

LEVEL THREE COACHING COURSE

TASK TWELVE

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TOPIC:-

“RUGBY COACHING :- “Now and then”

A comparison of coaching and training techniques in Club rugby and the changes over the past ten years....

INTRODUCTION

The change in the techniques used to prepare rugby players and teams change from year to year, let alone in the past ten years. In this paper I attempt to cover the main changes in coaching and training techniques and the impact they have had on the game. Debatably some good and some bad. As the game moves on from amateurism into a professional scenario the demands on the head coach and his or her staff is becoming greater, due to the intense pressure been created by professionalism. Players now look to their coaches as someone who can develop them, and the teams they play in, to create a financial future, where as previously players played for the “love of the game” and if further selection was achieved it was a bonus.

The relationship between the changes in the “Laws of the Rugby” and the affects on coaching and training techniques certainly have taken toll on the way the game is structured.

The law changes have created several challenging situations for coaches to adapt the way they approach the way their team play the game. As a coach you must adapt your team to benefit from using the laws rather than founding them a hindrance. The team that adapts and uses law change's as a positive will end up, not only benefiting from the referee, but also have a further understanding of the science of the game. It is very important in your coaching of players to educate them not only in the skills and conditioning but also to increase their awareness of the technical approach to rugby.

Strength and Conditioning

The advances in this area of expertise has arguably been the fastest changing area of preparation of a team for competition. “Fitness training”, as this area used to called, has developed into a one of the three major areas that coaches must adapt in to the teams yearly programs the others, been skills and technical play. (these areas will be covered later) Rugby “athletes” like all elite athletes cannot be at their peak for 12 months or even six months. Coaches develop periodisation schedules for their strength and conditioning programs to allow the team to peak for periods during the season such as the most difficult games and the final series.

Previously club coaches used fitness sessions as punishment for poor performance or tagged on the end of training as something that had to be done with no thought process in them. Players were expected to push themselves as hard as they could in these sessions or be frond upon as not trying, with no thought of the players individual personal condition. This process often led to injury and fatigue of the player rather than the desired effect of a prepared athlete ready to play.

Today strength and conditioning of a rugby team is looked on as much more personal individual science, with each individual player having specific needs depending on their positions in the team. Each player is given individual weight and conditioning programs to be done each week during the year with long

periods of rest to achieve the ultimate result of the player been at his or her physical condition peak at the correct time of the year. In most clubs this process is now overseen by a professional strength and conditioning coach specialising in “rugby specific” training techniques that have been developed through many studies lead by the leaders of this field. No longer is it left to the team coach to develop this aspect of his teams preparation, his role is to develop it into his teams periodisation program for the season. Each period of training be it off, pre or mid season must be carefully planned to get the best result from the players and the team. The search for the correct balance of these resources is one of the most difficult challenges that meet the modern day head coach.

The area of strength and conditioning changes rapidly as new techniques and knowledge comes to hand. This area is responsible for a completely different player been prepared, than the player ten years ago. The advances in strength and conditioning along with nutrition and player welfare has produced more superior athletes playing the game, thus affecting the speed of the game and introducing new levels of physical contact been achieved.

In summary this area and its development has improved the game by producing athletes that can continue to maintain and recover fitness levels quickly which allows coaches to develop game plans that could not be developed previously.

Skills

In years gone by this area of expertise has been downplayed of its importance by many club coaches as something you have or you don't have. Many skills were ignored in favour of more time spent on technical practise on certain set plays. It was also assumed that there was certain skills you needed to play certain positions and certain skills that you didn't. This attitude restricted the speed and expansion of game plans for many teams. Teams became typecast, earned labels such as "10 man" teams where the outside backs rarely saw the ball and all the plays were centred around forward tussles in set plays, using limited skills. This certainly restricted the spectacle of the game.

As the game has developed over the past ten years the area of skill development has taken leaps forward. All players are now required to perform many forms of passes and many different types of tackles, no player now can survive with a low skill base, been quickly exposed by the pace of the game. This has lead to coaches turning to and creating many drills that are game based. These are used during training sessions with all players to improve and develop skills across the board. Skills sessions are now a major component of all training sessions and are used for all players rather than individuals such as with strength and conditioning.

Skills of all players have been improved which allow coaches a wider scope to develop more expansive game plans using players with different skills to break defensive patterns. Players at top club football now are expected to do all skill sessions and to work on poorly performed skills, were in years gone by players would have been labelled as a player who could not perform that skill.

As with strength and conditioning, the skills area of rugby has developed into a specialist area with many clubs, and certainly at the elite level, a skills coach is employed to maintain this important ingredient in rugby.

Many players of the past could have been aided by enhancement of their skill level. The game as a spectacle has certainly been improved by the improvement of the skill level of all players. As the game develops further it will be important to continue the development of the skill training as an area for all players development to maintain the improvement of the game.

Technical Play

This area of expertise dealing with set plays of rugby has also changed over the years becoming more of a science, that the old adage that “practice makes perfect”. In the past training sessions for forwards put a large emphasis on set pieces and coaches used set plays to develop game plans.

During the games last decade the set play has become more of an even contest where teams don't completely dominate the lineout or the scrum. Even though they remain important areas of the game used to launch attacking raids on opposition defences. At top club level and in the elite area of the game coaches expect to win the majority of their set plays.

Training sessions for set plays are more technical and skill orientated, such as work in lineouts focusing on lifting and throwing (skill training) and developing strategies that will upset the opposition effectiveness in the lineout. In scrum training the emphasis is set on the engagement and the height of the scrum rather than setting thirty to forty scrums in a session in time gone by.

Set play training sessions have certainly reduced in the time allocated to them, however the intensity of these sessions, especially opposed sessions still are an exciting part of the training session.

Further changes in certain aspects of rugby

After analysing the three major areas of coaching and training, there are several other aspects of the game that through different change in either law or coaching techniques that have changed the way the game is played affecting the way the game is coached. These points change the way the game is interrupted and played. Rugby as a game is lucky in the way that as it evolves over the years the spectacle changes as well, this generates public interest and continues to provide coaches with the challenge of been able to change the way the team is prepared for the contest, pushing both individual players and as a team unit to demonstrate what they have achieved through been coached.

The following facets of rugby have changed over the past ten years. A summary of certain points demonstrate that the game never stands still, that's what makes it a pleasure and challenge to coach:-

1. Phase Play

- The development of “phase play” rugby has created the opportunity to maintain possession and create pressure on oppositions.
- Sequence and Team plays have been created to deal with continuous phase after phase rugby.
- Player's assume different roles in the make up of sequence play enabling all players to have a active role in the progression of the game.

2. Advantage rule

- The law changes with the “Advantage Law “ have created huge opportunity for the team attacking to expose weaknesses in the opposition and continue to build sequence plays to improve the standing of that team.
- Coaching and training techniques have changed to adapt to advantage play to allow continuous play rather than the “stop and start” game of previous years.

3. Maintaining possession

- Maintaining possession has become paramount in the modern game.
- In the past field position and dominance of the set play would achieve the correct result.
- Kicking the ball away is now a thing of the past. Ball in hand is the preferred option thus affecting the way the team is coached.
- If you can maintain possession and be positive with your plays the game falls into place.

4. New laws

- Laws such as the “Quick Lineout” law and the “quick tap” law have speed the game up and create opportunity for a expansive game rather than moving from set play to set play.
- There are always certain laws in the game that frustrate coaches and players, but as long as we continue to adapt and improve the game and do not stand still the game will continue to improve.

Summary

The major changes in the game over the last ten years has changed the role of coaching at club rugby level. Semi professionalism at club level has created a scenario that coaches and staff need to plan and structure the season over a 12 month period, so that the player can be developed through the year, rather than over a shorter period as years gone by. As the game has become faster due to the adoption of new laws, the players have had to adapt and have become more physically prepared for today's game.

As discussed in this paper, rugby is fast becoming a science and the more the game develops the more areas that need to be addressed by the coaches. Along with the areas discussed in this paper coaches need now to have many other areas covered such as:-

- Diet and nutrition
- Recovery and relaxation
- Psychological analysis
- Player welfare

All these areas need to be included when beginning to plan your season's calendar and organising your training periodisation. The game at Premiership Club level has changed as the game has progressed forward and will continue to do so.....as we proceed forward to whatever the future holds.