

Rugby World Cup final ref

By Dana Snyman

AST Saturday when André Watson, South Africa's top rugby referee, jogged onto the field for the World Cup final between

England and Australia, his brain was in L1 mode.

That's the upper left quarter of the grey stuff.

André, the first referee to handle two consecutive World Cup finals, can also tell you about the other sections of his brain – L2, R1 and R2 – and how he uses them on the field to control a game as smoothly and as fairly as possible.

So it seems referees do have brains – and André recently had lessons in how to use his.

He also did fitness training for at least two hours a day before the tournament – pumping iron in the gym, running long distances, swimming and building up speed.

He also followed a special diet. "People think we just run onto the field and start blowing the whistle," the former East Rand engineer says. "It hasn't been like that in a long time."

He credits much of his refereeing success to the time he's spent with Dr Kobus Neethling, a brain and creativity expert in Pretoria (André sometimes calls him his coach).

To understand what Dr Neethling did for him you need to understand the human brain (referees' brains too, it seems) can be seen as four sections or quadrants: top left (L1), bottom left (L2), top right (R1) and bottom right (R2). Each has its own set of characteristics.

"Each individual prefers certain quadrants and their dominant thought processes," Dr Neethling says. "This determines people's actions, decisions and choices."

People with a strong L1 quadrant are realistic and have a clinical personality. They treat facts as more important than emotions and require everything to be precise and accurate.

L2 people are similar, although they place more emphasis on punctuality, decency and thoroughness.

R1 people are imaginative and inquisitive and depend more on their intuition but they believe it's important

to integrate various points of view. On the other hand R2 people put more emphasis on emotions; they're sensitive and attuned to others' emotions.

André is an R1. Before Dr Neethling took him under his wing



André Watson of SA tells how he learnt his L1 from his R2

he compiled his brain profile with the aid of a comprehensive questionnaire.

The secret, André says, is being able to sum things up during a rugby match and move your personality to other quadrants according to particular situations.

"As a referee you can't be accommodating and forgiving at the beginning of an important final," he says. "You have to be very L1 and L2 because there's a lot at stake and players have to know someone's in control."

"But as the match progresses and you see the players are starting to relax and enjoy the game you'll sometimes move more to R1 and R2. It doesn't mean you'll overlook mistakes, it means

you'll approach players differently.

"Now I'm aware of the different brain quadrants and know people's personalities incline in a certain direction I handle players a lot better."

"I wish I could referee a James Small match again. We sometimes had problems on the field. I think he felt I was picking on him. Today I'd handle him completely differently to the way I did then. Back then I wanted to be too much of a policeman."

"I didn't show enough empathy for James on the field. If I had to ref a match now in which he was playing I wouldn't just punish him and turn my back. I'd explain properly why I'd punished him."

"James inclines to R2 and gets emotional very quickly. If I'd known that at the time it would have helped a lot."



Dr Neethling doesn't say so but perhaps a brain profile would also help us understand Bok coach Rudolf Straußel's match strategy. But to do that might require L1, L2, R1 and R2 all at the same time.

FOR understandable reasons André doesn't want to say much about current players.

It's especially important to sum up the respective captains' personalities so they can be handled in a way that allows the match to run smoothly.

"The main thing is the play should flow. These days rugby is entertainment and it's the ref's job to make sure the play is as entertaining as possible for spectators."

"Of course there are rules that have to be applied but if you know how various players' brains work it helps to make things run smoothly."

With Martin Johnstone, the England captain, you have to explain everything logically. If you simply punish him or his team he'll feel you have something against them. But explain and he understands – then the game flows.

"George Gregan, Australia's cap-

Controlling the world's ultimate rugby match is more than just walking onto the field and blowing a whistle, André says. Here's how he learnt to think properly

MAIN PICTURE: André Watson, the first referee to handle two consecutive World Cup finals, is an R1 person, someone who's inquisitive and intuitive. **ABOVE:** André plots strategies with Dr Kobus Neethling, a brain and creative expert, who compiled André's brain profile.

tain, is different. He's very R1. If things are going well for his team he'll try all sorts of things to outmanoeuvre you. But when he's under pressure he can get emotional. That's when you need to stay calm.

"Bok captain Corné Krige also understands best when things are explained to him logically."

Dr Neethling has helped other South African referees too. Soon they'll all know what their brain profiles are and how best to apply them to ensure the best match possible.

Freek Burger, manager of referees affairs at the South African Rugby Football Union (Sarfu), is all-in-favour of the technique.

"Freek deserves praise," he says, "because referees who know how to use their brains have a huge advantage over those who don't."

There's also a possibility referees on the international panel will be grounded in the workings of the brain in future.

"I hope more people realise our referees aren't there just to be mean," André says. "We do everything we can to make the game as attractive as possible within the rules."

He even had an eye test – which he passed. □

See, refereeing isn't a no-brainer