The weakest link

What you tell your players the session is about:

1 Exploiting a weakness in defence.
2 Making all players make decisions under pressure.

What you tell your players to do:

1 Scan the defence for point of weakness.
2 Communicate and attack weak point.
3 Pass the ball quickly to the point of attack.
4 Penetrate the defence.

what to shout

- **"Head up and look at the defence."**
- **"Pass quickly to the point of weakness."**
- **"Pressure defence by attacking quickly – don't hold back."**
- **"Support ball carrier on both sides and more importantly from behind."**
- **"Accelerate and evade using short steps."**

what to look for

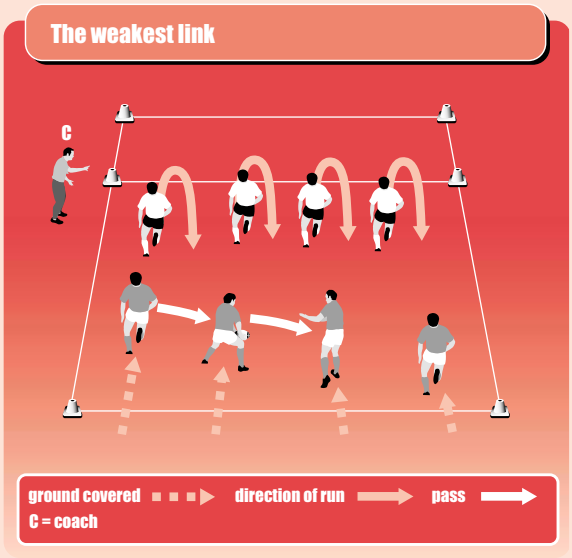
- **Players that have difficulty deciding where to attack. Solution – guidance on what cues to look for (dog-legs, gaps, mis-matches).**
- **Players that react slowly to the point of attack. Solution – up the pace of the whole exercise by asking the players to play at game speed or even faster than game speed.**

what to think about

What is your role as a ball carrier or support player? What impact can you make with a change of angle? How does a change of pace by the ball carrier affect the outcome? What types of pass are more effective? What role does good communication play? What are you looking for in the defensive line? How does one defender flying up affect the attack?

What you get your players to do:

Two groups of four players set out in two lines facing the same direction five to ten metres apart. Both groups run in the same direction, with the back group (Attack) passing the ball. On your signal, or when the front group (Defence) reaches a line, they turn and defend against the attacking group. The attacking group has to decide on the point of attack and run or pass to that point penetrating the defence. Use tag, two handed touch or tackle.



Development

1 Add more players to both attack and defence.
2 Let the attacking group decide on its formation before the whistle is blown.
3 Add a second group of attackers behind the front line of attack to create depth in the attack.
4 Let the defensive group decide on its formation before the whistle is blown.

How would I put this into a game situation:

During the team run condition the practice so that the attacking team has forward momentum by creating a new offside line ten metres behind the tackle/breakdown. The defensive team therefore has to get back onside ten metres back before being able to come forward in defence. This will enable the attacking team to decide which weak point in the defence to attack. This can continue until the attacking team has penetrated the defensive line.

Alternatively use touch rugby where after a tackle the defensive team must get back ten metres before defending.

Where does it fit: ***Individual skills:*** *Evasion / passing* ***Team skills:*** *Decision making*

How to use smart sessions

Print off the session and take it to training. It should take you less than five minutes to read the instructions, set up the session, and then you are ready to communicate what happens to your players.

Number of players

You only need six players to complete a session, though it can easily be expanded to meet your needs. With lots more players you could have a number of sessions working at the same time.

Timings

The timings are for a twenty minute session, but it can be expanded or reduced to meet your needs. It's your call.

As a rule of thumb 10 minutes would be enough time for a well executed first drill, development and feedback. Any shorter and you have not explored the full skill range or asked enough questions of the players. Longer is fine as long as you feel the session is developing. The game related element adds another 10 minutes.

Equipment

The equipment used is simple. A set of cones (or trainers or tops) as markers and a couple of balls.

You can add in tackle bags, suits and rucking shields where you feel you need them – we just assume that you don't have them because sometimes the shed is locked or another coach is using them.

Training area

The size of the training area is left for you to decide. Smaller players need a smaller area, but the session will never need more than a 20m x 20m box for initial drills. The smaller the area the more intense the training.

The standard and age groups

Smart sessions are based on the core skills of rugby. They will challenge any standard because a player can always perform the core better.

The "development" ideas can be used to differentiate between the different standards of your players; the "think about" section can challenge the more advanced; the "game related situations" can change the contact situations the teams face.

Elements of the session

What to tell your players the session is about:

This is your introduction and outlines the objectives of the session. Just read this out. The players then have an objective. Return to this at the end of the session to see if you have achieved your objectives.

What you tell your players to do:

This is how you want your players to achieve the objectives. You can tell the players straight away how to achieve the objectives, or you can tease it out of them as the session goes on.

What you get your players to do:

This shows you how the session is going to work. Depending on what is going to be achieved, it sets out what actions the players are going to take. There are no exact measurements, or complicated patterns – the approach is "simple, stupid, successful". Slow motion the first few patterns – get the drill right and the skill right first before speeding up. Use the "What to shout" prompts to keep the players focused. Use the "What to look for" to keep your eye on why the players might be failing.

Development

No session is worth doing unless there is some form of progression. Normally there will be an increase in pressure, say by adding more defenders, or by restricting the time available. Other areas for you to think about are: Where do I stand as coach? Do I throw the ball into the box?

How would I put this into a game situation?

All the elements of the session are geared to the game, but this section puts the session one step away from a full game, with attack, defence and a goal line.

What to shout

Have the words handy, because apart from the usual words of encouragement, it is good to shout the key factors to players. Of course you can hold some of these "shouts" back and ask the players to identify how they can improve.

What to look for

You need to keep your eyes open for "best practice". This section helps you identify quickly where players might go wrong so you can quickly put them right.

Think about

Here you have the chance to challenge the players and situation, either by using feedback or just asking yourself the questions. It is a little more advanced and might not be appropriate for your players.

Where does it fit:

To help you file and order our coaching we have given you the core areas of individual and team skills that the session covers.

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