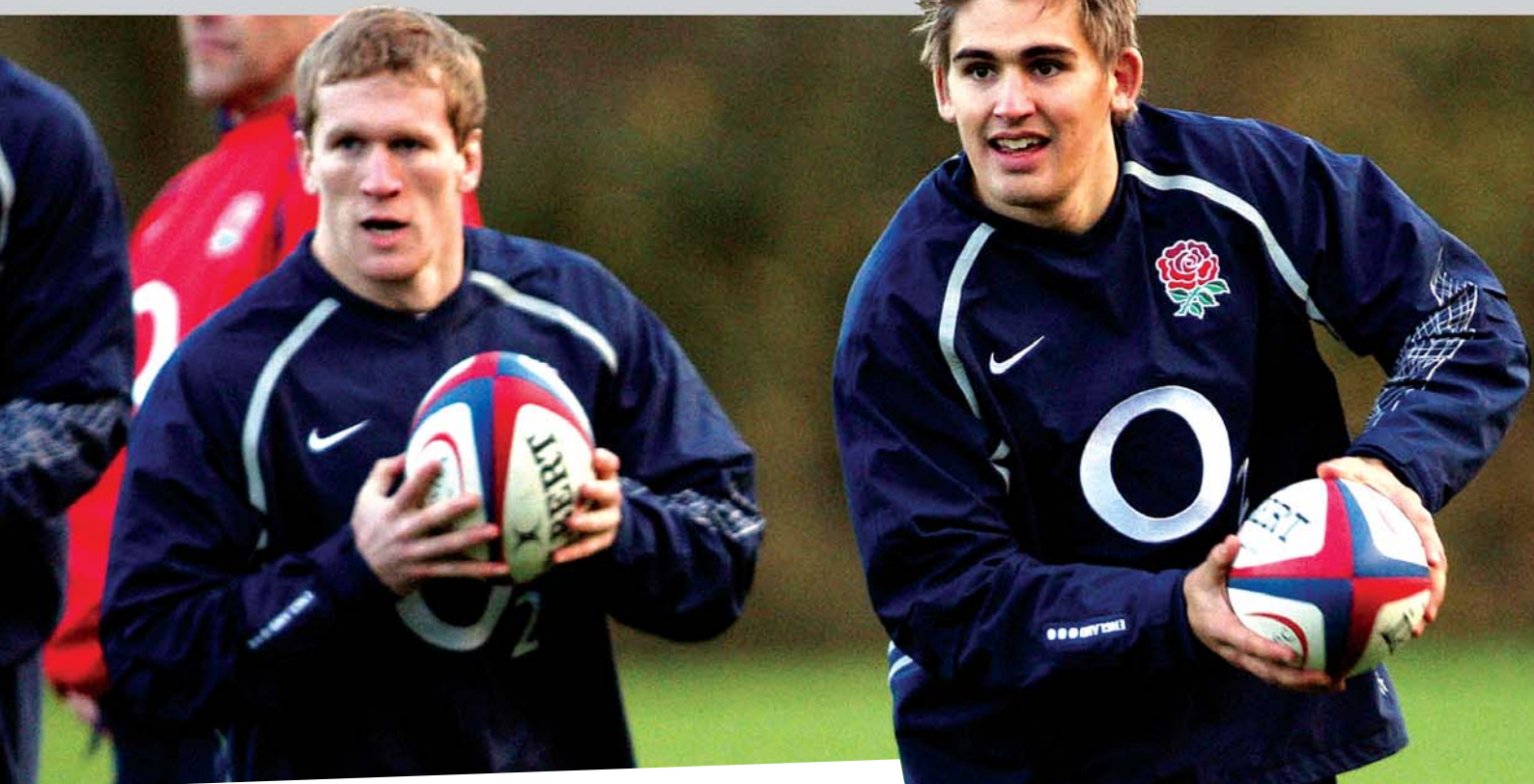


RUGBY EDGE

GIVE YOUR COACHING SKILLS THE EDGE

JANUARY 2009 | ISSUE 01



A LICENCE TO SKILL

Welcome to the first edition of the brand new **RUGBY EDGE** quarterly magazine from the RFU Coaching Department.

Rugby has been ever changing, but no more so than in the last 10 years with the onset of professionalism, the rise of the Guinness Premiership and Heineken Cup, and the global marketing of the game through The Rugby World Cup and Rugby Sevens Series. Latterly, the ELVs have engendered a good deal of interest, speculation, excitement and, in certain quarters, some angst.

This magazine aims to update, inform and challenge coaches with articles, views and comments from all areas of the game – participation to performance, children to adult, development to elite, England and abroad.

RUGBY EDGE has been created in partnership with the sports coach UK publication *coaching edge*, in order to provide the coach with stimulating, useful and thought provoking articles from other sports. Your contributions, comments or articles are most welcome and can be submitted to rugbyedge@rfu.com

**YOUR
EDGE
YOUR
MAGAZINE**

RUGBY EDGE: GIVING YOU LICENCE TO SKILL

The Rugby Football Union (RFU) is to trial a groundbreaking coach development programme, which is linked to a registration and licensing scheme, in three of its Constituent Bodies (CBs) this season. The pilot project will be launched in the Midlands East region, i.e. the CBs of Leicestershire, East Midlands and Notts, Lincs and Derbys, (NLD), and will run for 24 months from January 2009.

The scheme is designed to encourage the development of existing qualified coaches, and its main thrust is to offer encouragement for coaches to invest in their own development. This will enhance their coaching and personal effectiveness and will benefit all those they coach. Investment in their own development will be enabled and underpinned by the establishment of a range of Continuous Personal Development (CPD) events, for example, two-hour, subject-specific seminars, delivered on a local basis and in response to identified needs.

CPD provides a mechanism for developing coaches between levels of qualification and a tool for development in areas of coaching expertise. For example, the need to develop front row, kicking or attack coaches can be achieved by attending CPD courses. Whilst modest in number at the outset, the range will grow so that it becomes a game-wide support system for the coaching public.

The government's UK Coaching Framework calls on each national governing body to "set out and implement the steps needed to establish coaching as a professionally regulated vocation, recognising volunteer and part-/full-time roles. As a first step, conduct a detailed feasibility study on the licensing and registration of coaches".

"We believe a licensing and registration scheme will allow us to serve the needs of our coaches much better in the future, which is why we're trialling the scheme in the Midlands East region over the next two years," said Gary Henderson, the RFU's Head of Coach Development.

RFU TO PILOT A COACH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME REWARDED BY A COACH LICENCE

"At the moment, around 7000 coaches complete our Level 1 courses each year, but after that we may never come into contact with them again. The next step on our existing coaching ladder – the Level 2 course – may not be relevant to them, particularly those coaching children."

The RugbyFirst (RF) system and the forthcoming easy-to-use online registration will be harnessed to register then record and track the careers of all RFU coaches; the licence is granted automatically when a coach gains a qualification. The CPD programme will then help to support, engage and enthuse its 35,000 qualified coaches at all levels of the game.

The licensing aspect of the programme, developed in partnership with Coachwise Ltd, will, in the future, also enable all licensees to become members of a new RFU Coaches Association. The benefits of this membership include a quarterly sports coach UK *coaching edge* magazine, discounts at the Rugby Store, discounted corporate clothing, exclusive DVDs, a regular newsletter update and password controlled access to current coaching articles and videos.

The pilot scheme is being managed by Des Diamond (RFU Coaching Development Manager), and overseen locally by Nick Scott (RFU Coaching Development Officer for the Midlands East region).

"We're splitting the clubs in the three CBs into 25 clusters to make sure the delivery of the courses is at a local level that's accessible to everyone and to assist us in our aim of meeting local needs," said Scott.

"Thanks to the cooperation and expertise of the three CBs, our coach developers and especially the club coaching coordinators, we should hit the ground running in January and be able to offer new CPD courses and make the licensing process easy to implement."

A new tier of coach developers is being trained to deliver relevant CPD events at a local level in the three CBs where the scheme is being trialled before its evaluation in 2010. ■

The government's UK Coaching Framework calls on each national governing body to "set out and implement the steps needed to establish coaching as a professionally regulated vocation, recognising volunteer and part-/full-time roles. As a first step, conduct a detailed feasibility study on the licensing and registration of coaches".

From January 2009, the East Midlands Region will be piloting a licensing programme for coaches over a 24-month period. This is in line with the policy briefly outlined above.

Of course there are those who are concerned at the prospect of a licence, with the argument of "why should coaches be expected to have a licence when they are unpaid volunteers?" There are others who embrace the idea that licensing is long overdue and "will 'professionalise' coaching and make people attend continuous personal development (CPD) courses". The argument is that the attendance will make better coaches.

Let's take the driving licence as an example. Everyone has to have a driving licence to drive legally on our roads – we all comply with little or no fuss. Most of us are 'volunteer' drivers who happily prepare for the test and, once successful, we gain a licence that proves we have the necessary level of competence to drive safely on the roads.

A coaching licence will do the same: it can be applied for on successful completion of a qualification and demonstrates competency of delivery and safety.

So far this doesn't seem too contentious. However, the real angst appears to come from the process of retaining the licence. →



**WE BELIEVE A LICENSING
AND REGISTRATION SCHEME
WILL ALLOW US TO SERVE THE
NEEDS OF OUR COACHES MUCH
BETTER IN THE FUTURE**

**RFU COACHING
LICENCE**
Name: JOHN SMITH
DOB: 12.02.78
Qualification: LEVEL ONE
CRB number: 245678998
CRB expiry date: 15.08.11
Licence ID number: JS/789864
Licence expiry date: 15.08.11

What happens once we get our driving licence may go a long way to explaining why maintaining the coaching licence should differ.

Not long after we have gained some experience of driving, for many of us, a substantial amount of the good practice goes out of the window. We no longer drive with hands at 10 to 2; often taking one hand off the wheel for prolonged periods of time. The majority of us exceed the speed limit and even now I see drivers using hand-held mobile phones. Our gear changing is not as smooth as it might be, and we occasionally forget to apply the handbrake. We easily fall into bad habits.

The same can be said, for a large number of us, once we have gained our qualification. After an initial good start, which immediately follows completion, we often fall back into bad habits.

Just as licensing on its own does not make us better drivers, in isolation licensing will not make us better coaches. It demonstrates, at worst, a minimum level of competence. The essential (and strangely contentious) ingredient of the coaching licence however, is that once that level of competence has been demonstrated, it requires maintenance and development. This would be achieved through a comprehensive CPD programme, with a proposed requirement of attending one CPD event per annum.

As stated previously, there are some who would view this as an onerous burden in an otherwise busy schedule, and others who would welcome it as a means of making coaches get better. Perhaps it is time to look at licensing in an entirely different light, as a by-product of development, rather than an objective.

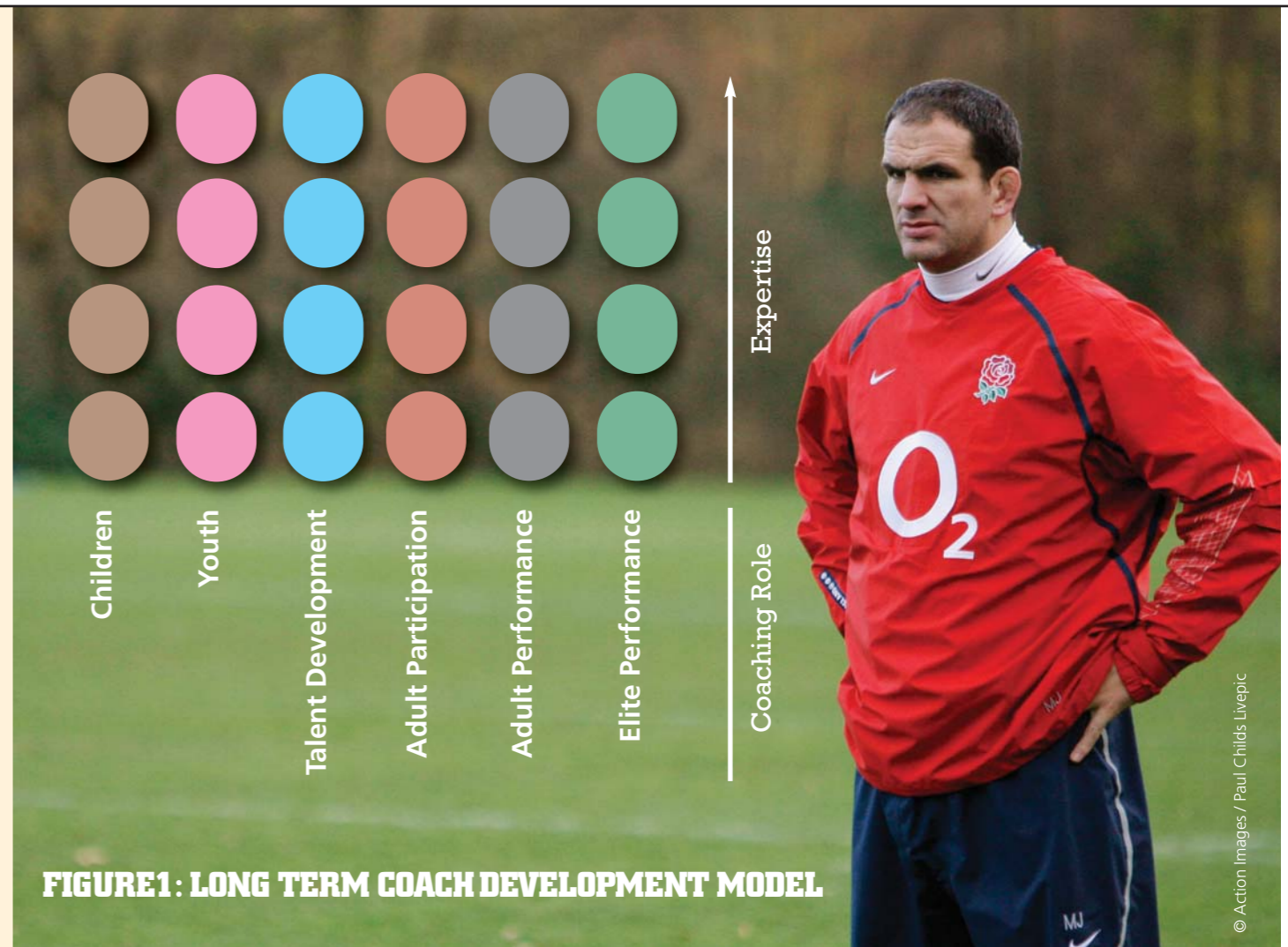
If we took a straw poll of coaches and asked “who wants to get better at what they do?” I suspect the vast majority of coaches would put their hands up. It is when we suggest that this will take hard work, time and some inconvenience to achieve, the commitment to the cause decreases.

Licensing will assist in getting coaches to attend CPD courses and I am certain will maintain and increase the level of competency. However, the real path to improving the ability of coaches lies within the coaches themselves.

The development of coaches comes neither from promoting the benefits of the licensing scheme nor warning of the sanctions of it, but from raising awareness of the benefits of CPD programmes for coaches and their players. To do this, CPD must be relevant, well delivered and stimulating, enthusing the coach to want to improve further.

In the past, the CPD programme has been largely ad hoc and variable, and in many cases non-existent. In some instances coaches completed a Level 1 qualification, were enthused by it, and saw the next logical step as a Level 2. Their enthusiasm was then dampened by being out of their depth on a course for which they were not prepared.

My early experience of CPD was attending a seminar/session, delivered by a highly ranked coach using very good players and then returning to my under-12s with a degree of expectancy, which my coaching and their ability could never achieve, thus hacking us all off.



This has largely been addressed over the past few years, but not entirely so. What licensing has encouraged is for governing bodies to focus on identifying the levels of participants in order to devise a CPD and qualification programme which best serves the needs of the coaches and players. The sports coach UK 4 x 4 model has been adapted and is currently being refined by the 3 Unions to a 4 x 6 model (Figure 1). This figure has helped to channel thought as to where our participants are, what their needs are, and what skills and knowledge are required by the coaches to best serve those needs.

This model (currently being refined by the 3 Unions) has assisted in identifying focus for potential CPD modules. This has assisted in identifying the focus for CPD modules and resulted in a dynamic and robust review of current CPD provision. What this will mean is that rather than attend a generic session, which may or not be of use, coaches should be able to choose from a range of CPD which suits their needs. If we take lineout for example, the needs of an under-9 player (and therefore coach) are different to those of an under-16 player (where supporting is introduced). For the coaches

THE REAL PATH TO IMPROVING THE ABILITY OF COACHES LAY WITHIN THE COACHES THEMSELVES.

to attend the same course delivered in the same way is clearly not the most effective use of their time.

If we also recognise that coaches have differing areas for further development, then we can also begin to tailor courses to those areas. Coaching process, Technical, Tactical, Psychological, and Physical Lifestyle are the five identified ‘tool boxes’ for a coach, and CPD is being designed to fit into these areas.

It may seem an idealistic expectation for most coaches to attend courses simply because they want to. However, I borrow a quote from the American Football coach, Vince Lombardi, which is equally applicable to coaches, players and coach education:

“Success is the result of dedication to an ideal of working hard to correct weaknesses – working hard to understand what is required for success and working hard to achieve the goal of being perfect. There is no substitution for work.”

It is evident from coaches who have just completed their Level 1 that there is a thirst for knowledge. It is also apparent from the large numbers of applicants for qualification courses that there is a desire to improve. A CPD programme which is appropriate and relevant, which is well delivered and exciting, and, which is of practical use, may very well get close to that ideal.

If the process is right, licensing will become a consequence of an enthusiasm to become a skilful coaching practitioner. The signs are good. ■

ELVS RULE IN MUDDLE EARTH?

There is a scene from the Lord of The Rings film Return of the King, where one of the "baddies" decrees that the time of Men is over and the time of the Orc is here. He was way off: this is the time of the ELVs.

It is recognised that the following article may not be balanced due to the disparity of the amount of detail and intent of the sources.

The reader should be aware that the following article pertains to all ELVs; some of which are not being trialled in the northern hemisphere.

Half way through the season the muddle continues and with the 6 Nations about to begin, a wider audience may be better able to gauge the impact.

The widely held belief is that Experimental Law Variations (ELVs) are part of a southern hemisphere conspiracy, led by the Men of Oz, to depower the scrum and the maul, with the northern hemisphere, led by the land of the "white Orcs on steroids" firmly against them.

Surprisingly then, two of the most interesting writings run contrary to this theory. These are in the form of a letter written by Pierre Villepreux (former France and Toulouse coaching guru), who was on the IRB Laws Project Group and a report from Dick Marks (former Wallaby centre).

Villepreux's contention is that the ELVs objective is to add some spice to the game and as long as players commit to it and are allowed to do so, this objective will be achieved.

This reminded me of a story of a chief executive officer who, when taking over a company had waxed lyrical to the assembled group of middle managers how things were going to change. Anyone not prepared to accept the change was a Luddite and would not fit into the new structure. Clever stuff – even if there are valid reasons for opposing the change, you'll be labelled a heretic if you do. Villepreux is a genuine guy and not nearly so devious but his statement does provide a ready-made excuse should the ELVs fail: "Of course they did, the players were not allowed to embrace them!"

Marks' report is scathing of the ELVs. He argues that the ELVs are like the free market, or communism. Great ideas on paper, but when you introduce humans to any project it has a tendency to go absolutely pear-shaped.

Even Villepreux recognises that the laws surrounding the contact area "may yet prove harmful". He argues, however, that there may well be an increase in turnover ball and the number of free kicks, but with tap and go or the option of a scrum with the new five-metre law, there is opportunity for a more free flowing game and increased creative possibilities. To quote: "The game will take another dimension without being unrecognisable."

Marks, of course, has a different view to the impact on the game. "Clearly the ELVs have failed...there were a total of 33 free kicks and penalties (per game) compared with an average of 19 in the

2007 Rugby World Cup (RWC) (the lowest number was 11). Any set of laws that produces 33 penalties, whether they be short-arm or long-arm, is flawed on the basis that players find compliance too difficult. It is no good saying that the increase in the penalties is compensated by a reduction in scrums because in the 2007 RWC, the average number of scrums was 19 and in the Bledisloe there were 26."

The report suggests that this "new dimension" is threatening to make the game unrecognisable. Marks' concern is the true ruck and maul, so crucial in the continuity process, has largely been eliminated and two of the most valuable identities of the game have been undermined.

He provides some evidence for this, again referring to the last Bledisloe Cup game where there were a mere six mauls, nearly all of which occurred at lineout. The ball-in-hand maul has almost disappeared as a continuity vehicle and the 168 tackle/rucks logged in the same game in no way resembled the ruck we all know, further eroding the identity of the game.

FOR MOST OF US THIS OPINION WILL NOT BE BASED ON STATISTICS BUT ON A FEEL FOR IT – THE ENJOYMENT FACTOR

Although one match does not provide an accurate reflection of the game as a whole, recent conversations with coaches within the community game in England suggest the maul is a thing of the past and even at line-out there are very few ("what's the point in doing them when they can be pulled down?").

Villepreux, however, remains optimistic about the implementation of the ELVs on the development of the game. He writes:

"Judgement is now regularly being made in both northern and southern hemispheres. The ELVs are now being thoroughly tested at all levels, and players, coaches and referees are growing more favourably disposed. Minor reservations regarding application remain, but not regarding the principles.

"Finally to the key question: can this 'new' game be a game for all (including the young and those at a less elevated level)?"



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"Absolutely, I say. The ELVs are about a game that is easier to play, to understand and to referee (!). We must recognise that the laws are to be used to our profit, and not to be broken or ignored."

And it is right and proper that a man who is respected throughout the game, and who was part of the group which formulated these laws is so positive about them. Marks, however is more sceptical and has a contradictory opinion on the game being easier to referee.

"As for the highly contentious debate on the role of the referee I thought that one of the intentions of these ELVs was to clarify the law and to reduce the refereeing factor in the outcome equation," says Marks.

"In fact he has become an even more crucial figure with his welter of penalties and his discretion in deciding what is short-arm, what is long-arm and when he will clamp down on a series of technical infringements. In short, he is becoming an increasingly irritating figure."

By the end of the season we may have a clearer idea of the impact of the ELVs. For most of us this opinion will not be based on statistics but on a feel for it – the enjoyment factor, whether player, referee or spectator. At the moment, statistics may be all we have to compare, and whilst Villepreux considers that for "those worried about the game somehow destroying itself or becoming unrecognisable, the statistics show that in terms of the traditional elements i.e. scrums, line-outs, breakdowns etc, the game remains the same". Marks, vehemently disagrees.

The ELVs have seemingly encouraged far more kicking in general play, with the South Africa v Australia Tri Nations game at Ellis Park last year seeing more than 80 kicks out of hand, a staggering statistic. Marks goes on to quote many current players and coaches, who perhaps, are closer to the reality than the practitioners of yesteryear.

This is what the Springbok Captain Victor Matfield had to say after the last test against Australia: "We found that during the Tri Nations the teams that kicked the ball the most, normally won."

All Blacks coaches, Wayne Smith and Graham Henry, explained the ELVs had led to an enormous game transformation.

"The kicking game in particular has changed considerably," said Henry. "We had 38 kicks that we received last weekend, and in a normal game it would be a third of that. It's become more of a kick-chase game." All Blacks Assistant Coach, Wayne Smith, could not agree more, believing the law of unintended consequences has hijacked the ELVs.

"The ELVs were introduced to encourage attacking rugby, but instead, Smith claims, they have produced the opposite effect.

"The ELVs have created a game where territory is important, where you don't want to be caught too often behind your gain line or in your own territory. Someone's going to get a free kick which could create momentum for the other team," he said.

"The vision was that teams would have to run it out from their 22m. I'm sure there are a lot of opportunities where teams could run it out, but the first tendency now is to kick it."

**PIERRE VILLEPREUX
FORMER FRANCE AND
TOULOUSE COACHING GURU**



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The promotion of ELVs in creating opportunity of having the ball in play for longer is, Marks argues, flawed: "Even if the ball is marginally more in play, that's not much use when it's 50 metres up in the air."

Marks acknowledges that Villepreux's vision for action-packed games has been acted out through some of this year's Tri Nations and Super 14 but most have involved the quick tap following a free kick. This doesn't provide the necessary variety of movement; it is quantity at the costly expense of quality.

"These quick taps create the illusion that sometimes we are getting one long action-packed phase when in actual fact it is punctuated with stoppages due to the compliance problem. The sanction changes have meant that the stoppages are shorter but it doesn't alter the fact there are now more of them and that the intrusion of the referee is even greater."

Sometimes vision and reality are far apart, and even the most inexperienced coach realises the way he wishes the players to play and the way they are able to play are so far apart as to necessitate compromise.

It is hoped that the same view is held by those who have influence, that the essential ingredients of the game are maintained alongside the vision for an even greater one. We wait to see if the rugby world will be dominated by identical clones, or continue to be a place for giants, dwarves, wizards, and magicians.

The end of the Time of ELVs is nigh, their impact may remain for a good deal longer. ■

SKILL PRACTICE

The following is the first in a series of games and game related practices to introduce, develop and refine game understanding and a range of skills. Research has shown that one of the best ways for players to understand the application of skills is not for them to “drill” in isolated practices, but to engage in practices which replicate game conditions.

Skill Practice:		Attacking a Drift Defence			
Objective:		Spatial awareness, Communication, Decision making, Attacking skills into space			
Equipment:			Skill Practice Requirements:		
Balls	1	Bags	N/A	Area	30 x 30 metre grid
Cones	4	Suit	N/A	Players	All
Shields	N/A	Bibs	N/A	Time	
Skill Practice Description:					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a player from the attacking team is touched, all the players from the defending team must run in and touch the ball and drop to one knee. • When scrum half plays the ball defence can go so forcing them to use a drift defence. • Attack have four phases to score until switch of roles. 					
Set-up Diagram:					
Key Coaching Points:			Relevance to the game:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visual acuity • Communication • Decision making • Footwork and evasion • Passing 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Great for coaching attacking drift defences within a game from various positions on the pitch. • Makes players have to fix and hold defenders with footwork, passing and running lines to put players into space to score. • No pre-calls so the attack is reacting to what they see. 		