Title: Coach Communication: What you see is what you get!

Abstract [poster presentation]

A major component of match-day preparation is the delivery of game specific information by the coach to the athlete. The assumption being athletes decode information and apply it to their performance. The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of athlete's playing experience on decoding match-day information. This study was generated from the field, rugby coaches working with a division two senior team wanted to investigate and improve their match-day preparation with a focus on communication. An action learning approach was utilized to enable the coaching team to be responsive to feedback, and make adjustments to their coaching during the season. Twenty team members and the head coach participated in the study. Team members were divided into four groups, (a) captain, (b) high performance academy players, (c) experienced players, and (d) first year university players. Structured interviews were conducted after every game with the captain and representative players from the other three groups. The coach submitted pre-game coaching notes, and post game reflections after each game. Information collected during cycle one of the study indicated that athletes with different levels of experience differed in their interpretation and use of information. High performance and experienced athletes were better able to decode and distil the pre-game instructions and select information that was pertinent to their performance. Common observations across all athlete responses were: (a) the delivery of pre-game information was most potent in the training session prior to the game, (b) information delivered using visual cues clarified the pre-game message, (c) athletes remembered cue words and brought them onto the field, and (d)in the majority of cases the defensive message was not received. Implications for coach communication are considered, with a particular focus on kinaesthetic and visual communication techniques.