ARU LEVEL 4

LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT

TASK 9

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HOW TO COMPETE – A BLUE PRINT TO SUCCESS
**Introduction**

In this paper I will outline some of the key factors and components in which I believe your rugby club should have successfully instilled into its environment and systems in order for it to be able to consistently compete week in, week out at the highest of levels.

I believe each rugby club needs to explore each of these components listed below:

1. **GOALS**
2. **PLANNING**
3. **APPOINTMENTS**
4. **CULTURE**
5. **FITNESS LEVELS**
6. **SKILLS {SKILL SETS}**
7. **AWARENESS**
8. **DEPTH OF TALENT {PATHWAYS}**

**GOALS**

*What are you as a rugby club trying to achieve?*

With rugby union and sport in general for that matter being a result based industry careful goal setting, planning and appointments (coaches and support staff) is crucial, there are all different types of goals and goal setting within a rugby club and organization.

Here are the three main:

- **PROCESS GOALS** – each of these process goals needs a clearly defined set of actions to be achieved, in other words if along our journey we can tick all these process goals our eventual end goal will be able to be achieved.
• **PERFORMANCE GOALS** – with each game or possibly a block of 3 games you need to have performance goals (or targets) of how you want the game to be played and what you want to have as an outcome irrespective of the score line, these goals tend to be very team orientated and help galvanize the group to be heading as one.

• **OUTCOME GOALS** – If throughout the course of the season your group can achieve a majority of their set goals, then your final outcome goals will be able to be reached, not all but most – a lot of clubs set out each year to win the premiership, but this does not always happen - so end goals need to be more about just winning a premiership.

Another factor when goal setting is understanding what you want out of the season i.e.

1. What as a club do we regard to be a failure?
2. What as a club do we regard as a pass mark?
3. What as a club do we consider a successful season?

Also, when goal setting you need to factor in how you can improve your resources i.e.;

• Fully maintained club website
• Access and improved quality of coaching
• Access to quality strength and conditioning
• Access for players to quality dietary requirements
• Access to qualified sports physiologist
• Access to personal, as well as group development

Once you have set the goals for your upcoming program (season) we move onto Planning.

Reevaluate constantly as what is important in January might not be as important in April etc. and vice versa

**PLANNING**
The most successful organizations – whether national associations, private enterprise or Sporting clubs all have strong, well established, strategically planned programs. A strategic plan includes the Rugby Union clubs Mission, Goals, priorities, and the actions needed to accomplish the mission (in this case being able to consistently compete at a high level both on and off the field) Such a plan will help allocate human and financial resources efficiently.

When proceeding to organize your planning for both on and off the field development factor in these three Key points:

- Where are we now?

This should be relatively easy to answer from both a resource and financial point of view as well as a playing group point of view

- Where are we going?

This statement is aimed at where do you want to be – this is the end result for the entire club

- How will we get there?

This question is aimed at finding out all the steps along the way you need to take in order to get to where you want to be

Now that all the Clubs goals and planning are complete the club needs to make appointments including its Head Coach and relevant staff to execute and drive the program to achieve the desired goals for the upcoming program (season)

**APPOINTMENTS**

Appointments for most Rugby Clubs will include the following;

**HEAD COACH**
Working with other rugby coaches can be as challenging as being the only coach at a club or school. There is always the danger that too many coaching “voices” will send mixed messages to your players.

As head coach, you need to clearly define your role and the role of your rugby coaching team. Are you going to be on-field solving problems, or managing the resources off-field?

Bring in specialists but keep control

At the elite level, rugby coaches have access to specialist coaching on every minute aspect of the game.

You may have access to a medical support team, rugby fitness advisors and other sports science support. In which case, you need to ensure you don’t become a slave to their regimes, which may conflict with your systems. To help you overcome this, my advice is to become a “T” shaped coach.

“T” shaped coaches

The head rugby coach needs to have both a breadth and a depth of knowledge. Those with a breadth of knowledge, as indicated by the horizontal part of the “T” in the diagram, have a good understanding of all the specialist areas, but may not be specialists themselves.

The vertical part of the “T” indicates the depth of knowledge of an area of specialism. The head coach needs to know a little about ALL areas of performance and development. The specialist coach knows a great deal about one specialist area of performance.
The head coach needs to be able to understand what specialists have to offer, manage them and balance this against all the other areas.

**ASSISTANT COACH (COACHES)**

The role of an Assistant Coach can be varied and very different depending on the needs of the individual program. A Head Coach will ultimately be the main driving factor within the role of what an Assistant Coach must complete. This is probably the defining point to the role of an Assistant Coach, as an assistant you are there is support and Head Coach and their vision of what a program should look like now and into the future.

For this reason, an Assistant Coach must buy into the philosophy, vision or mission and program in all aspects that a Head Coach deems to be necessary. This must be the consistent and unified theme of everything that an Assistant Coach does. At the very least to the outside observers of a program the Assistant Coach and Head Coach must be very consistent in their vision of where the program is heading. This can however be slightly different in private, behind closed doors. However, if behind the scenes the fiction becomes overly aggressive this will have a negative effect on performance.

**TEAM MANAGER**

A Club Team Manager is responsible for the:

- administration and management of the team and
- welfare of all team members at training and competition

**STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING COACH**

The Head Strength and Conditioning Coach is responsible for organizing and administering all phases of the training program for Varsity Athletes. The primary goal of the program is to increase the overall strength, endurance, balance, and agility of our athletes, and to reduce athletic related injuries. Supervised training sessions are provided for both in-season and off-season athletes, and are tailored to meet the needs of each individual as well as the
sport-specific requirements. The Head S&C Coach coordinates closely with the coaching staff to design sport-specific programs based upon the timing of the competitive seasons, as well as with the Athletic Trainers on program design based upon injury prevention and rehabilitation. In addition, the S&C Coach plays a role in providing fitness classes for the general campus population, including non-athlete students, faculty, and staff members.

**MEDICAL TEAM – *i.e. Doctor, Physio & Strapper***

These roles are very much self-explanatory.

All information should flow directly to the head doctor (where applicable) and all information then flows onto the head coach.

**SPORT PSYCHOLOGIST (full-time / part-time basis)**

The main job of a sports psychologist is to help an athlete maintain peak performance. But sports psychology involves a lot more than just helping an athlete deal with sports-related physical, mental and emotional stresses. Sport psychologists work with athletes to maintain good "mental hygiene" so they can be happy and healthy off as well as on the field. This is particularly the case in collegiate athletics, where sports psychologists help student athletes to stay focused, so they can be successful in the classroom and in their sporting endeavours.

After all appointments are filled as a collective the next important thing to create is what do we want our CULTURE to be.

**CULTURE**

Culture – what is it?

The Values and behaviors of a sporting organization define its culture, its “The way we do things around here “that establishes the brand of the club.
Leadership of the club should drive this culture and in many sports, coaches can have a significant impact. Recognising the importance of this and identifying opportunities to make improvements can provide a key to building a strong and successful sporting club.

Culture can influence the vitality and viability of a sporting club and impact on things such as participation rates, sponsorship and volunteer engagement, issues commonly identified in sport as providing a negative cultural influence include going beyond the spirit of the game, verbal abuse, negative coaching behaviours and practices.

It is important that members have the opportunity to provide feedback and take ownership of Culture change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Examples of Good Culture</th>
<th>Examples of Bad Culture</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunities for growth (All)</td>
<td>No possible long-term progression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invested in personal development (All)</td>
<td>Unorganized in planning and direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong and visible leadership</td>
<td>Possible groups to distract and divide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers are included in success</td>
<td>Way too comfortable in the way they are</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Player pathways are paramount</td>
<td>Too much laziness and entitlement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everybody heading in the same direction</td>
<td>No united leadership group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop for the future / not just now</td>
<td>No long-term development strategies</td>
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**FITNESS LEVELS (including basic skills)**

Main importance when we come to fitness is to increase our fitness levels to a higher standard while not neglecting the fundamentals of the game, yes strong men / women are great players, but faster fitter players are better

Focus on clear training objectives
- Work in blocks with your Strength and conditioning coaches from 1-4 week / 1-6 week blocks
- Understand the difference between physical and technical trainings
- Never deviate from the objectives

Build intensity and content slowly (pyramid training)

- Start slow / get your base sorted first
- Increase your base (strengthen it) before moving on
- Conditioning the body to absorb more work will give you long term gains

Find what’s important to your group

- Explosive speed
- Explosive power All can be developed pre – season
- Explosive strength
- Think outside the box (see your planning on how you can be better)
- Shorten sessions but increase intensity
- Incorporate plyometric work into all sessions
- Incorporate speed work into all sessions

Forget about rugby for a while

- Give your players a different approach to pre-season than the previous year
- Water activities to reduce load and impact in legs are beneficial
- Yoga and Pilates will benefit

**SKILLS**

When you compare rugby XVs skills at the highest level to other professional sports - particularly in the USA, then we are miles behind.

"Take the NBA for example and especially players like Kevin Durant, James Harden, Steff Curry ETC Every attempted shot is technically perfect and on the money... Watch them play or train and you will see the same exacting technique that has been practised ad
nauseam. (Ad nauseam – to the point that something has been done or repeated so often it has become annoying or tiresome)

"A player gets one step wrong or his shape slightly wrong defensively and it’s on repeat on TV and the commentators and crowd also point out that player's technical inadequacies

Therefore, we need to have this in mind when looking at our skills for rugby and never neglect the basics of our game – Passing is an absolute essential regardless of players position

**PASSING**

Whatever position a player ends up playing, passing will be a core part of their role. There is no excuse for any player not being able to deliver a variety of passes effectively or selecting the best pass to use in different situations.

All players should be competent at delivering clearing passes, spin passes, orthodox passes and **pop passes**, and in both directions.

In training, you must put players under pressure to deliver passes and condition games, so players must select different passes to suit different situations

**RUNNING**

Focus on the key running skills common to all players – acceleration, changing pace, changing direction and running efficiently sideways and backwards. Impress on the players the need to be balanced when they are running, especially just before contact situations.

Incorporate multi-directional running into all your **warm-ups** and work on all the running skills every week.

**SUPPORT PLAY**

All your players need to understand their supporting roles in the game. Insist that they come from a deep position behind the ball carrier and accelerate onto the pass. They must communicate accurately with the ball carrier to tell him exactly where they are and when they want the pass.
**TACKLING**

Players need to be able to execute a variety of tackles in different situations, and to make these tackles efficiently. Your team’s target should be that all players are competent tackling in one-on-one situations.

Work on individual technique and include tackling drills and games in every training session. Expose your players to different situations where they must make different tackles.

**DECISION MAKING**

Some players are natural decision-makers, but it’s important that all your players learn how to make good decisions under pressure the majority of the time.

As with most complex skills, decision making can only be developed by making real time decisions repeatedly.

**AWARENESS**

Awareness in rugby comes in many different ways.

**SELF AWARENESS**

Self-awareness. Knowing yourself as a coach is the most important step toward becoming an effective coach. Coaches need to build on their strengths while staying flexible in their thinking. Coaches, and athletes, also must be willing to attack and embrace constant pressure to identify and close personal performance gaps. As coaches you need to enhance your self-awareness through constant reflection, alone and with trusted peers. Frequently reflecting on how they coach helps challenge assumptions (mental models) they hold about coaching and their athletes. It also alerts the coaches to blind spots—important events or
behaviours coaches might otherwise overlook that could in some way undermine their approach.

Self-awareness coaching leads to athletes that are self-motivated, learn faster, react quicker, adapt to varying conditions and opponents more easily, have less injuries, and ultimately to improved sports performances.

I.e. know what your strengths and weaknesses are as a coach.

**PLAYER AWARENESS**

Get to know the person first – then the player.

Understand the reasons why your players actually play the game of rugby, understanding them as a person first i.e. their background, their schooling, their likes, and dislikes are all steps to making the person a better player.

Once you know the person you can then formulate methods to personally challenge them during training and also games.

**OPPOSITION AWARENESS**

Knowing your opponents is half the way to victory, and knowing your own capabilities is the other half to realise your objectives especially in a contest like rugby union.

Understanding why they do things a certain way will help you being able to break them down by being able to counter act with your own play.

**PATHWAYS**

- When we talk about pathways or pathway systems the end result never changes – get the player to highest level possible.
- By creating pathways with your clubs, you increase the chances of player retention and also increased playing numbers.
From a junior point of view look to aligning yourself with as many schools as you can in your area

Offer to send senior players there as well as coaches to run skills clinics and muster days

Also look at what other junior clubs are in your area who don’t have seniors – offer to do the same as the schools then a flow on effect will occur and they will fall under your banner to play grade rugby.

Create a pathway within your own club

Have a clear and direct pathway from the transition from the juniors within your club through to the seniors

Spend the time developing the players so there is never a block at the top and the players need to look elsewhere as their positions have been recruited from elsewhere by the club

Create a Pathway from your club to higher sides (professional rugby)

While all rugby clubs want to hold onto their best players they will inevitably get picked up for representative honours – the more this happens the more it will appear to the outside world that your club is a nursery to create and develop quality rugby players through your pathway systems

Always remember – your players will come back if you have created an environment (culture) for them to do so

Summary

In short these are my own thoughts on what I believe are important factors in creating an environment in which you need to be able to week in week out compete at the highest level you possibly can – use the pyramid analogy and work on the foundations first.

Set your goals and work on a plan to execute accordingly
- Get the right people in to do the right job for the club
- Find a culture that all can thrive in and want to be a part of (everyone is equal)
- Then work on being fitter and more skilful than your opposition while also working on yourself and group awareness in all aspects of not only the game but also in life.
- Then create Pathways for not only attracting juniors to your club but for seniors to develop grow and become better players so they can be picked up for higher honours and then return to attract even more players as you have created and direct line from junior rugby all the way through to the highest form in our game.