Training Ethics and Motivation within Hong Kong rugby players.

Introduction

Players at the elite level of rugby should spend far more time training than they do competing. The demanding and sometimes frantic Hong Kong lifestyle often leads to players having a negative training attitude. Elite level rugby requires a huge amount of time, effort, dedication, commitment and motivation to train. Since the introduction of professionalism into rugby in 1995, their have been increased demands and pressure on players to be fitter, stronger, faster and to perform better than before. These demands are also evident to a lesser extent in clubs and unions in both an amateur and semi-professional environment.

What do we want to find out? (Investigation Aim)

The primary purpose of this paper is to investigate the issues that influence semi-professional rugby players training motivations (i.e. fitness, weights, and individual skills) within the Hong Kong national setup. I will look at what factors may influence individual players motivation and how they train outside of team training situations. This is the individual sessions a player completes on their own or in groups which primarily involves fitness and strength, as well as their own skills or technique training.

How to go about it (Investigation Procedure)

Eight of Hong Kong’s elite rugby players aged between 20 and 30 years old were interviewed along with the HKRFU Strength and Conditioning Coach. The interviews provided a large amount of information about training motivation for these semi-professional rugby players in Hong Kong. The information that was collected was put into four themes. Four consistent themes emerged from the interviews to explain the players training motivation.

These are as follows -
1. Personal Management
2. Performance & Goals
3. Support
4. Commitment & Selection

There were a variety of themes/factors that influenced player’s motivation to train. These themes are not exclusive groups and some themes may be associated or related with others.
Investigation Findings

1. PERSONAL MANAGEMENT

Personal management was identified as a major factor that contributed to the players training motivation. This topic covered organisational skills, training knowledge and experience.

The results revealed that the players with good time management, organisational skills and a balanced lifestyle (i.e. regular sleep patterns, nutrition and life away from work/rugby) were the best trainers. The players that had a good understanding of the needs and benefits of individual training were more motivated. They said “it was easier as we knew exactly what to do and could just get in and get it done”.

This clearly demonstrates that time management skills and a balanced lifestyle are important factors within semi-professional sports people’s training motivation and adherence. One common concern that was identified in this investigation is the fact that there is no time for full recovery. This was due to work and lifestyle commitments. Limited or irregular sleep patterns with poor nutritional habits also decreased motivation levels.

2. PERFORMANCE & GOALS

All players claimed to have some sort of goal or focus towards their training. Their focus was on improving their own performance on the field and this was the primary motivation for their training. They all emphasized that enjoyment and variation in training helped them reach their goals and stay motivated to train after long days at work. They also agreed that individual training is important towards selection and performance mentally and physically on the field. At the same time they also said that those that train hardest are not always the best players as other considerations come into it such as natural ability and general rugby knowledge.

When asked about whether on-field performance contributes to the intensity put into individual trainings the majority of players agreed. One player said “after having a bad game it makes you want to get out there and do more training to improve and not make the same mistakes again, but after a good game there is always the temptation to reward yourself with lighter trainings or taking it easy”.

3. SUPPORT

All players commented that different means of support from a number of sources influenced their motivation towards training.

Management Support and Guidance – Most players commented that the Strength and Conditioning Coach has a major influence on their motivation to train. They mentioned that the training programmes provided gave them enough information and variation to prevent any boredom and continue to help them reach their targets. They
believe having good support from the trainer helped motivate and educate them to why they were doing the training and how it related to the game and their on-field performance. All players said they get the most out of their session when training one on one with the trainer or in small groups as there is nowhere to hide and you’re less likely to slack off. They view the trainer as a supportive figure in their personal training and feel that he should be available at any time if they need adjustments to their programmes or to check on techniques etc. His role needs to be flexible in a semi-professional environment as all of the players have different time schedules and commitments with their outside lives.

Feedback, whether positive or negative, or lack of feedback from the Coaches was seen as having an influence on the players training motivation. The players indicated that if the Coach gave them regular feedback, was supportive and told them what they needed to work on then they would be out there trying to better themselves. Feedback from the Coach motivated the players as it also indicated that the Coach was watching them.

**Partner/Family support** - All players stated that partner/family support was important to their training and motivation to train. The players that had the support and understanding from family were more motivated to train and got more out of their sessions. On the other hand the players that have pressure to spend more time at home with their family would tend to rush or even miss the odd training session to minimise time away.

**Team Environment** - The players mentioned that the way the team was performing and the team environment had the potential to influence the way they trained and their training motivation in both a positive or negative way. It was said that being part of a winning team had a positive effect on training sessions. Morale of the players was higher and everyone wants to train and contribute. One player mentioned “knowing that you are the best and that everyone is out to beat you is a good feeling”. However, a few players did say that being in a losing team made them train harder in an attempt to rectify the situation. Almost all players commented that being involved in a team that continued to be defeated made them in turn lose motivation, as they were not getting as much enjoyment and found it frustrating to be training so hard but not reaping any rewards.

Overall the players thought that there is enough support given and that the access to facilities are there to enable them to train and perform to a higher level.

### 4. COMMITMENT AND SELECTION

**Playing/Making the Team** – Making the starting lineup has an effect on the players motivation to train. Players said that selection in the starting 15, being on the bench or missing out of the 22 all had an influence on their training motivation. All players wanted to be in the starting 15 and if they were not they thought it was important to train even harder to try and prove they are worthy of a position in the 15. Non-selection can also have a negative effect on training motivation especially if (a) players aren’t being given specific feedback on why the didn’t make the 22 and what parts of their game they need to work on, or (b) they continue to train hard, be
committed but never make the team, or (c) being in the 22 but never getting a start and spending the whole season on the bench.

Players at this level are by no means content to just be involved; one player mentioned that when they weren’t playing they didn’t feel like they were contributing to the team. When sitting on the bench or missing out of the 22, their training motivation decreased as they saw no point in doing it and felt it was a waste of time training hard to be disappointed and to miss out on the starting 15 or selection all the time.

**Personal Investment** - All players believe that they have invested a considerable amount of time and effort into their training by Hong Kong standards. However, due to Hong Kong not being fully professional and the fact that the players have limited family time, jobs and/or study to do, this limits the time one has to train. They believe that they do not train often or hard enough in comparison to other fully professional teams (i.e. Japan).

All players had different motives and reasons for playing rugby, whether it is achievement of personal goals, overall health and fitness or simply enjoyment. These many different motives and reasons are important factors that contributed to their commitment to playing and training. Overall the main reason for playing was enjoyment of the game and being involved in a team environment. In a semi-professional environment incentives that keep them motivated to compete at the highest level were things like increased amounts of tours and tournaments and playing more test matches against other top countries. There was also a suggestion that being paid more would raise expectations on training and performance.

**Expectations** – Players set high expectations and standards of themselves and sometimes others around them. They also felt there was pressure to play well for Coaches, Management and family members. Some players commented that they weren’t influenced by other’s expectations and that their motivation came from their own performance expectations that they felt they had to live up to.

**Conclusion**

Hong Kong has many variables in what motivates players to train and play rugby. Each player needs to be aware of what motivates them and the different aspects that are involved when it comes to training motivation. They need to know the training environment that will enable them to get the best results out of their training and to have a good understanding of why they are sometimes less motivated to train. They need to have good time management, a balanced lifestyle and a good understanding of what’s required for each training so they can work effectively and efficiently.

Each player must communicate with their coaches and team trainer as they are ultimately there to help players and they need to be aware of what motivates or ‘demotivates’ each player. The coaches/trainers should have an open door policy so the players feel that they can approach them at any time. If the coach/trainer knows what influences an individual’s training motivation then they are more able to
structure the training environment to meet the player’s needs with variation or smaller training pods etc.

Players can no longer rely on ‘natural flair’ and talent alone. Fitness training is a key factor in peak performance and being motivated and committed to a fitness programme is crucial for success. Ultimately a player performs well to please himself and thus the greatest source of motivation comes from within.

Internal or self-motivation is the driving force that pushes one to achieve and if you are truly dedicated and determined, you will find the time and make sufficient sacrifices to achieve your training and playing goals.