

ANALYSING ULSTER

Preparation and analysis play a major part in a professional rugby team, with players able to use a variety of tools to analyse their game and that of their opposition.

www.ulsterrugby.com spoke to Ulster's video analyst, Simon McGookin, about his role with the team.

What is your background and how long have you been with Ulster Rugby?

I have been in the role of Video Analyst with Ulster Rugby for 5 seasons now, having started during the last year of coach Alan Solomons, the 03-04 season. I came to Ulster Rugby with a background in IT, particularly programming and software development. I've been able to combine that Cup winner in 1986 with Bangor Grammar, and played at club level, more socially really, for Ballynahinch.

What does your role as Video Analyst involve?

The role is essentially to provide analysis of Ulster's team performances, individual player performances and opposition team performances.

I use a software programme called Sportscode Pro, which allows you to view games, analyse them and break them down into areas giving specific statistical information.

After a match I will be able to produce a matrix on each individual player showing for example number of tackles, passes, carries, rucks, mauls, or on the negative side missed tackles, ineffective tackles, lost turnover ball etc.

This will allow the coaches to carry out a full analysis of each player. We have got six laptops and all of the players are expected to use them to view their own performance, as well as analysing the opposition.

With regard to the opposition, I will get footage of the last three games from our next opponents. I will then go

through them with the coaches and we will look at each area of their game – attack, defence, lineouts, patterns. With lineouts for example we will be trying to see what triggers they use for lineout calls etc

Players will view the opposition tapes and we will then discuss them in team meetings, where players will put forward their views on game plans.

With regard to our own team performances, we have playing outcomes that we want to achieve during each match, as well as a positive result, in terms of points scored, possession, advantage gained, lineouts, good ball from the scrum, number of penalties, turnovers won etc. We will also look at phases and outcomes of plays, and their success.



How have you found working with new coach Matt Williams?

Matt is an enjoyable guy to work for, with great enthusiasm and an extensive knowledge of the game. Obviously having a new boss is a big challenge, but an exciting one. Matt has brought in new ideas already and will gradually continue to do so in terms of match analysis.

From an analysis point of view, the Dragons game were markedly improved. There was a 100% increase in turnover created, and a 300% increase in counter rucking. Own turnover ball lost was down considerably.

How does your role integrate with training?

We use the analysis work we have done out on the

training pitch. For example from viewing the opposition, we get non-playing members to act like opposition and carry out their moves. It allows the team to be totally prepared when they go out on to pitch on match night.

We would also film training. This allows us to review training, and to keep a database of, for example, set pieces such as lineouts that we can use for reference and review.

The recent scrummaging session with Reggie Corrigan was also filmed. This means that it can be viewed again straight away by players, in order that they can review the work that carried out in the session.

What does a typical week involve?

It certainly is not a 9 to 5 Monday to Friday role. At the beginning of the week, the video analysis work will be looking at opposition defence and attack. Mid week the forwards and backs will review their own areas of play. On a Thursday I might work with the coaches to review tapes of the following week's opposition.

On a match night, I take a video feed from the Production Company, who film the game, directly into the laptop. From this I do basic coding analysis – breaking down the match into scrum, lineout, restart etc. All of the dead time of the game is taken out, which means that you probably only have about 40-45 minutes of actual play in an 80 minute game.

On match nights the coaches also receive a 10 second delayed feed into their screen beside their seats in the Committee Box, and that means that they can see exactly what is going on.

Within half an hour of final whistle, the coaches will have the game on their laptops, and I also burn off 22 copies of the match for the players so that they each have a copy to assess the game.

Over the weekend I will then work on full analysis of the match, ready for the following week, for players and coaches laptops.

How do players work on their own individual analysis?

The video analysis would form a template for the one-on-one meeting between the player and coach. On top of this players are expected to analyse their own

performance on one of the laptops, using it as a tool for self-improvement.

The younger players would also work with a 'player mentor' who would sit with them and go through their video analysis. For example David Humphreys would work with Niall O'Connor, whilst David Pollock would go through his analysis with Kieron Dawson.

I also get requests to source footage on key positional players. For example Niall O'Connor may request footage on All Black Out Half Dan Carter.

We would also look at footage from other key positions to use as best practice, as well as identifying other areas of best practice in team performances.

The IRFU High Performance Unit is working with us to set up a database of best practice, and they also do player cams, focussed on filming a specific individual player.

Do you carry out work for the Ulster Rugby Academy?

The Ulster Rugby Academy have their own video analyst to do similar work. A.I.L. matches are also filmed for purposes of the fringe squad players so that Matt and the coaches can see how those players not in the match 22 are progressing. Plus it can also be used to give the coaches an idea of any up and coming young club players.