

## Cardiff Cobras series (2.2): Refocussing training priorities

Published 29/01/16 by [Simon Browning](#)

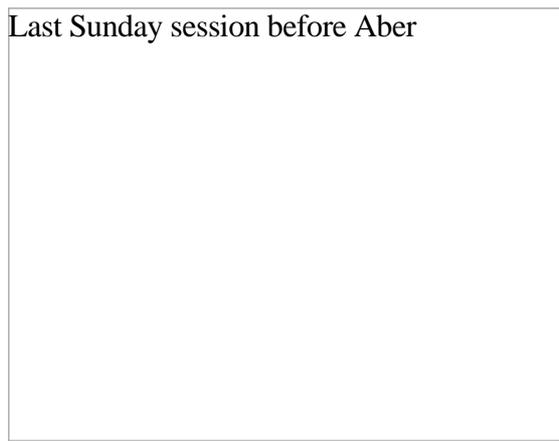
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In the last posting, we looked at how we sought to [manage player expectations and focus](#) during a time of conflicting priorities for the players. As the Welsh Bowl draws closer we now take a look at the final preparations for the game as we look to cover all the areas we need whilst contending with the weather.

As was noted in the [first post of the Cardiff Cobras series](#) we do not always train on 3G pitches. We have three training sessions, totalling 6 hours a week – Tuesday (1 ½ hours), Thursday (1 ½ hours) and Sunday (3 hours). While the Tuesday and Sunday ones are on a 3G facility, the Thursday night one is on grass. With all the recent bad weather we have had, this pitch (and others at the facility) has been repeatedly called off by Cardiff Sport. This has meant that we have been reduced in the amount of time we have had available to train.

In the short term this has a direct affect upon our preparation for Aberystwyth. However, with this as the first of 4 games back to back on Sundays it also has a longer term impact as we are already reduced in sessions given future Sundays are games – not training times. These sessions were needed for this full run of games to get the players up to speed and then just keep it ticking over during the stretch.

Last Sunday session before Aber



[Last Sunday session before the Welsh Bowl]

This means that we need to re-evaluate what we are doing in each of the sessions:

1. What are our core priorities that we must do?
2. What are our like to haves?
3. What are the additional things that we would do if we had the time?
4. Which coaches are at which sessions?

These questions are essential. We do not have the time anymore to do everything that we wanted to. While we are helped this second week with the exam period finishing so the turnout will increase, meaning the scope of what we can do increases, we still have to be selective. With two Thursdays gone we are down 3 hours of physical training time out of this two week total of 12.

Alongside this, as noted before, we are a group of amateur coaches. As a result, we don't usually have a full contingent at each session anyway due to various personal commitments outside of coaching. At this point of the year this is increased further as some coaches go back to their respective senior teams to coach and/or play. Therefore, we have a reduced pool of coaches to draw from. We also saw, in the earlier posts, that the structure of the team is that each unit would usually have its own designated coach.

With a reduced pool of coaches, we start to look to combine complementary units together and work both together more so than previously.

This situation, though, nicely tied in with some of the player feedback that we received from the players over the Christmas break. Here, one of the things that they had asked for was more of “versus” style drills, between complementary units, as they felt that was something they needed to push at this point.

Therefore, as we re-evaluated what we wanted to do – based on the questions above – things started to naturally fall into place. The things that we wanted to achieve were:

1) Core specials teams (Punt, Kick Off)

Tackling and Blocking

Unit “versus” drills

Scrimmage

2) Individual fundamentals

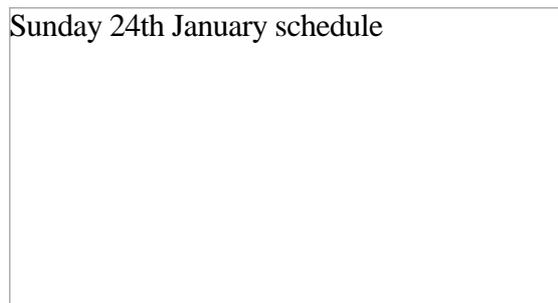
Punt Block

3) Kick Return

Field Goal

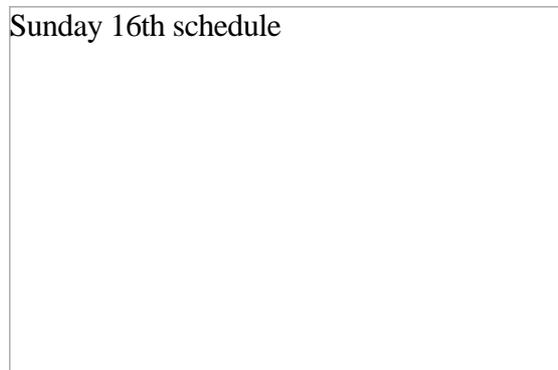
The training plan for Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> January thus looked like this:

Sunday 24th January schedule



For comparison the schedule from Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> Jan is shown below.

Sunday 16th schedule



You can see that, as a result of the issues we have discussed above, we have pulled the groups together more. There is less individual unit time, and instead players are working in larger groups.

With the reduced field time the mental side of the game increases in importance. While we might not be able to physically rep through everything that we wish, we can at least talk through (both verbally and

virtually) and mentally rep though what we need to do.

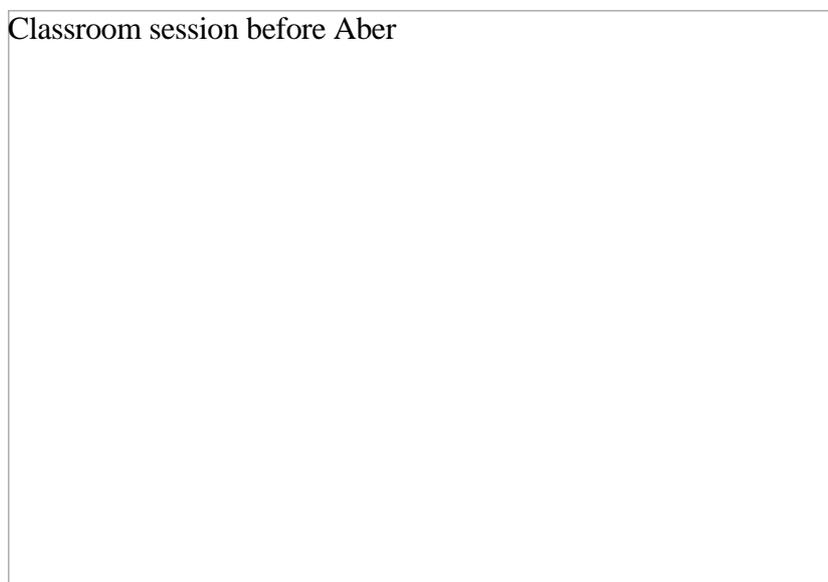
One part of this is analysing film of ourselves from training sessions through the Hudl software. In the below, we can see a portion of the screen showing footage from the Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> session. At the bottom of the screen the orange squiggle icon to the left of the play number indicates that a note(s) has been placed against that play. This software allows us to go frame by frame on plays and show exactly what is happening. From here we can note and highlight both the good practice and those areas that need fixing.



As well as Hudl, we have talked previously about how we use Facebook as a primary communications means. Here we will post up schemes/adjustments and invite discussions on them. We will also take specific plays out of Hudl and post here to discuss further, as Hudl does not cater for a discussion.



However, while these virtual tools are great at sharing information and having virtual conversations, nothing beats being able to discuss items face-to-face. Knowing that the Thursday session on the 28<sup>th</sup> was likely to be called off, this was rearranged to a classroom session for this very reason. Here we were then able to talk through different aspects of what we want to do against what we expect to see from Aberystwyth.



As you can see here, this is a much better method to communicate plans than solely via Facebook or Hudl. While both serve a purpose and allow us to get materials out to players in one go, having them in the classroom speeds up the learning and allows for real time interaction. Here we have the ability to draw up schemes on the whiteboard (in this case Aberystwyth's punt for our punt block) and then show specific film clips of that in action so that the players can see it in real life.

### **Summary and looking ahead**

In this post we have looked at the issues that can arise when weather affects your ability to train. Reduced contact time can throw out all carefully laid plans and as such it is essential to re-evaluate what your core priorities are to make sure that you focus on these. It is all too easy to try and still accomplish everything within the shorter time frame, but are you really getting what you need done? Or are you just doing it so that you can say that you at least did it, even though it was just a cursory attempt? For us, we refocussed on what we felt was the most essential activity and then backed that up with online and face-to-face communications to both reinforce and plug the gaps.

Next week will see a reflection on both the game and how well we felt these preparations worked in getting the players ready.

*What did you think of the issues raised here? Do you recognise some of the challenges we face? I would love to hear how you overcame these, or similar challenges.*

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