

Game is changing with ELVs - Smith

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Serious study of the ELVs and their implications has been on the minds of the All Blacks coaching panel as they consider their tactical options for Saturday's Philips Tri Nations/Bledisloe Cup match at Eden Park.

Backs coach Wayne Smith acknowledged that fundamental changes have occurred in the way the game is played and that has been a forced learning curve for the All Blacks coaches who were only observers, and not active participants, during the Super 14 season.

"The game has changed," Smith said.

"We've gone from coaching a game that played off scrums, lineouts and kick receipts and the odd bit of turnover ball and general kicks to one where the starting platform you have most often is free kicks and kick receipts from general play.

"The number of other platforms has reduced so it has just created a total change."

That required a change in thinking because by attempting to play the game in the old way, which is what the All Blacks did in Sydney on Saturday, they exposed themselves to fatigue.

"When you get fatigued and stressed your decision making goes to the pot. We do a lot of decision-making activities, we have done since the day we got together and they've been very good at them.

"I've got no qualms about their ability to see what they are looking for and to make the calls but when you are stressed and under pressure it is sometimes hard to do your tasks and that is where we have got to get better," he said.

While the scrum remained a starting platform, there were only six in Saturday's Test with the All Blacks attacking only twice. That meant the importance of the other possession platforms became very important.

"The starting of your possession has become more varied, and wider," he said.

If the ELVs were introduced globally the game would change and already the amount of time the ball is in play has gone from a traditional 24 minutes to 39 minutes.

He said evidence from the World Under-20 tournament played under the ELVs showed that in one game there were 110 kicks and he suggested that if you were going to play tennis you might need two umpires.

There were implications in the players suitable for the game and 2m tall players might need to be more of the explosive type of player like Ali Williams who could pass, run and kick.

Smith said the choice option was one of the more attractive variants to rugby and it wasn't necessary for teams to always take free kicks - they could use scrums if they wanted.

That was where the players' decision-making became crucial, he said.