

## Mental skills for rugby referees

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As with all successful performers rugby referees must prepare physically, psychologically and emotionally for each match. Sports officials like athletes attribute their success or failure to a range of factors. Attributions cover people's perception about causes of events. For a rugby referee the challenge is to oversee a game of two teams of fifteen players in which the players have the opportunity to perform at their best while providing an enjoyable experience for the spectators. Referees like other sports officials need to exert a degree of control over the game.

Rugby is a physical game with a high degree of physical contact. At elite levels of performance, rugby is played with high levels of emotion. It is the challenge of the referee to establish and maintain a setting in which the players are able to express their physical prowess and their emotions.

There is just one referee on the field during the entire game. S/he is assisted by two linesmen whose responsibilities include indicating when either players or the ball travel out of play, indicate the success or otherwise of kicks at goal, and indicating to the referee when a major infringement of the rules has occurred. All actions of the linesmen are to be considered by the referee as advice. The referee must make the decision as to what should be the consequent outcome.

According to the official rules the referee has total control of the game. It can therefore be seen that rugby referees will be candidates for the full range of fears, uncertainties, highs, lows, and decision making dilemmas as players. Referees would also like to reproduce the successful performances and eliminate the unsuccessful.

The developments within rugby in the past decade have catapulted the game well and truly away from the game as it began in the 19th century. Demands on players have increased. It is expected that they will act in a professional manner'. They must be physically fit and have a high level of skill competence. The large amounts of money which are now available to Unions through sponsorship deals and television rights has meant that some players are receiving relatively large salaries to play. Their income, and financial worth, are enhanced greatly when they are able to secure commercial endorsements.

The players have agents, lawyers, personal trainers and other specialists to help them to both secure the best financial package and get themselves into the best physical shape to play the game. The unions are also having to deal with large amounts of money and have been forced to employ their own team of experts to help in all the administrative areas of presenting the game to the public. Rugby has joined the many sports which are now firmly within the gambit of the entertainment industry.

A related development has been that of the professional rugby referee - a career that will last only while their legs can keep them up with the players on the field and they can cope with all of the pressures which come with what one referee has called ... 'the best seat in the house'!

What does a rugby referee do on the field? makes decisions changes attentional focus control his reactions to what is going on predicts where the play will go deals with people runs and runs and runs - making decisions all the while What attributes must s/he have? composure confidence be prepared positive self-belief control arousal level ignore distractions have rapport with players, linesmen and others be fair, consistent know rules deal with 'fear of failure' be comfortable with being a success perform within the 'bubble' or 'cocoon' be able to move on once a decision or action has taken place What Sport Psychology techniques and skills are required to help in preparing for a match? goal setting coping with distractions relaxation attentional focus imagery and mental rehearsal diary/log book check lists appropriate communication Distractions

Distractions are those influences, happenings, thoughts, people or objects which cause a referee to lose focus on what is happening on the field of play. What can be distractions?

#### PEOPLE

crowd, family, players, team management, the assessor, the big screen, the media, fans and mascots

#### THINGS

banners, noise, the boss, work

#### NATURE

weather; rain, wind, sun, heat, humidity, The field

#### RELATIONSHIPS

family, fans, friends, media, players, linesmen, assessor, IRB, national rugby union, self, trainers

#### RESPONSIBILITIES

chores, meet mortgage payments, wash the car, paint the house

#### WHAT I SHOULD HAVE DONE

spent time with the family, chores at home before leaving for the game, tasks at work, telephone calls, letters to be written, reports to write, people to visit

#### THINGS WITHIN ME

hunger and thirst, not being fit enough, tiredness, fatigue, uncomfortable clothing and boots, earphones and microphone, not being prepared

When you run onto the paddock it is important, imperative, that you have parked all the distractions. You do not enter the arena with any of the 'baggage' of everyday life. It is

all left behind. It is possible to develop simple but effective strategies to leave all of that behind you. In almost all cases distractions will serve only to distract you from your primary mission or doing a great job with the whistle.

We can describe and teach you techniques that go by the titles of The Black Box, The Lake, The Sea Chest. Techniques whereby you clear your mind and allow rugby refereeing material to enter. You can learn to use imagery to enhance your ability to make decisions, to see what is going on during play, to deal with the obnoxious player, to re-focus, and to reinforce that you are a great referee!

It is true that we are what we think we are. We are the result of the most effective type of self-fulfilling prophecy; our fundamental beliefs about ourselves and what we expect that we can achieve. Positive images and thoughts in; positive results will follow.

An interesting exercise is to list all the things over which you have control. Then in a second list all of those which you cannot control. As you will have probably predicted the second list will be many times longer than the first. However, there is no reason to despair! We have an indirect way of controlling this long list. We can do it by remote control by controlling how we react to all of them. There is the remote control. We control ourselves and so they do not control us.

Here is one technique which you can use so as not to be bothered by your everyday responsibilities. As you drive from your home stop just around the corner. Or if you are flying, find yourself a seat alone or do this exercise just as the airplane leaves the ground. Close your eyes. Take a deep breath. As you breathe out imagine that you are standing beside a beautiful blue lake surrounded by mountains. See the lake in vivid colour. Now take each item which will be a distraction and drop it in the lake. Watch it hit the surface and sink out of sight. See the ripples radiate to the edge of the lake. If you have done everything at home and work that is physically possible within the time available then placing everything else in the lake will serve to eliminate a long list of potential distractions. Remember that if something keeps you awake then it is a distraction because you will be tired and tiredness is a distraction.

As a successful referee you possess the skills and knowledge to apply sport psychology strategies and techniques. Goal setting is a traditional technique and process used by athletes. It is not an add-on process. You are setting goals all of the time. To prove the point to yourself complete the following 'questionnaire':

#### Section A:

When did you choose to live in your present home? How did you make the choice? Do you plan to move? If so when? If not why not? When did you decide to play sport? Or be involved in sport? When did you make your choice of your career? When did you decide to become a rugby referee?

#### Section B:

How good do you want to be at refereeing rugby? When do you think you will reach your peak? When do you think you will retire from refereeing? What do you need to im-

prove to move up the ranks? Who will work with you to help you improve? When do you hope to complete these improvements?

Section C:

What would you call the answers to these questions? Discussion. All of the answers are your goals.

Some notes about goals. It is important to have goals of varying 'length'; a season, one year, two years, five years - ten years, career. Goals must meet criteria

S specific

M measurable

A achievable

R relevant

T time lined

Specific; relates directly to a specific aspect of your sport. Development of strength, aerobic fitness, anaerobic fitness, flexibility, speed and acceleration; control of emotions; keeping a diary, setting goals, diet, time management.

Measurable; can you record details of your progress toward each goal? Are you able to show the percentage decrease in your 40 meter sprint time? Increase in bench press?

Achievable; even if the goal is set at a high level can you see yourself making it?

Relevant; it is necessary to work on elements which directly impact on your refereeing ability. Some things are nice to do but will not help you as a referee. These nice things can be used as rewards as you achieve each incremental goal.

Timed; when precisely will you reach the goal? Be precise. Not next year, or next winter, or in two years, or when I am 25! But, 31 March 2002, 20 November 2003.

Goal setting is a popular theme or topic which is often included in self-improvement books. The research points in the direction that you are more likely to get there when you see yourself being successful, reaching your goal, which you have created in your mind in vivid colours, stereophonic sound, with taste and smell. No iron clad guarantees, but be aware that we are the result of what we think we are and what we think we are capable of achieving.

Should you not reach all of your written goals you will, all the same, arrive at a destination which is part of your compendium of goals anyway. So why not orchestrate and programme yourself? Get to where you want to go. Be where you want to be. Do this with SMART Goals.

Some examples of goals for Rugby referees: By 31 March 2002 my 40 metre sprint will be 5.35 seconds. In the 2001 season I will pass with honours my Theory examination. By the end of the 2002 season I will be nominated for the I.R.B panel. I will be selected for the 2003 R.W.C. I will referee well in the 2003 R.W.C. My assessment rating for 2002 will average 88.0. I will decrease my critical incidents by 50 per cent. I am re-

minded of an interview given by Andre Aggassi on the television program 60 Minutes in the mid-90's. Two of his comments included, 'When I am on the court playing tennis there is no where else that I would rather be.'. When asked about whether he was affected by the noise of the crowd he replied that the only thing that was in focus was the ball!