

The PRINCIPLES of PLAYING good SEVENS

To play consistent and effective Sevens you first of all need the following in place;

(a) Specific Selection Criteria

Need to target 15s players who are suited to Sevens (pace for position, agility, vision, composure, excellent core skills ie catch and pass, tracking, 1 on 1 tackling technique, breakdown skills) I also think a certain attitude is reflective of a good Sevens player – that is a competitor who has a never give up attitude. Testing assists in selection – Speed, Beep Test, Speed Endurance.

(b) Stability in Selections

Crucial as it takes time and experience to play effective Sevens.

(c) Specific Fitness Base for Sevens

Another paper in itself, but speed endurance is the key. Players need to be able to run at maximum velocity for as long as possible throughout the 14 or 20 minutes. A very sound aerobic base is required and players need to be able to handle large volumes of running.

Once these issues have been addressed I believe the following **10 Principles** are the keys to having a winning Sevens Team. Every game should be assessed and measured against how the team and individual performed in each area. Unlike a game of 15s in 7s you can strive for the perfect game. If all the below points are performed well you are well on your way to winning a Sevens tournament.

(1) Win Primary Possession

Possession is the key to any Sevens performance. You need to hold the ball longer than the opposition. The 3 key sources of possession that are crucial are;

Scrum – an average of 3 scrums per game. Its crucial you win your own scrums and should strive to unsettle the oppositions ball

Lineout – keep simple and focus on lift and throw. Not many teams compete so should just have 2 man lift and throw to the front. A one man lift in defence can pilfer some ball or create a crooked throw.

Restarts – the largest source of primary possession. Restart policies and skills need to be worked on more than Scrums and Lineouts. A good kicker is crucial as is the timing and skill of the restart men

(2) Win Secondary Possession

Recycling any ball we take into contact is crucial. Ball Carrier and Support Player must be strong and do the core skill policies 100% correct. Most of it is strength and reactivity in contact/support. Opportunity also arise to pilfer opposition ball from the breakdown and this should also be a focus as a source of possession.

As fatigue or pressure sets in 50:50 ball on the deck becomes available. This is an easy source of possession and should be a focus to all players

(3) Ball Retention

Once we have the ball we must concentrate in our catch and pass and also as already mentioned at the breakdown. We should kick the ball away unless it is 100% that we will regather it or score from the kick.

A big focus needs to put on accuracy of catch and pass.

(4) Defence

The most effective structure to defend in 7s is a 6 man jockey line with a sweeper. As you are defending large amounts of space and usually numerous players with good speed you need a strong flat line with good spacing (ie pretty tight) If a team is playing width you must keep your spacing and jockey to the other side of the field. Players must be aware of tracking and watching the players back in front of you. A slight to heavy close the gate can be implemented once you herd a team to the sideline (but this takes a lot of experience and understanding to do well)

Once a player is in the right spot he then needs to make the tackle without relying on a teammate to assist. 1 on 1 technique is crucial with hit, stick and squeeze used as triggers. The defender can either go for the ball and wrap the player up or chop them down quickly trying to isolate them from the support (pilfer focus ie tackler gets to feet)

(5) Urgency to work off the ball

This does not mean run around like a headless chook, its means knowing where you should be (pocket, one of the 2 support players on ball carrier or working back for width and depth)

This needs a lot of awareness and communication (hence the first points on stability in selections)

No player is ever redundant in a game of Sevens!

(6) Communication

Talking in Sevens creates understanding in both attack and defence and needs to be practiced at training. Communication should be clear and composed not rushed and panicked.

(7) Discipline and Focus

The refereeing at IRB level is very strict. Yellow Cards (2 mins in the sin-bin) are handed out for anything even close to head high or late, off feet at breakdowns, deliberate breakdown offences, throwing the ball away and even not releasing the ball in tackle. Its crucial that when fatigue sets in and focus to get possession increases players are not being ill disciplined. Players need to listen to the referee and play smart.

(8) Width, Vision and Aggression of attack

In attack the ball needs to be a moving target and by playing with width it means the defence must start chasing hard, thus creating fatigue and hopefully some space to attack. Basic plays are the key. Get a defence chasing hard then strike back with simple dummy switches with hole running. Obviously natural footwork and pace are huge assets in attack but smart simple moves can also create space. Supporting a player who gets a break is also a focus.

The aggression side of things helps and attacker (and strength and smart running lines) as offloads are also very effective and even if an offload doesn't eventuate a ball carrier who needs 2 defenders to stop him – creates space from the ensuing ruck.

(9) Injury and Health Management

On tour it is very important that players' health and welfare issues are monitored. Long travel legs, lack of sleep and poor hydration and nutrition can lead to immune system break downs and a player with a cold or illness is a major hindrance in a sevens preparation. Rest, recovery and nutrition are crucial as players need to be fresh and feeling 100% to get through the nature of Sevens Tournaments (ie 6 games in 2 days)

I have found that if a player is not Sevens fit they will suffer from chin soreness and hamstring strains. Sevens requires a much larger running load than 15s and again the nature of training and game days put major strain on muscles. Its important medical staff and the management team know what loads the players can handle, it's a real balancing act. You need to train the players to fatigue to simulate a game – but at the same time you need to be aware to muscle fatigue and tightness. Its very important players are not leg heaving come the start of a tournament.

(10) Ability to work through 7s fatigue with vision and composure

When the Sevens fatigue sets in a player must be able to push through this and keep operating with vision and composure (ie still have quality in catch and pass, still be communicating and maintain decision making ability and vision) To do this it takes experience at working under fatigue in Tournaments and at training. Obviously the better conditioned athletes can do this better than the less prepared.

The above **10 principles** need to be addressed in all aspects of the Sevens preparation/training. To play quality Sevens all these aspects need to be perfected and this takes time, stability in selections allows players to be continually drilled in these areas.

