



# Rugby

## Seven Self-Management Strategies for Rugby Matches

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**R**ugby is a high impact sport that demands a wide variety of skills such as power, speed, agility, and quickness over an 80 minute game. Players need to demonstrate and execute these skills while determining the correct decision making requirements of the game. Players that are both physically and mentally prepared for the match are more likely to see the benefits as it translates into performance. This article will focus on seven key elements of self-management so that players and coaches have a take home guide to help improve match day performance.

### Assessment

To assess the level of expected goal achievement, there are key indicators that determine whether someone is going to be successful or fall short of their desired outcomes. Players that perform consistently well have received training and preparation in various forms of self-management. The steps that follow outline how players can improve their performance and enjoy playing better rugby.

### Seven Match Day Self-Management Steps

#### 1. Pre-Match Preparation

The night before a rugby match is an important step in the self-management process as this is the time to prepare for the upcoming performance. Players should focus on getting all their equipment packed and ready to go in addition to other items such as water bottles, pre-game food, a small first aid kit, a charged cell phone, extra money, and directions to the match (if necessary). The more things that can be taken care of the day before a match the better. Many times players will show up at a match without certain equipment or lacking adequate food or water. This can and should be prevented by preparing in advance of the match.

#### 2. Know the Opponent

As rugby is mostly a sport played at the amateur level, it may be difficult to pre-scout an upcoming opponent before the match. As players move up to higher and higher levels it becomes more important to assess teams before they are played. The key benefit to knowing an opponent is that players can tailor aspects of their game to that of

the opponent. If for example a team has been scouted as big and tough, they may not be fast and agile. This is where players can become students of the game in terms of finding out about the opposing and creating a personal strategy to defend against and possibly exploit weak areas of the other team. At the very least players can use this information in step seven when they visually prepare for the upcoming match.

#### 3. Current Personal Assessment

The next step in pre-match planning is to take current stock of feelings, abilities, and mental state. If a player is in a poor mental state from an external factor, such as relationship troubles or a poor evaluation at work, it will affect pre-match self-management skills. Players need to determine a realistic assessment of how they are feeling and thinking so that goals and strategies can be prepared to overcome and adjust to these obstacles. Perhaps talking to other players, friends, or a coach may be beneficial to help assess your current state, and they may be able to offer methods to sort out potential problems before this affects game performance.

### 4. Set Match Goals

In order to perform at the highest possible level it is critical to have a set of goals in place before the match. These goals can range from a wide variety of skills or outcomes such as scoring a goal, executing a certain skill properly that has been worked on in practice, exercising patients while handling the ball, or focusing on the correct technical skills in a tackle. Whatever the specific goal, it should be noted that a set of criteria are in place to determine the effectiveness of the goal and the result. A checklist might be helpful to help log current goals and then mark down after the match if those goals were met and at what frequency were they achieved. This way players can become more self aware of their abilities and skills so that in practice and future games these skills can be improved.

### 5. Identify Internal and External Distractions

With a game plan in hand and a set of goals for the upcoming match the next step for players is to identify any internal or external distraction that might take away from performance. Situations such as a rain delay, flat tire on the ride to the field, a poor sleep, relationship troubles, etc., are all circumstances that will potentially detract from game performance. It is important to identify the existence of these factors and then determine methods to diffuse or eliminate them from your pre-match preparation. Sometimes however events will happen that are beyond a players control, which leads to step six.

### 6. Getting Back on Track

Every game ever played will have a multitude of possible outcomes that cannot be planned or factored in the pre-game plan. A pre-game plan is carefully thought out and executed, but sometimes this is not enough to ensure a solid performance. Players need to have a strategy or plan to get back on track when things start to go wrong. A set plan to help get back into a favorable mental and competitive state is essential for a solid performance. This should be developed in advance of the match and perhaps with a member of the coaching staff.

### 7. Visualization

The final step in pre-match self management is the visualization aspect of sport. During this time players should focus on what they see themselves doing in the match in a positive manner so that they are filled with confidence for the upcoming match. Visualization should not only be a thought or a feeling but a real picture of what players envision for the match. Negative thoughts and worries should be eliminated during this step as the pre-planning, goal setting, and plan to get back on track will have handled these situations. With proper visualization, an athlete will focus intently on positive outcomes, situations and experiences for the match and create a visual and mental picture of these feelings. In alpine skiing, for example, you can often find racers standing on the top of the hill with eyes closed, turning the body back and forth as they visualize racing down the hill. Rugby players should be no different. This mental picture will help calm the mind and ready the athlete for the match that is unmatched by preparation alone.

In order to play the best rugby possible players need to begin some form of game day self-management in order to produce lasting results. Self management starts with a self evaluation and assessment of current strategies used for matches and ends with the player being able to combine all the critical skills into a worthy on-field performance. Armed with this knowledge you will be able to enjoy the game at the highest level you can play.

### About the Author

*John Coumbe-Lilley earned his doctorate from the University of Illinois-Chicago in Education Psychology following a masters degree in Kinesiology specializing in sport psychology. John is a Probationary Sport and Exercise Psychologist with the British Association of Sports and Exercise Sciences, and is a member of the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology. John is the Head Coach of the Canadian U19 Womens and Ontario Senior Womens rugby teams and is former Scotland rugby league international representative.*

