
TEACHTAIREACHT ÓN UACHTARÁN



Is cúis mór áthais dom réamhrá a scríobh don lámh-leabhar seo. Tá súil agam go mbainfidh gach éinne tairbhe as.

The coach plays a crucial role in the development and promotion of Gaelic games. The coach is the person who enables players to become competent by assisting and challenging them to achieve their true potential - whatever that may be. The challenge for the coach is to create the right environment for players to develop - where they can practice without fear of error or failure, where the needs of the player are at the heart of all activities and where they feel safe and supported. Being a successful coach is not always all about winning trophies, rather the improvement in individual and team performance marks out the truly successful coach.

The GAA's Grassroots to National Programme outlines the Coach Education Programme. This pathway, which will allow you to develop your skills as a coach, focuses on the continuing development of coaches, so that you can improve as a coach by means of a series of specifically designed courses, workshops and conferences developed using internationally recognised principles of best practice. The programme allows coaches to continually develop their skills, and to progress at a rate suited to their own development.

Ensuring that coaches have the ability to support our players with suitable training and preparation for games is the key focus of our Coach Education Programme. Over the last three years the Coach Education Programme has undergone a significant review, and the revamped programme promises to be the leading Coach Education Programme throughout sport. I would like to recognise the huge body of work that has been undertaken in this regard, and thank the Coach Education Workgroup and Coaching Ireland for this.

Coach education builds on the experiences of the coaches involved, where participants are encouraged to share experiences, question practices and challenge views. The Award 1 course and its associated resources provide this forum. This manual offers further insight into the materials covered on the Award 1 Youth course. Combined with other resources that are available, coaches will have a range of materials to refer to long after the course has been completed. I would encourage all coaches to take the time to use this resource and progress along the Coach Education pathway.

Finally, I would like to thank you, the coach. It is a fact that every team within the Association requires a coach – someone who will challenge our players to achieve their potential. By engaging with the Coach Education Programme you have indicated that you want to be the best coach that you can be.

Ní neart go cur le chéile.

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'Criostóir Ó Cuana'.

Criostóir Ó Cuana

Uachtarán Cumann Lúthchleas Gael

THE ROLE OF THE COACH OF THE YOUTH PLAYER

The coach holds a special role within any GAA club or school. The coach must be a leader, continually studying, planning and assessing the game, while being aware of the abilities of the team. Coaches should strive to bring out the best in their team, and develop them as both a group and as individuals.

The coach is someone who builds competency by assisting and challenging players to achieve their potential. The roles of the coach are many and varied. In many ways it is more than simply teaching the tactics associated with Gaelic games. Throughout the sporting year the coach may be called upon as an advisor, assessor, demonstrator, friend, fact finder, fountain of knowledge, mentor, motivator, organiser, planner and supporter.

The coach must be able to communicate well with individual players and with the team as a group. Off the field the coach is responsible for the development of a culture that highlights the values and ethical behaviours that the club or school wish to project.

Coaches are significant role models, especially for the Teenage player. With this in mind, coaches need to be continually aware of their attitude and behaviour.

Coaches within a Club or School should develop an agreed Code of Conduct to ensure that they project the correct message in line with the GAA Respect Initiative to their players, supporters, opponents and match officials.



KEY POINTS TO BEING A COACH

- Keep Winning in Perspective
- Losing isn't Failure
- Strive for Excellence in the Pursuit of Victory
- With Praise and Encouragement, Players will Risk Error to Learn

The 3 main priorities when Coaching a Teenage Team are:

- Ensure that all participants have Fun
- Develop the ability of the player and the team
- Ensure that safety is paramount

THE ROLE OF THE COACH

- **Analyser and Advisor** - Analysing a player's performance in training and games and advising on the need to improve an area of their game, providing appropriate training activities and game
- **Communicator** - Providing clear instructions and feedback, as well as possessing the ability to listen and develop a rapport with players
- **Demonstrator** - Demonstrating the activity to be performed is not always necessary. Coaches are not judged on their own playing ability - often the best coaches are those that have not played the game to a high level
- **Friend** - Over the years of working with a team and individual players, a personal relationship is developed between player and coach. The coach becomes someone who they can discuss their problems or share their success with. While being a person that any player can approach, the coach must always follow the guidelines of the GAA code of Best Practice in Youth Sport.
- **Fact Finder** - Gathering information on your own players and opponents and keeping up to date with current coaching and training techniques
- **Fountain of Knowledge** - A coach will often be asked questions on diet, different types of training, sports injuries and topics often unrelated to Gaelic games
- **Leader** - Coaches should have a vision of what needs to be done, in each session and throughout the year. The coach is firm, fair and flexible, and prepared to learn as well as coach
- **Mentor** - Any players attending training sessions are under your care, with responsibility to their parents and family for ensuring that they are safe and secure. It is important to get prior information on any health issues they may have, and ensure that the training/playing area is as safe as possible. A good coach should also support players should they have any problems or sustain any injuries
- **Motivator** - Maintain the motivation of individuals and the team during the year
- **Public Relations Officer** - Representing the Club/School by their actions
- **Role Model** - Demonstrating the values and behaviours that the coach wants his team to display. Providing direction and purpose for the conduct of players
- **Organiser and Planner** - Preparation of training programmes, developing Team Play and outlining tactics. This role incorporates the ability to organise training and games to suit players, other coaches and the Club/School as a whole
- **Selector** - Involved in the selection of the most suitable team for each game
- **Supporter** - Competition can be nerve-racking for some players, especially the young player. Often they rely on the coach to be around to help support them through the pressures

SUCCESSFUL COACHING

MAXIMISING THE COACHES PERFORMANCE

Apart from having an understanding on how the rapid changes that take place during adolescence, coaches at this level will maximise their effectiveness provided they place sufficient emphasis on:

- Consolidating the basic skills in a varied and stimulating fashion
- Introducing and developing standard matches, where there is proper regard for tactical development and team play
- Increasing awareness of the psychological skills which underpin good performance, e.g. being self confident, avoiding anxiety, being able to set and achieve goals, not being afraid of failure/losing etc.

Teenagers, especially those in their early teens should be exposed to as many different playing positions as possible with the emphasis on developing their technical skills and their ability to play off either side.

Coaches who choose to coach teenagers will have the pleasure of witnessing dramatic changes in their players - physically, emotionally, technically, tactically and socially. These changes bring inherent difficulties as well as enjoyable times.

SUCCESS AS A COACH

Winning is part and parcel of being a successful coach, but successful coaching is more than simply beating opponents. Successful coaches help players to master new skills, enjoy competing with others and develop self esteem.

Success as a coach will be impacted by your coaching philosophy more than any other factor.

Your coaching philosophy is a set of beliefs or principles that you bring to coaching which guide you in the decisions that you will have to make.

In developing your coaching philosophy it is necessary for you to decide what you want to accomplish as a coach and how you will deal with the diverse range of people - players, match officials, administrators and parents - that you encounter.

Your philosophy will be developed through asking questions of yourself and considering issues which may occur during your coaching career. Your coaching philosophy will be greatly determined by your belief of what success as a coach, and the goals that you set for yourself and your team:

- to have a winning team
- to help young players have fun
- to help young players develop technically, tactically, physically, psychologically, socially

COACHING STYLE

Your coaching style will determine how you organise your coaching sessions, what skills and strategies to develop and the role of the players in any decision making.

There are essentially 3 styles of coaching that a coach will lean towards:

1. The Dictator

The coach makes all of the decisions. Players listen and comply with the coaches instructions. The coach feels it is their role to tell the player what to do. This style can lead to a player being motivated to play through fear of the coach.

2. The Baby Sitter

The coach makes as few decisions as possible, gives little instruction and provides minimal guidance in organising activities. Many of these coaches adopt a 'throw out the ball and have a good time' approach.

3. The Teacher

The coach shares the decision making with the players. The cooperative coach provides the structure and environment for players to set their own goals.

For the Coach to think about:

- Consider each of the coaching styles and their characteristics. Take account of your own personality, your players age and ability.
- Which style suits best?
- Would there ever be a time when a different style of coaching is required?

COACHING PRINCIPLES

The principles of coaching below should form the basis of your coaching style.

Safety

It is the coaches responsibility to provide an environment that does not expose the player to injury. This incorporates an appropriate warm-up, protective equipment, rest and recovery, as well as safe playing and training facilities.

Be Organised

The coach is well organised, is enthusiastic and through his own actions, sets the work ethic for the team. Coaching sessions and match day arrangements are organised well in advance. The coach must be well presented, appropriately dressed and in control at all times.

Use Assistants

Surround yourself with people that are competent and you can work with. Ensure that each assistant has a clear role and understands their responsibilities. Communicate regularly and listen to their opinions and advice.

Take Responsibility

Remember its your team and you have ultimate responsibility for how they behave and perform.

Set Ground Rules

Outline to your players and assistants your expectations regarding start times, behaviour (on and off the field), treatment of match officials and opponents, and discipline.

Develop Team Spirit

Encourage togetherness on and off the field. Highlight team play efforts rather than individual

efforts. A team effort, such as a goal from good Team Play, should be strongly emphasised.



Respect Individuals

Remember that all players are individuals. Teenage players have different personalities, temperament and rates of development. Treat all players as individuals, ensuring that all players are recognised and treated individually.

Encourage Player Responsibility

Encourage more experienced players to take on extra responsibilities at training and on match days. Encourage ownership by players by seeking their opinion on opposing players and teams, how training is progressing and your game plan.

Reinforce the Basics

The skills of Gaelic games should be practiced in each coaching session. Tactical Prowess and Team Play are built on a solid foundation of Technical Proficiency

Knowledge and Care for the Game

The serious coach will have a genuine love for Gaelic games. Each coaching session and game should also encourage a love of the game in each player.

Coaches Strategy for Success

1. Show up on time
2. Say what you'll do
3. Do what you say
4. Finish what you start
5. Say please and thanks

COACHING TEENAGERS

Being a coach to teenage Hurlers and Gaelic footballers can be a difficult job. At this age, players are developing physically, psychologically, socially and emotionally. Where this stage of development begins and ends is hard to define exactly, as each player will develop at a different rate.

Coaching teenagers places unique demands on the coach. Depending on the player, the coach may need to adjust their activities to cater for changes in coordination, balance and growth. The coach may be required to offer words of encouragement to players who become frustrated with some of the difficulties of growth and how this affects their ability to play.

The motivation to play differs slightly from that of children. Teenagers get involved in Gaelic games because of:

- Enjoyment - Gaelic games are fast and fun games, often high scoring
- Skill - Gaelic games are considered very skillful games amongst teenagers
- Social Recognition - Teenagers, perhaps for the first time, recognise that playing Gaelic games can provide a higher social standing. As well as being skillful, Gaelic games are seen as being physically demanding and tough games, where courage and determination are important. Showing proficiency at such games can lead to a player developing high self esteem, and be recognised amongst other teenagers
- Possibility of Success - Many teenagers continue to participate as they have aspirations to play at higher levels - whether that be at adult Club level or Inter County level.
- Coach - The coach can be the most important factor in whether a player continues to play at this stage. Situations where the coaches goals and the players needs can lead to players becoming disillusioned and dropping out.
- Participation - Low involvement through poorly designed training sessions, or through a lack of games is one of the most serious causes of drop out. Being pigeon holed into one position, especially one seen as a less glamorous one, can be an issue here.
- Training and Games - Games can be fun, but if training is dull or set at too high a level players can lose interest quickly.

SPECIAL CHALLENGES TO COACHES OF TEENAGERS

Adolescence is a time when players:

- Have conflicting commitments - Teenagers like to be involved in a number of different sports, or with a number of different teams (within the Club, School and/or County set up). Many also take part time jobs to provide some income
- Seek Independence - Teenagers often want to display a higher level of independence by not having to rely on their parents
- Pressures from School - The later years of second level schooling places additional pressures on teenagers.

Some practical consideration that a coach can make for teenagers to assist them at this time include:

- Use School facilities for training purposes - reduce the need for students to travel to participate in Gaelic games. Developing a good Club/School link can help in this case, especially where training and competition schedules overlap
- Provide flexible schedules to accommodate the demands of study, and/or work
- Carefully follow the progress of each player, offering encouragement and advice where necessary

THE TRANSITION TO ADULT GAELIC GAMES

Teenagers are in a phase in their lives where there is a distinct change from the fun filled environment of childhood play, to a more structured type of organised training and competition seen at adult level. Coaches should always maintain the enjoyment factor in sport, and many teenagers will attempt to keep this through trying something different, some tricks or touches that they have developed through individual practice. Some of the problems associated with the progression to adult Gaelic games include:

- Adult training regimes imposed on less developed teenage bodies and minds
- Player skill levels may not match the demands of performance in adult situations
- The player may not be sufficiently developed cognitively to understand and implement the Coaches instructions
- Coaches may question the players commitment and discipline as they struggle to come to terms with the more demanding nature of teenage play over childhood play.

Coaches may find that they become disillusioned if they do not adequately take notice of the above issues. Coaches must be prepared to change their expectations in response to accelerated growth and emotional development.

GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT FROM CHILDHOOD TO ADULTHOOD

Coaching teenagers can be viewed as an adventure, as the teenage years are one of the most dynamic and changing periods of a players development.



Players experience a growth spurt at the end of their childhood years, on average at the age of 11.5 years. At its peak, players can grow up to 4 inches in height per year, with most physical growth completed by 16.5 years.

Often players of the same age in years (called the Chronological Age) will vary greatly from team mates and opponents of the same age in terms of their physical, psychological, intellectual, social and emotional development. This can vary by up to 4 years - so a player of 14 years of age, can be biologically as young as 10, or as old as 18. The difference between Chronological Age and the level of maturity of an individual player gives rise to the concept of Early Developers and Late Developers.

Early Developers

Early developers are players that are further developed at an earlier age than other players in their age group. These players often dominate games at underage level due to their early physical maturity and the advantage that this gives them over average and late maturers. Examples of early developers are well known, with these players often being known as the 'next big thing' - from Jimmy Doyle (Tipperary) and Tommy Murphy (Laois) to Brian Corcoran (Cork) and Joe Canning (Galway). All of these players were earmarked for success from a very early age largely because they were dominant figures in games in their early years.

However these players are the exception rather than the rule. Each Club and School will be well aware of players who were Early Developers, whether in your own team or on opposing teams. Once other players 'catch up' in a developmental

sense, and the dominance of the Early Developer is reduced, the result can be a difficult psychological adjustment for both the player and the coach. If the coach does not recognise that the reduced dominance of the Early Developer is more often related to an improvement in the other players rather than a decrease in effort from the Early Developer, the result might be that the Early Developer begins to feel isolated and marginalised at the loss of their 'stardom' as coaches may change their position on the team to accommodate players who developed at a normal or a slower rate.

Late Developers

Just as each Club and School is aware of Early Developers, within each team there will be a number of players who did not show early promise but go on to develop into important members of the team.

Late Developers would typically be physically smaller than the average player in their age group and can often drop out of sport because they do not have the physical size or strength to match their team mates or opponents, or because they are placed in peripheral positions on the team leading them to believe that they are not important to the team.

It is important that the coach tries to allow for maturational differences in players by attempting to match players of the same maturity in training and games. Thus Early Developers are exposed to a greater challenge by working with other players who can match their strength and physical size, while Late Developers will get a sense of satisfaction that will encourage them to continue to participate as they develop.

Remember also that it is not just physically that players can develop at an accelerated or slower rate. Young players will vary in their intellectual ability, their social and emotional maturity which may affect the rate at which they learn new skills, or develop tactical or team play abilities. These differences will influence the rate at which you can coach your players. However, if you attempt to allow for physical, intellectual, emotional and social differences amongst players, you can assist all players to achieve their true potential.

THE OTÚ COACHING MODEL



Quality coaching is one of the key requirements to ensuring that participation is maximised and playing standards are optimised. To support quality coaching, the GAA has devised the OTú Coaching Model.

The OTú Coaching Model is a blueprint which provides the basis for organising Training Programmes which enable players to deliver on their True Potential and achieve Total Performance.

The term OTú - the O as in oxygen and Tú, Irish for 'you' - has its origins in the fact that the desire to excel is driven from within.

The model operates on the principle that players will excel when the 3T's - Technical Proficiency, Tactical Prowess and Team Play - and the 3P's - Physical Fitness, Participant Feedback/Playing Facts and Psychological Focus - are integrated and developed in a manner which has regard for best coaching practice.

The 3 T's and 3 P's provide an insight into 'what' a Coach works. The OTú Model also focuses on 'how' a Coach does it. The 3 C's - Communication, Coaching Inputs and Cohesion - are a key component of the OTú Coaching Model.

The more that coaches and players succeed in getting the balance right, the more the players and team will maintain a consistent level of performance. The OTú Coaching Model outlines the knowledge required to achieve this level of success.

The GAA Coach Education Programme is designed to progressively explore the OTú Coaching Model. As coaches progress along the Coaching pathway, they will gain a greater understanding of the model, and how the integration of the 3 T's, the 3 P's and the 3 C's will enhance coaching sessions and lead to a more cohesive team unit.

THE OTÚ COACHING MODEL

As part of the Award 1 programme, participants explore the various features of the OTÚ Coaching Model. Coaches gain experience at coaching each of the 3 T's – Technical Proficiency, Tactical Prowess, Team Play – and the 3 P's – Physical Fitness, Participant Feedback/Playing Facts and Psychological Focus. This resource will provide some additional information on each of these areas that can be used during the course as a record of important points on each area, or as a reminder when the course is completed:



TECHNICAL PROFICIENCY (KNOW HOW)

The ability to perform the underlying techniques of the game accurately, consistently and at match tempo.



TACTICAL PROWESS (KNOW WHAT AND WHEN)

The ability to weigh up match situations and decide on what option to take and when to take it



TEAM PLAY (KNOW WHO AND WHERE)

The ability to anticipate movements and synchronise who goes where during play or set pieces



PHYSICAL FITNESS

The ability to perform the basic techniques, engage in physical contests and respond to the signs, sounds and signals experienced during the game with the least possible expenditure of energy



PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK/ PLAYING FACTS

The ability to identify playing strengths and areas where improvement is required and to accept why changes in training, tactics and team line out etc may be necessary



PSYCHOLOGICAL FOCUS

The ability to maintain attention on the here and now and switch concentration as the need arises

THE OTÚ COACHING MODEL



Consider for a moment the case of the plant and the gardener. The plant requires air, light, heat, water, soil and protection to grow. The gardener knows that all of these need to be provided or the plant will die. The gardener also knows that too much of any one will not be good for the plant and will not compensate for too little of another.

In much the same way the OTÚ Model outlines the 6 key ingredients for the development of a player. The correct application of the 3 T's and the 3 P's will allow the player to grow and flourish. The coach also knows that too much emphasis on any one of the 3 T's or the 3 P's will not compensate for a deficiency in any other.

No one part of the model is more important than any other and at different times in the players' development the focus may be greater on some than others.

The skill of the coach is to know which to emphasise at a particular time, ensuring that over time a player is exposed to all of the ingredients required for them to develop.

The integration of the 3 T's and the 3 P's - through the 3 C's - in the right proportions and at the right time will result in players reaching their True Potential.

In the following pages each of the 3 T's and the 3 P's will be discussed, and activities to develop each will be described.

“If nothing Succeeds likes Success, Nothing fails like Excess.”

(Loehr J & Schultz T)

TECHNICAL PROFICIENCY



Technical Proficiency is the ability to perform the underlying techniques of the game accurately, consistently and at match tempo.

DEVELOPING TECHNICAL PROFICIENCY

Gaelic games are among the most technically demanding games in the world. Hurling and Gaelic football stand apart from other sports as, to play the game well, all players - regardless of playing position - are required to master the techniques of the game. Performing the techniques of Hurling and Gaelic football requires excellent hand-eye, eye-foot and hand-foot coordination. The best players are also able to perform the techniques using both sides of their body - their left and right hands and their left and right feet.

Developing the techniques of Gaelic games requires practice. As already outlined, it is the role of the coach to ensure that the activities that take place during coaching sessions are pitched at an appropriate level - high enough to challenge a players' technical ability, but not so high that the player does not have a realistic chance of success.

This is not an easy job for any coach, and even the most experienced coaches can get it wrong from time to time. To assist coaches, the GAA has outlined the Skill Development Model, which identifies progressive forms of activity which the Coach can use in Coaching sessions. Within each different type of activity, Coaches can increase or decrease the difficulty using a simple formula - the STEP formula (see page 15).

ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP TECHNICAL PROFICIENCY

There are a number of different types of activity that can be used to develop Technical Proficiency, both on an individual and a collective basis:

Ball and Wall Activities

A (Hurling) wall, handball alley or any basic wall can provide for a range of different activities that a player can perform individually or in groups, often outside of structured coaching sessions. These activities develop Technical Proficiency by maximising the number of ball contacts in a training period, and as the only equipment required are a (Hurley), ball and a wall, they can be practiced in many places and at almost any time.

Technical Drills

Technical Drills focus on the performance of the underlying techniques of the game. There are 3 types of drill:

1. Basic Drills
2. Intermediate Drills
3. Advanced Drills

which require players to practice the techniques in progressively more challenging situations.

Basic Drills

Key Points:

- Players are stationary or performing at walking or jogging pace
- Emphasis on the ball doing all of the work

Basic drills allow the player to focus solely on the specific technique being practiced. To do so, all other demands on the players attention are excluded.

This means that movement is reduced to the minimum required to perform the technique. All further demands, such as speed, opposition and additional techniques are not relevant at this stage. If a player must contend with other demands on their attention, e.g. to run or turn while practicing the new technique, then they will not be able to fully focus on performing the technique to a competent level, and performance will suffer.

TECHNICAL PROFICIENCY

Basic Drills are usually set out in a linear manner, with players forming lines, circles, squares or triangles, and operating in small groups. The ball is played from player to player.

Intermediate Drills

Key Points

- One or more players must move
- Emphasis on the ball and the player doing the work

Intermediate drills introduce movement and require the players to have a significant level of proficiency in the underlying technique to complete the activity.

In this type of drill, the player learns to perform the technique with movement involved, with the pace of the movement gradually increasing - from walking to jogging to running - as the player's proficiency increases.

Intermediate Drills typically challenge players to perform the technique through the following progressions of movement:

- Stationary to Moving - performing the skill in a stationary position, playing the ball to a moving partner
- Moving to Stationary - performing the skill while moving, playing the ball to a stationary partner
- Moving to Moving - performing the skill while moving, playing the ball to a moving partner

Advanced Drills

Key Points:

- Pressure is increased by speeding up performance towards match tempo, or by reducing the space/time available to players
- Reaction responses, multiple techniques or physical contact may be introduced, but the activity should maintain a defined movement pattern.

As a player's proficiency increases, activities must progress further towards game like situations to further challenge the players. By introducing greater pace, reduced speed or time, other techniques, decision making or an opponent the activity becomes more like a game situation.

Opposed drills are the most challenging of the Advanced Drills. Opposition should be introduced

gradually, initially as 'token' or 'shadowing' opposition, progressing to full opposition as players develop.

Opposed drills will increase the pressure on the player performing the technique, and introduce decision making by requiring the player to make decisions about when to perform the technique. Opposed drills can be very productive with proficient players, but introducing opposition against a player who is not proficient at performing the technique can result in their performance - and consequently the activity - quickly breaking down.

The most important element in developing Technical Proficiency is that players have the ability to perform the technique in game like situations. While drills provide an organised structure for gradually developing technique, fun games and modified games should be organised in tandem with drills.

Fun Games

Fun Games are activities which further help to develop Technical Proficiency, while exposing players to limited decision making (Tactical Prowess).

As technical drills are organised in lines, lanes, circles, triangles or squares, and result in linear movement, players attend in a limited area of their vision.

Fun games and Grid Games generally take place in a defined space, but allow random movement within that space, e.g. a grid, a court or a field. This helps players to practice the technique while moving as they would in a game.

From a Technical Proficiency point of view, Fun Games challenge the players to perform the technique in a variety of situations. Fun Games allow players to develop positional sense, but limit the type of opposition that players encounter as they continue to develop. Players must make decisions about where and when to move as in a real 'game' situation, and are encouraged to develop an awareness of space and time.

Fun Games help to develop the characteristics of Tactical Prowess and Team Play and, as such, should form a large portion of any coaching session.

TACTICAL PROWESS



Tactical Prowess is the ability to weigh up match situations and decide on what option to take and when to take it - for example, to shoot for a score, carry the ball, pass it on or play it into space when in attack; or place the opposition under maximum pressure when defending.

Tactics are a set of plans designed to maximise your strengths or target an opponents weaknesses to gain an advantage in a match situation. Developing Tactical Prowess is about enabling your players to make good tactical decisions on the field of play. A lot of emphasis is placed on developing the technical abilities of players - especially at younger ages. As the players develop and are exposed to more competitive situations, the coach should focus on the development of decision making and problem solving skills - developing the players Tactical Prowess.

Decision Making Skills

When players understand the problem that faces them in the game situation, and have the appropriate knowledge available to them, the player is ready to make the appropriate tactical decision to give his/her team an advantage. In Hurling and Gaelic football it is rare that a player will have a prolonged period of time for this process to occur. Therefore the best way of developing a players decision making skills is to expose them to game situations in training.

This can be achieved in a number of ways:

- **Teach the Tactics – in whole, then in part:**
By teaching the overall game tactics and then breaking the tactic down to its constituent parts

players can see how they fit into the overall game plan, rather than teach each player their role and then outline the overall game plan.

- **Observation**

Players can observe both themselves and other players in game situations, and the decisions that they make in each situation and analyse the options available, the decisions made and the outcome of the decisions. This can also help players to establish the tactics employed by other players and teams, and devise plans to counteract these tactics.

- **Variable Practice**

Incorporating the principle of variation into training can result in players being forced into decision making on a more regular basis than if they were performing the same tasks consistently.

DEVELOPING TACTICAL PROWESS

Making good decisions on the field of play involves using a set of tactical skills, that can be developed with good coaching. To develop tactical prowess, players need to have the ability to read the play or situation, develop the knowledge needed to make the correct tactical decision and apply their decision making skills to the on field situation.

- **Reading the Situation**

Reading the game involves players using the skills of concentration, attention and perception. Players gather information using the senses of sight, sound, touch and their sense of place on the field. Perception involves the players gathering and interpreting this information. Often the amount of information that a player gathers in a situation is too much for the player to interpret at once. Players with good tactical prowess develop the skills to direct their attention to the important information and to eliminate information that is not relevant to the decision. Concentration is the ability of a player to maintain focusing his/her attention on the relevant information.

It is possible to coach a player as to which clues to look out for in a game situation. Once a player knows what clues to look out for, it is possible to develop their attention and concentration skills (Psychological Focus).

TACTICAL PROWESS

- **Controlling Feedback**

By providing occasional feedback to players in training situations and instead asking questions of them, the coach can compel the player to correct errors themselves, forcing them into the decision making process on a more regular basis. If the coach constantly provides feedback to the player, there is the danger of over analysing the performance (paralysis by analysis), or the player may become reliant on the coach to solve all problems as they arise, depriving them of the opportunity of developing their decision making skills.

ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP TACTICAL PROWESS

As outlined earlier, the critical element in performance is that players have the ability to perform the skills of the game in game like situations – Practice like you Play, and you are more likely to Play like you Practice. In order to develop Tactical Prowess, it is important that the players have the ability to perform the techniques of Hurling and Football. This will ensure that in any given match situation, the player will have the ability to perform any technique correctly. In analyzing any match situation there are two key questions to be asked:

- **Did the player choose the correct technique to perform?**
- **Did the player perform the technique correctly?**

If the player chose to perform the correct technique i.e. play the ball to a team mate first time instead of taking possession, but performed the technique incorrectly there may be a problem with that players Technical Proficiency. If the player chose to perform an incorrect technique for the situation that was facing him/her, (but performed the technique correctly) the player needs to develop their Tactical Prowess. In order to develop a players Tactical Prowess, there are a number of different types of activity that can be performed.

- **Game Play Routines**

Game Play Routines involve placing players in a situation where they are forced to weigh up the choice of which skill to perform, and how to perform the skill in order to complete the drill. In this case, the players' pattern of movement may or may not be restricted. Therefore, the player must adapt to the situation by being aware of his/her options, chose the correct option, and be technically proficient enough and physically fit enough to execute the option and recover in time for the next situation.

Game Play Routines may be Invasive or Part Invasive. Part Invasive drills restrict the movement of players to pre-defined zones. This allows the player to focus attention onto information that is relevant to that particular position, before advancing onto Invasive Drills, which remove the restrictions and force the player to be aware of all options on the field of play.

It is possible to provide a player with a restricted number of choices on which technique to perform in order to assist them in developing Tactical Prowess.

Game Play Routines differ from Advanced Drills in one key aspect. Whereas Advanced Drills require players to perform skills within a defined pattern, e.g. in a straight line between 2 cones or from one marker to another, Game Play Routines require players to perform skills while in situations that simulate those they may be exposed to in a game. Game Play Routines are sometimes referred to as Match Running Drills or Informal Drills. Essentially, as players are not limited to moving in a specific manner between set points, they must make decisions about where to move and when and how to perform the skills required.

Game Play Routines train improvements in adapting technical proficiency to pressure situations and improving tactical awareness which are vital elements in ensuring a player is competent in a match situation. Game Play Routines are the essential link between the development of technical proficiency and being prepared to play in full game situations.

TACTICAL PROWESS



Use the **STEP** Model to alter any game or activity

Space	Changing the amount of space available may reduce or increase the difficulty. More space means less pressure, but more running! Use zones, or restricted areas, to prevent all the players chasing the ball (beehive play) or to encourage width or to aid the defensive or attacking players.
Task	Change the task that the players are required to perform, e.g. choosing a more difficult technique to perform, or increasing the pace from a walk to a jog, or changing the target from a fixed to a moving target, or varying the playing or scoring rules for all or selected players.
Equipment	Change the equipment used, e.g. from using a big ball to a smaller ball, or from using a wall to a partner, or a bat to a hurley. Note: Small balls are easier to throw but harder to catch, whereas big balls are easier to catch and harder to throw. Similarly longer implements or implements with smaller heads are harder to use than shorter implements with larger heads.
Players	Introduce opposition, firstly in token form, before progressing gradually to full opposition (where the possession is contested in a game like manner). Change the number of players to give an advantage to the attacking or defending players.

TEAM PLAY



Team Play is the ability to anticipate movements and synchronise who should go where during play or set-piece situations in order to score or convert possession into scores when in attack, or minimise the amount of clean possession and time and space available to opponents to make clear use of the ball, when defending.

Team Play is concerned with much more than simply positional play. Team Play refers to the combination play between team mates that can result in an increased chance of scoring when in possession, and reducing the chances of opponents scoring when not in possession.

Developing Team Play involves:

- Team Plans
- Anticipation
- Creating Space in Attack
- Denying Space in Defence
- Combination/Support Play
- Communication

ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP TEAM PLAY

Team Play is an extension of Tactical Prowess, with the two sets of skills intertwined. Where as to develop Tactical Prowess, the players develop their ability to read a game and decide on which action to take, Team Play is the ability to anticipate the actions of the other players on the field, and mould these actions into a game plan.

Team Play is developed using Game like situations, incorporating Modified Games, Small-Sided Games and Full Games.

Therefore the player must adapt to the situation before him/her by anticipating the movement of the ball, team mates and opponents, communicating effectively with team mates and providing support to team mates in possession. It is through the combination of each of these techniques that a team develops cohesive Team Play.

• Modified Games

Modified Games are practices that focus on different aspects of Team Play through games. They are often undertaken in a defined space. Many variations may be used, depending on the objective of the game, e.g. 2 v 1, 2 v 2, 3 v 2, 3 v 3.

Conditioned Games can be used to develop the ability to retain possession (passing sequences), to create or reduce space (3 v 2 etc) or to develop contact or reaction skills.

Modified Scoring Systems (e.g. target scores or time limits) and Modified Playing Rules (e.g. no solo, one bounce, fist pass only) can be used to focus on particular techniques or aspects of decision making.



TEAM PLAY



Modified Games apply the skills learned to team situations. Players must make decisions on where and when to move to combine as an effective unit as in a real 'game' situation. Such games encourage awareness of time and space but also help develop specific characteristics of Team Play, e.g. support play and communication.

By not limiting players to particular positions the coach allows each player to develop greater decision making skills and tactical appreciation for different aspects of play.

- **Small Sided Games**

Small Sided Games are an extension of fun games and grid games but are basically smaller versions of full games. Smaller numbers are used to ensure plenty of ball contact for all involved. Positions may be used but it is advisable to allow individual players to play in as many different positions as possible over time.

Tactical Prowess and Team Play are further developed but with more specific relevance to full

sided games as the movement and open play mimic aspects of full Hurling and Gaelic football.

Games such as 7/9/11/13-a-side games provide players with the opportunity to encounter challenges similar to those found in full-sided games, however due to the smaller numbers and/ or restricted playing area, the number of times a player can be in possession, or contesting possession with an opponent is increased.

- **Full-Sided Games**

Ultimately players train to play full-sided games. Once the earlier progressions have been achieved, it is vital that players prepare for full-sided games by playing full-sided 15-a-side games with players in appropriate positions. In progressing towards this stage Backs and Forwards games are an effective method of developing positioning and allow the ball to be played into an area more frequently increasing pressure and optimising training time. It is still possible to develop specific aspects of the Technical, Tactical or Team Play components of play through employing modified playing rules and/or playing area.

PHYSICAL FITNESS FOR THE TEENAGE PLAYER



Physical Fitness is the ability to perform the basic techniques, engage in physical contests and responds to the signs, sounds and signals experienced during the game with the least possible expenditure of energy.

Because of the huge variation in the rate and timing of development of teenagers, the coach of teenage players must have a keen understanding of the processes of development that make one teenager different from another.

As some players will be early maturers, some average maturers and some more late maturers, coaches require the ability to modify their coaching programme to cater for the developmental needs of all of their players.

While this section specifically deals with physical fitness and conditioning, the importance of integrating skill development with physical fitness development cannot be over emphasised. With this in mind, coaches should always remember the STEP formula for adapting any activity.

Using the STEP formula, coaches can ensure that an activity can be adapted to develop a specific area of fitness appropriate to the age and stage of development of each player.

Coaches should attempt to make the training

programmes as relevant to each player as possible, taking into account the requirement for specific positional development.

COMPONENTS OF FITNESS

Success in conditioning will largely depend on how the components of fitness can be imbedded into the coaching programme. There are a number of different components of fitness for Gaelic games. There are certain components of fitness that have been identified as being best developed at each age group. For the youth player, the areas best developed include:

- **Speed**

Speed development for teenagers focuses on the development of the anaerobic systems. Activities should focus on developing speed over intervals of between 5 and 20 seconds, ensuring that adequate recovery occurs between sprints. Activities designed to develop reaction time and acceleration using short sprints are appropriate.

- **Endurance**

Before the onset of puberty, it is common for many players to improve, often dramatically, based on the improvement in their movement skills. Aerobic levels can be developed in teenage players, incorporating a number of different types of activities. Due to the different developmental stages that players go through during their teenage years, it is possible to group players based on their development in order to develop their aerobic capacity.

- **Flexibility**

Monitoring of flexibility is important amongst teenagers as, due to the large variations in the rate of growth, flexibility can be reduced if appropriate activities are not undertaken.

Introducing dynamic flexibility activities into the warm up, and cool down portions of a coaching session serves to ensure that the muscles are stretched throughout their full range of motion.

PHYSICAL FITNESS FOR THE TEENAGE PLAYER

• Strength

Resistance training for teenage players is ok – provided the activities are supervised, safe and age appropriate. The teenage years are a time of great change for the teenager. Teenagers grow more in these years than at almost any other time in their lives. This accelerated growth provides an opportunity to develop muscular strength and endurance in a planned manner.

Coaches must remember that the basis behind resistance training for teenagers is to develop their muscular strength and endurance, not to lift ever larger weights, or to build larger muscles.

The young player can build muscle strength using:

- Free Weights
- Machine Weights
- Medicine Balls/Resistance Bands/Tubes
- Body Weight activities

NUTRITION FOR TEENAGERS

The value of good nutrition for players of Hurling and Gaelic football is appreciated increasingly by players and coaches alike at all levels of the game. The nutritional needs of teenagers differs from those of adults. Due to the rapid growth that occurs during the teenage years, more calories and protein are required. It is essential that teenagers consume a well balanced diet to avoid succumbing to obesity or potential eating disorders.

Each teenager is different, and there are not golden set of rules for teenagers, however there are some basic facts that the coach can be aware of to work out what advice is best to give to teenagers:

The coach should:

- Know how to access information on diet and sport specific nutrition, how to organise this information and, if necessary provide details to parents.
- When going to away games or trips, the coach should ensure that adequate meals are available to the players.



- Avoid overstating the need for a particular body shape, size or percentage body fat that will assist the player to achieve their full potential.

REQUIREMENTS DURING ADOLESCENCE

An increased requirement for nutrients during adolescence is necessary to cope with the major growth changes taking place during this time.

Appetite is a good indicator of energy needs, but some teenagers are attracted to fad diets, or fad foods. This can be an example of teenagers expressing their independence by giving up some food habits that were introduced during childhood and developing their own habits.

Education and information about the best choice of snacks and meals are important for teenagers.

Teenagers will eat high fat snacks and take aways, but they should be encouraged to balance these with healthier foods.

Emphasise good food as part of a healthy lifestyle.

Coaches must make players aware of the impact certain types of foods can have on a players' preparation for a training session or a game so that they can avoid these foods when appropriate.

PSYCHOLOGICAL FOCUS



Psychological Focus is the ability to maintain focus on the here and now and switch concentration as the need arises.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CHANGES AND THE TEENAGER

A child is not simply a scaled down version of an adult. If the child is different from the adult, then the teenager is very different again.

Social and physiological changes can result in emotional imbalance and instability of mood. The young person's self assurance is replaced by a fluctuation between esteem and doubt. This is also a crucial factor in the formation of attitudes regarding participation in Hurling or Gaelic football.

Towards the end of adolescence the agitation and disharmony give way to the assurance which is linked with a visible increase in social capacity. Intellectual development reaches near adult level and attitudes are consciously critical and searching in the pursuit of independence. As the teenager moves towards the 17 - 22 years age group the personality fills out around the basic characteristics which have been developed up to then.

TEENAGERS AND SPORT

While the benefits of being involved in sport seem obvious - the development of skills, self discipline, the exhilaration of physical fitness and general well being, the achievement of performance targets and the consolidation of friendships, there are also a number of costs involved, apart from the obvious

ones - time, money and travel. These include fear of failure, lack of enjoyment, overtraining, injuries and more importantly for young people, missed opportunities to participate in other leisure pursuits.

In view of the increasingly sedentary approach being adopted by many young people there is growing concern about their noninvolvement in sport. Some actively resist games and most forms of physical exercise, while others have a 'take it or leave it' attitude. The situation has been compounded by a number of other sociological factors which have rendered it increasingly difficult to promote school games.

Coaches, trainers and those involved with underage teams find it hard to understand such indifference, particularly when it is reflected in poor attendance at training sessions or games.

Participation in team games can play a powerful role in helping young people through this period of rapid development, as they provide an excellent opportunity to mix with others, when socialising might otherwise prove difficult. Provided this involvement is combined with enjoyable and successful learning experiences, worries about the nature and speed of development will become less significant or forgotten. The sense of achievement gained will help to contribute to the development of a lifelong interest and enthusiasm for games. Building on this base, young people gain a positive self-image and increased self confidence which leads them to take pride in their appearance and a positive attitude to exercise and general well-being.

In view of the many alternative sport and leisure pursuits which are now available to young people it is important to remind people of the need to ensure that Hurling and Gaelic football are promoted as effectively as possible.

This can be achieved by:

- Pre-planning a regular, varied and enjoyable programme of games and coaching activities
- Having due regard for the physical, psychological and social development of those involved, e.g. not having 14 year olds competing against 18 year olds

PSYCHOLOGICAL FOCUS

- Ensuring that participation does not become an excuse for any of the types of excess which young people are being associated with.

TEENAGERS AND COMPETITIVE STRESS

Parents, coaches and peers all contribute to competitive stress. Self perception and self expectation can be further contributory factors as teenagers are prone to evaluate their self-worth on the basis of winning or losing. While some players handle this intensity well, and even thrive on it, many do not, particularly those who may be highly motivated, other-orientated or perfectionist by nature.

There is further evidence to suggest that teenagers who are incapable to handling stress are more injury prone. The belief is that teenagers tend to lose concentration when under constant pressure. This loss of concentration interferes with performance and leads to injury.

Competitive sport can, however, provide the opportunity to regulate and control disruptive worries and anxieties provided:

- The coach understands the integrated mechanisms which underpin worry, anxiety and applies the knowledge in a way that is meaningful and relevant to the teenager.
- The teenager has developed sufficient self awareness to be able to integrate the holistic workings of the physical (body) and cognitive (mind) processes.

In view of the mounting concern about the undesirable effects of long term stress, learning to cope should be an integral part of not alone preparing for games but also of the overall education process. These same coping skills will last a lifetime and as the principles of coping with stress are the same, irrespective of its root cause, they can be used to control a host of environments ranging from competitive pressure to exam pressure, disagreements, threats of reduced self-esteem etc.

Players and coaches throughout Gaelic games have recognised the importance of addressing the mental aspects of preparation for performance. Mental skills associated with reaching your true potential can be learned in the same manner as any technical skill. Through mental skills training you can gain a competitive advantage.

GOAL SETTING

Goal setting is the process of outlining targets or objectives. These targets are usually sport-specific goals and can be long term - winning the league - or short term - score 3 points from 6 shots during a practice game. Goal setting can be a particularly powerful motivating tool for teenagers as it can:

- Focus attention on the target
- Increase the effort and intensity
- Encourage persistence and practice over time
- Promote the development of problem solving skills

The coach can play an important role in setting out goals for an individual player or a team. By helping the player or team set goals there is a commitment from both sides towards realising the goal.

Writing down the goals, and placing them in a prominent place, helps to reinforce the commitment entered into when the goals are set down. The coach should recognise that the targets should be challenging and achievable but also flexible, as the aim is to challenge the player to achieve the goal, not provide an impossible task. By providing regular feedback, the coach can further challenge the players to achieve their goals. Shorter term goals are better for some teenagers as often they will not be able to realise how they are progressing towards a long term goal. This can result in a loss of focus and reduced motivation.

MOTIVATING YOUR PLAYERS

1. Recognise achievement

The majority of young players will develop self confidence and the motivation to try harder when they receive recognition for their efforts, especially when it comes from someone they respect, such as a coach.

Recognise achievements in addition to those related to performance or skill development. These might include:

- positive behaviour
- regular attendance
- caring for equipment
- assisting the coach

This ensures that not only the better performers receive recognition.

2. Set goals

Provide opportunities for all players to experience success by setting goals in both the short term and long term. Goal setting can have a dramatic positive effect on both motivation and skill development.

For example:

- see how many times you can use only one hand (skill development)
- during the next five minutes see if you can limit your opponent to under two points (competition performance)
- this season try not to miss more than two training sessions (attendance)
- ensure your boots are clean for each training session (care of equipment).

3. Self-motivation

The feelings of pride and self-confidence that arise from success, and the feedback gained from the coach and significant others may be more important than the achievement itself. It

encourages the development of self-motivation, hence reducing a young person's need for reinforcement.

4. Provide leadership opportunities

Providing opportunities for leadership and expecting your players to assume (not too great) responsibilities are very important. Acknowledging their efforts through leadership motivates further success.

5. Be consistent and enthusiastic

The environment a coach creates, what they say and how they say it, should be consistent, caring and enthusiastic. The coach's behaviour towards all young people, regardless of their sporting ability, should be the same.

6. Provide challenges

Don't underestimate the motivational value of small-sided competitive activities or seemingly frivolous challenges.

7. Vary your coaching programmes

A variety of practice games and activities will reduce the possibility of boredom. Challenging players to invent a game to practice a particular skill can be very successful in a number of ways.

8. Be organised

A carefully planned session increases the coach's confidence and this effort will rub off and help motivate players. Making sure enough equipment is available for the number of participants involved is often underestimated as a motivating factor. Nothing bores or frustrates young players more (often leading to disruptive behaviour) than waiting in long lines, or watching the more talented players dominate the equipment.

9. You can make practice fun

Regardless of the level of competition or the ability of the participants, most young people take part in sport for enjoyment and fun. Ensuring that young people have fun encourages them to maintain their involvement.

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK / PLAYING FACTS



Participant Feedback/Playing Facts refers to the ability to identify playing strengths and areas where improvement is required, and to accept why changes in training, tactics, team line out etc may be required.

In Gaelic games, it is difficult, if not impossible, for coaches to notice and remember all the key events occurring within a training session or match, equipped only with their knowledge of sport and their powers of observation.

That's where the relatively new discipline of the Playing Facts come in. The Playing Facts have developed rapidly over the last decade and has been facilitated by advances in IT resources available to coaches. This area is now acknowledged as an aid to performance enhancement at all levels.

Essentially, the Playing Facts about creating a reliable record of performance by means of observations that can be analysed, with training programmes and team line ups adapted based on these observations.

The process of identifying the Playing Facts typically involves the coach identifying key factors to be studied within the game or training session. Depending on the time and technology available to coaches, this can be done manually - using paper and a pen - or using a variety of computer based analysis systems.

WHY GATHER THE PLAYING FACTS?

The Playing Facts are a very useful tool in the armory of the coach. The Playing Facts allow for an independent analysis of the performance within a game or training session. Specifically, the Playing Facts can be used to:

- Protect players from the world of opinion
- Help players stay in reality
- Give players the right type of attention
- Help players set realistic goals
- Increase motivation
- Depersonalise issues

GATHERING THE PLAYING FACTS

The first step is to outline the possible events in a game and prioritise which to include in the analysis. This means defining the range of possible actions in the game and linking these actions with possible outcomes – for example a goalkeepers puck/kick out would constitute an action, with Won Clean, Lost Clean, Won Break, Lost Break, Free Won, Free Conceded the possible outcomes. In Gaelic games there are an almost infinite number of possible actions and outcomes ensuring that the coach must prioritise those which influence the game most.

Therefore the coach must limit the information being recorded to solely that information that will be of benefit.



PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK / PLAYING FACTS

WHY DO WE NEED THE PLAYING FACTS?

Using these events and outcomes, it is possible to create a paper template – or an electronic template if using a software package – that the coach uses to analyse the game. Each time an action occurs in the game, the coach notes the action and the outcome. By analysing all of the outcomes it may be possible to pinpoint areas that require adjustment within the team. This type of analysis enables the coach to create an objective statistical analysis of the match to use when giving feedback, whether that be during the game or in subsequent coaching sessions or team meetings.

USING THE PLAYING FACTS?

It is important to be careful with how the data is presented since, in isolation, these can give a distorted impression of performance.

Video footage is usually presented via television, although presentations on a computer enable much more flexibility when presenting information to players. Computer software (e.g. Power Point) can be used to enhance the visual information that players are shown, by highlighting key situations in the game and using these for feedback purposes.

Reducing the total amount of information presented to those that highlight the main objectives of the analysis is recommended, as large amounts of statistics can often be confusing for players and coaches. As well as this, statistics from categories that are too general may not be very informative (eg a chart showing the number of passes).

The Participant Feedback/Playing Facts Process - A Summary

Follow the diagram below to follow the Playing Facts process:

1. A game is played
2. The coach observes the game and analyses the performance
3. During the game, changes or substitutions are made
4. After the game, the coach plans forthcoming coaching sessions to rectify issues highlighted within the game.
5. Coaching sessions take place, leading to
6. Another game

How does analysis of the Participant Feedback/Playing Facts work in practice



From here the process continues. Effective communication is a crucial part of the process.

“The value of stats here is that it reduces the extent to which a player is prejudiced by a coach. Stats might show that the player who is a ‘bottler’ is actually, say, the best tackler in the team, while the team’s hero, who is afforded the privilege of the halo effect, is actually contributing very little beyond, say, scoring from frees.”

Kieran Shannon, The Sunday Tribune, October 2007

COMMUNICATION FOR COACHES OF YOUTH PLAYERS



As a coach, communication is one of the most important skills that can be developed. Coaches must communicate with their players, match officials, administrators, parents and other coaches. Communication might be in person, over the telephone, one on one or in group settings.

The youth player can provide additional difficulties for the coach. Differences in the use of both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication can make effective communication less clear.

Non-Verbal Communication

Communication can be both verbal and nonverbal. You will often hear players say “The coach is in a good mood today.” or “The coach is angry because we lost.” How do your players know that? Coaches communicate many messages to players by their actions, facial expressions, use of arms and hands, body position, overall posture, and voice characteristics.

How do you behave before a game? What do you do during a game? How do you behave when your team wins/loses? What do you do when a player makes a mistake in a game? The coach’s non-verbal behaviour should reflect what is verbally communicated to the players. Act in a way which shows that you are consistent with what you say. For example, if you ask players to respect for the referee and his officials, it is inappropriate for you to challenge a referees decision.

What you communicate non-verbally to your players can be as important as what you verbally communicate. For example, a player fouls an opposing player but is not penalized. The coach, by not verbally expressing disapproval of this infraction, is giving approval to this and other players for such unsportsmanlike conduct.

Effective Use of Voice and Body

Effective verbal and non-verbal communication with your players is affected by how well you use your voice and body.

COMMUNICATION FOR COACHES OF YOUTH PLAYERS

Effective Use of Voice

- Speak clearly and make eye contact with the players as you speak.
- From time to time, look carefully at the players who are farthest away from you. Can you see clear indications that they can hear? If there is any doubt, ask them.
- Use a voice that is only slightly louder than a normal speaking voice, except for the few times it is necessary to project your voice over a long distance.
- Speaking unnecessarily loudly encourages players to make noise themselves. Many coaches are able to settle players down by lowering their voices so that close attention is required to hear.
- Change the tone of your voice to communicate varying moods (e.g., energetic, patient, serious, concerned).
- When explaining a skill or an activity, use language that is easily understood by the players you are coaching.
- Watch for reactions from the players that they understand or do not understand your explanation.

Effective Use of Body

- Move amongst the players so that they feel you are spending some time with each of them.
- Make regular eye contact with all players. This not only reassures them, but can provide you with valuable feedback as to who is listening and understanding.
- Face all of the players whenever possible. By turning your back, you lose the impact of facial expression, which is a valuable non-verbal communication tool.

Listening Techniques

One important component of effective communication is listening. How good a listener are you? How much of what your players, other coaches or parents say to you do you actually hear? Listening to players tells them that you are genuinely interested in their feelings, thoughts, and suggestions.

Good listening is a difficult communication skill to learn well. Like all skills, it takes practice to be a good listener. The following techniques can be used to improve your listening skills.

Attentive Listening

Listening starts by the coach being attentive to the player, which can be demonstrated by your facial expressions and gestures, and by remaining quiet while the player is speaking. Eye-to-eye contact with the player at the same level is important.

Paraphrasing

Repeat in your own words what it is you think a player said to see if that is what they meant. Paraphrasing allows you to see if you have a complete understanding of what was said and provides feedback on whether the you interpreted the information correctly. Any areas of misunderstanding can then be explained by the player.

Restating

Repeats the last phrase or few words of what the athlete said without changing anything.

Inviting Clarification

Request that the player clarifies or expands on something that has been said.

Gaining Attention

- Designate a specific area to gather at the beginning of each practice.
- Use a signal (e.g., whistle) to indicate attention is desired. If a whistle is used, blow just loud enough and long enough to gain initial attention.
- Gather the players in a group and make an effort to make eye contact.
- If one or two players are not paying attention, look directly at them and ask for their attention by using their name(s). If a player is constantly disruptive, it may be best to remove them from the rest of group, continue with the session, and talk later with the specific player.

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION FOR COACHES

As a coach, it will be necessary to communicate with your players as one grouping, smaller groups of players (e.g., the forwards that play together) and as individuals. Regardless of the number of players you are communicating with any at one time, the same principles apply to communicate effectively.

- **Be an Enthusiastic Coach**

Establish your role as an enthusiastic leader of your team. Your enthusiasm will affect how you players enjoy playing and training.

- **Be a Positive Coach**

Interact with your players in a positive manner. Set a good example of desired behaviour. Constant criticism and yelling at your players will decrease their motivation to participate, so give praise and encouragement to your players frequently.

- **Be Demanding but Considerate**

Clearly establish what is expected of the players. Your expectations should be based on their abilities and experiences. Don't expect more than is reasonable and realistic.

- **Be Consistent**

Communicate in a consistent manner from one situation to another (e.g. from training session to session, game to game, or from training to a game) and with all of your players. If you are inconsistent you will leave your players confused as to what it is you mean and what is expected of them and will also reduce their respect for you.

- **Be a Good Listener**

Good listening is an important component of effective communication. Demonstrate a willingness to listen and your players will express their feelings, concerns, and suggestions to you.

- **Provide Effective Feedback in Identifying and Correcting Skill Errors**

Give feedback in a positive, informative manner. Be clear and concise in the feedback you provide. When correcting an error, first tell the player what is being done well. The player then knows which parts of the skill are being performed correctly. Then tell the

player what needs to be done to correct the error. Always end on a positive note by encouraging the player to spend more time on the skill. It is important that a player's feelings of self-worth should not be affected because the player demonstrates an improper technique.

- **Explain the Contribution of Each Player to the Team**

All players are part of the team and the coach should demonstrate confidence in each player's ability to contribute to the team. You should value the contribution of each player to the team. Players should be encouraged by the coach to be supportive of each other's contribution to the team.

- **Treat All Players as Individuals**

It is important to be sensitive to individual needs and to show all players that you care about them as individuals. Make an effort to talk with them all individually at every coaching session and game. Greet players by their first names.

- **Communicate in the Same Manner with your Child as with other Players**

Parents who coach their own children often put unrealistic expectations on them. If you coach your child, remember to treat them as you do the other players on the team and don't demand more of them than you do of the others. As well, if you coach your children, avoid showing favouritism toward them. It is important for you to treat your children as individuals, the same as you would do for all the other players, but do not show any particular favouritism toward them.

GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR SESSION

Before

- Plan your session before, or if using a pre-planned lesson plan read it carefully.
- Know and understand the skills you intend to teach.
- Make sure any equipment you intend to use is in order and set up prior to beginning.
- Check out the facility and conditions of the ground. Plan how the area is to be used.

During the session

- Introduce the session but keep your introduction brief. Explain what is going to happen and establish a few basic rules.
- Get things moving quickly.
- Spend the first few minutes on the warm-up. Make sure this session becomes a habit and fun to complete.
- Devote some time to revising a skill that you have previously learnt.

When demonstrating the new skill to be introduced at the session, remember:

- Be enthusiastic
- Make sure your instructions are simple and clear
- Demonstrate slowly at first
- Explain the new skill as part of the game
- Speak loudly and make your voice interesting
- Do not expect the players to take in too much detail - two or three points are enough at any one time
- Make sure everyone can see any demonstrations you may do
- Allow the players plenty of time to practice the skill. Your role is to observe and make corrections and to provide positive reinforcements
- Avoid shouting and criticising players.
- Making mistakes is a natural part of the learning process so you must not make the players feel uncomfortable if they cannot master a skill. Re-demonstrate if necessary. Point out what's wrong and show them what should be done.
- The players will want to spend some time in game play. Select one of the many modified games and let them play with a minimum of instruction from you.
- Be sure to properly conclude your session. This should include some more stretching and perhaps a slow walk if the session has been particularly strenuous. Talk to your players as they do the cool down exercises and revise the key points of the session through questioning. Provide lots of praise. Hand out any material you have and remind players of the time and venue of the next practice session or competition.

After the Session

Evaluate your session by asking yourself:

- Was it fun?
- Did the players enjoy themselves?
- What might be done to improve the session?
- Did the players participate enough?