**Game Tactics and Challenge Games: Save time & integrate**

Rugby for the majority is an amateur sport. A common constraint of all amateur coaches is that of time or the lack of it. There seems to be so little time to cover every aspect of the game. It is often said that amateur coaches are required to be the most diligent with time. Those with less time to spend with the players are faced with the most pressure. Not only are they faced with what to cover, but just as importantly when to cover it.

In very broad terms there are two applications to consider when teaching the players skills, they are techniques and tactics. This paper will focus on the use of challenge games, specifically on tactical application and a simple way to implement it into a standard training session that is both effective and time efficient.

**Current Trends**

Styles of play are forever changing. A combination of cycles and new methods continuously has coaches and players seeking the winning edge. Therefore a greater necessity is placed on time allocation for teaching new skills and techniques. Technique based training involves a culmination of individual, core and unit skills. A combination of these skill groups through various sequencing and patterns will result in the team tactics.

Current trends tend to indicate that a lot of time is dedicated to technique based training. That leaves the question of: Do we still have time to practice game day tactics? Technique based training has taken on change by being incorporated more vigorously into the periodised plan. Should we then look at how tactics are implemented and are traditional methods complimenting technique dominated sessions. This could indicate why coaches are simply running out of time. In the end coaches are being forced to put more into already precious time. Something will be neglected unless the coach takes a holistic approach to the way in which training sessions are conducted.

It is not uncommon for tactical awareness or The Game Plan to be implemented towards the end of training on the last training run of that particular week. For example: on the Thursday night before the game on Saturday. This is commonly referred to as the team run. This method could easily be related to studying for an exam, whereby students cram the night before. As most teachers would say this is not ideal for long term memory. Therefore a one off team run would not be a recommended practice, especially if the coach is attempting to ingrain tactics for the season ahead.

A team run may still be a necessary part of the training week. It should not be disregarded altogether. It should not however be the sole method of teaching players the tactical aspects of the game ahead. A 10 minute Captains run is often used by coaches as a great way to rap up a comprehensive training week. It also acts as a subtle indicator to whether or not the team is capable of satisfying the game plan with out the reliance of management input.
Making the most of Challenge games

Creating motivation through innovation can tread a very fine line bordering on time efficiency and effectiveness. This is a part of planning that needs to be measured quite carefully.

There have been some great training activities over the years used to keep players amused. Activities such as ‘king of the ring’ with an emphasis on contact, ‘sock wrestling’ and ‘knee slapping’ which highlight stability, and ‘upper body wrestling’ that covers a combination of stability and conditioning. Unfortunately these tend to lack both tactical and technical specificity. Although these activities relate to rugby do coaches have the time to include them?

Challenge games are a prime example of using time intelligently. Challenge games are game sense activities. Open skill training that incorporates the use of specific techniques that a coach is trying to instill into the players. An example of this would be ‘ruck touch’, whereby the coach specifies a particular form of ball presentation every time a two handed tag is made.

With an emphasis now heavily directed towards technique based training, it is not uncommon for coaches to incorporate a combination of closed and open drills (see attachment 1.2). Technique based drills, which are often closed and challenge games which are classified as open drills. Combining the two methods also means that players are experiencing two forms of learning, explicit and implicit. This is important as all athletes learn differently therefore coaches need to integrate a combination of learning methods. At this point experimental research cannot prove that one method out ways another, only that human all learn differently.

Challenge games cover the general tactical implications of rugby as they mimic real game situations. Theoretically, if athletes are placed in game situations through challenge games then they should be able to handle the real life game pressures with greater ease.

The Principles of Team play refer to those tactics occurring in all games; Possession, Go Forward, Support, Continuity & Pressure. An example of applying a principle of team play would be to deny time and space by taking the ball forward. Coaches have an effect on the game by controlling Game Plan Tactics, which are set prior to individual games by the coach. An example of a specific game plan tactic could be to spread the ball wide every third phase.
Adding Tactics to Challenge Games

Challenge games generally cover a number of specific technical skills that a coach is attempting to stress. Where challenge games often breakdown is within the general play of the challenge game. It is this area that frequently doesn't reflect that of a normal game of rugby.

Below are some common problem areas that may arise if challenge games aren’t controlled effectively and that coaches should be mindful of:

1. **Lack defensive & attacking structures**- Challenge games often look more like a game of game of touch, then standard rugby, whereby the games are played very lateral. Attacking alignments are often flat, there is no depth in support and therefore for the exception of speed the defense is rarely challenged. Due to the flat attack it becomes quite difficult for players to change the point of attack.

2. **Different Tempos**- The speed of certain challenge games are often unrealistic to that of normal games of rugby. Challenge games can sometimes keep a constant tempo, which is considerably fast pace, when in a standard game of rugby the tempo usually fluctuates.

3. **None specific positions**- Player positioning in challenge games quite often does not reflect a usual game of rugby, in fact player positioning doesn’t exist at all. For example is not uncommon for challenge games to consist of ample ball distributors and many free loading outside runners keen to score the try down the side line! There are many lateral supporters with a lack of primary support players which automatically restricts attacking and support options.

Below are simple coaching points that will allow challenge games to be more realistic:

1. **Continuously reinforce the importance of maintaining structure**- the beauty of a challenge game or any training situation is that the coach is in control. Stop the game to stress a point. Players don’t like to be continuously stopped when they are playing a game. Players will soon work out the point the coach is stressing. Make a point that unless there is a combination of varying support through primary, secondary and lateral then the defense will dominate.

2. **Include ways to vary tempo**- The number one rule with challenge games that involve tactical relevance is for players to realize that being tagged or tackled is not a bad thing. The hot potato method doesn’t achieve anything, especially go forward. Slow the tackle area down; an example could be to have a count by the acting half back.

3. **Players to be in familiar positions**- The players must get into a habit of playing in there standard roles or as much as possible. This will build familiarity, especially when including set plays into challenge games. It will teach correct running lines. Players may also learn to play in clusters, such as back row and inside backs working together, ball distributors and ball runners working together. All of this builds familiarity with team mates so that it is becomes common practice by game time.
As previously mentioned challenge games are predominantly used to practice individual, core and unit skills through game like situations. Attachment 1.1 shows a challenge game known as ‘One out touch’. A challenge that forces a defender to drop out of the defensive line every time a tag is made. Its overall objective is for the attacking team to run at the space left by the defender that drops out. This encourages players to attack from depth and only to go laterally when there is definite space.

One out touch with the added variations would be ideal for both pre season and also used as a reinforcement tool during the season. The addition of tactics to a game such as one out touch would be ideal for in season training.

By playing the same game as above some tactical awareness can also be included, below are examples of how tactical awareness can be applied:

- Rehearsed plays are often used in phase play see attachment 1.2-Glossary of terms for examples.
- Patterns of play for attacking certain areas on the field
- As mentioned above the combination of certain players. More often then not teams are made of certain individuals who are exceptional in performing different skills. An example could be that the number 8 is excellent at taking the ball into contact and the number 3 understands the hammer technique. Players such as these should be encouraged to position themselves on the field looking for such opportunities. Also the ball distributors should be looking for these personal.

Attachment 1.2 shows a training run where a challenge game is incorporated in between certain drill activities. Notice the challenge game, one out ruck touch relates directly to the ‘key coaching points’ through out the session (right column). The drills have specific focus of technique and the challenge game continues this notion as well as getting the players to integrate specific tactics, such as plays and directional patterns. The players are also instructed to implement the plays and starting alignments at particular parts of the game. Such as starting the game with a pattern (blues) and looking for specific plays by the 4th phase of play.

It is hoped that a challenge game with these set instructions will get players to start thinking on the run and in turn reacting off the ball. By forcing players to use a specific mind set at training it will hopefully convert into the game. The last drill in this session could also be a challenge game as it is an open skill whereby the players have four phases to produce a line break. The coach gains further control by the set instruction, reducing the numbers and targeting certain players to play specific roles. This will allow the coach to give specific individual feedback to key players.

In summary, coaches have to be diligent with time at any level. Any drill, activity, or game used at training must relate directly to rugby. Techniques and specific movements in the training environment should always mimic those seen in the game. Any drills that involve a sequence of events such as multiple phases should mimic game tactics. This includes specific player positioning. A well organized and planned training session should run no longer then 90 minutes. Adults cannot concentrate under physical stress for any longer then this. For 90 minutes to be realistic time frame all training activities must be technically and just as importantly tactically relevant.

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There is no doubt that achieving the above takes a lot of effort in the planning aspect of a coach’s week. The coach that is willing to put in such an effort will no doubt be rewarded with the most success. Rugby coaches have realized the importance of technique based training. Training the tactics of the game needs the equivalent attention.
## Attachment 1.2

### Training Session Format

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session - Tuesday 8(^{th}) March 2005</th>
<th>Group – 2(^{nd}) XV: 20 players</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>See pg2. for Glossary of terms</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

#### Session Objectives
- To demonstrate the correct technique of the hammer, stressing body shape of the ball carrier
- To understand the importance of timing with primary support player, including starting alignment
- To be able to demonstrate the hammer in a game situation using the ‘Blues’ pattern of play
- To ensure nominated players understand their specific roles; primary ball runners, hammer

#### Equipment Required
- 24x markers
- 4x balls
- 10x bibs

#### Session Plan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6:30pm</td>
<td>Introduce Session + objectives; discuss reasons due to last week’s game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>lack of structure &amp; communication from key personal, they know who they are!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Players namely ball runners and primary supporters need to be more decisive off the ball; ‘where am I required or to be most effective’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:35pm</td>
<td>Hammer Warm up- 4v2 mini grids (6x6m grid, groups of 6), begin with half back pass</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(10 mins) * complete routine upper body dynamics between activity (trainer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:45pm</td>
<td>Full contact with hammer, 5v4 double grid (10x10m grid, combine groups to make 12), same as above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(15mins) Drinks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:05pm</td>
<td>Challenge game, one out ruck touch: half in bibs</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Always begin with ‘Blues’ pattern (or turnover)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Play positions (or turn over)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Build triangle (or turnover)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Attempt hammer into contact (or turnover)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(20mins) Drinks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:30pm</td>
<td>4 phase drill/full contact/blues pattern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Split 2 groups of 10, even backs and forwards (look at key positions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- key players in positions, 2x ball distributors and triangle runners.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(15mins) Warm Down: Trainer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Key Coaching Points (KCP)

KCP: 1. early starting alignment, 2. ball runner to stay square into contact & maintain strong body shape, 3. hammer on buttock.

KCP: 1. look to build the triangle (Johnsy & Nuts), 2. if ball carrier goes to ground, hammer should attempt to maintain feet (jackie), 3. Attack the space, maintain leg drive through contact.

KCP: 1. Play an organised pace (half to slow it down), 2. Bust an arse to set alignment early (Johnsy & nuts), 3. Stay square, keep good shape, 4. 4\(^{th}\) phase look for options: mis match & nuts play |

* Look at individuals, offer feedback

KCP: 1. Must play Blues pattern, 2. Practice 'Johnsy' & 'nuts' play, 3. anticipate your next move!, 4. get set early, work hard off the ball with triangle runners, 5. Communicate the hammer early, 6. looking for line break 4\(^{th}\) phase

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Hugh Carpenter- L3 Task 12
### Glossary:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hammer</strong></td>
<td>A primary support player that hammers or latches onto the ball carrier into and through contact. A ball carrier, defender plus one more attacker in contact form a mini maul.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Triangle Attack</strong></td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Diagram of Triangle Attack" /> <img src="image2.png" alt="Diagram of Triangle Attack alternative" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Blues Pattern</strong></td>
<td>Attack the open side for 3 phases of play, including the initial set play, ball distributors should attack any weaknesses by the 4th phase, looking for possible mismatches.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Johnsy Play</strong></td>
<td>Ball goes inside on a triangle attack, all primary supporters looking to hammer on. Johnsy one out, figure 1.2 above.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nuts Play</strong></td>
<td>Ball carrier dummys to triangle runners, namely the outside supporter and picks up a lazy runner at depth (A4).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1.1: Triangle Attack  
Figure 1.2: Triangle Attack alternative  
Figure 1.3: Triangle Attack 4th option
Description

- A field is set up to accommodate the number of players.
- If teams are uneven, the coach may elect to run a defensive sweeper (S) to create even numbers in the attack v defense.
- Defenders effect a tackle with a two-handed tag. Once the tag has been made, the defender (A) must turn and run around the pole before rejoining the defensive line.
- Upon being tagged, the ball carrier goes to ground and places the ball (Long place).
- A turnover occurs when the attacking team knocks on and there is no advantage to the opposition.
- A turnover can also occur if the player does not place the ball correctly.

Variations/Progressions

- The game can work and training objectives can be met using as little as three players on each team.
- Alternative techniques for ball presentation by the ball carrier once tagged can be used before the game continues, e.g., turn and pop, go to ground and place, go to ground and roll back.
- The defender affecting the tag having to run around the back marker, the defensive team will have one less player, thus creating extra numbers for the attack. The defensive team must communicate and understand a general defensive pattern/structure to combat this mismatch in numbers effectively.
- The attacking team will need to understand and implement key factors of using the ball to most effectively capitalise on the mismatch. Key factors are alignment, angle, speed, support, and penetration. Depth of quick realignment is critical.
- The nature of the game does not mean that the attack must attempt to score off every phase. Control, patience, and positive attacking attitudes are required.

Coaching Points

- With the defender affecting the tag having to run around the back marker, the defensive team will have one less player, thus creating extra numbers for the attack. The defensive team must communicate and understand a general defensive pattern/structure to combat this mismatch in numbers effectively.
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- The nature of the game does not mean that the attack must attempt to score off every phase. Control, patience, and positive attacking attitudes are required.