

Captaincy_ by I Jones (2000)

Level 3 Paper

Abstract

Australian 5/8 Michael Lynagh's calm decision to run the ball in the final minutes of the Wallabies 1991 RWC quarter final against Ireland was the epitome of the cool confidence and on field leadership that makes a great captain. The audacious final minute escape effected by the Wallabies ultimately was the result of an inspirational leader being able to focus collectively a team of players towards a common goal whilst under immense pressure.

The qualities of a good captain and the role that the captain plays both on and off the field can so often be left as an after thought when selecting or preparing a team. Coaches at all levels from school 1st XV through to national level teams need to be empowered with a set of criteria. This criterion will be used to make informed choices about candidates for captaincy in their teams and as such, harness the maximum potential of the side in any and every situation.

' A captain must practice what he preaches'

Slack

Introduction

The role of captain is a multifaceted one of the highest levels of the game. Former All Blacks coach Laurie Mains believes " a good captain is born and not made" and as with a number of studies done on leadership as listed further in the paper. It appears that although people can be trained in the principles of leadership, as is done in such places as the Royal Military College, Duntroon. Those that perform the best are the students who have a personality type which is predisposed to the acceptance of a leadership role, something commonly referred to as ' the born leader".

Coaches and captains must realise that the captain's role has both on field and off field components. The procedure for selection of a captain must be thorough enough to address all of the captain's responsibilities whilst remaining sympathetic to the interpersonal dynamics of the squad. This paper intends to discuss all of these considerations for the selection of a captain both on and off the field. This is intended to aid both captains and coaches to better understand the qualities required in this very important facet of team preparation.

The research conducted for this assignment involved contacting current "best practice" coaching models in rugby union and rugby league. I canvassed Wallaby coach Rod MacQueen and former All Black coach Laurie Mains as well as considering the opinions of former Wallaby captain Andrew Slack and former All Black captain Wilson Whineray. Given the relative dearth of current research on captaincy in rugby, it is hoped that this assignment will offer some means to make a more reasoned

consideration of a candidate for captain in the future. I have broken my research down into five main areas which coaches could consider these being: the player's personality, what sort of leadership role he should have, the captain's relationship with the coach, the importance of his knowledge of the game and finally the position which is best for a captain. Each of these will be discussed to provide food for thought as the primary objective and not to necessarily be prescriptive.

A theoretical investigation of the concept of leadership is a foundation for an understanding of what coaches could look for in their captains. It is very difficult to offer an absolute working definition of leadership, something Kets De Vries (1945: 194) suggests is a "quest for a holy grail" and Bolman and Deal (1994: 77) feel is a "slippery and hotly contested exercise". Traditionally, "the right man for the right job" adage is disproved by Fielder's (1983: 171) work on The Contingency Model of Leadership. This sort of thinking does not take into account the capacity of the leader to grow as a leader, if inexperienced and it also doesn't factor into the equation the nature of the situation inherited by the new leader. As Fielder (1983: 171) states, "the right person for a particular job today maybe the wrong person in six months or one or two years". In this sense All Black captain Taine Randell may be being forced to accept too much pressure in a national side which could be expecting too much of him as a leader when he is adapting to a new role and a new position. Perhaps the All Blacks should have used Ian Jones as interims captain and allowed Randell the time to gain experience as a captain in the Fitzpatrick - Brooke dual role while he 'found his feet'. Bolman and Deal (1994: 81) feel that the best leaders are "communicators" and "implementors".

Hodgkinson (1991: 67) quotes from an unlikely source when he reminds us that an effective leader is what Adolf Hitler would call a "mennschenkenner" - literally - 'a knower of men', one who grasps instinctively, intuitively or otherwise the motives of men. Many famous world leader figures have shared a common denominator in the makeup of their character. Historians and social commentators alike have described Lee Iacocca, General Paton and Mahatma Ghandi and many others as charismatic. The concept of charisma is important when discussing selection of rugby team captains because it is an interesting yet intangible and elusive quality which we may recognise in another but difficult to develop in ourselves. Weber (1947) (in Hoy and Miskel 1996: 172) believes that the, "charismatic leader is an extraordinary individual who is a leader by virtue of personal trust or exemplary qualities". From a perusal of other research on this point (Avolio and Bass 1988: 37, Kofter 1992: 16 and Roberts and Bradley 1988: 271), it is fair to say that charisma is an essential feature of leadership and something which seems alluded to by most of my captaincy research reference.

As far as a captain's personality goes all sources saw different facets as having the most importance. Mains' stipulation of "controlled competitiveness" conjures up images of a snarling Fitzpatrick just as MacQueen's "respected communicator" offers the erudite Eales. Slack agrees with MacQueen that a good captain is a "listener". Slack also feels that a captain must know his own strengths and weaknesses and be confident of delegation for what others are better at. Whineray feels that self confidence is a captain's most valuable. I can understand all of these points as valid ones and I fell that captains that I choose are confident ones with the respect of their team mates.

To move off on a slight tangent, Whineray (1982: 222) poses an interesting point when he claims that a captain should be "appointed not elected". His reasons for this viewpoint are not clearly developed. Although my experience indicates that captains usually pick themselves, I feel it can be an important psychological tool in the process of team building to allow a team to elect their captain. This is virtually an admission of respect and confidence in a player. The team consequently feels ownership of the process and is thus more committed to having it work. In a close contest coaches have a ready-made captain and vice-captain; however if a three way tie looms, it may be better for a Whineray style "appointment" so as not to risk affecting team harmony. The captaincy voting sheet listed as Appendix 1 outlines the style of the player - vote - for - captain election method I have used with 1 st XV and State teams.

The captains leadership role is something, which is also seen differently by most, however there are a couple of mutual agreements, which are positive within the auspices of this research. Main's model was to have a captain of overall team and another two players like Brooke and Bunce to assist him in their various different roles on the field. This allows for the delegation role that Slack espoused earlier whilst also allowing an inspirational leader to do what he's best at. Moreover it leaves the implementation of game plans and the calling of moves to others who can concentrate on that role and play their normal game as well. Whineray agrees with this model that there must be delegation to be effective. MacQueen uses a similar model with senior players having support roles with Eales - Wilson in the forwards and Gregan and Horan backs leaders. As a schoolboy 1 st XV coach I feel that whilst this may work effectively at international level, it would probably confuse players at school and I would keep it simple with the standard captain and vice-captain positions.

The decision-making role is almost universally agreed upon by all surveyed, which is an obvious aspect of the role. Slack adds that a captain should know exactly how to motivate each player and feels this is an important part of a captain's role especially in terms of reinforcing game plans and specific roles. Whineray states that the best way to achieve in a team leadership role in rugby is to let players know exactly what is expected of them so they take the field with a clear mission.

The relationship between a captain and his coach is more of a partnership with the coach responsible for a game plan and a captain responsible for its implementation. Whineray reminds us that even in an international from the first kick off; a coach is essentially powerless until half -time. Both Whineray and Mains feel that the captain is an extension of the coach on the field with Slack feeling that coach and captain should work closely together.

MacQueen offered a different perspective here, quite possibly considering the aforementioned points were too obvious to bother stating. He feels that the captain should be able to discuss player form and team selections with him and understand enough about the players and the nature of the game to make a useful contribution here. Although he did not specially mention it, anecdotal evidence suggests that MacQueen, as well as many international coaches, places high regard upon the opinions of a core of senior players to augment the player selection discussions he conducts with his captain. Whineray also counsels that a good captain puts the team first and friendship second when involved in this sort of discussion. At School 1 st XV level I expect my captain to provide

direction for his team as to the major points of my game plan and also to provide concise summaries of the state of play, so I can consider tactical options during the game.

In terms of 'game knowledge' each person's opinion held a different aspect as important and indeed, some opinions actually appeared to cross over into other aspects of my research. Whineray simply feels that a captain should have "profound" game knowledge; however he does qualify this by saying that this is "relative to the level the captain is playing at". Mains feels that a captain must understand strategies and be able to speak tactically which makes sense if he is going to communicate effectively with either coach or players. My own views are very closely tied to Slack's in that a captain must demonstrate an effective working knowledge of the game to be able to change tactics and be prepared to implement these changes as the game situation dictates it. The schoolboy leader and the Test captain must understand the options available and be able to diagnose and remedy faults quickly and often under pressure. It is most probably for the same reason that MacQueen wants his captain to provide feedback to the coach.

There is some conjecture as to what position is best for the captain. Slack doesn't believe in any such concept, feeling that it is the person that makes the difference and not his position. Lending credence to his view, consider the following list of team captains from the last approximately twenty years of international rugby:

D. Sole (Scotland)

S. Fitzpatrick (New Zealand)

P. Fatialofa (Western Samoa)

M. Keane (Ireland)

J. Eales (Australia)

J.P. Rives (France)

F. Pienaar (South Africa)

M. Loane (Australia)

N. Farr - Jones (Australia)

M. Ella (Australia)

A. Irvine (Scotland)