

EDITOR'S NOTES

28.11.06

This week's article by Peter Johnson is on how to practise linking the midfield with the back row and there are important lessons for all of us coaches. The actual subject is important in itself, but it highlights an aspect of the game that we can all too easily forget.

Many practice sessions will be devoted to getting a certain aspect of the game finely tuned, but do we spend enough time putting it into the whole game so that all players know what to expect, where and when?

Hours are devoted to scrum and lineout with variations and moves everywhere – but do the backs know what might happen if the ball has to be passed differently in the middle of the move and not at the precise time that was so easily achieved in the practice session? Do the forwards themselves understand what they are trying to achieve and are they aware of the simple fact that the move might become disrupted because of an error or because of effective defence?

And if the move becomes seamlessly efficient in a game, are the rest of the team geared up to react effectively? The age-old coaching question springs to mind; “What happens next.”

It is not just the forwards who practise moves at scrum and lineout. The backs usually have a range of unlikely scenarios that rarely, if ever, reach the orchestrated end without an error or a tackle. But do we try hard enough to link the intended move with the other players? Do they practise enough together to work out potential responses to what might happen when a certain play is called?

Peter Johnson's piece actually tackles part of the problem but there are many other 'linking' practices that could be devised. What do the backs do at a restart and the subsequent possible outcomes? What are the forwards meant to be doing when a certain backs' move is called and what do the players do and where do they go if there is no chance of them getting to a breakdown in that move?

We tend to look at the seamless game where all the Tuesday night moves are successful, but surely as much time should be spent on practising the running lines of the whole team from a move whether it goes right or horribly wrong.

One skill that is often neglected in all of this seems a very simple one, but it can cause much wailing and gnashing of teeth; how can we get players to understand that a call for a move does not mean that the move always has to be completed as it was meant to be? There is a very strong case at many stages of a game when the right decision is *not* to pass. Solve that one and you are well on the way to becoming Superhuman Coach Of The Century.