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**“GAME SENSE COACHING &
DEVELOPING DECISION-MAKING”**

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GAME SENSE FOR FOOTBALL

Training involves 3 main areas of improvement:

AREA	AIM	FEATURES
1. Technical skill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop ability to perform a technique more effectively • Eg: kicking, marking, ruck tap work, set shots 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High repetition • More explicit learning • Often individual or simple drill based
2. Tactical skill (game sense)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop ability to improve decision-making and skills under pressure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High repetition • More implicit learning • Practice under variable conditions • Small-sided games
3. Team style of play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop understanding of team plays that form a framework to make decisions within 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low repetition • Large-sided games/walk throughs/demos • More structured scenarios eg. Kick-ins • Mix of explicit and implicit learning

Implicit & Explicit learning:

Implicit: learning skills through experiencing practice tasks without direct instruction on how to complete the task

Explicit: learning skills through direct verbal instruction on how to perform a task

Why implicit game-based training?

1. Elite players have better decision-making skills than lesser players
2. Football is an “open” skilled game i.e., techniques are performed within a variety of situations
3. Well-rehearsed techniques can often break down in a game under fatigue and pressure
4. It is well researched that implicit (learning sub-consciously from ‘doing’ and developing ‘experience’ in this way) training is more effective in transferring to performance than explicit (structured drills) methods of instruction
5. Implicit games are more durable in terms of player learning (lasts longer and less likely to be effected by pressure/fatigue etc.)

Features of implicit game-based training:

1. Is player-centred – coaches *guide/facilitate* players to explore options by asking *questions*
2. Emphasis on DM in tactical situations that might occur in a match
3. Implicit learning – players often learn sub-consciously by experiencing situations and ‘learning from mistakes’
4. Indirect learning through problem solving

Player decision-making involves:

TACTICAL KNOWLEDGE: What to do if?.....(Knowledge of game/rules/team plans)

READING THE PLAY:

- Pattern Recognition – ability to see a play unfolding, and the likely outcome
- Movement cues – postural position of other players eg. tackling, leading, kick direction

The DM process:

1. **Scanning: a visual display eg. High/low eye movements of the field**
2. **Perception: collecting & interpreting the scanned information**
3. **Attention: selecting relevant stimuli/ignoring irrelevant**
4. **Response selection: best option to suit the tactical scenario**
5. **Skill execution: performing a technique appropriate for a given situation**

How does game sense work?

- A consistent technique can break down in game/competitive situations when exposed to “distractions” (external & internal), such as pressure, fatigue, noise/auditory and visual. By practicing in game settings providing a variety of scenarios, players learn to ignore such “irrelevant” stimuli, and only attend to the “relevant” ones.
- By providing tactical situations that are repetitive within small-sided games, players can improve their DM skills (eg. when & where to pass/run) through “experience” and learning from good and poor decisions. Such decisions become automatic/sub-conscious, allowing more ‘attention’ and time for executing skills.
- “*You need to make mistakes to learn!*”

COACHING/TEACHING POINTS

The coach establishes a learning environment and uses questioning and guided discovery to help players learn to address tactical situations.

GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING GAMES/TRAINING:

1. Have an aim or theme for each game. What are we trying to achieve?
2. Use small teams eg. 2-6 players to maximize the no. of decisions they make (REPETITION)
3. Are there small scenarios that occur frequently in a game to replicate? eg. 2v2 cont ball, 4v3 in D50 then rebound, 3v2 overlap handball, defenders zoning off.
4. Length – drills need to be long enough to allow plenty of repetition to develop “experience” ie., recall of situations from long term memory
5. What are the main rules? The size of the area? (can adjust during game)
6. Prepare variations for the game eg. What is the next progression (eg. add another defender)
7. Develop questions to assist in the learning process
8. BLOCK (new or difficult concepts) vs RANDOM practice?

GUIDELINES FOR TEACHING THE GAME:

1. Explain purpose of game
2. Explain briefly (4-5 points max) the rules and limitations eg. area of play, time
3. Let them ‘play’ for a few minutes and observe (evaluate whilst observing)
4. Is the game working? How can you modify it? (*size of area, team sizes, positions, rules etc*)
5. Vary the level of pressure eg. Change rules, extra defender/s, less space, level of tackling
6. Ask individual questions during activity/recovery periods (*Was that your best option?*)
7. Look for “TEACHABLE MOMENTS”: Stop game at appropriate points to ask tactical questions to group (*How else could your team have defended that last play?*)
8. Freeze the play (to demonstrate a point), rehearse, then replay the scenario
9. Feedback – on good and poor decisions – use questioning
10. Try and not “tell” – turn your feedback into questions

EVALUATE THE GAME:

1. Did the game address the outcomes you set out to achieve? Why/why not? (Technical skill practice/decision-making/physical conditioning)
2. How could you modify the game to address these better?
3. Was there sufficient repetition of skills?
4. Was player involvement maximised?
5. Can the game progress into a more advanced version?

QUESTIONING:

Coach's role is to assist players in solving tactical problems, rather than solving the problems for them. Using questions will help 'guide' players.

- Questions revolve around 4 concepts:
 1. **TIME** – *When should you....?* (How long do you have?)
 2. **SPACE** – *Where should you..?* (In poss – create space / not in poss – deny space)
 3. **RISK** – *Which option was best? Why?* (What's the score/time of game?)
 4. **EXECUTION** – *How should you.....?* (Best technique for a given situation)
- **Turn feedback into questions to direct and test learning! (When, What, Where, Why, How?)**

Individual learning question egs:

Who was the best person to pass to? (*John*). Why? (*long option, 1 on 1 leading in front of opponent*)
When was the best time to pass? Why? (*after drawing defender – as it created a free player*)
Where was the best place to run? Why? (*wide to space – it opened up space in the middle*)
What was the best way to pass the ball? (*short and flat*) Why? (*less air time*)
What was the best option? (*take the space*) Why? (*all team mates manned or oppo zoned back deep*)

Team-based learning question egs:

What strategies did you use when in possession? Which ones worked well? Why?
What type of defence did you use? How could you have done it better?
What would you do differently if the opposition zoned?
How could you move the ball quicker?
What can the attacking team do to create space better?
What would you do differently if the opposition had 3 effective clearances in a row?
What would you do if our team won possession of the ball with 2 mins left and 3 pts up in D50?

To develop strategy, we can use the games by:

1. One team in attack for a time (eg. 5 mins) or for a no. of trials (eg. 6 successes from 10 trials!)
2. Give one group a task (unknown to opposition) eg. use a zone defence only
3. Set a scenario eg. 2 mins left, attacking team is up by 2 pts
4. Have one team observe and evaluate tactics / experienced vs inexperienced teams etc.

GAME DESCRIPTIONS

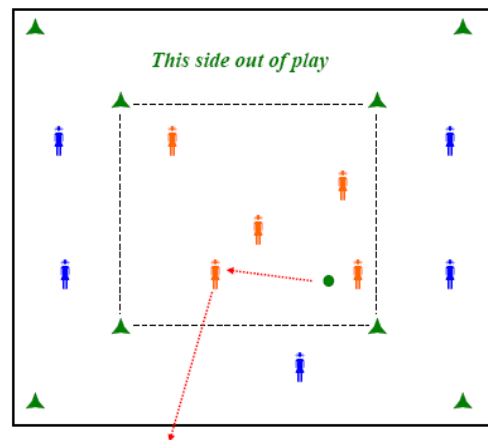
GAME 1: PRISON BREAK

GAME OUTCOMES

1. *Attacking team – to identify space in the defensive zone, outnumber the opposition, move the ball quickly to catch defence out of position*
2. *Defending team – to quickly shift defence around to deny opposition space*

GAME DESCRIPTION

1. Teams of 5v5 or 6v6. Mark out a square (about 10x10m) with another one about 3m outside of it.
2. One team begin as defenders, the other as attackers with the ball in the inside square
3. Time limit of 90 seconds before swapping roles
4. Defenders can move anywhere in the outer square, but cannot enter the inside square
5. Aim is for the attacking team to pass the ball around or run with the ball, until they can run the ball through the outer square, without being tagged/tackled by a defender.
6. If a score is made, the ball is placed on the ground and a team-mate picks it up to continue play by running it back into the inner square. The same occurs if a tag/tackle is made in the outer square before crossing the outer square.
7. If a score or a tag has been made on one of the four sides, that side becomes out of play (only 3 sides to protect at one time!) until another score or tag/tackle has been made on another side (eg. Can't score or be tagged on the same side in succession).



Variation:

- *Add a defender to inside square to put pressure on passes (can intercept ball for a point)*

KEY QUESTIONS

- (1) *How did you decide whether to run with the ball or pass it?*
- (2) *Was it more effective to move the ball quickly or slowly? Why?*
- (3) *How do you go about creating a gap (or space) in the defensive zone? (Draw defender/Run at defence/create 2 v 1).*
- (4) *Defenders – how do you work together in order to prevent space for the attacking team?*

GAME 2: 2 v 1 GAUNTLET

GAME OUTCOMES

1. *Develop knowledge and skills to know when to pass and when to run with the ball*
2. *Develop knowledge and skills about where to move to receive the ball*

GAME DESCRIPTION

1. In pairs, must get the ball over the end line without any of the defenders touching the ball. No contact allowed.
2. Attackers can run with the ball or pass the ball
3. 4 defenders must stay on their line (ie. only move side to side)
4. Have at least 5m between each defensive line and about 10m wide

HINT

Encourage:
“pass if defender is drawn” or “run with ball if defender drops off”

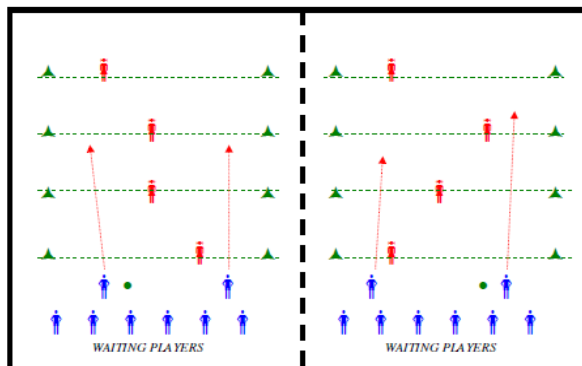
(Pass or Run?)

Variations

- (1) *Attackers must pass the ball in each zone*
- (2) *Once they are over the end line, the last defender chases whilst the 2 aim to kick a goal.*
- (3) *3 v 2 Gauntlet and Zone Gauntlet (see next game)*

GROUP ORGANISATION

- Players pair up (then place 2 pairs on the defensive lines i.e. 4 players)
- Have 2 grids side by side (5 metres between them for safety and for coach to walk between to give feedback)
- Rotate defenders once every pair has been through twice each



KEY QUESTIONS

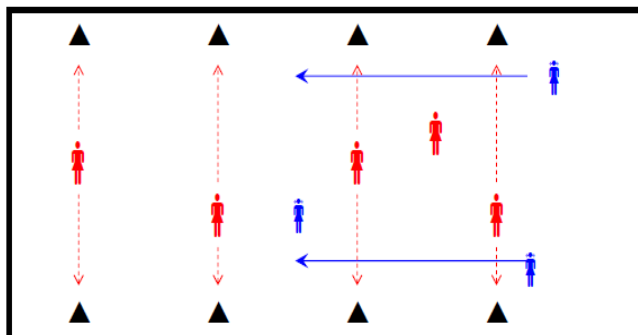
- (1) *When should you pass the ball?*
- (2) *When should you run with the ball?*
- (3) *What other strategies did you use to get the ball over the end line? (Eg. Fake, long pass)*
- (4) *Where can the receiver move to assist the ball carrier?*
- (5) *Where is best place to pass ball? (Between the lines)*
- (6) *How do the different rules affect your strategies?*
- (7) *How can the defenders anticipate where the ball will go? How can you work together?*
- (8) *If the game is too easy for the attackers, how could you modify it? (Decrease Space by shortening or narrowing the area)*

GAME 3: 3 v 2 GAUNTLET

- **This game has the same outcomes, questions and organization as Game 2, but is a more advanced/difficult version of ‘The Gauntlet’**
- **Progress to this game once you have success with 2 v 1 Gauntlet**

GAME DESCRIPTION

1. Game is set up the same as 2 v 1 Gauntlet, but allow a bit more room between defensive lines (8-10m) and width (12-15m)
2. 3 attackers must get the ball past the end line without any of the defenders touching the ball. No contact allowed. Attackers can run with the ball or pass the ball.
3. 4 defenders must stay on their line (ie. only move side to side)
4. 1 additional defender can move anywhere in the gauntlet area



Variations

- (1) Begin with 2 attackers at the start, and 1 attacker at the end who runs into play at start
- (2) "In the Zone" games (see game 4)

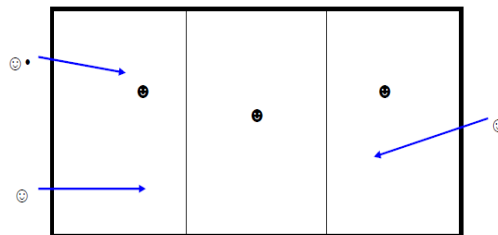
GAME 4: IN THE ZONE GAMES

GAME OUTCOMES

1. Develop knowledge and skills to know when to pass and when to run with the ball
2. Develop knowledge and skills about when to run and where to run to receive the ball
3. Develop defensive skills regarding reading cues of attackers and when to pressure ball carrier versus when to drop off to cover receivers

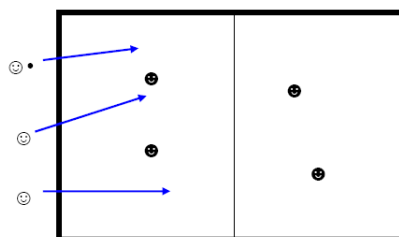
1. 3v1 IN THE ZONE

1. 2 attackers begin with the ball at the start, with 1 attacker starting behind the end-zone. This player can run in to create a 3 v 1 scenario in any zone.
2. Each defender must stay within their zone
3. Aim is for the attacking team to move the ball through the zone without it being intercepted
4. Can extend game to finish with a shot on goal, where last defender in the zone chases and puts pressure on 3 attackers as they attempt to score



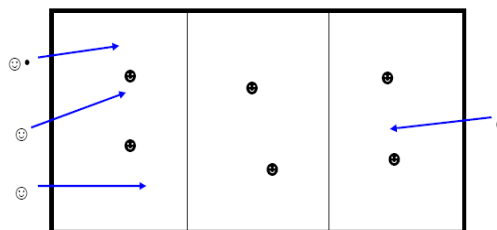
2. 3v2 or 4v2 IN THE ZONE:

1. 2 defenders must stay in each zone
2. Aim is for 3 or 4 attackers to move the ball through the area over the end line
3. Can make area bigger to include kicking



3. 4v2 IN THE ZONE VARIATION:

1. As above, but add a 3rd zone
2. Have a support player who starts behind end-zone and this player can run into the last 2 zones to support the other attackers as they move the ball through the area



Variations for “In the Zone” games:

- (1) Once the attackers are past the end zone, they continue on to kick a goal. The defender/s in the last zone apply pressure.
- (2) As above, except they continue on to kick the ball to a 2v1 (2 forwards/1 defender).
- (3) As above, except continue on to kick the ball to a 3v2 (more advanced)

KEY QUESTIONS

- (1) At any one moment, how many attackers were opposed to how many defenders?
- (2) Why is it more difficult for the defenders if the attackers spread out?
- (3) What can the defenders do to be more successful in an outnumbered situation?
- (4) Is it better for the attacking team to move the ball quickly or slowly? Why does slow movement make it easier for the defenders?
- (5) We can't move the ball quickly all the time, so what should we do if held/slowed up?

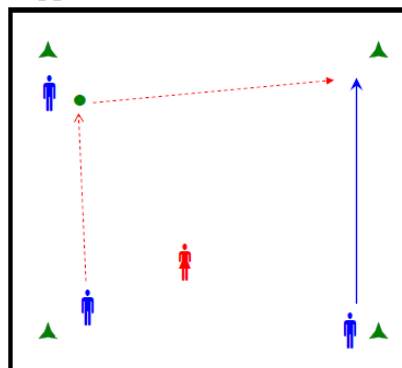
GAME 5: 4 CORNERS

GAME OUTCOMES

1. Develop knowledge and skills to know when and where to pass (draw defender)
2. Develop knowledge and skills about when and where to move (support the ball carrier)

GAME DESCRIPTION

1. 3 attackers start on a cone each – one corner is vacant
2. 1 defender starts in the middle
3. Aim is for the 3 attackers to keep the ball off the defender, who attempts to cut off the pass. The ball cannot be passed diagonally across the square
4. After each pass, an attacker should run to the vacant corner, giving the passer 2 options
5. The ball is passed to the cone, not in between – it is up to the attackers to get to the cones to receive each pass



HINT

(When to move)

Predict where the ball is being passed by looking at cues of the passer

(Where to move)

Always make sure the ball carrier has 2 options – 90 deg left and right

Variations:

- (1) 1 point for each successful pass, 5 points for an intercept. 20 sec time limit
- (2) Defender aims to tag the ball carrier (1 point) – this speeds the attackers up
- (3) Remove cones, and attackers should be able to keep same formation

KEY QUESTIONS

- (1) What was the best type of pass to use?
- (2) When should the attackers move to the vacant corner?
- (3) What was the best way to defend?
- (4) How can you relate this to a game of.....(eg. Netball, basketball, hockey)?

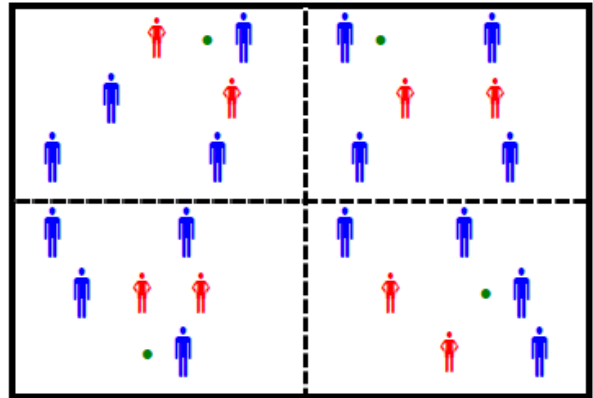
GAME 6: 4 v 2 TAG

GAME OUTCOMES

1. *Develop knowledge and skills to know when and where to pass*
2. *Develop knowledge and skills relating to creating space and increasing time to pass*
3. *Develop defensive knowledge and skills relating to decreasing time and space for the attacking team. Reading cues regarding where the attacking team will pass.*

GAME DESCRIPTION

1. In groups of 6, have 4 attackers and 2 defenders in a 15m x 15m square
2. The attacking team have a 30 second time limit and can run or pass the ball.
3. The aim of the defenders is to tag/tackle the ball carrier to score a point. Score as many tags in the time limit.
4. Rotate roles every 30 seconds.
5. As the attacking team becomes better with space and time, the defensive scoring will decrease.
6. If there are 2 or less tags in 30 secs, decrease the size of the area (to make it easier for defenders).



HINT

(For improving defensive skills)

Defenders should look at cues of the attackers to predict early where the ball will be passed or where they will run. For example, the body position, where the space is).

Variations:

- (1) *1 point for each successful pass, 5 points for an intercept. 20 sec time limit*
- (2) *4 v 2 or 5 v 3 breakout/spread to space to score or pass over an end zone (see next game):*

KEY QUESTIONS

- (1) *When should you pass the ball?*
- (2) *Do you need to run with the ball?*
- (3) *What is the best way for attackers without the ball to position themselves? (SPACE!)*
- (4) *How can the defenders predict where the ball is going to be passed? (Read Cues!)*
- (5) *If the game is too easy for the defenders, how could you modify it?*

GAME 7: 4 v 2 BREAKOUT

GAME OUTCOMES

- This game is a more advanced version of Game 6 (4 v 2 Tag). However, it has the same outcomes and questions as Game 6

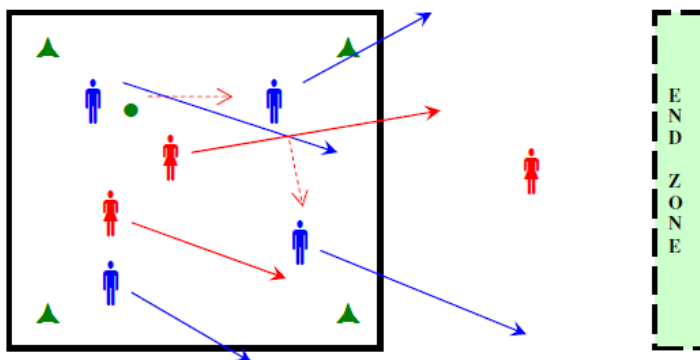
GAME DESCRIPTION

1. In groups of 6, have 4 attackers and 2 defenders in a 15m x 15m square. Add extra defender zoned off outside of square
2. It can also be played as a 5 v 3 (harder for attackers)
3. The attacking team start with the ball, and aim to keep it off the defenders
4. On the coach's call, the attackers break out of the area and aim to score a goal through a hoop (which is 10m away) or run/pass the ball over an end line or into an end zone
5. Rotate roles after every 5 attempts. How many times were the attackers successful?

HINT

(Where to move)

Attackers should look for space, then spread and separate out to make it harder for the defenders.



KEY QUESTIONS

- (1) *When should you pass the ball?*
- (2) *Where should the attacking players move to assist the ball carrier? (SPACE!)*
- (3) *How many options should the ball carrier have?*
- (4) *How can the defenders predict where the ball is going to be passed? (Read Cues!)*
- (5) *If the game is too easy for the attackers, how could you modify it?*
- (6) *Where was the best place for the attacking players to run once they broke out?*
- (7) *Where was the best place for the defenders to move to? Better to press up or zone back?*

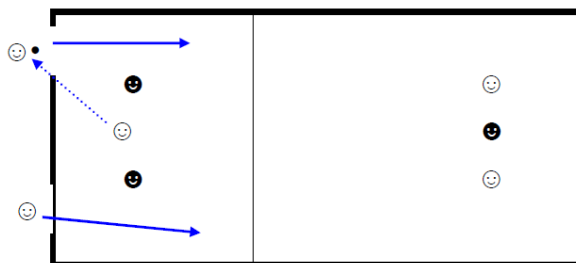
GAME 8: 3v2 KICK TO 2v1

GAME OUTCOMES

1. *Develop knowledge and skills to know when and where to handball or kick*
2. *Develop knowledge and skills relating to creating space and increasing time to pass*
3. *Develop defensive knowledge and skills relating to decreasing time and space for the attacking team. Reading cues regarding where the attacking team will pass. Forcing the attacking team to kick under pressure.*

GAME DESCRIPTION

1. Begin with one attacker standing between 2 defenders. The attacker handballs ball to either teammate to start game
2. The 3 attackers must run & handball until they can get a kick forwards to the 2v1 ahead
3. Aim is to kick before the line
4. Aim for defenders is to force a pressured/slow kick



Variations:

- (1) Time how long it takes the attackers to get the ball out of area (speed of ball)
- (2) 5 pts for uncontested mark to the forward
- (3) Play continues after the ball is marked by the forward (continue running) ie. Becomes 5v3

- (1) When should you handball the ball?
- (2) When should you kick the ball?
- (3) Where should the attacking players move to assist the ball carrier? (SPACE!)
- (4) How can the defenders predict where the ball is going to be passed? (Read Cues!)
- (5) How can the defenders work together to slow down the attackers? Make their kick high and slow?
- (6) Where was the best place for the defenders to move to? Better to press up or zone back?

GAME 9: BEAT THE DEFENCE

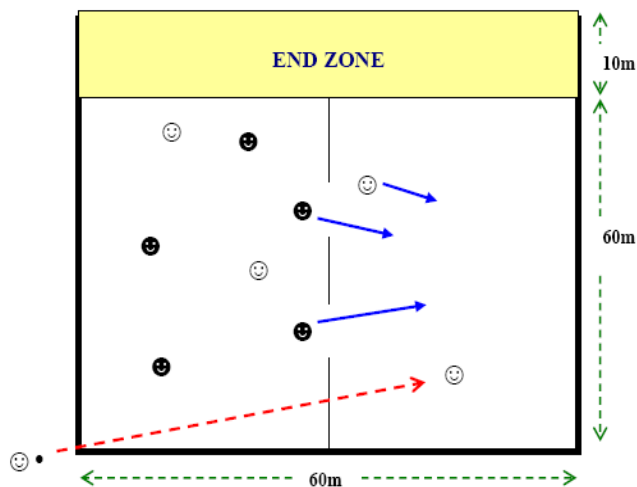
GAME OUTCOMES

- For attacking team to work hard for the kicker
- Work as a team – make good decisions with the ball and create space for teammates
- Defensive team to delay the time, through pressure, of the attacking team

- Teams of 5 or 6
- One team starts as defensive team, who must start in one half (and not in endzone). Attacking team starts with kicker in one corner. This player can kick or play on. Once he does so, the defensive team can move anywhere.
- Attacking team has 5 attempts at scoring, by kicking to any teammate in end zone.
- Play ends (with no points to attacking team) if ball goes out of play or defensive team gain possession/stoppage

Variations:

- Points – eg. 3 pts for uncontested mark in endzone, 2 pts for CM, and 1 pt for crumb possession.
- One defender can start in other half
- 3 second rule in endzone



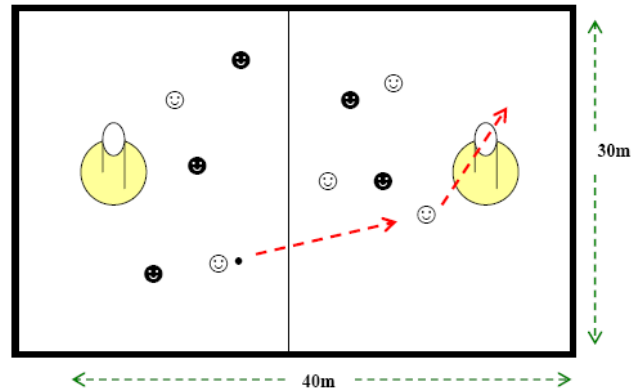
- Start at different corners each time (left, then right!)
- Have game end to end (have end zone at each end)
- Teams to have 30 secs to discuss strategies between each set of 5 plays!

Questions:

1. What scenarios arose that are similar to a full game?
2. When did you find it was best to switch the play? Was it effective? What are the pros and cons of switching play?
3. When did you hit-up or kick to a contest? How did you make your decision?
4. When did you run & carry vs kick? (speed of ball/gain territory)
5. What was the ideal way to move the ball into the endzone?
6. How did you support your teammate with the ball? What did you do to help him?
7. What decisions did you as a defensive team have to make? Was zoning or man a better option? Why?

GAME 10: "THROUGH THE HOOP"

- 2 teams of 5 or 6
- Handball only (or kick if bigger area), aim is to pass ball and score by handballing the ball through the hoop (attached between 2 poles about 2m above ground)
- No players are allowed within the 5m circle surrounding the goals
- Turnover results when the ball hits the ground (transition)

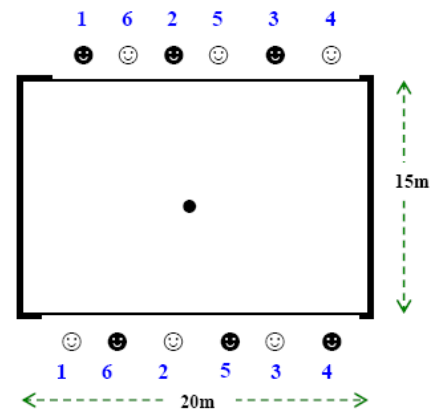
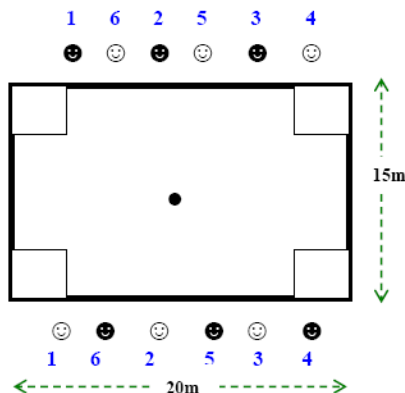


Variations:

- Have 2v2/3v3 stoppage/contest each time the ball hits the ground or a player is tackled

GAME 11: "NUMBERS"

- Teams of 6, numbered off with 1-6
- Each team starts with 3 players on each side (1,2,3 of each team on opposite sides)
- Ball is rolled in by coach, then 2-4 numbers are called out
- These nos run into middle and compete for the ball
- Aim is to run the ball over the designated end line

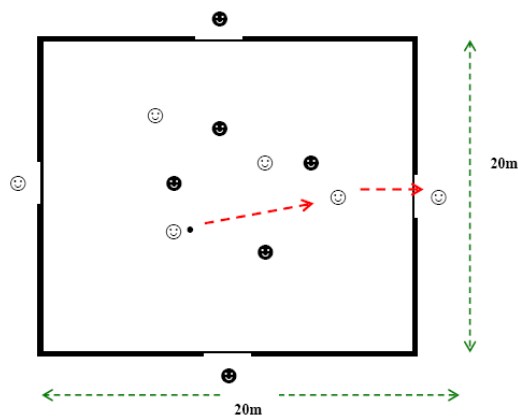


Variations:

- Run ball over designated side line
- Must get ball into 3m x 3m corner zones (no defenders allowed in area)

GAME 12: "CORRAL GAME"

- Aim is for attackers to handball to support players in goals outside the square to score
- Aim is for defenders to slow up the opposition in possession by applying defensive pressure
- Six per side - 4 v 4 in square with 2 players in goals outside area
- One team start with ball and have 1 min time limit for maximal score
- Once ball is passed to outside player, it must be handballed back in to a different player
- If ball turned over, defence place ball on ground. Variation – defence score 1 pt



Variations:

- *Play is continuous eg. turnovers = play on*
- *If handballed to goalie, the scorer replaces the goalie*
- *A score only counts if the ball is handballed out, then back in to another attacker without being touched by defenders*

Questions:

1. *Was it best to control the ball or go as quickly as possible?*
2. *Defenders – was it best to pressure all players? When might you drop off opponent?*
3. *Attackers – how did you help each other to create space?*
4. *Defenders – what did you do to deny the oppo space?*

GAME 13: "SPREAD 'EM"

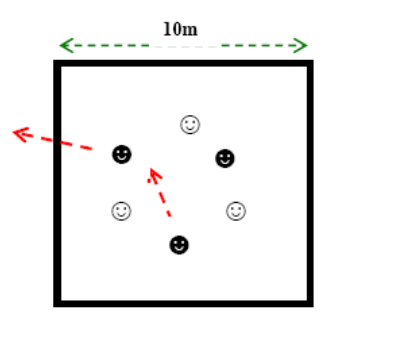
- There are several variations of this game
- Start with 3 v 3 in middle of small square
- Paddle ball around/handball to ground at random around circle
- On whistle/coaches call, the team in possession spread quickly to get the ball over an end line
- Variation – kick to a player

Variation 1:

- 2 v 2 / 3 v 3 in square. 1 from each team outside of square
- On call, attacking team must get ball over a line
- Attacker outside of square can go in to outnumber oppo
- Defender outside of square can go in or drop off to cover forward

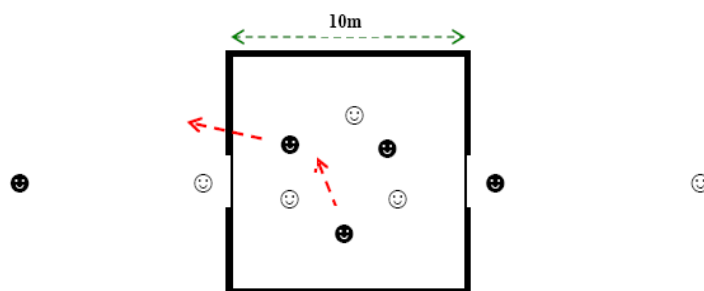
Variation 2:

- 3 v 1 in square. 3 attackers handball ball around with 1 defender applying pressure
- 2 defenders outside of square
- On coach's call, the 3 break to a point/line/kick to teammate



GAME 14: “THE SWEEPER”

- 3 v 3 within a small square (10 x 10m)
- Each team has a defensive player outside the square
- The 6 in the square paddle ball/handball to ground at random
- On coach’s call, the team in possession must get the ball to their forward
- The sweepers can go in to contest and support, or drop off to cover forward



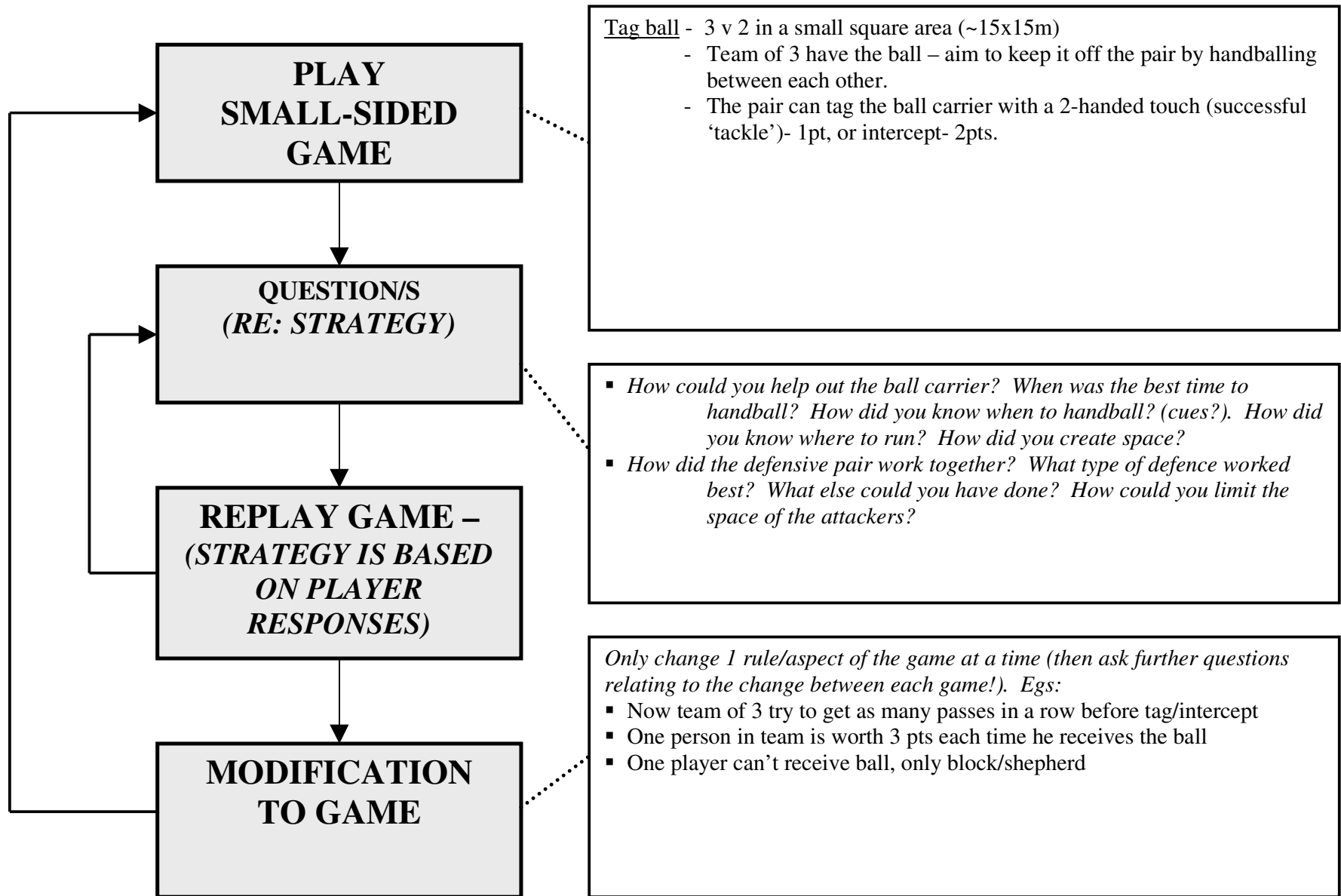
GAME 15: “4 v 4 TOUCH FOOTBALL”

- Touch rugby is a great game for developing:
 - *Fitness components of acceleration, reactive agility and anaerobic power*
 - *Reading movement cues of players (defensively and attacking)*
 - *Assist in getting into good position for tackling (reaction to opponent)*
 - *Developing defensive DM in terms of whether to pressure ball or corral*

Progressions:

1. 4 v 4 or 5 v 5 touch rugby. 5m defensive rule. Touch or 2-handed wrap. 6 touch turnover.
 2. As above, but handball only
 3. Once ball fed out to HB, defense can come forward with no offside. After touch, play stops for ball to come back to spot and defense must be 5m behind ball.
 4. Variation – on each turnover, play starts with a 3 v 2 contest
 5. Include a 1 v 1 forward set-up and allow leading and kicking (increases ability to read play re: pressure ball carrier or corral – not allowing easy kick forward). If ball hits ground or defense get ball, play on with a new set of 6.
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ACTIVITY NAME: 3v2 Handball. AIM: Keep possession. Draw opponent. Create/move to space.



ACTIVITY NAME: _____ **AIM:** _____

