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### Games Approach

Play Practice: The Games Approach to Teaching and Coaching Sport: Alan. G. Launder, Human Kinetics, 2001

#### Theory behind it

1. Every child should have the opportunity to participate in fun and challenging sporting activities.
2. The object is to remove the idea play must become work in order to improve.
3. Mastery of the skills is not a prerequisite to continue playing the game. This reduces the number of children dropping the sport and the children get to play the game before a certain skill is mastered.
4. It gets beginners playing a game, although not necessarily the real game, as quickly as possible.
5. If you play the game early in the session the child has the chance to appreciate the fundamental nature of the game
6. Through play the children are far more likely to be actively and purposely involved
7. It clearly identifies the technical skill that is holding back play. Children are more likely to want to improve that skill so the game may continue.
8. It encourages cooperation
9. It allows players to be more creative and innovative.
10. It promotes decision making by the participants. They learn strategies not systems.
11. It develops participants to be more reflective about there play.
12. Small sided games mean players take on more roles and develop a more ‘global’ understanding of the game.

#### Based on three fundamental practices

- a) Shape play – by using different rules you ‘shape’ the direction in which the game develops. For example; everyone must touch the ball before a shot is taken, shapes the game to involve more passing.
- b) Focus play – by “focusing’ on specific aspects of the game the coach can guide improvement in a certain area. For example; using the rule that everyone must touch the ball before a shot the players must focus on passing and getting open for a pass.
- c) Enhance play – enhance learning by making improved performance appear important and meaningful. Present challenges (how many passes in a row, make one more than last time), time restraints (perform the passes in a shorter period of time), handicap teams or individuals (play with only two defenders if the defense is stronger than the offense, use weak hands to dribble)

#### Interventions

The big fallacy is that a games approach is 'free play' and no learning takes place. This is not true. It is the successful interventions by the coach that lead to guided learning. It is very important to take advantage of the 'teachable moment'.

1. Freeze replay – freeze the group. Explain a concept and then rewind and allow the play to continue. Do not over use. The coach should make use of “what” and “how” questions, instead of telling the child what to do and how to do it. What could you have done differently to make a better pass? How would you do it differently?
2. Stop the game and work on a concept. When the coach realizes that the lack of a certain skill is hindering the game, stop the game, quickly work on the skill and then return to the game.
3. Debrief the game. Take time at the end of the game to ask the players what they learned and what can be improved for the next game.
4. Change the number of offensive and defensive players. By providing a one (or more) player advantages to the offense and defense you can shape the nature of what you want the players to learn.
5. Alter the size and shape of the playing area. For example; restricting the area from which players can shoot, can only play defense within certain areas, using a smaller court.
6. The nature of the goal. For example; lower basket, hit the back board, pass to a team mate in a certain position, and score for the number of passes completed.
7. Primary and secondary rules. Primary rules are the rules which clearly define the game (the travel rule in basketball). Secondary rules are rules that can be changed without disrupting the nature of the game (three seconds in the key). Start with as few as rules as possible. Add the secondary rules as they become necessary. Use a teachable moment.
8. Conditions applied to the game. Add secondary rules that may not be part of the 'real game' to shape focus or enhance the play. For example; you must complete five passes before you are allowed to shoot, it is a violation if you do not pivot to face the basket when you catch the ball.
9. Control and develop the good player. Children want to play on “fair” teams. Make sure there are players of equal ability. You will sometimes have to restrict the movement and actions of the 'good' player to promote equal play, but also develop some other aspect of his or her development. Give the good player leadership roles, make him /her dribble with his /her weak hand.

10. Differential scoring. Give different point to different shots, 3 point for shot from a certain distance, 2 points from closer and 1 point for a lay up. Another way is to reward points for completing an action; a point for every pass that preceded the shot.
11. Playing time. Every player should have an equal amount of time. By using shorter games the players can play more intense. Multiple short games also give the chance for a team to be reborn.
12. Tactical timeout. The coach can use freeze replays to direct the learning and it allows players to work out problems for themselves
13. Friendly equipment. Use small balls that are appropriate for the child or soft balls for teaching catching

### **Games Approach Session**

- a) The game should be as close to the real game (this is the modified 3 on 3 or 4 on 4 games described above) as possible. Introduce the basic concepts and primary rules.
- b) Allow the children to play without interruption. Determine the overall level of performance. Stop play only to act as the referee.
- c) Identify who are the better players. You will need to know this to make the teams equal and also for future interventions.
- d) Decide what needs to be improved
- e) Practice the one major skill needed to be improved in the game.
- f) Return to the game, now using feedback to improve play. Use freeze play to aid in the learning.
- g) Debrief the session and plan for the next session.