ARU Level 3

Task 12

Topic: Decision Making Skills for Players with Ball in Hand

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Due: 30 Sep 2008

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**Decision Making Skills for Players with Ball in Hand**

Most coaches believe that good decision making skills are intuitive and are hard to coach especially at junior levels.

At times during the game, players make decisions based on 2 principles. How the defence is lined up, and how their support play is reacting to it.

The key here is that most of the time, we are so focused on Structured Play, that we forget about Decision Making Skills (DMS). As with General play which takes up 70% of today’s game, DMS should fall into the same category in terms of practice.

There are many ways to teach DMS, they can be structured OR unstructured. But more importantly, can we (coaches) work them into our warm up routine? This can be worked from semi contact situations (During warm up) to full on contact (during Team Runs or mini games).

**Examples:**

**Structured way of coaching DMS –**

- 1 v 1 in a 5m X 5m Grid
- 2 v 1 in a 8m X 8m Grid
- 3 v 2 in a 10m X 10m Grid

All options to be listed down and run in a controlled environment

**Unstructured way of coaching DMS:**

- 3 v 3 Touch Rugby
- 5 v 5 touch Rugby

These mini games do provide players with an opportunity to practice their DMS under “Pressure” during warm up, in a fun & safe environment.

We take a look at what the IRB’s answer to Decision Making Skills for the ball carrier & support players are, including the Functional Roles & Key factors:
IRB Level 3 Manual Support Play in Attack

“The space that is created is the space that the player is moving away from not the space the player is moving in to.”

Aim
To be in a position that gives the ball carrier options to continue play.

Principles
- Support in depth
- Support on both sides of the ball carrier
- Pass to the support so that possession is retained
- Use support to keep the ball in play

Functional Roles

1. Ball Carrier  2. Direct support  3. Indirect support

Ball carrier Key Factors
- Create space for team-mates by drawing opponents away.
- Off-load the ball just prior to contact to commit defenders.
- Pass the ball into the space that has been created.
- Commit, pass and support in three distinct movements.

2. Direct Support Key Factors
- Support in depth
- Support in both left and right
- Communicate positioning and tell the ball carrier where the space is.
- Be in a position to move forward to the ball as it becomes available

3. Indirect Support Key Factors
- Act as a decoy by either maintaining positioning or moving away from the ball carrier

Conclusion

The key strategy in all support is to read the situation, to recognise where the space has been created, and to probe the space to cause a continual adjustment in the defence. With each attack the pressure on the opposition increases, creating an increased opportunity to finish things off and score. To the retention of possession and playing to space must be added pace, as, if the speed of the attack slows, or if the attack becomes stationary, the opposition will be able to re-establish their defensive pattern.
In this paper, we take a look at the fundamentals of decision making based on the constant variables that players face when they have the ball in hand.

**Two Key Positional Roles**

a) Ball Carrier  
b) Support Player

**Fundamentals of decision making for Ball carrier:**

*Fixing the defence*

- Draw & Pass  
- Step & Run through  
- Unders & Overs  
- Miss pass to extra man  
- Kick & Chase

**Fundamentals of decision making for Support Player:**

*Reading & Timing the support*

- Support from depth at Pace  
- Support from Angle  
- Support from depth at Angle & Pace  
- Support by reading opposition defence pattern and deciding on line of run to confuse them/ run into gaps.

**The Variables**

These must be taken into consideration by both the ball carrier & the support player:

- Options given by the defenders  
- Options created by the attacking side  
- Skill Level - Execution  
- Communication
Decision Making Skills Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ball Carrier Situations</th>
<th>Run</th>
<th>Pass</th>
<th>Dummy Pass</th>
<th>Kick</th>
<th>Loop</th>
<th>Switch</th>
<th>Stay Strong if isolated</th>
<th>Secure Possession if caught</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 v 1</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>3 v 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 v 3</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Options based on Skills Matrix

Run:
Evasive running is what we are looking at here, options are to:
  a) Side step
  b) Swerve
  c) Out Run (if faster)

Pass:
  a) Overs OR Unders
  b) Commit & Pass
  c) Miss Pass

Dummy Pass: If defender slides across channels as you are about to pass

Kick:
  a) Chip Kick (1 v 1)
  b) Grubber Kick (1 v 1 or 2 v 1)
  c) Punt Kick (If support is far away)

Loop:
a) Loop to create extra man either on inside or outside

Switch:
a) Changing Angles in Attack by fixing the defence and opening up gaps

Staying Strong if isolated:
a) This is a must, especially in 1 v 1 situations to prevent the defender from doing a pilfer tackle

Secure Possession:
a) In a 2 v 1 or 3 v 2 situation, where the ball carrier is caught, primary & secondary support players must help to secure possession by either forming a ruck or maul
**DMS Process**

We all may have seen this diagram time and again, but how many times do we actually put our players through it during training?

**Best Practice**

As with general play, we (coaches) need to include this into our Skills Matrix for the season, and ensure that players get enough time practicing the skills required for them to function at optimal levels during the games.

As coaches, we can also have preset options for our teams by giving them some simple moves that we will use during these situations.

As previously suggested, these can be included during warm ups in a fun and safe manner.

**References:**