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What are some areas coaches and trainers need to get better at when it comes to developing players?

We have to educate parents to help them understand that lining up kids at a team or individual workout for mindless repetitive drills around cones is not dynamic or productive. Parents have been fooled into thinking that linear, clean, neat drills with constant instruction are synonymous with quality coaching. Blocked practice is perceived as the only true practice but has very, very little to no transfer. The most important thing coaches and trainers can do to develop players is design effective practices by adding defense to any drill or skill they're trying to teach to make it more unpredictable & variable. Create more "alive" practice sessions which can individually & collectively stretch players to an acceptable challenge point. Kids learn and retain so much better and easier in game context situations. Use constraints to vary the situation and teach decision making. When coaches teach in this manner, they are using repetition without repetition. Human movement is natural. It self organizes in the face of constraints. Teaching in context produces players that are able to see situations in games and make effective, productive decisions much easier than those who are just taught through on-air practices. We want to help players become more adaptable in an ever changing, unpredictable environment. We must help create problem solvers by creating a learning environment more suited to authentic & adaptable interactions for players. Coaching is about developing the people you work to be the best players and human beings they are capable of being.

1. In regards to skill acquisition, as coaches, how can we improve the learning process for our players?

Coaches have to shift their mindsets from "I'm in charge" to "I'm a learning designer". They need to start seeing themselves as architects of an optional learning environment where players can reach beyond their current level and they feel safe and challenged. The coach won't have all the solutions, nor does he/she need them. Coaches have very relevant knowledge and experience and should use that to their advantage, but we should never try to 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 technique & drills, while not allowing the athlete opportunities for discovery that happen in live play. A better way to teach is by designing practice 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. Start with the decision and design your practices accordingly. Reduce your immediate feedback and explicit instruction. Let players figure out how to problem solve using & changing constraints to mimic game conditions. Players will learn so much more and retain it easier by doing it than by hearing a coach describe it or by trying to learn it in a drill setting. Kids learn to play the game by playing the game with a coach that can observe & then manipulate constraints accordingly. Having a coach that observes how

players interact with it all & then carefully manipulates constraints is critical. It might point to a new practice, more challenge, more intervention... or to less.

2. When presenting a new skill or task, why is 1 on 0 not always the best mode to present to players? What are a couple of other viable options?

Skill is learned faster and absorbed better by teaching it in a game-like context. Games are not played vs air, so skills shouldn't be taught that way either. Based on numerous studies, it's clear that athletes should never concentrate on their own movements, what movement scientists call an internal focus of attention. This is very contradictory to the way many people learn a new sport. After all, those who instruct others in the process of acquiring movement skills typically refer to body movements. Think of a coach telling a young basketball player to flick his/her wrist while shooting the ball. Consequently, athletes think about how to move their body parts, particularly in the early stages of learning. Numerous studies have shown that adopting an external focus is essential to optimal performance and it also speeds up the learning process. Skills emerge in a task-representative environment. Perception-Action Coupling gives kids the opportunity to learn while facing actual game constraints. Players are constantly perceiving to act & acting to perceive. Most coaches think that skill is independent of decision-making, but you will never play the game of basketball independent of decision making, so it's pointless to try to teach skill in that manner. Skill emerges in a task-representative environment that is ever changing. 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. Solutions emerge as kids are doing it for themselves.

3. Many coaches complain that their players struggle to shoot the ball well in games. How can we assist our players in improving their ability to shoot in games as well as their confidence?

A lot of coaches think that they can do form shooting and change the biomechanical technique of a player's shot and then they can just get lots and lots of reps, but the biomechanics of a shot change completely as soon as you add a defender. The jump times, 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 & decisions? This is a pretty simple concept-the closer the defender, the lower the %. A large amount of shots are open by at least five feet. These are the ones players should be shooting the most. The biggest problem, especially for high school players, is the inability to read closeouts. Players and teams need to work on decision making and shooting vs live closeouts. Players need to be able to understand how much space they need, what is a good & bad shot and when to put the ball on the floor. Shooting

in a game is a decision first. Shooting drills or shooting SSG's should give the player multiple decisions. The decision to shoot is much more important than the biomechanical skill of shooting. Reps on reps don't put players into a game-like context and using only blocked practice actually reinforces false confidence. Educate your players to understand the importance of repetition without repetition even in their individual workouts alone or with a trainer. Shooting drills should always involve decision making. Connections between perception & decisions happen when teaching shooting in game context. Variability is so important when it comes to shooting. Form, spot & repetitive timed shooting drills do very little to develop adaptable shooters.

4. In America, so many young players are good dribblers, but not very good drivers. As coaches, how can we improve our players' ability to drive? Plus, how coaches must change their approach as well.

Unless you are a complete beginner, the way to improve anything is by not doing anything prescribed or anything blocked. Most everything should contain defense. Executing biomechanical skill, but not in the context of a game isn't teaching your players to perform with decision making the way they will have to in an actual game. Dribbling is a biomechanical skill. Driving means going against defense. You can't learn that with a repetitive drill. Players learn by physically practicing, connecting perceptions & decisions, feedback on results, and with a coach asking questions. 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 is that players are completely and utterly removed from their environment (5-on-5) or in even slices of the game. 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 AND perception-action is engaged.

5. One major complaint many college coaches have with incoming freshman is that their "game IQ" and/or "decision making process" is severely lacking. How have some not all coaches failed their players in this respect? Also, what would be solution to the issue?

Dominant, traditional 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. Any player can execute a biomechanical 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. The kids who kill the drill struggle in games time & time again because the drill was never representative of the

game during their practice sessions. They never had to make a decision to execute the skill. Empirical research supports that dribbling through and around cones/pads/dummies have very limited effect on skill development and can detune players to vital cues of opponents and teammates. 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. Players should practice in small group settings where they can work on building connectivity through shared affordances & cognition with other players with a coach that can constantly manipulate task & environmental constraints to best challenge the players both individually & collectively. One of the biggest keys whether a coach is present or not is to practice with as much variability as possible. Repetition without repetition is key.

6. Here in America, players play in excess of over 100 games a year including school and AAU ball. How has the excess playing been detrimental to our player's skill development? Why is it imperative that coaches challenge this paradigm?

Young kids should be playing all different types of sports to develop in all ways including physically and mentally. Specializing too soon results in injuries, overtraining and kids losing interest in sports altogether. Young kids aren't even physically ready to develop some of the skills that coaches try to incorporate into their curriculum. The focus should be on letting kids have unstructured play, having fun and learning to play within a team. Creating fun, enjoyable practice environments should be the main focus of coaches at all levels of athletics. Teach players how to play instead of just running plays by introducing principles of play and being functional over fundamental. Principles of play help players understand that there are possibilities rather than automatics. Coaches should realize that pushing kids into one sport too early is detrimental to development and kills their motivation. A lot of players get frustrated and quit due to specializing and overtraining. One recommendation for maintaining healthy children and young athletes is for weekly training hours not to exceed a child's age and for structured hours not to exceed unstructured play by a factor of two or more. A greater focus on practice and fundamentals is not the cure; more free and unstructured play is the solution. Relax, take a step back, and let them play while embracing the variability and messiness. Learning & development is not a linear process and it's very messy. Players should feel comfortable & safe where they can make mistakes & explore functional solutions during training. This is where the real learning takes place.

Parents spend hundreds, even thousands of dollars on private individual training, yet many of those sessions are filled with cone drills, coaches with pads, scripted movements, and random conditioning.

The problem?

Sports like basketball aren't memorization tests.

They're environments full of constantly changing situations that demand perception, decision-making, and reaction. The best players aren't the ones who can perfectly repeat a meaningless drill, they're the ones who can read the game and adapt in real time.

This is why you often see players who look amazing in workouts. They can dribble through cones flawlessly, knock down shots in controlled drills, and move smoothly through every technical pattern.

But when the game starts?

Reality hits.

Because the game asks different questions. It asks players to process information quickly. To recognize space, timing, defenders, and teammates. To make decisions at speed. The traditional drills miss critical aspects of the environment (e.g., defenders, consequences, teammates, time and spatial elements, shared cognition, etc.) which shape how skills emerges in competition.

Empirical research supports that dribbling through and around cones/pads/dummies have very limited effect on skill development and can detune players to vital cues of opponents and teammates. 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. Game intelligence and feel can't be programmed through rehearsed drills. They are developed through playing, through real reps in real environments where problems must be solved on the fly. Repetition without repetition is key.

And there's another issue that often gets overlooked.

Many young athletes are underdeveloped physically because the majority of their time has been spent on isolated "skill" work instead of building the strength, balance, speed, and coordination needed to actually express those skills in competition. They essentially learn skills without context and then have to relearn them in context.

Skill matters, but not fake skill. Executing a biomechanical skill, but not in the context of a game isn't teaching your players to perform with decision making the way they will have to in an actual game Skill is the relationship between the performer and the environment. The environment is unpredictable and ever changing. Perception, decision-making, physical development, and real game experience matter more than anything.

If we truly want to develop better players, we have to stop confusing activity and a good sweat with development.