Wests Elite Player Development Squad.

Western Districts Rugby Football Club have developed and built arguably the best rugby club and facilities in Australia. It is now appropriate that we build the rugby program to suit the facilities, creating world’s best practice when it comes to Long Term Athlete Development. Wests will become ‘Go to’ club for players and their families who are looking for an environment which best suits their long term playing ambitions. We also have the opportunity to build and foster long term relationships with local schools and the community essentially creating ‘home grown’ players as opposed to importing them each year.

Why are we doing this?

- Create Long term sustainability – player pipeline
- Assist with Long Term Athlete Development
- Complete the Skills Gap – Technical, Tactical, Physical, Nutrition, Mental & Holistic/Leadership

How do we do this?

**Super Rugby**

**NRC**

**Premier Rugby**

**Premier Colts**

### Elite Player Pathway Under 15/Under 16

- 15-20 players
- Individual Plan Plans – Progression to Colts
- Monthly Sessions + 2 Day Camp
- Talent ID – player pipeline regular contact

### Developing Player Program Under 14

- 25-30 players
- Technical
- Monthly Sessions
  - Physical – Strength, flexibility, aerobic, anaerobic, speed (testing)
  - Nutritional – Body weight, hydration, General Dietary habits

### Junior Developing Player Program Under 13

- Introduction – Learning to Train (what it takes to be a Bulldog)
- Monthly session’s 35-45 players
3 Tier Player Program

- Developing player pathway – monthly sessions, senior elite coaches
- Through to Elite Group with reduced numbers
- Develop the player pipeline, understand our players and the gaps in our squads eg. Props & Locks
- Premier colts/Premier Grade pathway through to NRC/Super Rugby
- Build Connection with the current Premier Grade and Premier Colts Coaches

Junior Developing Player Program Under 13

- Nominated by team coaches based on the criteria set by the Program coach
- Team Coach involvement – Coach the Coaches (take back to their teams)
- Get the coaches to buy into the process
- 35-45 players
- Introduction – learn to train the Wests way
- Monthly coaching sessions outside the normal team environment
- Core skills:
  - Catch/pass
  - Tackle
  - Break down
  - Running lines
  - Set piece
- Physical (testing only) – develop player testing profile for future records
  - Strength
  - Aerobic
  - Anaerobic
  - Speed
  - Power

As this is the first level of the program, a big emphasis will be on creating an environment where we make a really big impact on the players as all being potential emerging elite players. Because we don’t want to deselect players due to maturational, physiological, psychological, sociological and anthropometric issue. They key will be to encourage them without bias as where they may end up in terms of their rugby development. Encouragement to develop skills in other sports will also be a big focus as this will help with overuse injuries as well as the players can potentially add different skills adding to their ‘point of difference’ as a player. The physical testing is to help us develop a database over a number of years to track players whilst also looking to see which players may end up in certain positions based on Anthropometric Factors. This is particularly important for certain positions such as lock and front row.
Developing Player Program Under 14

- Monthly coaching sessions outside the normal team environment
- 25-30 players
- Nominated by Squad coaches
- **Core skills:**
  - Catch/pass
  - Tackle
  - Break down
  - Running lines
- **Physical** (testing only) – develop player testing profile for future records
  - Strength
  - Aerobic
  - Anaerobic
  - Speed
  - Power
- **Nutritional**
  - Body Weight
  - Hydration
  - General Dietary Habits
- **Anthropometric**
  - Height
  - Sitting Height
  - Weight
  - Body Shape
The second level of the program becomes a little more streamlined with a smaller group. This is done as some players decide that other interests become more important. The key is still about developing the players overall rugby skills but we start to add other elements. This is to teach the players about ‘the process’. The process is about becoming process orientated, not outcome focused. Making sure we are training the most effective way but also learning how to prepare ourselves as athletes.

**Elite Player Pathway Under 15**

- 15-20 Players maximum
- Monthly Sessions + 2day Camp
- Individual Player program
- **Technical** (as per above)
- **Physical** (individual Programs)
- **Nutritional**
  - Bodyweight
  - Skinfolds
  - Hydration
  - General Dietary Habits
  - Performance Nutrition
- **Tactical**
  - Personal understanding – positional
  - Understanding team game plan and your role
  - Tactical Periodisation
  - React well to the picture you see
  - Tactical leadership
- **Mental**
The third tier of this program becomes a little more streamlined in terms of the squad total. We are starting to now see players who may have some potential in terms of their overall ability, however we must be careful not to deselect players as some still may be late developers. We will also add other elements such as leadership. Part of this is to show the players that we are a looking to develop them as people as well as players. We will look to introduce a certain speakers who come from different back grounds. People who have succeeded in their areas of life. Entrepreneurs, scientists, corporate, and military people who can speak about how they worked their way to success. What obstacles they had to overcome and what advice they would give to young people starting out in their lives?

What type of player are we looking for?

- Self-Starters are the players willing to go the extra mile?
- Coachable – is the player coachable
- Athletic Skills: Speed, strength, agility, flexibility
• Position Specific Skills
• Conceptual Knowledge of the game – Vision, game sense etc.
• Intangibles
  o Psychological
    ▪ work ethic
    ▪ aggression
    ▪ Grit.

How do we stay connected to the players in their final year of school?

When emerging elite players are in their final year of school it is sometimes hard as the school rugby commitments as well as their academic requirements become quite considerable. To keep the linkages with these players, some players will be invited to train with our current Premier Colts squad during preseason. Both the GPS and AIC competition is only 8 games and 7 games respectively. This is clearly not enough competitive games to develop long term emerging elite players. Clubs can play a critical role in bridging that gap if they work collectively with the schools. With dialogue with the school coaches and Directors of Rugby We have managed to have a total of 10 players from 3 schools in 2018 who will train and play Colts at Wests. Part of the arrangement is they can play for Wests up until their school training and playing commences. Normally through to the end of April. This allows the players to have an additional 5-6 competitive games at a higher level of competition, preparing them for their school season. The upside for Wests is that the players have a unique understanding of how we work as a club so the transition to club post school becomes easier. We become a known quantity so the recruitment of the player post school becomes an easier proposition as the players knows and understands where they stand with the club and they can see a pathway for them towards their rugby goals. The key point is communication between our club and the schools. We don’t want to return players who have soft tissue injuries through overloading so a revised training schedule can be arranged eg a school player may do the field sessions with club and do their gym sessions at school whilst missing the club gym sessions at club.

Summary

Rugby is a game that is loved and enjoyed by so many people in Australia. Part of the challenge is finding where you fit in the whole scheme of emerging elite development. Whether you are a club or a school we all have a part to play in the development of players plus also the long term retention rates of players. Having sat on both sides of the fences in school land and club land I can see both points of view. We at Wests see the benefits and solutions twofold. Firstly working with the players whilst still at school we see a huge benefit to the school by helping to develop their players so they become more rounded players, benefiting the school. We see the benefit of working with the players for a few years so when they leave school, we already have a connection with them. The biggest part between both parties is communication. We don’t want to don’t want to injure players through overloading so it is a matter of compromise between both parties.