



Issue 12: 17 December 2010

# NEWS

## JAPAN RUGBY COACH KIRWAN ENVISAGES ASIA-PACIFIC CUP

TOKYO — All Black legend John Kirwan says he wants to see a competition involving top club and regional teams from East Asia, New Zealand and Australia set up ahead of the 2019 rugby World Cup in Japan.

Kirwan, the Japanese national team coach, said he wanted to see the game in Japan develop in the run-up to the tournament. "Having the World Cup in Japan should be the icing on the cake. If we think it is the cake then we are in trouble," Kirwan, who is Japan's coach, wrote in a weekend rugby column in the Daily Yomiuri.

"We need to start planning now, not just for the tournament, but the years building up to it." One of Kirwan's visions of a "successful 2019" sees Japan's seven-year-old professional rugby union league, known as the Top League, reach a more competitive level.

"The Top League will have expanded to include franchises in Hong Kong and South Korea with the winners of the league playing the top teams from Australia and New Zealand in a Heineken Cup-style competition," Kirwan said.

The Heineken Cup is an annual competition involving leading club, regional and provincial teams from England, France, Ireland, Italy, Scotland and Wales.

Kirwan, who took over the Brave Blossoms before the 2007 World Cup, also repeated his wish that Japan would be in the world's top eight "and regularly beating the likes of Scotland, Ireland and Italy." Japan, the first Asian nation to host a World Cup, are currently ranked 13th by the International Rugby Board.

"We should have five major sponsors and one of the richest unions in the world, big crowds watching all levels of rugby and complete TV coverage," he said.

At the 2007 World Cup in France, Japan drew with Canada 12-12 to break a 16-year, 13-match losing

streak. The agile but physically inferior Blossoms have scored just one win against one draw and 18 losses in the past six World Cups, where they have represented Asia since the inaugural event in 1987.

Kirwan reiterated his goal of winning at least two games in next year's World Cup in New Zealand and automatically qualifying for the 2015 tournament in England. He also said he hoped top domestic university teams, which are hugely popular in Japan, will have the programmes and coaches to produce players able to play at Top League level.

"The problem is people think that is all going to come as a result of hosting the World Cup. And they are wrong," he said. "Simply waiting for things to happen is a recipe for disaster."

AFP

## HAWKE'S BAY'S STAR SAMOANS TIPPED FOR WORLD CUP

It's early days but there's a good chance all three of Hawke's Bay's Samoan rugby internationals will get the nod for the World Cup. Samoa's forward coach and Magpies co-coach, Tom Coventry, said Magpies halfback-first five-eighth Kahn Fotuali'i, prop Anthony Perenise and winger Sinoti Sinoti could be proud of their efforts for Samoa during the recent northern tour to Japan, Ireland, England and Scotland.

"They did their province and themselves proud," said Coventry. "Kahn was a star and, although we didn't start him in the No10 jersey, it was tempting. Anthony did a good job and started in two of the three tests in Britain." Sinoti was originally only called into the side for the Japan match as injury cover but was taken to the United Kingdom because of a further injury and made the most of his opportunities.

Coventry pointed out the progress made by the team under difficult circumstances indicated the side could



aim for a World Cup quarterfinal berth. At least three pool wins would give the side a quarterfinal and they will be up against Wales, Namibia, Fiji and world champions South Africa in pool play.

“Originally, the aim for the side was just to qualify for the World Cup. But a lot of confidence can be taken out of the tour ... Samoa will be hard to beat.” Because the World Cup is being played in New Zealand, Samoa will have plenty of home crowd support. At the same time, one can’t discount Fiji.”

With many top Samoan players based with European clubs, Samoa had lots of different players coming and going during the tour as the European club-contracted players can only make their Samoan commitments a priority for test matches.”It was difficult to plan short term,” said Coventry.

He is more than happy with the Samoans schedule in the build-up to the World Cup. It will include Pacific Nations Cup games against Japan and Tonga in Tokyo during July and games against Super 15 development sides. Because of the World Cup, the Samoan players’ ITM Cup appearances may be limited but the likes of Fotuali’i and Perenise will be able to complete their Super 15 commitments.

Coventry wasted little time in getting back into his Magpies co-coaching role upon his return from the UK last week.”After our ITM Cup season, we have a few things to fix,” he said.

He is keen to see a repeat of a Magpies pre-season trip to Queensland, which was made last year. This will give the side an opportunity to play at least three games against Super 15 development sides.

“It will give us vital coaching time away with the boys. It’s one thing to watch them play club rugby but, while they’re doing that, we don’t get our hands on them.” He said annual pre-season fixtures against the likes of Poverty Bay and Wairarapa Bush might return next year after they were given a miss this year.”We let those games go at our peril ... They served a purpose and provided valuable pre-season match time together.”

SHANE HURNDALL

## COACHING TO SOLVE COMMON SKILL PROBLEMS

Lee Smith



Whatever coaches may do in the final analysis they cannot play the game for the player.

The coach may develop skills, ensure a player’s fitness and train the player in game-like situations. All prepare the player for play, but once the game is underway responsibility for performance lies with the players. During the game the lessons learned on the coaching field can be put into practice, but what cannot be taught is match savvy. Savvy is the ability to continually pressure opponents, to recognise weaknesses and to exploit the weaknesses to gain an advantage.

This ability can be developed over long periods of time as the player learns to read the game. It is often subliminal, scarcely recognised at the time and probably only recognised on reflection. As a player develops increase amounts of match savvy are stored subliminally and can be used in the sub-conscious allowing the player to focus on the major priority at the time. This primarily focuses on what is to be achieved at the moment with the performance - the passing, kicking, evading, tackling – just happening without a conscious effort having to be made to perform.

It is this ability that gives a player an edge over opponents. The difficulty is that to reach this stage, takes time and the information necessary to accelerate this process isn’t readily available.

In an attempt to close this gap, this is a distillation of anecdote and experience relevant to this need accumulated over many years of direct involvement in playing and coaching. Just remember that pressure erodes skill and practices must simulate this pressure for a technique, a closed skill performed without pressure, to become a skill worth using in a game.

### Common Faults in Rugby Skills

Most fundamentally there is a range of common faults that occur at all levels and which reduce the players menu of skills limiting the ability to take options. These occur at all levels because of the relative pressure applied by opponents. It is pressure defined by the reduction in time and space and, implicitly, the ability of opponents to both do this and perform their own range of skills as a step to penetrate in attack and regain



possession in defence.

A further important consideration is the degree to which a player has a vast range of skills as opposed to the ability to perform a more limited range of skills under pressure. Many is the international player who does a few things well under all situations as opposed to the player who never becomes an international but who has a substantial range of skills but can't perform these under pressure maybe confused by choice.

So to get underway let's take some of the most fundamental skills and signal common faults.

## Passing

Passing only with the stronger hand. For left handed players this is to the right and for right handed players to the left. For #9 left handedness is valuable as all protected clearances from scrum are made with the left hand while there is a 50:50 split from other phases of play. This manifests itself in the sub-conscious with players favouring left side attacks and, when they do align to the right players stand closer together to compensate for weaker passing with the left hand. This allows the defence to be less isolated and can lead to the right wing getting fewer opportunities.

Passing too fast and too low. Passes should be sympathetic. A pass is only as good as the ease with which it can be caught after all the defence is a big enough challenge without an inaccurate pass adding to this.

"Drifting" in the direction of the pass. This is because players create space in the direction they are moving away from and not the direction they are running into because the defence follows them. This equally applies to players without the ball, most notably decoy players whose line of running attempts to take the defence away from space the penetrating player is moving into. However this more relevantly applies to the ball carrier and, as the passer, the ball carrier who drifts allows the defence to move with the pass so that the receiver has more than a fair share of defenders to deal with.

A passer not creating a commitment in the defence by running straight and at the defender to hold the player so the defender cannot assist further along the defence line. In some situations this commitment may take away the space between the receiver and the defence. Discipline by the receiver to retain their depth and by the passer to "pull" the pass back can compensate for the loss of time and space.

## Receiving a Pass

Standing too flat so that pass has to be fast and will be difficult to catch. This is signalled too often by the receiver getting the ball and the defender at the same time. The receiver shows this by slowing down, taking the ball at the side of the body and being too slow to make a further pass and having to seek contact. A further difficulty occurs when players take the ball up close to the source of possession. They often stand flat and, because contact is almost immediate, a pass that is high will compromise their body position, they will have to stand high and, in contact, they will be driven back.

Catching the ball in front of the chest instead of catching it earlier on the near side of the receiver's body. The time difference here is marginal but this can be enough to play over the gain line and establishing some momentum.

Standing too far away, slowing down the movement of the ball. The ball will have to be "heaved" rather than passed and will take some time to reach the receiver. The longer the ball is in the air the greater the time the defence has to adjust. The Australians call this defence free time. In practice this occurs when miss of skip passes are made along the attacking line to get the ball further along the line quicker. The length of time the ball is in the air the greater the amount of time the defence has to drift eliminating the overlap that may have initially existed.

Players reacting to the defence before they have securely caught the ball. No matter how close the defence the attack must cherish possession as without it you can't win the game. So it is ball first, attack second. In an ideal situation players will run onto the pass so catching the ball and threatening the defence are one and the same but this doesn't always happen.

Players standing or receiving the ball too flat so that the ball is passed into their body or even behind them, slowing them down and opening their body to a strong tackle. Players must retain depth so that the ball can be passed into the space they are running into. If they are going to be slow to arrive they should tell the passer so the ball can be passed further back and/or given more time in the air.



## OFFICE CLOSURE

The FORU Office will be closed from 12.00pm Friday 24 December (AEDT) and will re-open on Tuesday 4 January 2011.

We would like to take this opportunity to wish you and your families a Merry Christmas and a safe and prosperous New Year.

The next issue of the FORU Newsletter will be published on Friday 4 February 2011.

