



INFORMATION PAGE

Week of November 5th, 2004

1 Well done, June

Canadian referee June Carson is currently on exchange in Scotland. I have received this extract from an article by Bill Lothian of the *The Scotsman.com*, the *Edinburgh Evening News*, concerning a game she refereed this week. Well done, June!

RECORD-BREAKER Jon White has re-lived his unprecedented five tries for Heriot's - and sportingly acknowledged that even such a feat entitled him to only share top billing in a 72-6 third round BT Scottish Cup win at Madras College FP in St Andrews.

In re-writing the record books so that Heriot's go into tomorrow's draw on a high the 21-year-old flanker did so under the gaze of a female referee, June Carson, whom he rates highly and who was on an exchange visit from Canada.

Although Ms Carson has now returned to North America here praises continue to be sung, especially by man-of-the-match White, who said: "Our team were doubly apprehensive with the referee being a woman and also from one of the emergent rugby nations.

"But any worries were quickly dispelled and there's no doubt that the referee contributed to the occasion with her decisions which kept the game flowing," said the man who snapped up a hat-trick before the interval...

2 Coaching Leadership

Here is the first section of an excellent new document by Lee Smith, the IRB's Regional Development Manager in Oceania, on "Coaching Leadership". Thanks, as always, to Lee for his remarkable work.

Best wishes to all.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Tom Jones'.

Tom Jones
Regional Development Manager

YOU ARE WHO YOU ARE

COACHING LEADERSHIP IN MODERN RUGBY

LEE SMITH

PAST MODELS AND SITUATIONS

Many years ago it was “not the done thing” to have a coach for your rugby team. A manager, yes, as a job for long service in administration but not a coach. And then the coach was given the euphemistic title of Assistant Coach or the coach was one of the selectors not differentiated in title from the other selectors, but everyone knew who was running the “Cutter”.

Almost without exception the coach did his apprenticeship in club or school rugby the later at a prestigious rugby school. This was followed by coaching the provincial/state team and, after being in this job for a considerable period of time with a degree of success, natural selection usually resulted in the most able getting the job. Sometimes timing was right but often the opportunity came too late.

Sometimes this was coloured by parochialism with team selection reflecting a similar bias but in general results proved that they got selection and the game plan right. Those who were appointed to positions were appointed based on the success of the teams they coached. There has always been the dilemma as to what extent the coach contributed to success as opposed to the calibre of the players. Top players make for coaching success. In very few occasions appointments were made of coaches who did well with inferior teams. In times of the adversity the experience of these people is invaluable, but seldom do they progress up the coaching hierarchy.

In the past there were relatively few games played. Because of this, with the exception of tours, the job could be handled by the coach with administrative support from the union secretary, now the CEO, his secretary and amateur support who had sufficient time on their hands to pursue their love of the game.

Because contact was less frequent it was easy to cast the opposition as a bunch of ill-disciplined savages and parochialism and passion borne out of this xenophobia could be used to motivate the team and the nation.

The coaches that emerged from such a system seemed to be autocratic in their style and even the more thoughtful ones demonstrated a command and control style of coaching and management. When things went wrong it was in with the new and out with the old, although the new appointee may have been a selector- in-waiting. With each change of coach it was a new dawn, with the next messiah being seen, at least initially, as the person to change the playing fortunes of the union.

The flaw in this approach was to treat each new regime as something that commenced from square one once again, and not something that built constructively on what had been achieved in the past. The political contest for the top job even today, detrimentally affects the camaraderie between coaches. It is not helped by the appointments being made by administrators without coaching experience.

It is doubtful that this approach got the best results, if only because on the field decisions were being made by coaches who, by virtue of their position, were not playing the game and were therefore not those who were making the decisions in a game.

In more recent times there has been inconsistency in result. This is probably a reflection of professional rugby reducing differences in the standard of play. Under these circumstances the tendency, when making appointments, has been to seek solutions in past autocratic models. This shows inexperience and insecurity with an alternative. The communication style used tended to be one way, coach to player. This style assumes that leaders are born not made.

In books on the role of the coach the usual approach has been to explain alternative styles but little more. The following is an extract from the IRB Level 2 Manual explaining the characteristics of various types of coach, styles of coaching and approaches to coaching.

Types of Coach

- Authoritarian
 - Autocratic
 - Demanding
 - One way of doing things
 - Under these circumstances the player becomes disciplined, organised better conditioned and have good spirit when the team is winning.
 - When the team is losing the coach can become disliked or feared. Because the team is continually being driven, it can easily become fatigued.
- Mr. Nice-Guy
 - Well liked, flexible, sociable, involves players in decision making.
 - Team cohesiveness, players produce above their expectations, and problem players are handled well.
 - The coach may be seen as weak. Deceitful players can cause problems, and quieter players may feel left out.
- The Intense Coach
 - Similar to the authoritarian coach.
 - Tends to worry and take things personally.
 - Over-emphasises preparation.
 - The Team is usually well prepared and is supported when it works hard, by a totally committed coach.
 - Can be too demanding and emotional.
 - Poor at handling sensitive players.
 - May overwork the team before a big game.

- The Easy-Going Coach
 - Unemotional, dislikes exact schedules, pressure free and may appear lazy.
 - The team feels little pressure and does not complain about being over-worked.
 - The players feel independent and free to have input into the team.
 - Because the coach is seen as lazy, the team may lack good physical condition and be unable to handle pressure.

- The Business-like Coach
 - Well prepared, educated and continually learning and improving.
 - Organised, logical and plans ahead to avoid unexpected problems.
 - Uses up to date techniques and prepared well for competition. The players feel confident.
 - May be uncaring, using players as pawns, maybe too technical, can be hard on disorganised players and may ignore the importance of team spirit and emotion.

Seldom are these types of coach as specific as indicated. Each coach will be a mixture of more than one of these types, and it is the skill of the coach to produce the behaviour that best suits the situation.

Styles of Coaching

- The Command Style:
 - The coach makes decisions and the player follows directions.
 - This style often occurs when the coach believes that their experience is much greater than that of the players.

- The Submissive Style:
 - The coach has a laissez fair approach, with the players making most of the decisions and the coach as facilitator.
 - The coach lacks confidence and is generally lazy.

- The Co-operative Style
 - The coach shares decision- making with the players.
 - The coach serves in a leadership role and guides the players in developing their skills and reaching their goals.

Approaches to Coaching

- The Directive Approach
 - Based on rewards and punishments, less attention to the needs and feelings of individuals.

- Little player input.
- The Supportive Approach
 - People Oriented – uses positive reinforcement, encourages others to show their feelings.
 - Creates harmony
- The Participative Approach
 - Is democratic and involves sharing responsibility with the players for success and failure.

No single style or approach applies to a coach. It is important for the coach to develop a style that is comfortable, drawing on the strengths of a number of different approaches, but more importantly the coach must evolve a style that fits their personality.

What these categories explain is a range, and implied in this is a bias for particular approaches. What is not said is that these categories are a menu from which choices are made, depending on the situation. Further it is not said that selecting from the menu should be based on the needs of the player and not that of the coach.

Because of the complexity of coaching in the professional game in particular, it is important to look for new options and to avoid the pendulum swings in styles that often occur when a coach succeeds or fails. There must be a body of knowledge that gives a basic blueprint for coaching leadership which can be modified to meet the needs of individual players, teams and coaches.

The multi-faceted nature of leadership means that the modern coach is the catalyst for team development. It is this person's responsibility to see the big picture and to co-ordinate all the different parts to achieve a vision and aim shared by them. As a result the coach should be someone who has been exposed to a wide range of experiences, both domestically and overseas. So that a number of people fill this criteria encouragement should be given to them to pursue a wide range of coaching experiences.

The constant that emerges is that the successful present and future coach should have a people-centred approach to leadership.

STARTING OUT

The challenge is everything

Leaders are not born, they are made.

The modern coaching leader is made not born. Since the beginnings of professional rugby there have been a number of ex-international players who have sought to go straight into coaching at a high and lucrative level immediately following their playing careers.

No one can deny their playing ability and the innate knowledge they must have in their specialised position. This may spill over to knowledge of the play of a mini-unit they were part of, as well as the unit. It is unlikely, given the specialized nature of their play that they will have a complete view of the game. In many ways they have to be saved from themselves as the political appointment of a coach may result in them getting a position for which they are unprepared.

To insulate them from this situation they need to coach those of lesser ability than themselves to make them understand the difficulties faced by the developing player. They need to study the areas of the game in which they are not expert. They need to study planning, management, communication and a whole range of peripheral topics. In some of these a detailed understanding is required because they are the tools of the coaches' trade. Planning, management, time management and communication come to mind as the core tools. In others a sound overview is required so that the coach is in a position to know what he wants and to scrutinise the efforts of experts who are included in the coaching team to get results in these specialized areas.

Of all the areas of employment it is highly unlikely that something as complex as coaching is the only one that cannot be committed to a formal course of study to improve understanding. At the very least, the study process can speed things up so that time consuming trial and error is kept to a minimum. At best the tools of the trade can provide the coach with a well proven method of coaching that provides a blue-print that is comprehensive and specific and which can be modified to meet individual needs.

Embrace the professional environment.

Coaching professionally can only be successful if the coach completely embraces the professional environment. A global view is needed so that solutions to problems are sought from any source as no one will have a monopoly on the best way of doing things. In doing this, the coach may be impeded by the xenophobia of administrators that have not moved forward into a professional future. This is acceptable so long as the administration accepts the fact that results will be impeded by their attitude. What must be opposed is the expectation of high level results based on a pool of players which is less than is available because only players who are playing in the union are deemed to be available for the team.

In the same way that gains are being made by coaches expanding their experience by coaching outside the union, the same applies to players, especially where there are insufficient opportunities for developing players to play at a high level domestically. In the future global brands will be based on players and a high profile player playing away from their country of origin can equally engender enthusiasm for a team as those locally born. It is just a matter of rugby maturing in the professional era.

Start with a clean slate.

The newly appointed coach should make it clear that he/she starts with a clean slate. In selection, in particular, the message must be that no baggage has been carried forward from the past. In this way the coach distances him/herself from the past. The same is true for the strategies and structures that will be used in the future.

The first and most important task is team selection. The coach must survey the scene, identifying strengths and weaknesses. Player selection must be done with precision, with the specific positional requirements being exact. Players must have skills that are complementary to each other not the same.

A key selection is that of the captain. In order of importance the criteria for this appointment are:

1. The captain must be able to lead by example and as a result must be an outstanding individual contributor and an automatic selection to their position. There must be no doubt that this player should be in the team.
2. The captain must be familiar with and comfortable with the coach's management style, so that the message the players are getting from the coach and the captain is consistent.
3. The captain must be someone who is able to see the complete picture so that the player doesn't become pre-occupied with their own playing problems.
4. The captain must be able to adapt to the playing situation within the parameters of the options offered in the game plan. This means that play can be changed without players becoming confused and hesitant because of a lack of familiarity.

The initial requirement in the first stages of coaching a team will be to achieve results. To do this a conservative approach should be taken built on play that is familiar to the players. It may not be how the coach eventually wants the team to play but wins and close losses will create confidence. Eventually this will create the latitude to include new and better ways of doing things.

The patterns of play will be reactive, based on the exploitation of an opponent's weaknesses, and the avoidance of their strengths relative to those of the team being coached. It is highly unlikely that a team will be able to play to an ideal, visionary game plan unless they are playing in a competition in which they are superior to the other competing teams. An ideal visionary game plan is however, worth developing because

it gives a long term view as to where the team is heading so long as it is subject to review and regular doses of reality.

Once the team has been selected, its profile can be used to develop an attacking and defensive game plan. This should be based on previous game plans and information on changes in the game that are likely to take place during the period of the coach's appointment. The most important influence on the game plan will be the development of the play of the team's nearest rivals. Other factors are changes in law, competition structures, player eligibility and availability, advances in sport science and changes in the playing environment.

Once the long-term game plan has been developed, the strategies that have previously been used should be assessed as to whether they are able to contribute to the plan. Some will remain intact, others will be modified and others will be rejected. It is important that these strategies are developed before the structures. This is because an existing committee may not have the terms of reference and ability to administer a new strategy.

The structures are generated from the strategies with like strategies being grouped into a common project group not a standing committee. These project groups may be temporary, in place for a specified period of time during which their work will have been completed. Others will be in existence for the whole planning period.

It is the coach's role to co-ordinate the strategies of these project groups and to provide a method of monitoring their progress.

The people-centred approach

This approach demands that the coach keeps the game in perspective as part of life and is not life itself. In the same way the people he is dealing with must be regarded as people and not human resources.

A group with complementary skills

The range of skills required of the coach means that it is impossible for one person to do the job. As a result, considerable care must be taken to appoint people with complementary skills who are expert in specialized areas. The coach, as the co-coordinator and the remainder of the coaching team, are complementary experts who are the best available in their areas. The coach must have is the ability to manage people who are more expert in their areas than him/herself. To do this the coach must know what is needed from each of the experts and must be constructively critical, putting forward any doubts that come to mind, to the expert. This will be explicitly reflected in the team's vision, aims, game plan and job description.

The coach must be careful to not appoint people whose views will change when difficulties arise and who are not open in their opinions. On the other hand people who

stimulate positively critical discussion, but at its conclusion accept the final outcome should be appointed. In some instances the outcome will be a consensus, while in others the coach has the right to demand what direction should be followed. Backstabbers need to be avoided.

By the same token, sycophants or “yes men” must be avoided as their agreement with the coach may be just because they want the job and like the prestige and reflected glory. When things are not going well, they become backstabbers.

The manager has two key roles, that of a manager and that of a leader. As a leader the coach sets the direction and inspires people to achieve the aim. As such, the skill to deal with people and be flexible enough to become involved when it is opportune but removed when others are best left to do their own thing, is vital.

The management role is more one of organization and planning and it could well be that if some of these skills are not strengths of the coach then they should be delegated to others. There may be times when the coach is involved and others when management is delegated to others. An obvious example is budgeting.

Management skills the coach must have, even if they are delegated from time to time, are, planning and problem solving. In the initial planning phase the project groups that emerge from the process, must be given protocols for their strategies so that there are boundaries for their operation. It is through these protocols that the coach monitors progress. They provide a framework for problem-solving.

The qualities a coach must have.

These qualities are in no particular order of priority as they are integrated in many and varied ways.

Most fundamentally the coach must be realistic and coach to the real situation and not one that is abstract and hypothetical. While there will be times when the head may be in the clouds, the feet must be firmly planted on the ground. In order to achieve this, the coach in personal life must have a clear idea of what matters in life and keep things in perspective. The single minded coach, whose sole focus is the performance and results of the team, will not only be vulnerable to exaggerating small changes in performance, they will be unable to get the best out of the players as they will see them as one dimensional and a mirror image of himself.

The coach must have a holistic approach to the game, its place in society, to the players and their roles in society and to a range of priorities that make a complete person. In doing this they will retain the reality of where their origins lie and provide for themselves a sound set of values to which they can turn to under stress. This will also create a work ethic in the coach providing a role model for the players who, given their elite status, often need role models who demonstrate a sound work ethic.

A key element of this holistic approach is to know the game of rugby and to be able to apply coaching method to solve technical and tactical problems innately. This is the coach's stock in trade. Complementary skills can be provided by other members of the management team, but not in this area. Ultimately, if weaknesses exist in this area, the coach will be found out, undermining his/her credibility.

Coaches who excel will be strong willed individuals who are capable of holding onto strongly tried and true methods. In doing so they may be unable to see the forest from the trees. So, deep down humility is needed so that the coach is prepared to challenge beliefs that have been long held to be true.

While coaching will start from a known baseline which should be documented to act as a point of future comparison, the coach must realise that when progress is made the environment in which the team is operating will change as well. This means that with each change the environment alters and it is within this changed environment that further decisions are made. The team culture and playing environment will be evolving continually.

Finally, the most important quality is to be able to see "the big picture" and to develop an overall strategy that will enable the team to excel. This strategy will include people skills, strategic skills and skills that enable uncertainty to be handled successfully...

CONTINUITY AND GROWTH

Building on the past

While the track record of a newly appointed coach may create the hope of greater success, change will not happen overnight and time must be given to allow change to take place. In handling this expectation the coach must build on what has gone before.

Too often the new “messiah” will ignore what has existed before, ushering in a “new dawn”. The frequency with which this happens is great. As a result there is no cumulative development of teams. This particularly takes place with teams whose survival in a given competition is marginal. The marginality may be a function of many things, the coach being only one of them. However, the simplest solution is to get rid of the coach and start again, little realizing that all this is doing is perpetuating the past.

So each coach needs time to ‘bed in’. In this bedding in process much can be learned from carefully analyzing what has gone before, especially if it has been documented. This is assisted by categorizing information into each of the aspects of rugby preparation and performance. While it is recognized that these elements are integrated, their categorization enables each to be analysed individually. To name a few, these aspects are fitness, skill, mental strength, decision making, tactics and technology. These can be further subdivided.

By doing this it will become easier to identify where the greatest returns can be achieved. This will normally be in an area that has suffered from relative neglect and will be less likely to occur in areas in which the players are excelling. Recognise that by moving forward on all fronts in a balanced way, will make greatest progress. If balance is not achieved, performance will always be impeded by a lack of competence in the neglected areas.

Taking the long- term view

The whole process must be in the hands of people who are going to be in position for the total planning period, which should be for a minimum of four years. This does not mean that a plan is put in place and is dogmatically kept to throughout the four years. It does mean that the vision and aims should be consistent for the period and that each strategy should be monitored during its implementation and its conclusion too make sure that it is contributing most effectively to the aim and vision.

This particularly applies to situations in which resources are limited, be they time, money, or people. Affluent situations enable blind alleys to be followed and it could well be that one of these may result in a substantial move forward, a quantum leap. Few teams can afford this luxury and as a result progress is made by reviewing against a strategy’s contribution to vision and aim.

It is therefore essential that the vision and aim are well founded as only in exceptional circumstances should the criteria, vision and aim, that is being used to judge performance be altered. When this does happen a review of the whole process should take place.

Succession Planning - Coaching

Within a union playing success is based on the collective effort of the coaching staff as they develop each representative teams in the same way. If only to reduce the time it takes to educate a player in functional roles, coaching each team should follow the same patterns.

This requires a high degree of co-operation amongst the coaching staff and is not assisted by some coaches seeking, covertly, the positions others currently hold. Nothing undermines the coaching fraternity more than members of a coaching team having a double standard as they support the system in place on the surface while they are undermining the situation to feed their own ambition. There is a fine line between healthy competition for a position and actions that undermine loyalty and camaraderie.

One way of overcoming this is to appoint a team of coaches to all coaching positions for all teams e.g. the top team, "B" team, U21, U19 and Secondary Schools, for a given period of time, say four years. Each will then know they have security of employment within the total range of coaching positions – head coach, back coach, forward coach, assistant coach and technical adviser are some examples. This means that there is flexibility within the positions to best use the coaching talent as it emerges during the period. A coach may initially be coaching the forwards of the top team but, because of the coach is technically expert, in the second year, to bring young talent forward he/she may take the Under 21 forwards and move through with them to the top team in time. Another example is the case of the top team's top coach getting the position initially through force of personality and past playing status only to find that the coach's planning ability, technical knowledge and time management are deficient. Moving this coach to an assistant's position and directing him/her to courses where they can learn, means that the coach is not lost to the game and has the chance to improvement.

This also insures that a sizeable group of expert coaches are devising and implementing coaching strategies across all teams throughout the four year period. This will allow consistent progress to be made and if team results are not of the highest standard this may just be a reflection of the playing strength of the union not of the coaching panel. Experience has shown that this approach will lead to better results, and when the going is really tough, security lies in continuing to follow the strategies that have been agreed to. Improvement is highly likely when this approach is taken.

Within the hierarchical ranking of coaching positions there will be room for horizontal specialization. Initially this will be the strength the coach brings to the coaching panel. It may be scrumming or specificity in the development of skill drills in preparation for a particular opponent or an eye for a player when selecting. If the coach wishes to

continue in the game a greater range of skills will be required and the coach should be directed to become expert in a number of these areas for variety and freshness, another approach, as well as for their own professional development.

Apart from study this can be achieved in a number of ways such as job rotation within the panel, functional rotation as specialist in a particular skill, creating opportunities for overseas experience coaching another team or visiting similar set-up elsewhere.

All this requires a principled, selfless top coach as, with this experience one of the panel is likely to take over the top job. While it may be hard the top coach must realise that by improving the expertise of others the coaching ability of the whole group will increase exponentially. The good of the whole set-up is more important than the needs of any one part of it.

It is very difficult for a threatened coach to do this as; theoretically, the coach is ultimately working on his/her own redundancy. If the head coach is to grow with the job then skill to develop others is a valuable acquisition and organizational tool.

If the person at the top feels threatened then this insecurity will be reflected in the behaviour of the whole group. The others in the coaching panel will begin to tell the head coach what he/she wants to hear to their face reserving their real opinion to themselves or worst of all to an under-current of dissension in the panel and the team.

It may be all very well to take this unselfish position if the coach feels secure. An insecure coach will have difficulty accepting such a course of action but maybe a coach as insecure as this is a poor appointment in the first place.

Succession Planning - Players

If players can be recruited from all of the players that are available with no restrictions of cost or place of residence then the "Dream Team" can be assembled, but even then the chemistry may not work.

What is more realistic is the situation in which funding is limited either by a salary cap or a limited budget and where the recruitment of talent from beyond the team's tributary area is restricted by a quota ensuring that "home grown" talent is developed. Even in situations in which considerable funding is available to recruit a number of talented players from elsewhere successful teams emerge from a pool of players developed by the union from an early age who, even without the money have a loyalty to the union. It is, after all, from this pool of players that most of the team will be selected.

The development process will create a stream of young talent through which player succession can take place. This situation can result in two main problems.

The first is that a top player can occupy a position for a number of years impeding the progress of others in that position.

The second one is that the next ranked player, in spite of planning, may not be good enough for the position.

Various strategies can be used to solve the first problem. The player may be loaned to another team in the same competition for a stipulated period of time. The player may be loaned off shore so that their experience in the game in a different environment can assist their development. The player may be able to develop in another position to solve other selection problems. Eventually the situation may force the union to release the player. Under present conditions the union developing the player is in a position to receive monetary compensation for their investment.

In the situation where a gap exists, where the next ranked player is not, or at least not yet, good enough, it is important not to slam the door on local talent. As a result player recruited from elsewhere performs a valuable function temporarily filling the gap.

The ideal choice is an experienced player who is towards the end of his/her career and, who, because of their experience can contribute to the development of the young developing players. The contract will be for the period of time it takes to develop local talent. It may be for a season with right of renewal by agreement by the team and the player or for the number of seasons it will take to develop the talent. Experience is a major criterion but so is the player's physical fitness as wear and tear may have made him/her vulnerable to injury.