

EDITOR'S NOTES 31.10.06

At last there has been a reaction from you coaches out there and it does make the day go faster when you e-mail your ideas. Ian 'Spike' Milligan from Swaffham Rugby Club sent the following:

"I've just read your editor's note along with Andy's piece in the Journal this week. Normally I do this mid-morning on a Tuesday and have a bit of a coffee break whilst doing it!

I came back to the game as a parent, bringing a then five year old to the sport and have since qualified (only to level one) and coached my eldest son's age group from U7 to now U12. Like the coaches I joined at the club originally, we had a set of drills which we wheeled out at each training morning.

However, I now don't see much benefit from these as however you set them up they are sterile when compared to game situations. Most of my sessions now have a brief reflection on the last match, with some photos to illustrate key points, a quick chat about what we need to focus on this session (passing from ground, offloading, rucking, etc, etc) and then set a conditioned game. For example, we needed to focus on clearing rucks and getting quick ball after a recent match. The practice game was set where any maul would result in a turnover and rucks needed to be cleared and the ball moved in a set time (a time which we reduced as the players improved). This worked well as the team opposing tried very hard to hold the runners up and the contact area was very well contested. The boys (and girls- U12) then asked whether they could look to overload out of the tackle and just prior to contact, which we developed, taking Andy's point about playing the space of at least trying to create the space to play into.

I like the players to see ideas and develop them - after all, it's what they do in a match.

The best sessions are the ones where we as a team look at the last match, either from memory or pictures and highlight areas of focus (I've already got a few ideas and plans prepared) and as the team focus in on one area, we set some scenarios which can be achieved in live play and go and play it, have a few breaks for water and they comment on what was good etc and just tweak things. The very best are the ones where I hardly say anything.

Hope this makes sense."

It certainly does make sense and the letter contains just about all of the best coaching methods. Surely players have to be invited to see situations and should be encouraged to work out what they need to do to achieve improvement in certain areas. The coach



is not minimising his importance as he is supremely important in empowering this approach.

It will be far simpler to feed them drills – but which system will produce the better players? I think Spike is making his own coaching job harder, but it will be far more rewarding for him and his players.

Jon Loftus offered some thoughts of his own after reading Damian McGrath's piece on handling:

"This is just as an initial response to your "challenge" and it comes from Damian McGrath's presentation (Archive Winter 2004: *When All Is Equal, Skill Is King.*) I am a newly qualified Level 1 coach (coaching at U10 level) and have only recently started reading these articles on the RFU website, so I do not know if my contribution is what you are after...?

Practice could be done using old balls with little, or no, grip. They could also be over-inflated so that they are as hard and as big as possible. Alternatively (or additionally!), players could "grease" their hands with oil or Vaseline. This would ensure that players concentrate on the basic fundaments of watching the flight of the ball and on using 'soft' hands in the correct place to receive the ball sympathetically....

The exercises would be on simple handling and contact drills, to be ultimately carried out at high/match speed and intensity."

This is just what I am after. A new coach has put some thought into how a skill can be improved and has come up with some interesting 'solutions'. I would just suggest that the players, especially young ones, savour success at each stage of the process. It would be simple to devise cunning coaching schemes to make them fail, but once they master a ball that is difficult to handle, they will surely become more adept with a match ball.

So coaches, don't be shy. What do you think?

Keith Richardson, Editor.