

# Frames of reference essential to the big picture

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Mervyn Murphy is Ireland's video analyst. Here the affable former Ireland A centre offers an overview of his job in his own words

"What I basically do is analyse the performance of the team as a whole, the units, right down to the individuals. I would break down footage of opponents as well as screening the top five, six, seven teams in the world to see what they are doing. Referees and their style of officiating would also come under scrutiny.

"What that entails is breaking down the information using a (computer) program called Sportscode. What we have done is created a network within Ireland at every professional level within the IRFU. They have Sportscode programs in place and they have generic templates to cut up games and cut up individual performances. We are developing a framework, which we are calling the National Analysis Framework.

"My role on a match is with the team, but while it is being played, two laptops are plugged into the OB (outside broadcast) units so that I get clean camera feeds into the laptops.

"As soon as the game is over I go back to the hotel and cut it all up, firstly in terms of the match, then broken down to units (back row, lineout, scrum, etc) and finally individual performances. It's done using various templates that we have designed.

"Level-one analysis would be completed about five hours after the game. That's just everything the coaches need to see to get a basic analysis of the game.

"Then I would go into level two, where I would do a game review to see how the units worked out, how our patterns worked out, whether they were successful or not.

"The third thing would be individual work, where we would break the players' games down so the various skills and defensive coaches can work on the players' performances as individuals.

"The whole package would be finished about a day and a half after a Test match. It's then left to the coaches to work it from there.

"If I was up on the morning of a Test match about 8am, you'd probably finish at three or four the following morning. Then you're up again at seven, finishing at two the following morning. It gets a little easier as the week goes on before building again before the Test. You could be talking about 15-, 16-, 17-hour days.

"At the moment we're winning. It's pretty hard when you're losing. If you win a Triple Crown, you're there that night working. If you lose a match you're working.

"It's a labour of love. I have been involved for six years and our win ratio is pretty good. There is a very good management team. It's very easy to work in that environment.

"The whole outlook on analysis has changed since I started. Players want people to be hard on them and point out their faults and weaknesses. That's created an even better environment because they are demanding more and more.

"We have an analysis room set up, nicknamed The Bunker. It's got a round table that can seat 12, with nine laptops at each of the stations and a server in the middle. I just upload the data onto the server and the players come in and take positions round it, grabbing a laptop and working away on their own or with coaches. It's all ready waiting for them the following morning.

"There would two terabytes of rugby on the server from right across the world incorporating referees and footage from Super 14, Tri-Nations, Heineken Cup, Magners League, rolling databases of backplay, rolling databases of lineouts, etc. I back up the server with these external hard drives of 500 gigabytes each.

"I video every training session, which goes straight up on the server. I'd go back in a car so that when the bus gets back it's on the server already.

"We are getting great value from filming training in terms of the feedback that the coaches can give players.

"In the last two-and-a-half years there has been a sea change in terms of attitude. Guys don't go into a game without being prepared, for fear of letting down their team-mates. We have a great bunch in the national squad with a super attitude.

"Quite apart from counter-analysis – where they look for telltale signs of repeating stepping off the same foot or carrying ball in the same hand – the Irish players pore over their opponents. How does he carry ball? How does he

hend? The players feel they have to be in there (the "bunker"). No one wants to let anyone else down.

"Analysis is only as good as its application: how well you use it. There is no point in having tons and tons of data if you're not going to use it properly. I use the analogy of swotting for an exam with a massive bank of data: you have it all ready and you run out of time in terms of trying to study it.

"You study exactly what you need, look at it thoroughly and then use it.

"There's no point in having people getting blinded by data. My role is very much a minor one when set against the work done by the management team and players."

(In an interview with John O'Sullivan)  
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