EDUCATING REFEREES
BY ANDY DIXON.

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The following is an excerpt from a presentation given by Andy Dixon to the Northern Referees Federation at their request. The aim was to better inform the referees of the player coaching process so that they might better understand how the game is played and be able to better predict how play might develop in certain situations.

In winding up the session, I asked the referees to think about the Laws for a moment and then posed this question, "In accordance with the IRB's Laws of the Game, how many tackles need to be made before a team can score?" For a few moments this eminent body of referees was uncharacteristically quiet and, perhaps, even a little unsure of their knowledge of the Laws; eventually I received the whispered, hesitant reply of, "None", but it was more of a question itself than an answer. "Correct", I replied, much to the relief of the person who answered and it seemed to take some of the fear from the faces of the others. I then asked, "In accordance with the IRB's Laws of the Game, how many rucks need to have taken place before a team can score?" A similar pause occurred but this time a more confident answer of, "None," came back to me. I continued with similar questions, substituting the actions with mauls, scrums, lineouts, free kicks and penalties; all received a resounding, "None," for an answer. Clever, these referees!

I then gave them this situation. At the start of the game, my team received the ball from the kick off and, by skilful catching, passing, support, evasive running, speed, agility, change of pace, change of angle, communication, vision, attacking shape (width and depth) and decision making, took the ball down the other end of the pitch, untouched and untackled, to score under the posts and convert the score. All of this happened within five minutes and we were seven points to nil to the good.

I asked if this was legal and within the Laws of the game, to which they said it was. I then asked if it was possible, to which they suggested that it was possible but unlikely. I followed that by asking them what would happen next, which again drew a pause. Soon I got the answer that the non-scoring side kicked off again, to which I immediately added-on the next part of the scenario with, "My team again received the ball immediately from the kick off and, by skilful catching, passing, etc, etc, we scored again within five minutes and we were fourteen points to nil ahead."

I again asked then what happened next, to which they said that the non-scoring side … - you get the picture. So at half time, with a converted try every five minutes, my team was up by fifty six points to nil and I asked the referees how my players, coach,

chairman and committee should have felt right then, to which they all answered enthusiastically that they would all be, "Chuffed."

I asked once more what happened next and, to a man, they said that my team kicked off. However, I then gave them the information that the opposition turned out be a bit fitter and equally as skilful as my team at catching, passing, support, evasive running, speed, agility, change of pace, change of angle, communication, vision, attacking shape (width and depth) and decision making and they took the ball down to the other end of the pitch, scored under the posts, untouched, and converted the score. However, it only took them four minutes, not five. This got the score to fifty six against seven.

What happened next? Yes, you've got it. After eight minutes the score was fifty six points to fourteen and at the end of the game my side lost by seventy points to fifty six.

So what's my point? In the table below, none of the elements in the left hand column need to be carried out in order to score, but a combination of a few or all of those elements in the right hand column will be needed to score points. The right hand column, therefore, could be considered to be a list of 'scoring skills' and the left hand column 'non-scoring skills'. This skill table might seem quite unnecessary but for one thing; if my team had managed to regain possession of the ball just once before the opposition started their second-half comeback, we would have won by a hundred and twelve points to nil.

Tackle	Catching
Ruck	Passing
Maul	Support
Scrum	Evasive running
Lineout	Speed
Free Kick	Agility
Penalty	Change of pace
	Change of angle
	Communication
	Vision
	Attacking shape
	Decision making

The way we could have done that was by using the elements in the left hand column. In very simple terms, we would only have to use one of them, and only once, but we would have to be good at it and we would have to be better than the opposition in order to regain possession. Also, we couldn't dictate which element could be used so we would have to be good at all of them. The left hand column now becomes a 'regain possession' column to be set against the right hand 'scoring' column.

The reason I gave them this hypothetical situation was to show the differences in the amount and depth of the laws involved with each 'side' of the game. The laws associated with tackle, ruck, maul, scrum, lineout, free kick and penalty are long,

complicated and probably account for 70% of the Law book, whilst the laws associated with the 'scoring' column really only involve one law – that which states that there is to be no forward pass – and it hardly accounts for even 1% of the law book. In theory then, it is possible to have a game of exciting, expansive, extremely high scoring rugby using only 1% of the laws. As players and coaches, however, we expect referees to be sharp on those 'regain possession' laws because we need to get the ball back or the opposition will win. In other words, you *could* referee knowing only 1% of the laws but we need them to know the other 70% in great detail because at some stage we need to get the ball back from the opposition otherwise we tend to lose. I realise that what I am talking about adds up to only 71% in total but I am leaving out things like playing surfaces, players' equipment, etc and it is not down to my inefficient maths.

That's the angle I used with the referees to make them think about the game, but as I was drafting my presentation I looked again at the table and started to think how we coached the game and what sort of balance we gave to certain skills. It seems likely that many of us, as coaches, will fall into similar percentages with our coaching sessions and we might, perhaps, allocate 70% of our coaching to tackling, rucks, mauls, scrums, lineouts, free kicks and penalty moves, etc., and maybe only 1% to the 'scoring' skills of the game. I have suggested above that we must be good at the 'non-scoring' skills and it is right that we practise them, but do we do enough work on the 'scoring' elements of skill and actually practise how to score using them? Even a shift of just 5% of the overall session from 'non-scoring' to 'scoring' skills would hardly be noticed by the players and make little difference to the 'regain possession' practice, but it would increase the 'scoring' practice by 500% and must make a significant difference in the overall game.

Have a look at your own sessions and see how much time you allocate to properly practising these scoring skills and how many of them are maybe not even practised at all. It might not take too much change to get closer to those hundred points to nil scorelines.