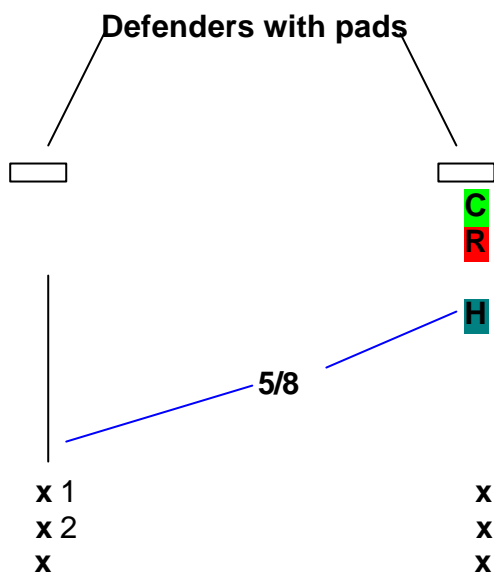


#### Pass and Drop

This drill is effective for "hands" and (unders/overs) support lines. The ball carrier (starting from a cone) travels in the direction of the black arrow, while the support communicates unders or overs (demonstrated by the curved line). The pass is

delivered (blue arrow is pass flight), received, and dropped (red arrowhead) for the next player who should attack the ball and execute the same procedure. Quadrant size is variable, and width should increase with successful skill execution and progression.

**APPENDIX 2**



Recycling Drill

This drill is effective for recycling with primary support. The drill commences with a ball carrier(**C**), a ripper or ruckman(**R**), a halfback(**H**), and **5/8**. The ball carrier goes into contact (pad) and is supported by the ripper, who delivers possession to the halfback who passes (blue arrow) to the **5/8**. The **5/8** then passes to the parallel player (**x 1**) and becomes his support **R** in contact. The second support player (**x 2**) becomes the new halfback, while the initial halfback slots into the **5/8** position and so forth. The drill continues up or across the field. Distance between pad men should be 15-20 meters.

D Ball

This game is played with 3 players per team on a 20 meter wide by 50-meter field area. 5 Cones are placed along each sideline (10-meter spacing). The attacking team may have 3-4 touches before turnover. Once the defender touches a player he must go and touch the nearest cone before rejoining his side, thus creating a 3 on 2 advantage for the attacking side to exploit. Playing the ball after the touch may need to be slowed down. This game can be played for 7 minutes or more, and is a good conditioning session with relevant skill application.

APPENDIX 3

