

**TEACHING AND
IMPROVING SKILLS**

5

CHAPTER



Chapter 5

Teaching & Improving Skills

INTRODUCTION

Fundamental skills form the basis for the development of all sporting skills. Many complex skills are made up of a coordinated sequence of fundamental skills (techniques) and the importance of these should not be underestimated. It is exciting to witness a champion displaying faultless techniques while performing in extremely competitive situations.

Every player and coach strives to achieve ultimate game skill performance. However, the process of developing skills is long and detailed. It begins with a command of the basic, simple and complex skills and progresses through a mastery of mildly competitive situations to competence in full-scale competition.

To achieve high-quality performance, players are encouraged to attend rigorously to each stage of skill development. Neglect at any stage of learning may result in the emergence of an exploitable weakness.

STAGES OF LEARNING

From motor coordination to major game skills

There are three identifiable stages of learning. Players will move through these stages at varying rates, and when new skills are introduced may regress from a later stage to an earlier stage. The coach's responsibility is to carefully assess each player's current stage and develop appropriate practices so that each player is motivated and challenged.

Early stage

Players in the early stage of learning a skill tend to make a large number of errors and may look and feel clumsy and uncoordinated. A player's performance might be characterised by one or more of the following:

- Parts of the skill performance are missing, particularly the preparation and follow-through components.
- Some parts of the skill are exaggerated, while in other parts the use of the body is highly restricted.
- Rhythm, coordination and control are poor.
- Minimal outcomes result from maximum effort.
- Poor decisions are made regarding response options.

Intermediate stage

Players in the intermediate stage of learning a skill have a basic command of skills and are able to perform the skills at a faster pace and, therefore, place them in a competitive situation. A player's performance might be characterised by one or more of the following:

- Movements have better control, coordination and rhythm.
- Some parts of the skill continue to be either restricted or exaggerated.
- While the overall skill produces reasonable results, some components of the skill are performed incorrectly.
- Many of the movement patterns, such as an individual's unique backswing in golf, remain throughout life because of the lack of opportunities to practise, poor motivation and/or the lack of qualified instruction.

Final stage

In this stage, players are able to perform skills subconsciously and under pressure. The player is ready to advance to more complex skills. A player's performance might be characterised by one or more of the following:

- Mechanically efficient and coordinated movements.
- Automated performance of the skill, which allows the player to process other information while performing the skill – The types of information includes strategies to counter opposition movements, responding to changes in the environment and planning for the next game play.
- Confident and purposeful movements.
- All components of the skill are correctly performed, well sequenced and optimally timed.
- Minimal variation in the outcome of the skill performance.



During all stages of skill development, coaches should:

- Provide knowledge of results and performance.
- Encourage players to feel the effect of their movement choices.
- Develop the player's ability to imagine correct skill movements.

The coach's responsibility is to carefully assess each player's stage and to develop appropriate practices so they are motivated and challenged.

TEACHING AND REMEDIATION OF SKILLS

Technique v skill - technique involves performing the skill, skill is doing it in a game under pressure with limited time and space.

Adolescents tend to display problems when trying to master the skills of Australian Football. Group or individual instruction can target common problems and help overcome skill barriers.

TEACHING FOOTBALL SKILLS

A great deal of training and coaching is based on the misguided notion that practice makes perfect. This is not necessarily true. Practice makes permanent and this applies equally to both good and bad practice. In preparing a training program, an effective coach should be able to:

- Know how to introduce a skill.
- Know the key points to emphasise.
- Recognise skill errors.
- Know how to rectify skill faults.

1. How to introduce a skill

To become a better and more efficient coach, some of your training sessions must be devoted to skill learning. A simple formula for a coach to follow when teaching a new skill is the SPIR method, which will be outlined later in this chapter. After some practise, the coach will find this procedure becomes second nature. It is efficient and follows the major principles of learning.

2. Know the key points to emphasise

To create an effective learning situation, the coach must take into account the following points:

- Minimise the number of teaching points. Don't confuse the player with a long list of instructions – keep it simple!
Likewise, when teaching an advanced skill, e.g. kicking for goal on the run, break the skill down into simple manageable stages.
- Ensure the skill is being performed correctly as practice makes permanent. During a training session, a coach should spend time observing and analysing various aspects of the session. Not only should the coach observe the general performance of the team, he must also analyse the specific performance of individual players within the group. The coach must also possess a good understanding of the skills of the game.
- Finally, the ability to organise and observe counts for very little if the coach lacks the ability to communicate.
In teaching skills, a coach can communicate:
 - By showing or demonstrating.
 - By speaking.

3. Recognising skill errors

The most important part of skill teaching is to determine whether correction is necessary. The preferred procedure in identifying skill error is as follows:

- Watch the player carefully to identify what the problem is.
- Break down the basic technique of what is actually wrong – e.g. eyes, hands, feet, follow through.

- c) Work out what is required to overcome the problem.
- d) Take the player aside – be positive and gain his confidence.
- e) Demonstrate the correct technique.
- f) Have the player practise, practise, practise. Repetition is the key to learning.

4. Rectifying skill faults

There are broad techniques which coaches should use to remedy problems in the performance of a skill:

- a) Rebuild the skill if the performance in no way resembles the desired model.
- b) Renovate the skill when the performance only partially deviates from the desired model.

FIXING ERRORS

Skill errors do occur. Many footballers are taught skills incorrectly and subsequently perform them poorly under match conditions. Individualised coaching can rectify many of these problems. Some common skill errors and suggested remedies follow. In all instances, it is preferable to break the skill down into its simplest form to ensure the technique can be performed at the basic level.

Kicking – ball guidance

Problem: Using two hands to slam the ball on to the kicking foot.

Remedy: Using the one-handed technique – the ball is held in the palm and fingers of one hand underneath its bottom end. Other hand is placed behind back.

Problem: Using both hands to guide the ball on to the kicking foot.

Remedy:

1. Walk 2-3 steps, drop ball on to a mark on the ground.
2. Repeat, bringing kicking foot through.
3. Repeat with one finger of opposite hand on the side of the ball.
4. With one hand behind the back, use the one hand drop.
5. Hold the ball with two hands, walk through the kick and guide the ball down with one hand.

Kicking – goalkicking

Problem: Inconsistency

Remedy: Focus on a target behind the goals.

Begin a short distance from the goals (about five metres and increase as the kick improves).

At all times, player's optimum power should be used (optimum power is the power at which the player kicks comfortably).

Marking – Overhead marking

Problem: Incorrect positioning of fingers and thumbs.

Remedy:

1. Mime mark (stress fingers spread and correct position of thumbs behind the ball - "W" formation).
2. Player grabs ball from coach's hand held above player's head.
3. Throw ball from hand to hand.
4. Throw in air and catch; bounce off a wall.
5. Increase frequency of catches and introduce opposition.
6. Run, jump and mark. Adjust your hands as the ball approaches.

Handball

Problem: Repetition – repeated handball can cause pain to the striking hand.

Remedy: Both hands can be used to minimise the pain of hitting the ball. Use the platform hand to help propel the ball.

Develop movement with the platform hand before the ball is hit.

Problem: Throwing the ball in the air or dropping platform hand before hitting the ball.

Remedy: Stabilise platform hand on table, fence or partner's back.

'Fist into hand'. Player grabs punching fist with platform hand after punching the ball.



General remediation suggestions

Coaches should refer to the main coaching points contained within the Skills Guide (Chapter 14) when setting out to teach the particular skills of the game.

It is important to use the SPIR method and to introduce only two or three coaching points at a time. For instance, in teaching handball, the first coaching point might be:

- Make a proper fist with the striking hand.
- Hold the ball with the other hand forming a platform under the ball.
- Strike the ball close to its point.

Having mastered that, add a new coaching point:

- Catch the fist in the hand and strike the ball.

Master that, then add:

- Step forward on to the front foot (same side as the hand holding the ball).

And continue over a period of weeks to “build” the skill. It is a trap to try to teach it all at once. Be patient and allow players to master each point along the way.

THE SPIR METHOD FOR SKILLS TEACHING

As previously identified, a particularly successful teaching method for assisting players to learn new skills is the SPIR method.

S for Show (demonstrate)

- Name the skill.
- Show the whole skill first.
- Show again while making the instructional points.
- Make no more than three coaching/instructional points.
- Ask if there are any questions.
- Demonstrate once more, asking the players to watch for the coaching points.

P for Practise

- Practise immediately.
- The learners copy what has been shown.
- Practise the whole skill first.
- Revise parts of the skill if problems.

I for Instruct (intervene to correct errors)

- Observe each group for 15-30 seconds.
- Keep repeating the key points about the skill.
- Provide further instruction.

R for Reward

- Praise good efforts.
- Show pleasure.
- Make every player feel his/her efforts are valued.

S	Show	Name the Skill Demonstrate three times Provide three coaching points (max)
P	Practise	Have players practise immediately via an appropriate activity
I	Instruct	Give feedback on their performance based on what they have been taught
R	Reward	Encourage and reward effort and achievement

USING SPIR EFFECTIVELY

During the Show (demonstration)

- Select appropriate learning information.
- Each skill demonstration requires a formation which allows each player to obtain a clear view of the key aspects of the skill.
- Use simple, precise instructions.
- A key word or cue should be used to emphasise the important parts of the skill.

During the Practice

- Let players freely experiment without much feedback at first.
- Get players practising as soon as possible so they don't lose their mental picture or the sense of how the skill is performed.

When Instructing

- Provide feedback as this lets players know how they are going.
- Allow them to practise for a time before offering any feedback.
- Offer specific, constructive, clear and positive feedback.

When providing Reward

- Encourage freely, particularly when an individual's progress seems slow.
- Set standards according to the capability of each player.
- Understand and allow for the fact that each player will improve at a different rate.
- Only compare players with themselves – what they could do and now what they are doing.
- Avoid comparing players with each other.

GAME SENSE AND DECISION-MAKING TRAINING

Game sense is an approach to coaching that uses games as the focus of the training session. By focusing on the game (not necessarily the full game), players are encouraged to:

- Become more tactically aware and be able to make better decisions during the game in pressure situations.
- Start thinking strategically about game concepts.
- Develop football skills such as kicking and handballing under pressure within a realistic and enjoyable context, rather than practising them in isolation.
- Develop a greater understanding of the game being played.

Game sense activities also aim to:

- Increase individual and team motivation to training – players love to play games!
- Physiologically prepare the body where conditioning is specific to that of a game.

This approach to coaching is 'game centred' rather than 'technique centred'. While most traditional coaching sessions have focused on the practise of techniques, the game sense session focuses on the game.

In the past, technique has often been over-emphasised within training sessions. While technique is an important part of the overall skill, it has often been taught in isolation, without requiring players to think and apply the techniques to the situations required in the game. By using game sense, players are challenged to think about what they are actually doing, and why. Players are taught to use the appropriate technique at the right time and place in the pressure situations of a game.

When designed well, mini-games appeal to the players' (especially adolescents) ability to problem solve and process information and subsequently raise their levels of attention and desire to do well.

Why use game sense?

The fact that games are intrinsically motivating is probably the best reason why coaches should adopt game sense, but there are a number of other reasons for using this approach, including:

- Encouraging a holistic approach to the teaching of games – players are taught to solve problems that arise in a game through tactical awareness and understanding; skills are developed in a more meaningful environment.
- Promotes enjoyment for participation – a fun environment increases motivation levels and encourages participation.
- Assists the beginner, who often has limited technical knowledge of a sport. For instance, for these coaches it is more appropriate to set challenges for players through games rather than conduct technique-based sessions that are based on unsound techniques due to a lack of technical knowledge. It helps avoid developing players with inflexible techniques, that is players who are unable to cope with change in the playing environment.



- Aids efficient group management – game sense is particularly useful as group management is often easier if the players are having fun and less time is being spent on drills; teaching space, equipment and time can be used more efficiently. It also lets the coach cater for all ability levels by encouraging players to concentrate on the game aspects, rather than on the textbook execution of the technique which some may never master.
- Coach talk and intervention is kept to a minimum – the coach questions players to challenge them to find solutions, rather than providing all the answers; cooperation between the coach and the players is increased due to the player involvement.

The coach's role in game sense

The role the coach takes in game sense is somewhat different. The coach adopts a role as a facilitator and co-ordinator rather than a director and creates situations where players have to find solutions for themselves. The coach guides rather than directs players in their understanding and playing of the game. The coach designs activities and games that progressively challenge players to develop an understanding of the strategies, skills and rules required to succeed in games. The coach should construct games with specific objectives relative to the team and individuals, such as first-option handball. If “first-option handball” was the theme of the training session or week then a game would be devised with this in mind, such as a game of six-on-six handball football played over a field of 30m x 20m.

This change in role should not be interpreted as a lesser role for the coach. In fact, it requires greater planning of activities and organisation on the part of the coach. Although many coaches take on coaching as a short-term proposition, perhaps for just one season, game sense is about the long-term development of players. Providing an environment where players can develop the strategic side of their game, as well as becoming an independent thinker, is a long-term goal. Coaches at all levels can contribute to this side of a player's development.

Traditional v game sense training session

For many years, coaches have adopted a traditional approach to training, which would look something like this:

- 2-3 laps warm-up.
- Stretches.
- Technique drills such as lane handball and kicking.
- Skill drills.
- Game drills such as full-ground game plan specific.
- Cool down, including stretches.

A game sense approach to a training session may look something like:

- Warm-up game.
- Questions, challenges and discussion about game (particular theme).
- Return to game.
- Questions/challenges.
- Extension of the game.
- Further extension of the game, incorporating other team plans and themes.

Modifying games for a purpose

With a game sense approach to coaching and teaching skills, the coach as facilitator plays a very important role in modifying games to emphasise or exaggerate a particular aspect or theme, for example:

- Number of players.
- Number of possessions.
- Length of time a player can hold the ball once tagged (1 sec, 2 secs etc).
- Size of playing area.
- Scoring areas.
- Equipment used (such as a soccer ball if playing a game of International Rules).
- Structure of scoring system.

When developing games for a particular purpose, as a coach you must have answers to the following questions before explaining the drill to your team. Some questions to think about when developing your game sense drills can include:

- What particular themes or tactics do I want to focus on in the game?
- What will be the main challenges to the players?
- What are the rules and who will umpire?
- What will the dimensions of the playing area be?
- How can I extend or modify the game to continually challenge the players?
- How can I construct bias if necessary to make individuals work harder than others?
- How can I include all players in the game?
- Will I carefully pre-select teams or will I run with several captains choosing teammates?

When discussing game sense, one very important aspect is that of questioning players on specific outcomes or focusing on specific aspects, which have been evident or not evident during the game.

It is important not to spend too long questioning the team as part of the success of a game sense approach is in fact the playing. Questions will generally relate to aspects of the game and are used to enable players to reflect and then visualise in a match-day situation.

The types of questions a coach might use include:

“What happens when you handball short?”

“How can you create more time for the receiver to decide and dispose?”

“How can you identify if a team mate is clear?”

Player empowerment ... players as game-designers

So far, information relating to game sense has been coaching-team facilitated and led. Once players are familiar with the concept of game sense and its relationship with aspects of the game, players can then be empowered to work in small groups or individually and presented a task of developing a game.

This can be an exciting, enjoyable and valuable process in reinforcing key concepts, tactics and themes and assists in the development of leadership within the group.

In this approach, the coach would explain the concept and construct some clear guidelines which players would use to develop a game. Some guidelines might include:

- Your game must run for about 15-20 minutes.
- It must focus on a particular aspect of the team plan (themes or guidelines).
- How will you explain the game?
- Will there be a scoring system?
- Who will umpire the game?
- How will teams be selected?
- What are some examples of player behaviour you might see, and how will you explain this to the group with strategies to improve this area?
- What equipment is required? Who will organise this?
- What will the playing dimensions be? Can this be extended?

Coaches, step back

It is necessary to stress that the young player's interest in processing information and problem solving at the same time will only be possible if the coach steps back from the practice and allows players the time to confront the challenges on their own and/or with teammates. Well-designed practices will ensure that the desired outcomes are achieved according to program guidelines. During practice, coaches should concentrate on providing accurate feedback and prompting. If it is essential to accelerate the learning process beyond what is occurring during a particular mini-game, the coach should attempt to interact by asking questions rather than offering a series of commands. By using the above coaching approach, the coach can provide the player with a balance of interactions which contains a healthy mix of 'do as you are told' and self-discovery practices.

Sample Games

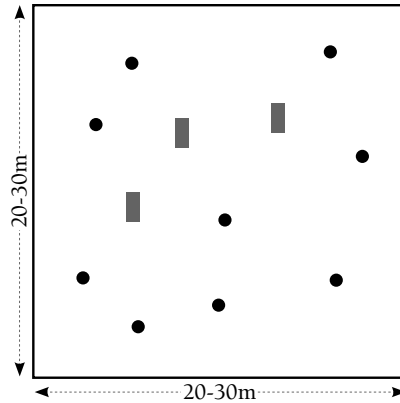
Following are two examples of ways to organise games which can be used to develop game sense.

Keepings Off

Themes: Clear communication, protect ball carrier at all times, follow your skill disposal.

Equipment: Football, different coloured tops for “chasers”

Key: ■ Chasers (3 players)
● Possessors (9 players)



Instructions/Rules:

- Ball can be handballed only. Once an unforced disposal occurs, “chasers” team get possession of the ball from the point at which ball was released.
- Compulsory rules are:
 - Must nominate who the player is handballing to (communication)
 - Must make a concerted effort to protect the receiver (teammate) by blocking and then tagging your receiving teammate after delivering ball (protecting ball carrier and following possession as in a game situation).
- The aim of the game of “keepings off” is for the team in possession to maintain possession using quick hands and following team guidelines, each time “chasers” touch the ball or the ball hits the ground as an ineffective disposal then a point is awarded to “chasers”. Game lasts 1-2 minutes before three more chasers rotate.
- Game can be played by any number but field must be adjusted particularly if introducing short kicking. Other extension ideas include playing seven players in possession and five chasers, and ultimately even numbers.

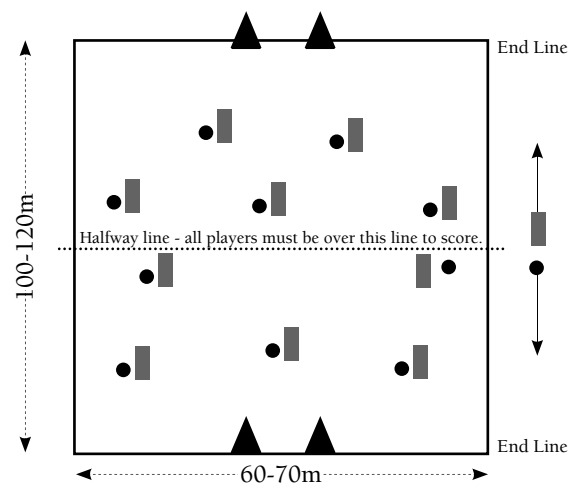
Corridor football

Themes: High skill disposal in pressure situations, hard attacking running and accountability

Equipment: Cones as boundaries, football, two different sets of jumpers/T-shirts. (Full length of ground can be used. Cones or portable goals can be used for a shorter playing area.)

Basic rules

- Seven to eight players per team
- Each half seven to eight minutes with a one minute interval
- Normal AFL rules with the following modifications
 - Player last touching the ball prior to it crossing the boundary loses possession to the opposition who return it to play from behind the line with a kick or handball.
 - Goals may only be scored if all members of the attacking team are on the forward side of the centre line when the ball passes through the posts.
 Scoring as for normal AFL rules.



There are many other games in use, including touchball (tackling and non-tackling, indoor and outdoor), touch rugby (handball), forwards and backs, front and square grid ball, centre square clearance game, end ball, etc. Coaches are encouraged to develop various aspects of game skills.