

The Game

Football matches are random and unpredictable events, who knows what will happen next; where and when you will get the ball, where a player might run etc. Playing against opposition and the fact that we are human and make mistakes ensure this, it is very unlikely that one player will do the same thing in the same way against the same player at anytime. This could be with or without a football; either situations include players dealing with pressure and the movement of opposition intending to steal the football. Our practices should resemble these game situations as continuously things will change; changes of space and time, players, the football moving in different directions, angles, speeds, heights. In response to all of these changes players move and make decisions from 'triggers' like speed and angle of the ball, defenders or team mates positions, children will learn to react and move to these changes, however only if they are constantly exposed to them.

Each time for example players receive and pass the ball, they search, recognise, assess, adapt, plan and predict before, during and after the pass. The majority of these things occur away from the ball, highlighting that allowing players to have time of the ball is important.

These 'Game Craft' skills are extremely important for the players to ensure they can transfer techniques into game situations, if a player has excellent passing skills and these are not accompanied by good decision making skills then they are little use.

Sessions need to be realistic and relevant to the game; a child will become more motivated if they can see why they are doing certain things during a training session. As well as the child being more motivated they will also learn more skills that are relevant to the game and can be transferred across. For players that are beginning to play the game, may not have the 'pictures' of 'what can happen' and as a consequence they will see most practices as relevant. In this instance the coach needs to help the player build up 'pictures' from simple concepts such as rules, boundaries etc. If practices are not realistic or relevant players may get bored and begin to express this as poor behaviour, attitude and effort.

So when next planning a session think;

- does it resemble match situations
- does it provide players the opportunity to search, recognise, assess, adapt, plan and predict
- provide opportunities for players to make informed decisions based on a variety of situations.
- does it constantly expose players to match like situations, such as 1v1, 2v2 etc.
- Does it allow for players to be creative and improvise.