

## Assessment Task #13

### “Questioning for Intelligent Performance”



Level 3 Rugby Course, 2008

## **Introduction:**

The arrival of high profile New Zealand coach Robbie Deans to Australian shores has significantly stimulated thought on the pedagogical approaches used to the coaching of rugby in this country. Deans in the tradition of 'game sense' pioneers Bunker and Thorpe appears to be coaching his chargers to individually and collectively "play what's in front of them". This teaching style although at times is often poorly understood and delivered challenges the traditional way that Rugby has been coached at various levels throughout Australia. It is clear that experienced 'Environmental' coaches that subscribe to this alternative form of coaching such as Deans do not teach by accident and simply roll out the balls and let the boys play, but rather carefully shape, focus and enhance play through various game based activities that are intent on eliciting tactical decision making that is reflective of the environments they are likely to encounter. Critical to the effective delivery of this style is the ability of the coach to be able to promote and develop player's cognitive functioning during training sessions that is manifested in an appropriate physical response. For the purposes of this paper this concept will be referred to as 'Intelligent Performance' and will be discussed in greater detail.

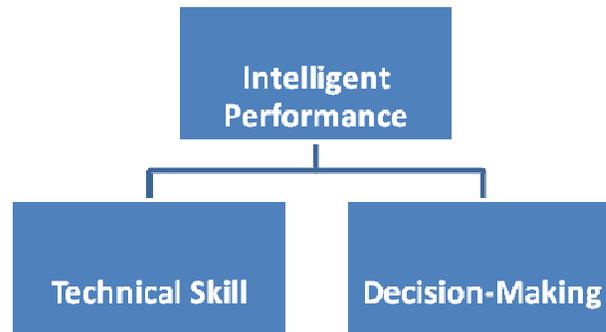
Consequently, because the mantra of "playing what's in front of you" is becoming an ever more popular form of coaching coupled with the needs of the 'y' generation the ability of coaches to adopt appropriate questioning procedures has come under much more scrutiny. The use of questioning is the fundamental teaching tool that should be implemented to facilitate the development of player's intelligent performance by promoting higher order thinking and problem solving capacities. The purpose of this paper is to outline an effective questioning procedure and how this can promote intelligent performance amongst rugby players. It is to this concept of 'Intelligent Performance' that the paper will now turn.

## **Intelligent Performance:**

A player displaying this notion of 'understanding in action' has only until recently been referred to as having 'games sense' or as an 'intelligent performer'. Launder (2001) maintains that a person with good 'game sense' has the ability to physically demonstrate their understanding of rules, strategies and tactics of particular games by solving problems that are presented to them in the dynamic game environment. Similarly the concept of an 'intelligent performer' is defined as someone who shows "rational and creative thought at a high level of cognitive functioning" through physical activity (QLD studies authority, 2004:1).

Subsequently, taken together, these ideas suggest that in a practical sense, players with such a quality have the ability to instinctively and correctly decide when to execute a particular motor skill or body movement within a constantly changing performance environment. In essence, these two concepts are very similar, as they both make a clear link between understanding in the cognitive and action in the psychomotor domains. The development of this competency is particularly relevant for rugby players as the playing conditions are constantly changing.

The following graphic organiser highlights the components that make up an Intelligent Performer.



### **Questioning:**

The effective use of questioning in a physical education context is an important and difficult skill to master. Barry & King (1993) reveal that questioning can be valuable to stimulate interest in your players, check for understanding, summarize important points, extend your athletes and gain attention when it is fading. Johnson (1997) and Tanenbaum (1997) add to these principles by suggesting that questioning is useful in pacing the instructional process and providing all players the opportunity to actively participate in the training sessions. Despite the numerous strategies that questioning allows the coach to employ, it is a process that is often performed quite poorly. This claim is supported by Bonwell (1991) who found that only 20% of all questions by teachers required students to think, while 80% were managerial or recall in nature. Based on this information the following paragraphs will primarily be aimed at establishing the correct questioning procedure in order to enhance intelligent performance. To do this, issues pertaining to; the suggested guidelines for questioning, the types of questions available to the coach, the relative importance of this process to player thinking and ultimately the difference that this will make to playing performance will be addressed in this paper in an attempt to shed some light on this particularly important coaching behaviour.

### **Types of Questions:**

To embark on a thorough questioning procedure the coach should have an understanding of the types of questions that they have at their disposal for varying levels of critical thinking. Seidentop (1991) identified four categories under which questions could be classified namely recall, convergent, divergent and value questions. In contrast, Butler (1997), Kidman & Hanrahan (1997) and Tanenbaum et al (1997) used only 3 categories for classification these being cognitive/managerial, technical/tactical and cognitive/affective respectively. Despite the obvious differences in the categorization process used by different researchers the recall, managerial, convergent and technical questions are very similar in that they are generally factual and require only one answer, thus only stimulating low levels of critical thinking. The

tactical, cognitive and diverging questions however require abstract thought and thus engages the athlete in higher order critical thinking (Kidman & Hanrahan,1997). Affective or value questions are those that assess the students feeling towards a topic or attitude and as a result may yield a mixture of higher and lower order thought. Consequently, for coaches to be able to perform effective questioning procedures they need to have an understanding of the types of questions on offer and the level of thinking that each of these invigorate.

### **Questioning Procedure:**

The correct questioning procedure is a methodological approach that needs to be administered appropriately if the coach and players are to benefit from the positive attributes that this process presents. The following paragraphs will highlight the technique that a coach should use when intending to use questioning affectively as part of their coaching repertoire. To facilitate this aim, issues relating to; the preparation of questions, gaining athletes attention, utilizing sufficient wait time, redirecting questions to enable equity and distribution and the probing of athlete responses will be dealt with.

Designing meaningful questions is a critical strategy in establishing a positive questioning environment (Kidman & Hanrahan,1997). Barry and King (1993) and Kidman & Hanrahan (1997) suggest that planned questions should; be matched to the content being examined, enable a variety of low and high critical thinking, are sequenced logically in order to reach a planned answer and be formulated to match the cognitive capacities of the athletes concerned. Nevertheless, when administering planned questions it is also crucial that coaches are flexible in both the construction and implementation of their questions (Kidman & Hanrahan,1997). This is because coaches can be more effective if they have the ability to immediately question, challenge or allow athletes to justify the decisions that they make in various competitive environments (Kidman & Hanrahan,1997). Consequently, the meticulous planning of questions and their conditions is a valuable step in constructing a positive questioning atmosphere.

Ensuring that all players are listening and follow the correct answering procedure is an important strategy that needs to be managed to make questioning affective. To do this, Kidman & Hanrahan (1997) believes that coaches should create rules or procedures that players must follow such as “when one person talks everyone listens” when responding to questions. To reinforce this concept the coach should utilize non-verbal or verbal prompts that specify how the questions should be answered before asking the particular question (Johnson,1997). Canter & Canter (1992) suggests that inappropriate responses that breach the correct procedure should be ignored or corrected in order to change the undesirable behaviour. By teaching players how to respond to questions the coach has decreased the chance of players to blurt out answers without thinking (Johnson,1997). By adopting this procedure the coach has equalized participation and limited the domination that an impulsive player may have on the questioning process.

Providing sufficient time for athletes to consider their responses to questions is another vital procedure that coaches should implement for effective questioning. As soon as a question is

asked a coach should wait at least 3 seconds before he/she will accept player's responses (Borish,1992). Kidman & Hanrahan (1997) said "increasing wait time enables athletes to formulate better responses and encourages athletes to give longer answers because they have the opportunity to think". This is supported by research conducted by Barnette et al (1995) who found that by providing students with higher wait times they were more likely to answer successfully. To increase wait time Kidman & Hanrahan (1997) suggests that a coach can; listen carefully to athlete's responses, resist the temptation to call on athlete's responses immediately or use non-verbal prompts to remind players about the correct answering procedures. Waiting for players to think after the question has been presented could be the most important questioning procedure, given its direct relationship to successful responses.

Coaches must make a concerted effort to include all members of the team in the questioning process. Research indicates that teachers tend to neglect students in the back of the group and those that don't appear confident in verbalizing their cognitive abilities (Kidman & Hanrahan,1997). This creates an inequitable atmosphere where the most confident students dominate the questioning process. Coaches can arrest this cascade of events by directing, distributing and redirecting questions to reluctant players in a non-threatening way can stimulate these players participation (Kidman & Hanrahan, 1997). Coaches should make sure that they praise these players' responses in order to promote their further involvement. Therefore by directing, redirecting and distributing questions to the whole spectrum of athletes, establishes a fair and equitable environment where all players can contribute equally.

The previous paragraphs have comprehensively reviewed the correct methods that should be utilized when questioning players within a sporting environment. It is to the benefits that a questioning approach has to athletic performance that the literature review will now turn.

### **Benefits of Questioning:**

A comprehensive questioning approach enables the coach to empower the players affected by the process. Research suggests that athletes learn best and have higher retention rates when they are provided with opportunities to work out for themselves what to do and how to do it in response to challenges presented to them (Kidman & Hanrahan, 1997). The solutions that they develop to complex questions are 'theirs' and they will be more likely to understand the content more effectively than if the coach divulged the information to them voluntarily (Kidman & Hanrahan, 1997). Therefore, a questioning approach has the ability to empower the athletes, utilize their ideas, challenge their critical thinking and subsequently inspire their intrinsic motivation to learn.

Coaching sessions that are embedded with a heavy use of questioning enables athletes to be significantly more physically, cognitively and emotionally involved than traditional methods to coaching. Butler (1997) found that by questioning players, there is a reduction in the time spent on managing the session allowing more on the facilitation of learning. Research conducted by Butler (1996) showed that a student centered instructional approach such as the one prescribed shifts more responsibility for learning on the player thus engrossing them in

their own decision-making. This approach creates more interaction on a player-to-player level aiding in enhanced social interaction between the teams human resources.

Consequently, a questioning approach to coaching significantly enhances players' physical, cognitive and emotional involvement in the training sessions. Furthermore, this approach provides opportunities for players to gain a deep understanding of the concepts and tactics involved their chosen sport. Carlson (2000) suggests that through questioning, players are invited to evaluate their own performance thus stimulating their critical thinking. This provides a constructivist-learning environment where players are encouraged to shape and remodel their own thinking based on new information or feedback. Research suggests that such an environment develops an understanding on a deep level because the players are required to be active and seek solutions for themselves. For these reasons, a thorough questioning approach facilitates the development of a constructivist-learning environment where players are urged to think deeply about concepts and tactics relevant to their own sport.

The shift from controller to a facilitator of information that this coaching approach is advocating has been shown to be an effective catalyst for improved performance amongst competitive athletes. By encouraging athletes to think critically about their performance facilitates a tactical approach to their game. Various studies have shown that this approach has the ability to develop their performance (both tactically and technically) at a faster rate than a traditional direct instruction approach (McBride & Cleland, 1998). In conclusion, a questioning approach to coaching has the ability to achieve maximal transfer of skills and strategies from learning to competitive environment.

### **Conclusion:**

The way that Rugby has been coached in Australia has largely resembled a traditional approach to teaching. This pedagogical approach is characterised by highly structured sessions that are predominantly comprised of drills with little decision making and is largely based on a strategy that highlights the “mastery of motor skills prior to actual involvement in the game, thus emphasizing physical capacities more than an understanding of the game” (Grehaigne & Godbout, 1998:490). Such a practice environment artificially manufactures sterile playing conditions, where key factors such as decision making and environment identification are absent, not fostered and not developed, thus having limited transfer to a real game environment (Emtage, 2001). Coaching players to ‘play what’s in front of them’ is a pedagogical approach that has been often used but rarely understood to teach players to successfully respond to the dynamic performance environment that surrounds them. This document has responded to this conundrum and shows how a carefully planned and executed questioning procedure as part of TGFU approach can facilitate enhanced understanding of Rugby in both the cognitive and psychomotor domains. Issues relating to; suggested guidelines for questioning, types of questions, its importance to player thinking and ultimately playing performance have been reviewed in an attempt to shed some light on this very important coaching behaviour.

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