INTRODUCTION

Analysis has become an integral part of the game at all levels. With the affordability and easy access to equipment and apps that allow the filming of training and games, have we, as coaches become obsessed with data or are we using the technology to develop our players? In this paper we will take a look at the "What", "How" and "Why" involved in the process of analysis. Are we as coaches creating analysis environments that stimulate our players to want improvement?
THE ANALYSIS PROCESS

“WHAT” “HOW” & “WHY” DO COACHES ANALYSE PLAYER AND TEAM PERFORMANCE?

Over the last 20 years, since the game turned professional analysis tools have evolved beyond belief. Coaches have access to every piece of data imaginable for both their own players and their opposition. Teams of analysts are often bunkered up during games trying to supply the coaching team with the data as quickly and accurately as possible, so the coaching team can make tactical or personnel changes “in game” hoping to affect the outcome of the game. The list of “KPI’s” and associated numbers are intriguing. The challenge as coaches is to filter the information to paint an accurate picture for themselves and for the players.

Games - “What & How” are coaches analyzing?

Coaches receive data on every individual, group & team involvement for the entirety of the game. Data is collected on success and failure rates of everything from tackles made/missed/dominant to how the ball is delivered from a line out out...
and on to the % time spent in certain areas of the field, studying plays, patterns and defensive weakness with every other detail in between.

With access to visual and physical data through cameras, GPS trackers and Heart Rate Monitors, is there a feeling at a coaching & playing level that players “Have nowhere to hide?” if so what are the impacts of that kind of environment? Performance? Pressure? Improvement?

Do coaches look to analysis data for a reason to pick players or more interestingly not pick them?

**Training - “What & How” are coaches analyzing?**

In training the cameras are constantly on and players at the top level are wearing GPS trackers and HRMs every time they take to the field. The data returned provides information on technical, tactical and physical output of players through training.

With ability to study things like body shape, tackle tech, defensive systems and offensive systems, distance ran, top speed, low speed, velocity through collision and all in training. In theory coaches can prepare players for game day better than ever before.

All of the above paints a picture of how a player is performing and allows coaches to track player performance, loading & risk of injury.
The Process of “Why”

The “**Cycle**” – Typical week

Saturday – Game

Monday – Training & Analysis Meetings

Tuesday – Training & Training analysis

Wednesday – Training & Training analysis

Thursday – Training & Training analysis

Friday – Captains Run – Run analysis

With analysis of technical, tactical and physical in play every day, how much sharing of information, data and footage do coaches encourage players to be involved in? Are coaches keeping the information in their back pockets or are they educating their players on how to use the information for improvement?

Who should be leading the review process? How should the process be structured? Is there an opportunity to develop other key roles in terms of leadership & empowerment through the process?
In 2016 I was lucky enough to be shown around one of the NZ Super Rugby Franchise facilities and training. There were a few things that stood out in relation to their environment and the processes they had in place which directly linked back to analyzing performance, empowering the players to analyse performance then the way they delivered the information gathered from analysis to the wider group.

The philosophy seemed simple, in essence they have created a player centered, player led analysis environment. They work as individuals and small groups to analyse the footage of games then deliver the key messages based on a “critical few” approach. The “critical few” approach is interesting and shows that the philosophy is based around the human brains ability to absorb and process information effectively to deliver an outcome – technical or tactical improvement....

With groups looking specifically at defence, attack, LO, scrum & launch plays, the players, in their groups are looking specifically at the key areas of game, identifying opportunity for technical and tactical growth, then as a very important part of the process players are delivering the message back to players by way of small presentations in the players room which has access to presentation equipment for footage, white boards and a table field that has 30 miniature players on a marked out field.

Each player in each group must present a part of the information using footage, drawings and the table field. Standing in a room full of your peers presenting can seem a daunting task. Not everyone is comfortable in such environments. Again as part of the process the environment is teaching players to be “comfortable being uncomfortable” and links back directly to situations you can find yourself in when playing or in life generally.
In this environment the players are challenged to use analysis as a problem solving tool. An opportunity to identify things for improvement or growth. The most important part of the process for them is that the players are challenged to come up with the solutions. They are given the opportunity to develop solutions and implement the plan. The coaches are there as a sounding board for ideas, as mentors and guides. They then start the process over again the following week taking in to account “positive” or “negative” outcome...

The coaches have access to all the regular data and footage, they spend hours pouring over it, understanding it and developing vision of how the game was delivered technically and tactically by the players. The most important thing these coaches have chosen to do with the information is empower the players to work out how they are going to improve...the coaches offer guidance and opinion but they also trust that the environment has the strength to help deliver improvement and ultimately success.

The benefits of developing the kind of environment above are -

1. Empowering players creates accountability
2. Buy in & stimulation = Enjoyment – Players want to be involved in the process
3. Leadership development
4. Developing skills that are life skills
5. Developing problem solving skills which relate directly to the game
6. Improved under pressure decision making in games.
Summary

Looking at the benefits of setting up an inclusive environment where players have a lead role in the analysis process could seem challenging for coaches who have historically delivered the detail around analysis rather than letting the players find the detail and present it.

Not only could it seem challenging for a coach, it poses the questions in relation to the playing group –

1. How will a playing group who are not used to the kind of autonomy it presents react?
2. How will players who are not used to presenting to wider group react?
3. Will it impact their performance on the field if they are in uncomfortable positions of the field?
4. Do the players have the IT skills to work effectively?
5. Do we need to teach them how to look at the data effectively for them to be able work effectively?

A period of transition where the coaching group or analysts guide the players through the process could be an effective way of implementing change.

Questions to think about as a coach -

1. How do I transition?
2. How much autonomy do I give the players?
3. Am I of a mindset where I am happy for the players to fail a little with it to aid growth?
4. How do I react to the process of change if some players struggle with it?
5. How do I get my key messages over as a coach?
6. How do I have time to make these kind of changes when my focus is on winning?

All of the above are valid questions that need answering as part of the process. Change is a process and an opportunity to evolve as coaches, players and a program.

The decision we have to make as coaches is, are we willing to make short term change for long term gain? How will the change impact performance and results in the short term and long term.

Modern players enjoy stimulation and involvement and the benefits are clear. Are we willing as coaches to make changes and involve the players more?

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