

The Rugby League
Coach Education Programme

The Think Coaching E-Link



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Introduction

In this issue we are focusing more on the how to coach rather than the what to coach. This subject is of particular relevance in light of some of the changes that are taking place with the UKCC (United Kingdom Coaching Certificate).

ARTICLE 1

Hey Coach! Do you keep a diary

By Gary Roberts

The season is over, the premiership has been won and the presentation night was a resounding success.

Junior coaches could look back and think one of two things: “did a good job with the kids and I will improve them next year” or “Maybe I could have done better.”

But did he keep a diary of the year? Did he evaluate and test the players and keep a report card on every player they had in their charge for the past season?

Did he record the skill, fitness, strengths and weakness at the start of the season and where the players finished, in regards to those attributes under his coaching?

Just as importantly did he evaluate his own performance as a coach?

Peter Corcoran, Education Director of the ARL Foundation, said in RLCM Book 14 it is necessary to realise that there are three aspects of coaching to consider with self-evaluation - managing, teaching and communicating.

1. Corcoran outlined that managing is the spine of coaching:

“Just as the backbone keeps you erect, management is the support structure that you need to do the job well.”

In this area, coaches need to ask themselves, ‘Was management involved and if so, how did I manage the situation?’

2. Teaching can be seen as the heart of coaching:

“If you teach players the skills they need, assuming that they are basic essentials of good performance, the learning of all these things will make them better.”

In this case, ask, “How did I perform when teaching the players? Did they understand me?”

3. Communication can be seen as the soul of coaching:

Corcoran views communication as 'the indefinable, invisible thing that allows you to bring it all together'. Such questions touch on all the pivotal points of a particular action and therefore lay the foundations for strong performance assessment and rectification.

Coaches should thus note the underlying importance of regularly reflecting on their performances. They should also document in a diary or a report card format where their players are at now and how far they progressed during the past season.

Malcolm McMillan of the QRL Southern Division coaching panel explains: "Although it is not really necessary to test the 'Mod' player, it is essential for the 'International' junior player. It will assist in the learning and teaching process.

As there is so much for the players to learn. There are all types of tests and evaluations that can be carried out. Keep the tests simple, create a competitive game to watch a skill that the players possess, maybe even stand back and have another coach run the skills session while you are evaluating and correcting the players. Record their ability with the basics; tackling, passing, catching, kicking, play-the-ball, agility and speed.

Children these days are not as naturally fit as they were in days gone by, so some type of fitness testing should also be applied during the year. They will react to the tests the same way senior players do and they will want to know their individual results." McMillan said.

This is an opportunity for the coach to develop communication with his players by discussing the tests results.

The current coach's report of all the players for the season can be previewed at the start of the next season. If a new coach takes over, the diary/report card will be an invaluable source of information for the incoming coach, ensuring a pattern of continuity for the particular team.

Records of the player's strengths and weakness, the improvement that was made during the past year is all vital information that assists in the development of young players.

The timing of the testing is up to the individual coach or club, but it would be suggested early season would be appropriate time to begin with a maximum of another three times during the year.

ARTICLE 2

The Coach and Planning

By Brian Canavan

Well, how is the season progressing? Is your team performing at the desired level or are there problems? Are things going as you planned? Did you have a fully developed plan to start with? It may be time to make a resolution about how you will plan a little more for next year's competition or attempt to improve in this season's performances.

Brian Canavan, Sydney Roosters' Football Manager, thinks this planning is very, very important. "It encapsulates all the knowledge and information you have in written form. The coach or coaching director at any level needs to get that planning structure right and then things will operate within that structure," he said.

Brian was speaking at the Annual High Performance Camp organised by the NSW Academy of Sport at Narrabeen. "The planning must be done pre-pre-season," he said. "It is difficult to plan when you are in the middle of a season because you are too busy looking at next week's performance whether you are coming off a win or a loss."

In the planning stage then, Brian reminded his audience not to lose sight of the main reason the players are there and that is for enjoyment and improvement. This enjoyment or fun aspect may take different forms. It may be the camaraderie, the "character" players in the side or individual experiences. Whatever the form, the coach should be mindful of, and plan for, enjoyment throughout the season.

As background to a planning philosophy, Brian talked about the main phases of athletic training being a pyramid of levels. The bottom level he called Multilateral Development. In the Rugby League context, this would mean the development of coordination, rhythm and agility, and applied to the age group up to 12.

The next level was seen as Specialised Training.

This saw the development of particular skills related to different positions on the field and applied to 14 to 16 year-olds approximately. The top level of the pyramid was labelled High Performance and Involved the older and more elite performers.

Brian reminded coaches that their planning would differ according to the different levels that they Would be working with.

So then to the planning: Using various analogies, Brian reminded his listeners that their players would come to them for a new season in an excited and enthusiastic frame of mind and ready to do their best, but ahead lay a rocky road for the coach.

Most players would go through an adaptation phase where they advanced and their performance improved.

Then, however, came the stage of diminishing returns where many performances reached a plateau or even diminished, and it was here that the coach's planning would bear fruit. The training regime is still needed but an effective plan allowed not only for active work but time also for rest and recovery. "The body improves while it rests," he stated. "It loads up physiologically and mentally in anticipation of the next training session in which it will show an improvement."

At this stage Brian equated properly planned rest and recovery sessions as important as his original point about enjoyment. "Technically," Brian said, "you need to be aware of the term Periodisation. This involves the division of the overall training programme into periods which accomplish goals."

He went on to say that the goals should be not just general but specific. They needed to state clearly what you wanted to achieve - even at different stages on the path to the premiership rounds. They needed also to be measurable. To this end he talked of Micro and Macro Cycles. The former are the small blocks of activities which are recurrent and the latter, planned four-week blocks of training.

Taking pre-season as an example, Brian stated that this would involve two to three four-week blocks divided into pre-Christmas, post-Christmas and trials. He added, of course, that this was for the top level and coaches of country teams and younger groups who would not have this luxury, would need to adapt their blocks to the level of time available to them.

In organising these blocks, Brian referred to three different methods of planning. The first of these, he called The Wave Plan.

This involved alternating waves of volume and intensity. Volume referring to 'how much and how many' of an activity and intensity to 'what level'. Over the four weeks, the change in both is meant to follow a gradual curve or wave with intensity, such as more body contact, increasing in the later blocks. Brian warned of over use of the volume aspect in particular.

The Step Plan, Brian said, involved more radical change in volume and intensity in the first three weeks of each block and then a very important 'drop down, recovery week'. The body has been challenged with significant increases in activity and the fourth week was for the mind to be challenged with different and lighter activities. This aligned with the 'body at rest' theory mentioned earlier.

Brian also stated that overseas research pointed to a greater improvement in strength and power under the Step Plan. This was probably due to the significant challenge to the body in each subsequent block.

The third method Brian labelled The Skill – Strength Plan. This basically involved enhancing skills before heavy work. That is, practice of the required skills with little fatigue before increasing time, distance and repetition loads. This plan he suggested as best fitting

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