

Planning your Coaching season or “So you are the Coach”

Introduction

Often getting a junior coaching position at your local club team is by default, and is not the ideal way you thought your re-introduction back into rugby was going to be, but sometimes roles like coaching or managing teams are thrust upon us with no warning. If this is you, hopefully this document will help and also give Club committee's a guide to appoint coaches for senior positions as well.

The basis of this paper will be broken into several areas:

Team Management

The Year Ahead

Planning your sessions and Core Skills coaching

The team management section will deal with appointments, assistance required, responsibilities and reporting systems. “The year ahead” will deal with what happens when the appointments have been made. I will also provide some tips in planning your season's sessions in the final section along with ideas on what core skills are needed for specific positions in the game of rugby.

Team Management

The coaching positions for most grade teams are usually advertised in the Off-season (October-December) and the appropriate appointments are made by the Directors of the Club. Sometimes minimal change is required with assistants or specialist coaches sought. If this happens the Head Coach may have already approached other coaches to seek the positions. All these positions, whether they are new appointments or extensions of current roles in the club, should be ratified by the club at specific meetings. Renewing contracts or drawing up new contracts may need to be done prior to the appointments.

In Junior Rugby this may differ, as sometimes coaching roles are not finalized until the new-year, when clubs know their player numbers and age group requirements. This may force someone who had no prior intention to coach to be thrust into a coaching role. If this happens it is far more important that the Club committee or director makes themselves available to assist this coach in the structure, requirements and even expectations of the coach, within the Club environment.

Whilst these appointments are made, the Club committee will need to make sure the appropriate accreditations are achieved. In some cases renewal of SmartRugby or level 1 accreditation will need to be finalised prior to the season commencing, as this may be a stipulation of the Competition Management. The team management group will need to get together to plan their season as soon as the positions have been confirmed.

The Year Ahead

This initial meeting will hopefully lay out the plan for the upcoming year. The Competition manager should have the draw in place by December, this is usually ratified at the AGM.

This is a major issue for the planning of the season ahead; and allows the team management to work towards hitting the ground running with good off season preparation. Some issues that have been raised recently at District level have been the following:

- Introduction of new teams into competition,
- Representative fixtures,
- Change of finals format,
- Allocation of spare rounds for wet weather catch up matches.

These issues all need to be taken into account by the Head coach and his/her management team.

The plan for the year of a Junior Rugby Club could be similar to what is set out in Table 1, below:

Month	Task	Responsibility
January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training Commencement date? • Venues confirmed • wet weather options • Other age groups training on same days • Rep policy in place if needed • Medical staff availability • Law updates, implementation at training • Whole club sessions or separate teams • Fitness assessments 	HC Club HC Club/HC HC/Staff Club/HC Club HC
February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre season continues • Trials /calendar communicated to players including social activities • Public holidays/School Holidays and Uni leave outlined • Player responsibilities (fund raising etc) • Implement playing style of club • Should be 2 nights a week by this stage • Pre-Season events ie Kiama 7's, are we playing? • Core Skill focus • Trials confirmed • Registrations days communicated to local media • Recruitment and retention • Fitness assessments x 2 	HC HC All Club HC/staff HC HC HC/Staff HC Club HC/Staff HC/Staff
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trials review and feedback • Selection policy needs to be in place • Rep Program in full swing, need to monitor players that are away • Tempo and structure of training needs • Sponsors Night • Season Launch club and District responsibilities • Players graded prior to commencement of comp 	All HC Staff HC/Staff All Club/HC HC/Staff
April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition begins • Rep Season finishes late April early May (Juniors) • Review of Season plan, any changes needed? 	All HC HC/Staff
May-September	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competition concludes in September ; • 3 week finals series as in 2010 • Prep for Semis, may have more players/staff at your disposal 	HC HC

Planning your sessions

This is where the hard part starts for most. Knowing what you want to achieve and how to implement it in the sessions is difficult. If you have to start from scratch you may need to ask yourself some questions to assist with planning the early sessions:

- Are we training 2 nights a week early on? Considerations of other sport commitments in January/February?
- How long is training?
- Coaches Knowledge of the players/quality and quantity?
- Have you inherited a skillful/fit/young/old/confident Squad?

These answers will manipulate how/what you are going to do at training. Simple fitness and core skill testing will assist the new coach to implement his training sessions, and gauge the level of skill/fitness at his disposal.

After assessing your player's basic fitness and core skill levels, you will have an idea of what style of play you would like to play. We all would like to see our players run with the ball, seeing forwards and backs combine and play expansively but the reality is it will take time for your players to become confident to do this. The important part is building up the skill level of your team to allow them to play the style they wish.

The skills that are usually paramount to successful rugby teams could be numerous and varied but the basic core skills could be narrowed down to:

- Catch and Pass
- Tackle
- Contact skills

All coaches would like their players to be proficient at all core skills ie Forwards to be able to Catch and Pass as well as the backs. The skills/style/steps needed to implement at training need to be identified by the Head coach and the coaching staff, and all staff need to be fully aware of techniques of how to train them.

A simple development model method that has been used for many years is the traditional technique approach, in which the coach breaks the teaching of rugby skills down into easy steps or smaller elements to teach individually. By definition this approach is a systematic procedure by which a task is accomplished. Each element is practiced separately in simple drills then brought together to form the whole skill. The skill is acquired through repetitious exercise.

Another method is a “game sense” approach which will develop your player’s skills in a game environment. In this approach players are challenged by the coach to execute the correct techniques and skills at the appropriate time, as well their understanding of making right decisions based upon the game conditions at the time.

Both approaches will be considered by a junior rugby coach and then delivery of a combination of the two will be developed. An example of teaching rugby skills using the “REAL” (Rugby – Enjoyable- Active – Learning) rugby philosophy is outlined below.

Core skill teaching – The tackle

Skill	Drill/Activity	Coaching Points	Time
Intro to Tackle	Tracking Static	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain Open handed tag • Target area? • Demo of Approach, Balance, Close out (ABC) 	1 min
Tackle	Tracking 1 v 1 in 3m x 3m grid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move forward • Eyes on target, hands up • ABC – Approach, Balance, Close Out • 45 degree angle • Foot in “hoola Hoop” 	3 mins
Tackle	Tracking 1 v 1 in varied grids 5 x 5, 3 x 5, 7 x 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extension of above with larger grids • Focus still on making tag over half way • ABC 	3 mins
Tackle	Tracking Push tag	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 m x 3m • This time two handed tag replace by two handed push • Aim to get ball carrier off balance • Both players need to remember good body shape 	3mins
Tackle	Game of Ruck Touch	Rules: Two handed tag Turn and pass to team mate	5 mins

This simple but effective way of teaching the skills, allows players to consolidate their skills and challenges them against their peers. The coaches can simply identify whether the players are ready to be extended or there is a need to adjust the groups training. The players will identify with the drills over a period of time, and to alleviate boredom or complacency, simple competitions can enhance performance.

Implications to coaching these skills are dependent on many things including time, staff, resources and the coaching environment. If the coaches can identify the base level we can use this as a guide to challenge our players. There are a variety of drills and most can easily be adapted to the level of the players and varied according to the progression required or achieved. Simply adding or subtracting players can make the drill harder or easier. Changing the width and size of grids can lead to a more challenging and suitable outcome.

Summary

Coaching should be an enjoyable and rewarding experience. At the beginning it may be daunting but hopefully this document has given you a simple framework to assist you in planning your season, your sessions and assist clubs in setting up good personnel and infrastructure. This is by no means the only document on these subjects; research is wide and varied on all coaching, club administration areas. If you would like more information on setting up your coaching structures, or administering your junior club please consult the following websites which provide plenty of information.

Australian Rugby Union's Community Rugby website www.rugby.com.au

New Zealand Rugby Community Rugby website www.nzrugby.co.nz

In writing this document I have come to realize that I once was in your shoes - a volunteer, just as daunted by coaching the Under 13's as you, just as raw, just as enthusiastic. I was lucky to have a Club that was very supportive of my coaching goals and dreams. If those committees or mentors had not been so supportive I may not have been able to continue coaching for over 20 years.

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