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coaching tips & tricks from
the best in the game...

the waratah way...



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Coaching:

5 common
mistakes

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1. Open v Closed Skill Environments

Coaches often make the mistake of moving players into an open environment without covering off on the skill in a closed environment.

A closed environment is a scenario where the options available are fairly few and largely constant, for example – a catch and passes drill or tracking drill.

An open environment revolves around placing a player in a situation in which there are a number of variables, the scenario is constantly changing and the player is required to undertake a decision under pressure. Examples of this are 3 v 2 attack or live tackling drills. This is environment players are more likely to reinforce current poor techniques.

How often do coaches set up a drill in an open environment and get frustrated with the result? For example putting the players in a 3 v 2 attack against defence drill when the players would struggle to complete a 2 v 1 and possibly even struggle to undertake a catch and pass drill without dropping the ball. Feedback in this environment is almost impossible as you could pull the team up on almost every aspect of the drill, so the coach lets the drill run poorly much to their frustration.

A common phrase is “I couldn’t give feedback as I would have to pull the drill up and we would be constantly stopping and we would get nothing done”. In both an open and closed environment limit your coaching points (coaching points are the aspects which you want to see done well) to around 3 per drill. This will allow you to give feedback and monitor the improvement in the players. Let the players know what you are hoping to see from the drill. Ask them to repeat them to you (just to make sure they are listening). Once you believe that they have mastered them, change them. Then you won’t have to keep stopping the drill!

Don’t start at the end and expect to get a good result, work your way up to that point and assess from there. Remember that if the open skill is not working go back to the closed skill to reinforce the basics!

2. Verbal Instructions

How often do you give a verbal instruction to the players and get frustrated when you move them into the drill that they don’t do in correctly?

Players learn through a variety mediums – listening, seeing and actually doing. The visual in conjunction with listening should prove the most effective method.

How can the coach tell whether the players have understood?

Simple - ask. “Who can tell me what the three points are?” “Why are we concentrating on these points?” “What does the next man into this scenario do?”

These are all examples of open questions which help the coach to understand whether the players understand.

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3. Coaching the Drill not the Skill

Ever feel that you spent the majority of your time trying to get the players to complete the drill properly rather than actually coaching them and giving them feedback?

The feedback might sound something like "no Bill you have to run around there, not through the middle!" Before long Bill has not been coached at all on everything else that he is doing (ie the actual skill).

This problem is often an indicator of the instructions that you have given (the players have not listened) and you have only given a verbal explanation and consequently you are trying to give a physical demonstration on the run.

Take a little longer at the beginning with your demonstration and ask the players to show you what they are to do. This will indicate whether the players understand the drill and the allow you to give feedback on the drill.

4. Game Realistic Drills

Do your drills actually replicate a scenario that happens in a game?

How often do teams warm up with a 4 corner drill where they are popping the ball to a player running in the opposite direction? Is there any scenario in a game (forward pass maybe?) where I am going to execute this, with the exception of throwing an intercept pass to the opposition!

Another example might be getting the backs to run moves which happen 10 metres over the advantage line. It would be nice if that happened in a game but it seems highly unlikely.

If you look at your drills and the possibility of the action not happening in a game is zero, change the drills. A catch and pass drill will have the same effect with communication, group management and player movement as the old 4 corner drill. Put an advantage line in your drill to ensure that the depth that the switch happens at is realistic.

5. Too many players standing around during drills

Too often drills are run that only incorporate 3 or 4 players moving and completing the drill. If you look at the other players during the drill and they are standing around for any longer than 30 seconds at a time, its time to have a close look at how you are running training.

The longer the players are standing around the greater the chance that discipline will become an issue (again another drain on time which affects the amount of training you are able to complete).

A simple solution could be to set up 2 grids incorporating the drill that you are doing. Split the team in 2 to ensure that all players are working. The coach should look to position themselves in the middle of the grids to allow them to police both groups and provide effective feedback to the players.

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