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

the waratah way...



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Selecting:

How to be
transparent & fair!

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Selection: How to be transparent & fair!

Synopsis

There are many variables associated with team selection and picking a team or a squad can be a difficult proposition for coaches. This paper assists by identifying the **variables** associated with selection, suggesting measures that can be taken to make the process more transparent and highlighting ways in which coaches can work towards a fair and equitable outcome for the players.

Coaches live by their results, and to this end, selection is one of the most crucial elements – for a coach cannot deliver results without the right personnel! **Selection** must be a transparent process to all and sundry. With this in mind, it is critical that the coach has an understanding of the processes that are associated with this procedure.

There are different types of selection processes that can be utilized by a coach – the majority are dependant on whether or not the coach is working with a selection panel. At its most simplest, a coach working on their own will use their judgment to decide whether a player is appropriate for their team; at its most intricate, the coach will work alongside others within a ‘Selection Panel’, using qualitative and quantitative data to determine the appropriateness of different players.

What are the variables associated with selection?

There are many variables associated with the selection of players. These variables will alter in ‘breadth and depth’ depending on the age and skill level of the team being coached. For example, picking players for the local U15 team will be different to selecting boys within an U15 representative program; this will be different again from selecting Grade players in a Premier rugby club to that of a Suburban or Country club.

For the majority of coaches, the **player’s ability** will be of paramount importance. Being able to differentiate between players by assessing their core skills is a function of coaching that takes time to develop. In order to develop this skill, the coach must have an understanding of what a core skill is and the ways in which they can develop them in their players.

Another variable associated with selection is that of **training attendance**. What does the coach do with players that are habitually late or are no-shows on a continual basis? This has got to be the bug-bear of every coach. Having clear boundaries (i.e. miss a training with no excuse will mean being dropped a grade or starting on the bench) that have been identified to the players and the ability to carry through with these boundaries is probably one of the hardest tasks in coaching.

The biggest concern, however, to a coach occurs with a player’s **injury**. A coach should have a concise policy for players returning from injury. The dilemma occurs when the injured player is a key play-maker (i.e. Dan Vickerman – lineouts and leadership) compared to a “Joe average” (i.e. a fringe Waratah player) > does the coach follow the protocol they set or do they make an exception? This is the one variable that requires a here-and-now answer (i.e. you won’t know until it happens!).

Other variables that may need to be considered and addressed could be:

- School and/or University holidays;
- Ski trips with family and/or friends;
- Player representative commitments (especially for junior club coaches).

There are sure to be others not identified in this paper and specific to the coach’s team and competition.

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Selection: How to be transparent & fair!

What are the common elements of a selection process?

Some common elements of the selection process are as follows:

- Having a clear understanding of **how** the process will work;
- Being able to justify selections – **why** certain players are selected over others;
- Showing **consistency** over the course of a season or representative program

The coach must have a clear understanding as to how the process will work. To do this the coach will have to set out the mechanics of the program. Some of these will be as follows:

- **When will the team be selected?** – For a Club side this may happen on the evening after the game (i.e. Sunday) or prior to the week's first training session. For a representative program, it may be at the end of each game or round of games;
- **Who is involved with the selection process?** – At a junior club level, the coach will usually be on their own, whilst at a senior club the coach will normally work with the coaches of the other teams. At Premier club level, the Club Coach normally works with the coaching staff in the selection process, whilst at representative level there is normally a "Selection Panel" organised to work through the process.
- **Is there a criterion for picking selectors?** – Depending on the type of team, selectors more often than not will be persons who are suitably experienced. A "suitably qualified" person is normally one who has coached or been involved at that specific level of rugby for a specific amount of time. For example, a person who has coached at U15 representative level should have the experience to select at a junior representative level. At the Waratahs and Wallaby level, it is not uncommon to have a member of the "leadership group" or the Captain sit on the selection meetings.
- **Is a selection criteria appropriate?** – The answer is definitely "YES"! One of the most important aspects of selection is to have a clear and transparent criteria set out for all those involved in the process – coaches, selection panel, players, committee members and, of course, parents, wives and girlfriends!! Some issues that the coach might consider are:

What criteria can be used to assist with selection?

Once the process has been determined, the coach's task is to establish how the players are selected. This means determining whether qualitative or quantitative analysis will be used to identify the "best" player for each game per position. Qualitative analysis on its simplest form is the coach's judgment whilst quantitative analysis relies on hard-data (i.e. tackle made; tackles missed; etc).

Qualitative analysis revolves around the why and how of decision making. At its most academic level it is an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons that govern them. For the rugby coach, it is having an understanding as to why players react the way they do in certain situations and how, through training, their decision-making can be developed for the benefit of the team.

Quantitative analysis refers to the what, where and why! At the academic level, quantitative analysis relies on having substantiated reasons behind the various aspects of behaviour (i.e. statistics). For the rugby coach, it is using statistics and the like to ascertain whether or not the player has or is performing to the required level.

Subsequently, it is up to the coach to determine the criteria that will be used to assist with team selection. It is even more important that the players are aware of the process, so that they can work towards developing their game if they wish to progress and develop. The Position Specific Selection Criteria (attached) can be useful when used to assist players to identify certain aspects of their game which the coach wishes them to focus on; this in turn should lead to a focused outcome from the player.

Selection: How to be transparent & fair!

How can the selection process be more transparent?

The easiest and most transparent way to view a selection process is by:

- (1) Having a written policy
- (2) Advertising the policy
- (3) Using the policy

As previously mentioned in this article, the coach should develop policies and procedures to assist with correct player selection. By having a definitive approach to selection the coach will be able justify why a player is selected over another. This is not only appropriate at senior level but also where junior selections become debatable; remember, a transparent selection process can save the coach the nightmare of dealing with disgruntled players!

Once the coach has developed a selection policy that they are happy with, this policy should be placed in written form. At this point, the coach may make the policy available to the appropriate groups – the players, other coaches and/or the Committee. The importance of this should not be dismissed, as having a written policy that has been circulated lets everyone know where they stand in regards to selections.

But what if I paint myself in a corner you cry!!!

Any policy must provide the coach with the ability to be pliable within the set framework. This may mean that a “best player for the position available” framework be adopted, which may overcome the instance of a player returning from injury having to return via a lower grade. In order to achieve this, however, the coach must have a ranking system that is concise and easily maintained.

At both a representative and grade level, it may be appropriate to achieve this outcome by using a ranking system. A ranking system can be developed using the coach’s identified criteria and ranking the available players in position against it; this is predominantly useful when dealing with large squads of players. The other positive of a ranking system is it gives players the opportunity to know where they lie in the pecking order of the team or squad, and with helpful instruction from the coach they can work towards maintaining or progressing higher in their rank.

So the most difficult of tasks has now been completed. The coach should now be able to identify:

- (1) How to put together their own policy
- (2) How to have the policy distributed through the club
- (3) How to implement the policy effectively and fairly

However, if the coach needs further assistance it may be applicable to attend a specific course that is dedicated to “selections” and/or further their education (i.e. ARU Level 2 Coach course). At NSW RU, a “Selectors Course” has been developed that focuses on assisting associations and clubs to formalize their selection process; such a course, has been delivered in the past to specific groups but if broad-base appeal is warranted, then the course may become a staple of the coach education unit.

Position Specific Selection Criteria

Prop Forward

- Scrum formation & engagement
- Body shape & height in scrum
- Problem solving in scrum
- Lineout support & sweeping on own throw
- Lineout pressure on opposition throw
- Body height & angle at the ruck & maul
- Drive/impact at the breakdown
- Mobility in attack & defence
- Kickoff support (for & against)
- Work rate at breakdown
- Effectiveness in tackling

Hooker

- Lineout throw
- Lineout work on own ball
- Lineout work on opposition ball
- Scrum organisation
- Hooking, including ball channeling
- Body height & angle at the ruck & maul
- Running with ball
- Drive/impact at breakdown
- Mobility in attack & defence
- Kickoff sweeping (for & against)
- Involvement & effectiveness at the breakdown
- Effectiveness in tackling

Lock Forward

- Quality & consistency of push in scrum
- Body shape in scrum
- Drive in ruck & maul
- Lineout jumping including organisation of their area
- Reactiveness to opposition ball in lineout
- Kickoffs & restarts – chase and receive roles
- Number of touches in general play
- Number & quality of tackles made
- Mobility in general play
- Impact with carrying ball

Backrow Forwards

- Contribution to scrum
- Contribution to lineout
- Pressure on opposition in close
- Pressure on opposition out wide
- Running lines in attack (support play & linking) and defence
- Effectiveness in tackle
- Effectiveness at breakdown: securing or sealing off ball
- Speed of arrival at breakdown
- Relative contribution in front & behind the gain-line
- Relative contribution on open side & blind side
- General involvement in play
- Effectiveness of back-row moves
- Ball skills – running, handling, evasion
- Impact on the game

Scrum Half

- Service from scrum
- Service from lineout
- Service from general play
- Kicking
- Handling of pressure
- Putting pressure on his opposition
- Blindside work in attack & defence
- Communication with forwards
- Variety in ball usage
- Field vision
- Decision making
- Communication with forwards & backs
- Organisation skills

Fly Half

- Starting position
- Running alignment & angle
- Quality & speed of ball transfer
- Support lines & effort
- Ability to control game
- Kicking quality – clearing kicks
- Kicking quality – kicks for territory
- Kicking quality – kicks for pressure
- Organisation & bringing up defence
- Kickoffs
- Drop outs
- Defence – effectiveness of tackles
- Composure under pressure

Centre Three Quarters

- Running alignment
- Running angle
- Agility & running skills
- Quality & timing of ball transfers
- Support play
- Creativity
- Midfield tackling
- Chasing of kicks
- Kicking
- Counter attack contribution
- Communication in defence

Wing Three Quarters

- Finishing
- Involvement on own side of field in attack & defence
- Involvement on other side of field in attack & defence
- Support of the fullback
- Communication with fullback & other wing
- Chasing of kicks
- Penetration achieved
- Positional play from scrum & lineout in attack & defence
- Counter attack
- Receiving kicks & returning or other options
- Control of ball at contact
- Defensive qualities – tackles made

Fullback

- Catching & kicking
- Organisation of back three (defence, kicks, counter attack)
- Positional play – defence & attack
- Defensive positioning & tackling
- Contribution to penetration
- Staying in the attack – support & chasing
- Communication skills
- Evasion skills