

The Rugby League
Coach Education Programme

The Think Coaching E-Link



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Introduction

Welcome to issue thirty four. The two articles below look at a subject that has been highlighted in recent times with the new UKCC qualifications. The importance and understanding of the planning process is a foundation element of the new qualification and also prominent in the Bridging Pack to UKCC. These articles will hopefully help underpinned and enhance coaches Understanding of this important topic.



The Coach & 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 FUNdamentals. In the Rugby League context, this would mean the development of coordination, rhythm and agility, and applied to the age group up to 11.

The next level was seen as Learning to Train. This saw the development of particular skills related to different positions on the field and applied to 12 to 14 year-olds approximately. The next level of the pyramid was labelled High Training to Compete and involved 15 to 17 year olds in more structured skill and athletic development. The top of the pyramid is Training to Win and is for 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 the country setting particularly keeping in mind the retention of players and the enjoyment aspect.

"After all," he said, "you don't want a young bloke driving an hour in his car to get to training and Then flogging him. You won't see him next week."

Finally, Brian admitted the job was a complex task. There were so many factors to be taken into account. These ranged from the level of skills already evident, the locality, the age of the participants, and in the case of some recruits moving from a country club to the top level, what he referred to as the 'training age' of the player. "However," he implored, "plan it, allow for rest and recovery, and above all, remember why we're there - for the enjoyment and improvement."

So there we are. With that resolution for careful preparation next season, you, like that cigar chewing leader of the old television show, 'The A Team', will be able to sit back and say, "I love it when a Plan comes together."

Developing A Periodisation Plan

By Ken Kennedy

A key of effective coaching, is a good plan.

Planning is a skill that should be developed, at any level. One of your objectives as a coach is to develop and prepare your team and players for competition. Having a plan will give direction in achieving this and developing the players' technical and physical skills.

When developing your plan, you need to follow some basic principles:

- The period of your plan.....1,2 or 3 years
- The age group and the ability level you are coaching
- All relevant dates of pre-season and competition
- All relevant training principles e.g. mental, physical, skills, training loads and recovery time

Having established the length of your plan (for a Rugby League coach, a two to three year plan would be ideal), you can now develop an annual plan, taking a full year, which is called a PERIODISATION PLAN. See diagram 2. A periodisation plan divides the year into a number of training periods that will vary in purpose and intensity. There are three main periods in a periodisation plan.

1. The preparation period
2. The competitive period
3. The transition period

These periods are divided into phases:

1. Preparation into
 - (a) the general phase
 - (b) the specific phase
2. Competitive into
 - (a) pre competition
 - (b) competition

Transition into two or three phases. This will depend on the coach's requirements.

(a) A period of complete rest of two to three weeks.

This enables players to recover from any niggling injuries.

(b) The active rest phase where players are encouraged to participate in some sporting activities like swimming, cycling, surfing etc. Any activity that is fun and relaxing but still some on going physical work

(c) Individual preparation where the player resumes his own training programmes, focusing on his aerobic endurance , strength and hypertrophy training, in preparation for the start of club training.

Players should return to club training fresh and injury free to start the new season.

The simplest way to structure your training plan is to divide the major training phases into units of Four weeks, which are called MACROCYCLES. Each macrocycle is made up of MICROCYCLES,

a period of five to seven days. In each macro there is a weekly increase in volume and intensity to your training load with the progression peaking in week 3 and a lighter load in week 4. The structure of each macro will depend on the objective and goal of each period of your training and competition demands. See diagram 1.

Setting Up A Periodisation Chart

Firstly you need to take into account all the relevant dates including the pre season and competition and the time between the start of the next season. Using the chart in diagram 2 for Rugby League, a training year runs from late September to the following September. This will differ for teams depending on the competition and the position the team finishes. In the chart (as an example) I have used, a transition period, preparation period and competitive period.

These periods have then been further divided into 5 phases:

- 1) Recovery phase
- 2) General phase
- 3) Specific phase
- 4) Pre competition
- 5) Competition

You must remember that during the preparation period, the volume of work will increase BUT During the competition phase, the volume will decrease and the intensity will increase. Therefore you have an increase in the overall “workload”. Your Periodisation plan must take into account all areas of training, remembering that there should be at least 3 fitness testing sessions included in your yearly plan. These will allow you to assess the value of your programme and enable you to make the necessary adjustments where required. You can make your periodisation plan as in depth as complex as you like but my advice is to keep it simple and constantly monitor the players’ progress under game conditions and at training sessions.

A Macro Overview For A Full Year

Macro 1 Recovery period - 2 to 3 weeks of complete rest. Start of active rest period - September/October.

Macro 2 Active rest/individual player training. Focus on building an aerobic base, also resistance training to develop strength and hypertrophy - October/November.

Macro 3 Individual player training focus – as macro 2 - November/December.

Macro 4 Professional players will have started club training, where most park players will still be working on individual programmes as in Macro 2 - December/January.

Macro 5 Beginning of club training. Players still required to maintain their aerobic endurance development resistance training with private sessions and club session that focus on aerobic endurance development and skill development - January/February.

Macro 6 Training becomes more specific with week 1 to 3 being focused on anaerobic endurance skill and agility. Week 4 will see an increased amount of specific skill work, speed and power development - February/March.

Macro 7 This is the beginning of the competition season. As in macro 6, the first two weeks of Training will place a greater work load on anaerobic endurance system, skill work, speed, team work and power development. Players are still required to keep individual resistance programme going - March/April.

Macro 8 Sees the maintenance of the aerobic and anaerobic energy systems. Resistance training Should consist of strength maintenance and power development with an increase of skill and team work - April/May.

Macro 9 Mid competition period will see maintenance programme put into place in the areas of power, strength, speed and agility work continued, emphasising on skill and teamwork. Individuals should continue their resistance programmes under supervision of coaching staff - May/June.

Macro 10 With continued maintenance training being carried out, training is now focused on skills and team work, with constant review of games - June/July.

Macro 11 & 12 The business end of the season. You need to be playing your best football of the year now, to be competitive in the final series.

You should see a peak in players' individual fitness levels. Training now revolves around skill, ballwork and maximum fitness. This peaking process will see a reduced volume of training, while maintaining a high level of intensity - July/August/ September.

Remember

.....Failing to Plan.....Is Planning to Fail

Examples of two Microcycles

The volume increases steadily each week with the fourth week being the recovery week

Diagram 1.

Macro 5

Macro 6

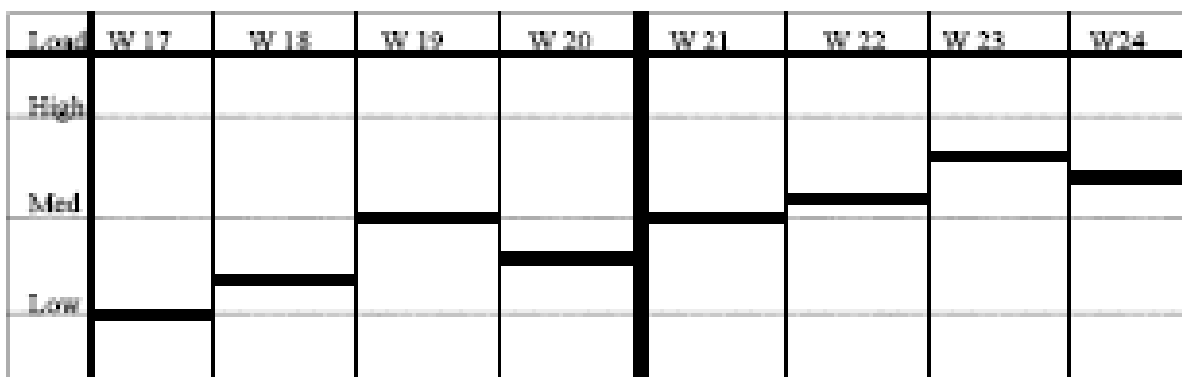
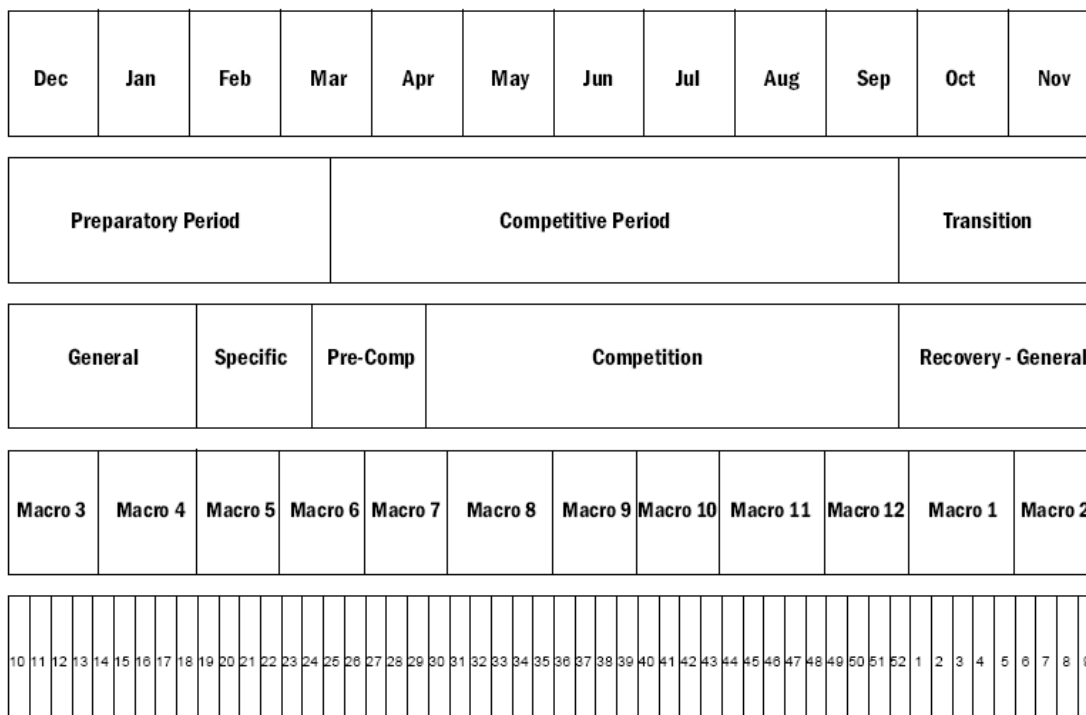


Diagram 2. EXAMPLE OF PERIODISATION CHART



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