

The Rugby League
Coach Education Programme

The Think Coaching E-Link



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Introduction

This issue looks at a couple of areas of mental preparation. Players motivation and attitude will have a massive impact in performance. These two articles look at identifying both the positive and negative signs in these areas, and how to develop strategies to build upon the positive.

Coach Development

Bridging packs are now available to coaches wishing to transfer their award over to the new UKCC qualification. Coaches who have not yet received a letter explaining the bridging process should receive notification before the end of April. If you have not had a letter by that time they should contact the office directly on 0113 232 9111.



Motivation and Performance

By Vic Mellors

In the modern game, the changes in the rules and the physical demands of the game mean that a player has to adopt a philosophy that is not only based on technical skills and physical ability but also one of extreme psychological resilience. The rule changes have made the game faster, more physically demanding and more susceptible to pressure and making mistakes. In semi-finals, it's not just fitness and skill, but mostly, the psychological ability for a team to absorb pressure.

Consequently the psychological characteristics and philosophy of the modern game player should be based on personal autonomy. Shown in *Figure 1* over page are the three factors that contribute to the performance of the Rugby League team i.e. the technical, physical and psychological. These parameters are clearly defined but they must work in unison for a team to be successful during the season.

The first stage of this paper is to discuss the characteristics of both a successful and unsuccessful team and to explain the notion of "autonomous behaviour". The idea of this approach is to stipulate that Rugby League is not an "emotional" game but an "intellectual" one. I hear football commentators and coaches say the Rugby League is all about emotion.

As a former fitness trainer with a number of football clubs, I have seen first hand the disastrous consequences that can occur from a rugby league team that has been too emotional and "psyched up" before a game.

Emotion when used at the right time of a football match can be turned into "positive drive" or motivation. It should be used to intensify such things as hard tackles or strong running at a time that psychologically demoralises the opposition. Emotion at the wrong time of a football match can make a Rugby League side scattered intellectually and thus riddled with mistakes.

It can place the opposition team in a very advantageous position early in the match by allowing a big lead to be consolidated and thus damaging the self confidence of the side

Key Psychological Characteristics for success in Rugby League performance.

There are three things that contribute to a successful Rugby League team: Persistence, Concentration and Discipline. Persistence is a psychological trait that can develop from physical fitness and endurance.

Concentration and Discipline develop from persistence.

These three psychological factors can arise through a new form of psychological therapy called Autonomy Training. Autonomous behaviour is "The ability to regulate one's behaviour independent of other people and objects under tough circumstances". In Rugby League terms: "doing your job" along with your team mates in a football game.

This is a cognitive-behavioural approach designed to teach players to take control of their environment and to remain focused on the task at hand. The idea is to control emotions and be

intellectual and avoid wasting unnecessary energy. An emotional team will become scattered in the first ten minutes and miss tackles and fumble balls. The idea is to teach Rugby League players to be 'calm, deadly and focused and to control emotion.'

What leads to motivation and success is winning. Whilst winning is not the focus in junior coaching, it is at the senior level. Success through winning, breeds motivation and confidence in a rugby league player.

Losing is detrimental to both the team and the player's motivation and confidence. Success through winning on the playing field breeds optimism. Optimism contributes to how the team will do under Pressure and how much they feel in control of the opposition.

Losing contributes to learned helplessness in a football team i.e. a belief that they can never win and take control of their opposition. Listed are the traits of a successful team.

The successful team in Rugby League

S - sense of direction:

The team and each player has goals.

U - understanding:

The team and each player knows each others playing style

C - courage:

The team has the strength to confront problems and persist.

C - charity:

To be a champion team not a team of champions.

E - esteem:

Each player in the team likes himself and never punishes his person when things go wrong.

S - self Confidence:

To have faith in your own and the team's playing ability.

S - self Acceptance:

To accept that if a football game is not going your way that you and the team can still succeed.

The failure mechanism for an unsuccessful Rugby League team.

F - frustration:

Not staying cool and calm in difficult situations during a game.

A - aggressiveness:

(Misdirected) emotionality and physical energy.

I - insecurity:

When a player or a team loses confidence in their skills and ability.

L - learned Helplessness:

When a player or a team starts to believe that they can never win. Defeat is expected.

U - uncertainty:

When players start to lose faith in both themselves and their team mates and become doubtful or unsure about containing and beating their opposition.

R - resentment:

When a team or its players lack physical, technical and psychological commitment to put the hard Work into both their training and ultimately into a football game.

E - emotion:

Over-reacting to difficult and frustrating periods during a football game instead of staying calm, deadly and focused. In other words, staying intellectual.

These traits result in:-

Learned helplessness (feelings of hopelessness/lack of control and predictability during football games).

Self-fulfilling prophecy, cycles of self defeating thoughts, feelings, emotions and behaviours which cause us to fail e.g. "I missed that tackle, I'm not good enough", "I can never improve my game or play well",

"We'll never win", "We have never won at Suncorp Stadium". You start to believe these statements. Self fulfilling prophecy makes failure certain. It creates a self image of unworthiness, incompetence, inferiority and a belief that you have no right to succeed, or enjoy the better things in life.

No one does this deliberately, with malice or aforethought and develop the 'failure mechanism traits'.

1. They do not "just happen".
2. Nor are they an indication of the imperfection of human nature.
3. Each of these negatives was originally adopted as a "way" to solve a difficulty or a problem.
4. We adopt these traits because we mistakenly see them as a "way" out of some difficulty.
5. They have meaning and purpose, although based upon a mistaken view, they form a way of life for us.
6. Remember, one of the strongest urges in human nature is to react appropriately.
7. These failure symptoms can be cured not by will power, but by understanding - by being able to "see" that they do not work and that they are inappropriate. The truth can set us free from them.

When we can see the truth, then the same instinctive forces which caused us to adopt them in the first place, will work in our behalf in eradicating them.

Figure 1.

Performance Factors for Rugby League		
TECHNICAL	PHYSICAL	PSYCHOLOGICAL
Coach	Fitness Trainer	Team Psychologist
Strategies for Winning	Training Regimes for Fitness	Personal Traits Stress: Personal Life
Player Specific		
Technical Skills	Cardio Vascular	Perceptions:
Passing	Fitness, Strength	Positive or Negative
Defence	Anaerobic Fitness	Optimism vs
Support Play	Speed and Agility	Pessimism, Tackling
	Flexibility	Lifestyle, Drinking
		Smoking, Exercise
		Sleeping
Opposition Specific		
Match Plan		
Rehearsed Moves		
Defensive Strategies		
Attacking Styles		
Individual Opposition (their strengths and weaknesses)		
		----- Develop Autonomous Behaviour to Improve and lift individual and team performance

Attitude Indicators

By Owen Dalkieth

Many times over the past year of football we have heard coaches after a loss saying their player didn't turn up or the attitude of their players contributed to the loss. Wayne Bennett has been quoted as saying he could see a loss coming in the first ten minutes of a game. How can he predict how his side is going to play so early? Attitude.

The attitude of your side can be the most important factor affecting the success of your football team.

Many coaches spend hours and hours pouring through statistics, analysing skills and questioning tactics but the one major fault your team may have is, bringing the incorrect attitude to the game. But how do we recognise a shift or downturn in attitude?

There are certain indicators that during a game should send out signals to the coach that something might be wrong. I call these attitude indicators. Many coaches will say they can tell if their team is ready to play after the first five minutes of the game. They have recognized and analysed these indicators early in the game.

Often these indicators won't show on your stats sheet and can sometimes frustrate coaches who solely look to their statistics as a reflection of the quality of their teams play.

The first indicator that is important but may not show on the stats sheet is the quality and quantity of the communication between players. Player 'talk' early in a game can highlight enthusiasm and willingness to be involved in the play.

A team that does not communicate well will struggle both in attack and defence. All players should communicate, and an encouraging effort and tactical talk should come from the leaders in the side. A team that has little or no talk will not be motivated and can find it difficult to follow a game plan.

Another indicator that will highlight attitude is the kick chase. A vital part of today's game the kick chase requires fatigued players to run downfield with the knowledge that they may not be involved in the next play. But by being in the correct position and making the effort to be as far downfield as possible players put the side in a good position at the end of their set of six. Again this comes back to attitude and physical effort that does not receive a statistical reward but requires a player to have the attitude of getting the job done for the best of the team.

Play the ball speed and support play shows if players are willing to be involved in the play. Many writers have written of the importance of the correct attitude in the ruck.

Players who want to win work harder when tackled and try to win the ruck. Support play is difficult to assess so many of our best support players never get any statistical reward and therefore it can often be an endeavour that is only rewarded occasionally.

Players with the team centered attitude will have good support instincts.

Some coaches talk about being 'In the frame' in reference to being around the ball and visible on the TV screen. A team that does not support the ball carrier shows a lack of enthusiasm and poor attitude.

Finally we come to the speed of the defensive line.

The speed at which the whole team moves up in defence is linked to fatigue and physical fitness, but players who have the attitude of wanting to compete and so as the coach sits down in the stands to watch the first five minutes of his side it is possible to gauge the attitude of his players. Within two sets of six tackles he can watch if his player's attitude is right just by ticking of and assessing his key attitude indicators.

So it is possible for a coach to see early if his team is ready to compete within the first minutes of the game.

All is not lost for the coach of the team that is showing poor attitude in games. Poor attitude can result from players being comfortable in their current position or situation. If a player is not challenged then there is no need for extra effort or good attitude. The coach must foster an environment of healthy competition with all players. Each player needs to feel as though their effort needs to be high to keep their position in the team. Also players need to have set achievable goals for each game. Many coaches will have the star player or veteran player who has become comfortable in their position and may have no real replacement to put pressure on the incumbent. That is where personal goals are invaluable. The coach needs stress the importance of senior players meeting personal goals without making the team success the only indicator for team selection.

Finally as the great Premiership winning Coach Jack Gibson once said, winning starts on Monday. It is attitude all week in practice and in games, it is a culture you have to foster within a club environment.

This months articles first appeared in the RLCM and appears here by kind permission. 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>

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