

**HALF TIME TALK:** Rugby League, unlike other sports, has only one official break where the team can be addressed collectively during the game - at halftime. The coach has to ensure that this small window of time is used effectively to either consolidate or try to change certain aspects of the game.

It can be of vital importance to the success of the team that the coach's message is transferred clearly and concisely. Over the years observation of coaches at different levels has resulted in the following phases being identified:

### **1. Preparation**

- If a dressing room is not available, find somewhere in the shade away from the sideline
- Stand where there is nothing going on in the background - crowd, sun, kids kicking footy
- If there is a dressing room, clear other teams and players
- Have ancillary things done first, eg drinks, injuries attended, wet towels, tape
- Clear the room of people not needed so there are few distractions - parents, trainers, gear people
- Ensure you have the attention of all players - make eye contact
- Squat down closer to eye level if they are sitting on the ground
- Make short notes during the game (no more than five) which can be referred to later

### **2. Delivery**

- Don't give too much information - players won't remember it
- Encourage players by emphasising both positives and negatives. Alternate your positive and negative comments, this is called the 'sandwich effect'.
- Avoid criticising an individual for poor play, have a short one on one talk before he returns to the field
- Don't let all players talk at once, after you've made your points ask for comments from the captain or key players
- Get acknowledgment from the players when you make your point - nodding of the head
- Use change of voice tone and hand movements to emphasis a point - avoid yelling and screaming
- Remain calm especially in pressure situations - if you don't appear in control your players won't
- Be specific with the words you use.

The speech is obviously the focal point of the half time break so try to avoid words and phrases, which are emotional and very ambiguous.

### **Some examples encountered over the years include:**

- "Come on guys, let's dig deep!"
- "Come on, Have a go!"
- "What's going on out there?"
- "Start playing smart"
- "Let's get into the game"
- "Our tackling is terrible"
- "Let's get out there and play well"

Coaches will have heard these and similar phrases before. These statements might sound encouraging, but give the team no real useful feedback. Messages that are more useful are words/phrases that Call to Action. Half-time instructions that highlight a negative result can be delivered in a more positive way. Not mentioning the action you wish to avoid focusses the players' attention on the positive. For example, everyone has heard a coach say, "Don't panic out there". Merely mentioning the word "Panic" can conjure thoughts of hysteria and lack of control. It would be better to say "Stay controlled and relax out there". In other words tell what to do or what action you are looking for NOT what they shouldn't do.

### **As an exercise, think of a positive way of saying these negative instructions.**

- No missed tackles
- Don't give them a sniff
- Don't be complacent
- Don't be lazy at marker
- Don't allow them to offload
- No bad passes

### **3. Summary**

- Just before the players run out, the coach should reiterate the main points even more concisely
- Announce any changes for the 2nd half team - It is useful to read out all the positions to avoid confusion
- Speak to key players/captain individually on how they can improve the performance of the team
- Wish them good luck - remain positive and believe in the players.