

# ARU LEVEL THREE



## DEVELOPING THE EDGE IN PLAYERS AND COACHES



KANE JURY

ASSIGNMENT 13

## **DEVELOPING THE EDGE IN PLAYERS AND COACHES**

**"The opponent in your head is more daunting than the one the other side of the net."**

Wouldn't it be great if all the players felt 100% physically and mentally before game? I could not imagine too many coaches have the luxury of this. The players need to feel they can make an impact on the game and be ready "all cylinders firing." I am going to give you my thoughts on how to develop the edge in players and how we as coaches can influence that and need to develop the edge too.

From people I have been in contact with through conferences, courses and one on one chats I find they all seem to echo the same thing: that the player must excel in managing their own self.

It sounds pretty easy doesn't it? In everyday life we make simple decisions that will affect our life, eating, drinking, sleeping etc. You have a decision to make, either do it or don't, each with its own positive and negative consequence. It's the same with rugby. Players have the choice on how good they can be. Each decision they make having a positive or negative consequence. And I am not just talking about the decisions they make during trainings or games, but also the decisions they make off the field too.

If you train hard and stick to your goals surely this means you will be a successful player. I am sure most people would agree that it is the small things that you do right which will make a huge difference. For example; eating right, stretching, turning up on time, asking questions and being focused at training are some of the small things you need to do right to develop the edge. It all seems so easy, but it is not.

Players should think of and apply this quote:

**"No one in the world prepares and trains as well as I do."**

If they can think this, and follow through with conviction, then they are on the right road to developing the edge. So why do players find this difficult? Quite simply- our players have never really been coached to do this at a young age.

What is managing own self? (I got this from the New Zealand Curriculum and re-worded it to adapt to a rugby environment) It is associated with self-motivation, a "can-do" attitude, and with players willing to be learners. Players who manage themselves are enterprising, reliable, and resilient. They establish personal goals, make plans, self-assess and set high standards. They have strategies for challenges. They know when to lead, when to follow, and when and how to act independently.

How do we as coaches develop this in our players? As you can imagine it is quite a challenging task, however, what you can do is make them aware of it and give them the stepping-stones to become good at it.

Again, these are my thoughts on developing the edge in players and you may not necessarily agree, but this is how I believe it can be achieved. Firstly ask, what is your dream? What is your ultimate goal? At first you will find players that will not know. It is a classic situation that either they do not want to tell you their dream, as it could be something they are embarrassed about sharing. Also, they do not really believe they can achieve it or they have never really thought about (which is a lie). Once we can get this out of them we need to value his/her dream and do as much as possible to help them achieve this and start to build their self-confidence.

It is very important that we create the right environment for the players to achieve their dream or goal. Here are some of my thoughts:

- Give the athletes the opportunity to experience their limits
- Encourage the right choices
- Take each athlete out of their comfort zones
- Decision Making under pressure and fatigue
- Basic Core skills
- Strive for excellence in each individual
- Help, congratulate, and listen.
- Be prepared to stand back and trust player's ability and let them do their job.
- Talk to them about things outside of rugby. You do not need to be their best friend but you should know who they are, where they come from and what makes them who they are.

As a coach you need the players to “buy in” to managing their own selves and be committed to it. A survey was done on Olympic athletes and these are the four qualities they wanted their coaches to have:

- Integrity
- Fairness
- Honesty
- Moral Courage

You would have to agree that an athlete will really only listen to a coach that they respect, they may not necessarily agree with them all the time, but they respect their expertise and demeanour. Coaches must gain this respect from their players. I know I have a couple of coaches that I never really listened to because they never had those four qualities, if any. The ones that did though I sat back and tried to hang onto their every word.

Successful New Zealand Sevens Coach , Gordon Tietjens, is a firm believer in making trainings harder than games and putting his players in high pressure situations. He is training the players to be mentally tough and make decisions in high pressure situations when the body wants to give up. Just look at the amount of quality players that have been coached by him and the outstanding results his teams have achieved. Every player that went into his camps wanted to impress him. I was told not so long ago from a former senior player that even he had to start with a clean slate with him at the start of every camp. He had to prove himself to Gordon all over again. And he wanted too.

Robbie Deans is a coach that keeps things very simple, nothing really fancy. He speaks clearly and gets straight to the point. He wants all the players to make decisions on the field and back themselves. Robbie loves the traditions and culture, with whatever team he coaches, and makes sure he gets his players to understand them and that they are part of it. This is a coach that takes pride in his coaching, players and team.

Both men are coaches who want the absolute best from their players and know exactly how to get it. They take pride in what they do and demand the same thing from themselves too. Players respond to this and want to work hard for these two coaches.

As a coach you must have knowledge of the game, know your players, listen to players concerns, practise what you preach, acknowledge all players are very important to your team and so on. If you want to implement “managing self”, then we as coaches must also want to develop the edge and be one step ahead of everybody else.

My challenge to you would be to try and find a coach who knows everything about their sport. I bet you will have a very hard time and I am sure Robbie and Gordon would agree. Rugby especially, is radically changing; with the new Experimental Law Variation’s coming in, players physically developing quicker and playing top level rugby at a younger age. Coaches need to be thinking of other ways that will give their own coaching and team the edge.

Coaches must have the same drive as the players to develop the edge. We need to have dreams as well and be committed to them regardless of how many times we fail. The secret to success is failure - getting up and learning from your mistakes. Leading sports performance expert Wayne Goldsmith mentions being a “futurist” and thinking about new innovative ways of accelerating in your sport. He emphasises to coaches to “dare to be different” and stay committed to this. Also, always be keen to learn off other coaches, sports and even players.

He outlines that maybe the big motivational speeches that are made before games, are not really what the players need. Lots of coaches think they need to come up with something inspirational all the time to motivate their players and get that edge before kick off. I have done this before trying to “fire up” up the team and when I look around at the players some are listening but most of them are not. Different approaches for different players. There is a time and place for motivational talks and videos but not all the time. The reality is that the players are they only ones who can motivate themselves – through

personal goals or dreams. Getting the players to be committed to their personal goals and how they should play is what we really need to get across to them. They should be self-motivated and ready to perform at their best before kick off.

**Conclusion:**

I cannot really tell you from my own personal experience whether or not that this is the right way, maybe I can tell you in a year or so. However, this is how I have interpreted what people have told me, or I have read, and I think is the way forward for coaches at all levels and especially at a high school age. The sooner the players realise what their dream is the sooner they will become committed to doing their absolute best. Not everyone will want to represent their country or be a professional rugby player but as soon as they do, they need to manage their own self and be prepared for the ups and downs. It will not be easy, in fact, it will probably be one of the hardest things to do. Reaching your dream does not happen very often and I know this for a fact. I was never coached to be a self-starter or realise that my dreams were actually possible. As a young player my practices were predominately coach driven and not player centred.

Rugby is an unpredictable game for players and coaches, however, these areas they can control; personal goals, make plans, self-assess, set high standards, strategies for challenges, when to lead, when to follow, and when and how to act independently. If you can get your players to develop these areas and feel confident about themselves, then you are well on your way to developing the edge in your players. So before the game has even been kicked off, you will have players that are committed and self motivated to play to the absolute best of their ability. As for coaches, they need to manage themselves and be prepared to be innovative by always trying to be one step ahead of everyone else.