

PART TWO: COACHING MINI RUGBY (U6-U10)

Enjoyment of the Game.

Mini and Junior rugby is all about introducing children to the joys of the game and encouraging them to begin to fulfil their potential. We are sowing the seed of a lifetime of enjoyment and appreciation of the sport.

Above all else we must make it fun.

That said, we must not ignore the vital ingredient of competition. It is not all about the taking part; it is also about winning well and when you can't win accepting defeat with dignity – that goes for coaches and parents as well as the players! Standards of behaviour are as important to this club as standards of play.

Our measures of success in order of importance are:

- 1). Attendance through the season;
- 2). Standard of play;
- 3). Results.

Young players of all ages enjoy succeeding and therefore we must offer them practices and games that they can perceive as successful. This is very easily reinforced with constant praise even when a little generous.

Despite the need for success we must stretch the player by offering challenging practices; indeed success is not rigidly defined and players of all abilities should be given positive feedback at all times.

Through the main aim of enjoyment other aims such as understanding game style and laws are achieved.

Main Coaching Areas

- 1) Running and Handling.- Ball Carrier + Support Player.
- 2) Tackling and being tackled.
- 3) Recycling the ball. (Keeping Possession.)
- 4) Set piece skills - dependent upon age group.
- 5) Development of a game plan for the club with adaptations for particular team strengths.
- 6) Offensive & Defensive Strategies

CLEARLY WITHIN ALL OF THE ABOVE CATEGORIES THERE WILL BE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF TECHNICAL EXPECTATION BUT DESPITE THIS THE MASTERING OF THE BASIC PRINCIPLES IS CRUCIAL AND CANNOT BE REINFORCED ENOUGH!

Below is a guide for U9s and U10s as to the areas that need to be focused upon throughout the season; this will be designed for guidance only and can be adapted to the specific requirements of the squad that the coaches are presented with.

We aim to post a library of coaching sessions onto the website throughout the season. This will start with some relatively basic drills but it is hoped that the momentum will build up with coaches approaching Tim Button (tim@nsrt.org.uk) to request ideas on specific aspects of coaching. This will create not only an environment in which we can all learn from each other but also ensure a uniformity of what and how we are coaching.

Tim will hold regular evening sessions at the club where the coaches coach the coaches.

Coaching the Coaches – Encouraging Best Practice

We aim to hold three such evening sessions per month, one each focused on Mini Tag Rugby (U6-U8), Mini Rugby (U9-U12) and Midi or Junior Rugby (U13-U16). Nonetheless, all coaches are welcome to attend any of these sessions. The dates of these sessions will be added to the Fixtures List, which is kept up to date by the Fixtures Secretary (andrew.gilchrist@eu.watsonwyatt.com) and is also on the club website (www.reigatiansrufc.com).

Sessions of this nature should prove invaluable, as there is always something new to learn, even for the best of coaches. They will help to reinforce consistency of coaching within the club - probably the single most important factor when dealing with a wide range of individuals – and enable best practice to be employed. After the initial sessions it is planned to look at developing “Feedback” sessions which would involve individuals coaching for a few minutes and then inviting feedback from fellow coaches. This is not a form of appraisal but simply an opportunity for us all to benefit from each other’s differing qualities.

This is one of the most important areas of our long-term development and for it to be successful needs to be supported by all age groups. As a coaching panel it is our responsibility to generate commitment to these sessions. We are all aware of life commitments beyond coaching rugby; it is hoped that by increasing the number of active coaches within each age group it should be reasonable to expect a minimum of one coach per age group each session who will then be able to relay any information back to his colleagues.

Coaching The Basics.

Training Grids

The use of grids and channels is important in maintaining structure and helps to ensure that all the children are receiving maximum ball time. Examples are shown below but are only a guideline; a coach should be able to determine the most suitable size and shape of training area for a particular situation.

A good coach will isolate the particular skill that is being taught and develop practices suitable to nurture the progress of the child. It is highly appropriate for a coach to

develop new practices and drills making sure that the following two basic principles are in operation.

- 1) Is the particular skill being isolated and developed?
- 2) Is the ball contact time at a high level for all participants?

Handling and Passing

Holding the ball correctly

It is important that children are shown the correct way to hold the ball, as it seems more natural for many to hold it end to end. Justification for the correct method is that it minimises movement in flight and therefore eases the role of the receiver. It also provides more stability when running with the ball whilst allowing a natural development of fluency in the pass.

For the real beginners it will suffice to tell them that the ball will travel to the receiver with the minimum of movement and therefore it will be easier to catch. At this stage stationary passing in pairs and simple relay runs will help them to become comfortable with the correct hold.

The Ball: It is particularly important that the children are given a ball that aids their handling. Practising with an old, worn ball or one that is too big will have nothing but negative effects. A child needs to be successful if he or she is to want to continue to enjoy and develop their skills. The introduction of a good quality, well-shaped ball has dramatic effects on the standard of a child's handling.

Running and passing.

It is important to encourage the pupils to run and handle the ball at as early a stage as possible. Encouraging them to catch the ball while running at pace whenever possible is invaluable in developing players.

Using passing channels as described earlier with groups of three working up and down continuously is an effective way of introducing the concept of the ball carrier making ground whilst still being fully aware of support players.

Use of groups of three or four

Working in groups of three or four optimises ball contact time whilst still allowing the players to get the feeling of real running and handling situations. At this stage you are only aiming to teach them the feeling of going forward whilst passing so don't worry too much about forward passes.

Points to bring out:

- a) Always provide the passer with a target by stretching your hands out in front of you pointing your fingers upwards.
- b) Once you have caught the ball your first thoughts must be to move forward quickly. "Put pace on the ball".
- c) Having gained ground then pass to your support player.

- d) Try to do everything moving. Children initially find it difficult to catch and pass without a slight falter in their running; emphasise the importance of moving forward above the importance of a successful pass. Once they have developed a natural instinct to operate whilst moving the perfection of the pass will come naturally.
- e) Passes are bound to be unsuccessful at times. It is vital to impress upon children that this is as much a part of the game as things going right and the skill of quick recovery is extremely important. When they drop the ball tell them to pick it up quickly and regroup immediately in order to continue forward as soon as possible. **TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE!**

Running and passing skills are a basic prerequisite for the playing of rugby. Because of this it is prevalent in most structured practices. The simple use of passing channels is a foundation upon which more complex routines can be built. For example you could introduce intrusive running skills along with contact drills in open play.

Handling and passing in grids can be invaluable for the reinforcement of concepts such as drawing your man when a confined space would be more realistic. However, such skills are advanced and need the foundation of natural handling and running skills to be laid before they can be introduced effectively.

I would recommend that your sessions always start with a period of time spent on simple passing techniques covering all of the coaching points mentioned earlier. Even the more able pupil will benefit from reinforcing these essential skills. As skill levels are raised then the session can move at a faster rate working towards the more involved grid work.

U9 and U10 Coaching Strategy

Introduction

The following strategies are suggested milestones within each age group. They may or may not be met but serve to provide a guide for coaches as to the possible expectations of their age group. Much of the work covered in the younger age ranges may need reinforcing throughout progress into other ages. It has been assumed that, as we move through the age range, previous skills mentioned are being reinforced where appropriate, therefore the content may appear to reduce in size as progress is made through the ages. As previously mentioned the reinforcement of the most basic of skills must occur at all levels. If you watch how international sides warm up before matches you will see them doing the same or indeed a variation of many of the practices we do week in week out.

U9

Running and Handling:

Use of passing channels to encourage pace onto the ball, basic realignment and development of correct lines of running.

Use of grid practices to develop ability to handle the ball with confidence in a more confined situation and introduction of the concept of decision making.

Within both channel and grid work, the idea of making the correct decision must be reinforced by ensuring that when wrong options are taken and "go wrong" we react to deal with them. What is important is how we deal with these situations. **RECOVER QUICKLY!**

The dive pass is a skill that all players would benefit from having in their repertoire and it is suggested that players are exposed to this at an early stage.

Tackling and being tackled:

It is a good idea to combine the duty of the tackler along with that of the tackled player in the same sessions. Introduce the front on tackle first using a stationary situation. For complete beginners it is a good idea to have a coach hold the hands of the player being tackled and pull them through the process giving both the tackler and the tackled the chance to move through the correct body positions. **MOVE WITH THE FORCE THAT IS ACTING ON YOU.**

Side and rear tackles should be covered but not necessarily at the same time.

DO NOT LET THE TACKLER RUN TOWARDS THE PLAYER BEING TACKLED. TECHNIQUE AND PHYSIQUE ARE NOT SUFFICIENTLY DEVELOPED AT THIS STAGE.

Keeping Possession:

Contact and going to ground - "Hit Hard - Steel a Yard - Go to Ground - Set the Ball in Concrete". This sequence will encourage the players to learn the importance of each aspect and the need to put each one in place before the other (whilst in the introductory stage). Contact pads are used and must be used passively rather than in a confrontational way.

Once we can go to ground effectively, we introduce the primary support player who must take "ROUTE ONE" (where the ball is as this is the danger zone). Secondary support player to join mini-ruck on the side that is most exposed, ie. where it looks as if the opposition may be able to steel or delay ball. (A difficult skill that younger players may not pickup immediately.)

Next player will operate as scrumhalf dive passing away to player number five who is in an attacking position.

Staying on your feet - An option if isolated or indeed your player base lends itself to a more maul based approach. Player one hits contact and presents ball on furthest hip. Player two must secure ball from player one but stay cohesive with player one (binding and wide base are crucial). Player three will bind on weak or exposed side and then ball to scrumhalf who dive passes away to player five.

GENERALLY THE MAUL IS A DIFFICULT THING TO DEVELOP WITH THREE FORWARDS AND OPINION SWAYS TOWARDS THE USE OF MINI-RUCKS ENCOURAGING QUICK BALL.

If isolated then create the maul but then coach the ball carrier to go to ground afterwards.

These two ideas of contact drills are the basis of developing game plan and structure.

Set piece skills:

Very little time need be spent on the passive scrum and lineout. It is important to teach the players to bind correctly and encourage the correct body positions (Low Hips/Head Up/Knees Bent) simply to prepare them for the forthcoming season.

The free pass is an area that can be worked on more as it presents an opportunity for your team to gain an attacking initiative during competitive matches. A simple pivot system with intrusive runners has proved effective.

Development of a game plan / structure:

At this stage positional structure is the main focus.

Unopposed practices starting with a mini-ruck then running down the line to winger who makes ground; then on instruction goes to ground simulating a breakdown. Forwards are encouraged to cross behind the back division and win the ball by which time the back division has realigned and the process can be repeated.

This is one of the single most important drills that can be put in place as a building block to developing more complex situations of fly half caught - forwards standing off etc. Ultimately building towards the basic principle of - "KEEP THE BALL AND HAVE OPTIONS IN PLACE AFTERWARDS"

At this stage the idea of back moves is not essential and depends on the players you have and the time you have. Simple switch / dummy moves would be more than sufficient but should be initially introduced in the grid and channel work discussed earlier.

Offensive & Defensive Strategies:

Defensive - Primarily work on tackling is the most fundamental requirement. However, this is an acceptable period to bring in the concept of defensive alignment and putting pressure on the team with the ball.

Offensive - All the previously mentioned ideas of ball retention / recycling / continuity of attack are vital offensive qualities; combined with any additional form of intrusive running you feel your players are ready for, eg. Switch / Loop / run-around, etc.

U10

Running and Handling:

With all the basic skills being reinforced this is the time to expect your players to start gaining confidence in more complex running skills.

Grid work could involve switching, direction change and much confined reactive handling.

Channels allow greater time to work on the switch, loop and run-around.

Tackling and being tackled:

Continued work in pairs covering all aspects as discussed in U9. Increase the pace of exercise where appropriate - Introduce the ball to the player being tackled working on what to do with the ball in the tackle.

Dependent upon the progress of players you can now introduce match related exercises, eg. larger groups with one player tackling continuously OR ball on top of tackle pad to encourage reaction to ball after tackle.

Keeping Possession:

A prerequisite to a successful team! Continued work on the basics of contact; moving into greater emphasis on the role of the primary support players.

EMPHASISE THAT IT IS THE DUTY OF ALL TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR BALL RETENTION! It must be the nearest players that deal with any potential breakdown. All too often young

players develop a mindset that they are “the winger” and shouldn’t get involved in the breakdowns - this is probably the single most important area at this stage.

Set piece skills:

The big changes at this age group are the introduction of a competitive three-man scrum and a competitive two-man lineout. (Whilst important parts of the U10 game there is a danger in spending too much time on these areas - particularly the lineout; where it can be that any one game will only feature 1 or 2 lineouts).

The Scrum - Unlike the lineout this does feature more frequently and simply on a safety basis does demand attention. Player selection is important and strength should be considered more important than size. Often the larger players are stereotyped into certain positions but they may find it difficult to assume the required scrummaging techniques.

Things to focus on in the Scrum - binding must be very tight at all times. Body position must be low; this is realised by bending the legs, dropping the hip line and keeping the head up (NOT BY KEEPING LEGS STRAIGHT AND BENDING AT THE WAIST). Always scrummage square. The hooker and scrum-half must work together to develop fluency in their roles.

The Lineout - If you have a player who naturally dominates through height then play to your strengths. If not there are several ploys that can be used, eg players moving backwards or forwards to create space away from the opposition.

Problems often arise after the ball has been won; what to do with the ball? Young players can easily turn winning a lineout against their own team. All too often the ball is thrown back to the scrum-half who then finds himself under pressure from loose forwards. An effective way to operate is to encourage your players to catch, attack and when challenged create a mini-ruck generating quick ball for the scrum-half.

Development of a game plan / structure:

See U9 Strategy above

Dependant upon your players this is a suitable stage to introduce structured moves within the back division whilst also looking to involve loose forwards in open play creating angles. (Short pop inside).

Offensive & Defensive Strategies:

All the Basics of tackling / running / handling / supporting / continuity must be reinforced as the foundation of offensive and defensive strategies.

Defence - The introduction of defensive alignment on the back foot with players communicating with each other, filling gaps, etc. Create pressure situations when the opposition have the ball. Go up together on your man’s weak shoulder; trust the player inside you to deal with his channel.

Offence - All the usual skills of wide players switching play / looping etc.