

# Elements to Recruitment

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## Introduction

At all levels, recruitment in rugby has grown in the past 5-10 years. We'll investigate the factors of what has impacted the surge in recruitment.

Recruiting the right person to your team is crucial. The best way of doing that remains to be challenging. We recruit in different ways and for the most part it is influenced by the environment we're in.

The impact of recruitment has varying return in on-field results and varying impact in off-field aspects where you would want recruited players to influence. Having a process to recruiting can minimise the surprise factor of unknown negatives that recruited players bring into the team.

The growth and opportunity in recruitment has also seen a rise in Player Agents who push players, CVs onto you almost daily.

Clubs and organisations have philosophies around recruitment. For example, the below from The Gap Football Club [1]

*Our philosophy is to:*

- *promote from within where possible*
- *encourage and support players who wish to move to a higher league outside of our club*
- *only recruit players externally when a clear need to do so can be demonstrated, **and***
- *there are no internal options available, **and***
- *the player can fill a position we need, **and***
- *they are of the right character that aligns with our club culture and expectations, **and***
- *their parent(s)/guardian(s) will align with our club culture and expectations.*

In this paper I will report on the different elements that would impact recruitment decisions through the lens of a coach or club. The levels I will focus on will be from Shute Shield (semi semi-professional) to Super Rugby (professional).

## The surge in recruitment – Why?

### Social Media

There is no doubt that social media has had the biggest influence in the ease players, coaches and clubs can access talent from all parts of the world. Before YouTube, Instagram and Facebook, word of mouth required trust without footage or evidence of the player for the club to see.

Social Media allows players and player agents to market the talent within seconds to include vision, which acts as evidence for recruitment purposes. The ease in which social media allows this has also seen a surge in player agents. There's now a level of player agent which now no longer requires an agent to meet with the player. It's all done through social media introduction then straight into the sell.

### Pathway

Another angle to the surge in recruitment is said here by an accredited and respected Player Agent in Australia:

*"I think pathways for young players have changed so much in the last 5-10 years. So many more young players are open to quality programs in Japan, France, and UK to help them develop. It used to be the Waratahs Academy or bust for young boys. Now they're moving around the globe to find the right development pathway for them."*

The above lends itself to the ease in which players can move "around the globe" in search for the best program/pathway for them.

### Increased Money in Overseas Market

Player wages have increased with the increase of club salary cap. Super Rugby salary caps have increased from \$4.1M in 2012 to \$5.5M as it is currently. That is a \$1.4M increase in 10 years. In the UK Premiership over the same period their salary cap has risen from £4M in 2012 to £6.4M in 2020.

The increased money in major markets will demand more recruitment options. Purely through clubs wanting the best talent for their spend. Big money offers = more recruitment opportunities. More money in the salary cap = potential opening of more spots. \$1M could mean one major signing or it could mean 3-5 new lower paid players.

## ELEMENTS TO RECRUITMENT

After identifying the need to recruit due to roster demands tied in with game model to get the right player, I will investigate what elements would go into a recruitment decision.

- You need to recruit what you NEED. Having a clear game model or philosophy around how you want to play gives you clarity in the type of player you need. This is tied in with what skills you need to execute game plan, what type of body shape you need for collisions, what position group you must have depth in.

### **What level you are recruiting at / for**

- a. Colts.
- b. Academy.

Both levels above require an eye for the future. Recruiting into these two categories with the aim to develop the player into a genuine 1<sup>st</sup> Grade or Professional player means identifying a player who will peak in performance in the future as opposed to being the product at the present.

Recruitment for certain positions might mean that the recruited player isn't presently playing the position you have recruited him for.

*Case: Props*

Several professional props grow up playing in the backrow or even in the backs.

A big powerful wide hipped backrower, centre at schoolboy level could end up a world class Prop. What affects the change in position? Growth in height, change in body shape.

Having an eye for what you're looking for deeper than what's on the surface is beneficial for you down the track and can save you recruitment time and finances on recruiting with a forward-thinking mind.

### **Players Age**

*Future vs immediate.*

The 1-year contract vs the 3 to 5-year prospect.

Do you gamble on the older player who is comp hardened for 1 year or go with the slightly younger less experienced options but lock the player in for a few years?

The gamble on the older player for 1 year might mean you're back in the market again in 6-10 months time looking for the same position. This takes time and resources. Could also end up being a more costly operation.

The gamble on the younger, less experienced player is that you most likely won't get the return on investment in the initial year. Year 1 might be spent getting the player up to speed.

*Things to consider:*

1. What is your club's objective – win now, win in 2 years. Do you have time? This will give you clarity on what you go with above.
2. Other options might not exist at the time. Whilst there's a slight gamble on both old-bull and young-buck; they each might be the only or best option available. You're in the market for a young player to develop but there's only mature aged players

available. Other side of that is you need a mature older head to steer or contribute to what is already a young

### **Star Player v Role Player – “Moneyball”**

**Star Player:** Your marquee player. The player you’ll build your team around or the player who’ll contribute most to your on-field success.

These types of players usually come at a bigger financial cost given their reputation and demand from other teams.

There could be some strain on club resources to gather everything that’s needed for this player to join. Semi-professional teams can be blinded by the name and over promise, under deliver on what they can provide.

**Role Player:** The glue of the team. You’ll need this player to fulfill a few different roles but is key to the team’s success due to a specific skillset around facilitating around the star player. There seems to be a more manageable financial rate for the role player. But the role player doesn’t always give you that punch needed in the big games that you might be looking for.

Understanding the differences above is vital for your team’s cohesion.

#### *Things to consider:*

1. You might already have your star player. That player might take up majority of ‘the room’ meaning there’s no real need or room for that matter for another big personality, most of your budget is used already so you might not have the means for another Star Player.
2. Too many role players, do you need x-factor in your team? Whilst the notion of a team full of workers is great, there might be some room to add x-factor into the squad or a big-time player who can steer the ship of workers.
3. Using relevant stats, data, and vision to compliment your summation of a player can alter what you are getting against what you are spending. The ‘Moneyball’ affect. You recruit based on data, rather than perception and reputation that build up characters in the market.

Both player types can win you championships now and into the future. But knowing which one to go for to align with what your team needs is important. Too many of one and not enough for the other is the potential imbalance in recruitment if you don’t consider the big picture when at the recruitment table.

### **Salary Cap**

Most semi-professional & professional competitions run to a salary cap. The cap is there to even the competition. Looking at most competitions there is a clear unevenness that sits in each competitions ladder. It’s not as tight as you would think. This also come down to mismanaged salary cap or a bad run with recruitment. We will focus this part on the salary cap element of recruitment.

The salary cap or even the budget for recruitment handed to you by your Board is the element.

How do you mismanage the salary cap to affect the roster?

- Paying players too much above their market value. Meaning you have less money to spend on positions that you need.
- Spending for 'wants' rather than 'needs'. Ties in with your game model. What is your team missing and what do they need.

Things to consider:

1. Do you spend 100% of your budget to recruit before the season starts? Does this leave you thin if you pick up midseason injuries which puts pressure on your depth? This strategy might mean you leaving available players on the table to save finances for midseason injuries.
2. Does your current year's budget include any previous year spending due to agreements? Knowing and having a clear understanding of what your actual spending budget looks like is an art. Given there are so many ways players current wage doesn't always sit nicely into the years budget. Sometimes you might have to continue paying a player who isn't currently on your team due to previous agreements on his contract.

*“Navigating a salary cap in professional sports can be a gruelling and hazardous journey, as General Managers bid against one another is the pursuit of championship talent. The opportunity cost of bad decisions in free agency can have devastating consequences, that can eventually sink even the most successful dynasties.” [2]*

### **Players Injury History**

Injury history allows a window into how much maintenance (rehabilitation) work you'll have to allow for a player.

A history of constant injuries to different parts of the body might mean there's room for the player to bullet proof his body a little better to cope with the demands of training and game.

A history of a constant injury to a body part like a knee, shoulder, ankle might mean that the specific body part is no longer able to cope with the stress of the games needs.

Having your own screening process to assess the players body or specific injury/body part is a way you can bullet proof your recruitment process.

The process for screening

Are they currently playing?	No > Yes >	Why? Next question...
Are they able to train without restriction?	No > Yes >	Why? Player is injury free
What impact does the injury have to their ability to train?	How many days will they be able to train without aggravating a chronic injury?	
Chronic Injury	Will it get worse over time?	
Non-chronic injury	Bullet proofing needed	

## Off Field

A big part piece of the puzzle.

Is what you're getting in going to contribute to the greater cause off the field.

You're recruiting the perfect picture – Plays well, contributes well, represents your club to the highest standard and makes others around them better.

What type of character or behaviours do you need for the team to function well off the field?

- Extra skills
- Recovery
- Representing the club (optics)
- Standards

### Case Study: Sonny Bill Williams recruitment to the Sydney Roosters (NRL)

*"From the start when Sonny came in, he taught us a lot of stuff about being professional and how to do things on the field," Roosters veteran Mitchell Aubusson said. "Then we took some stuff that he did off the field as well and the young guys need to fit in with that, with how you have to behave otherwise you get weeded out here.*

*Not anymore. Again, call it a coincidence, but instead of getting snapped outside nightclubs, Roosters halfback Mitchell Pearce has been spotted doing regular hot yoga sessions, along with teammates Waerea-Hargreaves and Shaun Kenny-Dowall.*

*The reason? SBW. An athlete who makes it cool not to get on the booze, instead advocating drinking green tea as an alternative to coffee and doing extras inside the fully equipped gym inside his home. "Sonny's not someone who goes around pulling people aside and wanting to have a word to them. In his time away from the game he clearly discovered exactly what works for him as an athlete and he simply endorses that with his actions," Robinson said.*

*"To be perfectly frank, he's had an even bigger influence on the club than what I expected," Roosters chairman Nick Politis said.*

*"Not only by lifting the standards across the board due to his level of professionalism, but as a person he's just a great example of how to live your life.*

*"Sonny genuinely cares about people and ultimately he cares about the team and the club. That's a unique characteristic and one I haven't come across too often in rugby league." [3]*

Above shows you the influence a recruitment selection can have on your rugby team or the rugby program. Taking personality and character traits of a player into account can influence others to perform better on field. The value of one can multiply if the recruited player can have that influence as the case study above showed.

## Conclusion

Building your team requires recruitment at some point. You can build a recruitment philosophy like stated earlier in the paper from The Gap Football Club [1] or follow your own process to recruiting.

What a recruiting philosophy or a full proof element consideration gives you, is a defined path to finding your player with all things considered.

What you want is a recruit that walks in the door with no surprises and greatly contributes to winning games. Either directly on-field or indirectly through off-field behaviours.

What you don't want is to recruit without a process. This could lead to players walking in

Key elements to recruiting.

- Understand the Level/Team you're recruiting into.
- Players Age.
- Type of Player: Star vs Role, linked to salary or budget.
- Salary Cap / Recruitment Budget.
- Injury History.
- Off Field influence.

*"It is easy to neglect best practice in recruitment, not only because it is tempting to think we don't have sufficient time, but also because we like to make decisions based on what feels intuitively right."*

[4]

One last thought for decision makers to think about before this process starts – what type of people, what type of player is your team or organisation attracting. Sometimes the best or easiest way to recruit is to have a product that attracts the type of players you look for.