

GAMES AND DRILLS FOR IMPROVING VISION FOR RUGBY BY PAUL TYLER.

The author is a Rugby Development Officer with the Scottish Rugby Union and is based in Glasgow. He is a Level 2 coach and coaches at Hillhead/Jordanhill RFC in Glasgow. He got interested in improving vision for sport after hearing about Sherylle Calder's involvement with the England squad and he started thinking of how this could be practically applied for the everyday club coach

Development and improvement of peripheral vision, variable depth vision, dynamic visual acuity, visual concentration, eye tracking, visual memory, visual reaction time, focus flexibility, depth perception and scanning skills can be built into nearly any rugby drill or game and almost without your players realising it.

In this paper I am going to look at a variety of different drills and games which will improve your players' visual skills at the same time as working on other important rugby skills. Some of them are *position specific*, some are for *individual players* and others are for *groups of players or teams*.

Most of the drills and games I'm sure you will have come across or will already be using in your training, but maybe you have never thought about them in these terms. Don't just stop at the drills in this paper; a lot of the fun from coaching comes from developing your own training drills and passing them on to your players and other coaches. Don't be afraid to try something – if it doesn't work, think about why it didn't work, change it and try again.

Visual training is essential for the modern sportsperson and is of paramount importance in rugby. The modern game is so fast and there is so much movement in attack and defence, on and off the ball, that the modern rugby player must have excellent visual skills to succeed.

As visual and audio inputs are the two main sources of sensory information that a rugby player receives during a game, the two are inextricably linked. A lot of the drills included in this paper are, therefore, designed to improve both visual and audio skills. There seems no point developing one if we don't develop the other at the same time; what use is a player who can see the gap but is not able to communicate it to his team-mates? It is essential that you insist on a high level of communication in all training, no matter how simple the drills.

Most of the drills and games here can be used for players at any age, although some of them might be more suitable for older players. Remember, though, that the quickest way to improve your players' all-round skills is by playing rugby, even mini games (4

v 4, 5 v 4 etc). I would recommend that you play rugby in training as often as possible. This will ensure the skills your players are improving are also being developed in game situations.

“The eye is a muscle and like any other muscle can be trained, exercised and measured in its performance”. Sherylle Calder (RFU vision coach)

I would suggest that the ear can also be trained, exercised and improved in its performance and we know for sure that the vocal cords can be trained and improved to improve communication.

“In rugby the biggest opportunities in defence and attack come from players simply seeing the space on the rugby pitch.

The problem is the players ***simply weren’t looking up*** and taking in all the information about the pitch. Most players ***only look up when they have the ball in hand***, at other times they ***watch the ball***. The players need to form the habit of ***constantly looking around the pitch*** throughout the game.” *Sherylle Calder’s comments when she started working with the England Rugby Team*

Contents:

- SAQ® drills.
- Peripheral vision.
- General awareness.
- Defensive drills.
- Seeing space.
- Positional vision.
- Definitions.

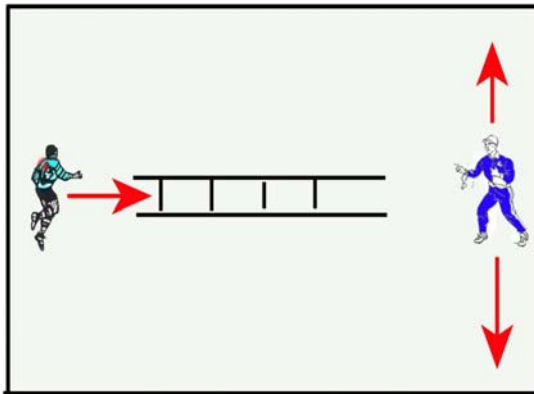
SAQ® DRILLS.

It is essential when carrying out SAQ® drills (especially with ladders and hurdles) to ensure that players keep their heads up and scan what is in front of them. Here are a series of really simple drills which will work on your players’ footwork as well as their visual skills.

- Always use short ladders (4 or 5 steps).

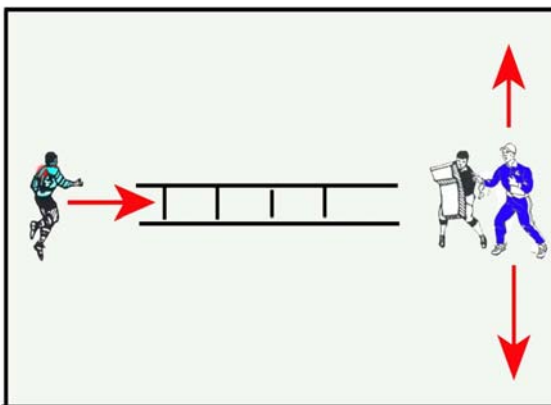
- Use a variety of footwork patterns.
- All these drills can be easily progressed as players improve.
- All these drills can be performed using hurdles instead of ladders.
- All these drills can be used just with straight running.
- As players improve, reduce the time and space they have to make decisions.

1/



A player moves through the ladder and the coach stands at the end. At any point during the player's progress through the ladder he points left or right and the player reacts by moving sharply in that direction.

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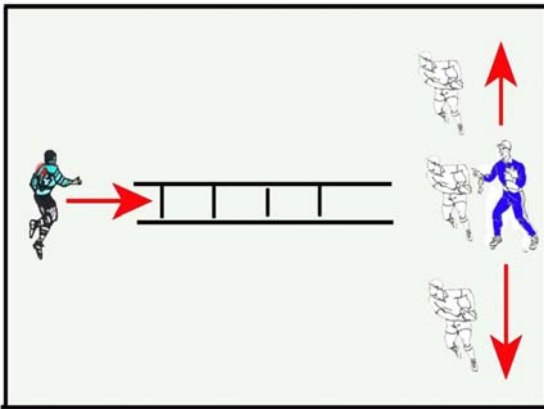


A player moves through the ladder and the coach stands at the end with a tackle shield. When the player reaches the end of the ladder the coach moves left or right and the player must react and make the tackle.

3/

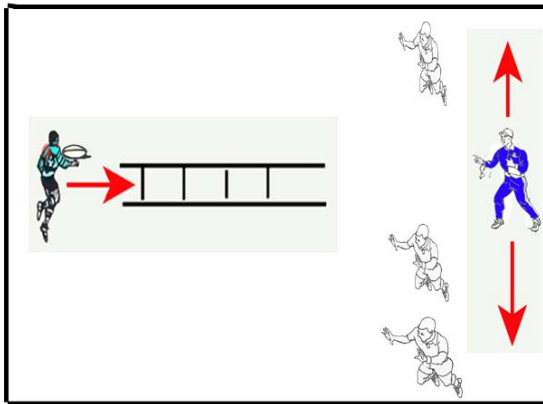
As the player moves through the ladder, another player passes the ball to him (this pass can be at any point). The player in the ladder must catch the ball and give a pass to a third player.

4/



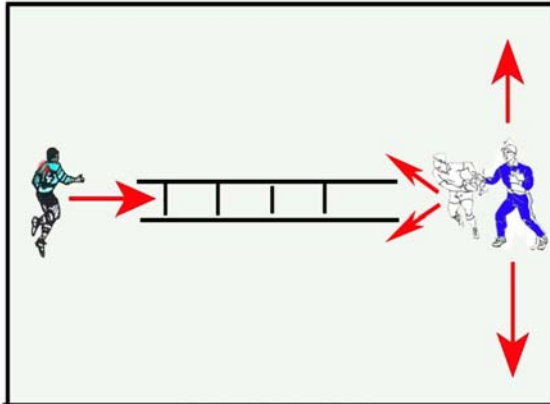
As the player moves through the ladder, the coach nominates one of three players (wearing tackle suits and carrying a ball), who starts to move forward. The player in the ladder must tackle the moving ball carrier.

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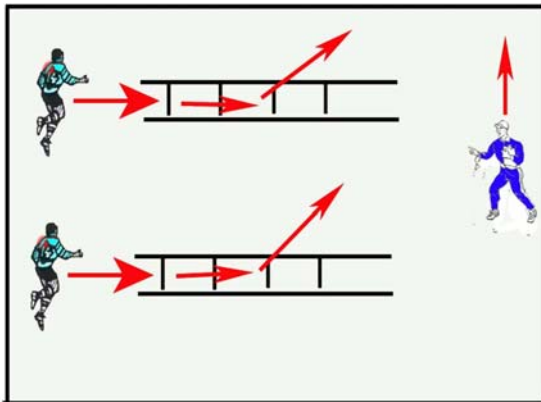
A player moves through the ladder and holds a ball. Three defenders stand in front of the coach, who gives them a signal to move up whilst leaving an intentional hole in the defence. The ball carrier must spot the hole and attack it.

6/



As the player moves through the ladder, another player stands beyond the end and moves toward the end of the ladder; he can hold a ball but it is not essential. As the player in the ladder approaches the end of the ladder, the other player runs either left or right and the ladder player must either mimic the movement or go in the other direction to avoid him. As players improve, the player with the coach can leave his change of direction as late as possible. The coach can call which option the ladder player is to take.

7/



Two players move through two sets of ladders at the same time. The coach stands in front and at some point *signals* left or right. Both players must react and sprint in that direction. When the players have mastered this, the coach *points* in the direction he wants the players to run. Then the coach *moves* left or right. The next stage of development can be when the players have to move in the opposite direction to the coach's signal. This can be made very intense for the players by the signals being altered by the coach's hands up or hands down. The number of players involved can be increased, depending on how many ladders are available.