



The Way of The Fox

Recollections of Duncan Thompson's
coaching methods
by Athol Smith

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Introduction

As a result of the demise of several of my Clydesdale teammates of the fifties, I have been stung into action to record as I remember them, the techniques and strategies used by Duncan Thompson in his life as coach. I know of no other such record so I am doing this for Rugby League, as I believe they are the very essence of the game itself.

I say this because, I have seen this last season Internationals run the defence onto the attack, players pass over the sideline, looking at the tackler instead of the man to whom the ball is going. Players not able to draw a defender. These are the players at the top of their careers and despite all the efforts of the NRL in regards to coaching and clinics etc, it is obvious to me that there is a breakdown of communication somewhere.

I have read an enormous number of coaching manuals and all these basics are in print and available for coaches to use. The literature available is very, very good, it is the interpretation or lack of it, that seems to fall down.

Following a lifetime of playing, coaching and mainly watching the game (but still playing every game), it has been of some concern to me to see players in today's games who haven't grasped, or don't seem to understand, some of the basic principals of the game.

They use bigger men more, play the man more, use a lot of negative tactics etc. I could go on and on.

These tactics are successful for a while, but they seem to break down when the opposition use different methods to exploit deficiencies in their games.

Having seen and analysed the game today I realise how great the methods used by Duncan Thompson both playing and more so coaching are, that I have endeavoured to record these as best I can. Someone much better qualified than me should be doing this job, but I do have the knowledge, and the desire to see that his method of coaching and playing the game is documented forever.

The way of playing the game has changed today but results are still obtained in the same way, by scoring more points than your opposition. This entails running the ball to outwit the defence to score points, and tackle well enough to stop points being scored against you. Same game 50 years ago. Nothing has really changed.

I believe that Duncan's method of playing the game, and coaching players, would be highly effective today and that his methods, once used, can do nothing but good for the game.

"Contract" is an odd method of describing the way he wanted us to play the game, but it gives each player an aspect of mind that goes to building a great team.

I could describe it better in application to today's game by calling it "Organised 2nd phase play".

Everybody would understand that better, but maybe today's players should stick with "Contract" a commitment they can't break without it being detrimental to themselves personally, something they all understand in today's game.

All these considerations have led me to put pen to paper to record this unique method of playing the game.

Good luck with your game whether you are a player or a coach, as anyone using all these described methods can only be better for it.

The Player

Duncan Thompson (alias The Fox)

North Sydney 1916-1923: 58 games - 10 tries, 47 games (124 points)
 Queensland 1915, 1919, 1924, 1925: 11 games, 1 try, 18 games (39 points)
 NSW 1922: 1 game (0 points)
 Australia 1919 and 1924: - 9 tests, 2 tries (6 points)

Duncan was the Maestro of Queensland Rugby League in the early years of the code, and through the middle years of the twentieth century. Commonly known as "The Fox", he was a half back with outstanding ability. He first played for Qld in 1915 while playing in Ipswich, and in 1916 played for Norths under the name F Thompson. At this stage, like most young men, he enlisted in the Army.

While serving in World War I, he was shot in his right lung at Dernancourt in France and was to carry bullet fragments for the rest of his life. He was told by doctors that he wouldn't be able to play sport again because of the damage to his lungs. (I always understood he lost a lung.)

However, on returning to Australia he resumed playing and made his test debut against New Zealand in 1919. The following year in 1920 he was to star in Australia's second test win against England, which secured the ashes for the first time on home soil.

In 1921 he rejoined North Sydney, and such was his impact on this team (with a champion back line of Horder, Rule, Peters and Blinkhorn) that the Club won consecutive premierships in 1921 and 1922. I think that was the last time North Sydney won the competition before it's demise. He then toured with the 1921-1922 Kangaroos, playing in all three test matches scoring 107 points (3 tries, 49 goals) in 26 matches.

4

The season after returning from tour he left North Sydney (while being captain) in bitter circumstances.

Suspended on a kicking charge he vehemently denied (there were no video replays in those years), he left the club and went to Toowoomba where he was friendly with E S "Nigger" Brown with whom he had toured England.

The following years 1924 and 1925 he was to captain Queensland to wins over New South Wales and played in his last test series against England in 1924. In 1925 he took Toowoomba as their captain (and I think coach) to the position of being undisputed champions of Australia with victories over Ipswich, Brisbane, Sydney Premiers Souths, New South Wales, Victoria, New Zealand and England. An outstanding feat!

This is about the time that his playing career ended. He was to resume his coaching career again in 1951.

In 1950 Brisbane defeated Toowoomba by a huge margin and such was Duncan's disappointment at the result that he resumed his role in League as a coach with the aim of regaining the Bulimba Cup within three years. He managed to entice some promising young players from Sydney to come to Toowoomba, the biggest incentive being, with less talent in Queensland, the opportunity to play for Queensland and ultimately Australia.

Such was the success of his method of coaching, a unique method, that he went on to win successive Bulimba Cups in 1951, 52, 53, 54, 55 and 1956. A number of these years the team was undefeated and defeated the French touring team in 1955. The culmination of these years resulted in six players from Toowoomba going on tour in 1956 with the Kangaroos. This was an outstanding accomplishment. His reputation as a coach during those years was so widely known, that he attracted many good young players from New South Wales and all over Queensland, to Toowoomba. There were only four clubs playing in Toowoomba at that stage and with 14 state players spread among them in some years the standard of competition became very high, and also among the players themselves for the "Clydesdales".

5

He had talked the Queensland Rugby League into playing night games (pre-season) at the exhibition ground in Brisbane between Brisbane, Ipswich and Toowoomba to give the players a chance of better competition and raise the standard of play.

He also coached Queensland in 1953 with a 2-all result against New South Wales and was also an Australian selector. I believe at some stage he was offered the position of Australian coach. One of his requirements was to put the team into a camp prior to the game, but as the Australian Rugby League refused the request, he declined the offer.

Although he never took a coaching position after 1956, he was still very active in the game, and was always available to advise coaches and players for years after, until his death.

The year 2005 was the year Duncan Thompson was inducted into the hall of fame of Rugby League. This was an honour he thoroughly deserved as there is no other individual who has surpassed his record both as a player and a coach. Always a gentleman, and held in great respect by the city of Toowoomba, and those who had the pleasure of coming into contact with him, his name will forever stand among the greats of Rugby League.

From my perspective as a player under him, I think he was unsurpassed as a coach, even to this day.

Duncan Thompson "The Fox"

Duncan Thompson was very thorough with all his methods, and very strict with his players but never interfered in their personal lives. There was no excuse for being late, or sloppily dressed, or not being ready to play the game, and if your personal life interfered in the standard of your play, you would be dropped from the team.

He had the assistance of some great old Toowoomba players in the form of Mick Madsen, Herb Steinhart, Fred Gilbert and "Nigger" Brown and he frequently called on them to give the forwards or backs advice.

At the start of each season in February, he would invite anyone with aspirations of making the Toowoomba team to come to his lectures (one before each training run) and train. This was pre-season and the team when selected would be whittled down to 19 players.

He utilised an 8mm camera to record games and study players. As a consequence he found that wingers ran for about 7 to 10 minutes for the whole game and the lock and half back about 55 to 60.

Accordingly he deduced that players needed to be able to play at maximum capacity for 1 hour allowing for stoppages.

As a result in order to be fit to play he would train us for one hour, without stopping, only allowing you to get your breath back. While you were recovering (deep breaths in through nose out through your mouth) he was talking all the time. He maintained that if you were fit, five to ten breaths was all you needed to recover.

After that there followed two hours of drill and moves and practice of his methods and discussion about the forthcoming games. Not much was ever said by the players.

At that stage after World War 2 the country was recovering very well, and after appealing to employers for time off for the players,

he was able to train the team Tuesday and Thursday afternoons from 2 to 3 o'clock. I feel this was great for the team, but we were never reimbursed for the time off work.

Together with your two nights of club training and your games at the weekend, it led to a standard of fitness, which I feel was above average for those years.

The success of his "contract" method of playing the game can be attributed to the fact that the players really followed his methods, meticulously. Discipline was paramount in what you did on the field at all times.

A man for man attitude in defence and cover defence in a game was high on the list of requirements for every player. There was no excuse in defence for a player not being between the ball and your own goal line. The exception being injury. He believed that a really good tackle would stop a player, lots of times fall and all, and coached accordingly.

He made us each individually responsible for our opposition number saying that if you did so and outplayed him in every game you should be in line to play for Australia.

Defence, and cover defence: He always believed aggressive tackling would win games by frustrating the opposition leading to a breakdown of their structure with the ball. The defence was well organised and every player knew his job, what was expected of him both in defence and cover as well, at all times. It was so well organised that if a try was scored against you, it was very easy to pinpoint the player or players at fault.

He was never abusive or loud in his addresses. He was conscious of diet and always had us eating the right sort of meals, at least three hours before a game. Whenever they were available, he made use of steam baths for the players. The team had a manager, a couple of strappers and Duncan! He did all of the training himself in all aspects, even down to coaching running, to lengthen your stride by a few inches, to run straight, all towards giving you that little bit extra speed.

Our training consisted of three hours. One hour of ball work, and two hours of moves, procedures and tactics to be employed in

your next game. If he had anything to say to you individually, he would call you aside during training, or ask you to come and see him in his shop, "Duncan Thompson Sportstore".

Training was very exacting and many was the time we would do extra work because of sloppiness or laziness at the time. However it never lasted very long as we very soon came to our senses, but we had to keep going until he was satisfied that the task on hand was done to his satisfaction. Such was the respect the players had for him that we would do anything required by him, even though it may seem irrelevant, as we knew it would always be for a specific purpose which would eventually be revealed.

His pre-match address was always simple and straight to the point. "You have been training to play football at its best all week. You don't have to go out to win this match. You go out there and play the football, put into action what you have been practising. Do that and the results will come, you will score the points, you will stop the opposition, you will have a win. Play football, enjoy the game."

GLOSSARY

(Some of his great sayings)

1. Hands up the walkers! (If you were walking too much and standing looking at the play in progress)
2. 90% dropped passes are due to giver not the receiver!
3. Like a shag on a rock. (A player left stranded on his own with no support from teammates)
4. 1 yard forward is better than 10 sideways. (You are not crabs - crossfield running.) (Don't you know what straight means.)
5. Dying with the ball (not getting the ball away)
6. If you want to watch the game let me know before the game. You can come up in the grandstand with me.
7. Always carry the ball in two hands.
8. Don't carry the ball under the arm (exception being in the open)
9. Where is your fire? Has someone put it out? Or haven't you lit it yet! (aggression)
10. Are you running with purpose? (To get the ball away? Draw one more opposition? Defend one way attack another.)

11. Never throw one handed or flick passes. (You can do the same thing other ways safely and keep better control. They are too risky)
12. Never let the ball bounce, always better to try and catch it on the full! Fall on loose ball. Possession is vital.
13. Leave the kicking to the ones with experience.
14. Injuries. They only hurt more when you think you are hurt. Get on with the game and they will be gone - at least 80% of them.
15. Where is your variation in play.
16. A pass only has to be hard enough to reach the man you are throwing it to.
17. A champion team will always beat a team of champions until the champions wake up and become the champion team.
18. Hands up those who aren't here? (when the team is not performing)
19. Always, in the open, give the ball if a man alongside you is faster than yourself.
20. Where are our 1/8 of a seconds. (slow ball handling)
21. Are you drawing your man? (Drawing the opposition before passing the ball?) (Where is your step?)
22. Don't be the ones to crack! (With two evenly matched teams a breaking point will come! It may be in the 30th, 40th or 50th minute. It may take until the 79th minute. Don't you be the team that cracks!)
23. Stay on your feet. (Don't die with the ball.)

These are all terms Duncan used at half time or when he was trying to get a point across. We knew exactly what he was talking about at the mere mention of one of these terms.

Half the battle of winning premierships or even games, is in the minds of the players. I believe that Duncan was naturally gifted in handling players. He knew which buttons to press to get individual players to perform, and the team as a whole to do the same.

There is no doubt in my mind that the discipline required to play contract football, using the associated practices learned at training

as well as playing with your teammates, to your teammates, for your teammates and to always put them in a better position than yourself was a dominant force in building a great team spirit. We also learned to always help and protect the weaker members of our team (we can't all be champions). This was the key to developing teamwork. It just came naturally because of what you were doing and the way you were doing it.

The lessons learned in playing the game using Duncan's methods, playing the ball not the man, the discipline, the respect for your teammates, opposition and Duncan, (he always gave more accolades to the man who made the try scorer although he always acknowledged him too) went a long way to making the players themselves much better footballers and citizens as well.

If you talk to any players who were lucky enough to experience his coaching you will always get a similar answer. A shake of the head. He was the greatest, his techniques would still work today. They (today's players) haven't got the discipline, they are not doing the simple things right. Maybe they have learned them but they leave them on the training paddock.

Yet you talk to present day players and coaches and they say "It won't work today", "It is a different game now", much faster, more fitter, more professional". Sure, it is played differently today, under different rules, different ball, and using different methods. However the objectives are still the same to score points by playing attacking football and prevent tries from being scored by tackling, exactly what we did 50 years ago. I am sure these old methods would work.

Duncan always believed in his "pack of forwards". We played as a pack in attack and defence and I see no reason why that would not work today. You can break a single stick very easily, but you put six sticks together and that becomes an entirely different proposition.

The professional players of today with the staff and coaches they have would, I am sure, make contract football a roaring success, although today's opposition coaches would soon realise what they were doing, and would endeavour to stop it.

A team using the contract method of training and playing is very hard to stop. The defence may keep up with it and stop the ball movement for some period but because the attacking team keeps using it all the time the defence will eventually fall off and the breaks will come.

It (contract football) really is a much better and more advanced method of playing what today is called second phase play.

Today they count the number of off loads in a game. **Contract football is an organised method of off loading for the whole game by every player in the team.**

Having played under Duncan Thompson from 1952-56 I can really testify to the success of this style of football, and the pleasure it gave me during that time.

I have endeavoured to write an accurate account of Duncan's methods as I recall them. To those who endeavour to use them I suggest you use the following procedures:

1. Spend 10 minutes to 1/4 hour warming up, three to a ball using the scissors movement. All the time accentuating, taking defences one way attacking the other. Never running across field except with purpose. If a player starts running across the field in front of you, cut in behind him.
2. A lot of time playing the ball properly and passing across the line up and down the field, always when the practice stops or breaks down the ball player goes down and plays the ball properly on every occasion. Be strict at all times in training with all of these aspects.
3. Practice your set plays for the whole game, ie. kick offs, free kicks, scrums and rucks.
4. Spend time across the field between the goal line and 20 metre line practising contract football, with the coach designating when players are tackled. This creates running with the ball in two hands, running straight, making openings, passing under pressure, all the things you would be doing in a game.

These are the basics of the game that are being practiced and should be done at all times without fooling around.

Playing the Game

When you are playing football you have to assume that the opposition are your equals, so in order to win you have to play the game better than they do. This requires you to apply your skills to the game.

It also requires you to think about the game, the openings, the overlaps, where to run in both attack and defence. This is an awful lot to think about, and execute and most times you have fractions of seconds to do this.

Like life generally few players are equipped with all the attributes necessary to play the game of Rugby League. Only the champion players have most of the skills naturally and even they will have to learn to use the ones they have not got. This they do to become complete players.

However, some of the best players of today have had to learn 90% of their skills. This they have done by their mental attitude to the game, which is equally as important as the physical side.

To be a good footballer, like any trade, you have to do an apprenticeship. You have to learn and apply all of the skills, carrying the ball, passing the ball, catching the ball, kicking the ball, tackling, etc.

Some of the things you will do naturally, some you will have to learn, like drawing a man. They are numerous, and it will take a lot of training and playing for you to acquire all of these skills.

Then you have to learn to apply and use them in a game for the advantage of the team.

Very few players can do everything perfectly, so you, in order to succeed need to apply your strong points and concentrate on your weakness, to be a complete player.

When you start playing you will find that you have to think about what is happening and everything you do. If you get the ball, do you run? Do you pass it? Are there any gaps? When you are defending, what are they going to do? Where are they going to run? Are they going to kick? Where do I go now?

Every game you play you will learn something, and will find it easier to get into the game, to anticipate the play to be more involved in both defence and attack.

Too many players spend long periods without involvement. Learn to read the play, get into the game, be in the thick of it and enjoy yourselves.

At the start, the play will always appear to be on the other side of the field, you have to learn to see what the opposition is doing, in other words read the play.

All of these things when you start playing initially will take a lot of learning, but remember, football is like a trade, you have to do an apprenticeship.

One day after many games you will realise that you are doing things without thinking, reading the play, being where the ball is, without having thought about it. Then you may be a tradesman. Like tradesmen, who vary a lot in capabilities, footballers will always have room for improvement, and should always strive for perfection for the sake of the rest of the team. Remember you are part of a team, you play in the team, with the team, for the team. You can't play on your own. The old saying look after the pennies, the pounds take care of themselves. In league, do the little things right and the big things take care of themselves. Remember, a champion team will always beat a team of champions. The exception is when the champions become a champion team.

A player also has to be physically and mentally fit to play Rugby League and you will not be doing justice to yourself or the team if you take the field less than 100%.

There is another aspect of playing the game which applies to a player and the team, and it is one of the most important aspects in a team. It is being tough both physically and mentally. This means playing the game hard and tough for 80 minutes, not using dirty or foul methods, just being hard in everything that you do. Some of the smallest men playing the game today are among the toughest on the field.

It is quite easy to be physically tough, but mental toughness is another thing altogether.

When a player or team becomes mentally tough it is this that will enable them as individuals to rise above injury, tiredness and fatigue and win matches. Sometimes this is the only thing that can do it for you. Duncan Thompson used to say (in tight situations), "Don't be the ones to crack".

In a really tight situation, mental and physical toughness will enable you to "not be the ones that crack". It can happen at any stage in a game. It might only take 10 or 20 minutes, it might also take 79 minutes or extra time even, but with the right mental toughness you can be the team to prevail.

Mental attitude explains the discrepancy in scores between teams in NRL today when there is no explanation why when A beats B, B beats C, and then C beats A, and sometimes by 40 points. This means that teams are not mentally ready to play.

So a coach has to be a psychologist as well in order to win games.

Therefore it is imperative that each player walks onto the field both mentally and physically fit for every game if the team is going to win.

The following lectures are designed to help you understand the game and bring out the best in you as a player.

As a player you have to really think about your game all the time with split second decisions often having to be made. You and your team are the ones who reap the consequences of your actions so you have to learn to get them right.

Think about your game!

Each player has his own individual skills and these should not be submerged but utilised to the full and incorporated into the team while still concentrating on playing "Contract Football".

Contract Football

(Organised Second Phase Play)

Contract football doesn't sound right for a method of playing the game, but in these times with footballers sometimes signing a contract before they are 16 years old, they might realise that a contract is binding and on the football field with each player and the other 12 it should be just as binding, and this would lead to Contract Football being played at its very best.

These days you could describe it as organised Second Phase Play and everybody would understand it more. In fact, using those terms would, I am sure, create more interest and get more response from both coaches and players.

A contract is a signed legal agreement between one or more parties.

In a Rugby League team it is a contract between the ball carrier and the other 12 players at any given moment.

The player, running with the ball must stay alive - not go to ground - at all times. His primary aim is to run as far as possible, is to draw as many opposition players to him and get the ball away. If he can pass it that's great. When he makes up his mind he is unable to pass or decides not to pass the ball, he must hit the opposition player with his shoulder, spread his feet, lower his profile - for protection and turn with the ball in two hands on his chest or stomach. He has performed his part of the contract.

Now the other 12 players who are party to this contract must then endeavour to get to the ball carrier to help him. They can get the ball either as a pass or if he is standing, by going in chest to chest arm around the ball, pivot and run away or pivot and pass to one of the other 11 players who are also subject to the contract and should be there to receive the pass.

This practice performed around the ruck for two or more occasions, draws in the defence, leaving gaps elsewhere, for the outside players to use. Now this practice is hard to do initially, but with a lot of practice, and players urging each other on, it will

become easier, and when it further becomes your method of playing the game, you will be amazed at the opportunities it creates, and the number of clean breaks.

Now both halves of the contract have to do their job (the ball carrier, and the other 12 players) one of whom will step up and become the ball carrier. Immediately then the previous ball carrier must stay alert and be aware that he is one of the other 12 players who are looking for the ball.

Someone always has to be there for the ball or the contract breaks down and the ball carrier is left like a "shag on a rock" and will get hammered. On the other hand, done correctly, no ball carrier should get hurt too much, but speed and efficiency are important at all times.

It requires two players to do this at all times, but can be done anywhere in the field of play and is not restricted to the ruck area. It can become a type of maul in the ruck area and generally attracts more defence. Now the opposition can become aware of what you are doing, but you have to keep on doing it. Because you have been doing it at training all the time, and because they are only there to prevent it. Your practice will let you prevail in a game. You will eventually get to a stage where they will give up, and then you can really enjoy yourselves.

For contract football remember, carry the ball in two hands, or on your chest. Ball control is essential.

A contract is a legal binding document, and the contract between the ball carrier and the 12 other players should be treated the same way. Both parties have to honour the contract. In public life penalties for breaking a contract apply. In football if the contract is not honoured, and players do not commit, it will break down and you have to start over again. Players must honour the contract.

It requires a lot of practice to get used to the technique involved in keeping the ball going, and for the players to get in there and be involved. It is easy to stand and look. Instead get yourself in there, be part of the action. Remember you are always part of the action. When you have got the ball, run as far as you can with it and then get it away, and when you haven't got the ball you should be

getting into position to receive it again. It could be perpetual motion (of the ball) and should keep going until it breaks down or a try is scored. It can be quite astounding at times.

The training for this should be done between the 20 metres and the goal line across the field with the coach calling held when necessary. This will lead players to run straight, and through small openings and reversing play. It is not done with full tackling.

It is to teach the techniques of getting the ball away, and using it in your hands, and creating openings.

Contract football is an organised method of exploiting second phase play with every member of the team becoming great off-loaders sometimes even leading to 2nd, 3rd and 4th phases of play. Today it would lead to many more tackles for the opposition which in itself would be great, without the extra time in possession.

This would result because a team was playing contract football (organised second phase play).

This was the most important part of Duncan's teams. The Contract or Contract Football.

It was the key to his whole successful career. It is imperative to persevere as it is hard to take it from training into a game and be successful initially.

The Value of A Metre

The average footballer can run 100 metres in 13 seconds, which is 8 metres a second, or one metre in $\frac{1}{8}$ of a second. Now one second is not very long, in fact by the time you say "one and", a second has elapsed. So $\frac{1}{8}$ of a second is no time at all.

How many times have you seen a try scored by a few centimetres? This is even less than a metre or $\frac{1}{8}$ of a second. A try can also be scored by 50 metres or more, but somewhere in that play $\frac{1}{8}$ of a second or a metre may have made that try!

The number of ways $\frac{1}{8}$ of a second can be wasted are numerous. For example, the play the ball area is very bad and can easily waste 5-10 seconds, bad passing leads to many seconds lost. Little things like carrying the ball under the arm - it takes a second to get it into the hands. In that time the opposition has moved up 8 metres. Every facet of the game will have areas where time can be saved.

The players have to concentrate all the time and be aware, in order to save those $\frac{1}{8}$ of seconds. It has to become part of their life, to play the ball properly (in two hands), to pass off the ground, to throw a good pass (remember 90% of dropped passes are due to the giver, not the receiver), to carry the ball in two hands.

Now using all the correct methods all the time will not result in immediate tries. It will give team members more room and opportunity and on some plays a try will be the result. Maybe it will be by 40 metres, maybe it will be by 40 centimetres, maybe by 4 centimetres, but somewhere in that movement one or two or three times, a fraction of a second may have been saved which enabled that try to be scored.

As a player you have to think about how you are playing all the time to save those $\frac{1}{8}$ of seconds to do it at training at all times in order for it to become your way of playing the game.

There are many more instances of saving $\frac{1}{8}$ of a second, which I haven't listed here, but players must be aware of them all and

Defence

endeavour at all times to eliminate the faults from their game so it becomes second nature for them to save those fractions of a second at all times.

There is an old saying, "Look after the pennies and the pounds will take care of themselves". Applied to football, "Look after the little things in your game and the big things take care of themselves".

By the same token you cannot sacrifice control for speed. It is no good being fast if you lose control. It can be done, but is something that must be practiced at all times. Remember, it is better to take the tackle and play the ball if you cannot be sure of retaining control of the ball.

This aspect of the game of Rugby League is just as important as the attacking side of the game. Individual coaches have different ways of deploying their defence and using tacklers in their game. Eg. 3-4 in a tackle, slowing down the play, compressed defence, etc. Duncan Thompson never coached a team to use negative tactics as above. He believed in the purity of football that hardness and cleanliness was the way to play and always encouraged these traits in his players.

As far as tackling goes, we had defence and cover defence and the one aspect was just as important as the other. You were expected to be able to tackle one on one, and get your man. Good strong low tackles were required and if you got your man the job was done. If you didn't the cover defence would always back him up.

Some players are natural tacklers, but all techniques can be learnt. The main thing is to commit to the tackle really strongly, watch only the place you are going to hit, and get your timing and weight right. A really good tackle will mostly stop the ball and the carrier as well.

Cover Defence: When the play goes away from your side of the field you should always be cutting back to get between the ball carrier and the goal line at all times, towards your own corner flag. It is amazing the number of times you will come into play if you follow this procedure.

You were always responsible for your own opposite number in defence. If every player could stop or outplay his opposition on the day you should in theory win the game. In fact, if you outplay every opponent you play, at a senior level, on the day you should find yourself well in contention for representative honours.

You cannot afford to let a player run with the ball and each defender must commit to stop the ball carrier, not leave it to someone else.

The low tackles around the legs are the best method to use.

Diving tackles should be used by the markers around the ruck area, as these are a very successful way to stop the ball. Again all these will only succeed with proper methods employed.

You never, ever leave a tackle that you can make for someone else, no matter how tired you feel.

Tackling is usually taking about 50% of your game time, and should not be neglected for running the ball, or attack. Good effective low tackling on its own can cause havoc to an opposition's attack and will often result in surprise victories.

Concentrate on your technique, become proficient! Sometimes an opposition player may beat your tackle. You must have made a mistake, so try and learn from it, but on other occasions you may have to acknowledge your opponent's ability.

The main thing is to do the tackling, even more than your share. It's amazing what it can do to your teammates when they see good strong hard committed tackling by one or two players repeatedly.

Remember defence can, and will win you matches, provided your commitment and your teammates are there for 80 minutes.

The main and only purpose of a tackle should be to stop the ball carrier on one.

You shouldn't worry if the ball moves on. If every other member of the team does the same to a ball carrier all the game, you are nullifying their attack and they won't be able to score points.

Therefore, the most effective and primary purpose of a tackle is put the man on the ground!

These days coaches use other methods than this simple technique, but Duncan Thompson only ever insisted "put the ball carrier on the ground".

A simple strategy, straight forward and not complicated, for Rugby League, a game of simple techniques.

Remember do the little things right! Commit to the tackle completely and the only one hurt will be your opponent.

Width of Field

The width of the field is only 68 metres and you must endeavour at all times to give the winger as much room as you can when he gets the ball in order to beat his opponents. There is nothing worse for a winger or anyone receiving a ball with one or two metres to spare.

In order to achieve this the inside players must - a: draw their man, step and pass. This is done by the inside men and will give the winger the maximum room possible at the sideline; b: you must run straight. Start by facing at the goal posts whatever your position. If you face across field, you'll run across field.

One yard forward is better than 20 yards sideways.

Only run across the field with purpose:

1. Take the defence one way, attack the other (scissors movement no flick passes)

2. Pass to players running straight

3. Reverse to player on inside

4. Dummy and run yourself

5. Defence out of line run and slide through

In all of these circumstances the ball must be carried in two hands. It is only permissible to put the ball under the arm out in the clear. To play contract football it is a must to carry the ball in two hands. It is only then that you have the best control. This eliminates the fend in close play and it should only be used out in the open.

In order to stop crossfield running and straightening the play the first quarter of an hour of training comprised running around the oval three to a ball doing the scissors movement.

Running past Duncan every lap you were subject to comments from him about doing it properly, doing it with purpose, etc. If we were not doing it properly we stayed until we did. It is a great drill and in a game you would find yourself automatically going behind anyone running across field. Practising this in training and use in a game leads to straightening up the movement and leaving room for the wingers.

It is not uncommon when playing contract football to have two or three scissors movements in the one attacking phase when players become accustomed to it. This tends to take play up the middle of the field leaving plenty of width for the wingers to work in when they get the ball.

A lot of players have little or no peripheral vision. That is the ability to be looking forward and see left and right of yourself at the same time. It is important to develop this as it will enable you to read the game and where the attack or defence is likely to go in any given situation. It can be developed and should be the aim of every player in order to increase his ability in playing the game.

Peripheral vision is very important for a player in both attack and defence and use of it should be of utmost importance to each member of the team.

You should be able by looking forward to see "the width of the field".

Variety In Play

The main way of being successful in a game of Rugby League, when you are having difficulties with the opposition is with variation in play.

1. Kicking early in tackle count
2. Chip kicking with the defence up
3. Kicking with fullback in line
4. Cross kicking, centre kicking
5. Grubber kicking at goal
6. Aerial kicking in goal
7. Running across field (with purpose)
8. Dummy half running
9. Playing wide
10. Playing in close up the middle
11. Reversing play
12. Run around

These are some of the methods that can be used for variations and it is essential to use all the options possible to keep your opponents guessing at all times. Once you become stereotyped in your play it makes it so much easier for the defence.

No player can afford to be doing the same thing all the time, from fullback to front row, in defence and attack. Each player is responsible for seeing that he has options and variations in the way he plays the game to create doubt and uncertainty in the ranks of the opposition. This can lead to openings in the defence that you can exploit.

It is up to the individual players and the team as a whole to adopt variation of play into their whole game to give themselves the utmost chance of success.

They talk about a straight line in defence in which every player moves up in unison. It is imperative in attack for the players to move up together, following the ball carrier, wanting the ball, completing the contract.

Too many times today, opportunities are lost because of lack of support, as players stand back on their heels thinking, and its only in the mind that they need a spell.

In attack you must move up with the ball as a team. A good team should score points as a result of every line break.

Move up in attack in a line. Move up in defence in a line.

Remember to think about the game when playing. If you have a problem breaking the defence, you have to vary your play, keep them guessing, look for weakness, exploit them when found.

Don't keep trying to run through a brick wall! Use a bit of variety and get through it that way.

To use your variation of play you have to do that old thing again.

THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU ARE DOING!

Discipline

Discipline is the one attribute required of a player in order to be a good team member, and succeed at the highest level as an individual. It starts the minute you decided to have a game of Rugby League and should continue while ever you play the game.

You will have to make sacrifices to meet your team commitments. This will be difficult at times as it will involve your family, your friends, your social life, your whole way of life in fact.

It will involve the way that you eat, drink, exercise and conduct yourselves at all times.

It carries onto the field where you must at all times present yourself with your gear and on time on all occasions. You must look like a footballer on all occasions. Stoppings of any kind is out - perfection is in! What you do in real life and in training is what you will do on the field.

You must always do everything to the best of you ability. Always go that extra metre, you will be rewarded on the field.

It can be very hard at times when you have to miss special occasions with you friends or family, but the rewards that can be reaped are impressive and will be worth the sacrifice.

Many times in a game you will have to exert discipline to put aside actions that happen, to refrain from reacting, to concentrate on the ball and the game you are in. Discipline plays a big part in your efforts on the field.

The minute you react badly to an opponent's foul play, punches, insults, etc., you are not playing football, but playing the man. The team can't afford for this to happen. Don't let it affect your discipline, just put a little cross on him and catch him with a legitimate tackle at some later stage. That can hurt more than any word or punch ever will.

Be disciplined, you can't afford to react on the spot, you can't afford to give away penalties or leave your team one man short. Swallow your pride and your anger, but never, never forget.

Many times in a game you might find yourself walking. Be disciplined! Get out of the walk, get into the game. You might think you are bugged! That's the worst thing you can do! Because if you even think it you are letting yourself down! Look at the opposition, get yourself going. Don't leave the team a man short. Some players think they are hurt. Often its only in the mind. Discipline! That's what is needed, Keep going and you will get through that pain barrier.

Mind over matter brings results.

Once started on this trail of discipline it becomes a way of life and will be of immense help to you as a player, to the team as a member, and to your coach. You will be able to do things that you thought impossible, make tackles, save tries, be the one who backs up. Be like the little train going up the hill. I think I can! I think I can! I think I can! I know I can! I know I can! You will get over the top.

It will be a great help to your football and also throughout life generally.

Discipline is the principal requirement of contract football to control the way you play your game. You have to do all the necessary procedures i.e. play the ball properly and quickly, run with purpose with the ball in two hands, pass the ball properly. These are only a couple of the things which have to be done, in fact all facets of the game covered in these lectures must be achieved to the best of your ability, in order for contract football to succeed. It will be difficult at times to do things which are so different from what you would normally do, but the discipline you exert, once achieved will be of immense benefit to yourself your team and your coach.

The mere fact that you learn to use the discipline necessary to play the game properly will lead you to understand the importance of this procedure.

A lot of you will find that it may change your character, and if it does it will be to your benefit for the rest of your life.

The Ball

What is it that is the single most important thing in a game of football? It's the football.

Why is it then we have so little respect for it? Why do we carry it under one arm? Why do we carry it in one hand? Why do we throw one handed passes? When with a little thought we could do the same thing with two hands.

Why do we play the ball with one hand instead of two? Why don't we fall on a loose ball straight away? Why don't we catch the ball on the full? Why do we try to pass the ball from impossible positions?

We need to carry the ball in two hands or on our chest in two hands to try and regain possession at all costs. Give it maximum protection!

We need to throw good passes in front of the support player to give him the best chance of catching the ball (90% of dropped passes are due to the giver not the receiver). We need to use two hands in passing at all times. Possession is too valuable to be squandered.

We need to play the ball correctly. Up quickly with the ball in two hands played back to give the dummy half the best chance of getting rid of the ball quickly.

We need to always catch the ball on the full when it is kicked. One of the quirks of the game of Rugby League is the ball. It is impossible to predict what it will do if it is allowed to bounce. It is better to try and catch it on the full and fail than to let it bounce.

Similarly with a loose ball. It is impossible at times to pick up. Better to fall on it and retain possession than rush a knock on.

Many is the time a beaten team will come off the field with the remarks "we had no ball" or "they had more ball than us".

We need to respect the football and possession of it at all times. You can't score without the ball! It is imperative for you as a player to value the possession of the football at all times. Remember the ball is like pure gold.

Think about the ball and what you are doing with it at all times! Minimise the risks! Maximise the positives! Give your team maximum possession and the best chance of success. The more ball possession you have the better your chances are. Whenever you see a ball on the ground, dive on it to give your team possession.

TEAM WEIGHTS

Are a lot heavier today

Some interesting statistics

1952	NZ	Backs	Av.	77	kg
		Fwds	Av.	88.7	kg
1953	Aus	Backs	Av.	80.5	kg
		Fwds	Av.	91.87	kg
1954	Eng	Backs	Av.	74.87	kg
		Fwds	Av.	92.43	kg

Player Profile For Contract

1. A person, who presents like a footballer mentally and physically fit ready to give 110% at all times.
2. A good low aggressive tackler both in defence and cover defence who will go that extra mile.
3. A player who always runs straight carrying the ball in two hands and is always ready to off load and never gets caught in possession (the most difficult thing to do).
4. A player who always draws his man and throws good passes saving 1/8 of seconds.
5. A player running with purpose, thinking about his game and varying his play.
6. A player who will always help his weaker teammates, playing with them, to them, and for them at all times.
7. A player who obeys his coach and always puts the good of the team and Rugby League itself first.
8. A player who uses his own abilities to capacity and tries to overcome his weakness at all times while applying the tactics of his coach.

This description is probable of a player who today is in the Australian team but it does describe a player who is following all the procedures of contract football and applying them accordingly. Consequently my profile for a player is a bit different. He has to have discipline, dedication and application.

DDA: Quite ordinary players can become outstanding in a team if they use these small definitions in playing the game.

SOME EXAMPLES

I have seen players who become expert in backing up to secure the ball, scoring tries game after game, and sometimes in multiples. (Contract Football)

Players who become expert in going in to get the ball in all situations, in fact handling the ball a number of times in a movement, becoming invaluable to a team. (Contract Football.)

Players who become expert cover defenders becoming invaluable in a team because of the tries they save. (Contract Football.) These are a few illustrations.

These were not outstanding players, just ordinary players, applying themselves to the practices of Contract Football who did become really great players.

So you see Contract Football is about developing the player so he is playing to the best of his ability using the methods outlined, in a team situation at all times.

Discipline Dedication and Application using Contract Football automatically builds a great rapport and mateship and consequently a great team without trying to.

Play Contract Football and become a great team. It can be used in all teams from Juniors to the NRL itself.

There are very few players who are born with great ability, and can play the game naturally. Sometimes the very best players are the ones who have had to learn to do a lot of the very important parts of being a player. The reason they are better is because of their mental attitude, so being a natural player isn't everything.

It's amazing what can be achieved by a player who doesn't know the meaning of the word can't. In fact I don't think it is really a proper word. Where there is a will there is a way. Wipe "can't" from your vocabulary and your mind.

The minute you think "can't" it means you are not going to try, and you always have to try. Never stop trying!