

EDITOR'S NOTES

24.7.07

The Editor had an interesting email letter from a coach, Matt Kemp (Wasps Women's RFC), who had read Gary Townsend's article on Game Sense (March 17th, 2007). Even though the article was published a while ago, the points raised are valid and may encourage other coaches to have their say.

"This may now be a little dated as I'm just catching up on missed TJ articles – unfortunately, while the ability to go back over things is much more convenient than the older paper magazine TJ, it also leads to checking up on articles being that much easier to forget to do because they don't periodically drop on your doorstep.

I've just read Gary Townsend's Game Sense approach article and found it compelling and incredibly powerful. While I don't know Gary especially well I'm pleased to be able to say that we are acquainted. Gary's correct in saying that the Game Sense approach suits him and his style. He's a big, muscular bloke but has a very gentle and self-deprecating manner, which makes him an excellent and encouraging guy to learn from. Like him, I'm also a big, muscular and gentle giant (with slightly more hair) and, like him, have a strong PE teaching background. Perhaps it's something that comes naturally to those of us with that experience but his advocated style is one that I've pretty much always used, and with success. I derive a real buzz from coaching and, since playing rugby is all about playing rugby (it does make sense!), I can't see a better way of introducing new players to rugby than playing it! Why not let them experience the buzz too?

I often see coaches whose knowledge of the game, whose integrity I respect, whose company I enjoy and with whom I regularly work, drilling players and wondering why their interest quickly wanes. Simply, as Gary suggests, they come to rugby because they want to play. I guess that the difficulty with using a Game Sense approach comes because coaches don't always feel that they are in control of what is happening. If you drill players you clearly know what's going on and are in total control of the variables. If you just chuck a ball in and say 'play' then anything could happen. There's also the audience factor: who hasn't felt 'on display' when coaching a group of kids on a Sunday morning while their parents stand by and look on? I know I have! In that situation we generally feel the need to demonstrate that we are the coach, the boss and we know our stuff. Just letting kids play looks more like semi-organised baby-sitting to spectators! We need to be confident enough in the potential results and secure enough in our knowledge of rugby to do just that – let kids play and find out for themselves what works and what doesn't, while guiding their progress with timely interventions to keep them on the right track.

Finally, I'm glad that the current trends in coach development also recognise the benefits of just letting coaches coach, again with timely interventions from the coach educators to keep them on the right track. Given the right opportunities, most players will find the right things to do in a given situation, as will most coaches. I hope that more coaches will have the confidence to try it and see how it goes!

Thanks very much Gary for writing such an erudite article and reinforcing to every TJ reader just how valuable a tool in the armoury of every coach is the Game Sense approach.”

Do you find that the original article and/or this letter strike a chord with the way you want to coach? Does it, perhaps, take too much confidence? Are you happier with a battery of drills and practices? Or should there be a combination of drills *and* Game Sense?

The floor is yours – on this and any subject. Just email the Editor on Keithrichardson@therfu.com