

**YOUR PRACTICES ARE YOUR PLAYER  
DEVELOPMENT**

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THE MOST IMPORTANT THING YOU DO IS  
PLAN & DESIGN PRACTICES.

PLAYER DEVELOPMENT ISN'T JUST A  
SEGMENT OF WHAT YOU DO IN PRACTICE

PLAYER DEVELOPMENT IS **EVERYTHING** YOU  
DO! IT'S HOLISTIC!

You do this more than anything else in your  
program!

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## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- ▶ Are there better ways to help the team and staff than what I'm doing now?
- ▶ Shift your mindset from "I'm in charge" to "I'm a learning designer"
- ▶ How can I set up my practices to make learning the most efficient and engaging for our players?
- ▶ #1 thing we do is representative practice design because we spend more time with our players at practice than we do at any other time

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DON'T BE A COACH WHO DOESN'T SEE THE VALUE  
IN CHAOTIC OR IN CONTEXT ENVIRONMENTS

MOST PEOPLE WOULD RATHER SEE CLEAN LINES  
& COACHES INSTRUCTING CONSTANTLY- USA  
BASKETBALL

THIS IS THE ILLUSION OF LEARNING

BLOCKED PRACTICE IS PERCEIVED AS THE ONLY  
REAL PRACTICE, BUT IT HAS THE LEAST  
TRANSFER

FIND VALUE IN CHAOTIC, MESSY IN CONTEXT  
ENVIRONMENTS BECAUSE THOSE ARE STICKY

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## EXAMPLE OF COMMONLY KNOWN DRILLS THAT BUILD POOR HABITS

- ▶ Any drill where a player executes an action and then goes to the end of the line
- ▶ Any drill that asks players to execute a prescribed pattern without defenders
- ▶ Any A to B passing drills
- ▶ Any linear drills like dribbling through cones
- ▶ Spot Shooting Drills, Form Shooting

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The problem with traditional drills like the Mikan drill, 3 man weave, box drills, form shooting, static ball handling, timed shooting drills, spot shooting & 5-0 transition break are that players are completely and utterly removed from their environment (5-on-5) or in slices of the game.

“We can’t understand skill without a deep understanding of the environment.” - Rob Gray

**“Your assumptions are your windows to the world. Scrub them off every once in a while, or the light won’t come in.” - Alan Alda**

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## DON'T BE A TWIT COACH

Here's the basic formula for TWIT coaching:

**T:** We **Tell** the player how to perform a skill (maybe even demonstrate it.)

**W:** We **Watch** them do it.

**I:** We stop **Immediately & Inform** them of all the things they did wrong.

**T:** Then we **Tell** them how to do it better (sometimes demonstrating again while pointing out the most intricate details of the movement).

If the player doesn't get it quickly enough, we make them do punishment runs or pushups.

If they still don't get it, we label them "un-coachable," and we move on, focusing our attention on the 10-20% who get better by random chance.

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- ▶ Are the skills you are working on technique based or affordance based?
  - ▶ Rather than using a list of techniques or repetitive drills within your player development, create varied situations for solutions to emerge.
  - ▶ Put players in situations where they have to make decisions, not follow instructions
  - ▶ You want to provide affordances for players because it naturally promotes deceptive behaviors.
  - ▶ Add constraints or advantages to get players exploring different movements in different scenarios

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## A COACHING CRIME IS WASTING TIME

You must maximize time on task.

Players learn by doing; not by listening to you talk, running line drills for punishments, standing in lines or by blocked repetitions.

Players learn by physically practicing, connecting perceptions & decisions, feedback on results, and asking questions. This process is what leads to learning.

Repetition without repetition.

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Dominant repetitive drills have been limiting basketball player development for years because there is no alive movement problem to solve. When players know what the problem is and how they should solve it before the drill starts, it is ineffective for development. Instead, use small-sided games with constraints to develop players into more adaptable solution finders.

“Sporting performance is best defined as a problem-solving activity.” Shawn Myszka & Tyler Yearby

“Variability is the spice of skill. Embrace and manipulate it in training to enhance adaptability and problem solving.” Frans Bosch

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Any player can execute a bio mechanical skill when the techniques are repeated enough, self-paced, pre-decided and without defense.

We tend to divorce the decisions and movements the athlete makes from the setting in which they make them. Yes, an athlete can look great making a cut or a juke on air, but what information is present when they are doing so?

Complexity translates better to simplicity, but not vice versa. You see the drill killers struggle in games time & time again.

Instead of training in an isolated, decontextualized environment, we should allow our athletes to experience slices of the game and truly adapt their skill in a meaningful way.

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## Coaches Complaints

Many coaches talk about how their players/teams:

- Don't compete
- Can't adjust to a variety of settings
- Can't make decisions
- Have no skill
- Have no leaders
- Have no instinct
- Are not engaged-bored

So coach, tell me about your practice...

But they fail to create practice environments where these things emerge. This is one of the greatest advantages about practicing with CLA activities.

You can teach in that context, but if you remove them from context then you can't complain when they can't apply that information in the game that's completely different than your practices. The games are unpredictable so let's practice in an unpredictable way. Players can't adapt to an environment they don't inhabit.

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## Time to Make a Change

- ▶ Coaches need to start seeing themselves as architects of an optional learning environment. An environment where players can reach beyond their current level and they feel safe and challenged.
- ▶ The coach doesn't have all the solutions. He/she has very relevant knowledge and experience. But we should never teach specific techniques because we don't know what the best technique is for every player.
- ▶ Player development can get overly focused on shaping the athlete with drills, while not allowing the athlete opportunities for discovery that happen in live play.

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Become a better coach by designing training sessions specially tailored for your players.

Let's say you want to help your team press more effectively.

What do you do?

You start by identifying the problem first and then design activities that recreate those pressing experiences

"Representativeness" should be thought of in terms of the decision-making challenge, rather than tactical/technical similarity to the game (which seems to be how representativeness is defined). Start with the decision, and design your practices accordingly

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# ARE YOUR PRACTICES GAME-LIKE?

Is there a ball?

Is there offense AND defense?

Is there an immediate transition/consequence?

Is it unpredictable/chaotic?

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**“AN EFFECTIVE COACH SHOULD ATTEMPT TO DESIGN PRACTICE ENVIRONMENTS THAT FOSTER EXPLORATION AND PROMOTE SELF-ORGANIZATION RATHER THAN PRESCRIBING A SOLUTION TO AN ATHLETE” — ROB GRAY**

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# WHAT IS SKILL?

The relationship between the player and their environment (the game)

The ability to identify & exploit opportunity

How do we help athletes develop that ability?

**NOT STORED TECHNIQUES!**

Skills emerge in a task-representative environment. Perception-Action Coupling-they emerge in the face of constraints

Most think that skill is independent of decision-making, but you will never play the game of basketball independent of decision making

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# THE LOGIC OF THE CONSTRAINT LED APPROACH

- ▶ What can I add to the practice environment that will make the athlete's **current movement solution** effective?
- ▶ Encourage **exploration** and **self-organization** of a new movement solution—Don't just tell them what you want them to do. Instead let them find the solution for themselves
- ▶ Amplify **information** and invite **affordances**
- ▶ Provide **transition feedback** about progress toward a new, more optimal solution
- ▶ The goal is individual player development in the context of team development because we can't separate the two

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# WHAT IS A CONSTRAINT?

A constraint is something that eliminates certain possibilities or opportunities for action.

The continuous interaction of constraints shapes the emergence of skills

## Constrain to Afford

If you want to shape offense, constrain the defense and vice versa

If you constrain the defense, you afford opportunities to the offense.

Also can do two way constraints-first to score a certain number of points or get a turkey

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# MANIPULATION OF CONSTRAINTS

Coaches can use constraints to guide players towards solutions. The key point here is that constraints shouldn't force a solution, but guide players to explore.

The continuous interaction of constraints shapes the emergence of skills

Looks messy. Looks chaotic. Looks disorganized. It's intentional and it's by design

\*Individual constraints

\*Environmental constraints

\*Task constraints- can manipulate the most

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## Game-Based Approach to Coaching

- ▶ The CLA is different than other games based approaches & is not just "letting them play"
- ▶ SSG's are not CLA- they will resort to doing the same things & not become more skillful
- ▶ Best constraints are turnovers for certain behaviors- focuses their attention
- ▶ SSG's become boring & repetitive. You must observe and then manipulate constraints constantly every 4-5 minutes; find a new challenge point

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Think of any game based activity that encourages them to work on **skills in context with game relevant information**.

Dribbling around cones is decomposed from context and is missing info such as space and the chaos of moving parts—it doesn't transfer well.

Task design needs to accommodate the perceptual variables typical of the performance environment. To ensure this, the **task constraints you use in your practices should represent actual game conditions** where players will use their skills where perception-action are engaged.

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# KEY IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE DESIGN

Skill is best developed through:

- ▶ Guided self-organization
  - ▶ Movement away from internally, focused technical instructions
- ▶ Optimal challenge
  - ▶ We don't learn anything if we don't fail sometimes
- ▶ Deliberate, individualized & representative practice
- ▶ Clear feedback & ask questions
- ▶ Promoting autonomy (individualization)

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Skill emerges in a task-representative environment. This means, an environment which looks like an actual basketball game.

The best way to get variability & unpredictability in a shooting workout, in a ball handling workout, in a passing workout is to do those things versus a real defender/defense.

Knowing it and being able to execute it are two very different things

Traditional practices don't promote game-like decision making

Implicit vs explicit learning-athletes should never focus on their own movements, decrease verbal instruction and instant feedback-internal vs. external focus of attention- find the solution- speeds up learning process

Kids don't learn by being told. They learn by doing. Solutions emerge as kids are doing it for themselves.

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# KNOWLEDGE ABOUT & KNOWLEDGE IN THE ENVIRONMENT

Basketball IQ is not 'knowledge about'-ie simply knowing what to do & where to go. It's about picking up key information in real-time and adapting accordingly-'knowledge of'.

- JJ Gibson

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## WHICH CONSTRAINTS TO MANIPULATE

“A coach’s choice of which constraints to manipulate is determined by his or her understanding of the key factors that are acting as ‘rate limiters’ on the emergence of higher levels of performance of individuals and teams”

–Renshaw & Chappell 2010

A key point for **effective coaching** is the ability to **identify** and **manipulate information** in the environment to continually challenge athletes

–Stone, J., et al (2020)

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Perfect technique is what works in a particular situation. And as every situation will be different, so too will that perfect technique.

The human body doesn't care what the coach says. It reacts. The brain doesn't work like that. It doesn't store moves in a brain database that it can bring out when needed in certain situations.

Let players figure it out. They don't know how to problem solve because we as coaches are always solving their problems = they don't know how to solve their own

Let players **PRACTICE** adapting & problem solving

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## SHOOTING WITHOUT DEFENSE

A LOT OF COACHES THINK THAT THEY CAN DO FORM SHOOTING AND CHANGE THE BIO MECHANICAL TECHNIQUE OF A PLAYERS SHOT AND THEN THEY CAN JUST GET LOT AND LOTS OF REPS

THE BIOMECHANICS OF A SHOT CHANGE COMPLETELY AS SOON AS YOU ADD A DEFENDER. THE JUMP TIMES AND THE RELEASE SPEED AND HEIGHT ARE THREE OF THE BIGGEST THINGS THAT CHANGE IMMEDIATELY.

EVEN AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS THE PROXIMITY OF A DEFENDER STRONGLY INFLUENCES SHOOTING ACCURACY, BUT HOW OFTEN DO WE PRACTICE SHOOTING WITH DEFENSE?

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## GAME SHOOTING

- ▶ Do your shooting drills involve decisions or vs. air?
- ▶ Perception-Action coupling must be engaged- perceive, decide & execute
- ▶ The decision to shoot is more important than your technique!  
Do you have room? Are you in range & in rhythm?
- ▶ Shooting reps on air is player led development & helps build comfort & confidence- not saying don't do these things, but our job as coaches is to connect perception & decisions

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## GAME CONTEXT SHOOTING

Shooting in a game is a decision. Shooting drills should give the player multiple decisions.

The decision to shoot is much more important than the bio mechanical skill of shooting

Pass, shoot, or drive. Pass & cut, get, relocate, etc.

Reps on reps doesn't put players into a game like context.

Blocked practice reinforces false confidence, so you want to educate your players to understand repetition without repetition in their individual workouts

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## WHAT IS GAMESPEED?

THOSE TALKING ABOUT GAMESPEED WITHOUT EVER REFERRING TO PLAYERS SOLVING THE RELEVANT PROBLEMS OF THE GAME, PERCEIVING AND ACTING IN RELATION TO EMERGING AND DECAYING OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES, OPPONENT INTERACTIONS, ETC, ARE NOT ACTUALLY TALKING ABOUT GAMESPEED AFTER ALL.

—SHAWN MYSZKA

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# SMALL-SIDED GAMES VS DRILLS

1. Players develop their own movement solutions vs. being told what to do by the coach
2. Play against live defenders vs 1-on-0 with the coach "teaching" the "correct" way of doing something
3. Nothing worse than having a full team to practice but having 15 separate individual practices
4. If 90 + % is played without the ball, 1v0 practice won't help this. Ex) Off ball & defensive skills

## WHY SSG'S INSTEAD OF DRILLS

1. Definition of Skill
2. Maximize in-game transfer
3. Shared Cognition
4. Enjoyment- Way more fun
5. Improves your Coaching- must be attuned
6. Develops resiliency- have to solve problems
7. They get better so much quicker

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## WHAT CAN PLAYERS EXPECT?

- ▶ An opportunity to change how they see and read the game, taking their decision-making to the next level
- ▶ Expanding solutions for creating and converting offensive advantages
- ▶ Improving finishing & shooting adaptability
- ▶ Enhancing understanding of “triggers”, such as Ball Screens, Gets, DHO’s and Off-Ball Screens
- ▶ Shared cognition- better connected with teammates

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# PRACTICE PLANNING

1. Use Dynamic Tasks: The problems presented should be ever-changing or 'alive' so players stay engaged
2. Allow for active perception: There should be a context around the problems and it's important to set clear intentions
3. Set Achievable Goals: The Goldilocks Principle comes into play here. Not too hard, not too difficult, but just right. Try to aim to have players succeeding 7 out of 10 times.  
MAYA
4. Include vital game reps and unstructured play experiences.
5. Practices that offer shorter, more intense sessions create a more effective learning environment. **More is not better. Better is better.** Players benefit from focused feedback and less fluff.
6. Prioritize player growth without sacrificing the fun factor. Fun for a player is improving, competing and being around like-minded players/coaches who share a love of basketball.

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## FIVE WAYS TO HELP LEARNING TRANSFER FROM PRACTICE TO GAME PLAY

1. Design game problems for your players to solve. The players should have to make group and individual decisions to solve the task. No predetermined route/routine.
2. Simplify the game problem to shine a light on certain moments if the broader more chaotic game doesn't hit on the game movement you want at a high enough frequency.
3. Give players time to work in game moments. Let them explore, fail and try again.
4. Improve intensity, competitiveness with a consequence for losing. This will also create a better learning opportunity for the athletes.
5. Coach should provide support between reps, ask the players questions, provide video for them to review to continue their search for solutions. Be a guide, give specific feedback, provide support without interfering in the learning process.

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## DOMINANT APPROACH TO SHOOTING

- Drills and correction
- Rely on opinions and experience
- Repetition and perfect technique
- Little variability
- Avoiding errors
- No autonomy

## CONTEMPORARY APPROACH TO SHOOTING

- Use small-sided games and DL
- Align shooting with empirical research
- Repetition without repetition (Bernstein)
- Variability from the start
- Amplify errors
- Autonomy- individualized to ones actions

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## SOME COMMON TASK CONSTRAINTS

- ▶ Space- biggest complaint by coaches, mark boundaries
- ▶ Begin with an action or run action before you score
- ▶ Shot Clock- helps with zero second decisions
- ▶ Floor is Lava- Can only catch behind 3 pt. line
- ▶ Dynamic Starts- Players must always start somewhere different
- ▶ Scoring system- Only Gold Medals, Silver Medals, Bronze Medals
- ▶ Defense can only switch or pack line, lock left, etc.
- ▶ Unpredictable, POP, slips, ghost screens, rejects, flips, etc.

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# PRINCIPLES OF PLAY

*The environment teaches us what a good shot is and we can teach it within the Principles of Play*

*Offense = Spacing + timing + ball movement + player movement + reading/decision making*

*This isn't possible without engaging action & perception*

*Does the ball need help or space?*

*Dominoes, Triggers, Game Actions*

*Mismatches & protection plans*

*The floor is lava*

*Zero second decisions*

*Spacing (one can't guard two) 15-18 ft.*

*Shot Selection (Gold, Silver, Bronze)*

*What is ball pressure- what does it look like?*

*How do we double or rotate on defense?*

**Gold medals allow players to score, get fouled or draw two**

**Brad Stevens Deep Paint Touches**

**If going against one defender you are a scorer; if going against two you are a passer**

**Shoot if you are open, pass if someone else is open, drive if no one else is open**

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# EXAMPLE OF A 3 ON 3 SSG

Constraints:

Drive & Kick only

No screens/no cuts/no handoffs

Have to catch behind 3 pt line

Teaches off ball movement

Creates closeouts for teammates

Attack/Read closeouts

Passing on the move/pivots

Attack off dribble

Finish contested

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## MUST WORK ON TRANSITION SKILLS

The worst efficient transition offense is still better and more efficient than the best half court offense (in any league)

This is because its easier to get advantages mostly with space, numerically, positioning, randomized

Playing fast has huge advantages

Traditional practices you only get to work on it in 5v5

Not enough reps to get better in 5v5

This must be included in SSG's to help players improve

Understand advantage & flow into triggers if no advantage

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# Why update everything in your life except your coaching style?

## Is There is a better way?

- ▶ Reduce your feedback & explicit instruction
- ▶ Stop coaching every play
- ▶ Watch & Observe. Provide them opportunity for self discovery
- ▶ Players are self organizing in the face of constraints- they will figure it out
- ▶ Change the task constraints. Ask great questions- What do you see?
- ▶ Understand that learning/development is a non linear process
- ▶ Play & observe intentionally. Probe, sense, adapt. Don't let ego get in the way.

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## NOT AGAINST PLAYER LED DEVELOPMENT

I'M NOT SAYING THAT PLAYERS SHOULDN'T GET REPS, BUT I AM SAYING THAT WHEN YOU ARE ORGANIZING YOUR PRACTICES, YOU HAVE TO PUT YOUR PLAYERS IN THE BEST POSSIBLE ENVIRONMENT TO IMPROVE IN THE VERY SMALL AMOUNT OF TIME THAT YOU HAVE.

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## JUST BE WILLING TO TRY

Coaches won't try manipulation of constraints in practices because they think they aren't familiar enough with it, but you're already doing it in games!

Get comfortable doing it in practices by using the CLA

Be attuned with what's happening on the floor at all times

The more prescribed your practices are, the less your players are learning

NBA teams are already catching on. Whatever happens at the highest level eventually trickles down

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# MENTAL TRAINING

- ▶ Pre Practice- What does a great practice look like for you today? What does great support for your teammates look like today? Picture this for 30 seconds, then discuss with a teammate. Then ask them to hold on to their mental image throughout practice. Players can discuss how they're going to help each other in practice (driving leadership, mindset, teamwork or things they are struggling with & how to overcome them)
- ▶ Give players their own time outs to discuss what they've just experienced related to leadership, mindset, teamwork or things they are struggling with & how to overcome them
- ▶ Post Practice- What one thing that went really well today that you will remember the rest of the week? Again ask them to ignite their mental images & have them affirm with their teammate. Players can discuss how they've helped each other in practice (driving leadership, mindset, teamwork or things they are struggling with & how to overcome them)
- ▶ Give your players the chance to take charge and take control of their team. To take ownership of their team. And ownership only happens through conversations, through participation, through sharing viewpoints, through co-design and being psychologically safe

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## COUNTER THEIR WEAKNESSES

- ▶ Don't teach players to play it safe, social media has made kids afraid to fail/compete
- ▶ Safe place to look foolish & make mistakes because that's where learning takes place
- ▶ Teach aggressive mistakes, I love the effort making a mistake
- ▶ Develop confidence, grit
- ▶ Learn how to miss and own it, learn how to fail & come back tomorrow ready to compete
- ▶ Influence this through the practice environment

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# TRANSFORMATIONAL COACHING THROUGH THE CLA

- ▶ Make your practice the best part of their day- is it fun?
- ▶ Time on Task- no lines, laps or lectures
- ▶ Co-design, I need your opinion on this
- ▶ Psychological Safety- making mistakes is ok
- ▶ Learning is non linear
- ▶ Sports are what we do, not who we are

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# 1992

The environment that coaches create for children in these practice sessions and during competition will influence the development of anticipation and decision making. Coaches should lead significantly more games-based and decision making activities during practice sessions compared to drill-based activities, especially in the earliest stages of participation by children (e.g. Proteau et al., 1992)

–Anticipation and Decision Making in Sport

A. Mark Williams and Robin C. Jackson

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LEARNING IS **NOT** THE PRODUCT OF  
TEACHING.

LEARNING IS THE PRODUCT OF THE  
**ACTIVITY** OF LEARNERS.

–John Holt

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