



Using tactical games

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To be successful in game play requires players to do more than execute sport-specific movement skills well. Players must be able to **read** the game situation off the ball, **respond** with appropriate movement to relocate themselves for the advantage of their team or self, **react** to produce appropriate skill execution, and **recover** with off-the-ball movement to set up further game involvement. Coaching using a tactical games approach facilitates the development of player understanding of this totality of game play, whereas traditional direct instruction drill approaches primarily centre on skill execution in isolation.

A tactical approach puts movement skills and tactical learning within the context of a game play and an associated tactical problem, and does not restrict the use of multiple instructional methods for the achievement of specified game learning. For example, skill drills are still used to develop movement competencies necessary to successfully apply the movement solutions required of the tactical problem. However, unlike traditional sport teaching approaches that begin with a series of drills, a tactical approach is consistent with a game sense or teaching games for understanding model where sessions begin and end with a game play to contextualise the practical application of movement skills.

Unlike traditional drill first approaches, the tactical application of movement skills is focused for players at the beginning of a session, as activities are linked to a tactical problem and the development of associated game performance. In contrast to the practice sequence of a traditional direct instruction drill approach, a tactical approach sequence follows a tactical problem — tactical 'game sense' game or 'play practice' — question — reflect — drill practice if necessary — return to game instructional sequence.

There are five essential elements of a tactical approach:

- identification of the tactical problems and the associated principles of play
- recognition of the level of tactical complexity appropriate for the stage of learning of the players
- within practice sessions players practise movement skills in drills after they have experienced a game form that represents to the players the tactical problem in focus
- the connections between the tactical problems, associated principles of play and skill practice are made apparent to players through the application of questions that encourage player thinking and problem solving
- after practising a movement skill, players must be provided the opportunity to apply their improved skill execution and tactical understanding in game play.

Manipulation of game components, such as rules, number of players, dimensions of the playing space and movement within the playing space, provides the tools to create games and 'play practice' scenarios that develop tactical understanding and the application of movement skills for intelligent play. Used in conjunction with questioning to guide player problem solving and their development of game understanding, teaching and coaching sport performance moves from the limited focus on movement skill proficiency to the development of intelligent play.

Below is an example of a tactical training session (applications are in territory/invasion type games, for example, Australian football, soccer/football, lacrosse, basketball and netball).

Tactical problem	How do you support the player with the ball when in an off-the-ball position?
Focus	Understand that in order to maintain possession off-the-ball players must be open (create a passing lane) to receive a pass. Understand that in order to maintain possession the player with the ball must choose and execute the correct passing option.
Modified game	3v3 Give and Go Grid Ball (see Pill 2008).
Examples of developmental questions	• How can the players without the ball help the player with the ball? • What should off-the-ball players be doing in support of their team-mate with the ball? • What should you do after you pass the ball? • What happens to the space when you move? And what does that mean for your team-mates? • What happens to the space if you do not move? And what does that mean for your team-mates? • How can you indicate that you are open to receive the ball? • How can you use space to your advantage in maintaining possession?
Practice task	Give and Go 3v1 (see Griffin, Mitchell and Oslin 1997) or 3v2 Grid Ball (see Pill 2008) with passive defence.
Return to modified game	3v3 Give and Go Grid Ball.
Conclusion	What game principles did you apply in order to successfully maintain possession?

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