

Introduction of Rugby To Children In France Part 1

by Jeremie Spencer, C.T.D., F.F.R.

The author represented England at scrum half in 1966 and played for Harlequins for seven years between spells at Bath and Northampton. He had cricket trials for Surrey and had been 'spotted', as a schoolboy, as a potential Tottenham Hotspur footballer. His professional activities in England saw work as a sports teacher in a variety of secondary and preparatory schools. After that he had a full coaching involvement in France as a county coach with the Basque-Landes FFR, as U16 and U19 coach to St Jean de Luz then as U21 coach to Avignon Bayonne. Since that work in France he has been heavily involved in Spanish rugby development with Catalan selection, club courses, Basque Country coaching, running U19 and senior representative sides and introducing the game to beginners in Spanish primary schools.

There are contact elements in the article that would not be allowed with certain age groups in England. Coaches must be aware that they are responsible for adhering to the continuum whenever it is appropriate. This may mean that certain aspects of the coaching information and coaching method in this piece would not be allowed at some specific age groups.

The concept that I always start with is that children love discovering, inventing and having fun – all at the same time – in a stimulating environment. They should not, however, be allowed to work in the comfort zone as it bores them very quickly and hinders progress.

My formative work experience in coaching was for three years in a progressive English school and I then moved to France and soon adapted to their way that had been developed by Rene Delaplace. His system of introducing rugby was well expounded in England on many occasions by Pierre Villpreux. I have presented work based on this paper to various London and South East conferences in the past.

Objective. To create players who are **Courageous** (combative). **Loyal** (to rules, opponents etc.). **Intelligent and multi-skilled.**

Key areas of development.

Emotional. e.g. Concentration. Motivation. Courage. Resistance to stress. Fear. Cognitive. e.g. Knowledge of the game. Understanding of the game. Intelligence. Physical. e.g. Physique. Quantity and quality of technique. Athletic skill.



The eyes see, the head decides and the body reacts – all these are complemented by the above emotional considerations and all combine to produce the finished product.

The Child The Adult

Plays for pleasure. Anticipates with or without the ball.

Is egocentric. Knows the laws.

Doesn't programme actions. Is physically prepared.

Has no anticipation. Has individual and team know-how. Is drawn towards the ball. Is familiar with the three key areas of

Is apprehensive of contact with ground Emotional.

And with opponents. Cognitive. Is apprehensive about being knocked over. Physical.

Lacks skill.

The Game

Bunching/swarming.

And must gain pleasure through careful Introduction of the key emotional areas.

Recognises patterns of play.

Satellites. Stands off in fear or anticipation. Knows how to defend. Individual contributions. Varies the style of play.

Very few passes. Tight game.
Weak defensive qualities. Wide game.
Poor ball retention/poor continuity. Kicking game.

Knows something about strategy and tactics. Achieves continuity through

support play.

Why start with a game situation?

- 1. Satisfies the child's desire.
- 2. Develops adaptability and familiarity with the demands of the game.
- 3. Develops game understanding, including better knowledge of the laws.
- 4. The child learns and discovers the complexities of the game little by little.

MOTIVATION - IMITATION - PERFECTION.

A typical coaching session.

- 1. Game situation the coach **observes**, **diagnoses** and then **remedies**.
- 2. Skill learning coaching to correct and help players to succeed.
- 3. Game situation to see whether progress has been made.



First level

Behavioural observations	Our objectives	How	
Pleasure. Maximum energy. Egocentricity.	Play/pleasure with the fundamental rules.	Very narrow pitch.	
Players are drawn to the ball.	Let the bunching solve the emotional problems.	Relatively small numbers in opposition.	
Some players are standing off through fear and/or anticipation.	Encourage the recognition that opponents exist.	n Contact games with or without ball, collectively or individually	
Fear of:Being knocked over.The ground.The opponent(s).			
Difficulty in advancing.	Go forward in defence and attack – the first rule!	1 v 1.	
	Second level		
All the players participate and bunching becomes regrouping.	Realisation that opponent and own players exist.	Narrow pitch.	
Beginning of co-operation between players.	Improve perception skills.	Variations on beginning the plays.	
Passes appear.	Improve defence.		
Support play emerges.	Improve support play.	Games with various numbers of players.	
Players go around the		Directives to the defence.	
bunch.		2 v 1+1.	



Third level

Individual actions are the starting point of collective projects.	Understanding and construction of 2 nd and 3 rd phases of game.	Learning of some complementary rules e.g. offside at rucks and mauls.
The play is organised with reference to defence.	Employ the three forms of play and know how to adapt them.	Directives to attackers or defenders.
Beginning of organised game.	Improve and reinforce individual and collective technique.	Large pitch.
		2+1 v 2+1.

I have developed my own way of doing things based on these basic theories and obviously my character and personality have been important in how I have tackled the

I always try to develop a real identification with the children and some of the following may be of interest and/or use:

- I always try to develop a real identification with the children.
- I am very aware of the magic space between teacher and child.
- I have a tendency to use their language and their humour.

work.

- I always try to get down to their height to reassure them and attempt to dedramatise the adventure that I am going to put to them.
- My structure base is the history of rugby development since Roman times. The Romans have invaded Europe and have set themselves up to live in these vanquished lands Britain and France are examples where they play a variety of games. One was called Haspartum, a glorified running battle. The French watched these games and developed their own version called 'the soule', where two villages challenged each other to get an object (a sheep's bladder, for example, stuffed with vine leaves or sand) into the opposing village's square. This led to attack and defence in a game that could be between up to five hundred a side over a space of many kilometres. In that space there would be natural obstacles of fields, woods, marshes and streams and there were no rules!
- This is the story that I present to the children and invite them to live it in the game that follows. There are no rules, other than safety ones, and we just get on with it, for this is roughly the game that was played until the English introduced the basic



- rules (1823-1874) that led to the three fundamentals of rugby... go forward, support and get continuity.
- This scenario allows the children to discover, invent and construct THEIR rugby in their own magic wonderland.
- Every time I introduce the game in this manner during six lessons, they invent their own version of rugby without the word rugby being mentioned and certainly without any technical work. That can wait for the second level!

MIEUX VOIR - MIEUX JOUER THE BETTER YOU SEE - THE BETTER YOU PLAY.

There are **three fundamentals** to the game as mentioned above. They are **go forward**, **support and get continuity**. All of these are controlled by the pressure of time and space.

Players have <u>three important facets</u>. The <u>cognitive</u> – the eyes see and the head decides. The <u>physical</u> – the body reacts. The <u>emotional</u> – the physical and cognitive merge and are complemented by emotional considerations to produce the finished article.

Players' rights.

- You can pick up, carry, pass or kick (only out of hand) the ball in any direction.
- You can block or tackle the ball-carrier.
- You can take the ball from him.

For the moment there are no specific rugby rules, only safety ones.

- You may not touch any player above the shoulders.
- No tripping.
- No pulling jerseys.
- No kicking the ball off the ground.

These elementary rules allow decisions to be made between contact and avoidance – running into space; they allow children to lose their fear of contact in a wholly natural, unforced way.

Progression in practical sessions.

- 1. Warm up with communication as the theme in grids of $10 15m \times 10 15m$.
- Get players to run and pass in any direction. Develop the awareness (by voice) of the role of the ball-carrier as being distinctly different from the non ball-carrier (support player). Let the children decide who calls, as use of the voice is very



important. It is usually the support (non ball-carrying) player who should be hungry and should call for the ball. This allows a game within a game, where the children can themselves count who calls most often, thus becoming the 'champion of hunger' for possession.

- The same exercise without the voice. Introduce hand signals as instructions/commands.
- The same again but introduce a whistled signal. When the whistle sounds, the ball-carrier offers the ball, a support player rips it then continues to pass to another player.
- Develop that theme so that the ball-carrier places the ball on the ground on the whistle.
- On the signal, the other players combine and push the ball-carrier out of the grid.

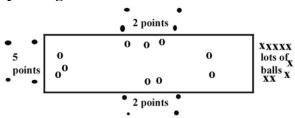
2. The fundamentals.

First rule – score or **prevent** the opposition from scoring.

Go forward. Invent games (or include in the normal game) where the mere fact that one side has advanced earns them points. In the learning process we should continuously be looking for specific and positive skills and they should be rewarded.

Normal game – One point for a ball-carrier who goes forward, one point for stopping the attack going forward and one point for scoring.

Specific game



Aim: The Xs try to get the ball into one of the scoring zones.

The Os try to prevent this.

If the ball-carrier is held up for more than two seconds, the ball goes back to the

bank.

3. Introduction of mirroring.

The attackers must learn to develop the skill of losing their shadow, their reflection – the opposing defending player. At first this is an individual responsibility but it soon develops into a team requirement. In the early stages of the development, get players of the same weight and height (as far as possible) to oppose each other.



Normal game – one point for going forward, one for preventing the ball-carrier going forward, one for the attacking player who has lost his mirror, one for the defending player who is opposite his mirror and one for scoring.

Specific game 1 - (i) Start with a normal game, where one team has the ball and the others may not touch it. On the whistle, the ball-carrier drops the ball and he and his team-mates all try to cross the score line while the others try to prevent them by each defender being responsible for the attacker that he is mirroring.

<u>Second rule</u> – offside – therefore passing backwards, therefore support. The aim then becomes to go forward (receiver always tries to go beyond the person who passed) without losing the ball, support your attack or prevent the ball-carrying side from scoring.

Specific game 2

XX X X The 2 sides have a ball each. They all pass but may take no more X XX than 3 steps with ball. XX The first team to score without an x error scores a point.	00 0 00 00 0 0
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Method:

- Each team has a ball and all attack at the same time.
- They pass but can take no more than three steps with the ball.
- The first team to score without a mistake scores a point, gaining a reward for being the faster side to score.

Extra points are then awarded as follows – one point for going forward, one if, from a pass, the receiver goes beyond where the pass came from, one for any attacking player who loses his mirror, one for any defender who (a) maintains or (b) recovers his mirror position, one for a player who prevents the attacker going forward and one for a try.

<u>Third rule</u> – a player is held with the ball at ruck or maul.

Aim –

- Go forward without losing the ball.
- Support and score, or
- Prevent the ball-carrying side from going forward.
- Recover their ball, go forward and score.

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N.B. the ball is always available to be won by either side unless the competition for possession becomes too difficult. (This is an early lesson so it can be difficult!)



Normal game – one point for going forward, one for my partner going forward thanks to my pass, one for the ball being available after a tackle at ruck or maul, one for mirroring, one for preventing the ball-carrier going forward and one for scoring

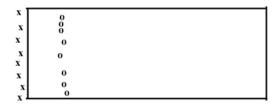
Specific game -

x x x	0	0	0	
x X	o	0	0	
XX XX X	0	0	o	
xx	0	0	0	

Method:

- The Os defend their zone.
- Once their zone is beaten they play no more, making the game 12 v 4 three times.
- The attacking players must look for the easiest way through (strength against weakness).
- The defence must prevent, for as long as possible, the attack from scoring.
- Defenders are not allowed to touch the ball.

Measuring players' progress can be part of the sessions after each change of rules or theme.



Method:

- The Xs must score with (i) one ball each, (ii) one ball between two players, one ball between three players etc.
- The Os must prevent the scores.

Part 2 of this article will appear next week. In the piece, the author will show how he utilises these principles and converts them into six practical lessons that he has taught to young players in Spain.