

Archive of Coaching Tips

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The Four Storey Coaching Model

Each player aspires to be the best. Each coach tries to bring the best out in players. One of the better ways to do this is to check for ways to improve individual players.

A top player should have four main qualities:

Superb Technique / Athleticism / Speed of Thought / Ability to be a Teamplayer

Think about your coaching sessions. In every session you should be working to develop at least three of these qualities, one on top of the other. If not, you're not really coaching. If you need to change, do it now!

A group of five year-olds might practise bouncing [technique], running and dodging [athleticism], tag-belt tig [speed of thought] and relays [teampay].

A group of eight year-olds may work on kicking with either foot [technique], races [athleticism], two-touch football [speed of thought] and a 7 a-side game [teampay]

A squad of senior players may work on various drills [technique], sprints [athleticism], conditioned games [speed of thought] and backs v forwards [teampay].

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Drills v Games

As players develop, their technique improves more rapidly than any other part of their game. They can usually learn to kick, catch, fist,

block, solo etc. with a fair degree of comfort. The better players often practise these skills at home and come on faster than those who only rely on drills in coaching sessions once or twice a week.

What they find more difficult is to develop the ability to make the right decision in a game - when to pass, who to pass to, where to run, how to pass.

A coach who prepares a squad through sessions filled with drills, is only working at one part of the game.

How can a drill solve problems like 'forwards bunching' or 'lack of midfield support' or 'no width' or 'poor use of quick frees'? The answer is...it CAN'T!

If a player is a poor kicker of the ball, there is work done to solve that problem. What are we doing to help the player who takes the wrong option more often than the right one in a game?

Get working at games. Remember...Games = Problems. Start solving the problems!

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Gaelic Football's Lost Tribe [The Half-Forwards]

In a week that saw two of Derry's half-forwards sent off and the other taken off, is it not time that coaches rethought the role of half-forwards?

Flavour of the month is to by-pass this group when attacking and employ them more and more as defenders who track back to block opposition attacks and close in to look for breaks from midfield.

A centre-half forward must be a creative player...one who orchestrates, who has great passing ability [preferably with both feet] and who has a tactical brain.

Wing half-forwards must be blessed with both stamina and pace, for they are link players who have to fetch, carry and support more often than any other group.

So, how about looking at your own team! Have you a playmaker pulling the strings at CHF? Do your wing forwards have the necessary characteristics to take them through a game?

Or have you created three extra defenders who help the defence and watch long balls fly over their heads at such a rate that a Derby horse would do well to get up in support?

Oh...and one more thing they should be able to do.....SCORE now and again!

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'Increasing the Traffic'

Many drills and practice exercises on the pitch are excellent, but often they do not mirror reality.

For example: A coach may run two or three drills in different areas of the pitch, all involving passing or catching or solo running or lifting etc. and all happening at the same time.

Small groups of players take part in each and there is always plenty of space in which to work. This is fine up to a point.

If coaches took two or even three drills, let players get used to them first and then moved the cones to superimpose the exercises one on top of the other in the same area of the field, this would allow players to practise skills and techniques while others moved among them and around the same area.

Players who can learn to cope with 'increased traffic' in a smaller area will be able to carry this through to a game, where there are team-mates and opponents getting in the way of passes etc.

Go on...try it!

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He's fit...but not 'match fit'.

How many times have you heard someone say of a player.....He's fit, but he's not match fit.?

**What does it mean? How can we be sure that a player is match fit?
What can we do to get players match fit?**

Match fitness can only come through playing games. Unfortunately, some have taken this to mean that a player needs to wait for a competitive game against another team before he can work on his match fitness. This is not true.

As I have said already, the only way to get match fit is to play games. If the right game is played in training then the coach can not only bring a player up to speed in terms of match fitness but can also set the limits for all players.

You see, match fitness is about how quickly a player can make a decision, how well he can react to a situation, how aware he is of the play around him. It has to be founded on physical fitness [particularly sharpness] but it is a 'brain' thing more than anything else.

When you hear people say that a player can't cope with the speed of the game, it doesn't mean that he cannot run as fast as the other players. It means his thinking, his reactions and his awareness are not as sharp as they should be.

So....what can coaches do?

The best games are based on the clock. Try playing a game, with normal rules except for the condition which allows each player a maximum of 3 seconds on the ball. Just count 1,2,3 when a player is in possession. This is better than calling for one toe-tap and/or one bounce. The best way to play this is to use one coach to referee and another to run the 3 second rule and blow only when this is broken.

If players really respond, cut it to 2 seconds. You will really only be able to do this after a number of weeks working on the former.

Another way to use the clock, is to decide on a certain number of seconds during which a team may score. Imagine the keeper kicks the ball out and a player gathers the ball at midfield. The coach/referee calls out a countdown.....10, 9, 8 ,7 etc. The team must shoot for a score before 0 is reached. If the opposition wins the ball, the coach

decides on the number from which to start the countdown [e.g. the opposition wins the ball only 45m from the goal. The coach needs to speed up their play, so he begins the countdown from 5.]

There are many modifications to such games...all based on working towards match fitness at speeds where opponents cannot hope to compete.

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Opportunities v Time

A top coach who guided his club team to an All-Ireland championship in the early nineties, regularly switched or even substituted players during the early stages of games. When asked why he didn't let players have more time to settle before he acted, the coach answered: 'Time has little to do with it. I only count opportunities, not time.'

His idea was simple yet brilliant. If a player had four chances to win the ball and lost out on three, then he had to be changed before his confidence was shattered altogether. It didn't matter if these opportunities came in the first five minutes or over the period of one half of the game.

The same coach maintained that it was vital all players were aware of this practice. They had to know that a switch was not a way to say 'You're not good enough' , but a chance to remind them that 'this is not your day in that spot...let's start again somewhere else'.

So, if you are a coach who prefers to make changes based on 'time', think about looking for 'missed opportunities' instead. Remember to make sure your players know and understand the idea and see if your tactical work on the line improves.

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Where is the 'Extra Man'?

How many times have you seen a Gaelic football team earn an 'extra man' and still lose? How many times have you seen the same happen in soccer?

Unfair comparison? - team size different? number of players different? These are only smokescreens behind which a coach may hide.

Fact - When opponents lose a player, they will reorganise and this reorganisation will determine who is left free on our team. So, for the first few minutes, our coach cannot claim to nominate the 'extra man'.

Fact - The player left free is, more often than not, a defender. This comes about when opponents lose a defender or a midfielder or a forward. In the latter case there is little or no reorganisation needed. If they lose a defender or a midfielder, they will withdraw a forward to plug the gap. In either case, our side is left with a spare defender.

Fact - Few, if any, coaches prepare for playing with an 'extra man', so decisions are often made on the spur of the moment, rather than with any method.

Fact - Players must know and have experienced the various options re. using an 'extra man'. So, whatever strategies you devise as a coach for such an eventuality [e.g. playing the 'extra man' wide on the wing to receive passes, double-teaming on a particularly dangerous opponent, patrolling the area along the 45m line, acting as a 3rd midfielder to mop up loose ball etc.] **must be practised if you want it to work rather than just hope it will work.**

My own preference is to practise using the 'extra man' wide. Opponents find it much more difficult to mark width rather than depth. It tends to stretch them much more and gaps begin to appear. Playing the 'extra man' wide also provides a release player for others on the team. Players are not lulled into a false sense of security about the 'extra man' covering for them if they mark loosely. What's more, if the opponents move a player to mark this 'extra man' after while, the response is simple - move the new 'extra man' wide on the other side of the pitch. Believe me, it does work and it has worked!

Whatever you decide, make sure you practise it. Gone are the days when any of us can afford fill sessions with endless drills and without reference to the 'what ifs' that appear in a match!

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See It and Believe It [after you've practised it!]

Earlier this week a swimmer won her first gold medal ever. She is thirty years old, nearing retirement in swimming terms. When interviewed, she was asked what had made the difference after so many years without having reached the top.

Her answer was a simple one, yet one that many coaches and players still shy away from. She said: 'This time I saw it happening. I saw myself winning that race.' She had employed a sports psychologist for the first time in her career and this was one of his ploys.

In Gaelic terms, players and coaches work hard to achieve physical fitness, to improve technique, to hone tactics and to develop teamplay. The same players and coaches all recognise the need for mental strength, but few are prepared to be different and tackle it head on.

Donegal were never expected to get as far as they have in this year's championship. They may go out to Dublin on Sunday, but they certainly won't leave the training ground and the changing room lacking in mental strength.

They have been 'seeing' good performances for quite a while now. They never step onto a pitch, having been told 'You HAVE to win this game.' They leave with the message 'You KNOW how to win this game. Now you must PLAY the game you've practised. You must see it happening and believe in it.'

In other words they target the PERFORMANCE, not the result. Everything is based on what they have done on the training ground. This allows them to see it and believe it [after they've practised it.]

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From Technique to Teamplay

One of the more difficult things to coach to young players is the need to modify their individual styles for the good of the team.

If you have spent time ensuring that players are comfortable on the ball, it means you have worked on kicking, catching, lifting, blocking, tackling, shooting, evasion skills and solo running.

The most attractive of these skills to a young player is very often 'solo running'. The feeling the player gets when he/she can run while making a ball spin from toe to hand is tremendous. Many players want to use this technique as often as possible.

So, when you step in to coach team play and take players to another level, some see it as a denial of the right to try out this great skill of solo running.

However, it has to be done. There are no easy answers, but if you explain that you recognise their position and, at the same time, remind them that your job is to take them to higher and higher levels of play [i.e. adding more skills to their repertoire] you may find it easier to introduce.

Conditions, limits, modifications....whatever you choose to call them, must be set for players to experience the beauty of good teamwork and to learn how passing, support running and shooting can bring as good a feeling as individual solo running.

Remember.....you may only have to limit a few players at a time, rather than impose a blanket ban on all solo running. One trick is to take a team aside, choose two of the seven or eight players who must play the ball immediately, only inform their team-mates [not the opposition] and let them respond to this for a five or ten minute spell. The roles may be rotated among the team to let all practise.

This lets you see how two players can change their games and how quickly five or six team-mates learn to make themselves available for passes and support the player on the ball.

Try it out - soon!

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One of the traits a good player has, is the ability to look up when in possession and scan the area ahead. He/she is scanning in order to make the right decision.

It is this very decision-making process that we, as coaches, must help players to speed up. Too often we simply eulogise the player who appears to have an innate ability to receive the ball, scan and make the quick and proper decision. This allows us a 'get-out clause'....the most famous one in coaching.....

"You can't teach that....it's instinctive. You either have it or you don't."

Not so! You may not be able to coach players to the very high standards set by the instinctive footballer, but you can certainly close the gap and improve both players and team when doing so.

One of the easiest methods is by running the 'Three Second Game'. This simply means playing a match or a backs v forwards game and introducing the rule that allows each player a maximum count of '3' on the ball.

To highlight this, the coach should referee the game and call out loudly "1.....2....3 when a player receives the ball. Should the ball be played on the count of '2' then the coach stops the call and begins again as the next player receives the ball. Should any player still be in possession after the count of '3', a free may be awarded to the opposition. The same count applies to the free kick.

The 'Three Second' approach has proved much better than the traditional 'one toe-tap, one bounce' game, for many players took this too literally and made sure they got in a toe-tap and a bounce before scanning for possibilities. Counting to '3' forces more players to look up first and, indeed, leads to more team-mates making runs for passes.

A few coaches decry such conditions, saying they do not mirror the real game. The same coaches, however, never seem to be able to suggest an alternative way to help speed up decision-making. They still prefer to hide behind the call 'You can't teach that..it's instinctive'.

Which type of coach are you?

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Cut The Queues!

One of the most annoying sights in coaching is a long queue of players lining up to take part in a drill or an exercise.

Who can state a valid reason for a queue of 8, 9 or 10 players [or more], each waiting in turn for two seconds of action?

All coaches, when designing drills or exercises, should look carefully at how the WORK:REST RATIO pans out.

If an exercise means that a player has 2-3 seconds of movement for a ball, followed by 30-40 seconds of lining up for the next bus, there is something wrong with the drill set-up.

Think the exercise through and divide the group or increase the number of footballs being used - do anything except let the queue continue to form and the players continue to lose out!

If the drill involves jogging, a good rule of thumb is a work:rest ratio of 1:1. Should the emphasis be on speed, then set a 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 determine the work:rest ratio.

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Probables v Possibles

Many people will associate this title with Rugby. For years now, Rugby coaches and selectors have played 'probables v possibles' games when coaching. This simply means that they pick the strongest team on paper and play them as a unit. The opposition is made up of the remainder of the squad.

Ask any top Rugby coach and he'll tell you that this system helps in a number of ways:

- 1. Those players most likely to make up the first team get the opportunity to play together, get used to habits, patterns of play etc.**

2. Those players on the 'possibles' who stand out and catch the eye will have done so against better opposition.
3. Those on the 'probables' who find it tough may find themselves replaced by a 'possible' who really wants a place.

In Gaelic Football we tend to take a squad of 30 players and play our strongest backs against our strongest forwards. There is nothing wrong with this if you wish to play like v like, but it will never give the best 15 a chance to play together, blend and prove themselves. Nor will it give the coach/selector a true picture of the reserve player who shines.

So, if you are blessed with a big squad, think about promoting the use of 'probables v possibles'. Go a step further and always 'bib' the probables in your own club colours. The task for every 'possible' is to win a bib and the task for every 'probable' is to retain it.

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Here's a game from Derry's new assistant to Mickey Moran, John Morrison. He could have kept it to himself but he chose to share it, so that others may try it and benefit from it.

Double or Quits

If you want your 'free' takers to practise 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 from 10v10 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 footballs 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.

Think about it. The 'free' taker has the added pressure of doubling the score rather than the double whammy of missing and wiping out the original one that earned him the 'free'.

Try it. It works a treat!

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Michael McGeehan, a tutor and coach who has worked with Mayo, Donegal, Clare and Finn Harps, gives this week's coaching tip. Michael is always keen to promote different ideas and has been to Holland recently to watch Dutch Soccer coaches at work.

Three Fives

My contribution to the tips section is the 5 v 5 v 5 game.

3 teams of 5, each team in different coloured bibs, say green, red and yellow.

Playing area 45m line to 45m line across the width of the pitch.

Reds and greens play as one team to start with. Yellows have to win ball back. The team that the yellows dispossess become the tacklers.

Ten passes for the two teams counts as one score. Try to get five scores to win the game.

The team of 5(tacklers) have to close down the man on the ball quickly, double and triple teaming - this takes a little while to master.

Normal rules apply.

Variations on the game are:

- a. Must give the ball to opposite colour on your team.**
- b. Must not play the ball to the person who has passed you the ball.**
- c. Ball must not touch the ground, Team that drops the ball become tacklers.**
- d. If tacklers win the ball they attempt to make five passes against the team of ten before they join the other team of 5.**

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Last week I took part in a coaching course in Cavan. I ran this game with U-12s and U-14s. The key to it is really to let the players experience the problems and work out the solutions for themselves. If you decide to use the game, do not be tempted to give players the answers. If they think it through themselves, they'll learn to use their ideas in a game proper.

Kick It - Run It

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.

Not much to it! So it seems. Quite a boring game then!

Not so! What happens is that the team of three will win the ball back and score more often than the team of four. This is not due to any slick move on the part of the three, but on poor use of player by the team of four.

You, as the coach should let these situations develop for a while, before taking the four aside and suggesting that they come up with a better decision re. how they use the extra player. In no time at all, the game will switch in favour of the four. Remember...let them make the decision...and let them think of new ones each time so that the opponents cannot counter.

As regards contour moves, you may also find that the three will sort out some defensive ploys themselves. So much the better. Everybody develops, everybody wins and you get a taste of what players can do for themselves [with a little coach input, of course]. Good luck.

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The Three-Part Pitch

Here is one way to develop teamplay. It also allows you, the coach, to step back, spot where things are going wrong and move to fix them.

Think of the pitch as three separate zones: The first, Zone A, runs from your own team's end line to the 45m line. Zone B lies between the two

45m lines and Zone C is that section from the far 45m line to the opposition's end line.

When your team is in possession, watch carefully what happens in each zone.

Priority in Zone A is 'KEEP BALL', with the emphasis on keeping possession through close passing and plenty of support play.

Once in Zone B, the focus changes to 'SET UP'. In this area a player should aim to use the ball quickly and directly to set up team-mates who are inside the opposition's 45m line. The ball must not stay in this zone for any longer than 3-4 seconds or for more than 2 passes.

Zone C is the 'SCORE' zone. In here the aim is to get into position to either go for a score or to directly assist a score.

NB. It does not matter which player is in which zone.....the task remains the same.

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Spot and Fix

Find the player with no technical problems in his or her game and I'll find you a leprechaun in return. All players need specific technical coaching at some time during their careers. Granted, this is best done at an early stage [e.g. between the ages of 7 and 11], but the reality is that coaches deal with many older players who still have problems with kicking, catching, tackling, blocking, evading, lifting, fist passing etc. that were probably not fixed years ago.

If you coach, then you should be able to 'spot and fix' faults in technique. To ignore such problems is tantamount to saying....'He never could do it and he never will'. Let's hope you're not the coach who recognises the problem, but prefers to work on physical fitness instead – there are plenty about! So, how do you fix once you have spotted?

The secret lies in the phrase '**Head, Hands, Feet for Better Technique**'. If you watch a player perform a technique [e.g. a shot for a point] you must look for head position, hand position and feet position during the execution of the technique. This sounds so complicated and yet it isn't.

Take the example of a player kicking for a point with his right foot. More often than not, he misses to the right of the posts. Some coaches may try to solve the problem by asking the player to 'aim left', but that is like asking a golfer who slices to aim down another fairway so that the ball can curve back. Better to look for the following –

HEAD...is his head up as he kicks? This will cause the player to lean back and push the ball further to the right.

HANDS...is he dropping the ball two-handed, cross-handed or is he holding the ball too far from his body?

FEET....is his standing foot pointing nowhere near the target? Is he playing the ball off the outside of his boot?

Think about HEAD, HANDS, FEET. For more tips on HHF e-mail webmaster@rossagaels.com

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Silent but Deadly!

Here's a simple idea for use in either small-sided games or full practice games, best used for short periods at a time [e.g. 10 minutes]. One of Ireland's top coaches, Brian McIver [Ballinderry's All-Ireland Manager], uses it regularly. Rather than point out the advantages of such a game, I'm going to leave them out for a few days. Let's see first if any coaches will email webmaster@rossagaels.com to offer their own thoughts on the advantages.

Here are the rules:

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 players beforehand your reasons for running such a game or you may decide to let them find out for themselves.

So, think about it and start emailing your thoughts [whether you're a Rossa reader or not!].

I'll publish Brian's thoughts later this week.

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Work to Rest' Ratios...a Vital Balance

The second batch of Level 2 coaches from across Ulster have just completed their residential part of the course this weekend [Jan 26th]. Among the many things discussed was the danger of burnout for certain players. These players are often the better ones and, as a result, they are pulled every way by club, county and school demands. What goes unnoticed is the amount of work demanded of these players.

Take the case of a 17 year-old who plays McRory, County Minor, Club Minor and Club Senior football. Which of his four coaches will be the first to contact the others to plan a common approach to training?

Which coach will recognise that the player's health is at risk if he must play a full part in all training?

I suggest that all four will acknowledge the risk but few will be prepared to do anything about it!

The same experienced coaches are, no doubt, fully aware of the importance of WORK:REST RATIOS when running a coaching session. These same coaches know that if they work on stamina, they usually afford players a ratio of 1:1 [e.g. work for a minute, rest for a minute] to allow for proper recovery. Similarly, they know that if they work on speed, the ratio has to change to as much as 1:5 [e.g. work for 5 seconds, rest for 25 seconds].

So, how about planning for recovery in the 'bigger picture'? It's time coaches got together to find out what demands are being made of the top young players, made decisions for the players' good and reaped the benefits as a result.

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Freeze Frame - Press Play

What are you doing to improve your forwards' concentration and ability to switch roles quickly and win the ball back when the ball is lost to the opposition?

Here's one to try. 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 backs 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 one 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 take 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-game 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 the exercise can be run again and again. Try it!

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Pay the Price

What about a game to allow defenders to work on tackling without fouling? What if the same game gave forwards the incentive to get closer to goal and even draw 'frees' from the opposition?

Let's say you have 21 players; set your pitch from the far '45 to one set of goals [i.e. approx. 75m 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 kickout. 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 2 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 point 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.

Try it...show defenders that if they are too rash and lack organisation they will pay the price!

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BREAK THE BALL

An exercise for 5 players. One player sets the ball on a multimarker [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.

E.G.1 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.

E.G.2 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 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.

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This week's tip comes from a Dublin coach - Brian Avery. Brian has the dubious pleasure of working with a certain Tom McLaughlin from Magherafelt. Both teach in Dublin and both promote sport as often as possible. Brian has been to Derry to watch the development squads train and was very impressed. His comment was ' things have obviously improved since Tom left the county'. Here's his tip:

ROTATE THE CAPTAIN

Captains are appointed for a whole variety of reasons, sometimes it maybe just for the sake of having a nominated player to go to the referee for the toss. Selection often is on the basis of the most popular (the loudest!), or the player perceived to be the most skilful. I have found that rotating the captain among different players to be a good idea. It is something too that I would recommend doing during the league/early stages and it allows you select/settle for championship games.

Advantages:

- 1. It can take pressure off one individual to produce a great game every time- some things don't always go the right way!**
- 2. It may bring to light a player who shines in the role and who could be otherwise quite subdued. A quiet confidence emerges.**
- 3. It buries the perception of favouritism among players.**

4. Some excellent players freeze with the weight of responsibility it's better to discover this early on and know their limitations and maybe work on their confidence.
5. The role of captain for the game often translates into the next game where although they haven't the title they show an increased sense of responsibility and leadership.
6. It does a lot to improve bonds on the team.
7. It is a solid way to reward excellent attendance at training or improved efforts in games or training.
8. It helps share responsibility among players.
9. The notion of a 'lucky' captain can be diluted. What happens on the day the 'lucky' captain is injured or sick? You should have a few capable deputies to take his place.

It's not a bad idea to have laid out beforehand what you expect a player to do in the role of captain.

I wouldn't recommend this role for every player; I expect anyway there aren't enough league games. Try it you might be surprised at who emerges the most able.

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Coaching from a Template

Let's say you have 3 coaches on a management team and all play an active role in the training sessions. Rather than set up the same drill and simply assign a coach to one of three groups, why not redesign your pitch.

Create a coaching template in terms of the playing area and what's done in the session.

Here's one that works on a full pitch for panels of 20 - 40 players

Split your squad in half [Groups A and B]

Send a coach with Group A to play a small-sided conditioned game in one half of the field, making use of one set of goals and a goalkeeper. The coach may further reduce the playing area if numbers determine. - playing time 20mins

Take Group B to the other end of the pitch and divide them in two again.[B1 and B2]

B1 takes part with another coach in a Play Situation [e.g. 3v3 / 4v4 - Kick It, Run It - see Tips Archive] - playing time 10 mins

The third coach takes B2 to practise in the Tech. Drill area [i.e. a drill to practise technique unopposed] - playing time 5 mins and then across to the Comp. Drill area [competitive practice - opposed] - playing time 5 mins

B1 and B2 groups swap after 10 mins

Groups A and B swap after 20 mins.

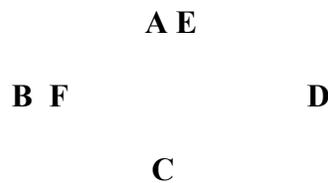
Full session - one hour [includes warm-up work and cool-down]

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The 'Split-Second Window'

Think of a moment in a game, when one of your players gets in position to receive a pass and as the ball is in flight, another player makes a break into space, screaming for the next ball to be played on to him. Your first reaction may be one of frustration, having seen and heard the latter player make both run and call much too early. By the time

the passer receives the ball, steadies himself and actually passes, the caller will have been tracked, marked and made to look silly. Yes, he did make the call and the run too early....and yes, the pass will probably be intercepted....but it will happen six or seven times in any game. So what should you do? Prepare for it. Run a simple exercise to speed up the delivery of the pass. Create a situation that is unopposed but forces players to receive and pass the ball on **IN ONE MOVEMENT**. Allow no more than one steadying step to be taken and let players practise receiving the ball and playing it in a split-second. It will be difficult, but it will be worth it. Here's the drill. Download it and draw the cones and arrows on to suit.



- 1st = A starts drill by kick passing to B. Distance between cones must be 30m minimum.
- 2nd = A immediately runs to join D
- 3rd = B receives ball and, in one stride, kick passes on to C
- 4th = B immediately runs to where the pass came from [i.e. where A was at the start]
- 5th = C receives the ball and, in one stride, kick passes on to D
- 6th = C immediately runs to where the pass came from [i.e. where B was at the start]
- etc. etc.`

* Remember, the key is to force players to receive and pass in one movement [i.e. in as short a time as possible]

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The Plight of the Two-Footed Jumper

It sounds like the title of a weird Hollywood movie, but it's just another problem we have to address in coaching.

We've all seen them. The players who run to the point where the ball will drop from the sky, get there a second early, stand with both feet on the ground and jump straight up to make the catch.

Now let's get something clear. These players do catch the ball at times. However, they generally jump about six inches off the ground instead of sixteen inches and they they make a vertical leap rather than one that takes them along a path to meet the ball in flight.

So...problem spotted..how can we fix it?

Here's one tried and tested way. If a player was faced with a leap across a stream or river, he/she would never run to the edge of the bank, stop briefly and take off two-footed. The jump is led by one leg, and the leap is not only across but up, to gain extra distance.

Apply the same process to the high catch at midfield and you have the template. Set up the river, using two lines of multimarkers. Decide on a realistic width for the river [test the jump without the ball first].

Coach stands midstream and either holds the ball above head height [for younger children] or lobs the ball [for older players]. As the players get used to the exercise, the idea should be to widen the river and work on technique through HEAD, HANDS and FEET positions.

Head - Watchnig the flight of the ball

Hands - Reach long with the arms, W shape with hands to catch

Feet - Plant one foot and drive the opposite knee up to give the lift [a natural jumping action to cross a stream]. Land running with the ball.

And when players need reminding during games, tell them to 'JUMP THE RIVER'.

