

"Skills required for Selectors and What to look for in Players – 13 Principles"

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Introduction:

To be selected for a rugby team, it could be said, is the sum of the following things: Politics; Timing; Common Sense. This assignment will attempt to cover all three.

In order to help with selection, I would like to offer 13 principles that will assist the selector and the selected.

Skills for Selectors:

1. Knowledge of the Game.

Selectors need to understand the 'Principles of Play' and 'Key factor analysis'. This provides a foundation for selection. Key factors may differ between positions however selectors need to identify factors that are necessary to fulfill the various positions.

2. Practical knowledge of the Game.

Can the selectors use the knowledge of the game in a pragmatic way? Translating the knowledge of the game on to the field of play is one of the challenges for coaches and so it is for selectors. Different scenarios can arise. For example, the player base differs considerably between Hong Kong and Australia. Selectors of teams, where there is a small player base, may select the best players and use them in other positions rather than player's specific position.

Using the knowledge of the game in a practical way should be considered for the following: the team pattern; specific game plans; venue of tournament or tour; whether conditions; the condition of the playing fields; selection policy.

3. Time & availability.

To be fair and equitable, selectors should be seen to be 'watching' games or activities that allows players to display their abilities. They should be active in searching for talent. Contacting clubs or teams, working with coaches or reviewing relevant videos could achieve this. A considerable commitment is required.

4. Purpose of selection.

An understanding (or if appropriate, an ownership) of the team pattern and team game plan. Selectors need the ability to comprehend the 'what' and the 'why' so they can decide on the 'who'. Darryl SuaSua, the New Zealand women's coach, outlines to his fellow selectors his team pattern the type of player he is looking for and they go searching for who could fill the profile (1).

5. Understanding of the selection policy.

The governing board of the rugby body usually sets the selection policy (domestically or internationally). This could include eligibility and criteria. Tournament organisers or other athletic boards can indirectly adjust the selection policy in terms of eligibility and criteria. An example of this is the Asian Games. The Asian Games includes both VII's & XV's rugby. The eligibility to participate at the games differs from the IRB regulations. Participants have to be of Asian descent or born in Asia and hold the relevant travel documents for the participating Asian country (2). Selectors need to be aware and informed of the relevant selection policy in order to make the appropriate selections.

Difficulties can arise when selectors use the selection policy as either a guiding light or an iron rod to lead the selection process. As the policy implementers, a non-adherence to the selection policy may cause conflict with policy makers. A compliant approach to the policy may cause players to be grieved, as the selection of players was not based on merit.

Selectors should give feedback on the effectiveness of such policies and make recommendations.

It should be noted that selection policies could be used as a performance indicator for selectors – following the selection policy and giving appropriate feedback.

6. Personal Profile System.

The ability to identify the type of players you have selected or hoping to select is a worthwhile skill. Although most selectors may not be familiar with personal profiling, such as 'D.I.S.C' (3), determining the type of players you have or hope to have is an advantage. Possible conflicts in the team could be avoided, potential weaknesses identified, strengths emphasised and the potential to take advantage of opportunities.

7. Attributes.

Quantifying these qualities is difficult and I will not attempt to do this here. My intention is to outline why I think these attributes are important:

- *Temperate* – During selection meetings remaining calm and focused. Allowing selectors to explore different ideas and options
- *Dedicated* – committed to the position so as to fulfill the requirements of a selectors. Often, more time is required than what is given credit. Selectors may need to be willing to be the 'unsung heroes' of a rugby programme.
- *Patience* – With reference to the time and effort involved in order to perform the duties of a selector, patience is required. Rash decisions can be hard to justify and may plague the selection process and the selection panel throughout the season. Selection dates should be scheduled so as to avoid procrastination. Selectors should work out their own schedule to meet these dates. They should have the knowledge that it will take more than one meeting to select a team.

- *Integrity* – An important attribute in order to maintain respect. By identifying and outlining the selection process, the selectors are able to establish a foundation by using this as their basis of selection. The integrity of the selection process is maintained if the communication between the selectors, the selectors and the governing board, the selectors and the players is amicable, fair and effective. Selection dates should be clearly identified. What will be required and why should be communicated effectively to those who will be involved.
- *Sober* – May be considered a contradiction in terms in various areas of the rugby world. Some of the best discussions on the selection of a team are often made ‘under the influence’. However when wise and prudent decision need to be made a sober approach is required. Stable selectors are vital assets. Selectors carried about by every trend or fad lack foresight and conviction to prudent selection goals.

8. Roles within selection panels.

Rugby Unions may vary on the make up of the selection panel. In Hong Kong for instance, the selection panel for the National XV’s squad is made up of a four people – a chairman of selectors, a vice-chairman of selectors and the two coaches’ (4). The All Blacks have the Coach (as chairman of selectors) and two selectors (5).

Although the make up is different they also have similar features:

- A final decision maker (chairman, also known as a convenor of selectors)
- More than one person on the selection panel
- Coaching and non coaching staff are involved on the selection panel

A distinct difference:

- All Blacks – the coach has the final say
- Hong Kong – the coach does not

While there are pros and cons to both approaches (and indeed other approaches), the identifying of roles within the selection panel is important. It establishes order. If these roles are not clear they need to be defined – a job description possibly? If the panel member is not satisfied with the role or roles, that person may need to be released from the selection panel.

What to look for in players:

When eligibility and the selection criteria have been established and the selectors have been identified, the selectors need to focus on their mission – to select the best players. The following points are suggested to outline the ‘best ‘ players.

1. Skill – individual position, unit, decision making.

To identify the skill of a player, a ‘knowledge of the game’ is very important. There are various checklists that can be used to make an assessment off players. If used (in whatever form), it should be agreed and understood by the selectors.

The selectors should look for the rugby specific individual skills that every player needs and then look at how they apply their skills to their respective positions, mini units, units, team. They should also display the relevant decision-making capabilities.

2. Physical conditioning relative to rugby and specific positions.

Selectors need to look at the physical conditioning of the players. To achieve a competitive standard of play, conditioning is a key ingredient. A general guide should be given and, where appropriate, benchmarks set for players to achieve. Consideration should be given for 'position specific' conditioning. For example, a front row forward will require different types of physical conditioning than a player on the wing.

3. Attitude

An attitude that encourages teamwork while achieving individual goals should be sought. However, the selectors need to outline the type of attitude they expect and how they can identify the type of attitude they are looking for. Selectors need to have the time and availability to watch trainings or matches and visit with coaches in order to recognise a worthwhile attitude.

4. Fulfill the team pattern, game plan

Can the player fulfill the team pattern? Is the player able to adjust to the game plan? This will be based primarily on the player's rugby skill and physical conditioning with their attitude being an underlying factor.

An objective approach is good when determining if a player is able to fulfill the team pattern and game plan. The 'checklist' can help accomplish this approach. This allows the selector to present an unbiased report to a selection meeting on a player or players where it can then be subject to scrutiny.

5. Development v Achievement

Most teams play to win. With this mentality it can often be difficult to work on the development of players to ensure a team can have a good player base and continue to be competitive from season to season.

In Countries where they have a competition that is close to the level the selected team will be participating in, developing players may receive appropriate opportunities. For example, a competition like the 'Super 12' may give more inexperienced players the opportunity to learn the skills necessary for International Rugby and to display them.

In situations where this is not the case, selectors may need to determine the outcome. Age is possibly less of a factor in today's rugby world. Rather the checklist on rugby skills/physical conditioning, experience, fulfilling the team pattern and the 'selection goals' should play the major roles in determining the 'development versus achievement' question.

The 'appendices'

The appendices are two examples of checklists that can be used by selectors to assist them in identifying players. The first has a subjective view while the second uses the statistics of a game to give an objective approach. These documents could be used separately but together they give a clearer picture. Selectors should use methods that take the 'guess work' out of selection.

Conclusion:

It is difficult job to be a selector. I hope it remains this way. The 13 points identify what to look for in selectors and how selectors can be effective. It is to help Unions, Clubs; Teams undertake the serious business of selecting selectors.

References:

(1) December 2001 - Darryl conducted clinics in Hong Kong. During this time, I was able to discuss his selection process for the New Zealand Women's Team.

(2) Hong Kong Rugby Football Union Handbook 2001-2002.

(3) As part of the ARU Level III, Doctor I.R.Kogus gives a session, on personal profiling (DISC). I attended the session at the Australian Institute of Sport, Canberra – 27th to 29th October 2000

(4) Hong Kong Rugby Football Union Handbook 2001-2002

(5) New Zealand Rugby Football Union official website

Acknowledgments

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