

# RUGBY SKILLS ASSESSMENT

Most coaches assess their players' skills in a very subjective manner. The usual assessment will be very much a visual rule of thumb as a player trains or plays and this assessment can be alarmingly accurate when carried out by many coaches. Unfortunately, it can also be a hugely flawed method of judgement and there has to be a more reliable way than the 'bright-eyed' method that cannot be backed up with any evidence.

It is a relatively simple task to devise a battery of skills and adopt a straightforward method of marking or grading. One such way is a *Criteria Based Skills Assessment* that will offer fairly reliable evidence that can be discussed with each player and he can then have a solid, reliable, objective judgement on his relative strengths and weaknesses.

The tests *probably* came from the New Zealand Rugby Union Academy but they themselves aren't certain about that. However, their attitude was that most of us copy something that has already been done by other coaches, so go ahead and use it. In the absence of any other evidence, apart from the vague thought that it once came from them, I will attribute authorship/originality to the New Zealand Academy and thank them for letting the Technical Journal use the material. We are especially grateful to Mike Chu, High Performance Coach Development Manager with the New Zealand Rugby Union, for his permission to print and for his general assistance.

The areas that will be tested are:

- 1. Tackle.
- 2. Catch and pass.
- 3. Body contact.

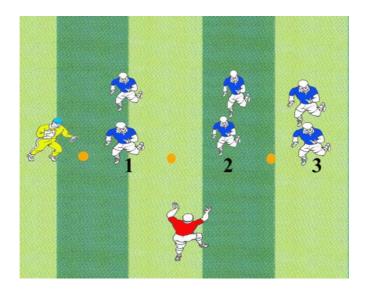
#### TACKLE.

# Key factors to look for (one at a time).

- (i) Move forward into the tackle.
- (ii) Chin up & eyes open focus on tackle zone.
- (iii) Drive in with shoulder, head to one side or behind & feet planted firmly on ground.
- (iv) Wrap up with arms, drive through the tackle.
- (v) Land on top of opponent then get up first.
- (vi) Re-gather the ball to initiate counter-attack.



# TEST 1.

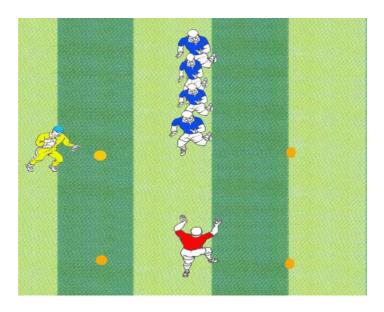


Assessor calls 1, 2 or 3. The player at the front of that line runs forward with the ball and the tackler makes the tackle with the best choice from left side, right side or straight on.

# Variations.

- (i) Ball carrier runs at slow pace.
- (ii) Ball carrier runs at half pace.

# TEST 2.



Ball carriers line up and the assessor signals 1, 2 or 3 to the ball carrier each time without the tackler's knowledge.



- 1 = Break to tackler's left.
- 2 = Run straight at tackler.
- 3 = Break to tackler's right.
- N.B. The ball carrier must stay inside the cone area.

#### Variations.

- (i) Begin with ball carriers at half pace.
- (ii) Increase pressure and intensity by increasing the ball carrier's pace and decreasing the time between ball carriers.
- **LEVEL 1.** Tackles with one shoulder only. Knows some of the key factors.
- **LEVEL 2.** Tackles with either shoulder but stronger favourite side when under pressure. Has knowledge of most of the key factors.
- **LEVEL 3.** Equally accurate and strong tackler on either shoulder. Good knowledge of key factors.

#### **CATCH AND PASS.**

(Note: Spiral pass has hands across ball's seam; swing pass has hands down ball's seam.)

### Key factors.

#### Catching

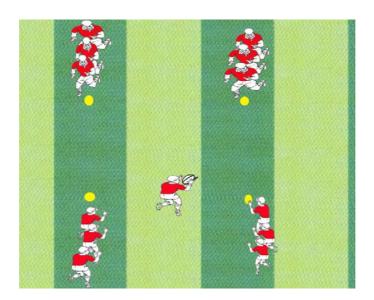
- (i) Eyes on ball at all times and call for the pass.
- (ii) Meet ball early with fingers spread and thumbs pointing towards the ball.

# <u>Passing</u>

- (iii) Swing ball through in one motion in and up and down plane (rather than across the body).
- (iv) Passing hand must carry on in a straight follow through (i.e. towards the target). Non-passing hand is less important.
- (v) Pass should be given chest-high and in front of the receiver.
- (vi) Total movement should be achieved in one motion while running a straight line.



#### TEST.



Player in middle passes ball to outside support. Each time he reaches cones, he touches ground and returns with new support players

#### Variations.

- (i) Support close, slow pace assess swing pass.
- (ii) Support close, faster pace assess swing pass under pressure.
- (iii) Support wide, slow pace assess spiral pass.
- (iv) Support wide, faster pace assess spiral pass under pressure.

**LEVEL 1**. Catches and passes to one side only.

**LEVEL 2**. Catches and passes to both sides, but stronger and more accurate to favourite side.

**LEVEL 3**. Equally strong and accurate passing and catching in either direction.

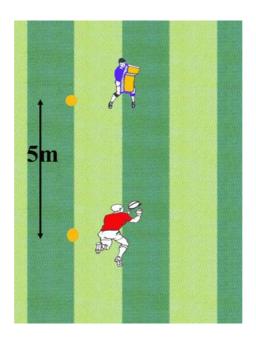
# **BODY CONTACT.**

#### Key factors.

- (i) Chin up, eyes open and focus on the hit zone.
- (ii) Lead shoulder rounded.
- (iii) Ball in two hands and held away from the point of contact ('body before ball').
- (iv) Small steps for timing followed by a wide 'power step' with the front foot going beyond the body of the tackler.
- (v) Low body position with a wide stance on contact.
- (vi) Drive from low to high to clear the defender from the ball carrier's space.



#### TEST.



The ball carrier makes repetitive contact with the defender. Initially, no instructions are given, which should highlight the preferred shoulder. Progress to instructing the ball carrier to use a specified shoulder. Defenders hold ground.

### Variations.

(i) On "Go", the ball carrier bursts up around the cone and makes contact with the progressing defender. (Closing down time and space.)

**LEVEL 1.** Makes contact in high body position and/or carries ball in one hand and makes contact with ball in front of body.

**LEVEL 2**. Has ball in both hands, understands the need to protect the ball in contact and has reasonably low body position. Better on one shoulder.

**LEVEL 3.** Understands key factors of body contact, the various techniques and their application. Effective on both shoulders.

The next three pages show a simple assessment form that can be kept as a player's record. The forms can be used for discussion between players and coach(es) and they are simple to fill in. A few ticks are all that is required and you have a tool that might be useful as you can come back to any skill whenever player and/or coach want to.



NAME:
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# TACKLE ASSESSMENT Key factors to look at (one at a time).

	Always	Mostly	Seldom
(i) Move forward into tackle.			
(ii) Chin up, eyes open, focus on tackle			
zone.			
(iii) Drive in with shoulder, head to			
side or behind, feet planted firmly on			
ground.			
(iv) Land on top of opponent, get up			
first.			
(v) Re-gather ball/initiate counter attack			

# **RATING**

- **LEVEL** (1) Tackles with one shoulder only. Knows some of the key factors.
- **LEVEL (2)** Tackles with either shoulder. Stronger on favourite side when under pressure. Has knowledge of most key factors.
- **LEVEL** (3) Equally accurate and strong tackler on either shoulder. Good knowledge of key factors.

Tick appropriate box.

LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3

# **GENERAL COMMENTS:**



NAME:

# **CATCH AND PASS ASSESSMENT Key factors to look at (one at a time).**

	Always	Mostly	Seldom
(i) Eyes on ball, head still and in line with ball.			
(ii) Call for ball.			
(iii) Meet ball early, fingers spread, thumbs up.			
(iv) Swing ball through in single motion in an			
'up and down plane' (not across body).			
(v) Straight follow through of passing hand			
('Straight' meaning towards target).			
(vi) Pass in front of receiver.			
(vii) Total movement should be achieved in			
one motion while running straight line.			

# **RATING**

**LEVEL** (1) – Catches and passes to one side only.

**LEVEL** (2) – Catches and passes to both sides but stronger and more accurate to favourite side.

**LEVEL** (3) – Equally strong and accurate passing in either direction. Good knowledge of key factors.

Tick appropriate box.

Tick uppropriate box:				
LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3		

# **GENERAL COMMENTS:**



# **BODY CONTACT ASSESSMENT Key factors to look at (one at a time).**

	Always	Mostly	Seldom
(i) Chin up, eyes open and focus on hit zone.			
(ii) Shoulder rounded.			
(iii) Ball in two hands and held away from point of			
contact – 'body before ball'.			
(iv) Small steps for timing followed by wide			
'power step' with front foot placed just beyond			
defender.			
(v) Low body position and wide stance on contact.			
(vi) Drive from low to high and clear defender			
from space ('jack-up').			

# **RATING**

**LEVEL(1)** - Makes contact in high body position.

Carries ball in one hand and/or makes contact with ball in front of body. Front foot planted away from defender.

Mostly goes to ground.

**LEVEL** (2) - Has ball in two hands.

Understands need and protects ball.

Reasonably low body position and good foot placement.

Better on one shoulder.

LEVEL (3) - Understands and demonstrates key factors of body contact.

Technique and application good.

Effective on both shoulders.

Tick appropriate box.

LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3

# **GENERAL COMMENTS:**



These tests are simple and very easy to run. There is no real technology required and no batteries to run out, so one coach can get some interesting material without a great deal of paperwork. They could take some of the guesswork out of the way we analyse a player just by watching him play.

If the tests are not exactly what you want, change them. If you can devise a better system, do so – and let the Journal know, as it will be of benefit to other coaches.

The beauty of such tests is that you get a view of each player's skills in key areas of the game in a simple, uncluttered manner. The tests would be appropriate at any level/age of the game and they were received very well by England's U21 team some years ago. The results mean far more to players than a vague analysis by the coach from his own perspective during a match.

Many clubs have the benefit of video analysis, which can delve pretty deeply into each player's skills. However, as we all know, many skilled players have the skill to hide their weaknesses in match play, making these type of tests all the more valuable and relevant to a player's skill development. Surely it is better to improve a weakness so that the player concerned does not have to hide it, albeit cleverly, in a game.

Next week there will be a piece on training activities that might bring about such improvement.