



Simonstown GAA

COACHING MANUAL - 2006



MISSION STATEMENT

That we as coaches in Simonstown strive to create an environment in which all our players experience a sense of Achievement, Fun and Fair Play as they learn to develop their talents to their full potential.

Purpose of this Coaching manual

This coaching Manual is designed to encourage and facilitate Best Practice in all matters related to Coaching Gaelic Football in Our Club.

The Manual attempts to provide a framework and reference point to our Coaching activities and can be read as official club policy for coaching Gaelic football in Simonstown Gaels.

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- 4 Coaching Football to Teenagers
Skills – Drills Conditioned Games for 12 to 14 yr olds, 15 to 16 yr olds, minors.
- 5 Coaching Adult Football

1. Coaching Gaelic Football

The GAA now has in place an excellent Coach Education and Development Programme, however, Coach Education is not a one off process – it is continuous and builds on personal experiences learned through observation and participation in games, involvement in teams and in coaching sessions.

'The Childhood Phase'

With the youngest age group (i.e. between 6 – 12 years) the emphasis is rightly on that of Skills Development. In function of this and in terms of best practice it is now a central part of clubs coaching policy that ALL children between the ages of 6 and 12 in our club develop their technical proficiency (skills) through the provision of appropriate practice drills and sustained involvement in "Go games".

What are 'Go Games'

The "Go Games" concept of players development involves three different levels "First Touch" (7 – 8) "Quick Touch" (9-10) "Smart Touch" (11-12), these have been developed based on principles now adopted within the GAA known as the Fair Play Index; that is, to provide ...

- (1) Full Participation
- (2) Frequent Prospect of Success
- (3) Development of Full Potential

Each game reflects best practice in terms of utilizing modified rules and equipment that is appropriate for each child's stage of maturation. As part of the clubs coaching policy it is intended that all underage coaches will receive instruction in the implementation of the Go Games and appropriate practice drills.

Why the 'Go Games'

All the recent research into the coaching of Gaelic games to young players has found that when participating in small sided games the children work harder (as measured by heart rate), had more touches on the ball (catches, lifts and scoring attempts) expressed a greater level of enjoyment and satisfaction as compared with participation in technical, tactical and physical development, improvements are greater when participating in small-sided games.

'The Teenage Phase'

The next challenge for Coaches is that of developing footballers through the Teenage years. Proper and effective Coaching during this phase of player development involves addressing the following issues...

1. Improving Individual Technique and Skills
2. Developing Tactical Awareness
3. Teaching the Fundamentals of Team Play
4. Educating the Essentials Associated with Success
5. Motivating Players

In the past there has tended to be an over-concentration on physical fitness during this phase of player development. However, more recently, developments in the modern game have demanded that Coaches establish a conscious balance between Fitness Preparation and improving Players Technical and tactical abilities and their knowledge of an effectiveness in key aspects of Team Play.

'The Adult Phase'

Building on the work already done at the Child and teenage stages, the Adult Coach, in order to take the players to the next level, must acquire and display a keen knowledge and understanding of the principles of the Modern game. Understanding the principles of Team Play in Gaelic football is one of the key cornerstones of successful Adult Coaching. Transferring this knowledge into an effective coaching session is the difficult challenge faced by the Adult Coach.

Coaching at this level must emphasise the factors involved in Team Play and concentrate on developing a footballer's ability to MAKE THE RIGHT DECISIONS. To this end, the following provides an outline and introduction to the principles at play in the modern game.

2. Introduction to the Principles of the Modern game

The starting point for every Coach of team games is to develop a thorough understanding of the Principles of Team Play. Essentially, there are three phases to most team games.

1. Attack
2. Defence
3. Midfield

Principles of Attack

Firstly, the principles of Attacking Play in modern Gaelic Football as presently understood are.....

- DEPTH:** Support on the ball
Players as Targets
Short and long ball passing options
- PENETRATION:** Moving the ball through or into the oppositions defence at speed
- WIDTH:** Playing balls into wide positions to draw and isolate defenders away from each other and from central positions giving more space inside for forwards to see.
- MOBILITY:** The movement of players in from or behind the ball therefore moving defensive players out of position and causing disruption in their defence.
Players making runs to leave space for others.

IMPROVISATION: Players changing roles/positions.

COMMUNICATION: Supporting Players giving verbal and non verbal signals to the Players in possession.

Principles of Defence

The principles of Defence are used to help counteract forward play. The main principles of sound Defence include.....

Make Forward Make Decision

Delay

Balance

Concentration

1. Make Forward make Decision

Too often defenders commit or lunge into the tackle without knowing what is going on behind them. A good defender will strive to get close enough to the attacker to prevent a score been taken but not too close to allow the forward to dummy or side step him. The defender must always keep in mind that the forward has to hop it – solo it – get fid of it – and the key principle of defence must be to MAKE THE FORWARD MAKE THE DECISION. Good defending is all about waiting for the right moment to make the tackle or force the forward on the ball into a potentially low scoring area of the pitch.

2. Delay

Too often defenders see their primary duty as dispossessing their opponent, often resulting in a free kick being awarded, whereas the key initial function of good defence is to delay and prevent the forward from doing what he wishes to do with the ball.

3. Balance

Balance also as a principle of Play in Defence is essential. With forward being mobile and moving defenders around the pitch and attempting to pull them out of position, it is essential that the defence maintains balance through depth and cover. Defenders have to be coached to 'read' the game while at the same time working on their 'man marking' skills. Maintaining Balance in defence is also about good Communication, Vision and Decision Making by the defender.

4. Concentration

For effective defending, high levels of concentration are essential. Concentration is central to getting players behind the ball and into the key defensive area to provide cover and depth.

N.B: Central to good defensive work is Competence with the tackle. This will be dealt with later in the Manual.

3. Coaching Football to Children

Fundamentals for Effective Underage Coaching

The coach must keep the emphasis on Participation and enjoyment. Be conscious of keeping everyone involved.

Our aim and focus at all times must be on long-term player development – it can take 10 years to develop a top class player – so take the time to work on fundamental skills.

At the core of underage coaching there must be quality time given to fundamental movement skills. Significant research has clearly shown that if fundamental motor skill training is not developed by the age of 12, skills cannot be successfully recaptured. Good fundamental movement skills must be developed before we can teach the specific skills of Gaelic football.

Always keeping mind that you as coach are a Role Model who will influence how youngsters feel and act towards others both on and off the field. Your attitude and actions as coach must demonstrate proper behaviour and good example in terms of winning humbly and losing graciously and explaining what can be learnt from both experiences.

Children generally try to do their best, by focusing on their strengths and addressing weaknesses sensitively you will make children better team players.

Remember, the will to win is innate in human nature and when kept in perspective can bring out the best in young people, however an over emphasis on winning can hugely effect player development and give rise to all kinds of negative thoughts and behaviour. In our club the order of priority at underage will be: - PLAYER DEVELOPMENT FIRST, WINNING SECOND.

In terms of best practice all underage coaches in the club are asked to acquaint themselves thoroughly with the "Go games manual".

Key points for coaching football skills to children . . .

Catching Skills

The chest catch

Keep eyes on the ball.
Arms held out with elbows close together.
Catch the ball into arms.
Pull the ball into chest to protect the ball.

The low catch

Keep eyes on the ball.
Bend knees and back low to the ground.
Arms held out with elbows close together.
Catch the ball in the arms.
Pull the ball into chest to protect the ball.

Hand passing skills

The hand pass

Keep eyes on the ball.
Hold the ball at chest heights with weaker hand.
Strike the ball with open palm of strong hand.
Aim to pass the ball into partner's chest.

The fist pass

Keep eyes on the ball.
Hold the ball at chest height with weaker hand.
Strike the ball with closed fist of strong hand.
Aim to pass the ball into partner's chest.

Kicking skills

The punt kick
Eyes on the ball.
Drop ball onto strong foot.
Kick with the instep (laced part) of the boot.
Follow through in the direction of the target.

Solo skills

The toe tap
Hand holding ball is lowered towards kicking leg.
Eyes on the ball.
Kick ball using instep of the boot and point toe towards oneself.
Catch the ball at chest height and pull the ball into chest.

Guidelines for an Underage Training Session

Every effective training session for children must give due attention to the following key elements of player development....

AGILITY, BALANCE, CO-ORDINATION – ABC
RUNNING, JUMPING, THROWING – RJT
CATCHING, PASSING, KICKING, STRICKING – CPKS

These three elements will now be referred to by their abbreviations ABC, RJT, CPKS.

In short, a properly structured training session for children should include:

1 ABC, 1 RJT, 1 CPKS

So when planning your session, please keep this in mind, and try to ensure that you have the necessary equipment to carry this out.

Finally, while these guidelines are based on good experience, remember that you as coach are the person in charge. If you feel the need to improvise, be confident in doing so.

Structure of a session

1. Warm-up

Always start with a warm-up or fun game (ie Bulldog, tail tag, stuck in the mud etc)

2. Skill Revision

Quick revision of the skill learned in the last session. If possible have a small competition of the revised skill.

3. New Skill

Call the children in a semi-circle

Keep the talk-time brief

Break the skill down 3 or 4 key steps

Demonstration of new skill (the coach does not be able to perform the skill, get some of the better children to demonstrate the skill)

As they improve add pressure ie competition, time-limitations, more balls, reactions, opposition etc.

4. Conditioned Games

Once they become familiar with the new skill that was introduced a conditioned game focusing on the new skill that was introduced ie for the punt kick skill you could use 'No Man's land' as the conditioned game as it focuses on kick skills.

5. Mini-Game

Should be small sided games so players get more touches of the ball. Preferably 7 v 7 (1 goalkeeper, 2 defenders, 2 midfielders and 2 forwards). Use zones to stop 1 or 2 players dominating the game.

Focus on the new skill learned ie bonus points awarded for use of the new skill or using weak hand/foot. Rotate position to give them an opportunity to play in each position. Keep the play moving.

Tips for Coaching

Always plan your training session beforehand.

Be organised. Arrive early to set up your drills before you start.

There should preferably be one coach/mentor to every 5-7 children.

Have the right equipment ie whistle/bibs/cones/balls etc.

Keep talk time brief.

Set some ground rules before you start ie everyone stops what they are doing and listens when the coach blows the whistle.

Face children away from distractions when explaining something.

Always give encouragement/praise.

Get the children to help with tidying up after training ie everyone grab a cone, makes coach's job easier.

10. Always ensure that the playing area is safe for the children to play on. If an area is unsafe find an alternative playing surface or cancel training.

Sample Format for 1½ hour training session

Warm-up -	10 mins
ABC's -	10 mins
RJT's -	10 mins
Skill revision -	10 mins
CPKS new skill -	10 mins
Conditioned game -	10 mins
Mini game -	30 mins

Sample Training session 1

Warm-up

Bulldog

10 mins

Mark out an areas of 30m squared with cones. Choose one player to be on. All other players stand on the end-line of the square. They must attempt to run to the far line of the square without being caught. If they are caught they must help the catcher. To start the game the catcher calls one player to run, all other players remain on the line. The players can decide to run themselves or they can also call 'open gates' whereby everyone must run at the same time. When the players get to the far line they remain there and wait for the next call. The last player to be caught is the winner.

ABC's

Agility

10 mins

Mark out an area of cones spaced out randomly. Players must dodge in and out of the cones without touching them. To make it more difficult get them to keep their heads up and they cannot follow anyone. Explore other ways of travelling ie skip, hop, jump etc.

RJT's

Running

10 mins

Team relay races. Divide group into 3-4 teams and get them to run around a marker and back to touch the next runner. First team home wins.

Skill Revision

10 mins

New Skill & Drills

The hand pass

10 mins

Explain skill and why it is used.

Give 3-4 key teaching points.

Demonstrate skill.

Ball between 2 to practice skill.

Add some competition ie how many passes can you complete in 30 seconds?

Drills using the new skill.

Conditioned game

Hand-Pass Dodge ball

10 mins

Use square as for warm-up. Same rules as dodgeball except players must hand pass the ball to get a player out instead of throwing the ball. To start the game players run around inside the square. The coach throws 3-4 footballs into the square. Aim of the game is to knock a player out of the game with the ball by hand-passing the ball off their body (below shoulder height). The last player left in the square is the winner.

Mini Game

30 mins

Preferably 7-a-side. Use zones if one or two players are dominating the game.

Sample Training session 2

Warm-up	Stuck in the mud	10 mins
Divide the group into 2 teams. One team are the taggers and they must try to catch the other players. If a player is caught they must stand still with their legs apart. They can be freed by a player on their team if the free player travels through their legs. Reverse the roles of the teams when all the players are caught or after 4 minutes.		
ABC's	Balance	10 mins
Line walk. Can they walk along a line without falling off-turn 360 in the middle? Can they do it sideways/backwards?		
RJT's	Jumping	10 mins
Challenge them to find different ways of jumping ie jumping from 2 feet landing on 2 feet, jumping from 2 feet landing on 1 foot etc.		
Skill Revision	The hand pass	10 mins
New Skills & Drills	The fist pass	10 mins
Explain skill and why it is used. Give 3-4 key teaching points. Demonstrate skill. Ball between 2 to practice skill. Add some competition, how many passes can they complete in 30 seconds? Do some drills using the new skill.		
Conditioned game	Fist-Pass Dodgeball	10 mins
Use square as for warm-up. Same rules as dodgeball except players must fist pass the ball to get a player out instead of throwing the ball. To start the game players run around inside the square. The coach throws 3-4 footballs into the square. Aim of the game is to knock a player out of the game with the ball by fist-passing the ball off their body (below shoulder height). The last player left in the square is the winner.		
Mini Game	30 mins	
Preferably 7-a-side. Use zones if one or two players are dominating the game.		

Sample Training session 3

Warm-up	Tail Tag	10 mins
Select 5 players to be the taggers. All the other players take a bib and place it in the back of their shorts to make a tail. The taggers must then try to grab as many tails as they can. The tagger with the most tails at the end is the winner. Give everyone a chance to be a tagger.		
ABC's	Co-ordination	10 mins
Statues. Get the children to run around a grid. On a signal they must hold a still position for a few seconds before moving on.		
RJT's	Throwing	10 mins
In pairs get the children to roll, throw the ball to each other.		
Skill Revision	The fist pass	10 mins
New Skill & Drills	Catching skills. The chest & low catch.	10 mins
Explain skill and why it is used. 2 Give 3-4 key teaching points. 3 Demonstrate skill. 4 Ball between 2 to practice skill. 5 Add some competition, how many passes can they complete in 30 seconds? 6 Do some drills using the new skill.		

Conditioned game 5 v 5 keep possession game.	Piggy in the middle	10 mins
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Mini Game Preferably 7-a-side. Use zones if one or two players are dominating the game.	30 mins
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Sample Training session 4

Warm-up Players run around inside a marked square. When the coach calls a number, the players have to get into groups of that number. For example if the coach shouts number 8 the players must get into groups of 8. The odd players out must do 5 jumping jacks.	Group/Numbers game	10 mins
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ABC's Stopping. Run and stop quickly on command. Stopping quickly is a key fundamental skill and must be taught like any skill.	Agility	10 mins
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RJT's Obstacle runs. Set a challenge of running avoiding obstacles or cones or running through hoops etc.	Running	10 mins
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Skill Revision	Catching skills	10 mins
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New Skill & Drills <ol style="list-style-type: none">1 Explain skill and why it is used.2 Give 3-4 key teaching points.3 Demonstrate skill.4 Ball between 2 to practice skill.5 Add some competition, how many passes can they complete in 30 seconds?6 Do some drills using the new skill.	The punt kick	10 mins
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Conditioned game Divide a 20 metre square area into 3 zones. Divide the players into two teams. The teams line out in two zones at either end of the square. The middle zone is called no man's land. The aim of the game is to kick the ball over no man's land into the opposition's zone. If the ball hits the ground in the opposition's zone you win a point for your team. If the ball lands inside no man's land or outside the square the opposition get a point. If an opponent catches the ball there is no score. The first team to 20 points wins. Switch sides when one team gets to 10 points.	No man's land	10 mins
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Mini Game Preferably 7-a-side. Use zones if one or two players are dominating the game.	30 mins
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Sample Training session 5

Warm-up Select 7-8 players to be taggers. The taggers must chase the other players and try to catch them inside a 20 metre square grid. When a player is caught they must jump up and down on the spot with their right arms outstretched. If another player's runs under their arm they are free. Change the taggers after a few minutes.	Jump Tag	10 mins
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ABC's Passing game. In pairs throw, hand-pass, fist or kick a ball to each other.	Balance	10 mins
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RJT's Star jumps, tuck jumps, scissor jumps.	Jumping	10 mins
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Skill Revision	The punt kick	10 mins
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New skill & drills	The pick up/crouch lift	10 mins
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- 1 Explain skill and why it is used.
- 2 Give 3-4 key teaching points.
- 3 Demonstrate skill.
- 4 Ball between 2 to practice skill.
- 5 Add some competition, how many passes can they complete in 30 seconds?
- 6 Do some drills using the new skill.

Conditioned game	Pick up game	10 mins
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Use same square as for warm-up. Select 10 players to play the game. Place 9 balls inside the grid. Players must pick up the nearest ball to them and then move on to the next ball and repeat until the coach blows the whistle. On the whistle the player who does not have a ball in their possession is out of the game. Take one football away for each turn. The last player with the ball is the winner.

Mini Game	30 mins
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Preferably 7-a-side. Use zones if one or two players are dominating the game.

Sample Training session 6

Warm-up	Relay races	10 mins
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Divide the groups into 4 teams. The teams line up in single file behind the cones. On the whistle the first player in each line runs out and around the cone and heads for home. The next player must be tagged at the cone before they can run. The first team to get all their players home is the winner.

ABC's	Agility	10 mins
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The side step. Use spaced out cones or partners to execute the side step.

RJT's	Running	10 mins
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Zig, zag run. Set up cones in a zig zag formation and get the children to run around the cones to encourage the dodging skill

Skill Revision	The pick up/crouch lift	10 mins
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New skill & drills	The toe tap/solo	10 mins
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- 1 Explain skill and why it is used.
- 2 Give 3-4 key teaching points.
- 3 Demonstrate skill.
- 4 Ball between 2 to practice skill.
- 5 Add some competition, how many passes can they complete in 30 seconds?
- 6 Do some drills using the new skill.

Conditioned game	10 mins
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Use same square as for warm-up. Players solo their ball around in the grid while also trying to knock their opponents ball away. Once a player's ball is dispossessed they are out of the game. The last player left with their ball is the winner.

Mini Game	30 mins
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Preferably 7-a-side. Use zones if one or two players are dominating the game.

4. COACHING FOOTBALL TO TEENAGERS

Skills – Drills – Conditioned Games for 12 – Minor Level

While the central emphasis in coaching children is right on skills development, the teenage phase must see the development of all factors involved in TEAM PLAY. This next stage of development must concern itself with developing the abilities to MAKE THE RIGHT DECISIONS in a game, e.g. when to pass, who to pass to, and what to do next etc.

While drills will work on one part of the game they will not solve problems like “forwards bunching” or “lack of midfield support” or “no width” or “poor use of quick frees”. When a young player continuously makes the wrong option more often than the right one in a game what is the answer? – The answer is to get working at GAMES – games highlight problems. Remember always at this level what process you are trying to achieve – to bring young players from improving their own individual technique to understanding and becoming competent at team play. Try always to keep this in mind, e.g. if you are looking after a young teenage team it’s quite likely that they will have spent a considerable amount of time working on their kicking, catching, lifting, blocking, tackling, shooting and solo running – your job and you must take the time to explain this to them – is to take them to higher and higher levels of team play. What you want them to experience is enjoyment of good teamwork and to learn how passing, support and running and shooting can bring as good a feeling as say, individual solo running. To work this, you have to be creative and inventive in your thinking e.g. before training session identify an area that needs to be worked on, put a little thought into how a practice conditioned game could address this problem and always explain to the young players what you are trying to achieve and why.

Take for example the common problem of one lad constantly soloing the ball to the exclusion of others. In a practice game, pick two sides and rather than place a blanket ban on all solo running – take one team aside (e.g. in a 8 v 8 game) and chose two of their better players (solo runners!) and inform them that their team mates (not the opposition) that they must play the ball immediately. Let them do this for a few or ten minutes spells and if necessary the roles may be rotated among the team to let them all practice. The aim here is to let you and your player’s see how well two players can change their game to benefit team play and how quickly their young team-mates learn to make themselves available for passes.

Drills & How to use them

Whatever drill you decide to use always please keep in mind the WORK: REST RATIO i.e. if an exercise means that a player has 2-3 seconds of movement for a ball, followed by 30 to 40 seconds of lining up for the next ball, then, there is something wrong with the drill set-up. This is why it is important to have a lot of footballs present. A good rule of thumb is if the exercise involves jogging a work: rest ratio of 1:1 is best. Should the emphasis be on speed then set the ratio of 1:4 or 1:5. In effect, this means that you simply include two players in a queue for the jogging exercise and five or six players maximum in the speed drill. The numbers used will determine the work rest ratio.

Training Session Checklist

Here is a guide to follow when planning a coaching session for young teenagers (12+) up to and including adult level. In every session you should be working to develop.

- 1) Technical Ability
- 2) Athleticism
- 3) Speed of thought
- 4) Teamplay

Forget the idea that there should be whole sessions with no ball involved. If you can design your sessions to include each of those four elements the players will not only develop more quickly, they’ll enjoy doing it.

TECHNICAL ABILITY - Working on technique means seeking to improve each player’s first touch on the ball. First touch is often only applied to receiving the ball, but it’s much more than this, it covers all techniques, - a better kick pass, a better block, a better lift etc. You as an effective coach must be prepared to help players to develop the correct techniques and never tolerate bad habits. Stop play if necessary and demonstrate proper technique.

ATHLETICISM - These terms covers all physical fitness work. In so far as you can try to include the ball as much as possible, players enjoy it all the more and keep as much variety as possible. Increasingly in Gaelic games players at all levels are taking more responsibility for their own physical fitness. You as coach must encourage this. When coming to training players ought to be FIT TO TRAIN rather than TRAIN TO GET FIT.

SPEED OF THOUGHT – Some would argue that this is something a player either has or hasn’t, Not So. All you have to do to develop speed of thought is to set appropriate conditions on a drill or a game during training session e.g. do you want your midfielders to release the ball earlier? – put a two-touch condition on them to help develop the correct instincts. Don’t just do it in one session and never again – repetition is the key – even for 10 minutes of every practice game. Just think about ways you’d like a player to change and then work out a method to do so in practice because simply hoping that a chat with the player will do doesn’t work.

TEAMPLAY: Does your team have any game plans? If so, are they appropriate for their age? Can everyone on the team understand them? Do you simply talk about them and expect the players to act it out? The example of drama best helps here – will a director of a play have a successful production simply by handing out scripts. Attention to detail through constant rehearsal is the only answer.

So as best as you can and as a general rule, try to include elements from these four areas in your training sessions.

When you come to think about your coaching session you should be working in each session on at least three of

these qualities, one on top of the other, if your not, quite frankly your not really coaching. Work on these four elements can be incorporated into every training session from 6 years old up to senior inter county, e.g. a group of six year olds might practice bouncing the ball (technique) running and dodging (athleticism) “tip rugby” (speed of thought) and relays (team work)

A group of eight year olds might work on kicking with either foot (technique), races (athleticism) two-touch football (speed of thought) and a 7-a-side- go games (team play). A squad of senior inter county players may work on various drills (technique) sprints (athleticism) conditioned games (speed of thought) and backs v forwards (team play).

As our players move up through the teenage years and as they develop their TEAM PLAY abilities, the types of games and training sessions they experience will increasingly simulate what happens at adult level.

How to cope effectively and comfortably at adult level, to the highest level possible is our aim and mission, and the following suggestions for “conditioned games at adult level”, can be used at teenage level to very good effect, as they are intended to address the factors they will face in match situations as they progress to their full potential.

5. Coaching Adult Football

The emphasis in coaching Adult Football in our Club is centred on bringing players to the level where their Full Potential is maximised.

If our coaching structure is effective we ought to be delivering players out of one underage structure who have moved forward through the following phases of development:-

CONSCIOUSLY INCOMPETENT: where the player knows and realises the areas of his game that he must work on, develop and perfect and through good coaching is motivated and instructed to do just that.

CONSCIOUSLY COMPETENT: where the player through good effective coaching, instruction and support is aware that he has now become good and proficient at the technical and Team Play aspects of Gaelic Football and is motivated to continually and consciously developing his abilities.

UNCONSCIOUSLY COMPETENT: this is the level we aspire to have our players at as they move into adult level. One underage structure can be deemed successful if we can deliver players whose competency has reached a level where they are doing the right thing in terms of team play through good habits and without even having to consciously think about it.

Adult coaching in the club must be focused on perfecting our player’s ability to consistently do the right thing in all aspects of team play, thus ensuring that our adult teams are remarkable for the teams always being stronger than the sum of their individual parts. This is the kind of identity our coaching must continue to deliver to our club teams and the following drills and conditioned games are intended to facilitate the delivery of Best Practice in both one youth and adult team coaching.

DRILLS AND CONDITIONED GAMES TO IMPROVE YOUTH AND ADULT PLAYERS REACTIONS, SKILLS, AWARENESS AND THINKING . . .

Coaching the Tackle

These are three basic types of tackle in Gaelic football:

- (a) Side on tackle (simplest and most common)
- (b) Front tackle
- (c) Tackle from behind

The 4 “D’s” of Defending . . . ,

- (a) Delay
- (b) Deny
- (c) Dispossess
- (d) Develop

are all explained in specific skill sets and condition games developed to illustrate to players, skills required in a game situation.

The role of Defender is first to prevent Forwards from gaining possession, which in turn would prevent scores or to prevent a Forward's contribution towards setting up scores. The principles of Delaying, Denying, and Dispossessing are all part of the tackle and are included in drill sets. Players must finally, "develop and distribute" from defence and link up with support play to form a platform for attack. These key elements of individual technical skills illustrated in the coaching sessions are extended into small sided and half field conditioned games.

A drill is set up in a 15m channel with markers at 5m intervals.

Players line opposite each other on markers with defenders (red) on one side and attackers (black) on the opposite with balls.

Players at markers 1, 2 and 3 go around marker 6 into the channel to attack with the ball.

Players 4, 5 and 6 go around marker 1 into the channel to defend.

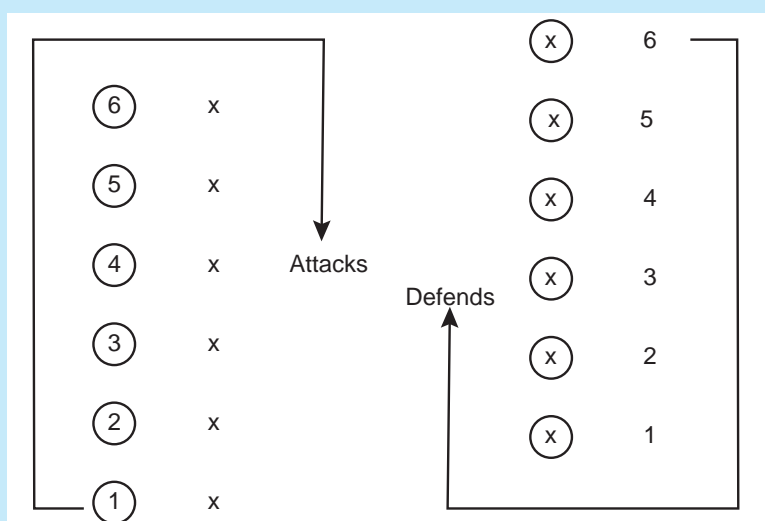
Each player returns to their original position. When all players have completed their tackle, positions are rotated and footballs are passed to opposite side.

This exercise is run with observation and no coaching for the first set. Coaches are encouraged to apply "spot and fix" in the tackle. The sequence of coaching should then be as follows:

- (1) Hands are placed behind back and players move to tackle with feet in the correct position, i.e., not flat footed, feet not in line but in "a boxer's staggered stance", balanced on balls of feet to allow movement right or left. The upper body is pushed forward and the head is up observing the opponent. The body position is such to channel player in direction away from scoring zone.
- (2) The next sequence brings hands into the tackle with hands brought up and wide to allow for front tackle.

The principles of "Head, Hands and Feet" should be demonstrated to players and a series of tackles utilizing the channel, conducted with the coach.

Utilising small grids 15m x 15m, this exercise can be developed into a 3 v 3 game were hands are kept behind back as part of tackle process in the first set and then hands are used in the second set.



Practicing Free-Taking

If you want your 'free' takers to practice in a realistic environment, where they've been running in the game, making tackles, breaking tackles, passing, shooting etc., and if you want to recreate a degree of pressure on the 'free taker', do the following:-

Set up a practice game between two teams on a full pitch or near enough a full pitch [teams up to 15v15]. Before the game starts, scatter five or six flexible multimarkers [not the domes!] in an area between the 13m line and about 40m from goal. Do likewise at the opposite end.

Play the game as normal until one team gets a score from play. Now let a 'free taker' choose which marker to shoot from and let him take a 'free' from that spot. If he scores add this point to the original one scored from play. If he misses, take away the original point. If he scores, remove the marker from that spot. This forces him to choose another marker next time. If he misses, leave the marker there, so that he'll have to take a 'free' from that spot again sometime later in the game [i.e. pressure]. To ensure that the game flows and there is not a lengthy delay as the 'free' taker prepares, have at least two footballers behind the goal. Let the 'keeper' set up a ball ready for the kick out, while the 'free' taker is getting set. Once the shot is taken, the other ball should be kicked out. The free taker has the added pressure of doubling the score rather than the double blow of missing and wiping out the original one that earned him a 'free'.

Improving Attacking/Defending Team Play

Choose an area on your pitch [e.g. play across the field between the 20m line and the 45m line]. About 15 metres from each touchline, create an end-zone [as rugby does]. You should now have mini-pitch measuring approx. 40m x 25m. Choose two teams of four players each. Start one team in a line across one end-zone. Give the ball to the other team and start them across the opposite end-zone, but with only three of their players lined across. The fourth player drops out to allow a 3 v 4 situation to develop in the game. On the whistle, one of the three kicks the ball high and long towards the opposing team. Both teams advance quickly to meet each other. The team of four should now be in possession of the ball. The four must work the ball past the three to get it into the end-zone. A score is only awarded if a player is in possession in the zone. Should the three win the ball back, the same rule applies. After each play, the teams switch roles and resting players and start again. Don't be afraid to stop play and suggest to the attacking team how to come up with a better attacking method.

Improving on Field Decision Making

Start the game you want to play, be it a small-sided or full-sided one, be it on a shortened pitch or not. Let the game run for a few minutes to get the flow going and then introduce a single rule. **NO SPEECH ON THE PITCH!** That includes...no calling for passes, no reminding team-mates to mark opponents, no speaking to the referee, no issuing instructions of any kind.

Should any player break the 'no speech' rule, award a 'free' to the opposition. You may decide to tell the players beforehand your reasons for running such a game or you may decide to let them find out for themselves.

Teaching Forwards to Defend

Imagine the situation in a game where forwards have been in possession and in attack mode. Each forward is looking for space and trying to get away from defenders. Suddenly the ball is lost near the opposition goal and their back can counter. Why are these backs usually able to build reasonably easily as they move out of defence? Answer – because the forwards find themselves in no man's land and are slow to react.

Choose on half of the pitch. Set out 6-8 multimarkers, as if they were forwards in various attacking positions. Pair off defenders and attackers and ask each pair to stand at a marker. Then tell the defenders to take three big steps away from the multimarkers. Leave the forwards where they are. You now have a FREEZE-FRAME situation, a moment captured in time.

Kick the ball long and high from the halfway line towards the goal. As it bounces the defenders are allowed to move. Only when a defender actually takes possession of the ball can the forwards move to close them down and tackle. This is now the PRESS-PLAY situation and the game is on.

Forwards must work out how best to close down defenders and win the ball back before the backs make it out and over the halfway line.

Forwards must learn to switch from attacking mode to defending mode faster and faster until it becomes instinct. In other words, these mini games situations will only work if you, the coach, are prepared to run twenty of them rather than just one or two. Players can take up positions again in a few seconds and exercise can begin again and again.

Working on the Tackle without Fouling

Let's say you have 21 players; set your pitch from the far '45 to one set of goals [i.e. approx. 75 in length]. In front of the goals create a large semi-circle of multimarkers. This must start on the end line, 20m from the left post, arc out to 30m in front of goal and then arc in to finish 20m from the right post on the end line.

Play 11v10 with one team made up primarily of attackers and the other of defenders. The goalkeeper plays for the defenders. Start each play with a knockout. Let the forwards attack the goal when in possession. Only points count.

Should they shoot and score from outside the semi-circle, they are awarded 1 point. A score from inside the zone earns two points. A 'free' scored from inside the zone earns 3 points.

Defenders must work to keep the scores to a minimum, so they must make sure they do not commit fouls inside the zone and that they mark tightly enough to keep down the number of 2 points scores. Defenders can earn scores for themselves, by winning the ball and working it up the pitch to cross the far 45m line while still in possession. The coach can determine how many points should be given.

Working on Winning the Breaking Ball

An exercise for 5 players. One player sets the ball on a multimaker [like a tee for kicking off]. The others form two teams of two [e.g. reds and greens]. One player from each team stands approx. 30m from the kicker, ready to catch the kick. The other two players [support runners] stand halfway between the kicker and the catchers. As the ball is kicked, these two turn to run towards the catchers, hoping to pick up any break ball. Should the ball be caught cleanly, the support runner must be ready to receive a quick pass, return the ball to the kicker and end the move. Should the ball be broken to a support runner, the catcher must move to be ready for a quick pass which must be returned to the kicker to end the move.

Variations 1 & 2

- (1) The ball is kicked and is broken between red and green fielders. The two support runners look for the break ball. The green runner wins it. The green runner wins it. The green fielder must immediately make room to receive a pass from the green support player and then get the ball back to the kicker to end the move and win a point.
- (2) The ball is kicked and the red fielder wins the ball cleanly. The green and red support players have been closing for the break ball. The red support runner should change the angle of his run to be in position to receive a pass from the red fielder. Once the pass is made, the ball is returned to the kicker to win a point for the red team.

IMPROVING SHOOTING

(1) CUT and DRIVE [shooting]

To do this, take about ten white makers and ten yellow makers. Stand on that mid-point on the 45m line. As you walk towards one corner flag, set out a line of white makers. Do the same towards the corner flag with the yellow makers. Your stage is now set.

Ask an attacker and a defender to stand beside each other on the mid-point of the 45m line. The attacker should solo run along a line of markers, staying on the outside of these. The defender should shadow his run on the inside of the same makers.

When the attacker decides, he should cross the line to run towards goal and take a shot. Once the attacker crosses the line, the defender can tackle. The attacker can use different types of evasion skill to make the cut [e.g. side step/roll/swerve].

(2) Fist, Feint & Shoot

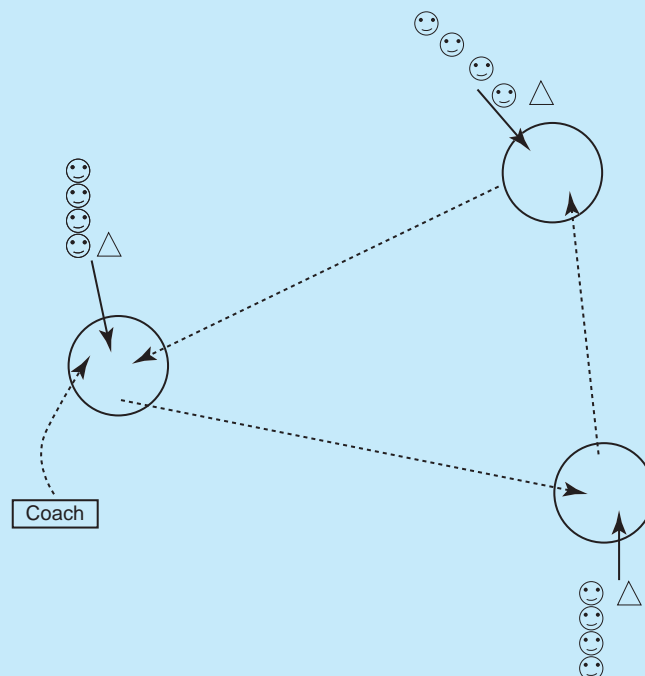
A simple drill to let players practice quick shooting after they have feinted and side-stepped to evade an opponent.

Set out 5 cones in a shallow arc along the 13m line. Set out 5 more to match these on the 20m line. A player stands at each cone. The five along the 13m line have a football each and are facing those on the 20m line. Five more are behind the goals to retrieve.

On the call, each of the players in possession fist passes to a player on the 20m line and advances to close him/her down. The receiver has time only to feint, side-step the opponent and kick for a point. The opponent can provide passive resistance or may try to get a block in [whatever the coach decides].

After each shot, the kicker moves along the 20m line to the next position, ready for a fist pass from another opponent. This gives players the opportunity to evade different opponents and shoot from different positions. The players behind the goals feed the footballs to those on the 13m line. After a few minutes the group rotate.

IMPROVING PASSING & DECISION MAKING



(1) Attack the Circle

Set up three circles, each 10m diameter and each 25-30m from any other circle. Use fleximarkers

Approximately 10m from each circle, set a cone. Players always start runs from these cones. Line up three or four players at each cone [red, yellow and white on the diagram]

The coach starts the drill by lobbing a ball into the red circle. The first red player bursts into the circle to collect the ball and **immediately** kick passes it to the yellow circle. The red player then goes to the back of the red line.

A yellow player should already be sprinting into his/her circle to receive the pass from the red. He/she then pick passes to the white circle to the white and turns back to join...etc ...etc.

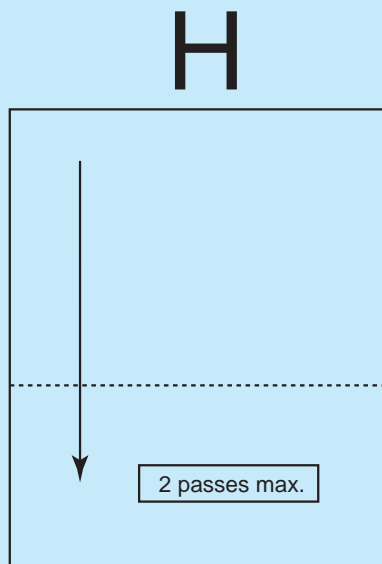
Once the red player has kicked the first ball, the coach should lob a second ball into the red circle for the next red player to start the move.

There should be no need for a third ball as the first ball will soon be on its way round to the start again.

Remember – players must attack the circle at pace. Passers must hit the circle and NOT the player. Kickers must turn back to rejoin their own lines [i.e. no following the pass].

To extend this drill coaches may add a shadow runner to each of the runners and kickers. This will put pressure on the kickers and runners to be accurate and have a good first touch.

(2) Two Passes Max. [Game]



A simple game to make passes more telling and players more economical in their play when in the opposition half of the field.

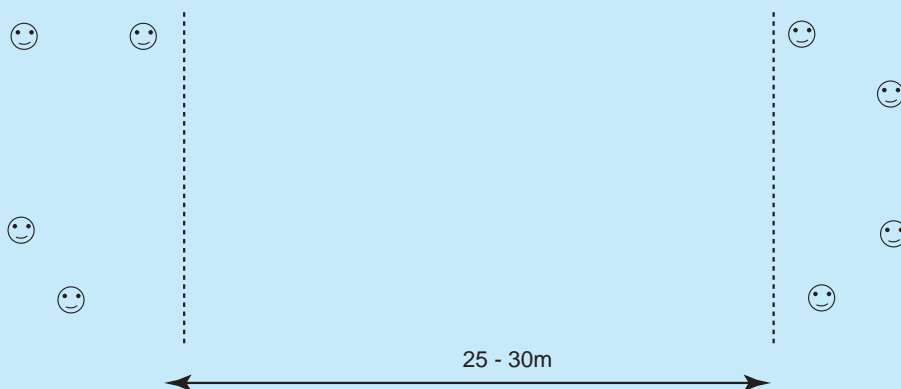
Once a team takes possession of the ball inside the opposition half of the pitch, the ball may only be passed between players a maximum of two times before a shot is taken.

This does not mean that the players MUST take two passes [perhaps one pass may get them into a scoring position e.g. if the take possession deep into the opponents' half].

The coach may change the rule to suit the skill level – would three passes be better for younger teams? Would a smaller pitch be more effective?

IMPROVING SUPPORT PLAY

Cross the Gap



Four pairs of player, two on either side of the gap; greens play with whites, blues with reds.

Start a ball with the reds and a ball with the whites. Red hits a kick pass across the gap [no high ball] and a blue receives. The other blue player runs to support the receiver [off the shoulder] and take a first pass on the burst. He/she must immediately kick pass across the gap to a red receiver etc. etc.

As this goes on, the same happens between greens and whites.

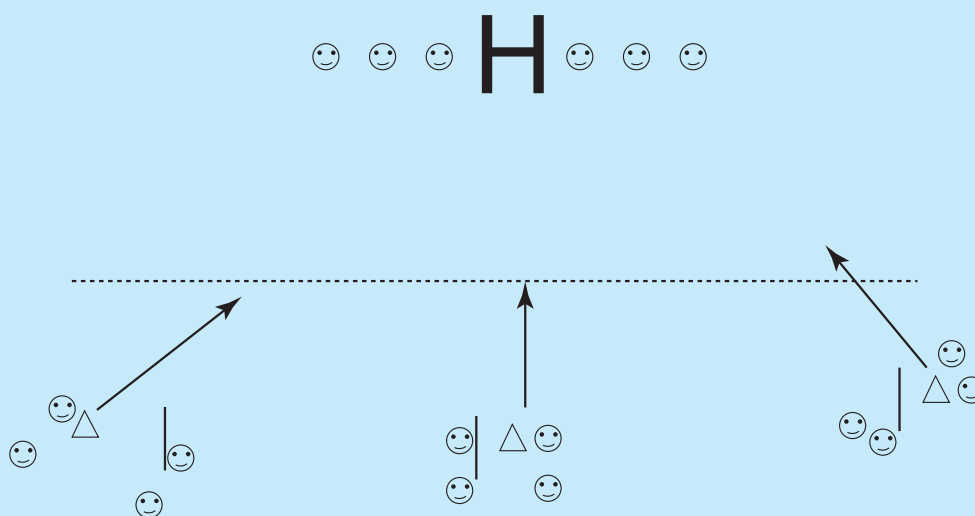
The keys to the success of this drill are:

- The passes must be hit properly [driven across the gap, no more than 2-3m above the ground]
- As the pass is hit, the players must decide quickly who will receive and who will support
- The support runner must learn to peel off and make a late run to take the ball on the burst, rather than stay too close to the receiver when the ball arrives.

Coaches will find that the latter is the hardest to coach. Support runners tend to run towards the receiver even when the ball is in flight. It often runs counter to their instincts to actually move away to create a distance and then burst when it is most effective.

IMPROVING SHOOTING AND CREATIVE SPACE

Step, Space, score



A drill to let players practice soloing towards goal, stepping into the tackler to make room and then shooting for a point:

Organise three groups of players [e.g. 6 reds, 6 yellows and 6 whites].

Take two from each group and send them behind the goals to retrieve footballs.

Set out three cones about 30m from goal and at different angles. Beside each cone place a pole. Groups choose a cone/pole each from which to start. Each pair should have a football.

Focus on the yellow group on the diagram. One player takes a ball and stands at the cone. Another stands at the pole. The remaining two wait their turn to do the same.

The solo runner [player at cone] and the shadower [player at pole] run at pace towards the goal. The shadower runs tight to the solo runner but does not tackle.

At some point along the run the solo runner must step into the shadower to make room for the shot. The shadower must provide stiff resistance without charging or shouldering. The solo runner must make the shoulder-to-shoulder contact.

Once room has been made, the solo runner must shoot for a point.

Both players follow on to end line. The ball is retrieved by the yellows behind the goal and carried out to the start. Meanwhile the other two yellows who were waiting their turn [at the cone/pole] start the exercise.

Reds and whites do the likewise at the same time.

The key to ensure that solo runners do not step away from the shadower and are not forced to change the angle of their runs just because an opponent in running alongside them [most players do this subconsciously and end up kicking the ball wide]. This drill is designed to work against these instincts.

Paddy Carr
Director of Coaching
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