

EFFECTIVELY TRAINING FOR DYNAMIC PHASE PLAY

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Introduction

Dynamic Phase Play refers to the area of the game between a set piece ending and the ball becoming dead. The game elements involved in Dynamic Phase Play are:

- General play attack
- Ruck & Maul (Breakdown)
- General play defence
- Tackle contest

Traditionally coaches have neglected much of this area of the game in their training sessions. When it has been touched on, the individual game elements have often been coached in isolation to each other and in an environment that was unrealistic to a game situation and without learning progressions.

The objective of this paper is to highlight game situation activities as an effective training technique for dynamic phase play. Game situation activities allow the coach to:

1. Cover many different areas of Dynamic Phase Play in a short space of time
2. Teach players how to transfer their skills into game situations.
3. Target specific areas that require improvement and progress the skill through learning stages prior to team pattern training.
4. Improve decision making skills.
5. Create a realistic “match-like” training environment.

The key attributes to game situation training are as follows:

- The training activity commences with a game realistic start to each repetition such as receiving a clearing pass, receiving a kick or diving on a loose ball.
- Opposing players in contest – often physical contact is involved.
- Player’s actions in each repetition of the activity are only restricted by grid size, starting positions and number of players involved.
- Activities are outcome not process focused. Using correct technique is a method to achieving the outcome.

When a coach is constructing a training activity they should be aware of the players' current stage of learning in relation to the focus area. There are three stages of motor learning. These are:

- **Cognitive Stage** – Early or technique stage where the player can only execute the skill without additional variables and requires full concentration.
- **Associative Stage** – Intermediate stage where the player can complete the skill in an environment that has minimal variations such as time and movement.
- **Autonomous Stage** – Advanced stage where the skill is automatic and can be completed with variations and game situation decision making.

To enhance the learning experience, a coach should construct training activities that challenge a player to perform a skill at a learning stage slightly above their current ability.

Introductory Training for Dynamic Phase Play

Dynamic Phase Play involves many different individual skills being combined together to produce a passage of play. Due to the natural progressions of learning, it is difficult for players to successfully practice Dynamic Phase Play as a whole. It is essential for players to have mastered the individual components of Dynamic Phase Play before they attempt to effectively train for Dynamic Phase Play.

The Stages of Learning indicate that game situation activities would have to be modified for the practicing of the skills involved in Dynamic Phase Play. Game situation training does not have to involve decision making or physical movement for it to still have an effective outcome.

The table below lists some of the core skills involved in Dynamic Phase Play:

Table 1

Area	Core Skill
Breakdown	Primary Cleanout
	Secondary Cleanout
	Counter Rucking
Tackle	Ball Carry in Contact
	Tackle
	Jackal
Attack	Catch Pass
	Running to Space
Defence	Defensive Roles
	Defensive Patterns
	Tracking

Each of these core skills can be introduced and developed in players using game situation activities. These activities will assist both the attacker and the defender in their training.

Table 2 outlines some game situation activities that can assist in the development of core skills.

Table 2

Activity	Core Skills Covered	Description
1 attacker v 1 defender (two handed tag)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Running to space 2. Tracking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity grid replicates an attacking area around a breakdown. The activity commences when the ball is passed into the grid. • Attacker attempts to get past the defender into a designated area. • Defender attempts to tag the attacker prior to them reaching the designated area (denying space & time).
1 attacker v 1 defender (Close together starting position - contact)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bally carry in contact 2. Tackle 3. Jackal (progression) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Players start no further apart than 1.5m • Attacker to attempt to reach a specified point beyond the defender. • Defender attempts to prevent the attacker from reaching that point. • Repetition is only finished once the tackle is complete or the attacker has reached the specified point. <p><u>Variation 1:</u> Defender to start on one knee to restrict movement.</p> <p><u>Variation 2:</u> Defender to attempt to jackal the ball after the tackle is complete.</p>
3 attackers v 2 defenders (full contact)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ball Carry in Contact 2. Tackle 3. Jackal 4. Primary Support 5. Secondary Support 6. Counter Rucking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activity grid replicates an attacking area around a breakdown. • Starting positions of each player is set. The starting positions will determine their roles in the repetition of the activity. • Attacker has no passing option. • Attacker attempts to gain as much ground as possible as well as re-cycle the ball as quickly as possible. Supporters assist in re-cycling the ball as quickly as possible. • Defenders attempt to tackle the ball carrier and recapture the ball (tracking & jackal). • Repetition finishes when phase is complete.

Each of the above activities has been designed to target specific core skills. The activities are game situation focused with the grid structures and the starting positions replicating real

match scenarios. The variables of starting position, activity space and number of players can be manipulated to enhance specific focus areas. Each repetition is continued until an outcome has been achieved.

Each activity's objectives should be clearly highlighted. Correct technique should be advised as a method to assist in achieving the activities goals. Feedback and questioning should be provided to players after each repetition. Questioning of the player for reasons why the repetition was successful or unsuccessful creates a "self-learning" environment and stimulates improvement in advised technique.

Combining the Game Elements of Dynamic Phase Play

For players to automatically execute their core skills in a match they need to undergo a comprehensive transfer process. This can be done by combining isolated areas of Phase Play to make larger, more complex activities that involve several core skills.

Increasing player numbers to an activity is usually the simplest method to including more game elements of phase play. This automatically increases the roles that are available to be filled. For example increasing the attacking player numbers to a contest activity will allow the attacking team to fill lateral supporting roles as well as the existing primary and secondary supporting roles. This will in turn give the ball carrier a passing option if needed and convert the activity to incorporate attack, defence and breakdown.

Table 3 shows some examples of some combination activities:

Table 3

Activity	Focus Area	Description
5 attackers v 3 defenders	Standard Attack Focus	A basic level of activity that combines all areas of phase play together. As per most game situation activities, the grid area resembles that around a break down and is started with the ball being cleared from a mock ruck. Attackers can only attack in a specified area. Each repetition is finished once the ball has been won from the following breakdown or the attackers have broken through the defence line (which ever occurs first). Although this activity focuses more on attack (due to the imbalance in numbers) it also covers defence, tackle and breakdown.
5 attackers v 5 defenders	Breakdown Focus Variation	Two extra defenders assemble behind the initial defensive line as "floating" defenders to fill in the gaps. This will strengthen the depth of the defence and inturn increase the chances of a breakdown occurring. This allows the coach to apply more emphasis on the breakdown and the roles associated with it, while still covering all other areas.
5 attackers v 6 defenders	Ruck Defence Variation	Defending players assemble in their specified defensive positions around the breakdown prior to the repetition starting (e.g. Pillar, Post, Key etc). Attackers are allowed to attack both sides of the ruck (including scrum half running). This variation allows the coach to focus more on defensive roles in phase defence.

There are many more variations for these activities that allow the coach to focus on specific areas of dynamic phase play while still incorporating other game elements. This type of training challenges the player in decision making and combining core skills, but still allows them the refuge of only working in short bursts and not having to combine passages of play together.

Dynamic Phase Play – Transition to Match Practice

This type of training usually occurs late in the periodised plan when teams are entering their peaking phase of preparation. It becomes effective when players have mastered their core skills and can automatically combine them together to execute various roles. The challenge for the players will be to execute tactical options such as team patterns and plays while still being effective with their core skills.

The activities are usually more continuous than less complex game situation activities and involve more players. An example of which is as follows:

Table 4

Activity	Focus Area	Description
2 x 4 attackers v 5 defenders	attacking pattern focus	Full contact. Phases are continued until the ball is captured by the defensive team or the coach is satisfied that the attackers have achieved their pattern goals. After the first group of four have attacked and recycled the ball, the second group prepare to receive the ball and continue play. The attacking teams endeavour to use their team phase options and overall team patterns to penetrate the defensive line. The defensive team defend using their usual defensive roles and patterns.
2 x 3 attackers v 7 defenders	defensive pattern focus	Semi-opposed breakdowns. Similar to the activity above, phases are continued until the coach is satisfied that the defenders have achieved their pattern goals. The semi-opposed breakdowns and 2 groups of attackers ensure the attack can continue while 7 defenders provide sufficient numbers to be on hand.

Other variations for this type of training are reliant on the number of players available and the amount of field space available. The fullest extent of this type of training is an opposed training run between two teams. Some coaches opt for protective suits to be worn while running this type of activity to minimise injury. The activity can mirror match like exertion times and field positions if needed.

Conclusion

Using game situation training activities can assist a coach in gaining some large improvements from their players in the Dynamic Phase Play aspect of rugby. They initially require a little more time to set up the training area due to grid size and starting positions needing to be precise, but this time can be recuperated with dual game elements being covered in one activity.

If injury from body contact is an issue then protective suits are an option. However, some coaches believe that these suits restrict too much movement in players and in turn could increase the injury risk.

The success of this type of training is reliant on the restrictions a coach applies to the activity area. The variables of space, player numbers and starting positions will determine what roles the players will fulfil during each repetition of the activity. Players must also be clear on their objectives for each repetition of the activity (e.g. break through the defensive line; re-cycle as quickly as possible; or recapture the ball). This will allow the coach to offer advice on technique or tactical decisions while the player self-learns through success or failure.

Game situation training gives coaches a viable time efficient option to coach the much neglected aspect of rugby, Dynamic Phase Play. Scrums, lineouts, backs starters, team runs and individual skill drills are the norm for many coaches to include in their sessions. Appropriate game situation training included into the session will see dramatic improvements in the team's dynamic phase play attack and defence and in turn show improvements on the scoreboard on match day.