

Morris Rugby Coaching Manual

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INTRODUCTION

The intention of this coaching course is to give the reader a method of coaching rugby. It is not the only method. I know you may have heard a million ways to coach. No problem. Take what you need. Please though be aware though that “run harder, ruck more and give a stiff arm” are not coaching points. Passing and catching for example take years to perfect. Doing it correctly from the start shall help the young rugby player progress more efficiently. Every player on field needs to be proficient at every skill. Also bad technique needs to be fixed now. Coaches need to be insistent.

I was asked to watch a young rugby player once. To see if he had a future at a higher level. I told the coach “your player can not pass the ball whilst running, he stops to pass”. The reply was “ he is a forward he does not need to pass the ball”. Wrong. I hope for that player’s sake that someone has since showed him the skills and been insistent that he improves. Otherwise, no future. I have also played along side US Eagles who are unable to pass left and right. This is unacceptable for any rugby player whether they are 9 years of age or an international. Be insistent.

This coaching manual only gives information. You the coach need to invent drills. What is game relevant? What is fun? What gives your level of students a challenge that they can achieve? The following should be kept in mind.

Learning styles:

- Some people are information oriented.
 - Some learn from observing and copying.
 - People like to see the big picture first, then the little pieces.
 - Others like to be given each part and build to a complete model.
- Every differing learning style should be catered for.

Also your students shall need to be motivated. Not all rah rah. Consider the following.

- Physiological needs such as water and appropriate clothing to maintain comfort.
- Safety needs such as structure, rules and appropriate people to play with and against.
- Belonging. A friendly environment, relationships and community.
- Esteem. Responsibility, achievement and respect.
- Self Improvement. Development, creativity and expression.

B. WARM UP AND WARM DOWN

Aim: To reduce injury and improve performance

Warm: The body should be warmed to 104 degrees. Often indicated by a light sweat. Thus on cold days the warm up should take longer.

The warm up process should be a gradual increase in intensity, whilst not depleting energy stores or building lactic acid.

Warm Up - Types

1. General –used at the beginning of any warm up. Includes- jogging, body motions, stretching, light resistance.
2. Drills –used before competition or training. Includes- skill repartition, appropriate stretches, decision making.
3. Games –used before competition or training. Safe, gradual increase in intensity. Focus on warming up vision and decision making part of brain.
4. Specific –prepare the body for that exact motion. Keys in on potential injuries.

Warm Down

Used to cool the body to normal temperatures. Best used when a player is expected to play multiple games.

Benefits include

1. Removes Lactic Acid.
2. Prevents severity of bruising.
3. Redistributes heat around the body.
4. Relaxes the mind and body, saving energy for next event.

Stretching

The body must be heated to 104 degrees before stretching has any effect. Ie. Stretches are best done after 20 minutes of activity or at the end of a game or training.

Two Basic Types of Stretching

1. Static
2. Dynamic

Static stretching is the lengthening of muscle to the end of its range and holding for a period. Generally used after activity because it relaxes the muscles.

Should not be performed until a light sweat is achieved. Should not be performed before competition.

Twenty seconds increases muscle flexibility.

Thirty plus seconds increases flexibility of connective tissue and allows full range of motion.

Benefits of Static Stretches

- a. Increase flexibility.
- b. Ensure full range of movement.
- c. Decrease incidence of injury.
- d. Promote development of body awareness.
- e. Aid relaxation.
- f. Reduce muscle tension.

Dynamic stretching is the gradual increased intensity of movement. Generally used before activity because it prepares the muscles for speed and motion. Should not be performed until a light sweat is achieved.

Benefits of Dynamic Stretches

- a. Prepares the body gradually for the activity to be performed.
- b. Optimize the learning practice and performance of body movements.
- c. Improves athletic performance.

Examples of Dynamic Stretches

Squats, Lunges, Twists, Crucifix (front back), Pelvic Thrusts, Bunny Kicks, Quad Stretch Quick Steps, Quad Stretch Kicks, Kicks, Leg Swings, Calf Pumps, Mountain Climbs, Alternate Straddle, Hurdles, Planks, Under/Over Fence, Sprint Motions, Karaoke, Resists, Battle for insides, Skips, Side to Sides.

C. RUNNING (rugby's most fundamental skill.)

Sprint Motions. Break down the movements of a sprinter and practice these individually. Great warm up.

Foot Speed: Some exercises

- Fast feet.
- Fast feet laterally.
- Fast feet on the spot then explode.
- Explode then fast feet on the spot (on coaches call).
- Fast feet then react to directional call (Left or Right or Colored cones).
- Run at 70% hitting feet on white line/missing white line.

Acceleration- Learning to get the body going is vital. A large part of this is technique.

Change of Pace- Running at one speed is easy to defend. Each player must be able to have dramatic changes of pace. Both up and down.

Change of Direction- Make defenders miss

- a. Swerve
 - Run toward the defender.
 - Move inside leg over outside leg.
 - Accelerate with ball in outside arm.
- b. Sidestep
 - Short steps in
 - Run to a space on left or right of a defender.

(if I am running left then I plant left leg and drive forward in to the space on the right of the defender)

- Accelerate or pass to a support player.

Angles

Angles are used to prevent the defense from gaining the upper hand.

If I run at the defender, the defender has to stop and wait for me. This is called fixing.

If I run outside (bounce) a defender. The defender has to follow me. This is called pulling.

If I run inside (wedge), the defender has to come back or leave me alone.

If members of the backline run differing angles we can “Push/Pull” the defense to open gaps where we can run our extra players. This opens holes and prevents the defense from coming forward with certainty.

Running with the Ball

- Ball in two hands.
- Fingers spread on the ball.
- Hold ball at chest height.
- Looking left and right to consider options and confuse the defense

D. PASSING

Aims:

- Move the ball away from congestion.
- Move the ball to an unmarked attacker.
- Move the ball into the gap between to defenders.
- Move the ball to a support player moving faster or in a better position than me.

Holding the Ball

- Rule of two thirds.
- Fingers perpendicular to lines on the ball.

Types of Pass

- a. Basic
- b. Scrumhalf/Off ground/Clearing
- c. Dive
- d. Spin
- e. Miss/Cut Out
- f. Face Ball
- g. Pop
- h. Switch
- i. Draw and Pass
- j. Dummy

Basic

- Ball from a to b timely and safely.
- Aim two feet in front of recipient.
- Pass so that the ball arrives softly.
- Elbows should be bent.
- Ball swings under chest in an arc.
- Hear then look at target (2 feet in front).
- Release running up field.
- At point of release use fingers and wrists to temper pass.
- Point fingers at target after release.
- Ball should be nose up and not turning in the air.
- Support your pass on inside shoulder (you are now primary supporter).

Scrumhalf

- Be in position early waiting for the ball.
- Furthest foot from target tight to the ball (weight on this foot).
- Point other toe toward target (4 foot in front of receiver) and open chest (wide base).
- Rule of "Holding the Ball".
- Sweep ball off the ground, under your chest, toward target in one motion, transferring weight from one foot to the other. Accelerating as you move.
- Flick wrist and fingers at the end.
- Hands and body move toward target.

Dive

- Used when ball is rolling away or defense is applying pressure to scrumhalf.
- Position so ball is in a line between scrumhalf and receiver.
- Get feet near ball, bend knees, sink at hips.
- Scoop ball and drive legs towards receiver.
- Arms swing under body.

Spin

- Rule of "Holding the Ball".
- Turn ball longways with fingers.
- Aim the nose of the ball at target (2 foot in front of receiver).
- Front hand provides accuracy and stability.
- Back hand gives power and rolls over top for spin.
- Follow through with fingers toward target.
- Receiver takes ball out in front on inside (allowing pass, bounce or wedge).

Miss Pass

- Pass that goes across the face of one player and into the hands of the next.
- Missed player puts out hands to fake catch.
- Pass should be flat and hard.
- Same rules as spin pass.

Face ball

- A pass that goes to the outside of the receiver encouraging the bounce.
- This puts the support player into an outside hole.
- Target is outside of the receiver.

Basic

- Ball from a to b timely and safely.
- Aim two feet in front of recipient.
- Pass so that the ball arrives softly.
- Elbows should be bent.
- Ball swings under chest in an arc.
- Hear then look at target.

Pop

- Fingers on ball pointing toward ground.
- Release at waist height.
- Release using only fingers and wrists.
- Pop ball to chest height.
- Leave the ball here and keep running.

Switch

- Ball carrier widens the angle with dramatic step.
- Ball carrier accelerates.
- Screens ball behind body.
- Pops ball.
- Receiver takes ball running upfield (not back at forwards).

Draw and Pass

- Run straight.
- Run at inside ear of defender.
- Look at target, then back and forward from defender to receiver.
- Slow down to pass 4 yards from defender, still running at inside ear.
- Support inside shoulder of receiver.

Dummy Pass

- Run at inside ear of defender.
- Make pass without releasing.
- Short movements, quick action.
- Slight inside or up field direction change.
- Accelerate.
- Look for support inside and out.

E. THE CATCH/PASS

Is three basic skills taught and practiced as one, in one step.

Pre-Catch

- Call for the ball early (short left, wide left).
- Hands out toward passer with elbows bent.
- Hands up.
- Fingers point upwards.
- Thumbs point toward each other.
- Inside hand closer to the ball.
- Elbows bent (do not get stiff).
- Head up turned toward passer, chin off chest.
- Forward body lean.
- Running straight up field.

Catch

- Watch ball into hands.
- Catch with inside leg up.
- Watch it into your hands so that you are following the rules of "Holding the Ball".
- Elbows bent, relax.
- Soft hands (no sound as ball and fingers gently come together).
- The ball should not touch the palms.
- Control ball with finger tips.
- Accelerate ball across body and look for target at same time.

Pass

- Hear target.
- See target.
- Continue ball across body.

If throwing a spin pass:

- Continue ball across at chest height.
- Do not drop hands.
- Do not bring ball into chest.

If using a basic pass:

- Arc under chest.
- At hip height.

For both continue as:

- Maintain bent elbows.
- Release using wrists and fingers to temper the ball.
- Release with outside leg up.
- Finish with fingers pointing at target (2-3 feet in front).
- Should still be running upfield.
- Support inside shoulder of team mate.

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VISION AND MATH

You can teach vision. Where is the congestion? Where is the space?

You can coach math. How many do we have? How many do they have? Is this more or less than them? Should we add more players or subtract theirs?

An attack is mindless if its players do not consider these questions constantly. That is to say if they have no vision or math ability. We do not hope to have more numbers, instead we add to ours, subtract theirs or move the ball to where we have superior numbers.

Rugby is not a mindless, robotic sport. It is a thinking sport. Players make decisions on what they see. Train your players to make decisions, train your players to see the defense, train your players to count.

Example Drill (3 on 2)

D	D	
!	!	
!	!	
A	A	A (Over load)

Two defenders (D) Three attackers (A)

First D takes First A

Second D takes Second A

Where should we get the ball to?

Do we have the time and space for it to get through the hands or should a miss pass be thrown?

This and every other likely scenario must be explained and practiced.

ALIGNMENT AND SPACING

Alignment is your players set up positions in order to attack. This is on all phases of play.

The faster we align, the sooner we are ready to attack. The more players we have aligned the more attackers we have, the more chance of the extra player.

Definitions:

Advantage Line: The line across field marked by the imaginary line at the shoulders of the props. This line if passed on attack allows our players to move forward to the next phase. Their players have to move backwards. In phase play this line gets blurred.

Tackle Line: The defense and offense are going to meet. This is the tackle line. How fast the defense moves forward often determines this line.

Playing to get over the advantage line is the main goal in rugby. Playing the tackle line is the reality.

Where do we align or re-align on attack? We should move to where we have more numbers. And keep a depth that allows us to pass the ball to our unmarked players before we hit the tackle line.

Example:

If the defense is moving forward at 5 meters per second.

The attack has a three on two overlap.

Defense moves when scrum half touches the ball.

Lets use algebra

A = Scrum pass to fly half (1 second)

B = Flyhalf pass to in center (1 second)

C = In center pass to out center (1 second)

X = Working space (space required to be away from defensive line to use overload)

$$X = (A \times 5\text{meters}) + (B \times 5) + (C \times 5)$$

$$X = 5 + 5 + 5$$

$$X = 15 \text{ meters}$$

Note this includes distance behind scrum half plus distance from scrum half to defensive line.

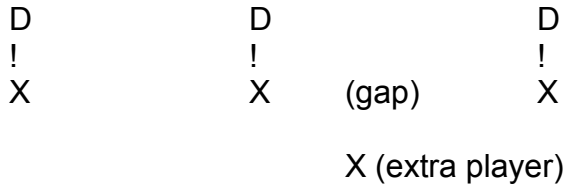
If the overlap is 5 on 3 and the defense is moving up at 3 meters per second. Passing is 1.5 seconds per player. Then X = ?

Lateral Spacing

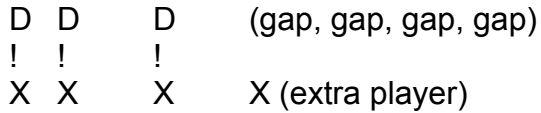
LS is the distance between players standing in the backline. If they stand 10 meters apart, then the defense stands 10 meters apart. Thus each individual player has room to beat their opponent. The chances of each player giving good passes diminishes as the distance the ball is thrown increases. Good rugby invariably involves running at speed and passing to players moving faster than the ball carrier. An inaccurate pass breaks this movement down.

So how far apart should backline players stand? As far as the person inside can throw a perfect pass 100% of the time. This allows us more room on the outside for our wingers and extra men that we have been creating.

Wide Lateral Spacing allows space for extra players in the middle.



Close Lateral Spacing allows space on outside for fast player or overlap



A good attack does both and brings in the extra player in the space created.

H. KICKING/CATCHING

Kicks are tactical. Never kick in hope or because there is too much pressure.

Rules for kicking:

- Awareness of options (where will it be the hardest for the opposition to re-gather it and attack us. Egs. Green grass, player who can not catch or kick or run.
- Communicate intentions
- Go for accuracy not distance.
- Team must chase (kicks are only as good as the chase).
- Mark up on the ball carrier and the support players.
- Regain possession

Dropkick

- Hold ball in two hands, point down.
- Eyes on the ball.
- Step forward onto non kicking foot flex at the knee.
- Drop ball on nose (the shorter the drop the less chance of the ball bouncing askew).
- Kicking foot swings through line of ball towards target.
- Connect with bone at top of instep.
- Follow through onto toes of non-kicking foot.
- Use arms for balance.

CATCHING

- Loud call for ball.
- Move forward to it.
- Support players move to aid receiver.
- Turn side on.
- Keep eyes on the ball.
- Move hands (palms up) toward ball above eyes.
- Elbows in.
- Absorb catch with a half squat.
- Bring fingers over top of ball.
- Perform the task the support player has instructed (run, pass, kick).

I. SUPPORT

Players should always work hardest when they do not have the ball in hand. The ball carrier runs in such a way that they can pass the ball to a support player running through an unguarded gap in the defense. A support player runs in such a way as they may be given the ball as they run through the gap, or so the defense gets drawn to them.

First Wave Support- players to your immediate left or right.

Second Wave Support- when the defense line is broken who, has positioned themselves to receive the ball?

Primary Support- the player who passes the ball, follows it and supports it on the inside shoulder of the current ball carrier.

Secondary Support- those near but at depth.

Support is more attitude and fitness than technical. The technical says stay inside the ball at the appropriate depth, until it is time to position yourself elsewhere to give your team the advantage.

Attitude is, "I want to be involved in the game at the crucial and mundane moments".

Support is also about Vision and Anticipation. Examples, if a player is going to get tackled get to that player from behind and on the inside. If a break is going to be made change your angle and meet your ball carrier downfield.

J. DEFENSE

Defense is recapturing the ball. The team without the ball having an awareness of the attackers options, communicating them and then minimizing those options, stopping the attackers progress and taking the ball. Voices are a verbal chain.
Man on Man

- Line up on the inside shoulder of an attacker.
- Outside foot up.
- Stand on the imaginary line marked by the last foot of the breakdown.
- Point at the player you intend to defend and tell the players around you who you have. (eg. "I have 'no socks'").
- If this leaves a member of the attack unmarked call for help. Use the word "come".
- When the ball is out move forward quickly – take their space and decision making time away. This also takes away their ability to get to speed.
- Try to force your opposite sideways, this limits their options.
- If you can make the tackle yell "I've got ball".
- The defender one person inside then yells "I've got inside". (This covers a sidestep).
- The defender outside continues to move forward onto their attacker. Pay no attention to what is happening inside.
- After ball has passed your player and the next, continue to push across the field limiting the inside options of the attack.

Drift

- When the first receiver (at the flyhalf position) passes the ball the defensive line yells "Shift" and all accelerate to the next player outside the attacker they originally lined up on.
- Players not close enough to tackle can still take the space and time and in turn the options away from the attack.
- Chase down your opposite before they have the ball.

K. TACKLE

Every tackle should have the elements of Hit, Drive, Turn and Steal. At any stage of the following descriptions they can be added. It usually depends on which player took the tackle on their terms.

- A. Side On
- B. Impact
- C. Containment

A. Side On Tackle

- Defender tries to force the attacker sideways (this cuts down attacking options).
- Eyeball the attacker (know where they have been looking).
- Sight the target area.
- Communicate intentions, "I GOT BALL".
- Accelerate to close the gap.
- Get feet in cloes.
- Head goes behind the ball carrier.
- Shoulder contacts first.
- Arms shoot from underneath.
- Wrap arms.
- Grasp opposite wrist.
- Squeeze arms.
- Drive legs.
- Maintain squeeze till tackle comes to a stop.
- Finish on top of ball carrier.
- Get to feet with 'busy hands' to pilfer the ball or 'trap'.

Busy Hands: Hands all over the ball in a scooping action to drag the ball to your side of the ruck.

Trap: Turn the ball carrier to face your team and stay on top to prevent them from placing the ball to their side.

B. Impact (Head on)

- Nominate whom you intend to defend.
- Move forward to close the gap between you and possible ball receiver.
- If your person is getting in a position to receive the ball accelerate to make contact as soon as they touch the ball.
- Eyeball the attacker.
- Keep chin up.
- Keep feet underneath shoulders and shoulder width apart.
- Breakdown at the last possible moment.
- Get feet into ball carriers personal space.
- 'Load' with a slight flex of the knees.
- Shoulder contacts target area first.
- 'Explode' vertically.
- Arms shoot from underneath and grab jersey.
- Drive attacker backwards.
- Drop one or two arms to 'hook' and separate legs.
- At all times look to 'tag' the ball.

Load: Drop eye height six inches by bending knees, or what ever height wins gets your shoulder to target height.

Explode: Apply power and speed (force) to the eccentric motion (straightening the knees).

Hook: Grab under a leg and lift up and out.

Tag: Touch or knock the ball to disrupt attackers ability to control it.

C. Containment

- Keep body between ball carrier and tryline.
- Drive backwards or give ground as long as you stay between the tryline and the ball carrier.
- 'Tag' the ball.
- Fight for the 'inside'.
- Push to ground and use 'busy hands' to pilfer the ball.

Inside: Under the armpits or between the ball and the ball carriers' arms.

L. BREAKDOWN

- A. Maul
- B. Ruck

A. Maul: When two or more attacking players enter the tackle situation and the ball stays off the ground.

- Players must enter from behind the maul.
- Players must bind when they enter.
- May either bind onto the ball or go past the ball to squeeze the opposition away from the ball.
- The body should be in a driving position and spine inline with the sideline.
- Shoulders should be on the opposition's stomach or on the shorts of a teammate in front of you.
- 'Body Height' should be lower than that of your opponent.
- Use as many players as necessary to move the maul forward.
- Ball should be released to the scrum half only when the maul is going forward.

B. Ruck: When the ball carrier goes to ground in a tackle.

- Players must enter from behind the ruck. (The Gate).
- Aim is to use shoulders and leg drive to push opponents off the ball.
- Shoulder hits first. (NOT HANDS)
- Arms wrap two or more opponents.
- Leg drive pushes these challengers off the ball.
- Use as many ruckers as needed to win the ball.

M. CONTINUITY

Continuity: When a tackle is made, continuity is what occurs when the attack avoids a ruck or maul. Examples are passing off the ground, passing in the tackle or holding the opponent off long enough to hand the ball to a player who can continue to attack.

- The ball carrier should take the tackle on own terms.
- Take a 'big step' to 'stabilize'. (So the defender can not disrupt your next actions).
- Create 'separation'.
- Make eye contact with support players.
- Ball into two hands to make a pass.
- Pass in such a way that the support player has time to adjust to get to it.

N. SETS

- A. Kick Offs
- B. 22 Meter Restarts
- C. Scrums
- D. Lineouts
- E. Tap Penalties against

- A. Kick Offs
 - Spread out so all areas of the field are covered. (The ball should never be allowed to bounce)
 - Distribute best high ball catchers so you have maximum chance of a reliable person getting to the ball.
 - Every player moves toward area the ball is headed as soon as it is kicked.
 - Person that can move forward to the ball to catch it calls "MY BALL" and should almost always jump to catch it.
 - Player behind catcher communicates best option depending on what he sees. Examples are taking the ball forward, set a maul immediately, pass right or left immediately or kick the ball into touch.
- B. 22 Meter Restarts
 - Same as Kickoffs however more chance of going into attacking strategy straight away.
- C. Scrums
 - Practiced Cadence calls. Our ball, their ball.
 - Attacking options should be known from differing field positions.
 - Quick set.
 - Tight Grips.
 - Tight Head Leads in.
 - Loose Head shuts the gate.
 - BIG HIT.
 - Chase the weight.
 - Loud call.

- Good body position.
- Sink knees toward ground.
- All 8 provide 100% pushing effort.
- Push over ball. (Do not lift feet to heel ball back).

D. Lineouts

- Get to the mark early.
- Early call.
- Hands ready for job.
- Go before the defense is ready.
- Accurate throw.
- Every member does their job. (Lift, jump, block, look for loose ball).
- Every lineout should have a different number of players to prevent the defense from setting.

E. Tap Penalties against.

- Get back 10 meters
- Then listen to the refs explanation.
- Do not turn your back on the opposition.
- As soon as the ball is tapped move forward quickly to the person directly opposite you. Do not let them run at you, close the gap.

P. STRATAGY

How will your team attack and defend?

How will the team communicate the intentions?

When and where shall the game plan vary?

Good teams attack the defense with differing methods at differing angles all across the field with all 15 players.

Good teams understand what the opposition is doing in attack and communicates the best defense strategy to each other.