

Coach Handbook

Community Coaches – 13+

COACH



This handbook provides participation coaches of youth and adult players (13s+) with the knowledge to create and maintain positive coaching environments for their players.



Foreword

Welcome to the world of coaching! Thank you and congratulations for volunteering your time to help develop and nurture the next generation of our Rugby League community.

This is an exciting time for our game as we embark on a new era for Rugby League participation and talent development with the introduction of the Player Development Framework.

Our vision is to ensure that Rugby League is a sport for Australians of all ages, abilities and aspirations. We provide a sense of community by connecting people and offering everyone the opportunity to realise their full potential.

You hold the key to unlocking this potential by fostering an environment of inclusion, confidence, and a sense of community that develops camaraderie, respect, self-esteem, patience, dedication, teamwork, selflessness and resilience.

Don't underestimate the impact you can have on a child's life, not only as Rugby League players, but more importantly as people. Children can learn so much about life through sport, and as a coach you have the ability to influence them well into their adult lives. I look back with many fond memories on the Coaches who influenced me over the years and who have helped me become the person I am today.

It's because of this I want to encourage you to take in the information within this course, it's this information that will help you create an environment the kids can develop in and will see them create their own memories about the impact you've had on them. For me, this is enormously rewarding, and I hope you feel the same satisfaction as I do when you see the kids in your team developing as Rugby League players and people.

Good luck and enjoy the experience.
Yours in Rugby League



Mal Meninga
Head Coach - Australian Kangaroos

Acknowledgement

The NRL would like to acknowledge the contribution, and guidance from our friends at the School of Human Movement and Nutrition Sciences, University of Queensland (UQ), in particular Professor Cliff Mallett, Dr Stephen Rynne and Mr Bob Crudgington.



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The Player Development Framework

The Player Development Framework (PDF) provides Rugby League a set of guidelines that will enable the game to prosper by offering age appropriate participation and development opportunities.

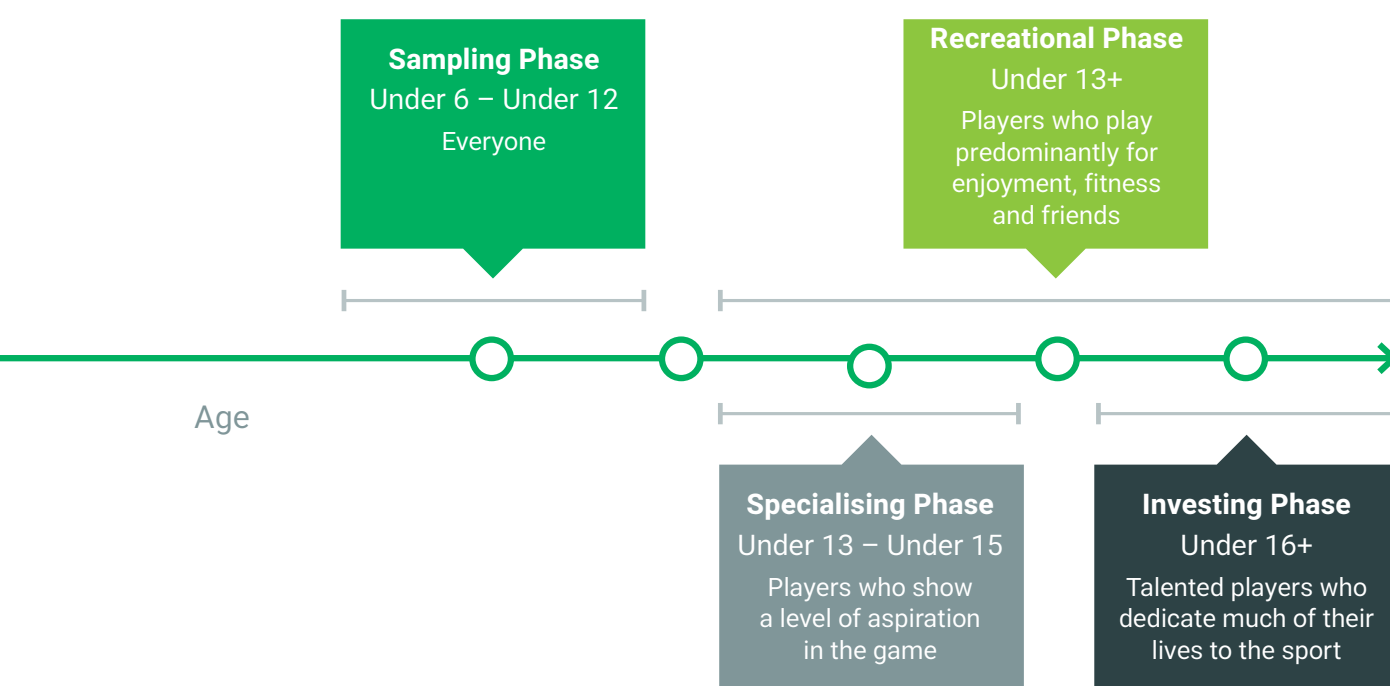
The objectives of the framework are to:

- › Attract and Retain Participation
- › Foster Personal Development
- › Transition and Nurture Performance

These objectives will be achieved in a coaching context by endeavouring to **offer appropriate settings** (specific to age, ability or aspiration of players), **develop quality relationships** (with players, parents and stakeholders), **and ensure maximum engagement in activities** (so every player gets ample opportunity to be involved).

If the framework is delivered effectively, players will develop stronger **Connections** (with coaches, team mates and the game of Rugby League), **Confidence** (in their team and club environment and their ability), **Character** (by becoming happy, healthy, positive members of society) and **Competence** (improving physical, technical and tactical skills). This will strengthen the Rugby League Community and encourage life-long involvement in the sport.

Throughout this handbook, you will be provided with the information that will help you develop the skills to achieve these objectives and therefore contribute to the future of the game and the players under your care.



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Overview of the Players



Why do young people play sport?

Coaches are encouraged to understand why their players play sport in the first place. This knowledge will allow their beliefs and actions to align with the players motivations.

The most common reasons young people participate in sport are:

- › To enjoy themselves and have fun
- › To develop friendships and feel accepted
- › To learn new skills and be physically active

Research into youth sports participation indicates that competing is important and winning is enjoyable. However, it is not the players primary reasons for participating. As coaches, you need to factor this in when designing your coaching environment.

Everyone plays sport to have FUN! Your challenge as a coach is to understand what fun looks like to them.

Reasons why adolescents stop playing sport

When coaches place an over-emphasis on winning, it leads to undesirable behaviours as they inappropriately apply high performance coaching principles in a participation setting. Research indicates that the main reasons they drop out is:

- › Their contribution isn't valued
- › Too much emphasis on winning
- › Lack of playing time
- › Pressure to progress too quickly
- › The coach shows favouritism



What Makes Sport Fun?

It is a well-known fact that people play sport to have fun. Enjoyment is the primary motivator for people to play sport at all ages. However, fun can have a different meaning depending on the age and development stage of the players.

There are some key areas that contribute to sport being fun for players at this stage of development. Coaches should be aware of these and ensure they provide an experience that meets the needs of the players.

This is a summary of what makes it FUN for the players:

- › They always receive positive coaching
- › They are learning, improving, and trying hard
- › They have great friendships in the team
- › They have the opportunity to play
- › They are supported by coaches, teammates, and family
- › They enjoy training activities that help them learn
- › They like doing social activities as a team

Reference:

Visek AJ, Achmati SM, Mannix HM, McDonnell K, Harris BS, DiPietro L. The fun integration theory: toward sustaining children and adolescents sport participation. *J Phys Act Health*. 2015;12(3):424–433. PubMed doi:10.1123/jpah.2013-0180




“I like learning
new skills”

“I like it when my
coach takes an
interest in me as
a person”

In their own words:

“I like it when we
have team social
activities”



A person's arm and hand are visible on the left side of the page, holding a white Powerade water bottle. The bottle has a black label with the word "POWERADE" in white capital letters. The background is a solid teal color.

“ I like staying
healthy and fit ”

“ I like playing
games at training ”

“ I like it when my
team mates all help
each other ”

“ I like trying
my best ”

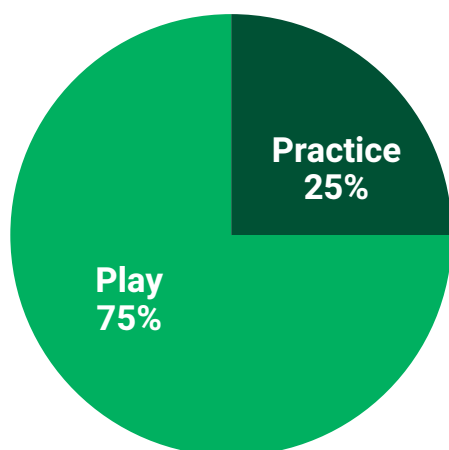
“ I like the feeling
I get when we train
and play games ”

“ I like being part
of the team ”

“ I like it when my
coach recognises
when I try hard
and improve ”

Creating the Right Environment

At each stage of development, players should engage in age-appropriate activities to optimise their enjoyment and development. The players you are coaching are at a stage of development where there is more of a focus on formal training and competition. Effectively, the balance between **deliberate play** and **deliberate practice** adjusts as they develop.



6-12



13+

If an appropriate balance between deliberate practice and deliberate play isn't applied or Coaches try to apply high performance coaching principles in a recreational setting it can have a negative effect on the players experiences and ultimately lead to low levels on enjoyment and engagement. To combat this, coaches are encouraged to challenge and support their players.

Deliberate play is intrinsically motivating, designed to maximise fun and enjoyment and provide immediate gratification. It often requires minimal equipment, is flexible and allows participants to experiment with rules, tactics, participant sizes and ages. (Bayley et al., 2010. Cote et al., 2009).

Deliberate practice is a highly structured activity that requires effort, generates no immediate rewards, and is motivated by the goal of improving performance rather than inherent enjoyment. (Cote et al., 2009).

Types of Motivation

Coach behaviour fosters different forms and quality of motivation that subsequently have the potential to influence how players think, feel, and act.

To develop players that are highly motivated, determined, and invested, coaches are encouraged to create an environment that provides player the opportunity to make autonomous decisions, develop competence, and feel connected to others.

There are three types of motivation:

Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation is when we engage in an activity because it is personally rewarding. It means that we don't need an external reward to want to do something like play Rugby League. Essentially, playing Rugby League is a reward in itself.

Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation occurs when we are motivated to perform a behaviour or engage in an activity to earn a reward or avoid punishment. For example, a player doesn't participate in Rugby League because they enjoy it or because they find it satisfying. They participate in order to get something in return or avoid something unpleasant.

Amotivation

Players are amotivated when they are neither intrinsically nor extrinsically motivated. When players are in such a state, they no longer identify any good reasons for why they continue to train or play. Eventually, they may even decide to stop playing all together.

Why is intrinsic motivation important?

Taking part in sport for 'intrinsic motivation reasons' are seen as the significant determinant to sport persistence and performance (Vallerand and Rosseau, 2001).

You will coach players with different levels of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, this is ok. The role of the coach is to create an environment that helps players develop higher levels of intrinsic motivation.

Players who have higher levels of intrinsic motivation in a **supportive environment** are more likely to:

1. Have an enhanced self-worth
2. Show increased effort
3. Have greater levels of persistence
4. Display greater performance

On the other hand, if coaches adopt a **controlling environment**, players are more likely to experience decreasing levels of motivation. This can lead to:

1. Increased dropout
2. Decreased well-being
3. Increased anxiety
4. Fear of failure
5. Poorer performance

What are the benefits of playing sport?

Coaching is about more than just teaching people how to play Rugby League. There are a range of benefits that sport can provide young people. These benefits extend further than just the development of skills. Coaches can positively impact the overall development of each player and enrich their lives both on and off the field by providing an environment that fosters the **4 C's** which are **Competence, Confidence, Connection**, and **Character**.

“The ultimate indicator of an effective coach is their ability to consistently contribute to the development of these attributes in their players”

Competence

Competence is a player's perception of their ability within the technical, tactical and physical skills of Rugby League. Players who have higher perception of their competence have reported to have greater:

- › Intrinsic motivation
- › Higher levels of achievement
- › Positive self-esteem, effort, and persistence
- › Higher levels of happiness
- › Lower levels of anxiety

Coaches should also be aware that players may feel competent in some areas of life and not others. For example, a player may feel competent as a Rugby League player but may not feel competent at school or in social settings.

How is competence developed?

Coaches can help develop competence by;

1. Using age appropriate activities in their sessions (Deliberate Play/Practice)
2. Ensure coaches, peers, and parents provide positive recognition
3. Focus feedback and recognition on effort and improvement
4. Be supportive, rather than controlling

Confidence

Confidence is the internal sense of overall positive self-worth and confidence to 'have a go'. It has also been described as the degree of certainty individuals possess about their ability to be successful.

How does confidence develop?

Physical appearance and social acceptance have the biggest effect on adolescent's self-confidence. So, it is critical that the environment fosters a culture of social acceptance and intolerance of negative comments on a player's physical appearance.

Creating a positive learning environment will also help promote confidence by allowing players autonomy and a supportive environment to improve.

Here are four ways you can help players with their confidence.

1. Encourage your players to learn from their mistakes and not fear the idea of failure.

Young players need to have the opportunity to be creative and try new things. If coaches are overly negative when a player makes a mistake, it can lead to feelings of low self-esteem, which can prevent the player from excelling.

2. Make sure players are appropriately challenged.

It's important for coaches to modify activities to suit the age and level of the player. If activities are too challenging, it will affect their confidence. On the other hand, if the activities are too simple and aren't challenging enough, then players may become bored.

3. Focus on Effort and Improvement

Avoid comparing players to their peers and encourage players to focus on their own improvement. There are many variables such as age, size and experience which are out of their control.

4. Practice, Practice, Practice

The most effective way to improve a player's confidence, is by helping them to improve their competence. When a player feels positive about their ability to contribute to the team, their confidence will increase, as will their performance

Coaches are encouraged to ensure they offer age-appropriate training programs that allow the players the chance to develop their physical, technical and tactical skills.



Connection

Connection is a sense of belonging and feeling of being valued within the team, club, and Rugby League community through positive relationships with coaches, team mates, and officials.

How is connection developed?

Coaches can help develop connection by supporting their players and actively working on developing a positive relationship with them. Peer relationships are also very influential. Coaches are encouraged to focus on creating opportunities for players in the team to develop social skills both inside and outside the sport setting.

Character

Character is the development of morals, integrity, and sportsmanship. Sport is a great setting for character development, however it can easily have the opposite effect if the wrong environment is created.

How is character developed?

Players will learn good character if the coach:

- › Creates moral norms in the group
- › Displays pro-social behaviour
- › Encourages players to control emotions and display good sportsmanship



Growth, Maturation, and Age Effects

There is a growing catalogue of literature on the effects of age, growth and maturation in both academic and sporting contexts. This research indicates that the more mature (physically and emotionally) an individual is within a peer group, the more success they are likely to experience.

It is important for coaches to understand that all players mature and develop at different rates. This early development also leads to advantages in size, speed, strength and endurance. When we think of these advantages in a Rugby League context, this results in a pretty significant advantage for these individuals. In sports like ours, it's extremely common for coaches to assume that early bloomers are the most talented. This means that the more mature players are sometimes favoured by their coach over the late developers or younger members of the team. This can result in the late developers becoming discouraged and dropping out of the sport.

The sad truth is that these children are not necessarily 'less talented' but may just be disadvantaged due to the later onset of puberty and maturation. Very often these kids don't just turn away from Rugby League but drop out of sport altogether.

As a coach, your ability to create an environment, that fosters positive development, is largely dependent on your understanding of the needs of each individual in your team. Ultimately you will need to create an age and stage appropriate environment that is enjoyable, challenging, and is highly supportive.

To be able to do this effectively, coaches of adolescents should have a good understanding of the changes in physical and psychological development of the players, which develop rapidly through these age groups. Whilst each player will go through these changes in the same order, they can go through them at very different times of their life. Some will go through these changes earlier than others, meaning there could be up to 4 years in development difference between players at the same chronological age.



Relative Age Effect

The Relative Age Effect (RAE) is a phenomenon in which children born in, or close to, a critical age cut-off period may have an advantage in both sporting and academic endeavours.

An earlier birth is typically associated with increased physical ability; however, the perceived advantage is often due to being physically, emotionally and cognitively more developed.

In Rugby League, the relative age effect is very apparent. This graph shows the percentage of male registered players from 2015 - 2018 when compared to the national census data. It clearly indicates a bias towards children born between January and March. The NRL player data shows an even higher bias towards players in the first quartile.

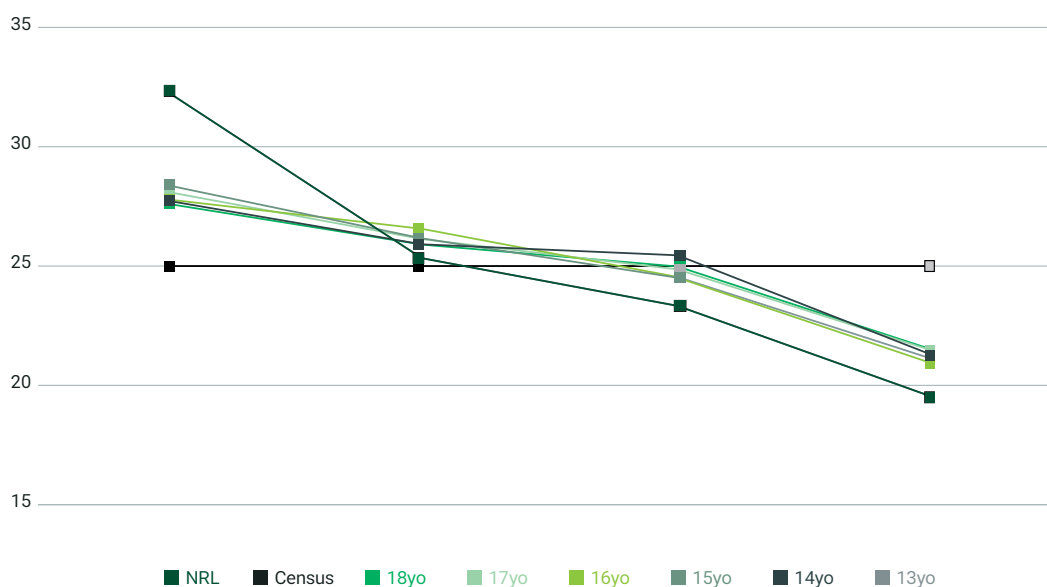
Growth and Maturation Effect

On top of the Relative Age Effect, there is also a Growth and Maturation Effect where the development of a child is driven by two distinct processes;

1. Growth is the increase in overall body size with changes in muscle, bone and fat and this affects motor skills. Growth is complicated because:

- Different parts of the body grow at different rates
- Periods of growth start and stop at different times.

Rugby League Participation by Age Group and Quarter of Birth



- **Maturation** is the genetically programmed series of changes leading to maturity. These changes occur in the same sequence in everybody, but there are great individual differences in:
 - When puberty starts
 - How long it takes (it can be 18 months to five years)
 - How much growth occurs in the adolescent growth spurt. The growth spurt in height happens first and is followed by the growth spurt in weight and then the growth spurt in strength.

The uneven spread in growth and maturation in young people of the same age makes chronological age of limited value in determining the developmental status of a young person. This creates challenges related to opportunity, training and competition.

Pygmalion and Galatea Effect

The three main influences on the Relative Age Effect are contributed by parents through the Matthew effect, coaches through the Pygmalion effect and players themselves through the Galatea effect. Each of these effects become more prevalent throughout various stages of development.

At around the age of 7 when the child is engaged in sport, the **Pygmalion effect** may impact their continued participation or improvement.

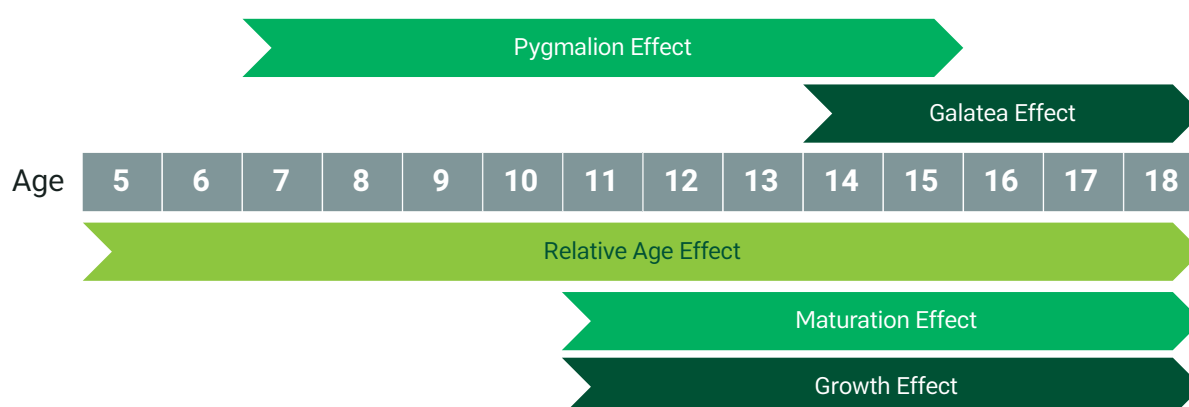
Contributing to this effect are parents/coaches/ selectors who may place expectations and determinations of 'talent' based on physical maturity rather than skill or potential.

The greater the expectation placed on an individual, the greater the result the individual will attain. The reverse impact is the lower the expectation placed on an individual, outcomes will be inferior.

Closely linked to the Pygmalion Effect, the **Galetea Effect** typically aligns their beliefs and actions with their expectation. As with the Pygmalion Effect, these beliefs and actions may be misplaced.

The Galatea effect is based on a player's expectations of their own ability. It's been shown that those who have a high amount of confidence in their own ability generally excel. However, those who are low in confidence and have low expectations of themselves are less likely to reach their potential. This could be attributed to coach behaviour.

When do these effects occur?





Pygmalion Effect

“I will do this because the coach thinks I can.”

Galatea Effect

“I will do this because I know I can.”



The Effects in Action



You can combat these effects by:

- › Understanding that current capacity doesn't equal future potential
- › Treating everyone equally and providing ALL players with an opportunity to develop their skills.
- › Considering varying levels of physical development and applying appropriate expectations that reflect this.
- › Rewarding and encouraging players on their effort and improvement

A photograph of a man, likely a coach, wearing a black t-shirt with the word "COACH" printed in large, bold, white letters. He is looking towards a young man in a white sports jersey, who is seen from the side. The background is blurred, suggesting an outdoor sports setting. The entire image has a green color overlay.

COACH



The Role of the Coach

Redefining Success in Coaching

Coaches need to understand the importance of the role they play and the impact their actions can have on an individual's development within and outside a sporting setting.

The role of a successful coach is more than just the outcome of a game.

The coach's role is to ensure that every player has the opportunity to enjoy an environment with an emphasis on **enjoyment**, making **friends**, and developing **skills**. If you can get this right it will encourage players to be intrinsically motivated and result in positive gains in the technical, tactical, physical, mental and socio-emotional development of each and every player under your care.

To achieve the best possible outcomes, coaches are encouraged to take a **player centred approach to coaching**.

This philosophy prioritises the player, and their individual needs over winning and has been proven to increase player retention, improve personal development and enhance sporting performance. Aligning your coaching beliefs and actions through a player-centred approach to coaching with a focus on developing personal assets (Competence, Confidence, Connection and Character) is the best way for a coach to be successful.

This relies on coaches knowing who they are coaching. How old are they? Why are they playing? How long have they been playing? What stage of development are they at?

These are important questions because rushing young players into environments that they aren't physically, cognitively, emotionally or motivationally ready for, can have detrimental effects on a young person's experience and development.

The true measure of a successful coach is the level of improvement experienced by every player and their ongoing participation.



Player Centred Coaching

Player Centred Coaching

Coaches who have an overemphasis on winning tend to exploit their power by taking away the choice and control from the player to ensure they win. Under this approach, coaches see themselves as the source of all knowledge and they attempt to drill their players with this specific knowledge, which limits their creativity and encourages them to think and act robotically. Coaches who adopt this style are usually coaching for their own goals and dreams.

Conversely, player-centred coaching is allowing the players to take ownership of their experience while challenging and supporting each of them to work hard and improve. Under this approach, a coach focuses on helping each player improve and defines success as working hard, playing as a team, and showing improvement.

Player Centred Coaches:

- › Have a healthy respect for players, coaches, officials, and parents
- › Recognise the players as people and help them develop life skills
- › Listens to players and allows them to have input
- › Develop a safe and enjoyable learning environment
- › Work with players to develop and reinforce team values and morals
- › Helps players develop individual goals that help achieve team goals
- › Ask questions to help players learn
- › Defines success as the **PURSUIT** of winning

What impact does this have on Players?

Players will often develop the following characteristics when coached certain ways, these are:

Player-Centred Coaching	Coach-Centred Coaching
Set their own goals and have a high level of motivation to achieve them	Have goals set by the coach with no player input
Enjoy sport and have a high level of intrinsic motivation	Have lower levels of intrinsic motivation
Are enthusiastic	Lack enthusiasm
Develop confidence in their ability	Lack confidence
Take responsibility for their own learning	Easily frustrated
Have trust and respect with the coach	Don't feel trust or respect from the coach
Committed to self-improvement	Are defensive when challenged

Guiding Principles for Coaches

To help you achieve a player-centred coaching philosophy, here are six guiding principles. By following these principles, you give yourself the best chance of providing your players with an awesome experience where they develop as a player and a person.

1

Adopt a guiding role in making it all about the player

Sport is a wonderful activity for youth players that can have a positive effect on the development of them as a player and a person. However, this development doesn't happen by chance and only occurs when they are exposed to a safe and enjoyable learning environment where the Coach adopts a player focused coaching philosophy.

Research tells us that Coaches who adopt a long-term development approach are far more likely to have a positive impact on a player's life than those who approach their Coaching with a focus on short-term results. There is far more value in coaches shifting to a guiding role where they provide players with the opportunity to learn through concise instruction, informational feedback, and developing a respectful competitive spirit.

There will also be a mix of recreational and aspirational players in your team. Coaches are encouraged to treat players as individuals and think about how they can create an environment where these players can work together effectively.

2

Work on having positive relationships with everyone

Players consistently rate connection with their peers and coaches as being of great importance in their sporting experience. We know the more they feel valued within the team, the more chance they are of engaging in activities and experimenting without fear of judgment.

Coaches are the key sculptors in creating an environment that fosters this sense of inclusion and this can be as simple as taking an interest in each players life outside of Rugby League, or enquiring how school was on a particular day, or ensuring players are respectful of one another.

What's important is that this approach extends to every player and is not only offered to those who may be more capable at that particular stage.

Coaches who value and emphasise positive relationships with their players will help them develop not only as players but more importantly as people.

3 Take an active role in creating a great learning environment

Coaches are responsible for the planning, facilitating, adjusting, and evaluating of the player experience. All the good things that are possible through sport can occur through the coach focusing on creating a fun and safe learning environment.

This happens by placing an emphasis on long-term development over short-term results. Coaches can do this by minimizing instruction, focusing feedback on effort and improvement, allowing players to learn from mistakes, and prioritising fun and development through games.

A positive learning environment also helps develop motivation in players, which has shown to be a key determinate on a player's continued engagement and enjoyment in sport.

4 Endeavour to use age-appropriate activities

The only players who can't be developed through positive coaching are those who have already left the sport. We now understand the main reasons they leave the sport is due to lack of fun. Using activities that are fun and age-appropriate is a great place for a coach to start. This means coaches are encouraged to use game-based activities, where players are challenged and involved, over more traditional, repetitive drills.

Using age-appropriate activities doesn't replace the development of a player's competence and confidence, it enhances it and contributes to the development of their connections and character.

5

Make every effort to keep players safe

Keeping everyone safe is a fundamental obligation for all coaches. Coaches have a duty of care to the players in their team and should always put safety ahead of anything else. This includes physical and emotional safety.

When most coaches think of safety, they might think only of the physical aspect. However, safety relates to much more than that. It should also include considerations around developing respectful, nurturing relationship that avoid isolating people in your group and aligning with the relevant Working with Children requirements.

Coaches can achieve a safe environment by keeping their equipment, activities, and interactions safe and have strategies for how they prevent and manage injuries and illness.

6

Always aspire to improve your coaching

The best coaches are those who prioritise their own development. This will allow you to provide your players with positive environments where they will also learn and develop. Coaches learn best on the job where they have the chance to experiment and learn from their mistakes. However, this learning is enhanced when coaches take the time to acquire some knowledge, through courses and researching, and reflecting on their own coaching.



Developing a Coaching Philosophy

Why should I have a coaching philosophy?

A coaching philosophy can be described as a written statement of a coach's personal values, morals, and beliefs that influence their perception of right and wrong, decision making, and behaviour. Effectively, your philosophy should provide you with a solid basis of HOW you coach. Your coaching philosophy is not a statement of how you think the games should be played tactically.

It is also important to note that research has shown coaches who adopt a player-centred coaching approach will be more likely to have high levels of moral decision making. Coaches with an approach that over emphasises winning will be more likely to make decisions that are detrimental on developmental outcomes.

What should I consider in my coaching philosophy?

Whilst a coaching philosophy is very individual, there are some core elements that coaches are encouraged to develop.

- 1. Enjoyment:** people play sport primarily for enjoyment. Coaches are encouraged to ensure they have an overarching concept of what this is and how they can make it enjoyable. Without enjoyment, many youth players will dropout of sport.
- 2. Outcome v Process:** whilst winning is something that coaches, and players strive to achieve, it can't be the sole focus of coaching. Players who are exposed to an environment that focuses on effort and improvement, rather than an over emphasis on winning, will rate their experience as positive regardless of the outcome of games.
- 3. Player Development:** it is well-researched that sport can positively influence the development of a players physical, social and emotional skills. Coaches are encouraged to also remember that each player is an individual and they should be treated as such. Coaches are encouraged to always consider the players stage of development when making decisions on their philosophy.
- 4. Coaching is Teaching:** one of the core roles of coaches, is to teach players through creating effective learning environments.



How to develop your philosophy?

A well-defined coaching philosophy can be a huge benefit to a coach. Being able to identify what you value and believe, then writing a statement that captures this, can help guide decision making when a coach is conflicted. It will also help you shape an environment that you and your players value.

Coaches can easily develop a player-centred coaching philosophy by:

1. Appreciating the reasons players play and coach accordingly.
2. Understanding the way you coach impacts the development of life skills
3. Defining your success by the development of personal assets rather than the outcome of a game.

Creating your philosophy

There are four steps to creating an effective values-based coaching philosophy.

1. Understand your players motivations
2. Identify what your values are
3. Understand where and who you are coaching
4. Connect values to coaching behaviours

Try writing your philosophy down and sharing it with the players and parents so everyone is on the same page.



Coaches Code of Conduct

Sport coaches should not use language or techniques that separate sport experiences from real life. Sport should be a medium in which citizenship qualities are learned and developed and the behaviour of adults is critical to this. The NRL has a Code of Conduct that defines the appropriate behaviour of coaches at a community level.

The Coaches Code of Conduct:

- › Actively discourage foul play and/or unsportsmanlike behaviour by players.
- › Seek to maximise the participation and enjoyment of all players regardless of ability; avoid the tendency to over-use a talented player; treat all players as equals, regardless of their talent.
- › Show concern and caution towards all sick and injured players. Follow the advice of a physician and/or sports trainer to the letter when determining when an injured player is ready to recommence training or playing.
- › Teach players that an honest effort and competing to the best of their ability is as important as victory.
- › Maintain appropriate, professional relationships with players at all times.
- › Maintain a thorough knowledge of the Laws of the Game and keep abreast of current coaching methods; maintain or improve your current accreditation level.
- › Always consider the health, safety and welfare of the players.
- › Teach young players to realise that there is a big gap between their play and the professional game; do not coach them as if they are professionals.
- › Ensure that your coaching reflects the level of the competition being played; do not be a “win-at-all-cost” coach.
- › As coach, conduct yourself at all times in a manner, and in all situations, that shows leadership, respect for the game of Rugby League and respect for all those that are involved in the game – the players, officials, the fans, the parents, the referees and the media.





Developing Relationships



Why are relationships important?

Quality relationships are paramount to positive experiences in sport and personal development of players. Coaches that prioritise relationships, group cohesion, and a sense of community play a pivotal role in creating positive sport experiences that generate positive development outcomes between youth and adults.

During adolescents, players transition from being children into adult members of society. Throughout this transition, players will go through numerous changes in their physical, emotional, cognitive, and social states.

In this phase, most players become less reliant on their parents for support as they become more independent. At the same time, their peers become much more influential in this period and a coach's role is to foster positive relationships between themselves and between players.

Research has shown that coaches who create a development environment that emphasise effort, personal improvement, and skill development positively impact on friendships between players. Coaches who create a performance environment that focuses winning at all costs, comparing player's physical competence, and public evaluation have a negative effect on player friendships.

The environment you create needs to support the basic needs of every player to belong to a social group where everyone is supportive.

The benefit of developing positive relationships is that you will be helping each and every player develop skills, like the ability to persist in the face of challenges and work on a team.



Player to Player Relationships

The most significant relationships that exist during adolescents are peer relationships. It's during these years that peers take over from parents as being the prominent influence in a player's life.

The quality of these relationships shapes how much your players value sport over other activities and has a significant impact on their feeling of competence and acceptance.

Coaches, as an adult leader and confidant, play a key role in helping these relationships grow and avoiding negative aspects such as conflict and exclusion. Whilst coaches can play a significant role here, they should also consider that the players need enough time and autonomy to interact with each other for these friendships to form.

Within your team, you will have players at different levels of ability and players who play different roles on the team. This will result in different levels of power and standing amongst the players. Coaches need to be aware of this and create an environment where everyone's contribution is valued and where they help each other achieve common goals and improve. This helps all your players feel accepted and valued by their teammates, which has a significant impact on their effort, motivation, and commitment.

Your players will also provide feedback to each other that directly influences each player's sense of their own competence. When this is positive, players will feel supported, provide more effort, and develop a greater sense of self confidence. When player feedback is focused on a player's ability compared to others, it can have a negative effect on their motivation.

Considering all this, coaches can help improve these relationships, and manage potential negative aspects, by actively facilitating positive group dynamics and helping players develop friendships.



Developing Positive Group Dynamics

Coaches are encouraged to focus on creating a learning environment where players are focused on teamwork, improvement, interdependent goals, and helping each other. Some tips for coaches include:

- › **Encourage more competent players to take responsibility for helping teammates:** if the better players in your team view other players as inferior or a hindrance, this will have a negative impact on teamwork and group dynamics. Encourage these players to take a lead role in helping other players improve and teach them how this helps them be a better player and teammate.
- › **Promote co-operation and inclusiveness:** this will encourage your players to treat everyone in the team the same and limit the chance of 'cliques' forming in the team
- › **Create opportunities for players to work together to solve problems:** this will allow your players to become independent, develop leadership skills, and be better prepared to play together during games. Encourage and create opportunities for your players to coach each other, this allows players to take ownership of their learning and development. It also allows your more experienced players to help the less experienced players to improve.
- › **Develop interdependent goals:** encourage players to set individual goals that can be clearly linked to the overall group goals. This will allow players to see the link between their performance and the greater team performance. It will also help your players work together to achieve these goals.

- › **Allow players to strategise and plan together:** providing players the opportunity to work together and develop attacking and defensive strategies in training and games can help them develop teamwork and mobilise toward a common goal.
- › **Work with every player to improve their competence:** a player's ability is strongly tied to a feeling of acceptance in the team. Coaches are encouraged to ensure they help each player improve their skills, which will enhance their peer's acceptance of them as a team member.

Developing Friendships

Unlike group dynamics, friendships are the social dynamic between two individuals. These friendships can also influence a player's feeling of acceptance. Some tips for coaches include:

- › **Spend enjoyable time together:** allow players time to interact doing things they enjoy at training and games as well as socially.
- › **Create opportunities for peer coaching:** create opportunities for a player to work with and help another player. Coaches can strategically pair players to do this and it can help individual friendships develop.
- › **Be a good role model:** players will learn positive interactions from you. Make sure you are caring, supportive, and encouraging and players will learn how to do this with each other.

Avoiding Negative Conflict and Exclusion

Whilst coaches can employ a variety of strategies to positively influence peer relationships, there will always be times that conflict, and social exclusion arises. It's important that coaches don't let this foster in their team as it will lead to disengagement of some players and contribute to a poor learning environment and lack of enjoyment.

Some tips for coaches to avoid these negative impacts are:

- › **Develop team norms early:** Coaches are encouraged to work with players to establish a set of values and behaviours that the team agrees to and follows. This helps avoid conflict and exclusion. It's important that players be involved in this process so it's much easier to enforce at later stages.
- › **Don't use ability as the primary basis of their value:** By focusing on each player individual contribution to the team, each team member can see how they contribute to the team. When a player's ability is the sole determinant of their value to the team, this can be very unmotivating for players who aren't as competent as others.
- › **Discourage bullying or social exclusion between players:** We know that for players to learn, develop, and have fun they need to feel psychologically and emotionally safe. If players are being bullied or discarded by teammates, they won't learn effectively and will most likely drop out of the sport.
- › **Discourage players making fun of other players appearance or ability:** your players are at a sensitive period when it relates to appearance, their self-confidence and perception of competence can be dramatically reduced when they feel like someone is criticising their appearance or ability.
- › **Coaches should avoid labelling, or name calling, of players:** Labelling or name calling is prevalent in today's world. This is usually in direct response to someone's behaviour, how they look, or stereotypes. Research tells us that adolescents will use this label as a primary means for their identification as a person. If your players are labelled based on their appearance or ability, it can have a negative effect on their social development.
- › **Avoid Cliques:** if a team first philosophy is developed by the coaches it should avoid small groups developing that exclude others. This can be very common amongst better players in the team, they may form a clique and exclude the players with less ability. Coaches need to be aware of this and explain to players the value of every team member and the contribution they can make to a team outcome.

Coach to Player Relationship

Adolescent aged players are going through many challenges at this stage of their development. They usually juggle school, family, sport, & social dynamics that are always changing.

Whilst this is challenging, their involvement in sport can provide a great opportunity to help them develop positive personal assets like resilience, achievement, and leadership which ultimately leads to positive development.

This makes the coach-player relationship even more important to develop. If the relationship is effective, the players will be more likely to navigate this period successfully and they will have increased levels of wellbeing, motivation, and engagement in Rugby League. Coaches who genuinely want to connect with the players also need to accept they are a role model and be approachable, genuine, and respectful.

The way a coach handles their emotions will also have a big impact on the coach-player relationship. Coaches who are very controlling will have a hard time responding positively to different situations, which can ultimately have an impact on the way the player perceives difficult situations. When coaches are supportive, and manage their emotions positively, the players will learn to view pressure situations positively as challenges they need to attack. The opposite will happen for coaches who don't handle their emotions positively by being controlling and inciting fear in their players. This will lead to players viewing pressure situations negatively and in fear of making mistakes.

Here are some ways that coaches can help develop positive relationships:

1. Provide the players with some choice in what they do as well as providing them rationale for doing it.
2. Focus on creating an environment that values each player's individual improvement over the outcome of games.
3. Create opportunities for one on one-time to get to know their players
4. Understand every player and their family's motivations
5. Make an effort to talk to each player individually at training and games
6. Offer constructive feedback that isn't controlling or threatening. This should be framed positively that helps improve physical skills and performance
7. Show genuine care and support for your players

Players don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care.

Coach to Parent relationship

During the primary school years (6-12) parents are a primary influence on their children and their sport experience.

As players progress from this stage, into adolescents, parents start to take a secondary support role in their children's sport experience. In the adolescent years, peers become the primary influence over parents.

Whilst parents may not be the primary influence, coaches need to work with them, so they can collaboratively contribute to the development of the player. They also need to work with them to ensure parents understand how they can best support their children to positively develop as a player and a person.

Coaches can help build positive relationships with parents by:

- › Having open communication lines to keep parents informed
- › Clearly articulate your coaching philosophy to parents
- › Have a pre-season meeting
- › Providing parents with information on how best to support their players



Creating a Learning Environment for Development



Why should I create a learning environment?

When a learning environment is created, players learn that training and effort matters most. They develop the idea that success is in the pursuit of winning, not the outcome of winning. This type of mindset can be directly influenced by a coach, who is ultimately the sculptor of the environment and usually controls what aspects of the experience is emphasised.

When this emphasis is on personal achievement, rather than a performance outcome, it promotes the right type of motivation in players to want to improve and continue participating.

This type of learning environment is characterised by a focus on:

- › Improving
- › Trying their best
- › Helping others learn
- › Emphasising each players importance

If players are exposed to this environment, they measure success as their own improvement rather than comparing themselves to their peers. Considering the differences in growth and maturation at these ages, the focus on self-improvement is very important.

This focus on a positive learning environment will result in the players developing higher levels of motivation and they are more likely to:

Develop good sportsmanship

Have positive attitudes towards players and coaches

Higher perception of their own ability

Make self-referenced judgments regarding success

Have higher effort and persistence

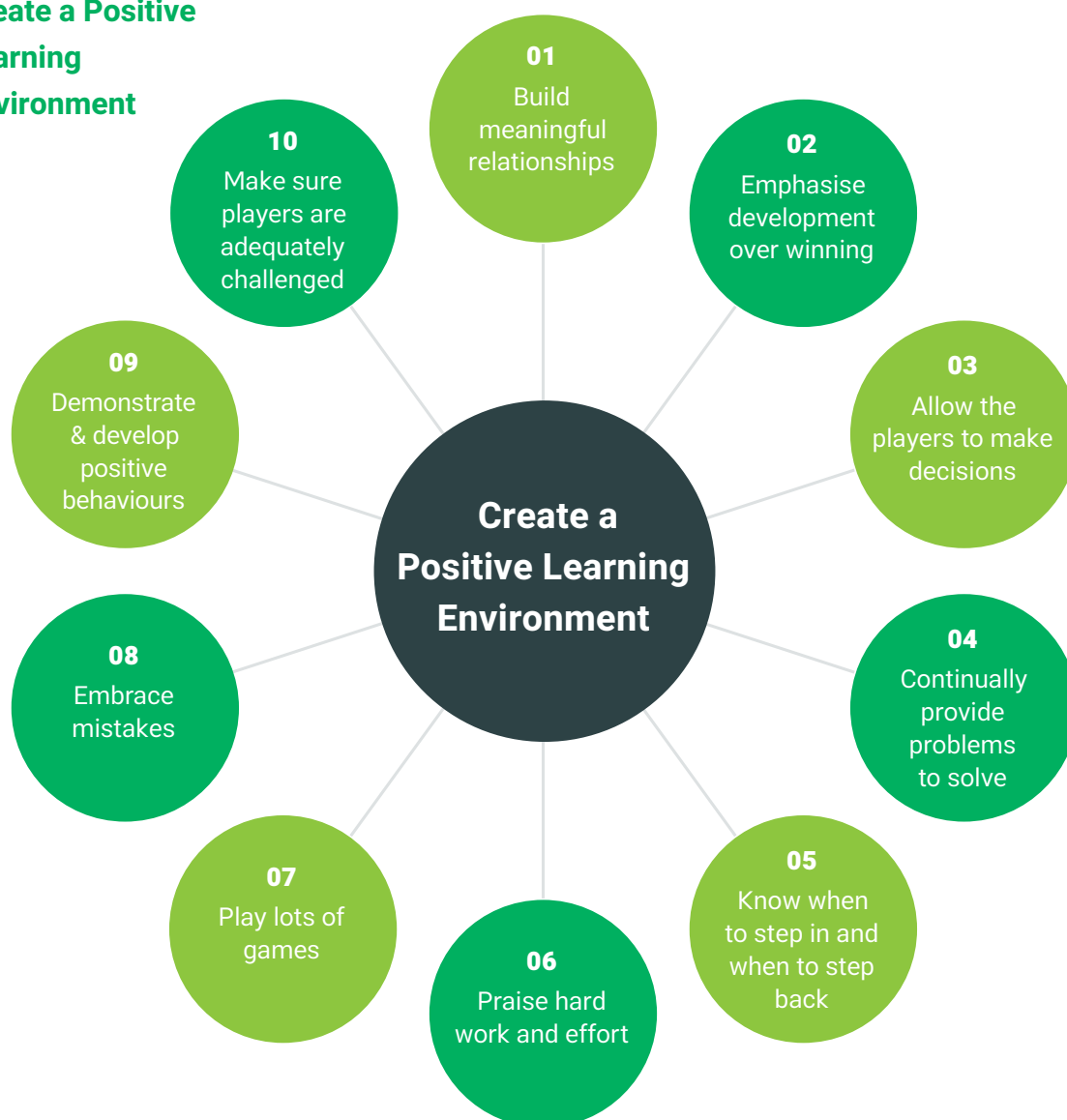
Increased well being

Continue participating in sport

How do I create a learning environment?

The first step to creating an environment that focuses on players learning and developing is to understand what helps players to do this. The diagram below describes what you can do to create this type of environment for the players.

10 Ways to Create a Positive Learning Environment





01 Build Meaningful Relationships

Players will learn more when they feel comfortable in their environment. If they don't feel accepted or there isn't a positive social dynamic in the team it will be less likely that quality learning will occur. Also, when players develop positive peer relationships, they are more likely to work together to solve problems and encourage each other to improve.

02 Emphasise Development over Winning

Coaches who take on an overemphasis on winning will behave in certain ways that are detrimental to learning and development. They tend to punish players for mistakes, are highly instructive, and are abusive and negative. Coaches who focus on individual player development as a measure of success will be more likely to provide players with positive feedback, allow them to have input, and develop positive relationships

03 Allow Players to have Input

When players have some input into their experience and environment, they are far more likely to positively engage in it. Coaches can do this a few different ways, including:

- › Allowing players to develop group norms and goals, rather than being completely chosen by a coach
- › Providing players with some choice in the activities they do
- › Allowing the players to decide on tactics and strategies they want to use in games

04 Continually Provide Problems to Solve

When developing activities and games to use at training, you should consider variations that continually ask your players to solve some sort of problem. This could be a tactic to use in a game, or a way to perform a skill. By continually changing the problem they are solving, you will be encouraging them to learn and develop.

05 Know when to Step in and Step Back

It can be very easy to over coach players through instruction and intervention. Coaches need allow the game to be the teacher and only step in when they can add to player learning. Coaches can do this a number of ways, however the players need time to learn and coaches are encouraged to step back at times and let players solve problems themselves.

06 Praise Hard Work and Effort

This is vitally important to sustain player enjoyment and motivation, which will ultimately lead to learning. If coaches focus on rewarding and recognising a player's hard work, and the effort they put into improving as a player, this will motivate players to continue striving to be better. Conversely, if coaches reward and recognise the outcome of games, or a player's physical competence, they are not encouraging players to continue trying hard to be the best they can be.

07 Play lots of Games

Let the game be the teacher. Players learn best when the activities they do resemble the game they play on the weekend. Using too many repetitive drills may look neat and tidy, but there is very little learning occurring. When players play games, it will generally look messier but that is ultimately how players learn to make good decisions. It's also much more fun, which encourages players to engage more.

08 Embrace Mistakes

Making mistakes and learning from them is vital to the development of players. Coaches who punish players for making mistakes will make a player feel like their only outcome is to not make a mistake. We want players to be creative, try new things, and learn. To do this, they need to make good mistakes and learn from them.

09 Demonstrate and Develop Positive Behaviours

Players learn much more than just how to play the game or to develop skills. They learn how to display good character and sportsmanship. The number one way they do this is through the behaviour of the significant adults and their peers. You should set a good example of how to behave and encourage your players to do the same.

10 Make sure players are Adequately Challenged

Players need to be appropriately challenged to learn and develop. If the challenge of the activity is too easy, players will disengage and there will be very little learning occurring. If the challenge is too great, players will also become discouraged. So, it is important to ensure the players challenge level is appropriate and you know how to increase or decrease this.





Keeping Everyone Safe

The NRL is a Child Safe organisation and is committed to promoting a safe environment for all children and young people and to assist everyone involved in Rugby League to fulfil their safeguarding and child protection responsibilities. As a sport, we must promote the safety and welfare of children and young people as the top priority. Coaches will need to ensure the safety of all participants before, during and after each session.

Safeguarding Children and Young People

When coaching children and young people you will need to adhere to the child safety guidelines in your state, including having a working with children check/Blue Card, maintaining appropriate boundaries and reporting any suspicious or potential abuse to the relevant authorities.

As there is currently no national child safety system or legislation, you will need to understand what is required in your state or territory.

For more information on child safety laws in your state go to www.playbytherules.net.au, and for information on the NRL's Child Protection and Safeguarding Children go to www.nrl.com/community/inclusion/rights-and-responsibilities

When interacting with children or young people it is recommended that you maintain appropriate boundaries to keep children and young people safe.

These boundaries include:

› Physical boundaries

- Only use physical contact that is appropriate for the development of a particular skill and with the permission of the child or young person.
- Work within sight of others at all times.
- Use drills to develop fitness, not as a punishment.

› Emotional boundaries

- Use positive feedback on performance, not negative feedback about the person
- Be encouraging and avoid put downs.

› To protect yourself and your child, avoid being alone with a child.

- Do not isolate yourself and a child, or young person, and avoid being alone with a particular child or young person.
- If a child or young person approaches you and wants to talk to you privately, do so in an open area and in sight of other adults (e.g. other coaches, officials or parents).
- Try to have at least one other adult with you in a change room with children or young people.
- › Lastly, as coaches you must report suspicious or potential physical, sexual or psychological abuse to the relevant authority in your state.

Psychological Safety

Psychological safety refers to the interpersonal dynamic in which each player feels valued and respected and is developed by ensuring that peer interactions are positive and that your own behaviour is supportive. Players who feel a sense of psychological safety develop higher levels of engagement, have increased motivation and learn and develop at a greater rate.

As a coach there are a number of behaviours that can help create a psychologically safe environment.

- › **Positive Reinforcement** – Every member of a team (players, coaches, parents, first responders) should be supportive and encouraging of the team. Positive reinforcement plays an important role in this and will help develop personal growth.
- › **Supportive Relationships** – The relationship between the coach and players is key to creating positive developmental experiences. It is recommended that coaches should make a determined effort to interact positively with every one of their players during every session.
- › **Feedback** – Promote opportunities for feedback. This might be one on one or as a team where opinions are shared freely, and individuals are asked for feedback without fear of being ridiculed.
- › **Openness** – This is essential to developing a positive environment. In an open environment, players are encouraged to be themselves, feel they can make a total contribution and can be free to communicate and express themselves without fear of being harassed, bullied or negatively impacted.
- › **Empowering Players** – Allowing your players to exercise autonomy and independent decision making promotes positive youth development.

Injury & Illness Prevention

Taking steps to prevent injury is as important as injury assessment and management. Injury and illness prevention includes the following;

- › Ensuring all players complete a suitable warm up before a training session or game
- › Always having water available before, during and after training sessions and games.
- › Encouraging players to use protective equipment such as mouthguards.
- › Ensuring that the playing/training surface is free from foreign objects e.g. glass or sprinkler heads.
- › Ensuring facilities and equipment are clean and in good working order.
- › Ensuring players are fully recovered from any injury before returning to play.

Protective Equipment

The NRL supports and strongly recommends the use of mouthguards by all players participating in Rugby League including during training and games to help protect against injury to the teeth, mouth and jaw.

Additional protective equipment such as head gear and shoulder pads can be worn to help with confidence or to protect against bumps and abrasions

Remember there is no conclusive evidence that headgear prevents concussion.

Hydration/Hygiene

Children can overheat and dehydrate quickly as they are not able to regulate their body temperature as well as adults. Hot and humid conditions can lead to increased fluid losses through sweat, reminding players of the importance of hydration and ensuring that they have access to water throughout the session is vital to player safety. If extreme heat is forecast, consider postponing the session to a cooler part of the day to prevent any heat related illness.

If a participant complains of dizziness, light headedness, muscle cramps, nausea or headache, they may be suffering from dehydration. In this instance remove them from the session, sit them in a shaded area and get them to sip cool fluids.

If possible, ensure that each participant has their own water bottle which can be used throughout the session to minimise the potential transfer of infectious disease. If communal water bottles are being used, remind all participants to hold the water bottle away from their mouth as they drink and ensure that the bottles are thoroughly cleaned after each session.

Please refer to the NRL Infectious Disease Policy for more information.

Environmental Conditions

Ensure that you are aware of any potential temperature extremes or electrical storm activity and plan accordingly. For example, if hot weather is forecast remind participants about sun protection, hydration and provide adequate breaks in a shaded area.

Please refer to the NRL's policies for Heat, Sun Protection and Electrical Storm Safety.

Teaching Players Correctly

An important part of injury prevention is ensuring that players are taught the correct technique, particularly in the skills which involve contact. Spending time to teach players how to make a tackle, how to be tackled and how to fall safely will be the most effective way to protect against injury.

Safe Conditioning

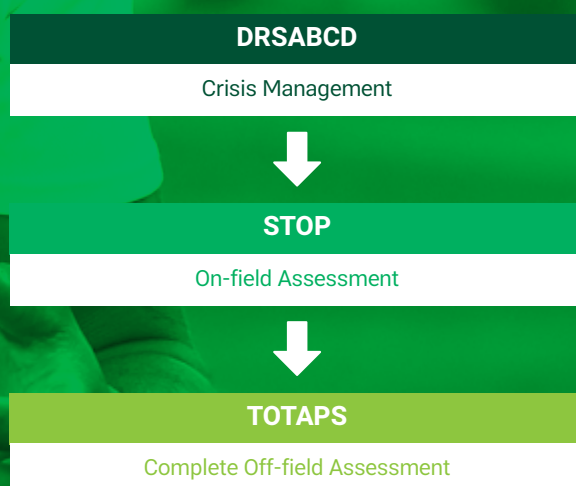
If you are planning a conditioning session, there are a number of considerations to ensure the safety of your players. These include;

- › **Age and maturation;** You may be coaching players with the same chronological age, however their biological maturity can be considerably different. This difference in biological maturity can have a significant impact on their ability to perform conditioning activities.
- › **Experience and playing level;** Be mindful of experience and playing level when planning a conditioning session. Do not take a 'one size fits all' approach to conditioning.
- › **Environmental;** As mentioned above, you must be aware of any potential temperature extremes and plan accordingly.
- › **Hydration;** Ensure water is available throughout the session and include drink breaks.

All NRL Policies can be found at www.playrugbyleague.com/policies

Injury and Illness Assessment and Management

Whilst there will always be a First Responder present at community Rugby League games, there may be times when a First Responder is not available, such as during a training session. If any injury occurs during these situations, you will need to have a basic understanding about the principles of injury management. The standard approach for injury assessment and management is summarised in the image below.



DRSABCD

This initial process should always be followed by the first responder. This could be the coach, League First Aid officer or Spots Trainer.

Danger

- › Check for Danger
 - To yourself
 - To others/bystanders
 - To the casualty

Response

- › Check for a Response
 - Is the casualty conscious or unconscious?

Send for Help

- › Call triple zero (000) for an ambulance
 - Or ask another person to make the call.

Airway

- › Check the Airway
 - Is the airway clear and open?

Breathing

- › Check for Breathing
 - Look Listen Feel
 - Look to see if the chest is rising and falling
 - Listen for the sound of breathing
 - Feel for air from nose or mouth

Circulation

- › If there are no signs of life (casualty unconscious, unresponsive, not moving and not breathing normally) commence CPR.
 - CPR protocol: Thirty (30) compressions, followed by two (2) breaths (rate of approximately one hundred (100) compressions per minute).

Defibrillation

- › Apply a defibrillator if available.



STOP

Once it is determined that the players life is not in danger using DRSABCD, it is important to do a quick on-field assessment to determine if the player is able to continue to play. The STOP principle provides an easy acronym to guide the first responders on-field assessment.

When performing the **STOP** assessment, first look for obvious signs of injury such as bleeding, fractures, swelling, bruising or any other type of observable deformity.

Stop

- › Stop the player from moving or further participating in the game and stop the game if necessary.

Talk

- › Check for a Response
- › When talking to the player make sure you ask questions which are clear and to the point and can be answered quickly. Questions can include, 'what happened', 'where does it hurt', 'did you hear a snap, crack or pop', 'are you feeling dizzy or nauseous'?

Observe

- › Look at the players facial features, are they grimacing, are they losing colour, do they look OK? Also compare the injured side to the uninjured side.

Prevent

- › Prevent further injury



TOTAPS

After assessing the injured person using DRSABCD, follow the TOTAPS assessment. This should be completed by a Sports Trainer or First Responder as they have received all of the relevant training.

Talk – Ask the injured player

- › How did this happen?
- › Where does it hurt?
- › How did you land? Twisted/straight?
- › Did you hear or feel clicking, locking, grating, snap, rip, tear or giving way?
- › What kind of pain? Throbbing, burning, searing pain? Pins and needles? Toothache pain?
- › Ask any other questions relevant to the players suspected condition.

Observe – Look for the following:

- › Bones: alignment, deformity or unusual shape
- › Soft tissue: contours shape, comparing both sides
- › Note any swelling
- › Colour: redness, inflammation, pale or bluish colour

Touch – This should only occur after the above has been completed

- › Be gentle and consider player comfort
- › Do not drag the player to their feet
- › Is it tender to touch?
- › Start away from the injured site and work towards and beyond
- › What is the extent of the painful area?
- › Try to locate the exact site and relate it to a particular anatomical structure.

Active – Movement

- › Ask the player to move the injured limb until restricted by pain
- › Significant restriction indicates possible serious injury

Passive – Movement

- › Gently move the injured area to the point of pain or restriction
- › Return to play should not be considered unless pain free full range of movement is evident

Skills

- › Ask player to stand unaided
- › Ask them to walk, jog and carry out specific skills related to the injured part
- › Return to play if pain free

Return to play should not be considered unless pain free full range of movement is evident

No HARM

If a player has suffered a soft tissue injury, to avoid making the injury worse, you can advise them to follow the acronym No HARM.

Heat

- Avoid heat packs or rubs as this will increase swelling to the injured area.

Alcohol

- Consuming alcohol may increase bleeding and swelling.

Running

- Any vigorous exercises, including running may aggravate the injury.

Massage

- Massage in the first 48-72 hours following an injury can also increase swelling and bleeding.



Concussion

Although you will be doing everything you can to teach safe technique, there is still the chance a concussion could occur.

As a result, you will need to have a basic understanding of what a concussion is and what the signs and symptoms are.

What is a concussion?

Concussion is a disturbance in brain function rather than a structural injury to the brain. It is caused by direct and indirect force to the head, face, neck or elsewhere with the force transmitted to the head. A player does not need to have been knocked unconscious to have a concussion. Loss of consciousness is seen in only 10-15% of concussion cases.



Concussion Management

The 3 most important steps of concussion management are:

1. **Recognise:** Although some signs and symptoms of a suspected concussion are obvious (e.g. loss of consciousness) it is important that you know and can recognise the subtler signs and symptoms of concussion. These include:
 - › **Headache**
 - › **Dizziness**
 - › **Confusion**
 - › **Ringing Ears**
 - › **Nausea**
 - › **Repeated Vomiting**
 - › **Vision Disturbance**
 - › **Loss of Balance**
 - › **Memory Loss (amnesia)**
 - › **Difficulty concentrating**
2. **Remove:** Any participant who is suspected of having a concussion must be removed from the activity immediately and must not be allowed to return to the training session. Ensure that the player is monitored and is not left alone for at least 1-2 hours.
3. **Refer:** A player with a suspected concussion should be referred to medical practitioner or an accredited NRL sports trainer. Remember only a medical professional can diagnose a concussion.

Return to Play

If a player has been diagnosed with a concussion, they must follow a graduated return to sport program. For school aged children (18 years and younger) they must first follow a return to school program before beginning a return to sport program. These programs are designed to ensure that the player has completely recovered from their concussion and that both their short term and long-term welfare is the main priority. It is important to note that these programs can take 14-16 days, or longer, to complete depending on each individuals case and a coaches understanding of these processes is vital.

Emergency Plan in case of Serious Injury

In the unlikely event of a serious injury you need to ensure you have an emergency plan. When putting together an emergency plan you need to consider the following.

1. Make sure you have access to a landline or mobile phone.
2. Make sure you know the emergency phone numbers (e.g. 000, 112)
3. Make sure you know the street address of the venue and nearest cross street.
4. Make sure you know where the entrance to the venue is located and ensure it is unlocked and unobstructed.
5. Make sure a designated person meets the emergency vehicle and someone is available to accompany the injured person in the ambulance.



Planning to Coach



Why is planning important?

One of the main goals of coaching is to create an environment where players enjoy themselves, improve, and develop good character. Each of these goals can be made significantly easier if coaches are well planned. By planning effectively, it will provide your season with structure and will make each session and game easier and more enjoyable for you and your players.

Some of the key benefits to planning are:

1. It provides you with a blueprint for the season ahead and what you and your players want to achieve.
2. Allows you to communicate with the players, parents, and coaching staff so everyone can work together.
3. Provides you with something to reflect on throughout the season.
4. Helps keep you very organised, which has huge benefits when everyone becomes busy throughout the season.
5. Well planned sessions help keep the players engaged and enjoyable.

For your season plan to be successful you need to ensure you consider your coaching philosophy along with the reasons why your players want to play.



Planning for the Season Ahead

Register as a Coach

All coaches must be registered each season they coach. This registration is different to your accreditation course, it is a record of who you have coached. To complete your registration just visit www.playrugbyleague.com

Educate Yourself

The first step to planning your season ahead is to make sure you have an up-to date coaching accreditation by either updating your accreditation or completing a course. You can do either of these by visiting www.playrugbyleague.com/learn

During your planning phase, it's also a great opportunity to acquire some new knowledge about coaching. You can do this through formal courses and updates or from talking to other coaches and researching ideas on the internet. All these methods will help you acquire some additional knowledge and is a great way to keep yourself up to date with coaching.

Talk to the Players and the Parents

This may seem like a no brainer, but it can be very easy to overlook. One of the most critical ingredients in becoming a player centred coach is to know why your players play Rugby League and what they want to get out of it. Parents are important in this process as well, they will have valuable insight into what experience they want their child to have. This also allows the players to feel better connected and engaged in what they are doing.

Develop or Review your Coaching Philosophy

After you have had the opportunity to talk to your team and the parents. The next step is to ensure you have an up to date coaching philosophy. This will help guide your season plan and make sure your coaching activities are age appropriate and your general coaching plan fits with the needs and wants of the players.



Get Some Help

You can't do it all on your own. The more help you can get, the better an experience it will be for everyone. Your coaching staff needs to be an extension of your coaching philosophy, if you engage people that are opposed to this, you will find it very challenging to provide the best experience.

Parents

During adolescent sport, parents stop being the primary influence and peers start to take over. Even though this is the case, parents still play a significant secondary support role for their child and can have an impact on other players in the team. As a coach, you should actively engage parents and try to educate them on how they can be a positive supporter for their child and the team.

Assistant/Co-Coaches

An assistant coach, or co-coach, can be a great help for you. There is no reason you have to be a coach on your own, having other people available to help you can make coaching a lot easier. Research shows us that coaches who are less controlling and more inclusive help create more positive coaching environments.

It can also provide you with the benefit of being able to be more creative with your training session design and have more eyes on what is happening.

If you do engage an assistant or co-coach, you should make sure they have received some education and share the same player centred philosophy as you.

LeagueSafe Trainers

A LeagueSafe trainer can also be great help for you. However, it is important to remember these trainers don't play the same role as what you see on TV. They may wear the same coloured shirt, but their focus and responsibilities are very different. For your team, the Leaguesafe trainer's role is to make sure the players have access to water, help you with interchanges on game day, and help with warm up's. There is more detail on this in the Game Day section.

The LeagueSafe Trainer is not a First Aid Officer or an On-Field Coach. There are other roles that are responsible for managing injury and illness on game day, which is the First Responder. There is also a temptation to use your trainer as a coach and instruct the players on the field, this is not their role and doesn't help your players learn and develop. Your players should be trying to play the game and solve problems themselves, which will help them become more autonomous and creative.

Your LeagueSafe trainer must complete their accreditation course and be registered as a volunteer at www.playrugbyleague.com

First Responders

Another trainer that can help you on game day is a First Responder. This person is the one who is responsible for managing injury and illness on game day. Depending on the age group you are coaching, the First Responder can either have a League First Aid, Level 1 Sports Trainer, or Level 2 Sports Trainer qualification.

- › **13-15s age groups can have a League First Aid, Level 1 Sports Trainer, or Level 2 Sports Trainer**
- › **16s and older age groups can have a Level 1 Sports Trainer or Level 2 Sports Trainer**

There is more information on this in the Game Day section.

Team Manager

A Team Manager is another role that can support the team. Just like any other role, having someone who shares the same beliefs as you is a great start. Your Team Manager can help you by taking care of the administration tasks required for the team, which can be during the week and on game day. This can help you focus on providing the best environment for your players without the additional administration tasks.



Developing Team Culture

A team culture is comprised of three essential pillars that support all team functioning and performance: values, attitudes, and goals.

- › **Values** are standards of behaviour. Values help guide the decisions you and the team make and how you play the game and act in general
- › **Attitudes** are the way the players think, feel, and act
- › **Goals** are a specific statement that guides what you and the players are looking to achieve



Coaches are encouraged to take an active role in developing these elements of team culture with the input of the players and other key people. When players have input into developing these values, attitudes and goals they will be far more motivated to abide by them, self-regulate and achieve team and individual goals.

There are also some specific things you can do to actively develop and foster a healthy team culture:

- › Make a list of the teams' values, behaviours, and goals
- › Create situations and activities in which team members have to work together
- › Identify team leaders to support the team culture
- › Look for teachable moments and use them to encourage your team culture
- › Provide opportunities for the players to show the key elements of team culture
- › Work on developing positive relationships between you and the players, as well as their relationships with each other

Coaches are encouraged to sit down with the rest of your coaching staff and the players to create their own team culture. This will help improve communication, allow the team to function better and reduce the chance of conflict.



Develop Season Goals

Goal setting is a great way to establish exactly what the team wants to achieve during the season. Setting goals will provide the players and yourself with motivation to try and achieve these. This should result in more engagement in training and games.

There are many different goals you can set for the season which generally fall into three categories, which are:

1. **Team Season Goals:** these are goals that the whole team is trying to achieve together.
2. **Individual Player Season Goals:** these are goals that each player wants to achieve themselves. These goals should relate in some way to the team goal. This will promote teamwork to help each other.

Whilst you can set a series of different goals within these categories, the most critical factor to consider is what you base these goals on.

We know that players are significantly more intrinsically motivated when the goals aren't focused on the outcome but are focused on the process to achieving something.

If your goals are focused on each player getting better individually, rather than comparing themselves to other players and teams, they will be more likely to keep playing longer, give more effort, and show more improvement.

What is an outcome focused goal?

An outcome goal is something that focuses on the result. These goals are not ideal, on their own because the result is usually out of your control and these goals don't focus on how to get the outcome.

What is a process focused goal?

A process goal is something that focuses on a player improving and how they plan to achieve that. These goals help each individual player work hard to achieve improvement in their game, which can lead to them feeling successful regardless of the outcome.

Planning the Season's Activities

Training Sessions

Planning, delivering, and reviewing training sessions is one of the primary roles that coaches will perform.

This can be time consuming for coaches, however failing to plan will result in a poorer experience for you and the players. Coaches who focus on creating quality plans for their sessions are more likely to:

- › **Keep the players actively involved**
- › **Provide more challenging and relevant learning environments**
- › **See greater improvements in their players skill development**
- › **Make the best use of their time, space, and equipment**
- › **Have less behaviour problems**

The first step to planning out your training sessions for the year is to look at the big picture first and develop a plan that considers:

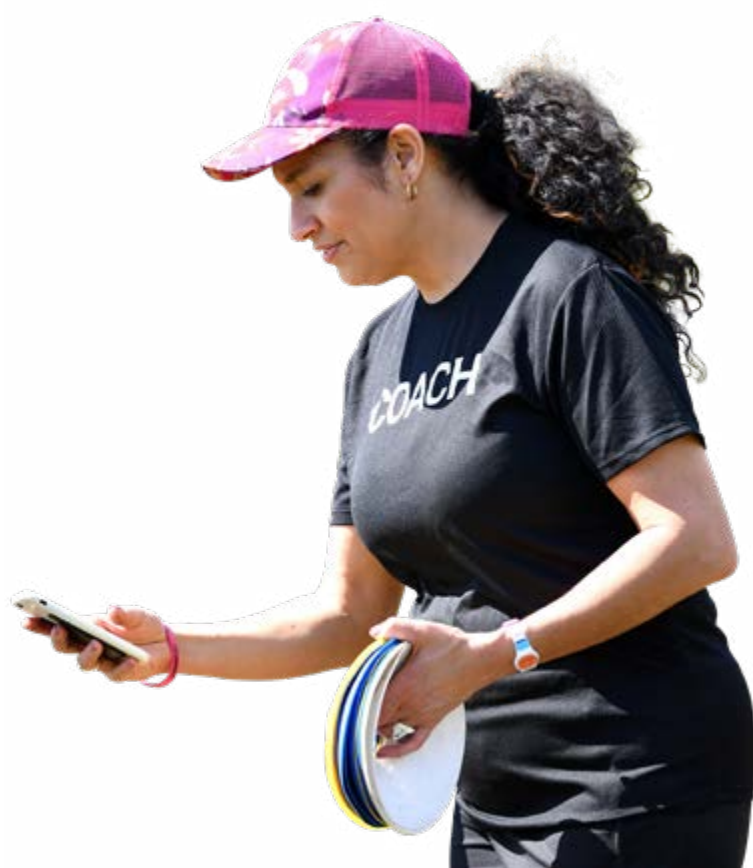
Dates, Time, and Length of Training

The players will most likely have very busy lives with a lot of competing priorities. It's important to be well planned on when and where you are training as well as focusing on quality of training over quantity of training. This will allow you to get the most benefits in the times you have with them.

Equipment and Space Needed

It can be difficult to train exactly the way you want to when there are other teams who might be using the field at the same time. Working with your club and other teams will help you achieve the most in your sessions. Just remember, you don't always need the full field to train, there are many ways you can achieve your session outcomes using smaller spaces. You can also work with other teams to do some combined training sessions where your players will have the chance to work with others.

When you take a game-based approach to training, there is not a lot of equipment you need. Just make sure you have everything you need to ensure your sessions run smoothly.



Games

Game day planning is all about understanding what works for your team and ensuring they have everything they need to be safe and prepared to play. When planning for game day coaches should consider:

- › **Times:** you will need to set and communicate what time the games are, when and where to meet, and what times you allocate to prepare and complete your warm up
- › **Injury Prevention:** it is important that coaches consider what they can do to help players prepare for the game and prevent injuries. You can do this by:
 - Ensuring players are hydrated and have water
 - Conducting an appropriate warm up
 - Having the right equipment and staff available
- › **Injury Management:** this is not the sole responsibility of the coach, you will also have a First Responder at the game to manage and injuries. Just ensure you take their advice on player health and safety.
- › **Player Rotation:** you should also plan for how you are going to use your players and when. Throughout these age groups there is more focus on players playing certain positions and trying to win, however coaches can't lose sight of the fact that your players sign up to play. You need to ensure everyone has that opportunity throughout the year. Research tells us that one of the main reasons kids drop out of Rugby League is due to a lack of equity and fairness.

Social Events

Remember sport is about more than training and playing. Most people play or are involved in sport because of the connection and friendship they have with others. It is important to provide the players and parents with some perspective by ensuring you plan in times for social activity, which is just as important as playing and will help develop a sense of community within your team.

When players and parents feel part of a community within the team, they will be far less likely to drop out. By planning different times for social events, and focusing the season goals on effort and improvement, it shouldn't matter what results you see on the field to determine whether the season was successful or not.



MY LEAGUE MY TEAM

IN THE PALM OF MY HAND



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Parent & Player Education

During this phase of a player's life, parents start to take a back seat as a primary influence. Peers start to become the primary influence in a player's sporting experience.

Even though this is the case, we need to educate parents that they can play a significant role in supporting their child. We also know that when parents and coaches communicate well and understand each other, there is significantly less conflict and the parents are more supportive.

A great way to engage with parents is to conduct a pre-season orientation style meeting with them. This doesn't have to be very formal, and really should be centred around something social so the parents get to know you and each other.

5 Steps to an Effective Parent Orientation Meeting

STEP 1

Introduction

Welcome everybody to the club, and let them know how excited you are to be working with their kids. Tell them a bit about you, like what you do for work to help them understand that you are a volunteer, and a “real person”.

Inform the parent of the logistics (dates, times and venues) and any equipment, training attire the players will require.

STEP 2

Goals for the year

Inform the parent that your goal is to ensure every player enjoys themselves, grows great friendships, and develops a range of skills that will help them in the future. Explain that fairness is high on your agenda and you will be doing your best to ensure that every player gets a fair go at training and games. Highlight that you will have a focus on effort, sportsmanship and respect over anything else, and although you hope your team will always strive win games, it won't be at the expense of the enjoyment and development of every member of your team.

STEP 3

Safety & modified rules

This may be some of your parent's first Rugby League experience. Talk about how Junior Rugby League is different to what they see on the television. Let them know that these rules are there to ensure that their children feel both physically and emotionally safe.

Inform the group that the game has strict guidelines and policies around safety, and with the help of the sports trainers you have a responsibility to abide by the policies.

STEP 4

Codes of Conduct

To help eliminate the likelihood of poor behaviour from parents and players, discuss the games Code of Conduct and how it is applied to coaches, players and parents. Let the parents know that their behaviour can impact the learning environment, and enjoyment for the players. Be clear that encouragement is fine on game day, but negative comments and abuse aimed at players, coaches, other parents and match officials will not be tolerated within your group. You may even like to talk about some of the consequences if your players don't abide by the rules. For example. “If a player behaves poorly, they will need to sit out of an activity”

STEP 5

Q&A

Give the parents a chance to ask some question. Do your best to answer, but don't worry if you can't. Just let them know that you'll get the information and get back to them.

The Training Session



What is the Purpose of Training Sessions?

Let the game be the teacher

One of the main roles of the coach is to design and deliver training sessions with age and stage of development appropriate activities. Training sessions should be viewed as an opportunity to help players learn, and the quality of this learning is directly related to how training sessions are planned and delivered.

Here are some tips to consider when designing your training sessions.

Tips for Designing Training Sessions



Safety First

Your first and foremost responsibility is to ensure that all the players at your session are physically and psychologically safe. The activities you plan and the way you interact with the players need to be safe. This is a non-negotiable for any coach at any level.



Have an Outcome

Players learn best when there is a clear focus and outcome for a training session and all the activities work together to achieve that outcome. Your outcome could vary depending on the group, the time of year, or focus for the week. Having a clear outcome will also help you plan and deliver sessions that are enjoyable and help players learn and improve.



Make it Enjoyable

It doesn't matter what level your coaching at, if players aren't enjoying what they do, they will ultimately stop doing it. In these age groups coaches need to learn how to balance enjoyment with helping players develop and learn the game.



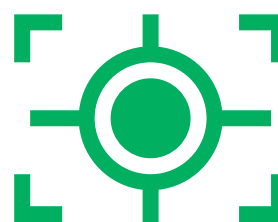
Use Variety

Players will get bored if they keep doing the same activity repeatedly. As a coach you need to plan for different activities that practice similar skills or develop a range of progressions and variations on games and activities that will keep players engaged. A good way to look at this is to keep providing the players with activities where they need to problem solve. Once they solve a problem, you need to change up the activity, so they have a new problem to solve.



Explain Why

Players will be more motivated to engage and perform in training sessions if they understand why they are doing the activity. Coaches are encouraged to explain what the outcome of the session is and why each activity contributes to the overall outcome.



Focus on Learning

Coaching has changed a lot over the years and one of the biggest evolutions has been a recognition that a coach is a teacher and should ultimately coach, so players learn. Coaches who focus on activities and strategies that are designed only to perform a certain way during a game are not helping players learn. Make sure you create opportunities in your sessions where players need to work together to solve problems and be challenged.



Player Input

We also know that players will be far more motivated if they have some input into their experience. Coaches can find ways to allow players to have input into what they are doing during training sessions.



Make it like a game

Making training sessions game like will help the players develop skills and know when, where and how to use them. This is important for teaching players how to play the game. If your players spend a lot of time with activities where players practice the skill in isolation, they may become very good at doing the skill without any pressure. However, they will struggle to transfer the skill into the game and know when, where, and how to use the skill. For example, players can learn how to pass the ball to a teammate. But they also need to learn when to pass the ball.



Healthy Competition

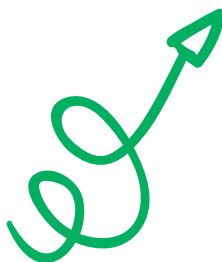
Game based activities are a fantastic way to generate healthy competition within your team. Competition is the essence of sport, it is the difference between sport and exercise. The players love to compete, and competition delivered in the right way can help develop your players character, confidence, connection and competence. There are some things you need to remember if you want the players to get the most out of the activity.

- › Make sure players are matched evenly
- › Encourage and reward respect and good sportsmanship
- › Let the players know, it's OK to lose if they tried their best
- › Design opportunities for players to compete



Embrace the Mess

Let the game be the teacher. Deliberate play is essentially a type of game-based activity that allows the players to learn through exploration and making mistakes. There is a misconception that training sessions need to be neat and tidy. If we were conducting the Sydney Symphony Orchestra then we would obviously expect perfection, but that simply isn't the case in Rugby League. The best players are those who possess creativity, imagination and vision, and they don't learn those skills through rigid drills. If there are no mistakes at training, we aren't challenging our players.



Keep them Moving

You should try and limit the amount of time players are standing around or listening to instructions. The more active the players are, the greater your sessions will be. There are a few ways you can ensure you keep them moving:

- › Be well planned and try not to deviate from this
- › Set up the session prior to starting
- › Have progressions ready to go if players are under or over challenged
- › Transition between activities effectively



Conditioning through Game Play

You generally don't have much time with your team throughout the week. To obtain the best results you need to maximise what you do during training. Using games and activities to develop conditioning is a perfect place to start. This way the players will enjoy this more and still gain the benefits of conditioning.

What are the Principles of Playing Rugby League?

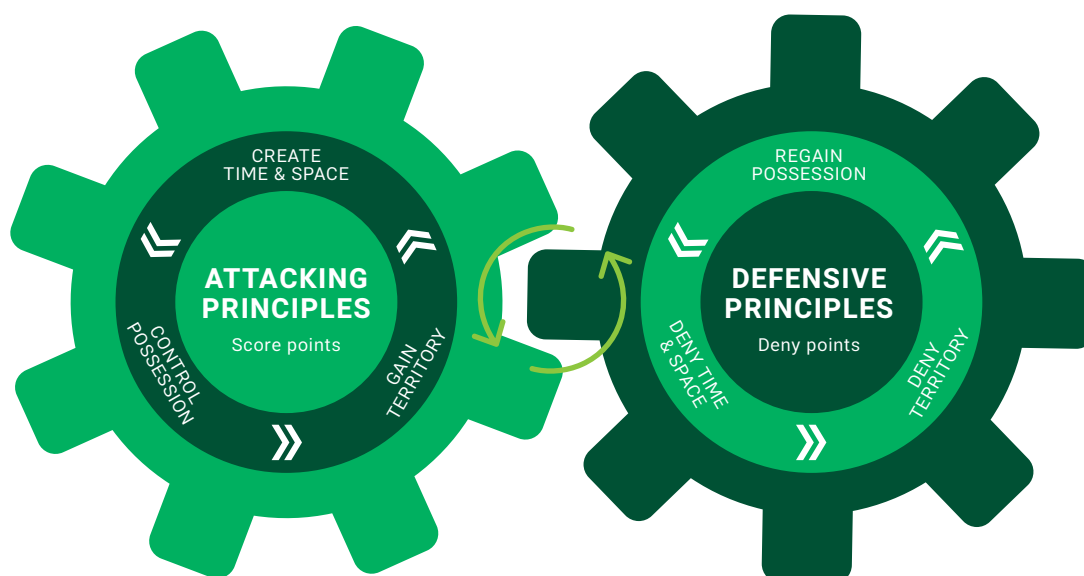
Rugby League is classified as an invasion game, where the aim, or general principle, is to invade and defend territory. To help players understand exactly what they're trying to achieve, they can follow these general principles.

Within these Attacking and Defensive Principles, there are opposing elements around possession, territory and space that ultimately determine how a team can either score or deny points. These Principles can be applied to all age groups and levels of the game. However, the number of strategies or tactics will increase as players develop.

To be able to achieve these general principles it's important players develop the following attributes:

1. Have a good awareness of the rules of the game.
2. Know when, why and how to perform a tactical skill under pressure.
3. Have the adequate physical skills to perform the skill.
4. Have good decision-making skills.

General Principles



Attacking Principles

Control Possession

The first thing players need to understand is the importance of maintaining possession of the ball. Ultimately, you can't win a game of Rugby League without the ball. This requires the player to weigh up the risk versus the reward of the decisions they make.

For example: Will offloading ball create space for my support runner, allowing my team to gain territory? Or risk an error and give away possession?

Gain Territory

This means moving the ball towards the oppositions try line via a carry, pass or kick and take advantage of the space we have created. This is a core element of Rugby League, because if we don't progress the ball downfield, we are unable to score points. The players will also need to consider various factors in determining what the best action to take is.

Create Time & Space

This requires players to have a sense of how to manipulate the defending players positioning by changing their speed, width and angles. Both when in possession and when not in possession of the ball.

To do this effectively, coaches are encouraged to teach players:

› What to do when they have the ball?

They need to consider:

- The speed they approach the defensive line.
- What direction they will run with the ball?
- When and where they can pass the ball?
- What is the defence doing?
- How do they hold the ball?

› What to do when a player doesn't have the ball?

- Where they stand?
- Where they run to?
- What speed they run at?
- What direction do they run?

Score Points

Our overarching objective is simply to score more points than the other team. To do that we need to **control possession**, so we can **create space and time** which will allow us to **gain territory**, so we are able to **score points**.

Even when we can score, the players need the situational awareness to know how to score.

- **Where is the space?**
- **How many points do we need?**
- **How long is left?**
- **Do we kick for goal?**

Defensive Principles

Regain Possession

When we're defending, our ultimate aim is to get the ball back in our hands. This can be done either by completing a set-of-six by **denying territory** or by identifying opportunities to force the opposition to give up possession by putting pressure on them and **denying them time and space**.

Deny Time & Space

Space in defence refers to the gaps created between defenders and between the defender and attackers. By denying time and space, we limit the opportunity for the opposition to make good decisions which prevent them from performing a skill effectively. For coaches to develop strategies to achieve this, you need to consider:

Where do our defenders stand?

(Including markers and the fullback)

- Where do we move to after the play the ball?
- How far apart do we stand?
- Which players stand in which spots?

Deny Territory

This refers to how the team prevents the opposition from getting in a position to score, as well as providing us the opportunity to regain possession in a good field position.

If we can deny the opposition enough space and time to gain territory, and force them to kick from inside their 30m line, we will receive the ball in a better field position than we would if we allowed them to kick from the half way line.

Prevent Scoring

Just as important as regaining possession is preventing the opposition from scoring points. This is done by **denying territory, space, and time** to keep the opposition away from a position that allows them to score. When the opposition is able to score, the team needs to make decisions that relate to things like positioning, line speed and tackle technique.

Transition

This refers to the time the ball is in the air, or on the ground. There are decisions to be made by both the attacking and defensive team that relate to:

- **Where do I position myself?**
- **Do I jump for the ball?**
- **Do I dive on the ball or just pick it up?**
- **Do I risk trying to regain possession?**

What activities should I use?

The players you have are no different to any other people on the planet. They want to do things they enjoy. As coaches, we should use activities that meet these needs. Generally, the players enjoy activities that challenge them, help develop their skills, and provide high levels of fun. A great way to do this is to use a balance of two types of activities.

Deliberate Play v Deliberate Practice

The activities we use as coaches can be divided into two main categories; 'Deliberate Play' and 'Deliberate Practice'.

- › Deliberate play is intrinsically motivating, designed to maximise fun and enjoyment and provide immediate gratification. It often requires minimal equipment, is flexible and allows participants to experiment with rules, tactics, participant sizes and ages. (Bayley et al., 2010. Cote et al., 2009).
- › Deliberate practice is a highly structured activity that requires effort, generates no immediate rewards, and is motivated by the goal of improving performance rather than inherent enjoyment. (Cote et al., 2009).

Your players need a balance of deliberate play and deliberate practice. This will help keep your players learn the game, have fun, and be motivated to improve.

Your training sessions should consist of

50%	50%
Deliberate Play	Deliberate Practice



Types of Training Activities

Training Games

The traditional approach to sports coaching has always been to start with a simple skill activity and progress this to a point where the players could play a game, which was usually at the end of training.

With all the advances in understanding how people learn, there has been a significant shift towards a game centred approach. This approach allows players to practice different elements of the game in the context of a game. We know that if players train using a high amount of repetitive, drill based activities, they will be far less likely transfer these skills to game day.

When coaches are designing training games, they should ensure the game allows the players to see, hear and feel the same as what they encounter on game day. These designed games should also have a primary objective that is related to one of the Attacking or Defensive Principles of Rugby League. When players have an objective like this, they will be far more likely to explore different solutions, which will help lead to a more creative mindset.

Benefit of training games

Using a high amount of training games in your sessions is the best way to enhance enjoyment, motivation, learning, and development in your players. It will also provide the following benefits:

- › Allows players to be autonomous
- › Provides players with opportunities to strategise and work together.
- › Teaches players to learn different ways to attack and defend.
- › It replicates what they do on the weekend, which helps them transfer what they learn from training to games.
- › Games are more enjoyable than traditional drills.



Designing a Training Game

Field Size?

How wide and long is the field?

You can change the size of the field to help achieve the outcome. By making a field bigger, you provide the players with more space and vice versa if you make it smaller.

Prepare Some Variety?

Coaches need to have a series of variations for their games.

This will help prevent boredom and allow the coach to keep the game challenging and enjoyable. Have a think about the different variations you can add to your training game.

Outcome of the Game?

What is the outcome of the game? What are you trying to teach the players?

This will help you design the variables of the game to help achieve what you are focused on. This outcome should ideally be related to an Attacking or Defensive Principle.

Players Per Team?

How many players are on each team?

You can manipulate the number of attackers or defenders on each to help achieve the outcome of the game. If you have a large number of players, you can also create multiple games and teams.

Game Rules?

One of the best and most creative ways to change a game is to change the rules of the game from normal Rugby League.

Starting & Restarting Play

How do you start and restart play? When you start the game, how is play commenced? Is it by a kick off or a tap? Also, what part of the field does this happen. The same goes for restarting play after a mistake or a try, how does this happen?

Stopping Play

How does the defending team regain possession or stop the attacking team? Do they need to make a tackle, tag, touch or a combination of these? Also, how do they get the ball back?

Rules of the Game

What other rules of the game can you change to help achieve the outcome? Try to create rules that allow players to explore and find different ways to solve the problem.

Create a Scenario

Another way that coaches can help make the training game more like the real game is to add a scenario. This could be the time of the game, the score, the positions the players are in or even the area of the field. Using combinations of these variables can help create a scenario that helps the players practice what they will see on game day.

Training Game

Field Size?

Prepare Some Variety?

Outcome of the Game?

Players Per Team?

Game Rules?

Practice Activities

There will be times when you will need to take players away from a game-based activity to help them practice a specific element of the game. These practice activities are usually focused on improving an individual skill, or team skill, in isolation. Practice activities can generally be classified as an Open or Closed activity.

Closed Activities

These are activities that allow players to practice skills in an environment that has no external pressures. Closed activities are best for players to learn a skill initially, however they won't progress this skill into game situations unless they can apply these in open activities or skill-biased games. Closed activities are great if you are finding that players are struggling to perform a skill in a game environment. You can then implement a closed activity, so they can improve that skill first, and then take them back to an open activity or skill-biased game.

Open Activities

These are activities that allow players to practice skills in an environment that provides external pressures. Closed activities can be good for players to practice a skill initially, however they won't progress this skill into game situations unless they can apply these in open activities or training games. An example of the difference between an open and closed activity could be around a simple 2 v 1 activity. If we had 2 players run at a pole and practice a 2 v 1, it would be considered a closed activity because there is no defender placing external pressure on the players performing the catch and pass. If we add a defender, instead of a pole, the ball carrier needs to make a decision on if they pass or dummy based on what action the defender takes.

Prepare to Play (P2P) Program

The Prepare to Play (P2P) Program is a prescribed set of activities and exercises that when done consistently have been proven to develop key physical competencies such as strength, balance and proprioception which increases athletic performance and reduces the risk of injury.

The program has been designed to be delivered to participants ages 13+ by coaches at the start of Rugby League training sessions and games. It is made up of three components:

- › General Warm Up: This part of the program raises the heart rate, to generate blood flow to the muscles, increasing their elasticity.
- › Hopping & Landing: These activities improve balance, agility, accuracy and stability within the hip, knee and ankle joints.
- › Strength: These exercises develop core stability and muscle strength which aids stability and skills performance.

To learn about the Prepare 2 Play program, visit www.playrugbyleague.com/coach/prepare-to-play/



The Coaching Process

Designing good activities is one piece of the puzzle to enhancing the learning and enjoyment of your players. The second piece of the puzzle, and the most critical piece, is the coaches understanding HOW to coach. Coaches who can use a good coaching process that allows players to learn will see significantly greater results in players competence and confidence.

To ensure we get the most out of training sessions and to help us achieve our aims of making training enjoyable and stimulating for the players, coaches are encouraged to follow this coaching process.

Getting Started

Don't get caught in the habit of spending too much time talking and explaining a new activity. Players will learn when they **SEE** and **DO** it.

- › New activities: if the players haven't done the activity before, provide a demonstration so they can **SEE IT** and then a half-paced walk through, so they can **DO IT**.
- › Repeated activities: if the players have done the activity before, just have them start straight away. Don't muck around with talking too much.

Observing

The main job of a coach is to observe what is happening in an activity and decide what they should do next. This is a critical skill for coaches to learn, but it will allow you to enhance the learning and enjoyment with the players.

The key questions a coach should be asking themselves when observing are:

- › Are they Safe?
- › Are they having Fun?
- › Are they appropriately challenged (is it too easy or too hard)?
- › How can I help them learn?

Decide

As you observe what is happening, coaches need to decide if they should **STEP IN** or **STEP BACK**.

Step Back

If your players are safe, having fun, and challenged then there may be no need to step in. Your players need to learn through exploring and game situations, sometimes its ok to just step back and let them play. They may also just need time to learn.

Step In

The key to coaching so that players learn effectively is knowing when to step in and what to do. Stepping in doesn't always mean stopping the activity, it just means that you can apply a coaching technique to help enhance the players learning. Most times you can do this while keeping the activity moving.

When coaches step in they can:

Provide
Feedback

Ask a
Question

Change
part of the
Activity

Providing Feedback

How do players receive feedback?

There are two types of feedback that your players will receive when they are training and playing. These can be categorised as:

1. **Feedback from a coach:** the main way we think of providing feedback is verbally to improve a fault in the skill of the players. This type of feedback can be used to help players improve, but when it is used regularly without any other types of feedback, learning is likely to be slow or non-existent.
2. **Feedback from themselves:** one of the other ways the players will receive feedback is through their own experiences where they reflect on what they are doing or what they encountered. This is a powerful form of feedback as the player will generally learn more when they are encouraged to think about what they see and how they can learn from it.

When players can internalise their feedback, they will be far more likely to problem solve in game situations and not be reliant on coaches to tell them how to play. Coaches can teach players to use their internal feedback by using the questioning technique. This allows a coach to guide a player's internal feedback.

Why do we provide feedback?

Feedback has been established as a critical tool for coaches to help players learn and improve. We also know that players receive feedback in two different ways. The next step is to understand when to use feedback and what to use it for. Typically, there are two reasons for providing feedback:

1. To **provide positive recognition** when players show desired behaviours or actions. This feedback helps motivate players to display this in the future.
2. To help change something about a player who may need to **improve skills** of the game or is not showing the desired behaviour.

Both reasons for providing feedback can help players become motivated and improve their performance. If coaches are using feedback to help a player change something, they should look to ensure the feedback is:

- › Not abusive or personal towards the player
- › Is focused on the behaviour and involves ways the player can see a solution
- › Is ideally asked as a question to the player

Coaches are encouraged to focus on feedback related to the performance and not the outcome. Players know when they have thrown a bad pass or missed a tackle. Coaches need to focus their feedback on why they missed the tackle or what the player saw when they threw the pass. This is where the use of questioning can be highly valuable, coaches can ask players what they saw, heard, or felt to help the player identify how they could improve in the future.

How can coaches deliver feedback?

There is a variety of ways coaches can provide feedback to players. These can be categorised in two different ways:

1. **Verbally:** you can provide a player with verbal details on how they can improve, or you can ask them a question designed to help the player learn themselves. Using a question instead of direct instruction has been proven to be more effective in helping players learn.
2. **Visually:** another way to provide feedback is to demonstrate or use video to help players improve. When coaches use video, they need to consider if they are showing the whole group or just an individual. When a coach provides lots of individual negative feedback in a group environment, it can influence the players confidence. Coaches are encouraged to always balance video feedback with good and bad examples.

When should coaches provide feedback?

Finally, coaches need to consider when they provide the feedback to players. When considering this coaches should consider when will be the best time to help the player learn and avoid damaging their confidence. Coaches are encouraged to:

- Avoid high amounts of instructional feedback that stops activities
- Be positive and avoid abusive feedback
- Focus on the performance and not the outcome



Asking Questions

One of the most powerful forms of feedback a coach can use is to ask a question. Coaches who are player-centred are far more likely to use this technique because they are generally more open to player input and creating a great learning environment. Coaches who are very controlling, and consider themselves the source of all knowledge, generally struggle to see the value in this.

Questioning allows coaches to help players learn for themselves rather than being told the answer. When players are asked questions, they need to think about what happened and what they could do to solve a problem. This will lead to a much greater level of learning from your players.

However, not all questions are created equally, and coaches can use specific types of questions to better enhance the learning. Questioning will also help create independent players that are able to think on the run and problem solve themselves.

Different types of Questions

Closed Questions (not great for learning)

These have limited effectiveness when related to player learning. Closed questions usually only have a Yes or No answer available to the player.

Some examples of closed questions include:

- › Did you see the defenders?
- › Did we score a try?
- › Were your eyes closed when you made the tackle?

Open Questions (great for learning)

Open questions are fantastic for providing players with the opportunity to learn. These types of questions require the player/s to apply, analyse, evaluate what has happened and how they can improve. Open questions can have multiple answers that allow players to consider how they perform a skill or what tactic to use.

Some examples of open questions include:

- › What did you notice?
- › How can you score a try?
- › What are you trying to do?
- › How did that feel?
- › What can you do if the defender changes?
- › What happened to the defence when you run at a different spot?

Structure of Questions

GROW Model of Questioning

A great way for coaches to structure a sequence of open questioning for their players is to use the **GROW** model of questioning.

This model helps you and the players work through the feedback and how they can improve.

- › **G – Goal:** what do you want to achieve?
- › **R – Reality:** where are you now?
What worked before? What didn't work?
- › **O – Options:** what are your options?
What is stopping you?
- › **W – Way Forward:** what can we try?
What will you do next?

Good, Better, How, How Model of Questioning

Another framework that coaches can use to ask questions is the Good, Better, How, How method. This also helps the players think about where they can improve and how the coach can help them. The model is:

- › What did you **Good**?
- › What could you do **Better**?
- › **How** could you do it better?
- › **How** can I help you?

When to Ask a Question

The key to questioning is knowing when and how to ask the question. Coaches who create a great learning environment know that they need to limit when they intervene and instruct. Here are a few tips on when to ask a question:

- › **Start of an Activity:** this can be a great time to ask the players how they are going to strategise together to achieve the outcome of the game or activity. This allows them to think about how they work together as a team and develops great social and leadership skills.
- › **During an Activity:** if you are going to ask a question or give feedback during an activity keep it short and simple. Ask the question to a player when it doesn't effect the activity to make sure you don't stop the whole group.
- › **At a break in an Activity or the End:** This is a great time to review what happened and have players discuss it. Ideally this provides the players with the time to re-strategise and have a chance to try the new tactic. This can lead to a continuous cycle of reviewing what happened and develop ways to improve or solve problems.

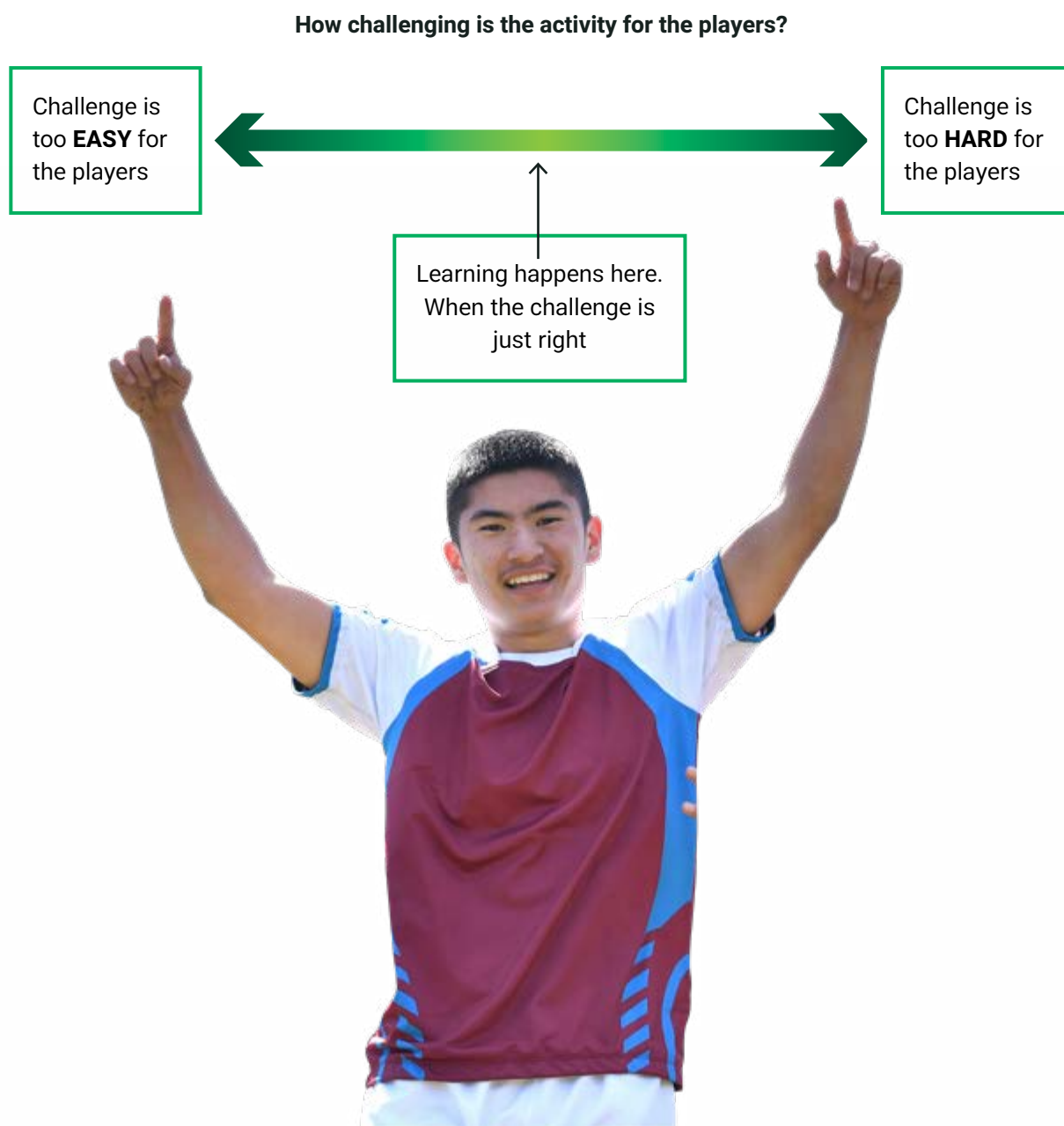


Change Something About the Activity

The other way coaches can STEP IN is to change something about the activity. The main reasons you would change something about the activity is to:

1. Keep the players engaged
2. Make sure the challenge level is right
3. Allow them to continue solving new problems

There are different ways coaches can do this through changing the rules, the field size, and the players. As coaches become more experienced, you will naturally pick up different ideas they can apply on the run. However, inexperienced coaches can plan a few back up changes that they can draw on quickly when needed.



Change the Rules

The first way you can manipulate an activity is to change a rule. This will allow you to increase or decrease how challenging the activity is and provide players with additional problems to solve. Changing a rule also allows you to provide players with the variety that they need to stay engaged.

Field Size

The second way you can manipulate an activity is to change the field dimensions. This can be a simple change that provides different challenges for each player or team. If you make the field wider and longer, it will make the activity more challenging on the defence or require players to exert more effort. Making a field smaller or narrower can make the activity more challenging for the attackers or it can make it easier if the challenge level is too hard.

Player Groups

The third way you can manipulate the activity is to change the group sizes or players per team. Coaches can do this to try and make an activity easier or harder for one team. For example, in a game of 5 v 5, the attackers may struggle to score a try, you can change this to 5 v 3 so they are able to solve the problem and gradually increase the defenders once they are more confident.

Add a scenario

Lastly, you can add a specific scenario to your game. When you add a scenario to the game, you are helping the players practice in a situation that they will be likely to encounter on game day.

This could include the score of the game, the area of the field they are in, the positions they are playing, how many tackles they have left, or how much time is left in the game.



What are the Skills of Rugby League?

Coaches are encouraged to focus on helping players achieve the Attacking and Defensive Principles of Rugby League. For the players to do this effectively, they need to develop skills that will help them achieve these principles. There are several different skills that can be developed depending on the age and stage of development the players are at.

These skills can be broken down into 4 key areas, these are:



Tactical Skills

Technical Skills

Physical Skills

Socio-Emotional Skills

Tactical Skills

Tactical skills are the ability to apply technical skills, physical skills and team strategy in game environment. Traditionally, people have defined skill simply as technical skills. However real skill is the ability to understand a particular situation based on multiple factors and apply a technical skill in the most effective and efficient way to enable us to achieve a positive result. There are three key elements for developing tactical skills.

Reading the Situation

The players need to be able to gather information they see, hear, and feel in a game and make sense of this in a meaningful way. This information could be what the opposition is doing, what their teammates are doing, what area of the field they are in, or even what time of the game it is. You can help the players to be better at gathering and processing this information by using a lot of game-based training where they are exposed to this information and can practice.

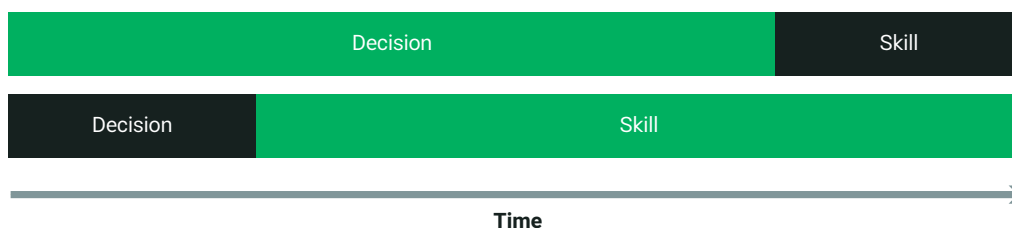
Knowledge of the Rules & Game Plan

The second component to tactical skills is the players having a good understanding of the rules of the game and what the game plan is. This will allow the players to quickly determine what the best option is in any given situation. Coaches can use game-based activities, and questioning, to allow players to learn what they can do in different situations to try and achieve the Attacking and Defensive Principles.

Decision Making

The third component of tactical skills is decision making. The players will have to make lots of decisions in games, and the more skilful players will be able to do this more effectively. As a coach, you can help players make better decisions by teaching them to read the situation and developing a good knowledge of the rules and game plan. When the players process this information quickly, they have more time to make a decision and perform the skill.

This diagram highlights the importance of making quick decisions.



- The top bar shows a player taking a long time to make a decision. This doesn't leave much time to perform the skill.
- The bottom bar represents a player who can make a decision quickly which leaves more time to perform the skill effectively.

There is an argument that a player with a lower level of technical skill but a better at decision making is more effective than a player with higher level of technical skill who is poorer at decision making. Creating an environment where the player can develop their decision-making skills in multiple game situations is important in developing player competence.

Tactical Skill Example - Marker Defence

The table below shows how these three elements of tactical skills apply to a certain situation in the game. Let's have a look at how this could apply to marker defence.

A good place to start is to first determine what Principle and what part of that Principle you are asking the players to achieve. It's even better again if you can clearly communicate this to the players as this will give them a deeper understanding of WHY they are doing a particular drill or the importance of 'getting it right' in a game.

Defensive Principle – Deny Time & Space > Deny Territory	
Reading the Situation	<p>When a player is defending at marker, they are taking in a range of information. This could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › What is the opposition dummy half doing? › What are the opposition players doing? › How quickly is the ball being played? › What is my other marker doing? -› What part of the field are we in? <p>When players can identify this information quickly, it will allow them much more time to make a decision and perform a skill.</p>
Knowledge of the Rules & Game Plan	<p>From a rules perspective, the players need to understand when they can move, where they are supposed to stand, and what they can do when they are at marker.</p> <p>Then from a game plan perspective, the players also need to know what the team strategy is for how they are going to achieve the Defensive Principles.</p>
Decision Making	<p>Once the players have all the information, they can decide on what they do at Marker. Do they chase where the ball goes, do they hold back, or do they attack the dummy half? These are the decisions the players can make.</p>

Technical Skills

Technical skills are the abilities and knowledge needed to perform specific tasks.

The technical skills of Rugby League include:

Safe Landing

Making a Tackle

Running into
a Tackle

Making and
Receiving a
Pass

Play the Ball

Kicking

Here are some key coaching points that will help you identify what might be happening if you observe a player struggling with a skill. When introducing and practicing skills, remember to use the coaching process! Be sure not to overload the players with too much information, providing simple instruction.

Tell them what they are trying to achieve, giving them a quick demonstration so they can see it, and let them practice!

The techniques described here are guides only. coaches are encouraged to focus on the outcome of the skill, and player safety, rather than ensuring every player executes the correct technique. Some players will develop other ways to achieve the outcome through their own idiosyncrasies. Try not to discourage these.



Safe Landing

Sink, Tuck, Roll



Sink

1. Make yourself small
2. Hinge at the knees & hips



Tuck

1. Bring ball to midline of the body
2. Tuck your arms and chin tight

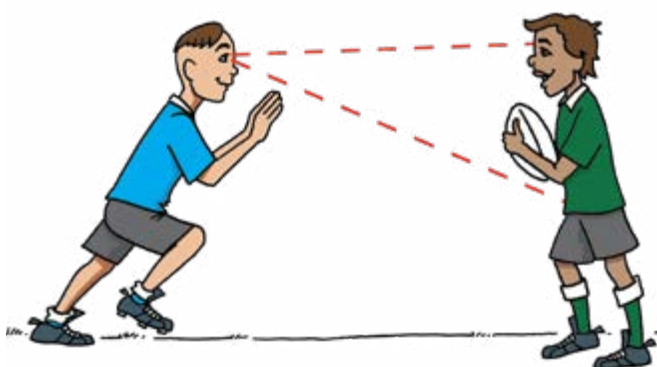


Roll

1. Collapse, don't fall.
2. Land on large part of the body

Making a Tackle

Approach, Hit, Wrap, Push & Roll



Approach

1. Chin up
2. Eyes at the target
3. Hands up
4. Short feet into contact



Hit

1. Aim for Tackle Zone (Belly Button)
2. Chin Up
3. Back Straight
4. Contact with Shoulder



Wrap

1. Head to the Side & Tight
2. Feet Close to Ball Carrier
3. Arms Wrapped
4. Squeeze



Push & Roll

1. Use ball carrier's momentum
2. Push towards the ball carrier
3. Roll them onto their back
4. Land on top with control

Running into a Tackle

Protect, Brace, Land, Play the Ball



Protect

1. Secure grip on the ball with finger spread
2. Tuck the ball into the midline of the body
3. Protect the ball with the non-ball carrying arm



Brace

1. Eyes up
2. Shorten your steps
3. Lean forward
4. Find Space



Land

1. Make yourself small
2. Hinge at the knees & hips
3. Land Safely



Play the Ball

1. Snap your knees up
2. Sweep your leg around
3. Touch the ball with your foot

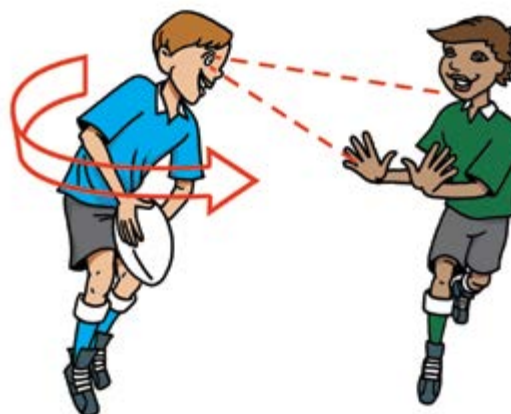
The Pass

Receive, Make



Receiving a Pass

1. Hands up early to provide target, forming a "W" with fingers
2. Keep elbows away from body
3. Eyes on Ball, early catch

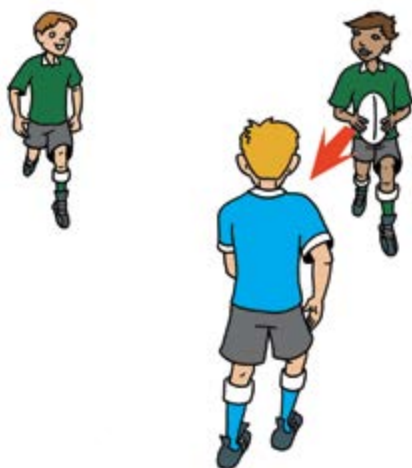


Making a Pass

1. Two handed grip, fingers spread
2. Eyes on target
3. Rotate torso. Extend arms towards receiver
4. Pass off outside foot

Draw and Pass

Engage, Read, React



Engage

1. Run towards the defender
2. Shorten steps
3. Create space for your support



Read

1. Has the defender committed to tackling you?
2. Or have they moved their focus to your support player?



or



React

1. Decide if you should pass or run
2. If the defender follows you, pass into the space created
3. Otherwise hold the ball, and run

Play The Ball

Snap, Sweep, Touch



Snap

1. Keep ball secure
2. Snap your knees to your chest



Sweep

1. Pick the ball up off the ground
2. Sweep the leg around
3. Place the ball on the ground with the points of the ball facing each sideline



Touch

1. Step over the ball
2. Touch the ball with your foot
3. Rolling it backwards with control

Kicking

Set, Drop, Kick



Set

1. Grip ball with two hands with point of the ball towards the ground
2. Hips pointing square to the direction you want the ball to go.



Drop

1. Head looking down over ball
2. Drop ball onto the laces of you boot



Kick

1. Swing leg through with toes pointing down and a firm ankle.
2. Kick through the ball, and follow the ball

Physical Skills

Rugby League can be a very physically demanding sport. It can be very beneficial for the players to develop a range of physical skills that will help them during the game. The key for coaches is to understand how they can help players develop these skills safely and with time constraints. Generally, you will have limited time at training to work on these skills, so it's best to try and incorporate them into training games.

There are 9 recognised general **Physical Skills** that apply to Rugby League, these are:

Cardiovascular/respiratory endurance

This is the ability of your heart and lungs to absorb, transport and utilize oxygen over extended period during physical exertion.

- › **Application in Rugby League:** Players with better cardiovascular endurance can perform for longer periods of time. They recover quicker from any involvement and can therefore be more effective.
- › **How to Train:** Training games that involve a lot of running, and repeated efforts are the best way for community level coaches to develop cardiovascular endurance. To use your time wisely you should incorporate the ball into any conditioning game so players can continue to develop their technical and tactical skills.

Flexibility

This is the range of motion of your joints or the ability of your joints to move freely. It also refers to the mobility of your muscles, which allows for more movement around the joints.

- › **Application in Rugby League:** Good flexibility will help players avoid joint and muscular injuries. It also helps them to efficiently perform skills due to a better range of movement.
- › **How to Train:** Incorporating the dynamic and controlled movements from the Prepare 2 Play Program within your warm up will help develop flexibility.

Strength

This is the ability to carry out work against a resistance. Training to improve muscle strength includes lifting weights or otherwise increasing the resistance against which you work.

- › **Application in Rugby League:** Strength is important in Rugby League because it allows you to perform skills effectively, and efficiently. The stronger you are the less effort it takes to perform the skill.
- › **How to Train:** as a Coach, most of you are not an expert in developing or monitoring any strength training in the gym. You should always refer this to people who are qualified to do this safely, especially for adolescent players.

Speed

This is the ability to move quickly across the ground or move limbs rapidly to grab or throw.

Agility

This is the ability to move and change direction and position of the body quickly and effectively whilst maintaining control.

Power

Is the ability to exert a maximal force in as short a time as possible, as in accelerating, jumping and throwing implements.

Coordination

Is the ability to move two or more body parts under control, smoothly and efficiently.

Balance

Is the ability to stay upright or stay in control of body movement.

Accuracy

Refers to the ability to control movement in a given direction at a given intensity.

Socio-Emotional Skills

We know that sport can provide players with a wide range of benefits outside of just physical improvements. When players are exposed to positive coaching, they can develop social and emotional skills that will help them be better players and better people. Many coaches wouldn't consider what these skills are, how they develop, and what they can do to help.

These skills will also help your players become better at achieving goals by providing them with the foundation to set goals, concentrate, and avoid temptations that might affect them achieving their goals.

What are these skills?

- › **Emotional Skills:** these are the skills that help your players recognise, express, and regulate their emotions as well as being empathetic towards others. These skills are critical to building positive relationships with peers and adults.
- › **Social Skills:** these are the skills that allow your players to interpret other people's behaviour and successfully navigate social situations and interactions. These skills are critical to being able to work as a team, solve problems together, and develop friendships.

How can you develop these skills?

Most coaches are not experts in child psychology, however they can apply some basic principles and practices that will help players develop these skills. Coaches can do this by:

1. Focusing on developing a positive relationship with each player
2. Provide a safe environment where the players feel supported and cared for
3. Focus on rewarding players effort and commitment
4. Provide players with some autonomy in what they do and how they do it
5. Always focus your sessions on learning
6. Be a good role model by modelling good character
7. Create opportunities for players to work together

Game Day

Developing a Healthy Competitive Spirit

Competition is the essence of sport and it's important that coaches foster a strong competitive spirit in their teams, but it's also imperative that you don't prioritise your desire to win at the expense of the development of the players in your team. Research tells us, of the families that leave our sport, a negative experience is the main contributing factor.

Coaches can look for ways to encourage their players to be competitive in a respectful way. You can do this by:

› Take responsibility for both teams

Without an opposition team, there is no game. Coaches and players should always try their hardest and compete with the opposition, but coaches need to be conscious that the opposition are not the enemy, they are necessary for the game to occur.

› Create a competitive practice environment

This will allow players to continually compete with others. Coaches can look for ways to encourage feedback focused on their effort and improvement.

› Model positive behaviour

Players will learn character from the adults around them and how they behave. Abusive or highly negative behaviour from coaches, coaching staff, and parents can give players the wrong idea about what is acceptable.

› Be grateful

Teach players to thank officials and the opposition. Everyone is there to learn, develop and enjoy their experience, including the referee. Gratitude is a very important attribute for a person to have.

› Teach players how to win and lose

We should want to be winners every time we take the field, but whether we win or lose, it shouldn't impact our self-worth or keep us from learning and growing. Coaches can teach players plenty of life lessons by winning with class and losing with dignity.

› Don't lose sight of development

Teaching players to compete respectfully is a key job for a coach, but we shouldn't lose sight of how players develop. At these ages, you need to ensure you continually focus on the individual player and how they improve. You also need to ensure you allow them to make mistakes and learn from them.

Just remember, sport can be both fun and competitive.

Game Day Checklist for Coaches

Planning is paramount for pre-game activity on game day. If it's the start of the season it's important to take responsibility for making sure you hold current and appropriate accreditation. You also need to make sure the team's trainers accreditation is current and appropriate to their role. As the season progresses you will be able to develop routines and consistencies for your team to prepare to play.

Pre-Game

- Meet the team at a set meeting place
- Make sure you have all the equipment and water bottles you need for your warm up and game
- Have a conversation with all players individually – this may or may not be about the game and specific things you'd like them to work on.
- Remind everyone the team goals for the game
- Complete a warm up before the game
- Maintain hydration before the game

Half-Time

Half time is a period of rest for the players. It is important to give players a chance to recover before they play the 2nd half. There is a window of opportunity to discuss 2 or 3 aspects of the game, making sure that you give the players a chance to have input.

- Provide plenty of hydration
- Give the players a chance to rest and relax
- Check for injuries
- Discuss 2 or 3 aspects from the game, allowing players to share their ideas
- Encourage the team's best effort for the second half!

Post-Game

Immediately after the game is finished is the perfect time to provide some positive feedback to the players and call out some individual efforts. Don't spend too long trying to dissect the game and determine the areas of improvement as this is often best done with the benefit of time (and the players are likely too tired for the information to be taken in fully).

- Provide plenty of hydration
- Give the players a chance to rest and relax
- Check for injuries
- Quick recap on a couple of positive things out of the game
- Post-match awards (if relevant)
- Make some notes on the game which may help reflect on the team's performance, and if there is anything you and the team can improve
- Remind everyone when and where the next training session is

Role of the Coach During Games

When a game is being played, coaches are encouraged to be very mindful of what they are doing and what impact that has on their players. A very common mistake is over coaching, where the coach excessively intervenes or provides overwhelming feedback to players. This has potential to undermine the development of your players. To combat this, coaches should focus on three areas during games. Coaches are encouraged to Examine, Encourage, and Educate.

Analyse what's Happening

Coaches are encouraged to observe what is happening during a game, so they can make informed decisions. Ideally coaches are encouraged to do this without constant instruction and intervention. Observation will help the coaches to:

- › Make strategic adjustments
- › Praise positive behaviour and effort in their players
- › Monitor for fatigue or potential injury

Encourage the Players

Another significant role that coaches play during the game is providing encouragement to the players. When coaches focus on praising positive effort over critiquing mistakes, you are showing players that you value them, and you value their effort, regardless of the result. This encouragement can be very motivating for players and research shows that they are more likely to perform better, have more enjoyment, and apply greater effort to the game.

Coaches can also play a leading role in the way parents and support staff encourage players. You can do this by educating on the benefits of positive encouragement over negative critiquing, which will help create a positive environment for the players

Find Teachable Moments

The final role of a coach during the game is to educate the players. To find teachable moments where players can learn how to play the game, how to be a good sportsman, and how to handle winning a losing. These teachable moments are a coach's opportunity to help players learn and improve. If coaches focus on trying to control players and trying to fix every fault they see, players will lose motivation and will learn less about the game. As a coach you can educate them by:

- › **Teaching them about the game:** Coaches need to be very selective on when they do this because game time is a time for players to be allowed to figure stuff out for themselves and learn from their mistakes. All too often, coaches spend most of the game trying to control the players through instructions from themselves and their trainers. Just like training sessions, the role of the coach is to observe what is happening and decide if they need to step in and do something to enhance the players learning.
- › **Teaching them good sportsmanship:** Coaches also need to educate players on how to show good sportsmanship and character. Coaches do this when they lead by example through:
 - Being aware of your body language and demeanour
 - Making sure you respect the officials and thank the opposition
 - Avoid providing excuses for a poor result
 - Keep it in perspective when you win or lose

Developing a Game Plan

In the previous chapter we introduced the attacking and defensive principles, not only are these principles a great basis from which to plan training activities and sessions, we also encourage coaches to make them the basis of developing game plans. Let's look at how this can work;

In any game of Rugby League, the goal is to score more points than the opposition. To achieve this outcome, coaches can work with their players and support staff to develop a game plan of strategies and tactics that are trying to achieve the **Attacking** and **Defensive** Principles of Rugby League.

Attacking Principles	Defensive Principles
Control Possession	Regain Possession
Gain Territory	Deny Territory
Create Time and Space	Deny Time and Space

Coaches are encouraged to consider the age and stage of the players in developing this game plan but be aware it can be easy to over-complicate things for the younger age groups, which will make it too challenging for the team to execute.

The Principles don't change for any age group, but the trick is to match the complexity of the game plan to make it age and stage appropriate for the team you're coaching e.g. If we're wanting to Deny Time and Space and we're coaching a 13 years old team, ruck control and line speed may be a bit beyond them but some general rules around marker defence and keeping a straight defensive line that moves forward together should be enough for them to understand and achieve. Keeping in mind of course that every group will have differing capabilities.

The real benefit here is that if as a coach you're able to communicate to the players **HOW** and **WHY** you're working with them on playing a particular way, it gives them a broader perspective and deeper understanding of the game and in many respects will simplify things for them, this will ultimately lead to them becoming better players



Developing the Game Plan

After you have developed the strategies and tactics, the next step is to provide the players with the knowledge of what they can do in their role. A great place to start is to consider the what the players can do when they:

- › Have the ball in Attack
- › Don't have the ball in Attack
- › When they are Defending

This will be different based on the **position they are playing** and the **scenario of the game**. For example, a fullback will obviously have a different role in how they help the team Deny Territory in Defence compared with a Front Rower. You also need to consider if the strategy and tactics change based on the **time of the game**, the **area of the field**, the **score**, or even the **weather**.

Teaching the Game Plan

Whilst coaches may develop the best game plan, it still relies on the players learning this and being able to execute this under the pressures of a game. At training, coaches are encouraged to use a lot of game-based activities, that expose players to these pressures, whilst they explore how to implement these strategies and tactics.

These training games can focus on the **Attacking** and **Defensive** principles that underpin the game plan. When this is coupled with coaches using the **STEP IN** and **STEP BACK** coaching process, there is a much higher chance that the players will be able to translate these skills to game day.



Laws of the Game (Under 13 & 14s)

www.playrugbyleague.com/referee/laws-of-the-game/international-13plus-laws/



6 Tackles



**100x68m
Field Size**



**13 Players
Per Team**



**25–35 mins x 2
Game Time**



**Scrum
Allowed**



**Conversions
Allowed**



**Defenders
Stand
Back 5m**



**0 Pass
Minimum**



**Kicking
Allowed**



**Kick Off
Restart
on Halfway**

Laws of the Game (under 15s and above)

www.playrugbyleague.com/referee/laws-of-the-game/international-13splus-laws/



6 Tackles



**100x68m
Field Size**



**13 Players
Per Team**



**25–35 mins x 2
Game Time**



**Scrums
Allowed**



**Conversions
Allowed**



**Defenders
Stand
Back 10m**



**0 Pass
Minimum**



**Kicking
Allowed**



**Kick Off
Restart
on Halfway**

SafePlay Code

The Safeplay Code was developed to emphasise safety and good conduct within the game of Rugby League by creating the best possible on-field environment and actively encouraging the core values of Rugby League, and a healthy respect for all participants. It applies to all players up to and including the Under 15 years age group. To find out more visit www.playrugbyleague.com/safeplay

Covering:

- › Tackle zone
- › Dangerous tackles
- › Aggressive palm
- › Pushing
- › Dangerous flop
- › Surrender (in the tackle)
- › Verbal abuse & foul language
- › Scrums
- › Sin bin
- › Advantage play



Game Day Safety Roles and Policies

On-Field Policy

The purpose of the NRL on-field policy is to ensure that on-field safety personnel possess the theoretical and practical knowledge required to complete their role in keeping players safe in the game of Rugby League.

The policy has two sections, one for the community game and one for the performance game. The main difference between the two sections is that, in the performance game, a doctor must be present for a game to proceed. The community on-field policy provides information on:

- › The two roles on game day, the LeagueSafe Trainer and the First Responder
- › The expectations and limitations of each game day role
- › The minimum personnel requirements for a game to commence at each age group

To read the NRL On-Field policy please go to playnrl.com/policies

Roles on Game Day

There are two (2) safety-based roles on game day.

1. The LeagueSafe Trainer

The role of the LeagueSafe trainer during a match is to provide water to players and to assist with the interchange process as required. LeagueSafe Trainers must be at least 14 years of age and have completed the NRL LeagueSafe course.

2. The First Responder

The role of the First Responder during a match is to administer first aid and/or offer advice to an injured or ill player. All injuries and illness assessed by the First Responder must be recorded in accordance with the NRL injury reporting guidelines. First Responders must be at least 18 years of age and hold a current relevant NRL accreditation.

The idea is to clearly differentiate between the game day role and the qualification/s required to fulfil that role. The minimum qualification to fulfil the role of a LeagueSafe trainer is the online LeagueSafe course. The minimum qualification to fulfil the role of a First Responder will depend on the age group they are involved with. A summary of the minimum requirements for each age group is below:

AGE	Minimum Personnel Required	Minimum Accreditation Required
U6-7	One (1) x First Responder for up to four (4) matches being played on an International Field	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · League First Aid; or · NRL Level 1 Sports Trainer; or · NRL Level 2 Sports Trainer
U8-9	One (1) x First Responder for up to three (3) matches being played on an International Field	
U10-12	One (1) x First Responder per game	
U13-15	One (1) x First Responder per team for each game	
U16+	One (1) x First Responder per team for each game	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> · NRL Level 1 Sports Trainer; or · NRL Level 2 Sports Trainer

Shirt Colours

On-field personnel will be identified on game by their shirt colour. Their shirt colour will reflect their level of accreditation and their accreditation will be clearly identified on the shirt.

A summary of shirt colours can be found in the table below.

Accreditation	Role on Game Day	Shirt Colour
LeagueSafe Course	LeagueSafe Trainer	A yellow shirt, vest or jumper with 'LeagueSafe' clearly labelled on the back
League First Aid	First Responder	A green shirt, vest or jumper with 'League First Aid' clearly labelled on the back
Level 1 Sports Trainer	First Responder	A blue shirt, vest or jumper with 'Level 1 Sports Trainer' clearly labelled on the back
Level 2 Sports Trainer	First Responder	An orange shirt, vest or jumper with 'Level 2 Sports Trainer' clearly labelled on the back



Shirt Colours

There are four (4) accreditation courses in the safety education framework.

1. LeagueSafe Course
2. League First Aid
3. Level 1 Sports Trainer
4. Level 2 Sports Trainer

A breakdown of requirements for each age group can be found below:

NRL GAME DAY REQUIREMENTS			
6/7s			
10	A maximum of one (1) LeagueSafe Trainer allowed per team.	One (1) First Responder for up to four (4) matches being played on an International Field.	Minimum accreditation to act in the role of a First Responder is League First Aid.
20			
8/9s			
30	A maximum of one (1) LeagueSafe Trainer allowed per team.	One (1) First Responder for up to three (3) matches being played on an International Field.	Minimum accreditation to act in the role of a First Responder is League First Aid.
40			
10/11/12s			
50	A maximum of one (1) LeagueSafe Trainer allowed per team.	One (1) First Responder per match.	Minimum accreditation to act in the role of a First Responder is League First Aid.
40			
13/14/15s			
30	A maximum of two (2) LeagueSafe Trainers allowed per team.	One (1) First Responder per team for each match.	Minimum accreditation to act in the role of a First Responder is League First Aid.
20			
16s +			
10	A maximum of two (2) LeagueSafe Trainers allowed per team.	One (1) First Responder per team for each match.	Minimum accreditation to act in the role of a First Responder is Level 1 Sports Trainer.
NRL GAME DAY REQUIREMENTS			



Becoming a Better Coach

Why should the coach keep learning?

The world's most successful coaches have one thing in common, an insatiable thirst for knowledge. Coaching sport is an ever-evolving process. We are constantly learning more about junior sport, player development and coaching strategies. We all want to do the best we can for our players, so keeping abreast of current coaching trends, and reflecting on your own experiences will assist you in delivering the best possible program to your players.

The learning process

Learning is essentially problem solving. Developing as a coach is a constant cycle of identifying a problem, working out what new skills you need, understanding how to implement them, and then reflecting on how well the new skill assisted you in solving the problem. Understanding this process will help you make the most of any learning opportunities.



How does a coach learn?

There are multiple ways for a coach to learn how to improve. Taking advantage of these learning opportunities will help you develop as a coach, which will in turn allow you to achieve great results in developing your players competence, confidence, connection and character.

1. Informal Learning

This is the most beneficial form of learning for coaches. It is self-driven and allows coaches to learn on the run, and find information that is relevant to them at that particular time. Informal learning derives from:

› Experience

The most effective way of becoming a better coach is quite simply, to COACH! Through gaining experience, you will get better at communicating and engaging with players and parents. With experience, making sessions engaging will become second nature.

› Other Coaches

Networking, sharing ideas, or simply asking for advice from other coaches can be very beneficial in the pursuit of information. Coaching the next generation of Rugby League people is a team effort!

› Players

Don't discount how much you will learn from your players through your observations and feedback. Remembering, our primary focus is to provide the players themselves with an enjoyable experience. Often, they won't hold back in letting you know when it's fun, and when it's not! The challenge for coaches is to listen, respect and respond to their feedback.

› Research

There is an abundance of books, academic papers and online resources available specific to coaching junior sports participants. This is a great way to learn if you have time to search for what you're looking for, but often this is very time consuming as there is a lot of information out there that may be out of date or not relevant.

The good news is that the NRL have done a lot of the hard work. This handbook, the MyLeague App and www.playrugbyleague.com each have a library of session plans, activities and useful information that will help you in your coaching.

2. Professional Development

Non-formal learning opportunities are additional non-compulsory sessions that supplement your coach accreditation course that allow you to gain further knowledge about your role as a coach. The NRL offer many opportunities to engage in non-formal learning through regional coach development club updates and seminars.

To find out more go to www.playnrl.com/learn and www.playnrl.com/coach

3. Accreditation Courses

These are courses where you achieve an accreditation or qualification. Rugby League requires you to hold an accreditation, appropriate to the level that you are coaching.

This is to ensure that coaches are equipped with the basic information they need to start coaching. Formal Rugby League accreditation courses are essential in guaranteeing all entry level coaches understand their roles and responsibilities, particularly relating to the safety and enjoyment of participants. The other hope is that the information provided throughout these courses inspire coaches to continue to develop and learn through informal and non-formal methods.



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