

PRACTICAL IDEAS FOR AN ATTACKING PHILOSOPHY BY STUART LANCASTER, ACADEMY MANAGER AT LEEDS TYKES (ENGLAND) ACADEMY.

The author gave a presentation at the North Coaching Conference, 2005. The presentation was in two parts. The first was a lecture on his ideas and the second was a practical session on the important areas of skill development.

KEY INFLUENCES:

- Brian Ashton through the National Academy coaching programme.
- Rugby League through Leeds Rhinos coaching staff, in particular Tony Smith, the Head Coach.
- Personal observation and reflection on the game.

COACHING PHILOSOPHY:

- The basics of the game have to be mastered. Catching, passing and carrying are vital components.
- The handling side must have the ability to play square to check/stop the drift defence.
- Aim to play through the defensive line as well as round the outside.
- Their runners in defence have to be fixed by the attack running effective late cut lines so that they cannot move sideways.
- The attackers must play to break the gain line at all times with 3 or 4 players going to the line at the same time.
- Rugby must be played, as far as possible, with players on their feet.
- There has to be a positive attacking mentality.

HOW TO COACH IT?

“Technical activities are too often individually practised outside the context of the game – this is ineffective. Technique and understanding can be distinguished from each other but cannot be separated. They influence one another and depend on one another.”

This is an extract from the Dutch Football Coaching Manual and can be realistically applied to the philosophy of how to coach rugby in a way that fits in with my personal philosophy of how the game should be coached. i.e. Coach the game by playing the game (or part of it) through conditioned games.

FINDING THE 'CODE'.

In order to develop team understanding and synergy between players, play small versions of the game in training; this will allow the players to develop a 'code' where those players will instinctively run the right support lines and read effectively the 'body language' of the ball carrier.

At the simplest level, there are two distinct ways of playing the game.

1. Play by making decisions during the game based on agreed **principles** of how to play.
2. Play in **patterns** that have been previously agreed and practised.

If coaches want to develop play by principles, i.e. playing with width, let players work out how best to solve the problem. In order to do this I would recommend that you play rugby in training as often as possible. This will ensure that the skills that your players are improving are being developed in a game.

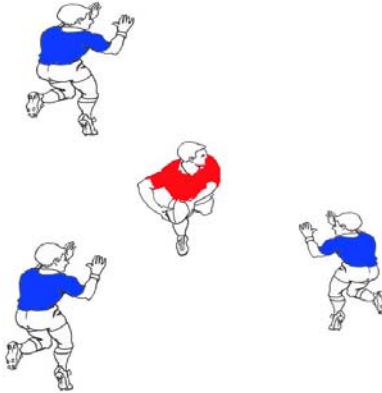
The 'code' may be found by developing special 'designer' games that maximise certain skills that the coach wants to highlight. The whole game of rugby does not have to be played in training; the thinking coach will be able to run conditioned practice games that highlight the principles and put players under pressure to make decisions rather than go through a pre-ordained set of pattern plays that do not consider what the opponents are doing.

PRACTICAL SESSION.

The second part of the presentation was a practical session that put forward handling ideas that Stuart has either seen during his time observing others or has developed himself and was based on Stuart's principles of play. The two distinct areas were:

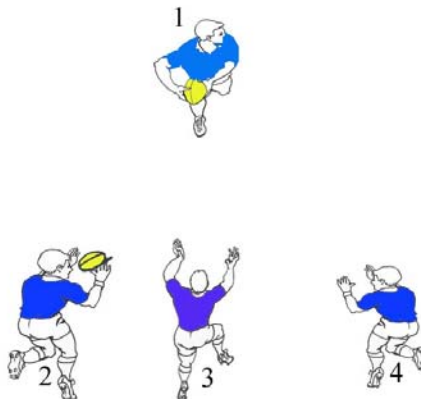
- Handling warm-ups for core skill.
- Decision making by playing square and focusing on the core skill of catching and passing.

1.



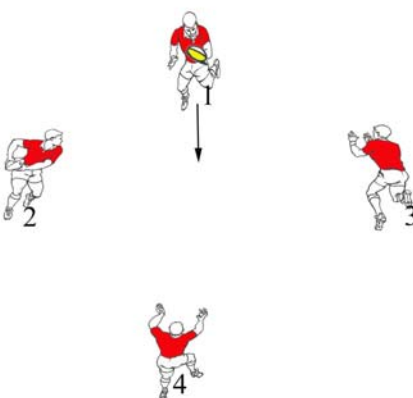
- Red player in the middle takes and gives all passes.
- The three blue players increase the difficulty of the passes he has to take with varying heights/pace/weight of the passes.
- The development gets harder as the man in the middle is forced to move sideways/jump/dip etc.
- A second ball is added to make it more difficult again and it is passed just as the red player passes the first ball.

2.



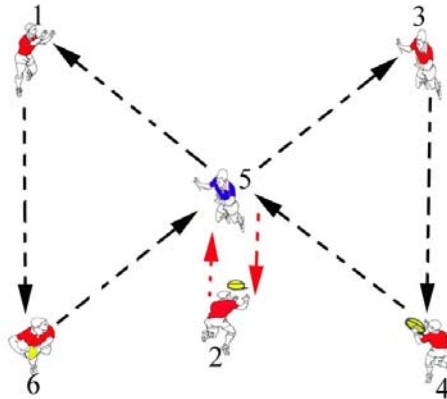
- Player 3 faces player 1, who works on 3's peripheral vision during this exercise.
- Players 2 and 4 stand *just* inside the field of vision of 3, who must not turn his head to look for their passes.
- One ball is passed continuously between 1 and 3.
- Just as 3 passes to 1, a second ball is passed along 2, 3, 4, 3, 2 3, 4 etc.
- Progress by trying to 'distract' the working player by asking him questions etc.

3.



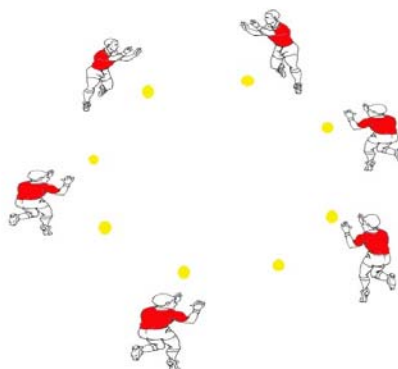
- Player 1 runs through and holds a ball with his left hand.
- He takes a pass from player 2 in his right hand and passes the first ball (from left hand) to player 3 - working on the offload.
- The next stage is to hold the ball in the right hand while taking a pass in the left. The first ball (in the right hand) is passed to player 3.

4.



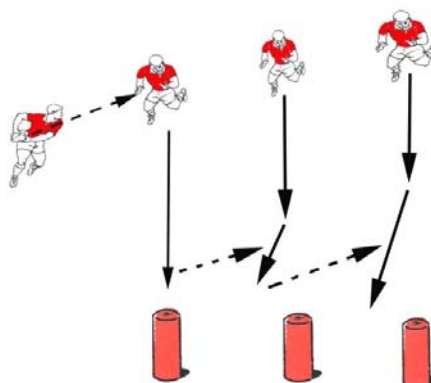
- **Player 5 is working as two balls are passed simultaneously and continuously (red and black arrows).**
- **Player 2 passes to 5, who passes back to him.**
- **Immediately after that a second ball (black arrows) starts with a scrum half pass from player 6 and it is passed in the sequence of 6 > 5 > 3.**
- **Player 2 passes (or rolls, chips, makes him jump etc) the ball back to 5, who passes back to him.**
- **A third ball is then scrum half passed from 4>5>1.**
- **Essentially 5 is always working at catching and passing off both left and right hands.**
- **The coach can try to distract the working player's (player 5 in the diagram) attention by occasionally getting in the way of a ball/pass.**
- **Add more balls as the players' skill levels demand.**
- **Rotate the players 'volleyball style' so everyone has a go in a different position.**

5.



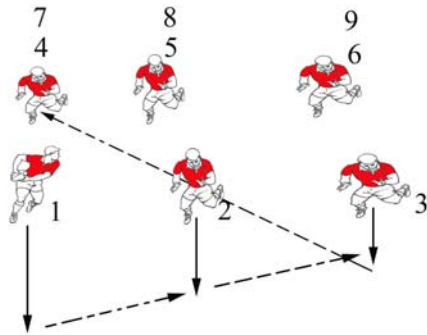
- The players form a circle and pass a ball to any other player then immediately sprint to the player's position that has been passed to.
- A second then a third ball can be added as the players improve.

6.



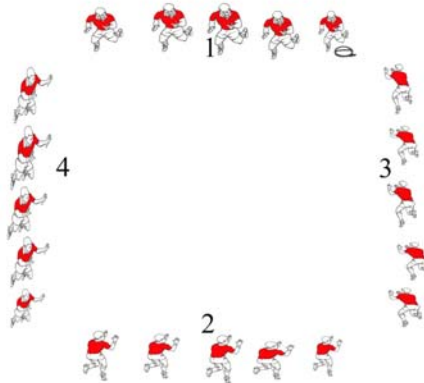
- The first receiver takes the ball up to the first tackle bag as if he were holding defenders in.
- Players 2 and 3 stay square as long as possible and cut late into a space.
- The initial running lines from 2 and 3 should be maintained as long as their skills allow and players should aim to change their line late, while the ball is in the air.

7.



- Arrange as many lines of three players as are needed.
- The front line runs through and passes 1, 2 then 3.
- As 3 takes the ball, he passes back to 4 so that that line can handle.
- Once 4 and 5 and 6 come through, 6 passes back to 7 etc.
- As soon as a line comes through, those players have to sprint back to be ready again to handle.
- An extra ball increases the intensity and a third ball makes the skill even harder.
- Concentrate on short accurate passes, focussing on the catch and pass.

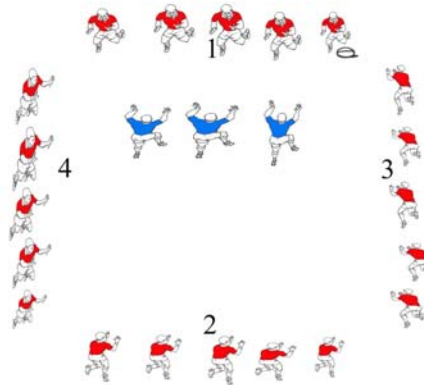
8a.



- Players form up in four groups in a square.
- Team 1 start by passing across the line as they sprint towards team 2.

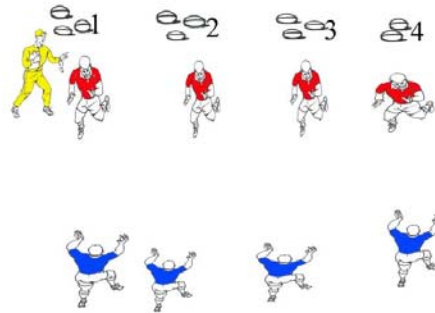
- The end man passes to the first man in team 2 and they sprint and handle back to where team 1 came from.
- Team 2 has no player to pass to immediately in front, so the pass is switched sideways to team 3.
- If there is a team immediately in front, they get the pass. If there is a space, the ball is switched immediately sideways to an available team.
- A second ball can be introduced.

8b.



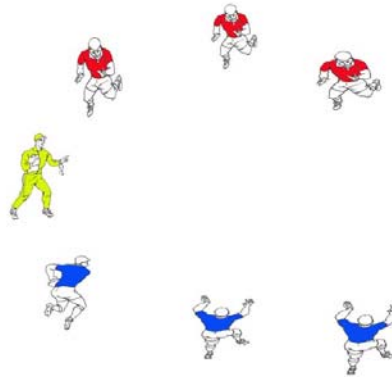
- The four teams line up in square formation again for the same practice.
- Now, three defenders have been introduced and they defend each wave of attack.
- The intensity of the defence must be monitored by the coach.

9.



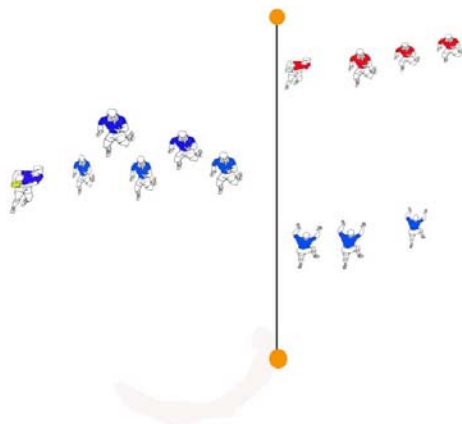
- A line of attackers stands in front of four sets of balls, each set with a number.
- The coach calls out a number, the attacking players sprint back to collect one ball from the appropriate pile and immediately attack the next four players.
- All the attackers go to the line at the same time.

10.



- The 3 v 3 game is a ‘one touch and there is a turnover’.
- The coach also keeps changing the focus of the attack by calling, “Ball down” when the players do not expect it and not just when there has been a touch.
- This keeps changing the attacking side so that attack has to turn quickly to defence and defence quickly to attack.

11.



- **This is a pressurized attacking exercise. The four red attackers beat the first three blue defenders. This channel is narrower than the second.**
- **The reds then run around the cone then they are defending an attack by all six blue players.**
- **The coach can condition the intensity of the defence.**

The practices are relatively simple and straightforward. The coach has to judge what he is looking for from the players and he must condition the intensity of the activity and/or defence to make the most gains for the players at all times.