

CIRCUIT TRAINING

AND

RUGBY LEAGUE

Circuit Training and Rugby League

A Rugby League players total running effort in a game adds up to a considerable distance, accumulated over short and long sprints, jogging, brisk walking, sudden starts and stops, instant changes of pace and direction interspersed with periods of lifting, pulling and pushing.

The stop start, fast slow, push pull variety in a game of Rugby League imposes extraordinary demands on the body and causes a sizeable training problem. This problem that can be overcome by using circuit training as a basis of Rugby League training. It will include all of the above.

Circuit training is a form of general fitness training based on sound physiological principles and aiming at the kind of varied activity and continuous challenges which are attractive to large numbers of young men, many of whom show little enthusiasm for ordinary forms of physical training.

Circuit training can include a deal of strengthening exercises. The emphasis in Rugby League circuit training is on physical exercise coupled with running to promote agility, endurance, speed and staying power. Thus all that is needed by the Coach/Trainer is a stop watch, markers to show the position, type and number of repetitions of the exercise to be performed at a particular point on the field, and of course a sound knowledge of the Ingredients of Fitness and a good imagination.

Rugby League circuit training is essentially a hard, continuous bout of strenuous exercise where selected exercises are performed a specified number of times depending upon requirements. Each player competes against the clock trying to better his time each time he does the circuit.

However, correct performance of work is more important than fast times to start with. Remember also that circuits can be planned to include just running, as you will see in the circuits I have prepared. Also included can be skills circuits. It all boils down to sitting down and planning training sessions.

Circuit training is hard work and there are 3 limits to what a man can reach and you as Coach should be aware of them. These 3 stages are:-

- The psychological limit.
- The physiological limit.
- The survival limit.

A man reaches his **psychological limit** when he is working hard and he **thinks** he has had enough. Most of us arrive at this in a very short time. The **physiological limit** is that which a man can force his working mechanism to before nature takes over and causes him to collapse. The **survival limit** in the sporting field remains unknown because there is no record of anyone dying from over exercise.

The aim of training is to bring the **psychological limit** towards the **physiological limit** and bring the **physiological limit** towards the **survival limit**.

We are all **individual**. Of any group of people brought together for a Fitness Training Program a simple test would show a big variation in the levels of fitness. Because of individuality everyone performs quite differently in the same tasks and record different times for the performance. But if one player's performance is three minutes slower than another, this does not mean he is not getting equal benefit. Indeed he could very well show a bigger improvement than the faster man in subsequent circuits. Each time a player trains, he must ask more of his body than at the previous training session. If he fails to do this he will not make any progress but will merely maintain the same fitness level. This is not enough to meet the extra work that comes to a football team as the season progresses.

Progressive overloading is essential in circuit training. This can be done in the following ways.

- Replace exercises with a new set.
- Add extra exercises to the circuit.
- Increase the number of repetitions of some or all of the exercises.
- Increase the distance of the running part of the circuit.
- Increase the number of times the same circuit is done.
- Set a minimum time limit that all players have to complete it in.

The rate at which work is done is far more important than the amount of work done. So in a comparatively short time of circuit training a player can have a really first class work out, expending more energy in 30 minutes than he would in a whole football game and **this brings results**. Intense training at a hard fast rate is far more valuable than hours of leisurely training. You must train Rugby League players higher than the demands of the game itself.

Anything that is wrong in practise does not lead to improvement. It is not merely practise but the **correct** practise that makes perfect. In circuit training, not only does everything have to be done as fast as possible but correct technique in the execution of the work is absolutely essential.

The keeping of times of each individual's performance is of the utmost importance as this is the only way of measuring improvement. This should be monitored on a **group** basis as well as an **individual** basis.

In the selection of exercises for a circuit sequence, it is most important that they be chosen logically. One very important principle for circuit training is the avoidance of localised fatigue, through the exercise of different parts of the body, especially early in the season.

With circuit training the **ingredients of fitness for Rugby League** should be developed ie. **endurance, muscular strength and endurance, power, speed, agility, co-ordination and flexibility**.

The number of players to use in a circuit can vary. Twenty players would be OK. A team (13) could do it together or 10 - 12 per group, while others are recovering. Dividing into groups will give each group an incentive to try and better the other group's time. They also tend to encourage and applaud other group's efforts leading to good morale within the team of Club.

It is a good idea to mix "A" grade players with Reserve graders and Juniors, especially for club training which I believe should be done once a week eg. Tuesday night. It develops a sense of unity within the Club instead of breaking the Club up into 3 groups of players.

Advantages of Circuit Training

- Avoids problems of overuse.
- Circuit training can be specific to Rugby League in skills and fitness.
- Good for balanced strength development.
- It is time efficient.
- Large groups can train at the same time.
- Low injury risk.
- Each player can observe his own improvement.
- It is space efficient.
- Each player is working at his own best rate according to fitness level and ability.
- It is very good for team and club spirit. The Coach can make up circuits to meet his team's requirements.

Above all, circuit training is as close as you can get to the game of Rugby League

Training Sessions

Training, especially "pre season training", should be based on the "buddy system". A player will choose someone as close as possible to his present fitness level and train with him at every training session. This will help with attendance and both players should help motivate and push each other.

Training sessions be done on a basis of 3 hard weeks and 1 easy week.

Groups of 10 - 12 players be made, consisting of junior and senior players. These groups should remain the same during pre-season training. Each group's fitness progress should be monitored. This also helps with motivation as well as helping attendance at training as each group will develop a certain "pride" and they don't like losing "ground" due to one or two players not attending.

The whole Club should train together at least one night per week, eg. Tuesday night.

All training through pre-season and in-season will be based on the **circuit system** interspersed with sprint training, interval training, skills training, flexibility work and games.

Of course it might be and probably will be necessary to concentrate on one of these according to the team's progress eg. speed work, however speed work can be done quite adequately on the circuit system, if it is planned correctly. I do not believe in road runs for many reasons, however one or two will do no hard during a season. You do not play Rugby League on the road!!!

A fitness test should be given early in the season and just before the first competition game to monitor fitness progress and amend the program if necessary.

Times should be taken at all sessions to monitor group and individual progress.

A sound warm up and flexibility program should be of utmost importance at all training sessions.

It should be the responsibility of the groups to push each other as well as training partners and hopefully this should minimise the time taken to reach a high level of fitness.

At least one (1) skills session should be given at each training session - pre-season and in-season. The three coaches and possibly a senior player should take this so that you have at least four groups.

A game of some kind, related to Rugby League should be played at the end for 10 minutes or so to end training on a good note (not tip if possible, once in a while is OK!)

Rolls should be marked off every training session.

The "A" Grade coach should set his rules and expectations on training at the first training session, so all players are clear on what he wants.

Some form of reward can be given to the best training group. This may place more responsibility on each player for his own fitness and bring out the element of competition and winning within the Club.

If players don't measure up, they don't play and of course this means missing out on match payments. This brings an element of professionalism into the Club also. Be responsible and earn your spot.

Venues for training can be changed eg. golf course, parks, sporting complex etc., however the majority of training can and should be done on the football field. This develops a form of pride for the ground and instils in the players "you don't lose at home" attitude, because "this paddock" is where we "slog our guts out" - training!!!

I also like to display the results of fitness tests in the club house, for obvious reasons.

Above all training sessions should be thoroughly planned.

When executing the following routines, keep in mind:

- Routines should be slotted into your fitness program depending upon the level of fitness of the players.
- Follow the ingredients and principles of fitness.
- Distances have been given, times have been left so you can put in the times of your own group.
- Make sure players do not take any short cuts ie. right to the sideline or the lines being used.
- Correct execution of the exercises is very important.
- Encourage players to sprint the last section of a circuit.
- The same circuit may be repeated a number of times with a good recovery period between each one.
- Times must be recorded for each circuit to monitor progress.
- Plan all training sessions to gain the maximum benefit from them.

Suggestion: Invite another club to have a circuit competition. Different groups can do a different circuit!!! pre-season?