

Plug those gaps now

This week's news that there are plans to again change the All-Ireland system of competition set my mind rambling on concentrate on the fact that our Association, like other sports, has many gaps to plug.

There is a need to produce the athletes first, then the player in our sport in order to create Gaelic Football athletes and, in doing so, we will produce the highest standard of preparation.

GAA, like other sports, by promotion is being forced by society to go for 'outcome' or 'winning' and, as a result, as a sport, we are short-circuiting vital development stages, especially in our youth and a lot of fun and enjoyment is being lost.

There have been many shifts in modern coaching which need to be addressed by the GAA to catch up with other sports.

Training is now becoming functional, or PRE-HABILITATION to prevent injury, while flexibility methods before training and exercise is based on dynamic, or ballistic mobility, while static stretching is now a session on its own.

There is a need to transfer strength in to power to play our game but, at present, we have only strong players, not powerful players, at senior level, while strength is neglected at all other levels, especially in our youth.

SPEED

Speed training should be all year round and, while linear or straight line speed is predominantly coached, there is a need to address the other game speeds, such as lateral (sideways), multi-directional (including backwards), and chaotic (game speed), speeds.

We must look to our systems of competition, as competition seasons longer than 13 weeks usually produce 'burnout' in players and modern ideas, on rest and recovery, restoration and regeneration of muscle fibre and tissue, must be taken on board.

When and what to eat and drink must be hammered home to players, as well as sports hygiene, i.e. avoidance of crowd for two hours after hard training or matches, as the immune system is low and a virus is easier to pick up.

One of the greatest dangers to our sport is that we must be careful of over competition, perhaps the greatest cause of injury, and under-training. Young players should have matches changed to once a fortnight, rather than once a week, to allow for more skill sessions and extend their coaching development session.

To attend to all these shifts in coaching practice, the association must educate parents and administrators about our game so that they can play a vital role in the development of players.

Away from coaches, parents and administrators can do a lot of damage if they have no knowledge of what is needed.

Our best coaches should, as least, be at the lower levels with the younger players, as damage done between ages 6-10 and 10-18, cannot be fully corrected.

MEDIOCRE

Poor or mediocre foundations produce similar players. Physical literacy is essential in our youth for, with no skill, there will be no participation and, like maths and science in school, if left behind young players will never catch up. It takes 10 years to fully develop a gaelic football athlete and only 10 per cent of those developing will make it to the top.

Thus to service All-Ireland winning teams, we must ensure many more play our games and thus we must address the huge loss of players in our sport through poor practice and lack of enjoyment.

The fundamental (4-10), and learn to train (9-12), and train to train (12-16) stages of development are very important and need to be concentrated on. These are the areas easiest to change to good practice because they are coached locally under the local control of clubs, parents and administrators.

Time to act now, Armagh, if the past decade of success, especially last year, is to have the potential of being repeated each year.

Claims that we had little strength in depth on the bench this year, and that there are few players at senior level capable of breaking into the county squad, are now an indictment of our current system and demand the need for change.

Forget Armagh, that change is a four-letter word FEAR and PLUG THOSE GAPS now.