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# Rugby in New Zealand

David Hadfield

In

## Secrets of Asian Sport Psychology

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## Introduction

New Zealand is a small country with a population of under 4.5 million people, hidden away down at the bottom of the South Pacific. Most who visit the country rave about its natural beauty, ranging from fjords and glaciers, to upland deserts, geothermal geysers and active volcanoes, to beautiful swimming beaches and some of the best snow skiing in the Southern Hemisphere.

As beautiful as the country may be, however, there is one thing that New Zealand is better known for even than its scenery and that is its prowess at the sport of rugby union. For those unfamiliar with rugby, it is a rough, tough game of physical contact played by two teams of 15 players over 80 minutes. It's like non-stop American football without the helmets, the padding, and the advertisement breaks - except that players cannot pass the ball forwards. It is perhaps the ultimate combat team game, where players rely upon each other completely.

New Zealanders started playing rugby within 30 years of the first European pioneers arriving in the 1840s and took to it like ducks to water. The tough, physical game was perfectly suited to hard-working, hardy pioneers, most of whom worked long, strenuous hours on the land. Since then, the game has become deeply embedded into New Zealand culture. It is said that when the All Blacks, the New

Zealand national team, lose (which is not that often) the local stock market goes down, and when we fail at the World Cup (which has been our Achilles heel - winning only twice in seven attempts, most recently in 2011) the whole country goes into depression.

The All Blacks brand - the black jersey and the silver fern - is known worldwide, creating one of the most instantly recognised international sporting teams. Since 1903, the All Blacks have notched up an amazing 75% winning record against all opponents, an unparalleled international sporting record. To put New Zealand rugby's performances into the context of playing resources, the country currently has 27,374 senior male rugby players, compared to the following numbers for its four greatest international competitors - England 166,762; France 110,270; South Africa 109,878; and Australia 39,380. It is also fair to point out that each of our great competitors has significantly superior national economies and financial resources to New Zealand.



Credit: The Roving Sheep/flickr/CC-BY2.0

So it's true to say that, in rugby, New Zealanders well and truly punch above their weight!



## New Zealand Rugby in 2012

Rugby became a professional sport in 1995, which brought (as if it wasn't important enough already) an even greater focus on high performance. Currently, New Zealand professional players play in three different competitions. Firstly, if players make the All Blacks squad, they play internationals against other countries, including a yearly round-robin competition against Australia, South Africa, and for the first time in 2012, Argentina - a competition known as The Rugby Championship. Traditionally, the international games have been scheduled in June and July, with international overseas tours taking place in November and December. Secondly, they play in the SANZAR Super 15 professional competition, which includes five New Zealand teams, five South African teams and five Australian teams. This competition takes place in the first half of the year. Although each Super 15 team is independently run, the New Zealand Rugby Union (NZRU) centrally contracts players and coaches. Lastly, there is an internal New Zealand competition (currently called the ITM Cup) which is played from August to October. Due to financial challenges, this latter competition is becoming increasingly semi-professional, rather than fully professional. Few All Blacks are now able to play in the ITM Cup due to timetable clashes, but it remains a high-quality competition.

The NZRU also supports two age-group teams - the New Zealand Secondary Schools (for players still at high school and under 18 years of age), which plays annual fixtures against Australian teams, and the New Zealand Under-20 team, which competes in the International Rugby Board (IRB) Junior World Championship. Prior to 2008 there were separate international Under-19 and Under-21 competitions. Since the inaugural IRB Junior World Championship in 2008, New Zealand has won it every year until 2012, when they were pipped 22-16 by host nation South Africa in the final.



## Sport Psychology in NZ Rugby

As in most countries and most sports, top New Zealand rugby coaches over the years have, to a greater or lesser extent, been amateur psychologists. The coach who presided over New Zealand's first World Cup triumph in 1987, the legendary ex-All Black captain (and farmer) Sir Brian Lochore, has described himself as a "bush psychologist" in some of the fascinating conversations I've had with him. Sir Fred Allen, the famous All-Black coach of the 1960s (who died at the ripe old age of 92 as I was writing this chapter), was renowned for his man-management and motivational skills.

Sport psychology as a discipline began in New Zealand in the middle to late 1980s at Otago University with Ken Hodge (who completed his PhD with Dan Gould at the University of Illinois) and in Canterbury with Graham Felton and Gilbert Enoka. Not too long after that, Gary Hermansson and I began working with teams and individuals in the lower North Island. Since then, sport psychology (or mental skills training) has gradually grown as a discipline, as have the number of practitioners operating in the field. Both Hodge and Hermansson have worked with a number of Commonwealth Games and Olympic Games teams, while Enoka is probably our highest profile mental skills coach, having worked with the All Blacks for many years now, the Black Caps (New Zealand cricket team), and the Silver Ferns (New Zealand Women's netball team), among others.

Performance analysis of the All Blacks' failure to win the rugby World Cup between 1987 and 2011 led to reviews that, as far back as eight years ago, indicated that the mental skills of the players and their ability to cope with pressure and deliver performances when it mattered had been found wanting. Since then, there has been a growing focus on mental skills across elite levels of New Zealand rugby. Much of what the All Blacks have done in the mental skills area prior to the 2011 World Cup win remains hidden, but I know that they have worked hard on dealing with the huge public expectations of the team, composure and effective decision-making under pressure, and leadership. Currently, most of New Zealand's semi-professional and professional rugby teams have at least some input from a sport psychologist or mental skills coach, as do the rugby academies of each of the 14 major rugby unions in New Zealand. The uptake of sport psychology varies throughout the country, driven, as it is elsewhere, by the coaches' perceptions both of the need for and the effectiveness of the discipline and its practitioners.



*Click to read more about the psychology of the Haka*



Under New Zealand's 2003 Health Practitioners Act, anybody who is not a registered psychologist is now forbidden to use the word psychologist in their title, which has meant that some of us who previously called ourselves sport psychologists have been forced to use another title - mental skills coach being the one that I prefer. Over the last nine years, Mike Chu (until 2011, NZ Rugby's High Performance Coach Development Manager) has been a prime driver of sport psychology both within rugby and in other sports. Mike has not only been an advocate for sport psychology and mental skills as a discipline, but has also organised and helped to organise professional development opportunities for those working in the field. His move to Rugby Canada was a big loss for mental skills/sport psychology in New Zealand.



## An Outline of 13 Years in Rugby



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My early experiences in the mental side of sport were as a cricket coach. I coached semi-professionally in the late 1980s and early 1990s and introduced mental training to the young players with whom I was working. Because I had a good deal of credibility with the players, they were keen to take on board the ideas I had for them. The work I did was mainly performance profiling, visualisation, and relaxation. I also got involved early on with establishing team culture, vision, values, and protocols.

After finishing my post-graduate degree in psychology and starting work as a lecturer in sport psychology and coaching at Massey University in Palmerston North, my first work in rugby was in 1998 with the Wellington team that played in the ITM Cup, then called the National Provincial Championship (NPC). This work consisted of just a couple of sessions with the team, talking about successful team goals and culture and assisting the players to come up with what they wanted to achieve from the season and what sort of values they wished to guide their behaviour.

My first real immersion in a team came in 1999 when I started to work with the Wellington Lions (an NPC - now ITM Cup - team) and then got leave from my university to work full-time for four months with the Hurricanes (then a Super 12, now Super 15 team), based in the capital city of Wellington. Sport psychology was new to the players and didn't fit with many of the players' perceptions of themselves as tough, macho men playing a hard, rugged game. There was a strong perception, despite my best efforts, that in order to sit down and talk with me there must be something mentally wrong with them. A good number of players were unreceptive and a few distinctly unwelcoming, despite the fact that I had played rugby myself for many years and knew the game very well. Of course, I had received no tuition as to what I should be doing and how I should be doing it, and was really just "following my nose."

My real focus was in working with the head coach, ex-All Black captain Graham Mourie, to improve what we saw as a distinctly inferior team culture around professional behaviour. I was heavily involved with drawing up and facilitating the development of the team vision and values document which was a combination of management of "non-negotiables", such as honesty and punctuality, and other values that the players proposed and signed off on as being important to them. I focused on staying in the background and pitching in and helping out wherever I could around the team, while trying to build relationships with players. There were some players who saw benefit in what I had to offer and approached me and I was delighted to work with those players, but I'd have to say they were a minority. It was tough going at times and I know I wondered whether what I was doing was worthwhile but, as head coach, Graham was completely supportive of me and unfailingly encouraging. As a result of meeting and working together during this time, Graham and I have become close friends - a friendship I value enormously.



When Graham finished as Hurricanes head coach at the end of 2002, my tenure finished also. I set up my own consultancy around that time, and for the past 10 years I have worked as a freelance mental skills and coaching consultant throughout New Zealand and offshore, having worked also in the United Kingdom and France. For the past decade, I have been used as a resource coach by the NZRU, working between 60 and 100 days per year with coaches, players, and teams throughout the country. I have, at various times, worked with every provincial (ITM Cup) side in New Zealand and all but one of the Super 15 teams, primarily the Crusaders (by far the most successful professional team in New Zealand and arguably - over the last 15 years - the best provincial or club team in the world), and the Hurricanes.

I have also done stints with the Black Ferns (the multiple world champion New Zealand woman's rugby team) and a small amount of work with the New Zealand rugby 7's team (the most successful team in rugby 7s history). I have worked with World Championship winning NZ Under-19 and Under-21 sides and have been fully immersed in the NZ Under-20's programme since its inception in 2008. Last year, for the first time, I was also involved in the NZ Secondary Schools team's programme, which consisted of a three-week campaign that ended with two games in Australia, the last of which was a test match against Australian Secondary Schools.



Credit: Womensrugby/wikimedia commons/CC-BY-SA2.5

## NZRU Player Development

The status of mental skills has changed considerably in rugby. There is now wide recognition of the "mental pillar" in rugby performance. Across New Zealand rugby, we use a six-pillar approach to rugby performance (see Figure 1):

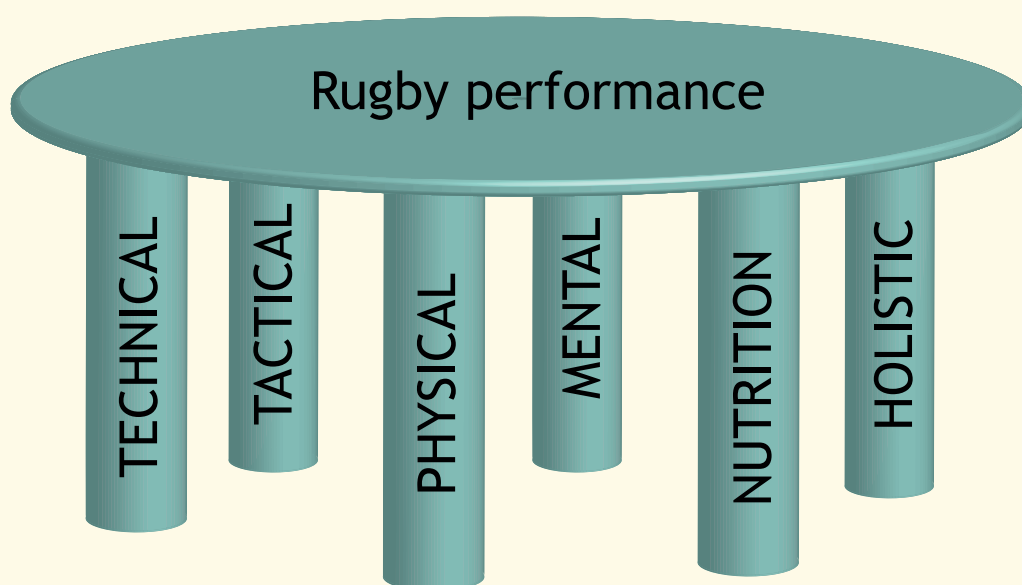


Figure 1. The Six Pillars of Rugby Performance



- **TECHNICAL** - this pillar refers to skills, including individual skills, such as catching and passing, running with the ball, evasion skills, tackling, kicking, “clean-out” at the breakdown, lineout throwing (for hookers<sup>1</sup>); and group skills such as lineout jumping and lifting, scrummaging and mauling.
- **TACTICAL** - this pillar is best described by a pyramid I have developed and use as a guide for coaches and players in developing the players’ tactical skills (see Figure 2). The model is based on the principle that the vast majority of decisions made by rugby players are intuitive decisions made subconsciously in response to the cues that are presented to them. These decisions are trained and develop with experience at training and from games, and involve procedural knowledge (ten Berge & van Hezewijk, 1999). There are some decisions in which players have time to choose and select from a list of options (e.g., deciding whether to kick for territory or to kick for goal from a penalty, or a player deciding which back move to call from a scrum), but once the game is underway, decisions are reactive in nature. However, all of these intuitive decisions require foundational (declarative) knowledge (ten Berge & van Hezewijk, 1999). The more clarity and accuracy in the underpinning knowledge, the better informed will be the intuitive decision. Added to the model is the player’s ability to focus, scan effectively, and communicate.

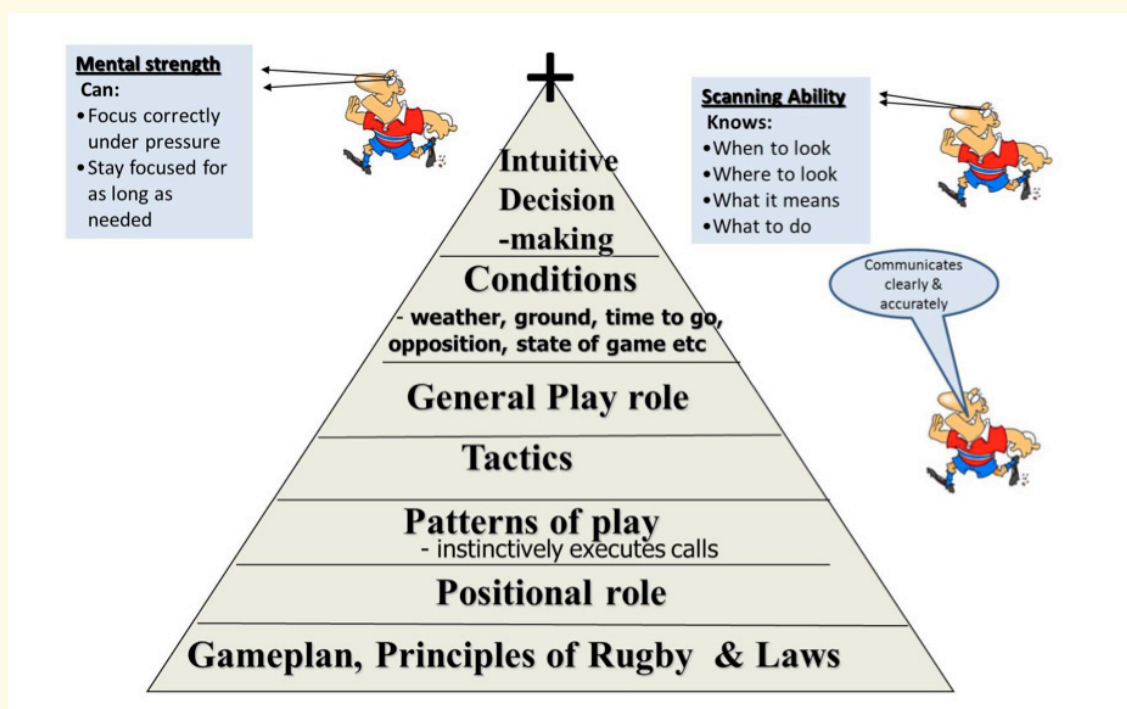


Figure 2. Guide for Developing Players’ Tactical Skills

- **PHYSICAL** - this performance pillar refers to the normal strength and conditioning aspects of rugby performance, such as aerobic and anaerobic fitness, strength, speed, power, flexibility, agility and balance.

<sup>1</sup> A hooker in rugby union is a front row forward, usually with a number 2 on his/her jersey, who typically throws the ball in at the lineout. Other information about the sport of rugby union can be found at: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rugby\\_union](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rugby_union)

- **MENTAL** - the mental pillar is discussed in detail below.
- **NUTRITION** - this performance pillar consists of basic diet, performance nutrition (around training and competition), skinfolds/body composition, hydration, and supplements.
- **HOLISTIC** - this pillar concerns off-field factors such as career planning and development, financial management, insurance, personal organisation and leadership. The NZRU philosophy is that players' careers may be short, and alongside the New Zealand Rugby Players Association (NZPA - which is jointly funded by professional players and the NZRU), they have a responsibility to assist players to prepare for a life after rugby. Each Super 15 team has a full-time Professional Development Manager whose role is to support players' holistic development.

The six-pillar approach is used as a template for NZ Rugby's elite player development programme. The NZRU have developed an on-line individual performance plan (IPP) system, which is centrally controlled and contains all pertinent player data, including contract details, information across all six pillars, and medical data. This information can only be accessed by authorized staff working with the players at that time. The players are entered into the database as young as 16 years of age and the on-line system is used by all elite coaches, players, and support staff for performance planning, goal-setting, and reviews.

In general, most specialists (e.g., mental skills coaches, strength and conditioning coaches, nutritionists) use a three stage model: *education* - outlining key principles; *application* - how to put these into practice at training and in games; and *support* - one-on-one support for players across the full gamut of issues associated with each pillar. This is certainly the approach I take with my own mental skills programmes.

## Connecting with Players

I vividly remember an early experience that was very humbling and taught me one of the most valuable lessons I've ever learned when it comes to the educational side of sport psychology. I had given an hour-long morning presentation to a group of 17-year-old rugby players who were involved in a two-day development camp and I was due to give another half hour presentation at the end of the day.

Around 3 p.m. (five hours after I finished my presentation), I asked one of the players, a Maori boy, what he had taken out of my presentation that he could use in his rugby. He looked more than somewhat blank, tried to tap into his memory banks and, after an uncomfortable 10 seconds silence, came out with - "I remember one thing - *fire in the belly and ice in the head.*"

As the little metaphor I had introduced about fire in the belly (physical intensity and aggression) and ice in the head (mental composure and decision-making clarity) had only taken two or three minutes of the 60 minutes I had spent with the boys, I realised that the other 57 minutes may have been, for many, of pretty limited use. There is nothing like a healthy dose of humility to focus the reflective mind!





There is much written about differing learning styles (visual, auditory, verbal, kinaesthetic, etc. see [www.learning-styles-online.com](http://www.learning-styles-online.com)), and I believe that being multimodal in your delivery is important. Access to video, music, and use of modern technology opens up tremendous opportunities to connect with young players. What is more important, however, is being as vivid, memorable, and humorous as possible. With regard to education sessions, I have also come to believe that “little and often” is the way to go rather than lengthy sessions.

In their terrific (2008) book *Made to Stick*, which I highly recommend to anyone who presents to groups, Chip and Dan Heath offer sound advice when seeking to ensure information “sticks” in the memory of the listeners and mobilises behavioural change. They use the acronym **SUCCEES** to describe key elements of successful presenting:

- S** • **SIMPLE** - ensure you get across the core idea simply; don't confuse the key message; prioritise what you want to get across and exclude irrelevant material.
- U** • **UNEXPECTED** - get their attention by doing or saying something surprising and then take advantage of their attention by great teaching; open “gaps” in their knowledge by tantalising them with something they may know, and then fill in the “gaps” in a pertinent, meaningful way.
- C** • **CONCRETE** - ensure your ideas are concrete, that they are tangible and clear; make certain that the players know exactly what they will need to do to put it into action and how they can do it.
- C** • **CREDIBLE** - make your ideas believable; bring credibility with you (teams you've worked with, results you've had); offer it to players by letting them know about successful players who do what you are suggesting they should try; use research and data (but personalise it).
- E** • **EMOTIONS** - get them to care about your ideas by making them feel something; bring your idea to life in a way that players will feel excited and intrigued when they hear them and help them understand how they will feel differently when they put your idea into practice.
- S** • **STORIES** - tell stories and use metaphors that connect with players and bring your ideas to life. An old friend, who is a committed Christian, always told me that the reason Jesus used parables was that they bypassed the mind and went straight to the soul. I'm not sure about that, but I am utterly convinced of the power of well-told, vivid stories to get players to act on ideas. I also believe that the use of metaphor (whether they be verbal, visual, kinaesthetic, or other) is a hugely powerful teaching tool and one that I use every day.

# My Current Approach to Mental Training

The framework for mental training that I use is shown in Figure 3 and explained in detail below:

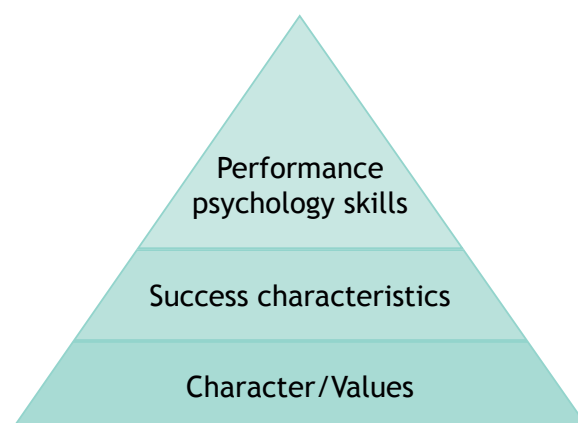


Figure 3. Mental Training Framework

## Character and Values

Rugby is an ultimate team game and no team in New Zealand except the All Blacks has epitomised a successful team culture better than the Crusaders, New Zealand's Christchurch-based Super 15 team. In the 16 years since the first year of professional Super rugby in 1996, when they finished last, the Crusaders have won seven titles, been beaten finalists three times and made the semi-finals on three other occasions. They have failed to make the play-offs just three times (1996, 1997, and 2001). Even in 2011, when their home city Christchurch was devastated by an earthquake that cost over 180 lives, hundreds of millions of dollars of damage and untold human

misery, a year when the team lost their stadium to earthquake damage and they had to play every game away from home, living out of a suitcase and away from loved ones, they still made the final. It was an astonishing testament to character and team ethos.



The Crusaders have developed a culture of sustained excellence that is unparalleled in Super Rugby and stands proud among any professional sport anywhere in the world. Some of the “secrets of their success” are really pretty obvious - top class coaching (notably world class coaches such as Wayne Smith and Robbie Deans, and now Todd Blackadder), world class players (e.g., Andrew Mehrtens, Justin Marshall, Leon MacDonald, Richie McCaw, Dan Carter, Brad Thorn), great captains (Todd Blackadder,

Reuben Thorne, Richie McCaw), top-class recruitment and development structures, and a team that has had, over the years, a deeper understanding of their game plan than any other team, but importantly a greater understanding of *why* they play the way they play. In my view, the other key success factor has been that they have recruited on character for many years. They have put an unapologetic focus on the personal values of the players they have recruited - a policy that might be described as “character first, ability second.”



The upshot has been a team that is not only highly successful, but enjoys reputations of being a group of “good blokes”, which transcends what they achieve on the field. This has been strengthened year by year by leaders (I think of senior players as a “magnet group” who attract players to do what they do and aspire to their standards in the same way that metal filings are attracted to a powerful magnet) who vouchsafe and nurture the culture, and will hold to account anyone whose behaviour is not aligned with team goals and values. I have learned that, in rugby, if you want to build a dynasty, it must be built on values and character. For the last several years, I have put a huge emphasis on the development of character in the academies and the national teams with which I have worked. I get the boys to identify the core values and, more importantly, the behaviour of a good human being, and bring these to life with examples, stories, and video. There are many academic definitions of culture that talk about norms, values, and beliefs, but to me it can be simply defined as “what’s the way we do things around here.” The players need to understand clearly the boundaries of acceptable (above the line) behaviour and unacceptable (below the line) behaviour.

There are many ways of symbolising goals and values, and I have been heavily involved in developing “themes” for many teams over the last 20 years. Of course themes are not necessary, but they can assist bonding and buy-in and can really add spice to the team ethos. They must be pertinent and the team must feel a sense of connection (and be involved in the theme development in some way), otherwise you may do more harm than good. The world champion NZ Under-20’s rugby team has used themes for its campaign each year. The 2011 tournament was in Italy and the team’s campaign motto was “where he stands I stand; where he goes I go” echoing the words of NZ prime minister Peter Frazer in 1939 when committing New Zealand to support the United Kingdom and the Allied cause at the start of World War II. We used military themes and researched the young men who left New Zealand to fight on the other side of the world, and then built meaning for the players in the analogies. A team and management photo illustrating the theme is shown in Figure 4.



Figure 4. Theme Poster Used With the NZ Under-20 Team

In 2010, the NZ Under-20's used the theme of a pack of black wolves. The accompanying motto was poet Rudyard Kipling's famous line, "...the strength of the pack is the wolf and the strength of the wolf is the pack." We linked strongly into themes of working together, trust in each other, and everybody "nailing" their job. Two slides from the team presentation are shown in Figure 5. Each year I have put together PowerPoint presentations that link pictures, photos of the players, and music to bring the team's vision and values to life and provide "stickability" and meaning. The players really enjoy it.



Courtesy of D. Hadfield

Figure 5. The Black Wolf Metaphor

I have many times used the concept of *True North* as a metaphor for team vision and values. The concept is (before the days of GPS) that if you are lost, you pull out your compass and it will tell you which way to go. In the same way, if you have clarity about, and commitment to, the team's goals and values, decision-making becomes simple. I say to the players "if it's taking you True North (i.e., if it's going to help you achieve your goals and is aligned to your values) then do it; if it's talking you away from True North, don't do it; if you're not sure, ask someone."

To reinforce the *True North* concept, I also use the model in Figure 6 as a self-awareness and accountability tool. I draw it on a white board and ask players to come up to the board and put their initials in the sector they believe they occupy and put the team in the sector they believe the group occupies, based on current behaviour.

I have found that although it's critical to establish cultural norms, it's equally important to use some system that allows a check-in to ensure that everybody is living it day by day. To do this, players must remind themselves of what True North is, self-reflect, and then hold themselves accountable in front of their team-mates. I normally engage with the outliers, initially by posing the question to them, "What is it about what you/we are doing that leads you to put us so far away from True North?" This strategy typically leads to a solution-focused discussion about what to do to move forward.



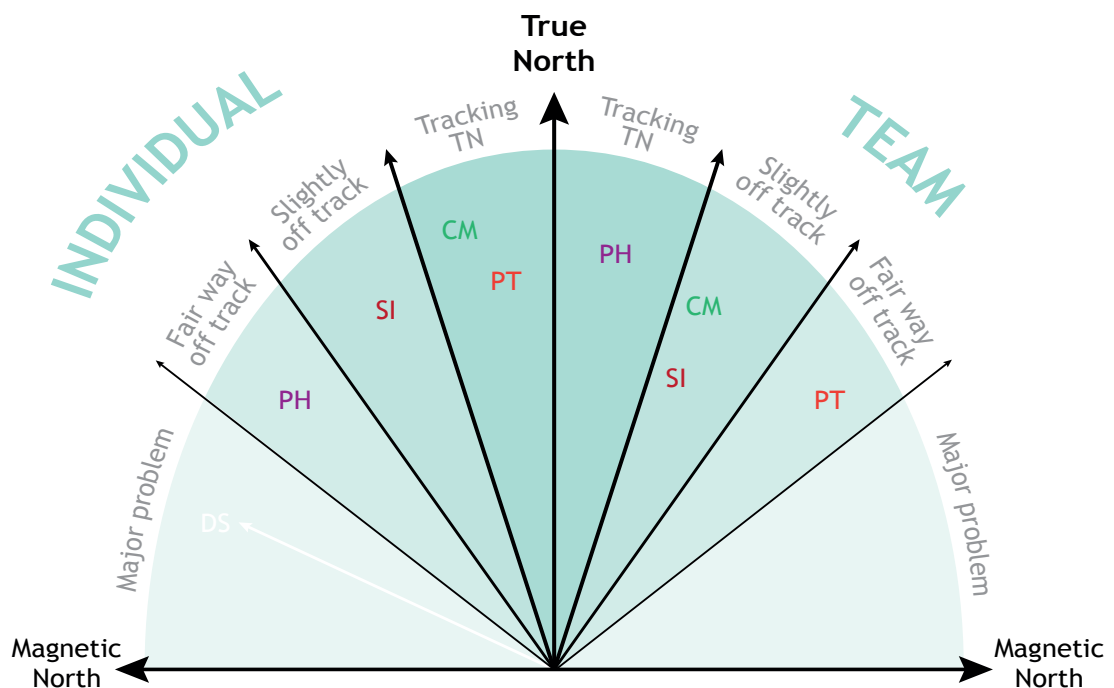


Figure 6. The True North Exercise

## Success characteristics

Books in the popular press, such as *The Talent Code* (Coyle, 2009), *Talent is Overrated* (Colvin, 2008), *Bounce* (Syed, 2010), *Talent is Never Enough* (Maxwell, 2007) and *Outliers* (Gladwell, 2008) and the work of Anders Erikson among others, have all clearly indicated that talent alone is never enough.

For athletes to succeed they must also have a range of what I call “success characteristics”. Some of these characteristics may be thought of as psychological qualities, but I prefer to teach them as separate constructs to performance psychology skills.

I have adapted material from the aforementioned books and my own experience to construct a programme that I have entitled (after John Maxwell’s book) *Talent is Never Enough*, which I teach to the NZ Under-20’s team using video, quotes, group discussion, and a bit of guidance from me around each of the success characteristics.

These characteristics include belief, focus, initiative, purposeful practice, teamwork, coachability, resilience, and awareness.

## Performance Psychology Skills

At a gathering of mental skills coaches and sport psychologists, organised by the NZRU a few years ago, we challenged ourselves to come up with a simple template that we could use to educate our youngsters around mental skills. My definition of simple is “everything you need and nothing you don’t” but I’m not quite sure we managed that level of simplicity. Perhaps there are some important constructs that we have omitted but, for better or worse, we split the mental skills pillar into three categories:

- **PERFORMANCE PREPARATION** - *routines and rituals, belief/confidence, visualisation, “cleared the decks”, “ticked the boxes”, ready to go.*
- **PERFORMANCE FOCUS** - *intense focus on pertinent cues, confidence, distraction control, intensity, switch-on/off.*
- **PERFORMANCE REVIEW** - *performance profiling, proactively reflect on performance, build strengths, tweak areas of weakness, constantly improve.*

With regard to performance preparation, I have found the metaphors of “clearing the decks” and “ticking the boxes” to be very effective (see Figures 7 and 8).

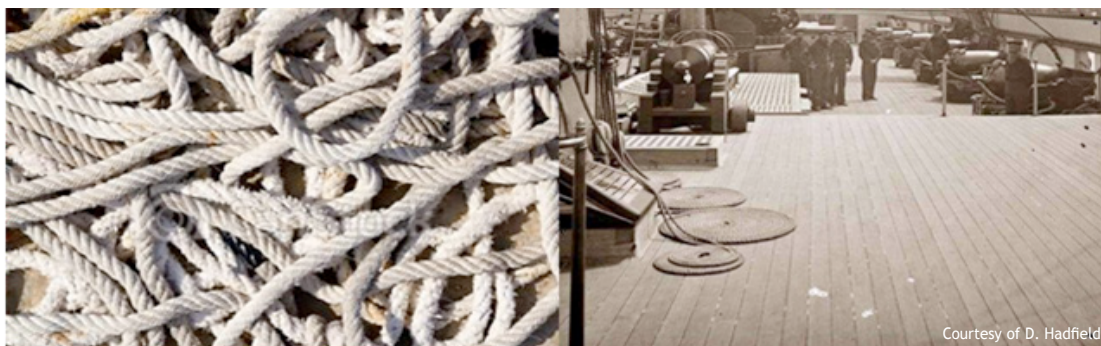


Figure 7. Clearing the Decks

Clearing the decks is a metaphor for clearing the mind of all extraneous thoughts and images prior to performance by adhering to a well-worn routine. Ticking the boxes is about using the performance pillars as a guide to ensure that nothing has been left to chance and that every aspect of performance has been honed, prepared and warmed up.





Click to play animation



I tell the players the old story:

*Every morning in Africa a lion wakes up. It knows it must run faster than the slowest antelope, or it will starve and die. Every morning in Africa an antelope wakes up. It knows it must run faster than the fastest lion or it will die.*

*The moral of the story is that when the sun comes up in Africa, it doesn't matter whether you are a lion or an antelope; you'd better hit the ground running. If you don't hit the ground running when the whistle goes, you won't die. But your dreams may die, your hopes and aspirations may die and so may those of your team.*

If all 15 players on a team have cleared their decks and ticked their boxes, they have a good chance of "hitting the ground running" when the referee blows the whistle.



Figure 8. Ticking the Boxes Model

## Hypnosis and the Subconscious

As a practitioner, I have been deeply influenced by cognitive behavioural psychology (Albert Ellis, Aaron Beck, Jeffery Young, and others) and also by humanistic and existential psychology (especially Viktor Frankl). However, over the past decade I have become extremely interested in mind/body psychology - the power of the mind to influence our physiology. One of the tools I have used now for many years is hypnosis. I stumbled upon it through my frustration at not being able to effectively help athletes change deeply imprinted beliefs and habits. I now wish I had learned about it many years ago. I have been using hypnosis for over 10 years now and have had great success with a large number of elite rugby players. I use hypnosis in a number of ways:

- As an adjunct to everything else I know and use;
- Performance confidence;
- Motivation;
- Dealing with difficult situations on or off-field;
- Anxiety management;
- Arousal control;
- Helping with pain/healing in conjunction with medical staff;
- Self-esteem;
- For assisting athletes with in-game decision-making;
- Ingraining new techniques/moves/sequences;
- Breaking unhelpful habits and thinking;
- Creating “anchors” for a number of situations including confidence, focus, and relaxation.

For those unacquainted with hypnosis (and there is still much ignorance about the subject), it has two basic parts. The first part is the induction, which is the process of getting into a hypnotic state. The second part is using suggestions, stories, and metaphors, and establishing anchors to mind/body states. Once players understand that hypnosis is a collaborative exercise and that they retain control during the experience, most are keen to try it.

There are myriad ways to induce hypnosis, but with rugby players I have found that rapid inductions (<http://www.hypnoticinductionsblog.com/arm-drop-induction-training/>; <http://www.adam-eason.com/>) are by far the easiest and most successful.

Once the whole hypnosis process is explained, rapid inductions (which are often used by stage hypnotists) allow me to induce a very quick state of hypnosis. Although I have used hypnosis to assist players in many areas, the use of hypnosis to create “anchors” is one of its most powerful applications. A neuro-linguistic programming (NLP; Grinder & Bandler, 1983) technique, anchoring involves creating a physiological link to an emotional, cognitive, or physiological state.

For example, for players who are struggling with confidence, I would use hypnosis to take them back to a time or a game when they were playing extremely well and felt “on top of their game” and extremely confident. When players report that their confidence is very high, I will have them access the anchor (which I normally pre-arrange with players). The anchor could be touching their thumbs and forefingers together, touching an earlobe, clenching their fist, or anything else that appeals to them. I will do this several times while the players are in a hypnotic state. Then I will bring them out of hypnosis and check to see that the anchor has been successfully created.

For me, one of the joys of working in rugby is its multi-cultural nature. New Zealand’s indigenous people, the Maori, have long been exceptionally talented rugby players, but over the last 30 years the influx of Pacific Islanders (largely Samoan and Tongan) who have immigrated to New Zealand has provided a wealth of new talent. My experience is that Polynesians (Maori and Pacific Islanders) are natural, gifted candidates for hypnosis. Whether it’s their long tradition of oral history or the fact that they are naturally respectful to their elders, I’m not sure, but I have found almost without fail that modern Polynesian athletes take to hypnosis and hypnotic techniques like a duck to water.



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## Summary

My father told me when I was a youngster that I would be the same person in five years’ time as I was today except for the books that I read and the people that I met. I’ve never doubted that he was right. I continue to learn every day from the athletes with whom I work, from coaches and from my peers, and the books and journals that I continue to read.

I hope that this book will help you along your path and that this chapter has given you some small insight into some of the work that is going on in New Zealand rugby and aspects of my favoured approaches and techniques.





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ISBN 978-0-9924576-1-7

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**David Hadfield MA** works as a high performance, coaching and mental skills consultant in New Zealand (NZ) and offshore. He has been a resource coach for the NZ Rugby Union for more than 10 years, working with NZ Super Rugby teams, ITM Cup teams, NZ Black Ferns women's team, NZ Under-20s, and NZ Secondary Schools teams, among others. He has also worked with many other elite athletes and teams including the NZ Track Cycling team and has mentored many high performance coaches. Many years ago, David played and coached cricket at representative level and also played club and representative rugby.



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## The *Haka* and New Zealand Rugby

An aspect of All Black and other New Zealand representative rugby teams that has fascinated, annoyed, scared, and inspired opposition (as well as many others) for over a century has been the pre-match performance of the *haka*.

A *haka* is a posturing dance of New Zealand's indigenous Maori people which is traditionally used for a variety of purposes. The *haka* can be used for entertainment, for celebration of great deeds, to farewell someone leaving (or at a funeral), to welcome those returning from a journey, and as psychological preparation for warfare.



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Te Rauparaha

The *haka* that is most recognised both in New Zealand and internationally is the *Kamate*, *Kamate haka* composed by the famous Ngati Toarangatira chieftain Te Rauparaha.

Early in the 19th century, Te Rauparaha was on the run from an enemy war party from the Ngati Te Aho tribe who wanted to catch and kill him as retribution for Ngati Te Aho people killed and eaten by Ngati Toa warriors under Te Rauparaha's leadership some years earlier. As he was pursued across the central plateau of the North Island, fellow chief Te Wharerangi helped him hide in a *kumara* (sweet potato) pit and then instructed his wife Te Rangikoea to sit on the pit entrance. In Maori tradition, female genitals contain considerable power against danger, and while most men would have refused to sit under a woman, Te Rauparaha had no such inhibitions (and afterwards used this fact to add to his reputation, rather than diminish it). At one stage, Te Rauparaha thought he would die, and then he thought he might get away with it and survive, then later he again felt he would be found and killed, then, finally he thought he would make it out from the pit in one piece - and did! This is reflected in the words of the *haka* and in his happiness to see the sun.

After the enemy failed to find him in his hideaway and moved on, Te Rauparaha climbed out from the *kumara* pit. Soon thereafter, to celebrate his fortunate escape, he performed *Ka mate*, *Kamate* (composed while he was hidden in the pit) in front of Te Wharerangi (who was notable for his profuse body hair) and his Rotoaira people (Burns, 1980).





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This is the *haka* with a translation:



<i>Kamate Kamate</i>	It is death It is death
<i>Kaora Kaora</i>	It is life It is life
<i>Kamate Kamate</i>	It is death It is death
<i>Kaora Kaora</i>	It is life It is life
<i>Tenei Te Tangata Puhuruhuru</i>	This is the hairy man
<i>Nana i tiki mai whakawhiti te ra</i>	Who caused the sun to shine again
<i>Upone Upone</i>	One step upwards
<i>Upone Kaupane</i>	Another step upwards
<i>Whiti te ra</i>	The sun shines!

This *haka* was first performed by the new Zealand Native (Maori) team who toured Great Britain in 1888 and then in 1905 by the “Originals” All Black side before their test matches. Since then it has become synonymous with the All Blacks and is by far the best known of all Maori *haka*. Furthermore, it has become a celebrated symbol of identity for all New Zealanders and is performed around the country and by New Zealanders overseas on a daily basis to celebrate, entertain, mourn, or in sport, to lay down a gauntlet. Although it is Maori in origin and in language and comes from the Ngati Toarangatira tribe, it has now become a part of all New Zealanders whatever their ethnicity or skin colour.

The words spoken by the leader that often precede the *haka* give instructions as to how it should be performed:

<i>Ringa ringa pakia</i>	Slap the hands against the thighs
<i>Uma tiraha</i>	Puff out the chest
<i>Turi whatia</i>	Bend the knees
<i>Hope whai ake</i>	Let the hips follow
<i>Waewae takahia kia kino</i>	Stamp the feet as hard as you can





## fire in the belly

Obviously rugby is a war-like game and *Kamate* is clearly a war dance. It is spiritual, in that it comes from the hearts (*manawa*) and spirits (*wairua*) of those doing the *haka*. When the All Blacks, the NZ rugby 7's team, the NZ Under-20's or NZ Secondary Schools team do the *Kamate haka*, they are communicating to the opposition: *we are strong; we have a proud tradition and represent our nation and those who have gone before us; we are together; we are ready to go into battle; we will fight until the end; we lay down a challenge to you!* New Zealand representative players these days are trained by knowledgeable Maori *haka* teachers who explain the origin and meaning (*tikanga*) of the *haka* to the players, talk about its significance, and teach them how to do it correctly. The players spend considerable time training the *haka* until the teacher is satisfied.

Opposition react to the *haka* in various ways. Most face up to it and accept it as a challenge. I have not spoken to many All Black, NZ rugby 7's, or NZ Under-20's opponents, but I'm convinced that most are stimulated and motivated by it, while I'm sure there have been times when opponents have been intimidated somewhat by it (some probably more than somewhat!). It is done less to intimidate the opposition than it is to "psyche up" the New Zealanders, but there is no doubt that it is intimidatory by nature.

In August 2005, the All Blacks unveiled a new *haka* called *Kapa o Pango*. The team saw *Kapa o Pango* as expanding the All Black's tradition of *haka* and a contribution to the team's heritage. The new *haka* has some wider Polynesian elements, speaking to the fact that players of Pacific Island heritage are now widely represented both in the All Blacks and across New Zealand elite rugby and it was felt that the new *haka*, while composed by a Maori (Derek Llardelli) and spoken in Maori, incorporated more accurately the ethnic reality of current All Black rugby teams. Since then this *haka* has been performed from time to time (the team decides when they will do it), but *Kamate* remains the preferred *haka*. My own view is that there would be an outcry if the traditional *Kamate haka* was replaced.

All Black and other New Zealand representative rugby players are well aware of the significance of the *haka* and are proud to perform it passionately and well. There is no doubt that players are aroused, both physically and emotionally, by performing it. Most are pretty "pumped up" after completing the *haka* and ready to go into battle. Some players (mostly backs rather than forwards) have reported to me that they felt over aroused after doing the *haka* and needed to take some deep breaths to calm themselves down before the match begins. As mentioned in my chapter, I use a metaphor of "fire in the belly, ice in the head" to describe how rugby players must be aggressive and intense with their bodies, but composed mentally. Some of the players who know this metaphor tell me that after the *haka*, the "fire" can creep up past the shoulders and melt the "ice" in the head - leading to over-arousal and poor decision-making (especially players in key decision-making positions such as half-back and first five-eighth). For most though, the *haka* gets them just where they want to be: feeling powerful, proud, confident, committed, and ready to "hit the ground running".

## ice in the head





For all New Zealand players who wear the black jersey with the silver fern, the *haka* is a special *taonga* (treasure) that they respect immensely for its power and significance and for what it has meant to New Zealanders and to New Zealand rugby for over a century. They do the *haka* with pride and passion, paying homage as they do it to all the players who have worn the back jersey in the past. As emotional and physical pre-cursor to the playing of the ultimate combat team sport in the world, it brings the players together as nothing else can and it prepares them to go into battle on the rugby field and give of their very best for the 80 minutes of the game. Long may it continue!

*Note - for the author, the haka has special significance because my great-great grandfather Octavius Hadfield was the first missionary (arriving in 1839) to arrive on the Kapiti Coast north of Wellington where much of my family still lives. This was the area under the control of Ngati Toarangatira chief Te Rauparaha, the composer of Kamate. Octavius had a 13 year friendship with the great chief which was ended with Te Rauparaha's death in 1851. Te Rauparaha gifted a tokotoko (talking stick) to Octavius which is still proudly cared for by my family.*



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## VIDEO

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21 All Blacks Haka vs Fiji Cibi [www.youtube.com/watch?v=db5NupD1Rg0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=db5NupD1Rg0)

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23 Tokotoko in cabinet, courtesy of David Hadfield



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