Rugby League
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Introduction to Rugby League

Rugby League is a fast and vigorous team sport which has an excellent image. It is exciting to play and entertaining to watch. Current standards in the First Division are as high as anywhere in the world. As a game it is simple to teach because all players have to possess the same fundamental skills, as there are no mauls, rucks or lineouts. The only complicated unit skill is the “scrummage”, and as there are few in any game, it is not vital to the tactics of the game.

Rugby League is a handling game, and because the ball is easily controlled, all pupils, whatever their ability, can enjoy a level of success. The game also presents an ideal medium in which to teach general ball handling principles. Although Rugby League is a contact sport, the rules may be modified according to the age and ability of the group to play grip, or even touch. By adopting this approach the game becomes an enjoyable, recreational sport for all abilities and ages, and can be enjoyed by both boys and girls.

The National Governing Bodies are The Rugby Football League and the British Amateur Rugby League Association, and they will be happy to provide further information on any aspect of the game.

Introduction to the Module

Module Objectives:
Students will:

• be able to apply the techniques and skills relevant to their level of ability within the context of the game
• show understanding of the Laws of the game
• be aware of the administrative structure of the National Governing Body
• understand and apply the theoretical knowledge which underpins the game

Method:
Teachers should:

• create a learning environment which will assist students to UNDERSTAND the game of Rugby League by adopting a “games based approach”.
• introduce the techniques and skills as they are REQUIRED to improve game performance.
• create an atmosphere which is SAFE, CHALLENGING and ENJOYABLE.
The beginning stage of learning is the exploratory phase, where the player is attempting to learn the correct sequence of movements of all the basic skills e.g. passing, catching, tackling.

During the intermediate stage a player will be performed with more consistency and quality. Timing, anticipation and reaction time will improve although the skills may break down under the pressure of a game situation.

At the advanced stage all the basic skills are automatic and players can concentrate on more detailed aspects of the skills and tactics required in the game.

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UNIT 1
Scheme of Work

1. The recommended Scheme of Work is both Skills and Games Understanding based and is progressive.

2. The Scheme of Work is for 14 weeks, progressing from a base of no previous knowledge. The Scheme may be modified to suit the particular needs of any school.

3. The suggested Lesson format is:
   - Warm Up and Stretch 10 – 15 mins.
   - Small Sided Game 10 – 15 mins.
   - Skills Teaching 15 – 20 mins.
   - Final Game 20 – 25 mins.
   - Warm Down 5 mins.

4. The Laws governing the playing of the game should be introduced in a logical sequence each Lesson.

**Lesson 1**
- Small Sided Game: Ball Tig.
- Skills Teaching: Basic Pass.
- Final Game: 3 v 1 : 4 v 4
- Warm Down: Pairs Passing.

**Lesson 2**
- Warm Up and Stretch: Union Jack.
- Small Sided Game: 3 v 1 : 4 v 4
- Skills Teaching: Line Passing
- Final Game: Touch Rugby, 6 v 2
- Warm Down: Line Passing

**Lesson 3**
- Warm Up and Stretch: Line Passing
- Small Sided Game: American Football
- Skills Teaching: Side and Rear Tackle.
- Final Game: Tackle 4 v 4. Restart game with a pass.
- Warm Down: Line Passing

**Lesson 4**
- Warm Up and Stretch: Line Passing.
- Small Sided Game: Touch Rugby.
- Skills Teaching: Front Tackle.
- Final Game: British Bulldog
  - Tackle 4 v 4. Defensive Game. Restart game with a pass.
- Warm Down: Pairs Passing

**Lesson 5**
- Warm Up and Stretch: Breaking the Tackle using shields, and Receiving the Ball then breaking the Tackle using shields.
- Small Sided Game: Tackle 4 v 4. Defensive Game.
- Skills Teaching: Play the Ball.
- Final Game: Tackle 6 v 2 or 4 v 2 with a Play the Ball.
- Warm Down: Pairs Passing.
Lesson 6
Warm Up and Stretch  Single File Passing Drill.
Small Sided Game  Touch Rugby 4 v 2. Defenders move back.
Skills Teaching  Moving the Ball wide.
Final Game  Tackle. 6 v 3/4/5/6.
Warm Down  Line Passing.

Lesson 7
Warm Up and Stretch  Line Passing
Small Sided Game  Touch Rugby 4 v 2. Defenders move back.
Skills Teaching  The Punt and Catching a High Ball.
Final Game  Full Game. No Scrummage.

Lesson 8
Warm Up and Stretch  Line Passing
Small Sided Game  Kicking Tennis.
Skills Teaching  2 v 1.
Final Game  Tackle. 6 v 3/4/5/6.
Warm Down  Line Passing.

Lesson 9
Warm Up and Stretch  2 v 1.
Small Sided Game  Touch. (2 + 2) v 2.
Skills Teaching  The Defensive Line.
Final Game  Tackle. 4 v 4.
Warm Down  Pairs Passing.

Lesson 10
Warm up and Stretch  The Defensive Line.
Skills Teaching  Ploys from Acting Half-Back
Final Game  Tackle. 8 v 8.
Warm Down  Line Passing.

Lesson 11
Warm Up and Stretch  Line Passing incorporating Run-Arounds + Drop-offs.
Small Sided Game  American Football.
Skills Teaching  Marker Defence
Final Game  Full Game. No Scrummage.
Warm Down  Pairs Passing.

Lesson 12
Warm Up and Stretch  2 v 1.
Small Sided Game  Touch. (2 + 2) v 2.
Skills Teaching  Hitting the Defensive Line with Support.
Final Game  Tackle. 8 v 8.
Warm Down  Pairs Passing.

Lesson 13
Warm Up and Stretch  Shield Drill. 4 v 2.
Small Sided Game  Corridor Football.
Skills Teaching  Scrummaging.
Final Game  Full Game.
Warm Down  Line Passing.

Lesson 14
Warm Up and Stretch  Picking up a Rolling Ball.
Final Game
Laws of the Game

It is important that all the players understand the basic Laws of the Game. These may be covered in a theory lesson, but even so, a greater understanding will be achieved if the Laws are gradually introduced each lesson.

Suggestions are:

Lesson 1 Handover and Six Tackle Rule.
Lesson 2 Forward Pass and Knock-on.
Lesson 3 Tackle, and Off-side Rule (Briefly).
Lesson 4 Ball out of Play in Touch.
Lesson 5 Play the Ball.
Lesson 6 Starts and Restarts of Play.
Lesson 7 Playing Positions.
Lesson 8 The Field of Play.
Lesson 9 Off-side Law.
Lesson 10 Scoring Points.
Lesson 11 Marker Defence.
Lesson 12 Penalties.
Lesson 13 Scrummaging.
Lesson 14 Tap restart.
UNIT 2
The Skills of the Game

Listed below are explanations, teaching points and practices of the skills of Rugby League contained in the recommended Scheme of Work. Additional information can be obtained from the official Rugby League Coaching Manual and the Basic Skills Video.

LESSON 1
Catching and Passing

Coaching Points

1. **Holding the Ball**
   - Hold the ball in the centre
   - Fingers spread
   - Finger tip control
   - Relax wrists

2. **Passing the Ball**
   - Hold the ball correctly
   - Eyes on the target area
   - Take the arms well back
   - Direct the ball with fingers and wrists
   - Follow through with the arms
   - Weight the ball

3. **Catching the Ball**
   - Eyes on the ball
   - Fingers outstretched
   - Use both hands if possible
   - Be prepared for the unexpected pass

Suggested Practices

Stationary passing in pairs.

In pairs, the players should pass to one another. Vary the distances they are apart, ensuring that all passes are weighted correctly and that the trajectory of each pass is flat. Place the players in groups of four in small squares within easy passing distance, facing inwards. Encourage them to pass around the square, first to the left and then to the right, bringing out the previously mentioned teaching points (see Fig. 2.1).
LESSON 2

Line Passing

Coaching Points

1. Catching
   - Run straight
   - Upper body mobility – turn towards ball carrier
   - Look at him
   - Communicate – ask for the ball
   - Bring the ball into the bread basket

2. Passing
   - Run straight
   - Upper body mobility – turn towards receiver
   - Look at him
   - Make a decision
   - If in any doubt – keep hold of the ball
   - If passing – look at the target area and pass perfectly
   - Support the ball carrier.

As the practice develops, the coach should encourage the players to give and take a pass without slowing down, and gradually introduce them to timing their run, so they can handle the ball at speed. Make them aware that it is speed on to the ball that matters.
LESSONS 3 AND 4
Tackling

1. The Side Tackle
The side tackle is the easiest to execute and for this reason should be introduced first.

Coaching Points
Tackle with determination
Keep eyes on the target, the thigh
The head of the tackler should be behind the ball carrier at all times
The shoulder should make contact and drive powerfully into the target
The arms should strongly encircle the thighs and grip tight (See Fig. 2.2)
The tackler should hold the ball carrier until he is well and truly tackled and on the ground
The tackler should finish on top of the ball carrier

2. The Rear Tackle (Lesson 3)
Coaching Points
As for Side Tackle. (For illustration See Fig. 2.3)

3. The Front Tackle
Tackling head-on is vital to team play. There are two types of head-on tackle:
Passive – when the tackler uses the body weight of the ball carrier
The Blockbuster – when the tackler forcefully knocks the ball carrier backwards

Fig. 2.2
Fig. 2.3
1. Passive, using the ball carrier’s momentum

Coaching Points

Keep eyes on the target, the thigh

Position the body so that the head and neck are to the side of the ball carrier

Use the ball carrier’s own weight and momentum to make the tackle

The tackler should block the thighs of the ball carrier with his shoulder

The arms should powerfully encircle the legs and grip tight

The ball carrier should be rolled on to his side

The tackler should finish on top of the tackled player

2. The Blockbuster

(See Figs. 2.4/2.5)

Coaching Points

The shoulder should drive powerfully into the target area with the utmost determination

Keep eyes on the target, the waist

Quickly move forward into position

The head of the tackler should be to the side of the ball carrier

The arms should powerfully encircle the ball carrier below the centre of gravity, that is, below the buttocks, and grip tightly

Drive powerfully with the legs

Pull and lift with the arms and shoulder

Drive the ball carrier upwards and then backwards

Finish on top of the ball carrier, with the shoulder buried into the target area

Timing is the key to success
PRACTICES – ALL TACKLES

PAIRS

A Introductory practice
In pairs, using natural progression, and checking all the coaching points
- Tackler kneeling, ball carrier stationary
- Tackler kneeling, ball carrier walking
- Tackler crouching, ball carrier walking
- Tackler standing, ball carrier walking
- Tackler standing, ball carrier jogging

B Consecutive tackle drill
In pairs, with players facing one another two metres apart. 1 tackles 2. Both regain their feet quickly and the practice continues with 1 trying to make a maximum number of tackles in a given time (perhaps thirty seconds).
After sufficient rest the players alternate

C Confidence and timing
In pairs, with players facing one another two metres apart. On a command from the coach, 1 runs backwards, 2 chases and executes a determined tackle making contact on the thighs, head to the side.

RELAYS

A Technique drill
Players form two lines at right-angles, as shown in Fig. 2.6. The players in one line are to be tackled; the others are the tacklers. 1 moves forward. 2 judging his run, comes in and tackles 1 at X. After the tackle 1 runs behind 9 and 2 runs behind 10. The other players repeat the process in progression. The tackles should be practised from both right and left and each group takes turn at tackling and being tackled. This practice can be used, with some variation, for all methods of tackling.

B Consecutive tackling
T, the player tackling, faces a line of five attackers, as in Fig 2.7. On a command, 1 runs forward to be tackled by T. Immediately the tackle has been completed T regains his feet. As T regains his feet, 2 runs forward to be tackled. The relay continues.
The tempo can be increased as soon as the players become proficient.

C Defence from the rear: one on two
The defending player D starts in line with the attacking players 01 and 02. 01 starts to run with the ball, while D attempts to defend against 01 and 02 to prevent them scoring, as in Fig. 2.8.
LESSON 5

Play the Ball

Coaching Points

Play the Ball perfectly, but quickly. Get up on your feet as soon as possible.

Place the ball on the ground lengthways across

Put your foot on top of the ball and roll in back gently.

Support play

The play-the-ball movement restarts play after a tackle; a quick, efficient play-the-ball enables the team in possession to launch sustained attacks. A ball which is brought back into play slowly allows the defence time to retreat the required five metres and to regroup.

A fast play-the-ball is likely to catch the defence bunched up and moving backwards and will not allow them time to regroup in a good defensive pattern. See Fig. 2.9.

Remember

Regain one’s feet quickly

Heel smoothly

Give a pass from the ground

PRACTICES

In Pairs

One player plays the ball, the other acts as acting half-back. The practice begins with the ball carrier lying on the ground as if tackled. He regains his feet as quickly as possible and plays the ball as previously explained.

In Fours

1 plays the ball, 2 is acting half-back, 3 receives the pass, 4 is the marker. The marker should put pressure on the ball carrier, who ensures that the ball is played in such a way that the opposition cannot gain possession. The acting half-back should pass from the ground. The position of the players should be rotated after each one has practised each position adequately. 3 must be five metres behind the play-the-ball to comply with the laws of the game. See Fig. 2.10.
LESSON 6
Moving the Ball Wide

Coaching Points

1. Playing the Ball
   - Play the ball perfectly but quickly
   - Support play

2. Acting Half-Back
   - Know where the first receiver is and how he wants the pass
   - Encourage the ball carrier to play the ball quickly
   - Pass accurately
   - Pass from the floor
   - Support play

3. First and Second Receivers
   - Stand as far away from the receiver as he can accurately pass
   - Communicate to the passer
   - Stand deep
   - Know where the receiver is and how he wants the pass
   - Catch and pass in one movement as quickly as possible
   - Support play

4. The Runner
   - Stand deep
   - Communicate to the passer
   - Time your run – hit the pass at speed
   - Run into space
   - Be determined
   - Carry the ball in straight

Suggested Practice

- Numbers: groups of six, seven or eight
- Equipment: one ball per group, and ten cones

Stage 1: The groups move downfield passing the ball

Coaching Points

Efficient passing
- Catching and passing without bringing the ball into the breadbasket
- Wide passing
- Timing by the receiver to take the ball at speed

Stage 2: Introduce the play-the-ball.
- The group continues until the ball reaches the end man who, after sprinting with the ball for ten to fifteen metres, slows down. He then lies down, counts to five, regains his feet and plays the ball, which is then moved in the opposite direction.
- The practice continues.

Coaching Points

Efficient play-the-ball
- Acting half-back to pass from the floor

Stage 3: Introduce the groups to the duties of specific positions
- Designate one player to be the acting half-back at all times; and have the same two players alternate between first and second receiver. The others in the group, the end man apart, always take up wide positions whichever way the ball is being passed.

Coaching Points

Ball carrier – an efficient play-the-ball
- Acting half-back – pass from the floor, and support
- First and second receivers – catch and pass in one movement, then support
- Runner – straighten the line and take the ball at speed.

Stage 4: Teach the first and second receivers to catch and pass in one movement, continuing as before with emphasis on moving the ball quickly to the third receiver without carrying it towards the opposition. When working with young children the first and second receivers may have to angle across field. The runner should straighten the line and take the ball at full speed.

Coaching Points

Ball carrier – an efficient play-the-ball
- Acting half-back – pass from the floor, and support
- First and second receivers – catch and pass in one movement, then support
- Runner – straighten the line and take the ball at speed.

Stage 6: Increase the pressure by placing the cones in an arc so they represent a defence which is moving up quickly.
- The ball carriers must again move the ball wide, round the outside cone to the runner.

Stage 5: Cones are introduced to simulate the defence, as in Fig. 2.12.
- One is placed where the ball is to be played, and four others are placed five metres back and four metres apart, in line. The ball carriers cannot carry the ball through the cones; their objective is to move the ball outside the cones to a player running hard and straight. The first three receivers are a link in the chain, and catch and pass quickly as possible.

The groups are now able to interpass at speed down the field, starting at one goal-line, attacking two sets of cones, and scoring at the other.

Stage 7: The cones can now be replaced by defenders using tackle shields. The defence should move up straight, in line and at match speed. The ball carriers have to move the ball round them to the runner.

When preparing to play against a team noted for the speed of its defence it is essential to practise against opposition.
LESSON 7

Kicking and Regaining Possession

Although Rugby League is essentially a handling game, kicking is a skill which also plays an important part in its scoring and tactics. All players should become proficient kickers.

The Punt (See Fig. 2.13)
The punt is kicking a ball from the hand, and is used to:
Gain ground from a penalty kick
Gain touch directly from play
Take play downfield.

Coaching Points
1. The Punt
Hold the ball as if for passing
Eyes on the ball
Pore the ball onto the foot
Drive through the ball
Head and eyes down
Follow through

Fig. 2.13
PRACTICES

Individual Practice

Players should be encouraged to practise the various techniques of kicking on their own.

Pairs

Practices in which partners kick to one another should concentrate on technique, accuracy and then distance.

Accuracy in kicking the ball:
- to a partner who should not have to move
- to catch the ball
- between the posts
- into a grid or area of the pitch
- bouncing into touch
- Distance, attempting to force a partner back. Start an equal distance from a line and then try to finish closer to the line than the partner.

Because kicking is an important tactic in Rugby League all players must be able to catch a ball that has been kicked high into the air.

Coaching Points

2. Catching a High Ball

Eye on the ball
Quickly move underneath it
Hold the arms up and out
Trap the ball on the chest
Round the shoulders

PRACTICE

1. Pairs

Two players working together, one kicking the ball into the air, whilst the other catches it. Pressure can then be developed by the feeder following the ball in and offering some form of opposition.

2. Grid Game

Six to eight players in one grid, each has a number and one has the ball. The player with the ball kicks it high into the air and clearly shouts a number. The player of that number has to catch the ball. The game continues. Any player who either drops the ball, or kicks it out of the grid is eliminated.

3. Kicking Tennis

Two teams, four against four, in a forty x twenty metres area, with one team in each half, as in Fig. 2.14

A starts the game by either throwing or kicking (depending on the level of skill) the ball into the other half, but if the ball goes out of bounds without a bounce the server loses a point.

The receivers have to control the ball quickly. All punts must be caught cleanly before the ball touches the ground, while grubber kicks should be controlled.
LESSON 8
Two Against One

The major objective of successful Rugby League is to create situations in which a team has more players around the ball than the opposition, and then when in possession to convert that overload into points.

Coaching Points
1. The Ball Carrier
   - Run at speed
   - Be aware of the position of the receiver and defender
   - Run at the opposite shoulder of the defender to where the support is
   - Look at the receiver
   - Make a decision – if in doubt keep hold
   - If passing look at the target area and pass perfectly

2. The Receiver
   - Stand deep
   - Time your run – hit the pass at speed
   - Run straight, but into space
   - Look at the ball carrier
   - As soon as you realise the defender cannot tackle you shout clearly for the ball

PRACTICES
1. Two against One
   In a grid, two players attack one defender. At first have the defender standing directly in front of the attacker and condition him to attempt to tackle the ball carrier. See Fig. 2.15

Fig. 2.15
Development

As the attackers become more confident, allow the defenders to play as they would in a match. Remember to make the drill realistic. Progress to placing the defender in a winger’s position, still encouraging the ball carrier to run straight and fast. As the defender comes in, the man ‘in space’ should call for the ball.

A more difficult progression is for the defender to adopt the position of a covering full-back. The ball carrier now has three options:

- To give an early ball to the winger and then support him on the inside
- To arc infield toward the defender, slowing down his progress before making the pass
- To commit the defender, then pass in the tackle

These three options depend on the skills of the attackers and each situation as it arises.

LESSON 9

The Defensive Line

It is vital for the defence to maintain a straight line across the pitch. The end men should be slightly outside the opposition’s end men at each side of the line, but gaps between players should be as small as possible, particularly around the area of attack. The defence should have the same number of players as the offence at each side of the play-the-ball. The line should extend at each side of the play-the-ball and move forward together.

Coaching Points

Concentrate
Stand slightly outside the player you are marking
Count heads
Communicate
Move up in line together
Tackle with determination
If the ball passes you, keep in line and drift in line after it

Play the Ball

There are three basic areas which should be covered at every play-the-ball:

(i) At the side of the play-the-ball (ruck)

Two players, ideally front rowers, should stand six metres apart, three metres either side of an imaginary line running back from the centre of the play-the-ball.

(ii) Right centre and right wing

Assuming that the centre has the ability to tackle strong running forwards, the two players should stay together on taps and on all occasions except where a narrow blind side exists, or from a kick-off. The winger positions himself outside his opposite number, while the centre follows his opposite number to the left side of the pitch only when he is confident that the defence on his side is formed. The centre, upon moving, should tell his winger that he is going, and also, as he moves across, encourage the other players to move outwards so that no gaps are left. Once on the other side of the pitch, the centre should be aware that he has a responsibility to move back when his flank is under attack. The team should understand that a reduction in defensive crossfield running is good policy, and that at no time should any gaps be left in the defensive formation.
(iii) Left centre and left wing

Their responsibilities are identical to those listed in the paragraph above.

All the other areas between the centres and the ruck must be filled on each side of the field.

N.B.

• It is important for players to read the game and to be where play is developing.
• It is important that players do not follow the ball in a swarm, otherwise criss-cross moves will exploit the defence and open up gaps.
• It is important that players space out evenly and move up in the line together.

PRACTICES

1. Small Sided Grid Games

Touch football in a fifteen-metre x thirty-metre corridor (two grids). There is no play-the-ball, so the game is re-started after a touch with the ball carrier passing. Encourage the team in possession to use every possible attacking combination. The defence should be encouraged to maintain the line and adopt a zone defence in the line, rather than man-to-man marking. Communication is very important. The defence should move up and drift across together to control the game.

Begin with four defenders v three ball carriers. As the defence improves, equate numbers to four ball carriers v four defenders.

The chief aims are:

• maintaining the defensive line
• zone defence
• communication, and thinking.

Other aims are:

• enjoyment
• improvement of handling skills.
2. The Defensive Line

The players form up across the pitch, as in Fig. 2.16. The unit moves forward and backward as one, always facing up field, but visually checking to each side. All players should be encouraged to call out 'forward', 'backward', 'together', and so on.

Cones are then placed up field at ten-metre intervals. The defensive line starts on the goal-line, jogs to the first cone, back to the goal-line, up to the second cone, then back to the first. In this way they progress up field and the unit develops the habit of moving forward when defending.

It may help if young children initially hold hands and later position themselves as in a match for a mid-field play-the-ball, with the props in the middle at either side of the ruck, the second rows at either side of them and the wingers and centres outside near the touchline.

The chief aims are:
- quick realignment
- maintaining the defensive line
- communication.

The other aim:
- warm-up.

Fig. 2.16
LESSON 10
Ploys from Acting Half-Back

Coaching Points
1. Run-Around
   a. Ball Carrier
   Runs across field towards the pivot
   Eyes on him
   Weight the pass – gently does it
   Pass accurately
   Move behind the pivot to receive a return pass
   Eyes on the ball
   Ball Carrier Making the Break Himself
   Immediately receiving the pass, straighten up
   Arc through the gap

   Ball Carrier Passing
   Immediately receiving the pass, eye on the runner
   Make a quick decision – if in doubt hold on to the ball
   If passing – eye on the target area weight the pass perfectly

   b. Runner
   Run outside the ball carrier, then angle in at the decisive moment
   Timing – hit the pass at speed
   Eyes on the ball
   Use both hands
   Run with determination
   N.B. Please note that the Run Around and Drop-Off are advanced handling skills which can be performed anywhere on the field of play, and should be practised by all players.

2. Drop-Off
   a. Ball Carrier
   Move quickly across field
   Cross the runner
   Turn outwards keeping him in vision
   Pass gently

   b. Pivot
   Receive the pass in a flat position
   Commit the defence
   Keep the passer in vision – turn inwards
   Weight the pass – gently does it

LESSON 11
Marker Defence

Coaching Points
Get up on your feet before the ball carrier
Communicate with the other marker
Be aware of which defensive pattern you are using
Work together
Be prepared to make the next tackle
If using two markers – know the rules – stand in line
Be alert
Concentrate

PRACTICES
The following practices test a two-marker system, operating think left, think right.
They can, however, be modified to suit any other marker system which the coach might put into operation:
Working in a confined space, (see Fig. 2.17) the double markers 6 and 7 should be able to prevent:
(a) The acting half-back 2 attacking in any direction, or
(b) The acting half-back 2 moving across and dropping off any player.
(c) The first receivers 3 or 4 running straight, or
(d) 5 when running on the inside of either 3 or 4.

The two markers, operating think left, think right, will be vulnerable only when:
(a) 3 or 4 run across field
(b) 3 or 4 pass the ball back inside, across 5, to each other (that is 3 to 4, or 4 to 3).

In a game each of these plays would be prevented by the next player in the defensive line.
Players should practise marker-defence regularly.

The chief aims are:
marker defence
alertness
communication
thinking
The other aim: work rate (match involvement)

Ruck Defence
The defence around the ruck can be severely pressurised by seven players attacking seven defenders within the confines of a grid about fifteen metres wide. The marker defence is certainly tested, but so too are the speed, drift and combinations of the first two defenders in the line on each side of the play-the-ball. M1 thinks left and M2 thinks right. The ball is moved to 01 while D2, and D4 move up; both markers move towards 01, and D1 and D3 move up in the line but drift inwards, thus blocking the area around the play-the-ball. (See Fig. 2.18)
LESSON 12
Support Play

Coaching Points
1. The Ball Carrier
   Be aware of the position of your support
   Listen to their calls
   Look and decide before passing – do not pass blind
   Be prepared to pass to players in a better position than yourself

   A. The Ball Carrier – Punting into the Defence
      Be determined
      Hold the ball in two hands
      Attempt to break the tackle
      If held look for support, but protect the ball
      Look, make a decision – if the pass is on make sure it is a perfect one

   B. The Ball Carrier – Making a Break
      Run as quickly as possible for the goal-line
      If a support player is better positioned then you pass immediately

2. Other Players
   Support the ball at all times
   Be alert
   Concentrate
   Communicate
   Time your run

   a) Supporting the Break
      Defences in modern Rugby League are becoming increasingly efficient, so direct penetrations are less frequent. It is, therefore, important that the most is made of every break, and support is necessary to maintain the impetus of the movement. The individual who breaks the line will very quickly be tackled by the full-back or cover defence so it is essential that colleagues arrive alongside him/her quickly. Anticipation, communication, prior knowledge and timing are the necessary ingredients of success.

      During the small sided games, encourage players to continuously follow the ball.

   b) Hitting the Defensive Line and Off-Loading
      A ball carrier running strongly and hitting the defensive line with determination will be hard to handle, and will often cause two or even three defenders to be drawn into the tackle, unless the defence is extremely well organised and has the ability to drift in, gaps will be created alongside the runners. These gaps should be exploited by support players arriving after the gap has been created but before the ball carrier is grounded. Timing is important.
PRACTICES

1. Passive Opposition
Two defenders close together and kneeling. The ball carrier jogs into them, concentrating on thrusting his upper body upwards and forwards over the two defenders. The pass is made to a player in close support.

2. Shield Opposition
The shields are held by two defenders standing close together but lower than usual, at lower chest height. The ball carrier runs in between the shields, passing to a player in close support.
Decision making should now be introduced. As the ball carrier thrusts his body through into space he should hold the ball out and look for support. If there is any doubt whether a successful pass will be made, the ball should be brought back into the chest and made safe using both hands.

c) Hitting the Defensive Line and Keeping the Ball Alive
Players carrying the ball up strongly and trying to break the defensive line are often aware that they are going to be tackled a split second before they are grounded. A good player will use this split second to try to turn so he can off-load to a team-mate directly behind.

3. Three Against Two Shields
In Fig. 2.19 three players, the ball carrier in the middle, attack two shields. The players holding the shields are instructed to be firm, but to allow penetration as long as the ball carrier runs strongly with determination. The ball should be passed immediately the shield has been penetrated.
Major coaching points are:
Ball carrier: determination
  hold the ball firmly
  break shields with shoulders and chest
Support: timing

4. Four Against Two Shields
In Fig. 2.20 the practice is extended to include an additional support player at the back. The players holding the shields try to prevent the ball carrier breaking.
If he does break, he off-loads as in Fig. 2.19. If the defence is too strong he turns and off-loads to the support player at the back, who must follow the ball, always reading the situation, and when the ball is made available, time his run to arrive at the correct side at the correct time.
The practice can then be developed to encourage team play. The support player at the back will always follow the ball and should have the option of penetrating himself or immediately off-loading as soon as he receives possession of the ball.

Fig. 2.19

Fig. 2.20
LESSON 13

The Scrummage

Coaching Points – By Position

1. No.8 Open Side Prop
Forward

Stand at the side of the hooker, next to the Referee
Place your inside shoulder behind the hooker
Firmly grasp the shirt of the blindside prop, or the hooker’s hip
Bind tight
Your outside foot should be forward, i.e. the one nearest the put in. Do not form the scrum until your back row are secure
Form the scrum with a straight back
Grip the opposition’s shirt firmly with your outside hand

2. No.9 Hooker

Be the first to arrive at the mark of the scrum
Bind tight, over the shoulder’s of the two front row
Do not form the scrum until your back row are secure
Be as comfortable as possible
Strike for the ball with your nearest foot

3. No.10 Blindside Prop
Forward

Pack at the opposite side of the hooker to where the Referee is standing
Pack lower than the No.8, so that the hooker is naturally turned towards the put in
Push your inside shoulder into the armpit of the hooker
Grasp the shirt of the No.8 firmly under the armpit
Your inside foot should be forward i.e. the one nearest the put in
Do not form the scrum until your back row are secure
Form the scrum with a straight back

4. No.11 Open Side Second Row

Bind firmly with the blindside second row before entering the scrum
Bind over the arm of the blindside second row
Do not disturb the front row, move into position low down
Move your shoulders up until they rest beneath the bulge of the No.8’s buttocks
It is vital that your back is straight, so keep your head up
Bind the front row tight
Your outside foot should be forward, i.e. the one nearest the put in
Help to channel the ball back

5. No.12 Blindside Second Row

Bind firmly with the open side second row before entering the scrum
Bind under the arm of the open side second row
Do not disturb the front row, move into position low down, putting your head into the gap between the No.10 and hooker
Move your shoulders up until they rest beneath the bulge of the No.10’s buttocks
It is vital that your back is straight, so keep your head up
Bind the front row tight
Your inside foot should be forward i.e. the one nearest the put in
Help to channel the ball back

6. No.13 Loose Forward

Place your head between the second row forwards
Your shoulders should rest under the bulge of the second row’s buttocks
It is vital that your back is straight, so keep your head up
Place your arms round the two second rows and bind them tight
Be in position before the scrum is set
Spread your feet for pushing and balance
N.B. All the players referred to in this section should perform regular neck strengthening exercise

7. The Scrum-half

Get hold of the ball as soon as possible
Hold it point to point
Be aware of how your hooker likes the put in
Obey the rules
If possible pass immediately from the ground
Scrummaging is an important contributory factor to possession, and possession in Rugby League football is probably more important than in any other team game. Statistics suggest that the team which has most possession in a game invariably wins.
Therefore, the objectives should be to:
- win every scrum when you have the head and put in
- win at least three per game against the head
- reduce the number of scrum penalties conceded.

To achieve these objectives a team needs to develop the skill of efficient scrummaging within the laws of the game.
Aim: to win possession at the scrum
The major factors influencing this are:
- The ability to push the hooker closer to the ball than the opposition’s hooker
- To create a good striking position, while at the same time making difficulties for the opposition
- To push over the ball, and push the opposition off it
The major principles of scrumming are, therefore, scrum formation, a quick strike for the ball, and a strong coordinated push.

PRACTICES

1. General Conditioning

It is necessary for all forwards, but particularly the front row, to develop their all-round strength and pay particular attention to the muscles of the neck, shoulders and upper body.

It is valuable for the forwards to perform regular exercises to strengthen the neck. For example Fig. 2.21.

a) Static neck-muscle exercises (no movement, just an equal and opposite force from head and hands). Press the head forward, backward, left and right, tensing each time for ten seconds. Perform ten repetitions for each direction.

b) Dynamic neck-muscle exercises (the head slowly moves against the pressure of the hands). Use the same movement and repetitions as shown.
2. Partner Exercises

Competitive practices involving partners pushing and pulling one another provide excellent introductory and warm-up games before scrummaging is introduced:

a) Pulling and pushing (Fig. 2.22): partners grip each other’s jerseys, and either pull or push. Children should be with those of a similar size.

b) Two-man scrum: two players in a safe and strong scrummaging position compete against one another. They have chins lifted and backs flat, with feet spread out, and each grips his partner’s jersey at the shoulders while endeavouring to pull or push him off balance.

3. Hooker and Scrum-Half

The hooker faces forward, with the scrum-half to his side. The scrumhalf is holding the ball and facing the hooker.

The scrum-half:
- Bends down holding the ball, point to point, close to the ground
- The ball is rolled along the ground, in front of the hooker
- The scrum-half quickly retires behind the hooker
- As the ball appears, the scrum-half quickly picks it up and moves forward.

The hooker:
- Bends forward, with head turned to concentrate upon the ball
- Strikes for the ball with the near foot
- The foot should be cocked so that contact is made with the outside of the near foot
- The ball should be diverted backwards
- The ball should be put in from both sides so that the hooker becomes skilled at using both feet.

4. Front Row and Scrum-Half

Two sets of front rows pack down against one another. With students care should be taken that all six are evenly matched physically, and the opportunity used to make them fully aware of the rules relative to the head and the put-in. The practice should progress to the scrum-half putting the ball in. At this stage the two packs should set with their feet back. The ball should be put in from the right and left.

5. Pack and Scrum-Halt

Two sets of forwards pack down together. Care should be taken with the positions they take up. Once the ball has been put in, the back three should channel it back so that it comes out between the loose forward’s feet. If the back three have problems they can be taken out of the practice and placed in a pushing position against a wall. In this way they can practice controlling the passage of the ball out of the scrum.
LESSON 14

Picking up a Rolling Ball

A moving Rugby ball is difficult to control due to the unpredictability of the bounce. As possession is of vital importance in this game it is essential that all students are taught how to cope with this aspect of play.

Coaching Points
Move quickly to the ball
Keep the eyes on the ball
When approaching the ball, readjust the position of the feet
Lean the body close to the ground
Extend the hands
Be prepared to catch the ball as it bounces up
Timing is important

PRACTICES
Arrange the group as in Fig. 2.23
No. 1 rolls the ball forwards towards point X and runs to the back of the line No. 2 runs forward and picks up the ball at X, runs with it to point Z, changes direction and moves to Y. Rolls the ball to X and runs to the back of the line. No. 3 runs forwards and repeats as above. This practice should be repeated using the other side, and with the ball travelling directly towards and away from the player.

GAMES
Three against Three
The formation is as in Fig. 2.24
Equipment: three balls. Two teams at opposite ends of the grid. The teacher successively kicks the three balls randomly into the grid. Team “A” chase the balls, collect and move forward to “score” in Team “B’s” half. Team “B” may attempt to harass them, but may not “grab” the attackers. The winners are the team who are quickest to have all team members “score”.

There are many other practices and games for this and all the other skills discussed in this Unit. Staff are referred to the Rugby League Coaching Manual for further details.
Unit 3
The Game

Overview
The game of Rugby League is played between two sides of 13 players. There may be two substitutes used during a game, provided their names have been submitted to the referee prior to the start of the match.

For reason of identification players may wear numbered jerseys (1-13 with additional numbers for substitutes).

The players are divided into Backs and Forwards and the playing positions are as specified below:

Backs
1. Full Back
2. Right Wing Threequarter
3. Right Centre Threequarter
4. Left Centre Threequarter
5. Left Wing Threequarter
6. Stand-off half or Five-eighth
7. Scrum Half

Forwards
8. Openside Front Row Forward
9. Hooker
10. Blindside Front Row Forward
11. Openside Second Row Forward
12. Blindside Second Row Forward
13. Loose Forward

The Field of Play
The area is as illustrated in Fig.3.1. The game is played on a rectangular shaped field which has an in goal area behind the goal line. Here tries are scored.

The boundaries of the field are, therefore, the dead ball line which marks the limits of the in goal area and the touch-line at the side. The field is divided in half by the half way line and each half is further divided by the 22 metre lines.

Because the game can be restarted from the goal line, 22 metre line and half way line, intermittent lines are marked 10 metres in front. When the ball goes on or over the touch-line, the game is often restarted with a scrummage or tap penalty 10 metres in, therefore, another intermittent line is marked 10 metres in from either touch-line.

The goal posts are placed in a central position on the goal line.

It is important to understand that the lines mark the boundaries of play. Therefore, if the ball is on:
1. The touch-line, it is deemed in touch (out of play)
2. The goal-line, it is deemed in-goal (a try)
3. The dead ball line, it is deemed dead (out of play)
The Ball

The game is played with an oval, air inflated ball the outer casing of which should be of leather or other approved material.

All equipment must comply with the Laws of the Game, and must not be of such construction or condition that it endangers the players in any way.

The Laws

In a work of this size it is not possible to include the Laws of the Game. However, an understanding of the following are vital in order to play the game.

1. Scoring points
2. Running, passing, tackling and kicking
3. Play the ball
4. The six tackle rule
5. Starts and restarts of play
6. Penalties
7. Ball out of play in touch
8. Scrummage
9. Off-side law
10. Tap restart

Staff are advised to obtain a current copy of the Laws of the Game which can be obtained from The Rugby Football League, 180 Chapeltown Road, Leeds.
Unit 4
Physical Conditioning

Fitness Facts
- to reach the top in Rugby League players train six days a week, fifty weeks of the year
- in a match a player may cover between 5,000 – 7,000 metres at varying speeds
- as a contact sport players are subject to intense physical and psychological pressure
- speed is an essential prerequisite
- training is specific to individual requirements

Within a work of this size it is not possible to provide comprehensive coverage of this subject. Staff are therefore referred to the Rugby League Coaching Manual for full details.

General Principles
All players must develop:
- suppleness
- strength
- stamina
- speed

All conditioning programmes must obey the “Laws of Training”:

Overload
Unless the body is subjected to stress, its condition is unlikely to improve. Below this critical stress level the player will at best maintain his current fitness status. If a training programme is to be effective it must make demands on the systems of the body.

Adaptation
As a result of the body being overloaded it adapts, and in doing so compensates in preparation for more strenuous efforts. The result is an increase in endurance or strength, and a greater capacity to do work.

Progression
As the body adapts it is able to tolerate work of greater intensity. Training must progress, and staff and students should maintain records to monitor progress. There must be a balance between hard and easy weeks of training. Without this recuperation the body will not compensate and hence the objective of increased fitness will not be achieved.

Reversibility
Once training ceases, levels of fitness deteriorate at a rate far faster than they increased. This is particularly relevant in the closed season, and when returning to the game after injury.
Warm up and Suppleness/Flexibility

Players should warm up and stretch before every game and training session. The major reason is to prevent injuries. Records would suggest that a regular flexibility programme will reduce the number of strains, tears and pulls by over 80%.

Poor flexibility also hinders speed and endurance, whilst a heavy strength training programme requires to be combined with a flexibility programme if the range of movement is to be maintained.

REMEMBER

Warm up before every game and training session
Raise the heart rate first by non-explosive exercise. Jogging or running on the spot are ideal, but in a training environment, combine the warm up with a skills practice
Do each of the flexibility exercises until the stretch is felt then hold
Do not bounce; achieve the stretch position gently
Do not over stretch; the position should be tight but not painful
Stretch before and after weight training
On match days finish the warm up and flexibility programme ten minutes before kick-off

Stamina

A Rugby League player requires a higher level of stamina than those taking part in other collision sports and, therefore, endurance training must be the foundation of the training programme for all players, irrespective of the position. Stamina relates to both the energy and muscular systems.

1. Developing the Energy Systems

Both the aerobic and anaerobic energy systems need developing.

a) Aerobic Endurance

Aerobic endurance is also known as cardiovascular endurance, and involves the efficiency of the heart, lungs and circulation. Every muscle in the body requires energy, supplied by the blood which receives oxygen in the lungs and is pumped through the body by the heart. The bigger and stronger the heart, the more efficient will be its pumping capacity, and the more "fuel" will be supplied to those muscles which are working. Greater efficiency is shown by a drop in the pulse rate.

Training Example

Type: Long continuous running
Results: Increases efficiency of the lungs
Increases the number of red cells in the blood
Increases the size, strength and thickness of the heart muscle
Key points: Checking pulse rate (P.R.) is important in monitoring training effects. The optimal rate for a positive effect is to maintain between 130-160 beats/minute (BPM) for a minimum of 30 minutes.

Variety: Continuous running can become boring so:
Change routes
Change terrain
Increase duration to 40 minutes

N.B. Encourage players to do this work in their own time and not in club/team training time.

b) Anaerobic Endurance

‘Anaerobic’ literally means ‘without’ air, or effectively without oxygen, so anaerobic endurance implies muscular work done without oxygen.

In this the athlete is using two energy systems, with the anaerobic cycle supplementing the aerobic mechanism. This occurs during relatively short intense activity of between ten seconds and two minutes, and is therefore relevant to the Rugby League player.

The anaerobic cycle involves chemical changes which take place in the muscle, which in the context of this series it is not appropriate to cover, and P.E. staff are recommended to refer to the standard texts on exercise physiology for further details.

Training Example

Endurance

Interval Training is an ideal method of developing anaerobic endurance.

Key Points:
1. Early season interval runs should last about 30 seconds. (i.e. 8-200 metres)
2. As fitness improves high intensity runs of 60-120 metres should be used.
3. The rest period is vitally important. An estimate of duration of rest should be 5-6 times longer than work.

Interval variables are:
Length of run
Speed of run
Number of runs
Rest between runs

2. Developing Muscular Endurance

Rugby League requires players to:

a) Make repeated body contact and become involved in heavy collisions.
b) Quickly regain their feet after becoming involved in a tackle.
c) Move forward and backward in the defensive line.

All players, therefore, whatever their position, require to have a high level of muscular endurance. This is best achieved by Circuit Training.

Circuit Training can take place in the:

a) Home
b) Gymnasium
c) Weights room
d) Club
An example of a home circuit is:

**Session 1**
Exercise for one minute on each of the nine exercises listed below. Have one minute rest between each exercise and record the number of repetitions done. Total time, 18 minutes.

**Remaining Sessions**
For all future training sessions, half the number of maximum repetitions and do three circuits without any rest intervals. The exercise should always be completed in the same order.

The time taken to complete three circuits should always be recorded. The times should eventually improve, and when the circuit can be completed in less than fourteen minutes, increase the number of repetitions.

**Warning** If the time taken exceeds twenty minutes, the number of repetitions should be reduced.

**Strength**
A carefully planned weight training programme can be beneficial to most sports, but the influence on Rugby League, a sport which is dependent upon speed and bodily collision, is colossal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exercise</th>
<th>Maximum (Total in 1 min)</th>
<th>Circuit (1/2 Max)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step Ups</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sit Ups</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Press Ups</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squat Jumps</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trunk Curls</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back Press Ups</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squat Thrusts</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trunk Curls</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dips</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Does weight training continue into the Season?**
Yes – remember the Law of Reversibility “if you don’t use it, you lose it”
3 sessions per fortnight are recommended
No weights 2 days prior to a game

**What kind of weight training?**
The best results are achieved by the 10-8-6 systems of repetitions (reps) and sets.
1) Select a weight that will permit no more than 10 reps, do this on first set.
2) On the second set, increase weight to permit 8 reps.
3) On the third set, increase weight to permit 6 reps.

N.B. On all sets the maximum number of reps are done, so muscle failure is always achieved.
In reality players will initially only perform 8/4/4 reps. When they can achieve 10/8/6 reps **increase the weight**.
In leg exercises only a 20/12 rep. formula should be used.

**Speed**
There are more players who have not fulfilled their potential because of a lack of speed than for any other reason, and, therefore, it is commonsense for all players, whatever their position, to increase their running speed.

**Example 1.**
1. **Adequate warm up**
2. **10 x 50 metres: 3 x 150 metres**
3. **Steady run 15 mins**

**Example 2.**
1. **Adequate warm up**
2. **5 x 40 metres: 3 x 50 metres: 2 x 60 metres – rolling start**
3. **3 x 150 metres – standing start**
4. **Warm down**

**2. Bounding**
Helps to strengthen the legs and improves leg drive as well as stride length.

**Example**
To be completed outside on grass. All exercises completed over 40 metres and repeated 3 times.
1. **Continuous hopping left foot**
2. **Continuous hopping right foot**
3. **Continuous hop and step**
4. **Exaggerated stride with high knee lift**
5. **Continuous double footed jumps. Walk back recovery.**

**3. Harness Running**
Players should work with a partner, who holds a harness round him, offering a resistance by leaning back. The resistance should not be so great that their running action is impaired. A long towel can serve the same purpose as the harness.

**4. General Training**
Apart from the long continuous runs, most other training should be performed at speed.

**5. Strength Improvement**

**6. Flexibility**
Training Summary

1. General Training
   Although each individual needs to include one long run in his weekly training programme, most running should be performed at speed to create a high percentage of fast-twitch fibres in the muscle.

2. Sprinting
   Quality sprints should be performed weekly.

3. Reaction Time Drills
   Should be specific to the game.

4. Strength Improvement
   Each player should be involved in a heavy-weight training programme.

5. Flexibility Work
   To supplement training and increase stride length. Flexibility work should take place before and after every training session.

6. Speed Endurance Exercises
   These should be performed each week.

THE ANNUAL PROGRAMME

Training should take place on an annual basis with the elements of each different phase depending on the needs of the player, and the stage in the competition cycle.

The diagram below (Fig. 4.1) shows a 7 phase year and the notes which follow provide general outlines of the type and amount of training which should be done in each phase. (For further details see the Rugby League Coaching Manual).
Unit 5
Mental Preparation

A sport such as Rugby League demands not only that players are physically fit, but that they can withstand the psychological pressures of the hard physical contact which is an integral part of the game. Rugby League therefore demands courage and commitment on the part of players, and players at school level are no exception. Staff must be prepared to cope with the psychological as well as the physical preparation. An additional factor to be considered is that in Rugby League there is the preparation of both individual and team. Both have equal importance as a badly prepared individual can jeopardise the chances of a well prepared team.

In Rugby League there are two key psychological concepts to be considered:

Motivation
Anxiety

Motivation
Motivation is that which drives an individual towards the achievement of a desired goal or outcome. Motivation is two dimensional and requires both direction towards a goal and intensity of effort reach the goal.

The teacher must try to ensure that each player has a set of individual goals, and that these goals are co-ordinated and blended into the overall team. One technique to achieve this coordinated approach is Goal Setting which is known to be effective motivational technique with players of all levels of ability.

Goal Setting Check List
- When establishing goals don’t forget:
  - Goals must be sufficiently challenging
  - Goals must be realistic
  - Goals must be specific
  - Goals may have different time scales, e.g. short term, medium term, long term
  - Goals require feedback to provide a check on progress
  - Goals should be flexible enough to cope with necessary changes
  - Goals must be negotiated and not imposed
  - Goals should be related to the overall aim of the team and/or individual

The Value of Goal Setting
- Goal setting focuses the attention on the task in hand
- Goal setting encourages responsibility for individual actions
- Goal setting improves communication in that everyone is clear about where they are heading
- Goal setting helps decision making

Further details of Goal Setting and Goal Setting Techniques can be found in: Harris, D.V. and Harris, B.L. An Athlete’s Guide to Sports Psychology: mental skills for physical people.

Anxiety
All players feel anxious at some time, and increases in anxiety usually relates to the perceived importance of the event. Anxiety is a normal human reaction and should be handled sympathetically by staff. The major problem with anxiety is that it can, and often does have a negative effect on performance. Staff must therefore be sensitive to the teams’ levels of anxiety and be ready to support and help as needed.

How to recognise anxiety in players
- Physical signs:
  - Increased and profuse sweating
  - Complaints of nausea, dizziness, headaches
  - Frequent visits to the toilet
  - Signs of agitation and/or overactivity
  - Frowning, nailbiting, lip chewing

- Mental signs:
  - Frequent lapses in attention and concentration
  - Changes in social behaviour
  - Irritability, aggression etc.

How to Cope with Anxious Players
- Make players feel secure and accepted irrespective of success
- Try not to make negative comments
- Encourage openness, discuss what make players anxious
- Encourage positive thinking
- Encourage the “I’ve done it before” approach
- There are certain psychological techniques which may help anxious players. Using such as Visualisation or Relaxation techniques may help. But, each player is different and each will find what best helps him to overcome or cope with anxiety. Staff can provide the support and advice to help the anxious player through the difficult times.

For further details of Psychological Preparation see:
- The Rugby League Coaching Manual: Appendix psychological Preparation of a Team. Thomas, A.
Unit 6
Injury Prevention

The saying “prevention is better than cure!” is particularly true in sport.

Most Rugby League injuries are trivial and only temporary discomfort is experienced. However, it should be the intention of everyone to reduce even these to a minimum.

If we consider the game from all aspects, preventive measures will become obvious.

Injury prevention can be divided into (a) injuries the player can prevent, (b) injuries other people can prevent, (c) prevention of accidental injuries.

1. Prevention by Fitness

Rugby is physically demanding. The ability to play the game and to enjoy it depends on fitness. The fit player is less likely to get injured.

2. Prevention Through Health

Physical fitness forms a large part of good health. Both of these rely on the person having a good all-round diet. Playing rugby needs energy and in young people, there is also the need to consider the foods necessary for the growth of bone and muscle.

3. Prevention by Choice and Care of Footwear

The comfort and support of feet and ankles is vital if rugby is to be enjoyed. The quality and fitting of the boots and training shoes is most important. Cheap shoes are no use for sport. The correct size is obvious, but also the strength of the heel – support is almost as important. Care of footwear, by replacing studs, and repairing worn down heels, is essential if many ankle injuries are to be prevented.

4. Prevention by Care of Playing and Training Facilities

The careless and thoughtless approach to playing areas, gymnasiums and sports halls leads to a number of preventable injuries. Pieces of glass, stones and cinders are often found on playing pitches. If the teams just walked the length of the field before the game, most of it could be removed. Protruding obstacles and surplus equipment could be protected before skills practise and indoor training. Exercise equipment and apparatus should be maintained and used correctly.

5. Prevention by Preparation for Activity

Effective ‘warm up’ prepares the players both mentally and physically. It consists of general activities, like jogging and free exercise, and then more special things, like skills and stretching. The session should increase the body temperature and cause mild sweating. It should also produce a mental alertness and sharpened reactions.

6. Prevention by Control

The Laws of the Game are designed to prevent injury. In a contact sport like rugby, a firm discipline to play within the laws is vital to injury prevention. Referees must see the application of the laws as a means of preventing injury. Coaches are responsible for insisting on discipline and self-control.

7. Prevention by Correct Attitudes to Injury

The physical demands of the game will expose most injuries. Playing whilst injured is stupid behaviour. Firstly, it will make the injury worse, and secondly you will not be able to maintain standards of skill. Persistent and long-standing injuries should be investigated by medical authority. A return to the game should only be considered after a fitness test. Pain is a clear sign that the injury is not fully healed.

Injury prevention should be everybody’s concern. As a result of the discipline which already exists, serious injuries are very rare. The aim of this unit is to create a greater awareness of some of the main sources of injuries.

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Phase One
While there is no firm evidence that a game called Football was played in Britain prior to the 14th century, there is evidence from other cultures of earlier origins. The Greek game of Episkyros and the Roman game of Harpastum are both acknowledged as early forms of the game. There is also evidence of similar games from cultures as diverse as China and Mexico. Whether the British game evolved from these origins or from the Celtic, Norman or Anglo Saxon sports is not known. However, by the 14th century references to “football” are common. The games of Soccer and Rugby emerged from a folk tradition as distinctive games, both were wild and unruly and played according to unwritten rules.

Phase Two
The years between 1750 – 1840 saw the development of the modern game of football in the Public schools, and it is from here that the game of Rugby has emerged in its modern form.

Phase Three
Between 1830 – 1860 the game continued in the schools, but in a more elaborate form and with more structured and controlled rules.

Phase Four
In the years between 1850 – 1900 the game spread from the schools to society in general and the club system was established. The historic action of William Webb Ellis in 1823 of picking up the ball led to the final differentiation of the game of Rugby in its modern form.

1900-to-date
The division between Union and League came over the question of “broken time payments”, whereby players demanded to be paid for time and wages lost through playing the game. On August 29th, 1895 a meeting of 21 clubs at the George Hotel, Huddersfield led to the formation of the Northern Union which was officially established on September 3rd of the same year. In 1897 there was significant rule changes when the line outs were abolished, and three points were awarded for a try and two for a goal of any kind. In 1906 the number of players was changed to the modern form of 13 a side, resulting in a faster and more spectacular game. A fact which is exemplified in the modern game of Rugby League at both professional and amateur levels. The game of Rugby League has two governing bodies, the Rugby Football League, based in Leeds which governs the 36 professional clubs. The British Amateur Rugby League Association which was formed in 1973, and which governs the rapidly expanding amateur game.

Amateurism and Professionalism
One of the biggest misconceptions is that Rugby League is entirely professional. Nothing could be further from the truth. Like most sports it is only the top echelon which is professional, representing approximately 2% of the game as a whole. The recent increased popularity and wealth of the game has resulted in these top professionals having six figure earning capacities per year, but even so the majority of professionals are part-time and follow their own full-time careers in industry and commerce.

The majority of Rugby League players are home grown, starting their careers in schools and amateur clubs. The more outstanding graduate to the professional game via the representative teams in BARLA and ESRL, and many of them return towards the end of their careers to put something back into the sport.

BARLA have their own representative structure from the many District teams to the International team which toured all over the world. It is worth noting that whilst ex-professionals are welcomed back into the amateur game, they are excluded from playing representative amateur rugby of any kind.

Relationships between BARLA and RFU improved considerably with the ‘free gangway’ which allows genuine amateur players freedom of movement between the two codes. This freedom of movement works to the benefit of both sports, as well as the players themselves, and was perhaps best illustrated in the student Rugby League World Cup in 1989 when many Rugby Union players made their baptism in International Rugby League whilst still being members of their own Rugby Union Club – such is the healthy and friendly relationship between BARLA and Twickenham.

Women in Rugby League
Rugby League has always been proud of its family appeal, and women and young girls have always been welcome as spectators. Only recently, however, can it be said that women have ended the male dominance of the sport.

Perhaps the most notable event was the election of Mrs. Kathy Hetherington as the Sheffield Eagles representative to the Council of the Rugby Football League in 1984.

Since that date Ms. E.L. Rosewarne BA has been appointed as Head of Player Personnel by the Rugby Football League in 1989.

At least four of the professional clubs now have women physiotherapists who treat the player’s injuries, are in the dressing-room on training and match days, and come onto the field of play whenever necessary. Many clubs also have female full-time secretaries.

The British Amateur Rugby League Association also welcomes females, and several of them hold prestigious positions as local League Secretaries. Although none at the moment have penetrated the full Executive, Mrs. Alfreida Kindon has been elected onto the Full Council, and Mrs. Jayne Lines is Chairman of the powerful Manchester League.

The Women’s Amateur Rugby League was formed in 1989, has eight teams playing regular fixtures, and their representative team has recently toured France.

More and more women are actively coaching the game both in schools and in clubs, and several are now progressing through the Coaching Scheme.
Women now need to further their knowledge so that they can play as well as coach and spectate. Women’s participation in sport in general has increased over the past ten years and many “traditionally male” sports are now being played by women. Rugby League is no exception to this. Throughout the country (specifically at present in the North but there are also teams forming in the London area) women have formed Rugby League teams and play in Leagues on a regular basis and often appear as curtain raisers before a big match, thus gaining publicity and acceptance.

Once women are seen playing an entertaining and skilful game of Rugby League, they will at the least be taken seriously. However, this is only the tip of the iceberg!

In the late nineteenth century, Rugby League was instrumental in breaking down the social barriers that Rugby Union had so vigorously advocated. Now after two Student Rugby League World Cups it would appear that the future generation of Rugby League is successfully catered for with a group of highly educated and articulate connoisseurs of the game, and in this time of equal opportunities, there is no reason why women should not be actively involved in the sport, be it at playing, coaching, or spectator level.

However, for this to be accomplished, it cannot be emphasised enough that women need knowledge of the game in order to appreciate the skills, tactics and sheer enjoyment that exists in this speedy contact sport, and what better way to start learning about the skills than to take the option of Rugby League within GCSE Physical Education.

Steps have already been taken in the right direction as girls have taken the Rugby League Level 1 Course as part of their GCSE coursework. In conclusion, it would appear that GCSE PE in schools is able to provide a stepping stone that allows young people, especially girls to become more knowledgeable and educated in areas of sport that in the past have largely remained untouched. Indeed, many adolescent girls have become “turned off” by the idea of playing hockey and netball as they fail to see any relationship between such a sport and present day lifestyle. Alternatively, the dynamic nature, publicity, colour and vigour that Rugby League now provides allows many young girls and women an outlet with which to direct their interests and reach its target of becoming a national sport by 1995, then what better way can this be achieved than via schools and colleges – and there is perhaps no better avenue for young people, notably girls, than to take a Rugby League option in GCSE Physical Education.

Drug Testing in Rugby League

When it became clear a few years ago that certain drugs, if used in sport, might boost a player’s performance, The Rugby League Council asked the Rugby League Medical Association in consultation with the Sports Council to draw up clear rules about which Drugs players could take for genuine medical reasons.

Contravention of these rules would mean possible disciplinary action or suspension from the game. The banned classes of Drugs were described with sufficient examples in pamphlets issued to players to demonstrate the purpose and control envisaged.

At present there are six distinct categories of banned Drugs – stimulants, narcotics, anabolic steroids, beta-blockers, diuretics, hormones. Stimulants can be used to aid recovery from fatigue, but they can also produce heart failure resulting from over-exertion. The narcotic analgesics are powerful painkillers and may enable a person to compete despite injury – but further injury and permanent damage can result.

Much has been written about anabolic steroids. Suffice it to say that they can cause infertility, raise blood cholesterol (increasing the risk of heart disease) and, in some cases, they may produce cancer of the liver.

Beta-blockers and diuretics are of little help to the Rugby League player and may actually impair performance. But as these Drugs may steady the concentration in shooting events, snooker and darts, Beta-blockers are banned in sport. Diuretics may help a boxer or jockey to achieve a certain weight – they too are banned in sport.

Gas spectrometry is used to screen urine samples at the Testing Laboratory, and if a banned substance appears to be present, further identification is obtained by mass spectrometry.

At the match where testing takes place, two players from each team are selected at random by a draw at the half-time interval in the presence of the team’s medical representative, or official.

The home official or medical representative draws out the away players to be tested and the away official or medical representative draws out the home players to be tested. The player is given written notification at the end of the game that he is required for testing about one hour later and will be required to produce 100 ml of urine.

The sampling officer receives a sealed bag and bottle sent by Data Post from the Laboratory containing 12 sampling bottles engraved with an event code number, the date of the match, and a bottle identification code, e.g. A1, B1, A2, B2, A3, B3, A4, B4, A5, B5, A6, B6.

One 100 ml A bottle and one 50 ml B bottle are provided for each player to be tested, though two additional sets are sent to ensure that the players still have a random selection from a total of six sets of containers.

The player is allowed to choose which sets of bottles he wishes to use. The sampling officer accompanies the player to the toilet area where the sample is to be produced in the sampling officer’s presence.

When the player has produced the 100 ml sample into the larger A bottle, the sample is divided into two parts, the larger two thereby going into A container and the remainder into the B. The player witnesses this procedure. The filled glass bottles are then put in padded form plastic containers and sealed with a uniquely numbered “Envopack” seal – the player continuing to witness the procedure.

If the player cannot produce 100 ml but only 30 ml at the first attempt or at further attempts, the bottles are sealed and reopened until the procedure is complete. The partial sample seal No. is recorded each time on the form provided.
At Kings College the A sample is analysed and the second B sample kept as a reserve in case further analysis is requested by the player. The seal numbers are noted on the form provided with any drugs, medicines, tablets etc., the player has taken within the previous three days. A note is also made of any infections the player may have had during the past three days.

One copy of the form is given to the competitor, one goes to the Rugby Football League, another accompanies the sample to the Laboratory, and one is sent to the Sports Council.

The form which goes to the Laboratory is coded and does not reveal the name of the player or his club so that the sample is analysed anonymously at the laboratory. If anything is found by the Laboratory, they reveal the Code No. to the Governing Body to identify the player concerned.

Finally all the sealed samples are placed in a large bag which is sealed similarly to the bottles with the necessary paperwork and returned to the Kings College laboratory by Data Post.

### Rugby League in Schools

The great changes which are currently taking place in education have badly affected sport in schools and have seriously reduced extracurricular activities. However, the number of schools participating in the game of Rugby League is higher now that it has ever been. This is partially due to the increase in interest in the professional game and partly to the work of the major schools’ organisations.

In 1913 the Lancashire Schools Rugby League was founded, and was shortly followed by the establishment of the Yorkshire Schools’ Rugby League. In 1965 these two autonomous organizations came together to form the English Schools’ Rugby League (E.S.R.L.) under the Chairmanship of Mr. Fred Howarth of Oldham. The E.S.R.L. Executive became the controlling body and at present controls the following organisations:

1. **Local Organisations**

   The structure of each local organisation is different, but the recommended format is as follows:

   A committee consisting of President, Chairman, Vice-Chairman. Treasurer, Secretary, Fixture Secretary, plus Life members and teachers who coach the school teams.

   This body meets five times per year to organize all aspects of school Rugby League in that district.

   The Local Association also acts as a forum for Rugby League discussion and appoints three representatives to the Regional Association.

2. **Regional Associations**

   At the present time there are two Regional organisations under the aegis of the E.S.R.L.:

   - North & West Counties Schools’ Rugby League
   - South & East Counties Schools’ Rugby League

   While both these bodies are autonomous they are subject to E.S.R.L. rules concerning E.S.R.L. competitions.

3. **English Schools’ Rugby League**

   The E.S.R.L. meets five times per year and is responsible for the organisation of competitions:

   - At school level through its Individual Champion School Competition
   - At District level through the Inter-District Cup & League Competition
   - Overseas, County and Regional Competitions
   - Arranges the Schoolboys’ Wembley Curtain Raiser
   - Organizes International Competition at U16 level

   The Executive appoints a National Coach for a two year period (after which he may seek re-election). His task is to watch U16’s play on Saturdays, watch County and Regional matches and finally select a national squad of 24 players. He is the sole selector, but a number of his colleagues report on outstanding prospects. In addition to this the opinions of District, County and Regional coaches are sought and noted.

   The primary aim of the association is to develop boys through active participation in the game. It is also aware of the needs of the very talented player and these boys are invited to join Centres of Excellence in their own Districts. These are run in conjunction with the National Coaching Scheme providing advanced coaching for boys in preparation for their U16 season.

   The Executive concerns itself with all aspects of Rugby League in schools, obtaining grant aid from the Rugby Football League and the Sports Council. It is however a totally autonomous organisation and, as in the Districts and the Regions, forms a forum for discussion.

   **Further information may be obtained from:**

   - Mr. R. Unsworth, Sec., E.S.R.L., 92 Derby House, Warrington Lane, Wigan, WN1 4RW. Tel: 01942 39588
   - Mr. D. McHugh, Coach, e-mail: d.mchugh@cableinet.co.uk
   - Mr. R Knowles, Fixture Sec, 7 Langdale Ave, Wigan, WN1 2HW Tel 01942 238135.
The Sports Council and National Coaching Foundation acknowledge the Rugby League National Coaching Scheme as one of the leaders in Coach Education.

The Rugby League National Coaching Scheme runs three Coach Accreditation Courses, with the major objective to improve the overall standards of the game at every level.

All those who enter the Scheme must do so at Level 1, where both men and women with no previous knowledge or experience will be made welcome as long as they are over the age of sixteen.

**Rugby League Level 1**

An enjoyable course which introduces sound and tested coaching methods through the important fundamental basic skills of the game. There is also an emphasis on the playing of many varied small sided training games.

**Rugby League Level 2**

Those attending this course have the opportunity of obtaining the prestigious Level 2 Grade 1 Certificate, which makes the holder eligible to coach professionally and at representative level.

This is a far more in depth course than the Level 1, concentrating upon individual, unit and team skills and proven coaching method. Physical conditioning, motivation, laws of the game and the subject of sports injuries are also an integral part of an enjoyable and enlightening course.

Applicants are restricted to those who are involved in the game and hold a Level 1 Grade 1 Certificate.

**Rugby League Level 3**

The Level 3 course will explore team preparation in detail, particularly the tactics and game plans necessary for winning rugby. Emphasis will be on the four principles of play – tactical kicking, defence, control of the ball and support play – in addition to team moves, set pieces and patterns of play.

There will also be a concentration upon the organisation, planning and testing of the conditioning programme with an emphasis upon closed season preparation, and methods of peaking for important games. Nutrition will also be an important aspect of the course. Applicants are restricted to those who are involved in the game and hold a Level 2 Grade 1 Certificate.

If you would like further details on this year’s Coaching Courses then please complete the enclosed form and return it to the Rugby League National Coaching Scheme, West Yorkshire House, 4 New North Parade, Huddersfield HD1 5JP.
Recommended Reading

The Sports Trainer – Australian Sports Medicine Federation
Towards Better Coaching – Australian Coaching Council
The Rugby League Coaching Manual – Phil Larder
Explanatory Notes on the Laws of the Game – Tom Bellew
Rugby Football League Official Handbook
National Coaching Scheme Level 2 Booklet
An Athlete’s Guide to Sports Psychology – Harris, D.V. & Harris, B.L.

Contact Numbers

Further information on the game of Rugby League can be obtained from:

Rugby League – Professional
Dave Callaghan, Chief Executive, The Rugby Football League,
Redhall Lane, Leeds. LS17 8NB. Tel: 0113 2329111

Rugby League – Amateur
Ian Cooper, Chief Executive, National Administrator, The British
Amateur Rugby League Association, West Yorkshire House, 4 New
North Parade, Hudderstield. HD1 5JP. Tel: 01484 544131

Rugby League – Schools
D. McHugh, Treasurer, English Schools’ Rugby League,
20 Greenways, Billinge, Wigan. Tel: 01695 624104

Rugby League – National Development Scheme
Nick Halafihi, National Development Officer, The Rugby Football
League, Redhall Lane, Leeds. LS17 8NB. Tel: 0113 2329111