



**The Rugby League  
Coach Education Programme**

**The Think Coaching E-Link**

**Issue 07**



## Welcome to Issue 07 – Coaching the Modified Game

This issue looks at the very important role of the modified games coach. The two articles follow on nicely from the issue on game sense and also set the scene for a future issue that will look at Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD). Both articles originally appeared in the Rugby League Coaching Magazine and offer some useful information, advice and good practice to those coaching at this level.

### Coach Development News

The Think Coaching e-zine is growing rapidly and now has over nine hundred subscribers. These include coaches in Australia, France, Ireland, USA, Serbia, Georgia and Japan.

The Rugby STEPs programme has added another module to its expanding portfolio with a Kicking workshop now available.

A total of fourteen coach development projects are underway including ones with the women and girls representative coaches, the English Schools Rugby League, Wigan & Leigh Service area and Leeds scholarship coaches. Pictured below are the Leeds scholarship coaches at their project launch with the minister for sport the Right Honourable Richard Caborn MP.



# Coaching the Mini – Mod Team

By Matt O'Hanlon ARL Level 3 Coach

For some, coaching the mini mod team may be their first appointment. Often this is a result of being a parent of one of the players or even being a local senior player, giving a hand. Very soon your thoughts may shift to, "Why did I ever choose this job". But if you are prepared to tough it out, this type of coaching can be very rewarding. Mini Mod coaching can be divided into three main groups. These groups could be loosely regarded as Beginners – Under 7 & 8's; Intermediates - Under 9 & 10's; and Seniors - Under 11 & 12's. The coaching of these groups requires the development of a number of skills that the coach might not normally associate with Rugby League. The following points may give some ideas to the coach of appropriate activities that can be used to develop skills but using a game oriented approach.

## Beginners Under 7s and 8s

Young children are only interested in one thing – having fun. If an activity is not seen as fun, you will lose players. As coach your responsibility is to structure a program that not only develops the rudimentary skills but also develops an ability to understand the game, and generates a lasting desire to want to play. It is important at this early stage not to focus on winning. If you have a winning philosophy your judgement will be clouded as to equitable development of our beginners. In terms of your players - 5 minutes after the game all they are worried about is whether mum or dad will get them a pie and a drink. The end result of the match does not have a lasting influence. In skill development there are a number of key areas. The following are most important, tackling, passing, catching, and falling. At the start of the Under 7's, players will be of a very mixed ability. By the end of under 8's the coach's aim would be to have all players at a basic level of competency. Mini football is designed in such a way that both training and games allow skill development. In Under 7's & 8's I use the following techniques. Initially, I make sure communication is very clear and lacking ambiguity. Instructions should be concise and reasonably loud to the group in a close huddle. When using markers I write a number on each one. Kids are directed to that marker number. It then becomes a game of musical chairs. Each kid finds their number and rotations are very simple - "You! Go to your next number". Along the same lines, use the jersey number at the order for having a run during the game. This stops the incessant shirt pulling of kids wanting a run, and ensures all get a go. Try and develop the key areas above by playing games. Where I see a child, deficient in a particular skill they are withdrawn and given specific skill development. It is pointless coaching skills in static situations when the game is very dynamic. The biggest problem is in tackling and this is on two fronts. Firstly, kids have a fear of being hurt, and in return they fear hurting anybody. Lots of tackling should take place to build confidence and allow players to recognise that the game is a contact sport. In training ensure every player does 20 tackles. In a game this is impossible so for some players, if they don't tackle at training - they don't tackle. The other problem is in the two pass rule which tends to see coaches getting players to hand off in a junior "ball game" style. Try to encourage your players to run.

A major concern for the coach of the beginner is the development of basic motor skills such as agility, balance and co-ordination alongside the development of specific rugby league skills. These specific rugby league skills can be taught in the context of game situations. Remember beginners should enjoy stimulating activities. If they do they will be back and will provide satisfaction for the coach.

## Intermediates Under 9s and 10s

Many of the principles that apply to the beginners apply here as well. However, we are now looking for greater understanding of team play from the players. Although these are **basic** only, they are designed to introduce the players to team concepts and strategies in attack and defence. During this two year period, players should develop a simple attack plan that involves positional play and

also a knowledge of using a defensive line. Try to give the players specific roles in attack or defence and try to alternate positions so that the players are experiencing a feel for the game - not just a position. Often with junior sides one or two players can dominate. These players need to be rotated through a number of roles so that they have the opportunity to develop all their skills. The 'bigger and faster' players especially need work so that they develop good evasive and drawing the player skills and do not rely solely on size or speed.

It is important that the drills and practices that are used are stimulating so that the young players can be entertained whilst developing the particular skills that you have in mind. The development of capacities for varying responses will be of great benefit later, to children of this age group, fatigue very easily if the program you give them has a lot of anaerobic activities. Coaches need to be aware of this, especially if you want your skills development to be of benefit.

## Seniors Under 11s

Once again the same principles apply to this group as to the two previous groups but now because of greater skills and a better grasp of the rudiments of the game, a your responsibility shifts to a new dimension. Whilst still refining techniques and skills the coach now has to increase exposure for team members to the demands of the game. With the younger age groups try to provide the basic skills but with varying degrees of opposition. The young, or new player is required to make a number of responses in a short period of time. Often in a game this time is too short for a considered decision. For these players, and most players in these age groups the game presents many uncertainties through your program, and its development it is important to use and control your opposition in training. Opposition is used in many of the drills. With younger players it is introduced gradually and increased from token, to controlled and finally full competitive.

As your opposition develops to full competitive you need to be aware of working both your attack and defence. An example of this could be shown in drawing the player, your strategy would first allow the development of player anticipation so that the supporter can learn and recognise the cues leading to the execution of the pass. Likewise the defender can do the same. This can be further enhanced by the development of functional practices that have a sequence of movements from the game. Three on two plays, with at first token defence moving through to contact, and fully competitive, is an example of using all players in a decision making game simulating activity. Finally in training the players are further tested in the development of the skill, by the development of the games that require this play to be used.

Development of these conditioned game allows for the coach to fully evaluate the development of these game skills. The benefit of this approach is that the players are gradually exposed to the various demands of the game and hopefully develop anticipation for suitable responses as situations present themselves. The time of the response will also shorten as the players develop a memory store or association for a response and its matching game cue.

Finally, I have found that young players respond enthusiastically to game based training. All the elements of the game can be carefully thought through over a period of time via systematic progression. In my experience, players respond well and easily grasp principles of play rapidly and this allows for the coach to find deficiencies and work on them. As a coach if your players are improving in skills, playing better in games, and are happy at your training I'm sure you are a success. It may also help you shift your focus from "Why did I do this" to a much more positive response.

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# Mini Coaching – Real Coaching

By Matt O'Hanlon ARL Level 3 Coach

*In my last article titled 'Coaching the Mini-Mod Team' I finished by presenting an outline of the development of exposure to the demands of the team game. In that development a sequence was demonstrated for the skill of drawing the man that could be used from the basic skill, right through to the game. As with all theory it is great on paper but in the real world and in coaching mini players the coach is at the very centre of the real coaching world, there is often a fair gap between theory and practice. In this article I am going to focus on providing some things I have found helpful and that you may like to try when coaching at this level.*

## Checklist Before Training Commences

An important job for any coach is to be prepared, but when coaching 6-7 year olds this is even more important from both a position of control, and from your position of responsibility. If possible all players should bring their own water bottle, and a football, if impossible encourage players to bring water bottles and the club to buy footballs. Markers that are colour co-ordinated (I would suggest 16 with 4 of each colour and numbered with thick Nikko pen) essential for any mini-mod session. It is always handy to have a parent rostered on for each session. Once these issues have been attended too you as coach are ready to get on with the job. That is to teach and coach the kids, not only how to play, but also to develop an appreciation of sport in general and Rugby League specifically.

## Development of Coaching Method

### **a) Exposure To Demands of a Team Game**

Using the outline for the development of exposure to the demands of the team game set out below and discussed in my previous article we can, as coaches, try and prepare our sessions around development of the skills and techniques required to play the mini game.

## Outline For Skill Development

1. Basic skills
2. Sequence
3. Opposition - Token
  - Controlled
  - Competitive
4. Practice
5. Conditioned game

Obviously this program will be heavily oriented to basic skills, token opposition, and conditioned games but there is still a requirement to develop a knowledge of the game and this can only be acquired during your training sessions. So what basic skills are essential for the mini player. I concentrate on the following:

- Tackling
- Passing
- Catching
- Falling

Falling may cause some debate but it is the fear of falling that causes kids to just throw the ball. While many may be adept at falling without a football, falling with the football under the arm is a skill we cannot assume is inherent. Therefore when teaching these skills it is necessary that the children fall correctly. Here are some progressions for the mini player that follow the above outline in the key areas of tackling, passing and catching.

## ***b) Tackling***

### **AIM - To build confidence and develop technique.**

Tackling is a skill which requires most work because of the variety of skills of your players.

Some will be effective tacklers whilst others will have no idea at all. As coach, focus on the key components of each of the tackles you are using - front on, side on and behind and then give the players plenty of practice so that confidence can grow. This is the basic skill, don't be afraid to use the tackling bag or sand pit to emphasise technique. In the game situation often your best player will do most of the tackling, and this situation is not a good one. In training aim for every player to do 15 to 20 good tackles. Here is a game for mini's that allows for each player to perform tackles for you to monitor.

#### Spider Tackle Game

Mark out a grid suitable for the number of players you have and allowing a fair amount of running space. Nominate two spiders and their job is to tackle everyone else. When tackled, players move out and form a web on the ground by touching hands, head, feet etc. Spiders can then move through to choose prey and when all have been caught, these prey become the new spiders. If you have enough footballs make prey carry them. A simple game adapted for mini football but a confidence booster that builds fun into your program. As coach you can concentrate on kids with lesser ability and coach their technique by giving instruction and demonstration. By modifying the rules to spider tackle you can use it in either the controlled or competitive opposition more. Finally when you are satisfied, use a conditioned game, and hopefully you will see results in the game the next time they play. Remember if you don't tackle properly at training you don't tackle properly on game day.

## ***b) Passing and Catching***

### **AIM - Improve skills so that catching and passing can flow on into the game situation.**

Catching and passing can be treated together with the mini player. Explain the skills individually but when practising passing, it is logical to have someone catching so you can focus on that skill as well. The first point to stress to your players is for them not to spin the ball. This is significant because the floating pass is a lot easier to catch than the spiral, especially for young children. With mini football you will have to revise the basic skill continually, try and use words that sum up what you are trying to teach and be very repetitive with these words so as to condition your players to their meaning. E.g. in catching emphasise a word like 'target', explaining to your players that this means to get your hands up prior to the ball being passed to you. Over time players will react automatically to the word. You can develop your own words or simple phrases to go with many parts of the basic skill. Single words with clear meanings are an effective way to develop techniques. Once the young players have a basic idea you can then develop basic sequences. For example, passing off the ground to the first receiver. Here is a simple pass of the ground drill.

#### Dummy Half Relay

Mark off two squares of 5 metres. Each group has 5 players in it, when you say go player 1 passes off the ground to player 2 who places the ball at his feet. Player 1 runs to player 2 and passes to player 3 and so on. When player 1 passes to player 5, 5 becomes the new runner by passing to player 2 who will place the ball on the ground. Player 5 completes one circuit of the grid then passes to player 2 who completes a circuit. Player 1 takes 2's position on grid and drill continues. When everyone has had a go you can then reverse the pass. Once players are familiar with the drill you can make it a relay.

You can devise other games that practice these skills in the token, controlled and competitive modes and these can be used to not only provide enjoyment, but also improve skills.

## **CHECKLIST FOR SUCCESSFUL MINI COACHING**

Often as coaches we are under prepared for the rigours of coaching mini players. It is easy to become obsessed with winning rather than developing the abilities of our players. Having been a

player and knowing the technique may make you qualified to coach but it does not necessarily mean that you can create a good environment for the kids in your group. Often this is just as important in the delivery of your message. As coaches we need to be sure that our environment is appropriate in a number of areas, developmentally we are not asking our players to do things they are not capable of. Emotionally yelling to increase motivation may have a reverse effect. Here is a simple checklist I have modified off the internet you can use when evaluating your coaching sessions or games.

## **Checklist For Better Coaching**

I thank players for just turning up.

I focus on positives

I accept kids will make mistakes.

My expectations are reasonable and realistic.

I remind kids not to be too hard on themselves.

I remember not to take myself too seriously.

I model good sportmanship.

- win without gloating
- lose without complaining
- treat opponents and officials with fairness generosity and courtesy

The website for this was <http://www.tutornway.com> you may find it interesting to read if you have access to the internet. Finally after being prepared before training, having a program of skill development, and coaching in a positive manner as a mini coach you are ready for success. Not in terms of winning or losing but in encouraging kids to play the game. Sport is a great provider of lessons in life and for those of us reading this e-zine, Rugby League is a great sport through which this can happen. I will leave you with the following thought to apply to your coaching that I think is quite apt. 'As coaches we are able to be far more animated in our responses to negatives than in our reactions to positives. Turn this around and we will be successful and the mini's we are coaching will turn up ready to have fun and learn at the same time.'

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The Rugby League Coaching Magazine website has a wide variety of products that are useful for coaches. They can be contact via this link <http://www.rlcm.com.au/home.htm>

Have the issues raised in these articles been of any use to you?

Would you like to see further articles on the subject?

Drop us a line at [haydn.walker@rfl.uk.com](mailto:haydn.walker@rfl.uk.com)

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