

INTELLIGENT RUGBY

ARTICLE 2

By Pete Steinberg and Geoff Tanner

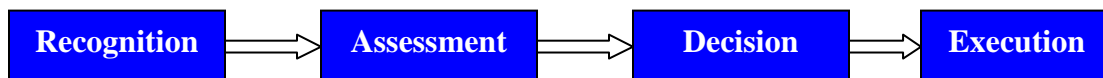
Intelligent Rugby: A Framework

In this section, we present our initial attempt at developing a framework for Intelligent Rugby and we provide some suggestions for how to implement the concept based on a year of experimentation and analysis. Again we would like to stress that efforts to put some structure and substance around the concept are merely a first attempt to flesh out what we believe to be an incredibly powerful development concept that has the potential to fundamentally change the way the game is coached and played as well as the wider image of the game. We recognize that if the concept of Intelligent Rugby is to be used as a development platform, a significant amount of additional research and analysis will need to be undertaken to define the framework in more detail and determine how to deliver the concept to the grass roots of the game.

The first component of the framework is the decision making process. It is absolutely critical that coaches and administrators have a strong understanding of this process. This is because the central objective of Intelligent Rugby is to improve the understanding and application of this process.

The Decision-Making Process

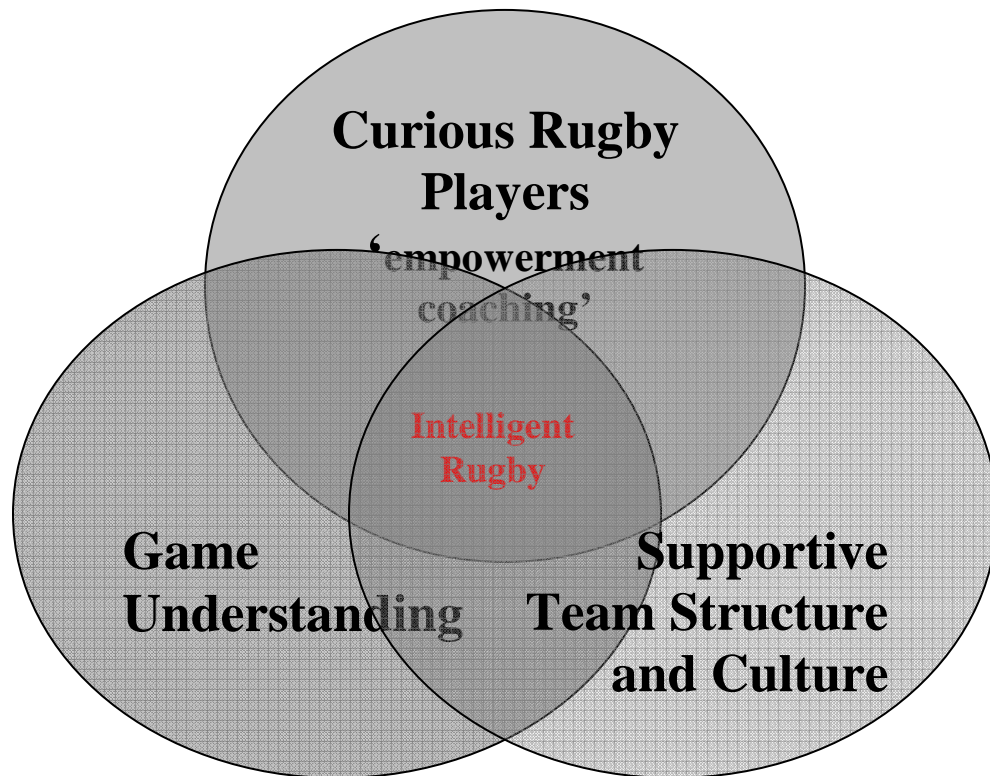
To make decisions at each level, player's need to follow a simple decision making process that can be split into 4 steps:



1. Recognition – The player first needs to be able to identify each situation on the field and understand its context within the overall game. The understanding needs to take into account strategic and tactical factors such as the strengths and weaknesses of their play or team, the strengths and weaknesses of the opposition as well as the conditions and position on the field.
2. Assessment - Once the player has recognized the situation they need to develop a list of options that they can execute.
3. Decision – The player then chooses the option that gives them the greatest advantage.
4. Execution – The player, unit or team then executes their decision.

The 4 steps are progressive in nature, meaning that players have to correctly execute the first step to be able to move to the second. If a player does not recognize the correct situation, then their decision will not maximize the team's advantage. If their decision is not correct, it will be very difficult to execute. A mistake on the rugby field can be traced to a failure of one of these steps – and more often than not it is one of the first three steps that force a failure in execution.

As mentioned, the central objective of Intelligent Rugby is to improve players understanding and application of this decision making process. To achieve this objective, a program needs to contain three structural elements. Only when each of these three elements is in place, will players will be able to develop their decision making abilities to their true potential. The three elements of developing decision makers are represented on the diagram below. Intelligent Rugby is represented by the intersection of these three elements.



Each of the three elements of Intelligent Rugby is equally important to developing effective decision makers. An empowerment coaching approach is essential in encouraging players to think and make decisions on their own. However unless the players are equipped with a very strong understanding of the game, it will be difficult for them to recognize situations and identify the best options, even with help from the coach. Without a strong understanding, players will become frustrated and it will be very difficult for a coach not to revert back to a more 'command and control approach'. The

third element, a structure and team culture that supports decision making is important because of the unique requirements and stresses of an ‘empowered coaching’ approach. The structures and culture of a team coached using the traditional ‘command and control’ approach simply do not work in an ‘empowerment’ environment and need to be adjusted allowing for more flexibility and player control. Unless these adjustments are made, the benefits of improved player decisions on the field will not be realized.

If the goal is improved decision making, or ‘Intelligent Rugby’, then a program needs to have each of the three elements in place. Having one or even two of the elements will not work. All three need to be in place to develop effective decision makers.

Pete Steinberg was born in England and is currently working as a Game Development Officer for USA Rugby. Pete also owns his own Management Consultancy business specializing in leadership development and strategic marketing. Pete has extensive coaching experience having been former Director of the US women’s national team and is a certified International Rugby Board instructor. For the past eight years Pete has held the head coach position for the Pennsylvania State University women’s team.

Geoff Tanner is a New Zealander currently working in the United States managing the Strategy Group of a Fortune 500 company. Before moving to the United States, Geoff worked as a Strategy Consultant for Cap Gemini Ernst & Young based out of New Zealand and Australia. During this time Geoff worked on a number of projects to help develop strategies for the development of rugby in New Zealand. His clients included the New Zealand Rugby Football Union, the Wellington Rugby Football Union and the New Zealand Marist Rugby Federation.