

# Key Factors That Influence The Pace of the Game

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## Introduction

After seeing Premier Rugby Semi Finals in Brisbane and being able to see the Premier Rugby televised from Sydney, I started to ask the question to myself “How or what needs to be done to increase the speed of the game in our competition, in the Northern Territory?”

The current local competition is a very stop start style of game and therefore lifting the pace of the game would improve the public perception of the game and the competitiveness of the Representative Sides. The following key factors have been narrowed down and provided by with the assistance from Senior Australian Coaches;

- **Environment**
- **Fitness Level of Players**
- **Skill Level of Players**
- **Refereeing**

The first three factors are certainly within the Coaches influence, however the Refereeing is outside of the Coaches influence and is the unknown factor. (These have not been ranked in any order of priority).

## Environment

Environment also encompasses conditions that the players have to play in at any given time. As more teams are able to tour to other Countries and therefore required to play under different environments/conditions, Coaches have to be able to prepare their players to be able to adjust to the environment/conditions elements.

Coaches need to be able train their players to be able to adjust their game plan due to the weather environment/conditions. For instance a team needs to be able to adapt to the elements rain and wind. Below are some areas that Coaches need to make their players aware of are as follows.

### *Back-line*

Players need to be aware that the need to stand closer.

Sympathetic passes to teammates.

Go down on the ball rather than try and pick it up on the run (especially one handed).

They need to be prepared to receive a lot of high kicks from opposition.

Positional, wingers and full back need to be aware of opposition kicking for territory and therefore drop back.

Blind side wingers need to support inside backs in case of drop balls in executing set moves.

Assess what moves they should do and the ones they shouldn't do.

Type of boots and size of sprigs.

### *Forwards*

Expect a lot of scrums and line-outs.

Determine the more reliable position to throw in the line-outs (more than likely two or four), but this is dependent on the quality of the thrower.

Expect to do more mauling, however when doing ruck ball it needs to be controlled.

Support Wingers and Fullback (Backrower & No.8).

Go down on the ball rather than try and pick it up on the run (especially one handed).

Throw sympathetic passes to teammates.

Size of sprigs.

Coaches also need to train or prepare their team to play at certain times and ensure that players are aware of the hazards that come with playing in either the day or at night. Some of the hazards of playing at the times are listed below.

### *Day Time*

Depending on the Field placing the Captain needs to be aware of the sun and time that it sets, and if it is better to run into it in the first half or second half.

Wind direction and if it picks up or dies down during the game.

Depending on the sun players need to be aware of the high balls.

Depending on the location of the game the players need to be aware of hydration and fluid loss.

Warming up time allocated

### *Night Time*

Players need to be aware of the effect the light of the ground will have on their ability to see the ball.

Wind direction and if it picks up or dies down during the game.

Depending on the location and environment/conditions the players may need to warm up more effectively to increase body temperature.

Ensure player still consume fluids.

Certainly another area of environment/conditions that Coaches have to ensure that their players are aware of is the condition of the ground. Players need to be aware that they could be playing on a soft or hard ground with long or short grass. The soft ground, long grass would influence a slower game, were as the hard ground, short grass would influence a faster game.

Players need to be aware of these elements to ensure that they are able to have the right equipment come game time. Players should be encouraged to have two pairs of boots or at least a second set of sprigs.

Players need also be aware of the length and width of the ground, no ground appears to be the same anymore and the differences could be as small as the in-goal area is either 5 meters or 10 meters. The ground could slope in one direction as well.

Coaches in addressing the factor of environment/conditions have to use their own knowledge of the ground, Town and Country that they are visiting to play. Most teams when travelling arrive at a Town/City at least one day prior to the game and are able to train on the ground that they will play on and therefore Coaches and Players are able to address the issues stated above. Teams should train at the same time of the scheduled game time to experience the

different elements in the environment/conditions that they are going to experience in the game.

## **Fitness Level of Players**

Fitness levels of players certainly influence the pace of the game. The level of the player's fitness will determine the type of game plan and patterns of play that the Coach can introduce. The fitter the side the more expansive the game plan and patterns of play can be. Players will also be confident in their team mates and know that the support players are going to arrive at the breakdown, secure the ball and that there will be a support runners running to receive the ball and take it on to the next tackle contest.

Coaches are able to properly prepare their players through the various Fitness Programs, Fitness Testing available and Periodisation of Training Plans. Players need to be game fit as well and therefore Coaches need to be able incorporate this into their Periodisation Training Plan to ensure players are game ready for their first game and peak at the most important time, generally when finals start, for big competition games and representative games.

There are five areas of fitness training that Coaches should incorporate into their Periodisation Training Plan, they are

- *Endurance Training*
- *Strength Training*
- *Speed Training*
- *Power Training*
- *Recovery Training*

*Strength training* should be conducted pre-season with maintenance program during the season.

*Endurance training* should follow Strength training in the pre-season, with maximal effort for 30 minutes is ideal for maintaining endurance fitness so long as intensity of the sessions remain high.

*Speed training* in the pre-season should focus on general speed conditioning and honing of an efficient running technique. Later speed training should focus on the development of speed endurance and an efficient lactate system. Maintenance sessions must be completed during the season.

*Power Training* is a combination of strength and speed. Having done strength training the same exercises can be followed to achieve power by executing a fast, explosive and concentric contraction, after a slower eccentric contraction. Plyometric training is another very effective way to develop explosive power.

*Recovery training* should be incorporated into training programs to ensure players can optimise adoption to training, and at the same time minimise the risks associated with non-adoption or maladaptation. Players need to be responsible and able to monitor their own recovery programs.

Coaches should test players on a regular basis and educate players into self-monitoring of their own recovery sessions. Coaches need to ensure players are not mentally fatigued from over training as well.

## **Skill Level of Players**

This is the most important of all the influences that affect the pace of the game; the level of player's skill level certainly determines the pace of the game. However the larger the player base certainly the possibility of having skilled players. This is not always possible in most Rugby Centres away from Brisbane, Canberra and Sydney, and Coaches need to increase player's skill level through training.

Coaches need to train their players in the following area to improve player's skill level and then be able to increase the pace of the game.

### *Tackle Contest*

Ensuring that the ball is maintained in contact and support players are effective in executing their roles at the breakdown (ie 1<sup>st</sup> support player cleanout opposition tackler, 2<sup>nd</sup> support player secure the ball, 3<sup>rd</sup> support player either provide further support to the secure the ball, picks and go, feed further support players or provide option to receive the ball as a runner) The type of delivery of the ball to the half back at the breakdown is also an influence of the pace of the game (ie the ball close to tackled player generally the slower ball delivery, the further away from the tackled player the quicker the ball delivery/access for the support players/halfback).

### *Line-outs*

Players being able to perform the Key Factors (Throw, Jump and Catch, Support, Variety & Surprise) in a line-out effectively will ensure that their side retains the ball and therefore able to use the ball in what ever way their game plan stipulates (ie ball down and drive at either the front/ middle of the LO or ball of the top at either front/ middle or back of the LO). The thrower, jumper and support players in the line-out need to continually work on their line – out skills to ensure that they retain the ball and also pressure opposition ball. Due to the increasing variety at the line-out this is becoming a major attacking option for teams (ie England, New Zealand & Australia).

### *Scrum*

Players being able to perform the Key Factors (Foot positioning, Bind/Grips, Push/Resist & Mechanics) in the scrum effectively will ensure that their side retains the ball and be able to use the ball to their game plan or pattern of play. If the key factors are performed the ball delivery can be executed (ie channel 1, 2 or 3), backrow moves can also be executed. If the key factors are also performed effectively pressure can be put on opposition ball to retain the ball.

### *Back Play*

Players being able to perform and vary the Key Factors of back line play (Alignment, Angle, Speed, Penetration & Support) effectively will ensure that their side is able to use the ball to their game plan or pattern of plays. The support play is very important to ensure that the ball is retained and the player with the ball has options.

### *General*

All players need to be able to perform all the different types of passes effectively and at pace if this is done the pace of the game increases. With backs being required to support in rucks and mauls more and more the forwards are being required to fill in, in the back line and we have all seen the ball move along the back line and then all of a sudden the ball goes behind

the next player and we wonder who threw that pass and it is generally a forward (however there are some very good ball playing forwards, but they are better suited to shorter/close in passes). All players need to be able to receive a pass and throw a pass. Another area that gets overlooked is that players need to be able to take quick taps, however this is sometime a ruling area that Coaches need to inform players on (ie ball must be released from the hand by kicking the ball forward)

## **Refereeing**

This is the only influence of the pace of the game that a Coach cannot train his players for. Certainly the level of fitness of the Referee will determine the pace of the game, his interpretation of the Laws of the game and also his Game Management Skills

All of the above interact as the level of fitness of a Referee will determine the quickness of him interpreting the laws on the run and therefore the way he manages the game (ie being able to talk to players at tackle contests (ie tackler release, tackler rollaway, release the ball & balls out) and general play (ie players not to advance when in front of a kicker)). We can generally see that the Northern Hemisphere Referees are not as fit as the Southern Hemisphere Referees and this is evident in the way they do not keep up with play and the way they manage the game (very quick to blow the whistle and have a break).

## **Alternative**

An alternative in increasing the pace of the game is to force the pace of the game up. This can be achieved by;

1. immediate recycle
2. no bridging, drive PAST the ball,
3. insist on a minimum of two passes wide on each phase

Training unopposed will also influence players to be more urgent in getting to the tackle contest so as to maintain continuity this will force the issue of players improving fitness levels and skill levels.

This is just one alternative and each Coach will have their own alternatives at influencing the pace of the game with their own Teams.

## **Conclusion**

The pace of the game is also up to individual Coaches attitude and coaching style. The Coaches influence within the Club/Structure and their philosophy to the pace of the game, certainly some sides have traditionally been playing the same way for a 100 years (ie 10 man Rugby) and will never change.

Overall if Coaches are able to ensure that players are able to perform the basic skills, improve player's fitness level and able to change game plans due to the environment/conditions then the Coaches are able to determine the pace of the game they want their players to strive to achieve.

## **Bibliography**

Richard Turnbull – 2002 Season Periodised Training Programme.

### **Thanks to;**

Eddie Jones

Bob Dwyer – Alternative

Steve Tuynman