

TEACHING GAMES FOR UNDERSTANDING – TGFU

(A Small Games Approach to Coaching)

Today's coaching is moving away from the traditional "drills based" approach and is instead moving towards a more modern "games based" approach to skill acquisition.

Drawbacks of the traditional drill base approach:

- Direct instruction (vs. discovery learning) – doesn't encourage "thinking" players with good "game awareness" and decision making skills.
- Unrealistic (un "game like") situations = lack of pressure found in game situations, learning not easily transferable into game situations.
- Mindless drills that don't engage players – players become bored = misbehaviour and decreased motivation and enjoyment.

Positives of the games base approach:

- + Guided questioning and discovery learning (trial and error) – develops "thinking" players who demonstrate game awareness, decision making skills, ownership of learning and also promotes the retention of learning.
- + Provides realistic "game like" situations that contain elements such as time and space constraints, allowing players to practise the delivery skills under pressure. Practising in a "game like" environment also makes it easier for players to understand how a skill or concept applies to the game.
- + Because players are engaged in activities that are inherently enjoyable, they have more positive experience increasing motivation and reducing boredom. Games based approach.

The Basic Concepts of TGFU

+ Shaping Play

- Change/Develop rules to shape play.
- Change the number of players and player ratios.
- Adjust the size, shape, dimensions of the field of play.
- Modifying the goal or how points are scored.

+ Focusing Play – Guided Questioning

- Use guided questioning to make players think about the activity they are engaged in i.e. "Was that a successful pass? Why? / Why not?"
- "Freeze Frame" play to look at positioning etc.
- Point out and praise good play.
- Demonstrations – use players where appropriate.
- Use short well timed breaks for demonstrations or questioning.

+ Enhancing Play

- Praise and focus on players doing well, 10:1 good to bad.
- Create a challenging and stimulating practice environment.
- Create opportunities for achievement.
- Encourage decision making from players.
- Ability Matching – match players together based on ability.

Points to Remember When Designing Practice Sessions

- Always pre-plan practice sessions (see example session planner).
- Don't try and pack too many activities into a session. Depending on difficulty 4 – 5 activities is usually sufficient.
- Set timeframes for activities and wear a watch so you can keep track of how long you spend on each activity.
- Avoid having players lined up or standing idle.
 - It is likely they will get bored and consequently misbehave.
- Try to use game-like activities that are stimulating and consistent with the game of hockey.
 - Repeating mindless drills is not only boring but players find it difficult to transfer these skills to games.
- Try to group players so that they are matched against other players with similar skill levels.
 - This stops advanced players getting bored and newer players becoming disheartened. It also reduces the risk of injuries.
- Limit instruction and keep instruction periods short sharp and to the point. Use players to demonstrate when appropriate.
- Practise transitioning between activities so that practice flows smoothly and players aren't left waiting around.
 - Try to set up the next activity while the last is still running.
 - Set up the next activity during a drinks break.
- Don't just rely on 'the same old drills' be inventive in designing activities that are effective and enjoyable for your players.
- Always make sure that the practice environment is safe. This may include;
 - Checking the practice area is safe.
 - Ensuring players are wearing the correct safety equipment.
 - Make sure players remove any jewellery or items that could be dangerous.
 - Setting activities up in a safe way - i.e. not having one group hitting balls into another group of players.