

DEVELOPING RUGBY ATHLETES.

MOVEMENT SKILLS FOR YOUTH AND JUNIOR ATHLETES BY MARK GODWIN, ELITEPERFORMANCE SPORTS CONDITIONING.

Eliteperformance is based outside Chester and the company specialises in the physical conditioning of athletes. They have been involved with the RFU in running 'developing rugby athletes' sessions in the North West and with the RFU Referees Department.

One area of rugby development that is generally taken for granted and subsequently overlooked is movement skills. Rugby is a dynamic, multi-speed, multi-directional sport requiring all players to have the ability to change direction deliberately and at varying speeds.

Evasive running for both forwards and backs assists in the development of a quicker, more dynamic game. Youth and junior athletes should undertake movement skills training as part of their rugby development programme with an emphasis upon good form.



The basic movements required by all players are:

- Straight forward.
- Straight backward.
- Lateral.
- Angled.

Each of these movement patterns needs to be taught with acceleration and deceleration included. They also need to be performed over various distances and intensities.

In order to maximise the learning effects of movement skills and to add an enjoyable element to training, the use of ladders, mini hurdles, hoops and poles is recommended. These provide a challenging and stimulating environment for younger athletes to learn a new skill while increasing

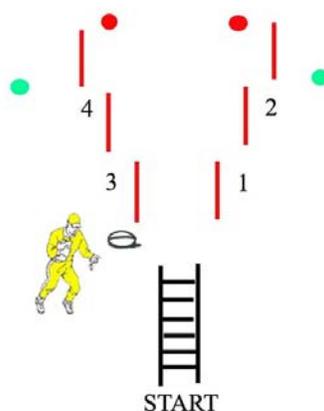
their rugby performance. Remember that movement is a skill and can be learned by players of all ages and abilities.

The movement drills can be simply split into forward (attacking) drills and defensive drills, with or without a ball. The development of these drills can be as simple as adding another player(s), increasing the pace of the movement or reducing the reaction time.

Attacking drills

The first drill is for attacking movement.

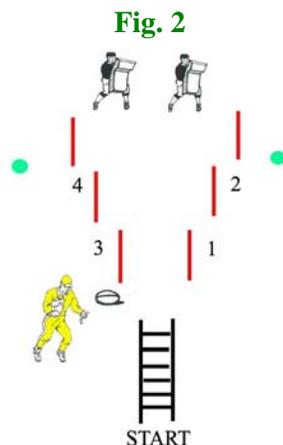
Fig. 1



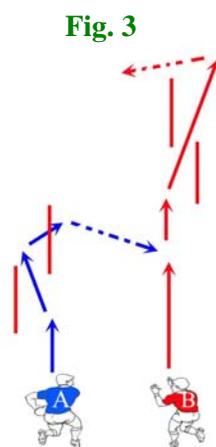
The player starts behind the ladder. On the coach's call or signal to go, the player accelerates through the ladder and receives a pass from the coach as soon as he comes out of the ladder. After he has passed the ball, the coach immediately calls a number between 1 and 4. The player, who is running straight ahead and between the two lines of poles, then sidesteps once through the numbered gap in the poles, sidesteps again at the green cone and immediately straightens up towards the closest red cone.

This first drill is initially undertaken as an individual skill. To progress towards more rugby-specific movement, additional players can be included. For example, once the first player has exited from the ladder and has sidestepped through either the left or right poles, a second player starts and runs in a straight line between the poles. As the first player reaches the green cone and straightens up towards the red cone, the second player should be running from depth. This player's run is straight up the channel to receive the ball at pace from the first runner.

Further players can be added as handlers or in a contact area after the pass to the second player, for example:



For another general attacking and support running drill, set out a channel 5m by 15m as in Fig 3.



Starting in pairs, the first player runs forward until he sees the space between the first two poles. The player immediately steps through the gap (beating a defender), steps back to straighten up and passes to the second player. This second player then repeats the drill, stepping to the right and then back to the centre, passing back to the first player. Further players can be added from depth to support the first two players. Organise the attack so that as the poles are exited, the players have formed a line for simple passing.

Two players run to the red cone (1), laterally step through the ladder left or right (2). Upon exiting the ladder they tackle the shield in front of them (3) before moving laterally and backwards to the blue cones (4). They accelerate into a contact area into the two shields (5).

Coaches can build up their own work based on these ideas. Once you have the basic elements of what you are trying to achieve, conditioning players can be rugby-related throughout, which holds the players' interest and gets more quality work from them as there is always part of the game within the conditioning exercise.

If you would like to contact eliteperformance, you can use the following:

www.eliteperformance.biz

mail@eliteperformance.biz

0151 343 0154 (tel).