Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU)

Some approaches to coaching have suggested utilising the context of a small sided game as a start point for sessions to allow players to demonstrate understanding around any given theme such that the coach can seek to determine the best practice approach to aid the players’ development.

This whole-part-whole approach to practice (Swanson and Law) suggests that players have an opportunity to play the game in it’s unfettered form (the whole) and, if appropriate, for the coach to, later, retract to a practice (a part) or practices that allow players the opportunity to practice some of the related skills (particularly one’s they find tough in the whole) in an environment where there may be fewer decisions, reduced opposition and/or more time/space.

Traditionally, the coaching method for many coaches across sport was to work ‘up the steps’ in sessions, building from a technique practice (defined as unopposed), into a skill practice (with some pressure) into a game related practice (often directional and with even numbers), where the game practice is an opportunity for players to test what they’ve learnt in the previous work. This approach links to Rink’s work, with the suggestion that once technique and skills have been mastered, that players will be in a position to transfer into a game situation. Here, through the theme of goalkeeping, coaches are asked to consider an approach to practice Bunker and Thorpe referred to as Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU).

This could be explained as a problem based approach to games where the play of the game is aligned to situated skill development. This implies that through relevant design of the game and the use of conditions/constraints, that players can practice particular skills with direct context to the game of football. Bunker and Thorpe explained that this approach to practice does not assume tactical and strategic awareness in games must come after the development of complex skills.

The benefits of the use of TGfU as a practice method are:
• Motivation often remains high as players practice in game context
• Players practice skills in the ways they occur in the game of football, which alleviates concerns around how the way skills in some technical/skill practices are practised transfer to the game of football
• Potentially, greater opportunities for complex problems to be solved and decisions to be made, which from research by the University of Wisconsin leads to greater brain activation.

Now, the suggestion here is that TGfU is another approach to coaching that coaches may wish to utilise, it isn’t suggested as The Way to approach coaching. However, coaches can sometimes feel pressure from the players to play games and find it difficult to align any focus of learning to the game.
Further, goalkeepers are often included in practice for the benefit of the rest of the team or a disproportionate amount of time can be spent on individual movement and technique development, that whilst aids development can limit the opportunity for decision-making and problem solving. The games have constraints/conditions that encourage GK’s to practise each of the four elements – (i) Dealing with back passes/switching play, (ii) One on One’s, (iii) Crosses and (iv) Saving shots, whilst providing a benefit for the whole team.

The games incorporated here provide an opportunity for coaches to establish games with their players that provide opportunities for ‘play’, which Jean Cote’s Development Model of Sports Participation (DMSP) suggests is a key part of a young persons sporting experience, whilst the subtle design of the games encourages players to work at solving particular problems and rehearse particular skills in the context of the game of football.

Additionally, coaches may wish to provide the players with 3-4 games and ask them to decide which one they’d like to play and then to set it up, play it and manage it themselves. This opportunity for self-directed practice is another way to provide opportunities for players to take responsibility for themselves and their learning.

How coaches then choose to intervene is for them to decide; consider the following examples, which link to coaching style methodology (relates to the goalkeeper receiving game):

**Command** – I want you to use the GK to switch play

**Question & Answer** – If you’re playing back to the GK, how can you help them to be able to play quickly?

**Observation & Feedback** – Watch Sam, see how she moves outside the line of her post to receive the ball before switching to Andy

**Guided Discovery** – Show me the different ways you can play out from the back (e.g. to the Full Backs, the Centre Backs, the holding midfielder, further forward or dribbling the ball out from the box)

**Trial & Error** – Try to recognise when to use the GK to keep possession

There are four games included here; with the various constraints and conditions within each/any, they can make a whole session. Be comfortable with the players not being able to succeed easily and allow them time to struggle and find it tough. If the majority of players succeed in practice too easily/often, the practice may not be challenging enough but be mindful that success breeds confidence, so try to find a balance of a. success and difficulty and b. a range of ways of measuring success (not only goals).
Game 1 - Goalkeepers Receiving to Feet

Game 1
1 – Outfield players can Only enter end areas When their team is in Possession
2 – Try to use GK to set up attacks

Game 2
1 – As per game 1
2 – Offside applies In end area
3 – If you score a goal having played through your GK (3 goals)

Game 3
1 – As per game 2
2 – Team out of possession can send someone into the end area to pressure the GK on receiving a back pass
3 – GK – Spot when to play out & when to dribble past the opponent

Integrity Soccer
Innovating. Inspiring. Integrating.
Game 1
1 – 6 vs. 3 + 2 GK's in boxes (10 x 10)
2 – Outfield players – Score by running balls through the box
3 – GK's try to save the ball or force player out of side of box – 1 goal

Game 2
1 – As per game 1
2 – GK can score 3 goals if they can leave their Box to intercept a pass or take from a players feet (with their hands)

Game 3
1 – As per game 2
2 – If GK leaves box, they can only gain ball with their feet
3 – If whites regain the ball, try to keep it and use GK’s to do so (5 passes = 1 goal)
Game 1
1 – Outfield players try to score from crosses
2 – GK’s try to intercept and start attacks
3 – Players restricted to channels

Game 2
1 – As per game 1
2 – Full backs try to join the attack to create 2 v 1 (and likely) different types of crosses

Game 3
1 - Players can move freely
2 – Goal from a cross equals 3 Goals
3 – GK securing a cross = 1 goal
4 – GK securing a cross and starting an attack = 2 goals

Pitch wider than it is long to encourage play wide
Game 4 - Goalkeepers Saving Shots

Game 1
1 – 3 v 3 in one end, 2 v 2 in other – which is larger (more space may lead to different types of shot)
2 – Use ‘S’ to set up attacks

Game 2
1 – As per game 1
2 – S can join in to support team in possession, which may lead to more set backs and longer shots

Game 3
1 – As per game 2
2 – Attackers try to shoot within 5 seconds of entering attacking area (may lead to more quick fire shots)
3 – GK can serve straight into attacking area if appropriate