

The Essential Skills For The Early Learners by Lynn Evans.

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A very large percentage of the coaches that attend the Level 1 RFU award courses have had limited experience of playing rugby let alone coaching it. From the experience of taking dozens of coaching courses and also speaking to other Tutors on the Level 1 courses, it is evident the knowledge of understanding of how to coach some of the basic rugby skills severely limits how much input some coaches can have with their young players.

There is not enough time on the current courses to present enough information for the coaches to go back to their clubs and teach the basic skills effectively. We require a package of the 'essential basic skills' that will enable the coach at Under 9 level and above to help the players play more effectively in the game.

Having been convinced that teaching the 'game understanding' is the most effective method of players being able to play intelligently, we now need to provide them with the most effective 'tools' to be able to do so, otherwise we might liken it to teaching a new language with not enough vocabulary (the tools).

A list of the basic skills that could help the novice coach with his coaching 'must-cover' content might be:

- Passing and receiving.
- Support running.
- Retaining the ball in contact.
- Managing the body in contact.
- Tackling from the front *and* side.

Passing And Receiving.

- Giving a pass to a support player that will enable that player to more effectively carry out the next piece of action.
- This requires accuracy and weight appropriate to the distance travelled by the ball.
- The receiver must try to go forward *beyond* the passer.
- The ball should be carried mostly in two hands, enabling the passer to have more choices of play.
- The receiver should take the ball in a way that could offer him further choices of play.



Support Running.

- The first principle for the ball carrier is to *pass and immediately support the next ball-carrier*.
- Try to organise support from behind the ball carrier to assist in keeping the ball when the ball-carrier goes into contact.
- Always encourage *side and deep support* to assist in keeping possession.

Retaining The Ball In Contact.

- Carry the ball in two hands to signal to the defence that you have several options.
- Turning 'early' before contact that is getting your support player to have hands on the ball before the defender can get to the tackle and/or the ball.
- Support to secure the ball immediately go forward or quickly feed another support player who is moving forward.

Managing The Body In Contact (floor and bodies).

- Try to *unbalance the defenders* with agile footwork.
- Try to play in the spaces between defenders, not at the bodies.
- *Carry the ball in two hands* and hold it on the chest area away from the defender.
- Try to *stay balanced*, with the body weight over the feet.
- Adopt as *stable a base* as possible to remain on your feet.
- If the defender is bigger and stronger, slide to the floor quickly and put the ball back for your support.

Tackling.

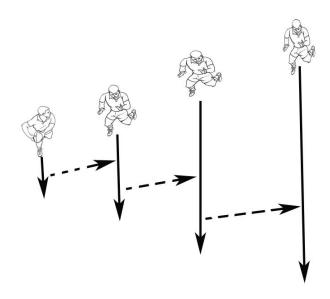
I would encourage a short ten minute practice each week on tackling technique. Working from the kneeling position builds confidence for both the tackler and the tackled player and it is best to use a ball so that the tackled player is encouraged to fall properly *and* place the ball precisely.

- It is essential to build *confidence* in basic technique with little or no running.
- Start with the tackler on his knees to encourage best technique. The drive, arm grip and tight shoulder need continual emphasis.
- Players, both tackler and tackled, must get used to falling on the larger body parts.
- This should be done *every session* for ten minutes.
- Always use a ball.



Some Practices To Complement The Theoretical Points.

Pass and receive and go forward.

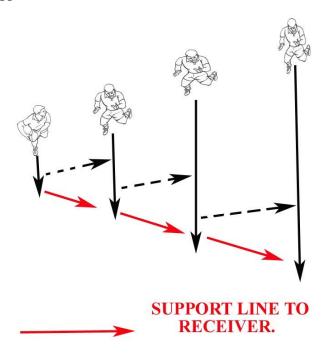


Coaching points.

- Receiver takes a short half metre pass and goes past the passer (*go forward*).
- The main objective is to *go past the original ball-carrier*.
- A further practice can be built up where defenders are added and the ball-carrier is encouraged to pass just as he approaches the defender at just over a hand-reach away in distance.



2. Pass and support the receiver.



Coaching points.

- The attackers go in groups of four. The first man runs and passes to the first receiver (Attacker 2), who goes past the passer (Attacker 1).
- The first passer (Attacker 1) then moves to support on the inside shoulder of the man he has just passed to, which can become very useful as a contact support player when the skill is put into a game situation.
- Continue the same movement with all the passers.
- The key point is to develop inside support for the new ball carrier each time to help to retain possession if/when there is a tackle.

Further practice.

- Pass and offer inside support but now the new ball-carrier turns towards the original passer who goes in to take (rip) the ball.
- The aim of this is to help with immediate support in contact and to enable continuity in attack.

Coaching points.

- Player receiving the pass goes past the passer.
- The pass receiver should slow down slightly and move back towards the passer and away from the defender.
- If the ball is being received from a pass from the right, the support player uses his right arm to secure possession at the tackle to secure a V shape on the ball. If the pass has come from the left, the support player uses the left arm.



- The support player now feeds the next runner on the outside, who aims to go forward past the contact point.
- The support player could be given further options and might be encouraged to take the ball and drive on or roll off and drive on.
- Aim to go forward and maintain movement in play.

Practice For Close Support.

Use a 2 - 3 kilo medicine ball, which encourages the support players to go to the ball-carrier rather than wait behind to receive a ball that might travel over two metres backwards.

In a game of 8 v 8 encourage the support to go to the ball-carrier and take the ball or receive a short pass whilst moving, thus giving the new receiver a better chance of going forward. The ball cannot be passed very far due to the extra weight. This practice helps the support to recognise the plight of the ball carrier and his need for *immediate support*.

Body Management - Balance And Agility Practice.

Work in a grid 10 metres square. Have between ten and fifteen players, each with a ball.

Agility:

- 1. Move quickly around the grid and avoid contact whilst holding the ball.
- 2. Use short strides to change direction and spin away.
- 3. Decrease or increase the grid size to offer players different challenges within greater or smaller space.
- 4. Reward players who avoid contact for a given time span (10 15 seconds).

Balance:

- 1. Now, still holding the balls, get the players to move around the grid and they have to stop immediately on a call or signal from the coach.
- 2. Look for:
 - A sink of the hips with bent knees in a 'piano sit' action.
 - Upper body held erect.
 - Head up to be able to look around.
 - Weight held centrally, not on one foot, enabling any player who is nudged/pushed to stay in a strong, balanced position.
 - Elbows held out with the ball on the chest. (See photograph below.)





Immediate Support Practice:

- 1. Now work in pairs, one as ball-carrier and the other as support player.
- 2. On the coach's call or signal, the ball-carrier turns and the support player immediately rips the ball and moves into space as the new ball-carrier. The two players keep changing roles.
- 3. Next work in threes across the grid. The first player is the ball-carrier, the second (first support and feeder) rips (as in 2 above) and the third player (running support) takes a pass from the second player.

PLAYER
3
TAKES PASS
FROM 2
THEN RUNS BEYOND 1
TO START PROCESS AGAIN

RIPS

PLAYER 1 TURNS