

Rugby Tough

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Editors



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For my wife, Sandy, who has supported my interest in participation, coaching and writing in my favorite sport; and to the Penn State Rugby Club, who provided me the opportunity to grow and enjoy the greatest sport in the world!

—Bruce Hale

For Joe, Judy and Rosie, and all the men I have played with.

—Dave Collins

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foreword:

The Mindset of a Champion

Rugby is the ultimate team sport. All 15 players have to be focused on identical team goals: to play with an intensive, aggressive style; to communicate effectively; and to perform high-speed decisions and skills in synchrony. At the international level, every player must be strong, quick, highly skilled and well versed in knowledge of the game. In the All Blacks, all coaches and players must strive for the highest honors.

Preparation is the key to success at any level. Every player needs to have sufficient nutritional intake, adequate technical knowledge, well-rehearsed match strategies and highly trained physiological capacities—and that's not all. There is even something more necessary than knowledge and physical preparedness: mental preparation. At the international level, often the only difference between the players that earn the silver fern and those who fail is adequate mental preparation. Although this seems like an insurmountable challenge, even new players can learn to build this very mindset of a champion.

Mental preparation involves learning mental skills and strategies that can be used in matches to attain optimal individual performance and team success. These are skills that are learned on and off the pitch and are applied to competitive performance. Rugby players can learn these skills from coaches, players and sport psychologists, and they can learn from reading books and watching videos.

As with any skill, if you want to improve your match performance, you have to practice regularly. This book will help you learn those critical mental preparation skills, and it will show you how to use them in training and competition.

The All Blacks are no exception. The All Blacks are the jewel of the rugby world because they are more mentally tough than other national sides. They have consistently been the best team over the last few decades with players that are in outstanding physical condition and who receive superlative coaching to play at their highest capacity each week in the season.

So when players want to get a place on the roster of the All Blacks, they have to play and act like All Blacks. That means being prepared physically *and* mentally. I want teams that show a lot of character and are relentless. I expect players to be fluent in a range of skills, not just those associated with their positions. Our team needs to be multiskilled in every position.

The playing skills I want in my players include the very mental skills stressed in this book. Players like Andrew Mehrtens spend hours visualizing and rehearsing perfect kicks and punts. Christian Cullen and Jeff Wilson have honed their decision-making skills for a match to quickly decide whether to run or kick on attack. Former captain Sean Fitzpatrick excelled in the skill of motivating his side to the right level of aggression and confidence. Back-row players such as Todd Blackadder and Taine Randle have trained their concentration focus to such a high level that they can anticipate offensive and defensive moves before they occur. All our coaches motivate individual players and the team by formulating and evaluating match and seasonal goals. Mental skills are such a critical part of each player's repertoire; they simply must be there if they want to excel at the highest level.

This book is written for every union and league player and for coaches who want to optimize their own and their team's performance on the pitch. It can fill a gap in current training by ensuring that players are both physically and mentally prepared. It will acquaint you with the essential mental skills that are necessary for success, and it will provide opportunities to practice these skills in training and competition. Mental training is important at all skill levels, and this text will help both elite and novice players consistently play better.

The book begins by exploring fundamental mental skills, then it moves to applying them in specific competitive situations. It focuses first on individual skills and then shows how they are used in team interactions. It is written by some of the most experienced rugby sport psychologists and qualified rugby coaches in the world. It will assist in identifying your strengths and weaknesses to allow you to individualize your training. Numerous examples of mental skill applications in training and competition are presented to help you improve your mental preparation and give you a game-winning edge.

Will it make you a champion? That is for you to decide. All rugby players have to train hard, eat well and play smart to succeed. In my experience, mentally prepared athletes are more likely to play well and perform at the elite level; subsequently, their teams usually succeed. Regular mental training is the simple difference between good athletes and great players. The information here can help every rugby player reach for greatness. Good luck!

Wayne Smith, head coach
New Zealand All Blacks, 2000-2001

chapter

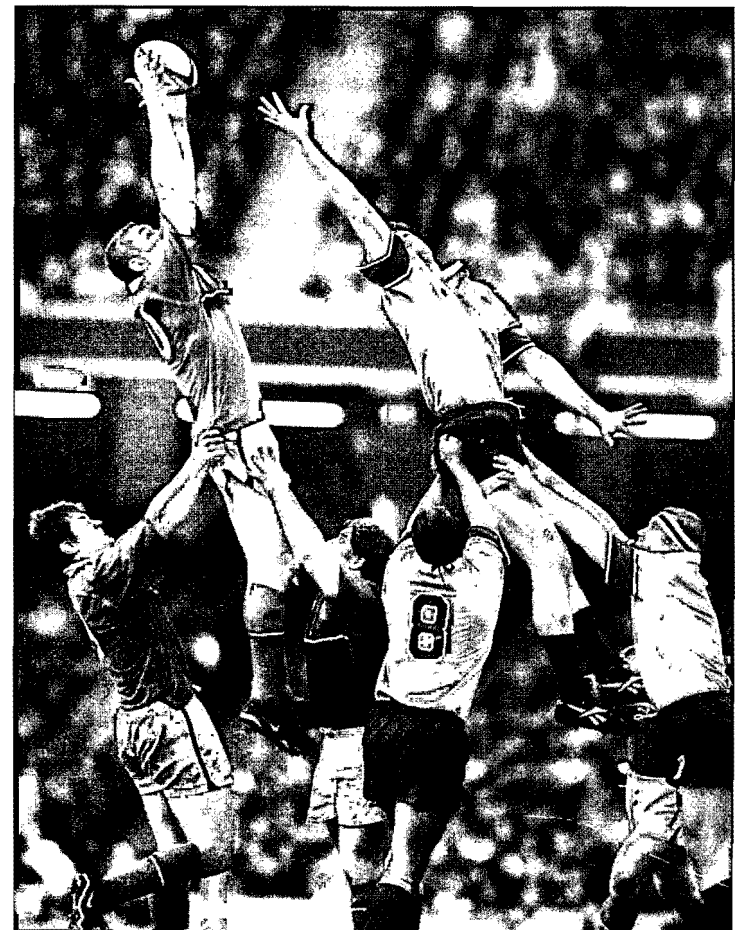
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Cohesion and Teamwork

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