Keeping them playing

By Brenton Sanderson, NAB AFL Academy Head Coach

Welcome to the AFL Youth Coaching Manual. It will be an invaluable resource while you are engaged in the exciting adventure of coaching young footballers in the 13 - 17 age groups.

Adolescence is an incredibly important and challenging time in the lives of young people. As a coach you will play a vital role in their development as players and enjoyment of the game. It is a crucial time for establishing a strong connection to our game and maintaining their involvement. AFL and other research has consistently shown that the way coaches approach their role is a critical factor for young people in deciding whether they will continue to play or drop out of sports including football. Youth coaches have a great challenge and a wonderful opportunity to engage young footballers.

Coaching can be a very satisfying role. Watching young footballers displaying their skills, making good decisions, helping their teammates and trying their best under the pressure of competition provides a great sense of pride for a coach. Also seeing the players carrying-out in a game the things that are being taught and practiced in training is immensely satisfying.

Teenage players have many competing activities as well as their schoolwork in their lives, but fundamentally they are playing because they want to be with their friends, they want to learn more about the game and they want to improve themselves. They will be looking to you as their coach to provide the education, guidance and support in helping them to achieve these outcomes. You will be a teacher, role model, leader and friend, and you can exert enormous influence in their football and in other areas of their lives.

As you impart productive behaviours and strong values through your coaching, you will help them build life-long relationships with each other and with you. Young people tend to carry the lessons they learn as adolescents through their adulthood. Let’s make sure the lessons they learn are the best possible.

As the NAB AFL National Academy Head Coach I have a responsibility to live up to the Academy’s Mission Statement - “Developing Better People, Better Footballers”. As coach I also instil my values as a person, Respect, Integrity, Teamwork, Honesty and Excellence, into everything I do with them.

As the Academy Coach I also recognise that these young footballers wouldn’t be achieving at their current level, or perhaps even playing the game, if it wasn’t for all the coaches who have engaged with, taught and encouraged them along the way.

It is every coach’s responsibility, at every level of the game, to make the experience of playing Australian Football as enjoyable and fulfilling as possible and to provide the best possible environment to encourage their continued participation. This is equally important whether they are eventually to become AFL players or continue to play at the community level. All form part of the lifeblood and future of the game. This manual is a great resource for assisting coaches to develop their capacity to fulfil that critical coaching outcome of keeping them playing and loving football.

The manual contains core information about skills and tactics and comprehensively explores the extremely important social and interpersonal skills required of effective coaches in working with this age group, as well as broader social issues associated with youth welfare in the football environment.

I strongly support the AFL coach education programs and recommend that all youth coaches undertake the AFL Level 1 Youth Coaching Accreditation Course. AFL Coach Accreditation is now mandatory in all leagues and associations around Australia. The Accreditation Course and this supporting manual will greatly assist youth coaches to effectively and appropriately perform their role.

The best measure of the quality and success of your program is that your players keep coming back to your next practice session, next game and particularly continue in the system.

Thank you for undertaking this critical role of youth coaching in Australian Football. Best wishes with your coaching. I hope you find it as fulfilling as I do.

Brenton Sanderson
NAB AFL Academy Head Coach
Using this Manual

By Lawrie Woodman, AFL Coaching Development Manager

The AFL Youth Coaching Manual provides a specific framework for coaching youth footballers. Youth is defined as secondary school players aged 13-17 years.

This is a critical period in the lives of young people when they are faced with regular decisions about how to spend their time, including their continued participation in sport and physical activity. From detailed research we know that the quality of coaching they receive is a critical factor in deciding whether they will continue to participate or drop out.

As part of a review of the National Coaching Accreditation Scheme (NCAS), the AFL developed a new Level 1 Youth Coaching course, aimed specifically at coaches of youth teams. The content and structure of the course is based on the developmental needs of players in these age groups.

The AFL brought together acknowledged experts from its coaching and development staff, the general sporting community and specific youth-focused agencies to produce this manual. The manual has been developed specifically to support the AFL Level 1 Youth Course which was introduced throughout Australia in 2004. More than that, it is a comprehensive reference about youth sport issues which will be valuable to coaches at all levels.

It is AFL policy that coaches of teams in affiliated clubs and leagues hold current accreditation to ensure that they have had a basic level of training to prepare them for this important role. Those who are coaching youth teams now have the opportunity to participate in a course which is oriented around the youth target group and focused very specifically on the tasks youth coaches will be expected to carry out in their crucial role.

As well as the appropriate football-specific content for youth players, the manual has sections dealing with the characteristics and motivations of youth footballers, effective coaching methods and communication skills for youth coaches and youth welfare issues which may be related to the football environment.

The manual is distributed as a specific resource for the Level 1 Youth Coaching Courses. It provides further reinforcement for the important principles which are presented during the courses and coaches will find it an excellent ongoing reference as they go about the task of coaching young players.

I encourage all Australian Football coaches to visit the Coaching section on the AFL community website aflcommunityclub.com.au and afl.com.au to keep up to date with latest information about coaching football in general and youth coaching in particular. The site contains a wealth of information about coaching and new material is added regularly.

Lawrie Woodman,
Coaching Development Manager
Australian Football League
The manual aims to provide guidance to accredited coaches in Australian Football who are coaching the youth age group (13-17 years):

**CHAPTER 1**  
Youth Footballers – Characteristics and Motivations
- Defining Adolescence ................................................................. 11
- Adolescents in Sport ................................................................. 11
- Physical, Cognitive and Emotional Development between 14-18 years ...................................................... 13
- Youth Footballers’ Motivations – Why They Do and Don’t Play ................................................................. 15
- Access Challenges ................................................................. 16
- Implications for Coaches ................................................................. 18

**CHAPTER 2**  
Effective Coaching
- Role of the Coach ................................................................. 21
- Coaching Styles ................................................................. 22
- Coaching Philosophy ................................................................. 22
- Coaching Qualities of Successful Coaches ................................................................. 23
- Coaching and the Law ................................................................. 25
- Measuring and Improving Coaching Effectiveness ................................................................. 27
- Behaviour Modification ................................................................. 27
- Ethical Considerations ................................................................. 27
- The AFL Coaches’ Code of Conduct ................................................................. 28

**CHAPTER 3**  
Coaching Youth Footballers
- Approaches to Coaching ................................................................. 31
- Time Management ................................................................. 31
- Progressing to Higher Levels of Competition ................................................................. 32
- Developing Rapport ................................................................. 33
- Developing Trust and Mutual Respect ................................................................. 34
- Player Discipline ................................................................. 36
- Recommended Coaching Behaviours When Working with Youth Players ................................................................. 38

**CHAPTER 4**  
Communication for Youth Coaches
- Effective Communication ................................................................. 41
- Non-Verbal Communication ................................................................. 41
- Communication through Demonstration ................................................................. 43
- Active Listening ................................................................. 43
- Effective Feedback ................................................................. 44
- Game-Day Coaching ................................................................. 45

**CHAPTER 5**  
Teaching and Improving Skills
- Stages of Learning ................................................................. 49
- Teaching Football Skills ................................................................. 50
- Fixing Errors ................................................................. 51
- The SPIR Method for Skills Teaching ................................................................. 52
- Game Sense and Decision-Making Training ................................................................. 53
- Sample Games ................................................................. 56

**CHAPTER 6**  
Planning
- The Yearly/Season Plan ................................................................. 59
- Phases of a Year Plan ................................................................. 59
- Planning the Training Program ................................................................. 60
- Training Variables ................................................................. 60
- Planning a Training Session ................................................................. 61
- Training Diary/Planning Sheet ................................................................. 61
- The Weekly Plan ................................................................. 64
- Goal-Setting ................................................................. 64
- Planning Strategies for Keeping Adolescents in the Game ................................................................. 66
- Principles for Designing Training Activities ................................................................. 66
- Adolescents with Disabilities ................................................................. 68
- Coaching Female Players ................................................................. 68
- Training Session Plan ................................................................. 69

**CHAPTER 7**  
Conducting Training Sessions
- Principles of Effective Training ................................................................. 73
- Designing the Training Session ................................................................. 74
- Training Drills and Practices ................................................................. 74
- Variation in Training Sessions ................................................................. 76

**CHAPTER 8**  
Team Play and Game Plans
- Anatomy of Team Play ................................................................. 79
- Developing a Pattern of Play ................................................................. 82
- Game Plans ................................................................. 84
- Tactics ................................................................. 86
- Set Plays ................................................................. 87
- Optimal Team Performance in Adolescent Football ................................................................. 89
- Positional Descriptors ................................................................. 91

**CHAPTER 9**  
Conditioning Youth Footballers
- Principles of Fitness Training ................................................................. 97
- Establishing Needs ................................................................. 97
- Fitness for Players ................................................................. 97
- Components of Fitness for Australian Football ................................................................. 99
- Long-Term Player Development ................................................................. 101

**CHAPTER 10**  
Prevention and Management of Injuries
- Preventing Injuries ................................................................. 105
- Prevention of Injury is Better than Cure ................................................................. 106
- Stretching for Games and Training ................................................................. 106
- Specific Safety Considerations ................................................................. 109
- Environmental Conditions ................................................................. 110
- Facilities and Equipment ................................................................. 111
- First-Aid and Injury Prevention Principles ................................................................. 112
Contents

Management of Injuries ................................................................. 113
Soft Tissue Injury Management (RICER) ..................................... 113
STOP (Stop, Talk, Observe, Prevent further injuries) ................. 114
Unconscious Player ..................................................................... 115
Management of Concussion .......................................................... 116
Blood Rule – Infectious Diseases .................................................... 122
Maintaining Injury Records ........................................................... 123
Injury Report Sheet ....................................................................... 123

CHAPTER 11
Nutrition

Building a Quality Foundation ...................................................... 127
Types of Carbohydrate Foods ........................................................ 129
Sample Meal Plan ......................................................................... 130

CHAPTER 12
Talent Identification and Development

AFL Player Pathways ................................................................. 135
NAB AFL Rising Stars Program ................................................... 136
NAB AFL Draft ............................................................................ 137
NAB AFL U16 and U18 Championships ......................................... 137
AFL National Academy ............................................................... 137
NAB AFL Draft Combine ............................................................ 137
Test Protocols ............................................................................. 139
Skills Tests .................................................................................. 140
Example Results ......................................................................... 143
AFL Recruiting Reports ............................................................... 146
Evaluation of Youth Players .......................................................... 152
Coaches' Evaluation Guide ............................................................. 152

CHAPTER 13
Coach, Player, Umpire Relationships

Umpiring .................................................................................... 157
The Big Picture – where do we all fit in? ...................................... 158
Knowing the Laws of the Game .................................................. 159
Spirit of the Laws ....................................................................... 160
Role of the Field Umpire .............................................................. 162
Role of the Goal Umpire ............................................................. 163
Role of the Boundary Umpire ....................................................... 165
Scorecards and Vote Card ............................................................ 166
AFL Umpiring Pathway ............................................................... 167
AFL Umpiring Accreditation Courses .......................................... 168

CHAPTER 14
Youth Welfare

Understanding Youth Today ...................................................... 171
The Nature and Prevalence of Mental Health Problems in Adolescence 172
Adolescent Risk-Taking Behaviour .............................................. 173
Drugs and Adolescence ............................................................... 174
Bullying and Victimization .......................................................... 176
Resiliency ................................................................................... 177
Self-Esteem ................................................................................. 179
Promoting Emotional Well-Being .............................................. 181
Referring Young People .............................................................. 182

CHAPTER 15
Skills Guide

Introduction to Skills Guide ....................................................... 185
Kicking ...................................................................................... 186
Drop Punt ................................................................................... 188
Torpedo Punt .............................................................................. 188
Banana Kick ............................................................................... 189
Handball .................................................................................... 189
Marking ..................................................................................... 189
Arm or Chest Mark .................................................................... 190
Hand Mark ................................................................................ 190
Overhead Mark ......................................................................... 191
Ruckwork .................................................................................. 191
Palming: Front ......................................................................... 192
Palming: Back .......................................................................... 192
Picking Up: Moving Ball ............................................................ 192
Picking Up: Stationary Ball ........................................................ 193
Ball Handling ............................................................................ 193
Running ..................................................................................... 193
Bouncing the Ball ..................................................................... 194
Sidestep .................................................................................... 194
Blind Turn ................................................................................. 194
The Dummy ................................................................................ 195
Spoiling .................................................................................... 195
Contact Skills ............................................................................ 196
Stage 1: Landing ......................................................................... 196
Keeping Your Feet ...................................................................... 196
Falling Forward ......................................................................... 196
Rolling ........................................................................................ 197
Stage 2: Bracing ......................................................................... 197
Bumping .................................................................................... 197
Shepherding .............................................................................. 198
One-On-One Tussle ................................................................... 198
Shoulder Roll/Backward Shoulder Roll ..................................... 198
Tackling ..................................................................................... 199
Stage 3: Front 'Drive Tackle' ......................................................... 200
Side Impact Tackle ..................................................................... 200
Behind Drop Tackle ................................................................... 200
Being Tackled ........................................................................... 201
Fending ..................................................................................... 201
Smothering ............................................................................... 201
High Marking and Landing ......................................................... 201
Assessment Form for Australian Football ................................... 202

References, Further Reading and Acknowledgements

References and Further Reading ................................................... 207
Acknowledgements .................................................................... 208

APPENDIX

The AFL National Coaching Accreditation Scheme .................. 211
AFL and State Affiliate Contacts ................................................. 214
Resources ................................................................................... 215
YOUTH FOOTBALLERS - CHARACTERISTICS AND MOTIVATIONS
Chapter 1
Youth Footballers – Characteristics and Motivations

DEFINING ADOLESCENCE
Increasingly over the past few decades, adolescence has been seen as a developmental stage in its own right, where childhood behaviours are adapted and adjusted to adult forms. The beginning of adolescence is generally seen as coinciding with the physical changes of puberty. Where this stage of development ends is harder to define, however, since each individual moves through the tasks of development at a different rate. This is due to the influence of social, cultural and other factors which impact on the timing and nature of change over this period, including the way in which ‘adolescence’ is viewed in different societies.

The World Health Organisation refers to the age range of 10-24 years as encompassing adolescent growth, and further distinguishes between early adolescence (10-14 years), middle adolescence (15-19 years) and late adolescence (20-24 years).

Broadly speaking, the main tasks within these phases can be seen as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early</th>
<th>Middle</th>
<th>Late</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Am I normal?</td>
<td>Who am I?</td>
<td>Where am I going?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transition to adolescence</strong>&lt;br&gt;Coming to terms with body/biological changes</td>
<td><strong>‘Essence’ of adolescence</strong>&lt;br&gt;Establish self among peers as a worthwhile individual</td>
<td><strong>Transition to adulthood</strong>&lt;br&gt;Vocational/educational issues and one-to-one intimate relationships</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This chronological breakdown goes some way to acknowledging the need to differentiate between developmental and health issues for each ‘stage’ of adolescence, as opposed to viewing adolescents as an homogenous group. While it may seem to encompass a broad age range, there are various reasons why such a view is taken. This definition reflects the variety of the adolescent experience in different cultures, and recognises that opportunities such as employment and marriage, which have traditionally been associated with ‘adult status’, are occurring later on average than in previous years.

ADOLESCENTS IN SPORT
The period of growth between childhood and reaching one’s final size, shape and sexual potential is called puberty. At this time there are increased concentrations of male (testosterone) and female (estrogen) hormones in the bloodstream of both males and females.

Coaching adolescents during puberty places unique demands on the coach. In some instances, the coach will need to modify their program to cater for changes in coordination and balance. In other instances, the coach will be required to offer words of encouragement, words that indicate to the player that the coach at least understands some of the difficulties the player experiences when passing through puberty.

Growth
At the onset of puberty, weight gain occurs before height gain. At first, girls experience enlarging breasts while boys experience enlarging testes. About one year later, the growth spurt begins and physical changes become observable to others.

Certain parts of the skeleton develop more rapidly than other parts. The extremities of the body grow before the central portions. The nose, ears and lips grow before the head and the feet grow before the legs. Often the two halves of the body do not grow at the same rate. The left side may grow ahead of the right. The visible spurts of weight and height occur before the less visible ones of muscle and organ growth.
Oil, sweat and odour glands become much more active, often resulting in problems with acne, oily hair and smelly bodies. The heart doubles in size and the eyes elongate, often causing the adolescent to become temporarily near-sighted and in need of glasses or contact lenses.

When evaluating the effects of puberty on performance, the implications for coaches include:
• Considering the growth factors as the possible cause of the player's rate of skill development slowing down.
• Delaying the introduction of resistance work until the muscle and joint skeletal growth can cope with weight gain.
• Providing the player with greater privacy and space while they learn to cope with changes in primary sex characteristics and any loss in confidence sometimes associated with increased body odour and acne.

**Emotional unrest**
For many adolescents the challenges of accommodating the effects of puberty on their daily lives and relationships can place them on an emotional roller-coaster. This is particularly true for late and early maturing boys and girls. For these teenagers, there are observable characteristics that signify they are different. For late maturers, the problem is achieving in a culture that applauds sporting achievement and gives attention to physical maturity. Early maturers can become sexually active before they have the emotional maturity or intellectual understanding to manage their relationships with others.

Coaches need to consider that emotional unrest may be more prevalent in particular adolescents. Therefore coaches need to be prepared to give support when there are fluctuations in attitude. On the other hand, coaches can be reassured by the accepting and focused attitude of other adolescent players.

**Sex characteristics**
Before puberty there is very little difference between the male and female primary sex characteristics. However, during puberty significant changes occur. Up to 50 per cent of females suffer considerable discomfort during this time of change. Menarche, which is the first occurrence of menstruation in a female, is one such discomfort and change during this period. While they can continue physical activity during menarche, they should not be expected necessarily to maintain performance levels or training efforts.

Males grow taller than females and wider at the shoulders than the hips. Females become relatively wider at the hips and develop breasts. Following these developments is the appearance of facial and body hair.

Coaches need to consider:
• The impact of an emerging interest in the opposite sex.
• Re-adjusting training and performance goals to respond to the effects of menarche.
• Developing a rapport with the players which encourages them to openly discuss difficulties they may be experiencing adjusting to the changes in sex characteristics.
PHYSICAL, COGNITIVE AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT BETWEEN 14-18 YEARS

The following tables developed by Canadian coaching consultant, Istvan Balyi, provides an overview of the physical, mental/cognitive and emotional developmental patterns of players between the ages of 14 and 18.

### TABLE 1: PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic characteristics</th>
<th>General consequence: Performance capabilities and limitations</th>
<th>Implications to the coach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The circulatory and respiratory system reach maturity.</td>
<td>These systems are generally capable of giving maximum output.</td>
<td>Aerobic and anaerobic systems can be trained for maximum output. Full sport-specific energy system training should be implemented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase in height and weight gradually lessen. Stabilisation occurs in the muscular system.</td>
<td>Muscles have grown to their mature size, but muscular strength continues to increase, reaching its peak in the late 20s.</td>
<td>Strength training can be maximised to improve overall strength development. Neuromuscular training should be optimised during this phase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skeletal maturation continues in males and females.</td>
<td>Connective tissues are still strengthening.</td>
<td>Progressive overloading in training should be continued.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>By age 17, girls have generally reached adult proportions, whereas boys do not reach such proportions until several years later.</td>
<td>Proportionally, girls gain more weight than boys during this phase.</td>
<td>Aerobic training for girls to be optimised as well, coaches should be aware how to deal with weight gain and its impact on figure. Players should learn how to compete, including all technical, tactical and ancillary components.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE 2: MENTAL/COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic characteristics</th>
<th>General consequence: Performance capabilities and limitations</th>
<th>Implications to the coach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generally, by age 16, the brain has reached its adult size but continues to mature neurologically for several more years.</td>
<td>Players can cope with multiple strategies and tactics, particularly near the end of the phase.</td>
<td>Coaches should ensure the refinement of all technical and tactical skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical thinking is developing well during this phase.</td>
<td>The capacity of self-analysis and correction is developing.</td>
<td>Decision-making should be developed further through technical, tactical development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic characteristics</td>
<td>General consequence: Performance capabilities and limitations</td>
<td>Implications to the coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer group influence is still a powerful force.</td>
<td>Independent decision-making and leadership skills are becoming more developed.</td>
<td>Players should be given the opportunity to develop through participation in an appropriate leadership or responsible role (i.e. team captain, athlete representative, etc) but strong direction and discipline must be maintained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Players are searching for a stable, balanced self-image.</td>
<td>Still very susceptible to successes and failures. Coping techniques are useful.</td>
<td>Positive evaluation of performances and positive reinforcement are imperative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities and interaction with the opposite sex play strong roles during this phase.</td>
<td>Male players must be aware that female players now face a problem of femininity versus sport development. Female players must be aware that male athletes now face a problem of relating performance to masculinity.</td>
<td>Facilitate the recognition of the former issues through education and club programs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Istvan Balyi, National Coaching Institute, British Columbia, Canada.
YOUTH FOOTBALLERS’ MOTIVATIONS – WHY THEY DO AND DON’T PLAY

In 2001 the AFL, through Deakin University, carried out extensive research examining the key factors and circumstances associated with youth participation in football. The main factors why 10-17 year olds do or don’t play are:

The motivators
• Football is fun and fast.
• It is high scoring.
• It is considered very skilful.
• It provides opportunities for social interaction and is team-based, making it more attractive.
• It is community orientated (regional).
• It improves an individual’s self-esteem.
• It provides recognition.
• Its physical nature and toughness is attractive for many adolescents.
• It provides dreams of AFL glory.
• It beats boredom.

The competition
• Other team sports offered.
• Individual sports (tennis, swimming and other extreme sports).
• Duration of AFL games compared with other sports.
• The growth of informal activities such as skateboarding.

The ‘PlayStation effect’
• PlayStations are one of the most serious competitors.
• The popular games.
• Reality versus fantasy.
• “It’s cold outside …”
• Some parents are alarmed by this trend while others view it as a babysitter.
• Television.
• Internet.

The coach
The coach is perhaps the most important variable influencing a player’s participation in Australian Football.
• Nothing is more directly linked to quitting Australian Football than ‘abusive’, ‘angry’, ‘too serious’ coaches.
• Coaches seriously lack social skills for managing 10 to 16-year-olds.
• Coaching plans and preparation is critical.

Participation
• Low involvement through poorly structured participation is one of the most serious de-motivators.
• Not enough time on ground.
• No opportunity in glamour positions.
• Exclusively in the backline.
• Too many players in some teams and too few in others.

Training and games
• Games can be fun and rewarding, but if training is dull, too hard or too serious then dropout is likely.
• Games are often not competitive (more important to parents then players).
• Parents are concerned about grading.
• Dropout can occur when better players leave a club for representative footy.
Social issues
- Fewer physical education teachers in schools.
- PE diminished in size, frequency, quality and range.
- Majority of teachers are female.
- If teachers take sport outside, other sports are preferred.
- Pressures on single parent families.
- Social pressures on 14 to 16-year-olds.

Playing AFL as a motivator
- Powerful for 10 to 13-year-olds.
- Limited by realism for 13 to 16-year-olds.
- Limited in non-traditional areas.

Other factors influencing dropout
- Simply too lazy.
- Getting up early (parents also).
- Driving to games and training.
- Duration of commitment (parents).
- Violence/perception (also an issue for mothers).
- Serious injury.
- Want to play in games, but not train.
- Becoming better at an individual sport.
- School commitments.
- Natural attrition.

Motivating Youth Players

What adolescents want
- To be appreciated for themselves, not just when they are “good”.
- To feel they have some control over their lives.
- To be successful at something.
- To belong.
- To have other people other than their parents care for and support them.

Six out of 10 boys aged 14 to 17 claim that they love to do as many sports as possible. How can you, as a coach, manage this?

ACCESS CHALLENGES

What do adolescents want out of their involvement in sport? Participation, success, status, health, friends, fun, thrills, risk, challenge, order, support, access and the opportunity to be creative are some of the known reasons why adolescents play sport. The emphasis in the information that follows is on how coaches can make football more accessible to adolescents.

Access does not only relate to physical proximity but also to the individual’s perceived compatibility with what the sport program has to offer.

Some of the methods coaches can use to help adolescents participate in football include:
- Using school facilities to reduce the need for adolescents to travel to the training venue.
- Providing flexible schedules to accommodate the demands placed on adolescents by study and family commitments.
- Carefully nurturing the progress of each individual player while offering the ultimate challenge for high achievers.
- Providing quality equipment and facilities.

It could be argued that the above list relates to all ages of players and not just adolescents. However, there are some unique characteristics of adolescents that can require coaches to pay particular attention to these strategies.
Parents do not necessarily provide the same level of support (transport to training and games) for adolescents as they do for younger children. This is partly because adolescents seek to display their independence by not having to rely on their parents. They no longer have a free ‘taxi’ service to get them to games and training, but they are not old enough to get a driver’s licence.

Many adolescents have disappointing sporting experiences as children and subsequently lose confidence in their sporting ability. Unless a sport can provide a beginner level specifically for adolescents, it is difficult for anxious individuals to attempt new sports. This is particularly true in team sports where a beginner adolescent often has to play in a team of people who began playing as children and have many more years’ experience.

The high school academic curriculum gives notice to young people that to make it in the adult world they must perform well in the last two years of high school. This creates problems for talented players who are constantly trying to manage the demands of school and the expectations of high performance coaches. Many parents advise their sons and daughters that they should forgo any sport involvement during these vital two years of their secondary education.

Parents require the adolescent to continue to support family activities, which can sometimes conflict with sporting interests. This problem compounds when the adolescent develops a natural interest in sex and begins to attend social activities. An ideal situation is when all members of a family share an interest in the same activities.

Adolescence is a time when individuals have:
• Many conflicting commitments.
• Limited mobility (not able to drive and less-involved parents).
• The ability to play adult games.
• In many cases, acquired anxieties about their sporting ability.
• No income to support an involvement in adult level activities.

There are many examples of organisations and coaches that have attempted to increase the access of adolescents to their sport by recognising the above problems and developing solutions. The most appealing solution to the problem of travel is to base sporting clubs at local high schools. Some schools have excellent sport programs and teachers are employed for their coaching as well as their teaching ability. Many schools have weekend sport programs for students at all levels of competition. These are examples of efforts to improve each individual’s access to adolescent sport.

THE TRANSITION TO ADULT FOOTBALL

One of the other compelling challenges for coaches is for them to develop programs that guarantee achieving desired competencies while also offering enough diversity to extend each player and/or team. The thrill of playing sport can be gained in many ways, one of which is the absolute mastery of basic skills and tactics, and another is the ability to successfully deploy a range of intuitive, high-risk skills and/or tactics. Some coaches subscribe to one or other of these approaches while others manage to include both in their coaching programs.

Adolescents are in a phase of their lives where there is a distinct shift from a playful, divergent and creative approach to sport coaching and organisation, as is typical of junior sport, to a more structured, imposed and restricted approach, used most often when in adult sport. It is usually during this period of change or transition that the trust between individuals can be tested. Players continue to seek enjoyment through the creative use of high-risk skills while their coaches demand the use of low-risk skills only. The players’ thrill may come from attempting something different, while in contrast, the coach’s thrill may be derived from a player’s conformity to a set of well-rehearsed skills and game routines.

The transition phase from junior to adult sport does not have a defined approach that guides the attitudes of participants. It is this lack of direction that can test the trust between player and coach. While in most sports the rules of the game during the transition phase are the same as for the adult game, the approach of players and coaches varies considerably. The language used can vary between commands such as “You will …!”, “I must …!”, “Give more!” and “Try to …!”, “My options are …”, “Take a risk.” Tactics employed by coaches can vary. An example is “for anyone who is clear inside 50m, it is appropriate to have a shot at goal,” versus “always try to give the ball to players in a better position to score.”
Because adolescent sport does not have a specific set of guidelines, it relies on adopting either the children's sport or adult sport approach. In most situations, coaches seem to adopt the adult model rather than the children's model when coaching adolescents. Some of the problems created by this unique situation include the following issues:

- Adult training regimes can negatively affect immature bodies and attitudes.
- Previous freedoms are challenged by the demands for conformity.
- Coaches verbalise their frustrations and opinions in an often demeaning and negative way.
- Player skill levels may not be able to match the demands of an adult game.
- Cognitive expectations may exceed the ability of the player to link the coach's instructions with game situations.
- Coaches may question the discipline of their players because they appear to be ignoring the coach's requests.
- Players may question their coach's methods because the coach is often more dictatorial and demanding than their previous coach.

Coaches who do not give enough attention to the above situations may find that a mutual lack of trust develops between them and their players. The coach observes players who seemingly continue to ignore their instructions, and players become disillusioned when they are criticised for a lack of effort when in fact lack of skills and understanding is the problem.

There are many strategies that coaches can use to prevent unwanted tension developing between them and their players. However, before and during the use of these strategies it is essential for the coach to trust the player. Unconditional positive regard for the player is every coach’s responsibility. Players also have a responsibility to trust their coach but, for many adolescents, it is too much to expect them to have the emotional and/or psychological maturity to manage the dynamics of complex human relations effectively.

**IMPLICATIONS FOR COACHES**

It is often difficult to know how sensitive players are to pubescent changes. Only when a coach asks the young male player to remove his top when training does the coach discover that the player is sensitive to his newly acquired rolls of fat around the abdomen. Allow variations in training attire when players are noticeably embarrassed about some of their physical developments. Next time there is a team function involving food, use the opportunity to serve a balanced meal, invite the parents, enlist the services of a nutritionist and provide the players with some understanding of the importance of each food type.

Be prepared to modify performance expectations in response to accelerated weight and height gain, eyesight adjustments, primary sex characteristic changes and muscle and organ growth. During this time there may appear to be delays in response to training efforts. In most settings, the adolescent can mask the bodily changes caused by the onset of puberty. However, in the sport setting, everyone is focused on physical matters. Even before and after activity, there is usually a need to change in public. A coach can help to redirect a player’s attention away from their own anxieties about their bodies by focusing on the task of becoming a better player and team. Coaches should avoid making comments about physical changes unless they specifically relate to performance. In these cases, the matter should be discussed in private.

Coaches who choose to coach adolescents will have the pleasure of witnessing dramatic changes in their players. These changes bring with them inherent difficulties as well as times for exploration and exhilaration.

**Coaches are not required to become obsessed about knowing how to cater for every individual’s response to change. It is, however, important to demonstrate understanding and support while focusing on providing an enjoyable and challenging sport experience.**
EFFECTIVE COACHING
Chapter 2
Effective Coaching

ROLE OF THE COACH
The coach of an Australian Football club holds a dynamic and vital position within that club. Coaches represent players, officials and supporters as the figurehead of the club. The coach must be a leader, continually analysing, studying, planning and assessing the game as it develops, while being aware of the capabilities of his/her team. The coach must strive to bring out the best result possible for the group of players under his/her direction and develop the team as both a group and as individuals.

The game’s emphasis on running and possession football has developed to an extent that at every level players are aware of the need to be fit, skilled and versatile. Players are expected to be able to adopt attacking and defensive roles regardless of the positions they play. It is the coach’s responsibility to ensure the development of these attributes to a level equivalent to the age and ability of members of the team. The increased importance of tactics to maintain possession and restrict the opposition has placed even greater emphasis on the coach’s role in creating a successful team. The coach must be able to communicate well with his/her team and create the correct environment for players to perform at their optimum level.

Coaches have many diverse roles which can vary in importance according to the age group of the team. In simple terms, the role of the coach is to plan, act and review. This is an ongoing process aimed at improving the qualities of the coach and the performance of players. The basic roles of an effective coach are:

• Manager – dealing with a wide range of players, officials and supporters.
• Leader – assigned to organise training, match-day events and team morale.
• Teacher – instructing football skills and team tactics.
• Mentor – behind every successful person there is one elementary truth: somewhere, somehow, someone cared about their growth and development. This person was their mentor.
• Selector – involved in the planning and selection of the best team to represent the club.
• Communicator – providing clear instruction and feedback to the team and individual players.
• Psychologist – dealing with various individual personalities within the team.
• Public relations – representing the club at official functions and community activities.
• Student – continually seeking to upgrade knowledge of the game.
• Sports trainer – with a basic knowledge of injury prevention, care and management.
• Planner – annual integrated plan covering pre-season, competition, physical, technical, tactical, psychological, workload volumes and intensities etc.
• Motivator – including engendering players’ acceptance of own responsibility.
• Goal-setter – making sure that goals are achievable, challenging and measurable.
• Creating a successful learning environment – focusing on what you can control; recognising individual and group needs.

The coach is the role model so it is important to set standards in everything you do. With this, mutual respect will be gained from all involved in the game. This not only refers to being knowledgeable about the game, but also has to do with coaching within the laws, having respect for the abilities of opponents and the umpires as well as abiding by the AFL Coaches’ Code of Conduct. A coach who is punctual, organised and willing to provide positive feedback to players will improve the playing standard at a rapid rate.
COACHING STYLES
In a study of more than 500 coaches, five distinct categories of coaching styles were identified. There is, however, no one perfect style that leads to success. Most coaches often possess certain characteristics of each coaching type, but should be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of the various coaching styles. If a coach is able to identify some of his/her shortcomings, they are in a position to improve.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coaching style</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authoritarian coach</td>
<td>• Strong disciplinarian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Well organised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Good team spirit when winning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Dissension when losing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• May be feared or disliked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business-like coach</td>
<td>• Intelligent, logical approach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Well planned and organised.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Up to date with new techniques.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Expects 100 per cent effort all the time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• May set goals too high for some team members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nice-guy coach</td>
<td>• Well liked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Players sometimes take advantage of the coach's co-operative nature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Gets on well with the players of similar temperament.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intense coach</td>
<td>• Emphasises winning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• High anxiety often transmitted to players.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Easy-going coach</td>
<td>• Very casual.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Gives impression of not taking the game seriously.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• May not be prepared to drive his/her team at training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Well liked but may seem to be inadequate in some situations.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

COACHING PHILOSOPHY
Coaches have a significant impact on both the quality of performance and the quality of enjoyment that players achieve in football. Coaches largely determine whether the experience in football is a positive or negative, and whether the players gain or lose self-esteem. It is important that coaches develop a general approach or philosophy towards coaching that will ensure a consistent, positive impact on their players.

It is imperative that a coaching style and philosophy takes into consideration the age and ability of players in the team. A coaching philosophy is individual and reflects both the coach’s personality and coaching objectives. However, it should be reasonably constant over time and for different groups of players. The goals of each player or group may vary and the achievement strategies associated with those goals may also vary, but the underlying philosophy of coaching should remain constant.

It is unrealistic to expect someone who is starting coaching to have a clear philosophy to apply, however, developing a successful coaching philosophy should be based on:
• Knowing why you coach.
• Knowing why players participate.
• Considering the opinions of others.
• Developing a set of personal guidelines on how you will operate as a coach.

Developing a philosophy of coaching also centres on the concept of respect. Essentially:
• A coach must respect the players and provide all participants with equal opportunities.

A coach should also encourage players to:
• Respect the principles of fair play.
• Respect opponents.
• Respect officials and their decisions.

It is imperative that a coaching style and philosophy takes into consideration the age and ability of players in the team. A coaching philosophy is individual and reflects both the coach’s personality and coaching objectives. However, it should be reasonably constant over time and for different groups of players. The goals of each player or group may vary and the achievement strategies associated with those goals may also vary, but the underlying philosophy of coaching should remain constant.

It is unrealistic to expect someone who is starting coaching to have a clear philosophy to apply, however, developing a successful coaching philosophy should be based on:
• Knowing why you coach.
• Knowing why players participate.
• Considering the opinions of others.
• Developing a set of personal guidelines on how you will operate as a coach.

Developing a philosophy of coaching also centres on the concept of respect. Essentially:
• A coach must respect the players and provide all participants with equal opportunities.

A coach should also encourage players to:
• Respect the principles of fair play.
• Respect opponents.
• Respect officials and their decisions.
In developing a coaching philosophy, players must be the overriding consideration. The sport belongs to the players and coaches should therefore have a player-centred approach. It is the coach’s responsibility to assist players to set and achieve goals. Coaching goals may be as simple as creating enjoyment or as demanding as striving to win. The coach should endeavour to ensure that the goals set by players are both achievable and in line with the overall coaching philosophy. It may help coaches to clarify their coaching philosophy by writing it down. The content will be based on the values and beliefs that come from your experience and direct your coaching.

It is not enough to merely have a coaching philosophy. As coach, you must also consider how the philosophy will be communicated to players, parents and administrators. It is also reasonable to consider how to ensure that the coaching philosophy is followed and what you will do if your coaching philosophy is challenged. That is, how will you deal with the different values of different people?

### COACHING QUALITIES OF SUCCESSFUL COACHES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coaching qualities</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Professional preparation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Knowledge</td>
<td>Knowledge of football and ability to use it in coaching. Knowledge of coaching technique.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Planning</td>
<td>Plans for each practice. No surprises, players know where they stand in the team. Establishes rules and regulations for players. Flexible – able to handle disruption to the coaching format, playing personnel, training venues, travel etc. Players lose respect for a rigid thinker unable to change with the times. Encourages players to set personal goals. Continually seeks ways to strengthen the program. Pre-plans the use of staff and facilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Mental and physical well-being of players</td>
<td>Shows concern for the physical and mental well-being of the players. Is a trouble shooter – keeps on the lookout for warning signs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Control of emotional environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Self control</td>
<td>Maintains self control at all times. Is stable, honest and straightforward. Maintains some distance with players while encouraging a warm congenial atmosphere. Does not play the role of a dictator and run the squad like an army drill instructor. Does not succumb to apathy and start believing that other things in life are more important. Shows ‘strength of character’ e.g. When a key player or two is lost, the coach does not write off the season. Is not easily intimidated by disgruntled supporters. Does not become more irritable and short-tempered while coaching than at any other time. Does not give up when things go wrong during a contest. Does not hold grudges against certain players.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Personal characteristics</td>
<td>Sense of humour and compassion. Good listening and motivational skills. Thinks clearly in pressure situations. Flexible personality – able to coach over a long period of time and cope with different individuals. A model of socially acceptable behaviour. Has enthusiasm to instil confidence in players. Assumes the role of a strong supporter of players and system. Seeks to improve. Attends coaching courses, seminars and supports accreditation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Communication</td>
<td>Keeps the team under control. Is fair and consistent at all times. Refrains from embarrassing players publicly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Handling of discipline</td>
<td>Leaves the door open for discussion. Holds frequent team meetings – listens to players. Keeps administration and maintenance staff informed and establishes lines of responsibility. Communicates regularly with coaches of the other clubs and the coaches association.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Public and player relations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Player preparation</td>
<td>Plans well for each practice. Maintains variety and specificity in training. Urges players to assist each other and take responsibility during training. Provides immediate feedback following the completion of tasks. Understands the basic training routines and their relevance to team play.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1 Training</td>
<td>Develops strategies to cope with a variety of opposition strategies, opposition strengths and weaknesses and game significance. Effectively uses and analyses statistics. Is versed in the most effective styles of play – prepared to listen to advisors and adopt suggestions of significant others. Has extensive experience of other team styles of play. Efficiently manages post-game discussions and analysis with players, media and supporters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2 Game preparation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3 Motivation</td>
<td>Accurately assesses player anxiety, mood changes, stress levels and feelings of competence. Understands the principles of arousal as they relate to player performance. Avoids holding grudges with players. Can prevent the ‘stars’ from becoming egomaniacs by treating them like all other players.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Recruitment</td>
<td>Willing to devote time to rigorously pursue young talent. Establishes a criteria for player recruitment.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
COACHING AND THE LAW
The law touches all aspects of our lives and sport is no exception.

The issue of sports safety and the legal responsibility of the coach is an extremely important one. The following information outlines some of the legal issues as they relate to coaching. Please note this information should not be regarded as legal advice.

COACHING: A LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY
By accepting a coaching position, you have made a commitment to your players. You have:

• Indicated you possess coaching and other related skills.
• Indicated you will maintain your skills at a level equal to the skills of other competent coaches in your field.

Some injuries in football are inevitable. However the responsibility of your management of players should not assume such intimidating proportions that you give coaching away, or unduly restrict your programs to the point where players' needs are not being met.

Negligence
Negligence consists of falling below the standard of care required in the circumstances to protect others from the unreasonable risk of harm. In the coaching environment, negligence can be defined as a coach's breach of any duty of care owed to a player and where the breach results in actual damage to that player which should have been foreseen by a reasonable and prudent coach.

The court, in determining whether there is a duty of care owed by a coach and what that standard of care is, will ask: Has the coach failed to provide the standard of care to a player that a reasonable and prudent coach would? The court would look at what a competent coach could be expected to anticipate under the circumstance relevant to the case.

Care
A coach should, under all circumstances:

• Take all necessary precautions to prevent injuries from occurring.
• Treat injuries correctly.
• Ensure the treatment provided prevents further injury.
• Take no action that could cause injury.

A reasonable and prudent coach should provide care based on what should be known about the sport and/or the injury. Ignorance is no excuse.

Other Areas
In better understanding legal issues surrounding coaching, it is important to recognise that there are a number of areas of Commonwealth and State legislation that have an impact on the coaching environment. These include discrimination, harassment and child protection.

Discrimination
There are four main types of discrimination that may affect football clubs:

• Racial and religious discrimination
• Sex/gender discrimination
• Disability discrimination
• Infectious diseases discrimination

Harassment
Harassment consists of offensive, abusive, belittling or threatening behaviour that is directed at a person because of a particular characteristic, usually sex, disability or race.

Child protection
Greater attention has been given to young sports participants and their welfare recently and several states have passed Child Protection Acts. While these vary from state to state, they have common principles designed to protect the safety and well being of children. Generally, the key principles include awareness of the issues and procedures that are in place and open communication to increase awareness and manage the issue.

For the latest information in these areas, go to the Policies section of the AFL website afl.com.au/policies
PROVIDING CARE
In addition to applying that careful parent test (i.e. the way you would act with your own child), carrying out the following steps should assist you to be a competent, reasonable and prudent coach:

The following table is a checklist for coaches to ensure appropriate care is provided to your players.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provide a safe environment</th>
<th>Facilities and equipment must be safe for both the users and others involved in competition. Adverse weather conditions must also be taken into consideration during competition and training sessions.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Activities must be adequately planned</td>
<td>Impaired learning ability and injury may be the result of unplanned practice sessions. Using the appropriate progressions in teaching a new skill, especially potentially dangerous skills, is imperative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Players must be evaluated for injury and capacity</td>
<td>Players with an injury or incapacity should not be expected to perform any potentially harmful activity. Players should never be forced to take part in any activity that they do not wish to. Individual differences must be taken into account.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young players should not be mismatched</td>
<td>Young players should be matched not only according to age, but also height, weight and maturity. Skill levels and experience should also be considered.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe and proper equipment should be provided</td>
<td>Existing codes and standards for equipment should be met and all equipment should be kept in good order. It should always be adequately repaired so that it is safe to use at all times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Players must be warned of the inherent risks of the sport</td>
<td>The inherent risks of any sport can only be accepted by the participants if they know, understand and appreciate those risks. In some situations, even such a warning may not be enough: for example, where young people are involved in a school supervised activity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities must be closely supervised</td>
<td>Adequate supervision is necessary to ensure the practice environment is as safe as possible. Each sport will have its own specific requirements in this regard.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaches should know first-aid</td>
<td>Coaches should have knowledge of basic emergency procedures and keep up to date on them. Coaches should know STOP (Stop, Talk, Observe, Prevent further injury) and RICER (Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation and Referral) procedures for managing injuries. Coaches should have a written emergency plan and ensure that appropriate medical assistance is available. At the very least, coaches should ensure that nothing is done which could aggravate any injury.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop clear, written rules for training and general conduct</td>
<td>Many injuries are the result of fooling around in change rooms and training venues. Clear written rules should be developed for general conduct and behavior in such situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaches should keep adequate records</td>
<td>Adequate records are useful aids to planning and are essential in all cases of injury. Record cards should be kept on all players, including relevant general and medical information and progress reports. Accident reports (not diagnoses) should be made as soon as possible after each injury occurs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MEASURING AND IMPROVING YOUR COACHING EFFECTIVENESS

Australian Football is continually changing; rules change, techniques change, equipment is refined and coaching methods, including the application of sport sciences, evolve. Coaches must keep abreast of these changes and adapt their coaching accordingly. All coaches have to know if they are effective or ineffective, independent of the ability of the playing group. The following techniques can assist coaches in measuring and improving their coaching effectiveness.

Coach self-reflection
Unless coaches can arrange for someone to observe and analyse them on a regular basis, the self-reflection method is the only method that can be used to confirm the effectiveness of their coaching. Self-reflection in coaching is a process where coaches compare their current practice against an ideal set of practices, using a systematic procedure to make comparisons between real and ideal.

Video analysis
Video analysis is another effective tool that assists in the self-reflection process because videotape provides permanent images that can help with in-depth analysis and evaluation. It can also help to identify areas in need of improvement and can also be used to plan for such improvement.

Video self-analysis is a six-step process:
1. Recording – videotape a coaching session.
2. Reflecting – review the tape to find a suitable segment, then analyse the segment against the ideal model.
3. Consulting – invite a mentor to ‘audit’ the analysis.
4. Planning – design a plan to improve.
5. Implementing – carry out the plan.
6. Follow-up recording – videotape a follow-up coaching session and check that the plan has worked.

Mentoring
Effective coaches have often had the good fortune to have been coached by a very good coach. On becoming coaches themselves they may have imitated many of the coaching behaviours and methods used by their previous coaches. This process can be carried on into a coach’s current development through a mentor.

A mentor is usually an experienced person who works individually with a less experienced coach. A good mentor is someone, chosen by a coach, whom the coach respects for their knowledge, attitudes and mentoring skills to assist them in their development. The mentor asks questions about the methods used and guides the coach toward a better understanding of his or her coaching.

In selecting a mentor, a coach can reflect on who are the people in their field (not necessarily restricted to other coaches) they admire most, why they admire these people, and what are the admirable qualities they possess. The answers to these questions will direct coaches to suitable mentors, with whom they can work formally or informally to develop their own unique skills and attributes.

BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION
It is sometimes just as difficult to modify coaching behaviour as it is to modify player behaviour. Coaches who are attempting to modify their own behaviour should try the following strategies:

• Identify the behaviour to be modified.
• Establish the characteristics of the new behaviour.
• Look at models of the new behaviour.
• Assess how important the change is – how will it affect the coach’s effectiveness?
• Obtain feedback about the behaviour.
• Reassess the effects of the change on all coaching tasks.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS
The role of the coach has broadened immensely in recent times and there are a number of ethical issues they have to deal with, e.g. drugs in sport, harassment, fair play, cheating, eating disorders, judging when a player should return from injury and respect for officials. The AFL has introduced a Coaches’ Code of Conduct which provides behavioural standards for coaches coaching Australian Football.
THE AFL COACHES’ CODE OF CONDUCT

I _____________________________________________ of ______________________________________________________ Postcode___________________

hereby commit, to the best of my ability, to uphold the AFL Coaches’ Code of Conduct.

I understand that as an integral component of my accreditation, I must maintain a standard of behaviour and conduct in the best interests of the game and the players/staff in my care.

In representing myself in an honest manner, and without bringing the coaching profession or the Game into disrepute, I will endeavour to uphold the following to the best of my ability:

1. I will respect the rights, dignity and worth of all individuals within the context of my involvement in Australian Football, by refraining from any discriminatory practices including, but not limited to, discrimination on the basis of race, religion, gender, ethnic background, special ability/disability or sexual orientation, preference or identity.

2. I will abide by and teach the AFL Laws of the Game and the Rules of my Club and League/Association.

3. I will be reasonable in the demands I make on the time commitments of the players in my care, having due consideration for their health and wellbeing.

4. I will be supportive at all times and I will refrain from any form of personal or physical abuse or unnecessary physical contact with the players in my care.

5. I will have due consideration for varying maturity and ability levels of my players when designing practice schedules, practice activities and involvement in competition.

6. Where I am responsible for players in the 5-18-year-old age group, I will strive to ensure that all players gain equal playing time. I will avoid overplaying the talented players, aiming to maximise participation, learning and enjoyment for all players regardless of ability.

7. I will stress and monitor safety always.

8. In recognising the significance of injury and sickness, I will seek and follow the physician’s advice concerning the return of injured or ill players to training.

9. I will endeavour to keep informed regarding sound principles of coaching and skill development, and of factors relating to the welfare of my players.

10. I will at all times display and teach appropriate sporting behaviour, ensuring that players understand and practise fair play.

11. I will display and foster respect for umpires, opponents, coaches, administrators, other officials, parents and spectators.

12. I will ensure that players are involved in a positive environment where skill-learning and development are priorities and not overshadowed by a desire to win.

13. I reject the use of performance-enhancing substances in sport and will abide by the guidelines set forth in the AFL Anti Doping and Illicit Drugs policies.

I agree to the following terms:

1. I agree to abide by the AFL Coaches’ Code of Conduct.

2. I acknowledge that the AFL, or a body affiliated with the AFL, may take disciplinary action against me if I breach the code of conduct. I understand that the AFL, or a body affiliated with the AFL, is required to implement a complaints-handling procedure in accordance with the principles of natural justice, in the event of an allegation against me.

3. I acknowledge that disciplinary action against me may include deregistration from the AFL National Coaching Accreditation Scheme.

Note: This “Coaches’ Code of Conduct” is to be signed and conformed to as part of the accreditation requirements of the AFL. Coaches should be aware that, in addition to this Code, they may be obliged to sign a further Code of Conduct/Ethics with their Club and/or League.

SIGNATURE: _____________________________________________ DATE: _______________________________

WITNESS SIGNATURE: ___________________________________________ DATE: _______________________________

(To be signed by Club President, AFL Auskick District Manager or school principal – whichever applies)
COACHING YOUTH FOOTBALLERS
Chapter 3
Coaching Youth Footballers

INTRODUCTION
Adolescence is a stage of development marked by dynamic biological and psychological changes, and requires adoption of specific coaching behaviours if young adolescents are to realise a socially fulfilled and worthwhile outcome from their involvement in Australian Football. Coaches not only occupy an influential position in the football setting but their influence can extend into other areas of the player’s life as well.

Key areas of consideration are lifestyle and time management, progression to higher levels of competition, developing rapport between coaches and players, developing trust and mutual respect, setting limits and enhancing discipline.

APPROACHES TO COACHING
The following recommended coaching approaches are aimed at assisting coaches to respond effectively to some of the social needs of adolescents. Coaches should view the list as a collection of alternatives to be used at their discretion. The manner of delivery of each behaviour should also be determined by the coach and will be strongly influenced by the interpersonal attitudes that are typically unique to each coach/player relationship.

TIME MANAGEMENT
As a coach of adolescent footballers, you are faced with many problems throughout a football season which are quite unique to the teenage group. Unlike the majority of senior footballers, teenagers are still deciding what their priorities are in terms of their sporting, social and academic careers. This can cause problems in time management whereby they try to fit in too many commitments appropriate for their lifestyle. Eventually, something needs to give.

The challenge coaches face in this situation would be to assist the player with these extra demands. The ideal situation would be for players to manage their time so that commitments are met and at the same time maintain interest and enthusiasm for football. However, this is not always the outcome. The reality is that at some stage coaches will need to deal with low attendance rates at training and even struggling to field a team on weekends. These problems will always be perennial issues, but the following steps may help minimise the effects they might have on your team.

1. Identify potential disruptions
These may include:
• Injuries and illnesses.
• Work – full-time and part-time.
• School demands.
• Family holidays.
• Other sports.
• Cost.
• Travel.
• Family problems.
There may be many others which relate particularly to players, the coach and the club.
2. Establish a club procedure
Discuss this with your players and together come up with a policy for dealing with such situations.
This may include:
- Prior notice must be given.
- Attendance at training re selection.
- Rehabilitation re injuries.
- Penalties re non-compliance.
This is an opportunity to discuss team rules and expectations for the season.

3. Develop strategies
Always try to be pro-active to situations that may occur.
Some strategies may include:
- Preparing a monthly calendar which highlights:
  - Upcoming games.
  - Training nights.
  - Social events.
  - Other important reminders.
- A reduction in the number of training nights/weeks off.
- Providing variety to maintain interest:
  - Indoor training/swimming/basketball/touch football.
  - Social activities.
  - Team-building activities, e.g. triathlon competition.
  - Going to an AFL game together.
- Taking an active interest, ask questions.
- Continue with planned training programs.

Potentially disruptive players especially should be assisted to overcome behaviours that will impede their learning or the learning of others in the team. Ignoring these factors that can disrupt the team and impede learning can result in the teaching/coaching role becoming more and more difficult and contribute to player dropout.

Behaviour problems can destroy the coach’s aim to provide enjoyable learning experiences. Most problems can be avoided if training sessions are well planned and a clear code of behaviour is established and reinforced from the outset. A knowledgeable coach who provides training sessions that yield fun, active participation and development of skills, and that allow all players to achieve personal success, will not be confronted with disciplinary problems very often.

PROGRESSING TO HIGHER LEVELS OF COMPETITION

Win or lose – enjoy the contest
Win or lose, remain composed throughout a season, teach players that the contest provides the excitement and enjoyment while the outcome provides a guide for assessing strategies and skills in relation to the opposition. Also, by setting up competitive activities at training, the coach can observe how players react and therefore intervene if necessary. At training, the coach is able to remove a player from a game to provide feedback about the player’s composure during the contest. At all times it is appropriate to stress good sportsmanship, fair play, support for teammates, clever play, teamwork, concentration, maintaining effort when being beaten and focus the players’ game analysis on the application of skills and strategies rather than the outcome.

Playing competitive sport with friends
One of the important reasons why young people participate in sport is to be in a team with friends and enter a competition against other teams. Sometimes coach, club and organisation strategies, designed to improve the competitiveness of teams, prevent players from realising this need to be with friends.
Adjusting to the pressure of competition

“Did you win?” is the question often asked by parents and friends when young people are involved in competitive sport. Those on the sidelines become more intense and begin to question umpires and criticise opposition players and coaches. Players feel the pressure of the need to win, not just for themselves, but also for obsessive adults, and this can become a huge responsibility. As young players enter into the environment that is the product of competitive activities, they need to be protected from the often irrational behaviour that others display, particularly at the game. Football has developed codes of behaviour to guide players, spectators and officials. Coaches are advised to refer to these continually and lead by example to help young players develop a frame of reference for what is acceptable sporting behaviour.

As with the teaching of skills, introducing competitive elements should be developmental. This developmental process will be different for each player. However, all coaches would be aware of the difficulties young players have coping with the various situations that arise in their competitive activity. Some coaches prepare lists of these elements and sequentially deal with them throughout a season. This list might include:

- How to cope with winning and losing.
- Accepting selection policies.
- Accepting umpiring decisions.
- Supporting teammates when they make errors.
- Supporting team strategies.

Gradual introduction of competitive elements, consideration for each player’s reasons for playing, emphasising the process rather than the outcome in the initial stages and providing players with mechanisms for coping with external influences are ways in which the coach can help players adjust to competitive activities.

DEVELOPING RAPPORT

One of the perceived effective ways for a coach to develop a rapport with players is to train them to do as they are directed. However, today this approach is no longer so effective. It is often justified because the time and coaching skills required to implement sophisticated coach/player interaction strategies are not available in most junior sporting contexts.

A coach may have a squad of 25 players who, for each week during the competitive season, the coach only sees for three hours at training and two hours at the game.

For most of this time, the players are involved in activity and therefore are not available for individual counselling. In this situation, having players who will accept the coach and who will comply without question to every direction, often sacrificing their own development to facilitate the development of others, tends to nullify the need for sophisticated strategies for maintaining rapport between coach and player.

The ‘do as you’re told’ coaching strategy always seems to be tolerated when players are winning the majority of their games. However, the rapport between players and coaches can often become strained if players exposed to this coaching strategy lose the majority of their games.

Adolescents of today are being educated in school to question, interpret and process information as well as role learn and apply information. Subsequently, the adolescent player will bring these questioning skills to their sporting context. Even if the team is winning, these players will be considering the wisdom of some of the directions that emerge from the coach’s ‘do as you’re told’ coaching strategy.

As a result, the emerging interplay between these coaches and questioning players is often critical to the rapport developed between the player and the coach, and subsequently critical to the morale of the team. Despite the powerful proposition that life requires people to learn to cope with ‘doing as they are told’, this management approach is no longer a one-way dialogue. Today’s leaders are having to learn to cope with the needs of the informed masses who can quickly deplete the power of a leader who lacks the ability to manage the attitudes and opinions of his/her charges by using collaborative approaches to the implementation of training, practising and competition.
The following are approaches that coaches can adopt with adolescents to nurture the rapport between coach and player.

1. **Physiological awareness**  
   Develop an understanding of the physiological changes that typical adolescents will experience while they are under the coach's control. Dramatic changes occur in muscle fibre types, the presence of the hormone testosterone and the growth of lean body mass. Changes to muscle fibre type are almost completed in early adolescence, which means that a player's potential for endurance versus speed has been determined. Knowing whether a player is capable of speed and not endurance can affect a coach's expectations in game and training situations.

2. **Psychosocial awareness**  
   Develop an understanding of the psychosocial changes that will confront the adolescent during the time they are under the control of the coach. Adolescents become increasingly interested in establishing an identity as well as defining their role as a future independent adult. As they move through a myriad of opportunities that confront them, they begin to make choices based on experience and a confirmed belief in their abilities. When coaching these players, it is essential to recognise the importance of supporting the choices they make about their role, particularly in the sporting context.

   It can be demoralising for an adolescent who has been encouraged to expect to be played in a particular role to then find themselves relocated accordingly to the policy of 'do as your told'. The scenario can manifest itself in situations such as a player not being selected as captain or being told to shift from defence into attack. Each of these situations has the potential to erode the rapport between player and coach. All can be productive events provided the coach has prepared the athlete to accept the alternative roles that may confront them and their team.

   Being able to predict possible management strategies and player reaction to those strategies is one of the attributes of an effective coach. It is recommended that coaches present their coaching philosophy to the players on the day that they start their player/coach relationship. They should also be capable of providing players with the necessary rationale for making decisions about changing the player's previously defined role.

3. **Awareness of self-responsibility**  
   - Show respect for the player by acknowledging their every effort and by entrusting them with positions of responsibility. This begins by making every role in the team as important as the other roles.
   - Adopt a non-threatening posture when the player's body language may suggest a lack of support for the coach. It is often worthwhile when players seem to be ignoring the coach, to make an effort to informally interact with the player about any topic which is known to be of interest to the players. The icebreaker approach may be enough to curb a potentially strained relationship from negatively affecting the quality of the players' performance and subsequently the team's performance.
   - Be noticeably consistent in supporting the worth of each player's goals and roles. This may require making a mental note of the comments made by significant others who are close to the player and can provide useful inside information about the player's needs and wants.
   - At all times, the coach should avoid making the player feel as if they are being constantly analysed. Adolescents should expect that they have intimate discussions with those people who necessarily affect their lives. No matter how intriguing a particular player's situation may be, managing their personal domain is not part of a coach's role unless directed to do so by the player.
   - Understanding and respect from adolescents can only be developed through knowledge of their unique characteristics. However, it is also important to acknowledge that adolescents must understand the importance of being able to 'do as they are told' when part of a team.

**DEVELOPING TRUST AND MUTUAL RESPECT**  
Coaches seem to be aware that an adolescent's commitment to a training program and/or performance strategy will be greatly enhanced if there is mutual respect and trust not only between the players and their coach but also between the players themselves. Developing both types of respect is largely the responsibility of the coach.
How do coaches develop mutual respect?

There are many opportunities for coaches to gain the respect of their players. There are also opportunities for coaches to lose the respect of their players. On occasions, this loss of respect may be due to the input of a ‘significant other’ such as a parent, previous coach and/or friend. The player may not even be aware that there is a problem until a significant other chooses to criticise the coach. Therefore, the strategies coaches use to gain the respect of their players must consider the degree of influence that significant others will have on the player.

Establish codes of behaviour for effective team function

Codes should include parameters for attendance, dress, demeanour, teammate support and attitude. Each of these codes should be stated, clearly defined and any code violation linked to appropriate consequences. For example, players who do not comply with a stated code may be:

- Spoken to by the coach.
- Requested to carry out certain duties.
- Act as a reserve for a period of time.
- Asked for a special effort at training or during competition.
- Required to apologise to those whose participation has been disrupted by the offending player.

The severity of a consequence will greatly depend upon the offending player's control over the situation and the previous history of the player. Obviously, with adolescents, their late arrival at a training session or a competition can be caused by factors outside their control such as parent transport being delayed. A poor attitude may result from a lack of consideration given by teammates or other aspects of their lives being in disarray. Coaches must be sensitive to the various factors that may cause a player to stray from the expected standards.

Use a consistent approach when delivering the consequences

- Avoid allowing personalities to affect your decisions.
- Act immediately when an infringement of the code occurs.
- Consult with parents if a situation with a player is becoming unmanageable.
- Be calm and objective when applying a consequence to behaviour.
- Speak with the offender in private whenever possible.
- Create a policy for team, strategy and/or event selection.

This policy can be as simple as ‘players will be selected in positions that the coach considers will give the team its best chance of winning, given the circumstances of the competition (i.e. playing conditions, opposition ability and availability of players)’. This policy should be clearly articulated to the players and, in the case of the younger adolescents, to the parents as well. Should there be a need to vary the policy, then it is advisable to conduct a team meeting to communicate the reasons for the change.

Establish the worth of every player’s contribution

This is achieved through the consistent reinforcement of effort. Some guiding principles include:

- Ensure that the player who has the least ability and can contribute only in a minimal way feels worthwhile. For these players, the sport may not be a priority in their lives, however they give a maximum effort. A coach lacking in empathy may unintentionally burden these players with feelings of guilt. Public acknowledgement of their contribution is encouraged.
- Challenge the high-ability and totally involved players to measure their performance against a higher standard rather than against that of their less-involved peers. Make certain that all involved are aware of the contribution talented and committed players make to a team and how difficult it is for them to cope with the high expectations of others.
- Give equal consideration to players who fit between the two extremes. Take time to discuss their ambitions and roles. They are not the captains of the ship or the porters, they typically work in the engine room and often go unnoticed.

Open discussions about the relative worth of each participant can ensure that young adolescents develop empathy for their peers and the various situations that they themselves must face as players.
Identify acceptable comments for players to make in most team sports
Basketballers have developed a supportive slap of hands to signify support for their teammates. This usually occurs either after a mistake or good play. Comments such as ‘What do you think you were doing?’ or ‘You idiot!’ have no place within a team and should be replaced with ‘Keep it up’, ‘We’re with you’ and ‘Hang in there’.

Coaches should attempt to anticipate when a player may be troubled and then create an opportunity for a discussion to occur. It is not advisable to do this when emotions are high but rather before the anticipated moment of tension or at a time when those involved have calmed down. Having regular times for review often relieves the anxiety between individuals who may not be able to resolve their differences and/or disappointments.

Trusting the adolescent player
Effective coaches not only set goals for the performance of their players but also for their own performance as coaches. One of the critical performance indicators is the harmony between the players and between the coach and their players. Good coaches will have supportive and striving players even when they are not winning. Although, all things being equal, the coach who develops mutual respect with and between players will eventually be a winner.

Setting limits
Another important role for coaches of adolescents on their journey to adulthood is to set limits. Setting limits has a number of important consequences for young peoples’ development:
- Protection and safety.
- Socialisation and consideration of others.
- Developing a sense of obligation.
- Maintaining order and peace in the team.
- Self control and discipline.
- Learning moral values.
- Establishing expectations.
- Assisting in defining their roles.
- Giving them a sense of security.
- Letting them know we care about them.

It is normal that these limits will be tested. Make allowances when negotiating them. Mistakes will be made – this is part of the learning process. Present outcomes as consequences rather than punishments.

PLAYER DISCIPLINE
Player discipline is an important factor underpinning learning, development and performance. ACT Academy of Sport Psychologist Michelle Paccagnella produced the following framework for enhancing player discipline.

Enhancing player discipline
A disciplined player is one who is in control of their behaviour and conduct, adheres to training protocols and consistently trains and performs to a required standard. While good discipline is not a prerequisite for achievement, it is certainly an ingredient that can make the life of both the player and coach a lot smoother. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the player, however a good coach can greatly assist them to instigate and maintain good discipline.

How to identify the disciplined player
Discipline can apply to both commitment to off-field issues (for example, organisation, healthy diet, etc.) and during the course of training or competition to adhere to team plays or control emotions. Good player discipline incorporates a high level of commitment, responsibility, motivation to train and perform, meeting all requirements (such as administration), organisation and good focus. At the more elite levels, this entails a certain level of professionalism, including ownership of goals, self-control and maintaining good life balance.
**Benefits of player discipline**

There are some obvious benefits of player discipline. These include:

- Setting the scene for a good work ethic.
- Providing structure.
- Not relying on talent alone.
- Helping to put players in a position to achieve their goals.
- Facilitating leadership when other players rely on you.
- Assisting in adhering to team plays (players put team goals before their own).
- Increasing coachability of the players.

**Educating your players**

The first step in enhancing player discipline is education. Do your players know what discipline is, or how it can enhance their performance and enjoyment of football? Does your players’ understanding of discipline match your own? These questions can form the basis of an education session to help you and your players embrace and understand the concept of discipline. Education sessions can take the form of group brainstorming sessions, formal workshops, informal discussions or individual player meetings.

**Strategies for enhancing player discipline**

Once players have a good understanding of discipline, there are many things a coach can do to further support and enhance player discipline. The following approaches will help to establish an environment where discipline problems are largely avoided and where the few discipline problems that may occur are managed well.

- Provide concrete training rules, particularly with young players. Establish the rules and the consequences of breaking them. Allow your players to help with the establishment of rules and consequences so they have ownership of them.
- Create the kind of culture you want.
- Have set routines at training and competition.
- Provide a structured, consistent training environment.
- Lead by example.
- Encourage the behaviour you want and reward it.
- Teach your players to believe in themselves.
- Learn what enhances your players’ motivation. Help them discover this for themselves.
- Be supportive and flexible.
- Make training fun/enjoyable.
- Maintain a process orientation where you focus on performance, not outcomes.
- Be aware of other influences on the player (for example, other sports, school demands and talent programs).
- Do not give up on undisciplined players. Find a way to get through to them. Think creatively.
- Allow for flair/creativity/spontaneity (both yours and your players).
- Encourage your players to set and review their goals.
- Be a role model/mentor or provide them with role models. Provide examples of other player discipline (how they train, live etc).
- Maintain a good coach-player relationship and communication.
- Enhance players’ ownership of their training/program.
- Know when to be autocratic and when to be democratic.
- Encourage player honesty – how are they really feeling/coping?
- Encourage your players to keep log books or training diaries.
- In dealing with unsatisfactory behaviour, focus on the behaviour not on the individual as a person. Do not insult or embarrass a player.
- Intervene at the earliest signs of misbehaviour so players can easily redeem themselves before things get out of hand and are less easy to resolve.
- Early intervention strategies include issuing clear reminders of expectations, introducing a ‘diverting’ activity, inquiring if there is something wrong, discreetly informing the offender that his/her behaviour is getting out of order, and other ‘low key’ reactions signalling that the behaviour has been noticed and that it should stop.
- Discipline firmly, fairly and consistently.
Mental discipline

Discipline can be applied to players’ thoughts and emotions, as well as their on and off-field behaviour. Teach your players to review their goals, discover their optimum level of arousal, control their self-talk, replace negative thoughts with positive ones and deal with their emotions.

Unfortunately, many players don’t learn how to be disciplined until they experience real failure, disappointment, adversity or injury, forcing them to improve their discipline. However, through education and a commitment to enhancing player discipline, you may be able to help your players learn this valuable lesson sooner rather than later.

RECOMMENDED COACHING BEHAVIOURS WHEN WORKING WITH YOUTH PLAYERS

- Establish and consistently apply participation rules and regulations for players.
- Work with each player to determine their personal goals.
- Be enthusiastic and show enjoyment for the task of coaching.
- Promote the value of each player and the role that they have in the team.
- Encourage players to evaluate their own performance and discuss their evaluation openly.
- Show concern for the physical and mental well-being of each player.
- Learn to identify player anxiety and help the player cope.
- Be an appropriate role model for players to follow.
- Always publicly support players and the system, including officials and administrators.
- Emphasise effort and enjoyment as well as winning. Do not emphasise winning to the exclusion of effort and enjoyment.
- Ensure that all players have an equal opportunity to participate.
- Maintain some distance with players while encouraging a calm, congenial atmosphere.
- Learn to identify and understand the physical changes that can occur during early adolescence. Help players to adjust their sporting involvement to allow for these changes.
- Use reward systems to maintain discipline and only occasionally use predetermined and high-impact disciplinary strategies.
- Promote and insist on fair play and good sportsmanship.
- Use each player at various times to take responsibility not only for the conduct of training and competition but also the conduct of the club.
- Assign individuals to coaching and management roles with younger teams and/or players.
- Allow players to take risks and explore the options in their sport.
- Assess players according to their commitment and ability, not their personality.
- Have a thorough knowledge of the rules, techniques and tactics of football.
- Focus on all aspects of individual growth – developing physical and social skills and promoting attitudes such as fair play, sportsmanship, consideration for others, work ethic, striving for success, overcoming adversity and having fun.

If included in a coach’s coaching repertoire, these approaches will enable them to help adolescent players satisfy their social and psychological needs through football more effectively. In particular, coaches should strive to:

- Nurture the self-esteem of young adolescents.
- Raise their sense of responsibility.
- Confirm the worth of consistent and enduring relationships.
- Promote sportsmanship, fair play and an honest effort.
- Create a convivial and supportive environment.
COMMUNICATION FOR YOUTH COACHES
Chapter 4
Communication for Youth Coaches

INTRODUCTION
Good communication is an essential component of good coaching. Communication is a process that involves far more than the spoken word. It is the information link between coach and player which pulls together all aspects of coaching from sport science to team management. In the coaching environment, effective communication involves skill in sending messages and skill in interpreting messages.

A coach may possess all the technical knowledge and skills of Australian Football, but without the ability to communicate this information, it is of little use. Communication skills, like all other skills in coaching, need to be practised to improve your coaching effectiveness.

Consider the following questions:
• How do your players know if what they are doing is actually what you want?
• How do you correct a player's faults or weaknesses in a positive manner?
• How do your players and your team improve by having you as a coach?

Communication and feedback in coaching terms refers to information which is transferred from you as coach to your players, which is primarily aimed at improving both the individual's and team's performance.

Some other benefits of good communication:
• Improves morale.
• Provides a sense of involvement (belonging).
• Promotes commitment and understanding.
• Is more efficient (saves time and effort for coach and player).
• Promotes better teamwork.

Coaches should remember that:
• Coaching is a two-way process.
• Clear and consistent messages help to avoid miscommunication.
• Open questions will glean more information from your players.
• ‘Good’ feedback will complement your coaching.
• ‘Active listening’ shows interest in your players and gains valuable information.
• Non-verbal communication is as important as verbal communication.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION
All players respond differently to various forms of communication. Some will find visual cues most effective, others respond to verbal cues and others to touch. Using a number of forms of communication will not only maintain a playing group's interest, but increases the chance of finding a communication ‘trigger’ that works for each player.

Communication is also more effective when a coach encourages open communication and welcomes input from the group of players. This involves establishing an environment of mutual trust and respect between player and coach.

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION
Non-verbal communication refers to all information which is not presented verbally by the coach but has powerful messages that can bring about both positive and negative behaviours in players. Non-verbal communication can be very effective if used in the correct manner, but destructive if used inappropriately.
A large percentage (studies suggest over 80 per cent) of the meaning we get from communication comes from the non-verbal cues that go with it. If your non-verbal cues match or complement your spoken word then your communication can be more effective. If, however, your non-verbal message conflicts with what you say, your message will be confusing. For example, if coaches tell their players they have done a great job and then let their shoulders slump and sigh heavily, the players are more likely to get the message that the coach is not really happy with them. Non-verbal information from coach to player can incorporate gestures, clapping, facial expressions, shaking the head, hands on hips, deep breaths etc.

There are four main areas of non-verbal communication:

1. **Visual**
   This includes all aspects of body language, such as posture, gestures, facial expressions and eye contact.

2. **Touch**
   Touch can be a very effective way of imparting meaning. For example, a pat on the back or hand on the shoulder, or using manual manipulation (physically guiding a player through a movement) as a teaching skill. Significant caution must be taken with physical contact. Different players will feel comfortable with different amounts of physical contact and closeness and this should be respected. In addition, there are legal implications with sexual harassment. A good rule of thumb is only to use physical contact if it is essential and then ask the player if they are comfortable with you using it. Coaches should familiarise themselves with the *Guidelines for Coaches* booklet in the Harassment-free Sport series published by the Australian Sports Commission (www.activeaustralia.org/hfs).

3. **Voice expression**
   A phrase often said is ‘it’s not what you say, but how you say it’. The tone of voice, rate of speech and volume of voice can dramatically change what is being said. For example, depending on how you say the word ‘no’, it can express fear, doubt, amazement, sarcasm or anger. How you say something can also gain attention, maintain interest and emphasise points.

4. **Role model**
   This area covers the other things a coach can do to communicate to their players, i.e. arriving to training on time and being dressed for action. Making the effort to do these things communicates to the players that you are interested in what they are doing. Most of the ‘meaning’ we give to words comes not from the words themselves, but from the non-verbal factors, such as facial expressions, tone, body language etc. Non-verbal communication can complement a verbal message and may even substitute for it – a coach may only need a slight nod or raised eyebrow to tell the player all they need to know.

Skilled coaches will use non-verbal communication to improve their coaching effectiveness. Using the SOLVER checklist is an easy way to remember how to use non-verbal communication in a positive manner.

- **S** Squarely face the player. Face the player and move to their height level.
- **O** Open posture. Crossed arms or legs puts up a barrier and suggests an unwillingness to listen.
- **L** Lean slightly forward. Again this demonstrates interest and shows you are listening.
- **V** Verbal comments are relevant. Comments should also support what the player is saying.
- **E** Eye contact. Contact should be made and maintained, without overdoing it.
- **R** Relax. Be comfortable and show it.
COMMUNICATION THROUGH DEMONSTRATION

Communicating to players by demonstrating or having someone else demonstrate while the coach instructs can be one of the most engaging ways to impart knowledge to a player of the team. An example based on correcting a player's kicking style is outlined below:

**Problem:** Player kicking the ball too high in the air.

**What the coach can do:** Firstly, the coach would identify with the player that the problem lies in the position of the foot at impact, where the toe is pointing to the sky rather than the intended direction of the ball. In the next step, the coach could demonstrate an example of the player's current kicking style illustrating the problem, and then demonstrate the desired kicking style, with corrected problem. Ideally, the player will then, with the aid of a teammate and coach, work on practising and improving this skill.

ACTIVE LISTENING

An important skill for coaches to master is 'active listening'. This is when you concentrate completely on what the player is saying, both in their actions and words.

This can be one of the hardest skills for a coach to do as they feel it is their job to direct and will often butt in or attempt to solve the problem without all of the necessary information.

There are large advantages to a coach listening actively to his/her players:

- It shows interest and fosters a positive environment.
- It reduces the chance of being misunderstood (more efficient).
- It encourages further communication.
- The player is more likely to listen to the coach if the coach listens to them.
- The coach can learn from the player.

Four simple steps to improve active listening

**Stop**

Stop what you are doing and pay attention to what the player is telling you. This may be difficult in a coaching situation with other things going on, but paying attention, even briefly, lets the player know that he/she is important. Avoid interrupting.

**Look**

Make eye contact with the player by being at the same level and facing the player. Show interest in your expression and look for non-verbal cues the player might be giving out.

**Listen**

Focus your attention on what the player is saying by listening to their words and the emotion in what is being said. Use non-verbal cues such as nodding, smiling or frowning, appropriate to the context of the message. Support this with encouraging words to show you are focused on what the player is saying.

**Respond**

Re-state what the player has told you, in your own words. This shows you have been listening, checks that you did understand and can summarise what was talked about. Remain neutral and supportive. Use open questions to prompt the player for more information if needed.
**COACHES: PLEASE LISTEN!**

When players ask you to listen to them and you start to give them advice, you have not done what they asked.
When players ask you to listen to them and you begin to tell them why they shouldn’t feel that way, you are trampling on their feelings.
When players ask you to listen to them and you feel you have to do something to solve their problem, you have failed them, strange as that may seem.
Listen! All players ask is that you listen.
Don’t talk or do – just hear them.

**EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK**

The ability to provide effective feedback is an important tool for coaches to have. ‘Good’ feedback can result in dramatic improvements in comprehension, awareness and skill, however, ‘bad’ feedback can alienate, discourage and bring about a decrease in player skill level. Providing constructive or negative feedback is generally another component of coaching, but it must be constructive. Effective feedback provides information that helps learning and development of skills and attitudes. It can positively affect maturation, learning and self image, and can be the key to motivation. Players should be allowed to practise for a period of time, which arises with the complexity of a skill before offering them feedback (observe for a longer period). Correct one error at a time, allowing more practise time before attempting to correct other errors. What the coach says as part of the error correction must give the player the information with which to improve the individual’s performance.

Positive reinforcement will hasten skill development – shouting and criticising will achieve very little. While players are practising, consistent errors may appear. Re-demonstrate the skill or rephrase instructions for those needing extra assistance. Players who are unable to correctly perform the skill following the second presentation should receive specific feedback immediately following each practice. It is equally important to provide feedback for the competent performer as well as for those making errors. Highlight what the player is doing right, and then provide feedback relating to errors.

Feedback is effectively given by using verbal reports, physical cues, checklists, video replays and/or peer comments. The style of feedback depends on the availability of resources, type of skill and the personality of the player. The ability of players to critically analyse and evaluate their own performance is often underestimated. An immediate critique of a player’s initial attempts at a new skill may be an insult to the athlete’s intelligence and a waste of time.

To be effective, feedback should be:

**Specific** – feedback should only relate to those components of a task that the player has been asked to attend to before performance.

**Constructive** – if feedback is used to identify an error, it should provide reasons for the error and possible solutions.

**Immediate** – for a brief time after a performance, a player retains in their memory information about the performance. Therefore, the sooner feedback is presented, the more meaningful it will be to the player.

**Clear** – when players perform rapid, complex movements, it is difficult to relate to them the nature of specific errors in performance. Therefore, to clarify feedback, it is sometimes necessary to use slow-motion video replay. Whatever the situation, players must understand exactly what is required.

**Positive** – most feedback should serve to improve the quality of performance. Feedback should be positive and encouraging as this will generally hasten skill development.

**Simple** – feedback should be brief and to the point to improve skill development and to avoid confusion between player and coach.
GAME-DAY COACHING

Communication and feedback on game-day

It's always difficult for coaches to place a desired timeframe on the amount of information that should be communicated to players, not only before the game but in general. It is, however, supported and acknowledged by many coaches that the KISS principle be adopted (Keep It Simple Sport). Communication should be very specific, concise and clearly communicated to both the team and individuals within the team.

Players are naturally nervous before playing and their ability to absorb great amounts of information is generally low. A team meeting prior to the players preparing physically should reinforce key themes/processes and tactics that may relate to weather/ground conditions etc.

It is important that all communication and feedback provided to players during the game is specific and in the best interests of both the team and individual performance. The role of the runner is also crucial in communicating information quickly and efficiently to the players.

Golden rules for coaches on match-day

- Ensure players are aware of their positions on the field (a whiteboard is useful for this).
- Provide appropriate warm-up exercises with footballs (if possible do this on the ground).
- Encourage players to encourage each other.
- Use interchange players freely.
- Encourage all players to acknowledge their individual efforts.
- Focus on teaching the game, not on winning the game.
- Addresses to players before, during and after the game should be used as teaching and learning opportunities (coaches should be calm and positive and avoid any emotional gospelling, derogatory or sarcastic remarks).

Tips for match-day addresses

- Addresses to players are a means to teach them about the game: both its skills and values.
- Prepare the pre-match talk beforehand and consider what to say to individuals and groups (e.g. forward line players) and what to say to the whole group.
- Talk to players individually and in small groups about their responsibilities as they are getting ready.
- Stress that the game is an opportunity to practise skills.
- Encourage players to do their best.
- Use words and expressions they have heard before to enhance understanding.
- Be positive and encouraging.
- Use statistics as positive reinforcement during breaks.
- Make sure all players are attentive and focused when being spoken to.
- Reinforce plans and policies that have been practised.
- Comments during game breaks could refer to the playing conditions, skill strengths and areas for improvement, position play, good efforts from groups or individuals and plans for the next stage of the game.
- Post-game comments should review what was done well, what needs improvement, what can be learned from the opposition's play, what individuals did well, what was learnt, the extent of player satisfaction, what needs to be worked on and what the team should aim to do better next time.

SUMMARY

Depending on which form of communication and feedback you adopt as coach, it's critical that communication is clear, concise and, wherever possible, reinforcing. Obviously, players prefer positive communication rather than negative communication, however, as we all mature and develop, there is a place for both types. Most coaches in today's football acknowledge that positive individual communication is well received by all players, both publicly in front of peers and in a one-on-one situation. Negative communication, however, is probably best received in a one-on-one situation and not in public where humiliation or embarrassment can be very disruptive to the player and the team as a whole.
TEACHING AND IMPROVING SKILLS
Chapter 5
Teaching and Improving Skills

INTRODUCTION
Fundamental skills form the basis for the development of all sporting skills. Many complex skills are made up of a coordinated sequence of fundamental skills (techniques) and the importance of these should not be underestimated. It is exciting to witness a champion displaying faultless techniques while performing in extremely competitive situations.

Every player and coach strives to achieve ultimate game skill performance. However, the process of developing skills is long and detailed. It begins with a command of the basic, simple and complex skills and progresses through a mastery of mildly competitive situations to competence in full-scale competition.

To achieve high-quality performance, players are encouraged to attend rigorously to each stage of skill development. Neglect at any stage of learning may result in the emergence of an exploitable weakness.

STAGES OF LEARNING
From motor coordination to major game skills
There are three identifiable stages of learning. Players will move through these stages at varying rates, and when new skills are introduced may regress from a later stage to an earlier stage. The coach's responsibility is to carefully assess each player's current stage and develop appropriate practices so that each player is motivated and challenged.

Early stage
Players in the early stage of learning a skill tend to make a large number of errors and may look and feel clumsy and uncoordinated. A player's performance might be characterised by one or more of the following:
• Parts of the skill performance are missing, particularly the preparation and follow-through components.
• Some parts of the skill are exaggerated, while in other parts the use of the body is highly restricted.
• Rhythm, coordination and control are poor.
• Minimal outcomes result from maximum effort.
• Poor decisions are made regarding response options.

Intermediate stage
Players in the intermediate stage of learning a skill have a basic command of skills and are able to perform the skills at a faster pace and, therefore, place them in a competitive situation. A player's performance might be characterised by one or more of the following:
• Movements have better control, coordination and rhythm.
• Some parts of the skill continue to be either restricted or exaggerated.
• While the overall skill produces reasonable results, some components of the skill are performed incorrectly.
• Many of the movement patterns, such as an individual's unique backswing in golf, remain throughout life because of the lack of opportunities to practise, poor motivation and/or the lack of qualified instruction.

Final stage
In this stage, players are able to perform skills subconsciously and under pressure. The player is ready to advance to more complex skills. A player's performance might be characterised by one or more of the following:
• Mechanically efficient and coordinated movements.
• Automated performance of the skill, which allows the player to process other information while performing the skill—The types of information includes strategies to counter opposition movements, responding to changes in the environment and planning for the next game play.
• Confident and purposeful movements.
• All components of the skill are correctly performed, well sequenced and optimally timed.
• Minimal variation in the outcome of the skill performance.
During all stages of skill development, coaches should:

- Provide knowledge of results and performance.
- Encourage players to feel the effect of their movement choices.
- Develop the player’s ability to imagine correct skill movements.

The coach’s responsibility is to carefully assess each player’s stage and to develop appropriate practices so they are motivated and challenged.

TEACHING AND REMEDIATION OF SKILLS

Technique v skill – technique involves performing the skill, skill is doing it in a game under pressure with limited time and space.

Adolescents tend to display problems when trying to master the skills of Australian Football. Group or individual instruction can target common problems and help overcome skill barriers.

TEACHING FOOTBALL SKILLS

A great deal of training and coaching is based on the misguided notion that practice makes perfect. This is not necessarily true. Practice makes permanent and this applies equally to both good and bad practice. In preparing a training program, an effective coach should be able to:

- Know how to introduce a skill.
- Know the key points to emphasise.
- Recognise skill errors.
- Know how to rectify skill faults.

1. How to introduce a skill

To become a better and more efficient coach, some of your training sessions must be devoted to skill learning. A simple formula for a coach to follow when teaching a new skill is the SPIR method, which will be outlined later in this chapter. After some practice, the coach will find this procedure becomes second nature. It is efficient and follows the major principles of learning.

2. Know the key points to emphasise

To create an effective learning situation, the coach must take into account the following points:

a) Minimise the number of teaching points. Don’t confuse the player with a long list of instructions – keep it simple!

   Likewise, when teaching an advanced skill, e.g. kicking for goal on the run, break the skill down into simple manageable stages.

b) Ensure the skill is being performed correctly as practice makes permanent. During a training session, a coach should spend time observing and analysing various aspects of the session. Not only should the coach observe the general performance of the team, he must also analyse the specific performance of individual players within the group.

   The coach must also possess a good understanding of the skills of the game.

c) Finally, the ability to organise and observe counts for very little if the coach lacks the ability to communicate.

   In teaching skills, a coach can communicate:

   - By showing or demonstrating.
   - By speaking.

3. Recognising skill errors

The most important part of skill teaching is to determine whether correction is necessary. The preferred procedure in identifying skill error is as follows:

a) Watch the player carefully to identify what the problem is.

b) Break down the basic technique of what is actually wrong – e.g. eyes, hands, feet, follow through.
c) Work out what is required to overcome the problem.

d) Take the player aside – be positive and gain his confidence.

e) Demonstrate the correct technique.

f) Have the player practise, practise, practise. Repetition is the key to learning.

4. Rectifying skill faults

There are broad techniques which coaches should use to remedy problems in the performance of a skill:

a) Rebuild the skill if the performance in no way resembles the desired model.

b) Renovate the skill when the performance only partially deviates from the desired model.

FIXING ERRORS

Skill errors do occur. Many footballers are taught skills incorrectly and subsequently perform them poorly under match conditions. Individualised coaching can rectify many of these problems. Some common skill errors and suggested remedies follow. In all instances, it is preferable to break the skill down into its simplest form to ensure the technique can be performed at the basic level.

Kicking – ball guidance

**Problem:** Using two hands to slam the ball on to the kicking foot.

**Remedy:** Using the one-handed technique – the ball is held in the palm and fingers of one hand underneath its bottom end. Other hand is placed behind back.

**Problem:** Using both hands to guide the ball on to the kicking foot.

**Remedy:**
1. Walk 2-3 steps, drop ball on to a mark on the ground.
2. Repeat, bringing kicking foot through.
3. Repeat with one finger of opposite hand on the side of the ball.
4. With one hand behind the back, use the one hand drop.
5. Hold the ball with two hands, walk through the kick and guide the ball down with one hand.

Kicking – goalkicking

**Problem:** Inconsistency

**Remedy:** Focus on a target behind the goals.

Begin a short distance from the goals (about five metres and increase as the kick improves).

At all times, player's optimum power should be used (optimum power is the power at which the player kicks comfortably).

Marking – Overhead marking

**Problem:** Incorrect positioning of fingers and thumbs.

**Remedy:**
1. Mime mark (stress fingers spread and correct position of thumbs behind the ball – “W” formation).
2. Player grabs ball from coach's hand held above player's head.
3. Throw ball from hand to hand.
4. Throw in air and catch; bounce off a wall.
5. Increase frequency of catches and introduce opposition.
6. Run, jump and mark. Adjust your hands as the ball approaches.

Handball

**Problem:** Repetition – repeated handball can cause pain to the striking hand.

**Remedy:** Both hands can be used to minimise the pain of hitting the ball. Use the platform hand to help propel the ball. Develop movement with the platform hand before the ball is hit.

**Problem:** Throwing the ball in the air or dropping platform hand before hitting the ball.

**Remedy:** Stabilise platform hand on table, fence or partner's back.

‘Fist into hand’. Player grabs punching fist with platform hand after punching the ball.
General remediation suggestions
Coaches should refer to the main coaching points contained within the Skills Guide (Chapter 14) when setting out to teach the particular skills of the game.

It is important to use the SPIR method and to introduce only two or three coaching points at a time. For instance, in teaching handball, the first coaching point might be:

• Make a proper fist with the striking hand.
• Hold the ball with the other hand forming a platform under the ball.
• Strike the ball close to its point.

Having mastered that, add a new coaching point:
• Catch the fist in the hand and strike the ball.

Master that, then add:
• Step forward on to the front foot (same side as the hand holding the ball).
And continue over a period of weeks to “build” the skill. It is a trap to try to teach it all at once. Be patient and allow players to master each point along the way.

THE SPIR METHOD FOR SKILLS TEACHING
As previously identified, a particularly successful teaching method for assisting players to learn new skills is the SPIR method.

S for Show (demonstrate)
• Name the skill.
• Show the whole skill first.
• Show again while making the instructional points.
• Make no more than three coaching/instructional points.
• Ask if there are any questions.
• Demonstrate once more, asking the players to watch for the coaching points.

P for Practise
• Practise immediately.
• The learners copy what has been shown.
• Practise the whole skill first.
• Revise parts of the skill if problems.

I for Instruct (intervene to correct errors)
• Observe each group for 15-30 seconds.
• Keep repeating the key points about the skill.
• Provide further instruction.

R for Reward
• Praise good efforts.
• Show pleasure.
• Make every player feel his/her efforts are valued.

USING SPIR EFFECTIVELY
During the Show (demonstration)
• Select appropriate learning information.
• Each skill demonstration requires a formation which allows each player to obtain a clear view of the key aspects of the skill.
• Use simple, precise instructions.
• A key word or cue should be used to emphasise the important parts of the skill.
During the Practice
• Let players freely experiment without much feedback at first.
• Get players practising as soon as possible so they don't lose their mental picture or the sense of how the skill is performed.

When Instructing
• Provide feedback as this lets players know how they are going.
• Allow them to practise for a time before offering any feedback.
• Offer specific, constructive, clear and positive feedback.

When providing Reward
• Encourage freely, particularly when an individual's progress seems slow.
• Set standards according to the capability of each player.
• Understand and allow for the fact that each player will improve at a different rate.
• Only compare players with themselves – what they could do and now what they are doing.
• Avoid comparing players with each other.

GAME SENSE AND DECISION-MAKING TRAINING
Game sense is an approach to coaching that uses games as the focus of the training session. By focusing on the game (not necessarily the full game), players are encouraged to:
• Become more tactically aware and be able to make better decisions during the game in pressure situations.
• Start thinking strategically about game concepts.
• Develop football skills such as kicking and handballing under pressure within a realistic and enjoyable context, rather than practising them in isolation.
• Develop a greater understanding of the game being played.

Game sense activities also aim to:
• Increase individual and team motivation to training – players love to play games!
• Physiologically prepare the body where conditioning is specific to that of a game.

This approach to coaching is ‘game centred’ rather than ‘technique centred’. While most traditional coaching sessions have focused on the practice of techniques, the game sense session focuses on the game.

In the past, technique has often been over-emphasised within training sessions. While technique is an important part of the overall skill, it has often been taught in isolation, without requiring players to think and apply the techniques to the situations required in the game. By using game sense, players are challenged to think about what they are actually doing, and why. Players are taught to use the appropriate technique at the right time and place in the pressure situations of a game.

When designed well, mini-games appeal to the players’ (especially adolescents) ability to problem solve and process information and subsequently raise their levels of attention and desire to do well.

Why use game sense?
The fact that games are intrinsically motivating is probably the best reason why coaches should adopt game sense, but there are a number of other reasons for using this approach, including:
• Encouraging a holistic approach to the teaching of games – players are taught to solve problems that arise in a game through tactical awareness and understanding; skills are developed in a more meaningful environment.
• Promotes enjoyment for participation – a fun environment increases motivation levels and encourages participation.
• Assists the beginner, who often has limited technical knowledge of a sport. For instance, for these coaches it is more appropriate to set challenges for players through games rather than conduct technique-based sessions that are based on unsound techniques due to a lack of technical knowledge. It helps avoid developing players with inflexible techniques, that is players who are unable to cope with change in the playing environment.
• Aids efficient group management – game sense is particularly useful as group management is often easier if the players are having fun and less time is being spent on drills; teaching space, equipment and time can be used more efficiently. It also lets the coach cater for all ability levels by encouraging players to concentrate on the game aspects, rather than on the textbook execution of the technique which some may never master.
• Coach talk and intervention is kept to a minimum – the coach questions players to challenge them to find solutions, rather than providing all the answers; cooperation between the coach and the players is increased due to the player involvement.

The coach's role in game sense
The role the coach takes in game sense is somewhat different. The coach adopts a role as a facilitator and co-ordinator rather than a director and creates situations where players have to find solutions for themselves. The coach guides rather than directs players in their understanding and playing of the game. The coach designs activities and games that progressively challenge players to develop an understanding of the strategies, skills and rules required to succeed in games. The coach should construct games with specific objectives relative to the team and individuals, such as first-option handball. If “first-option handball” was the theme of the training session or week then a game would be devised with this in mind, such as a game of six-on-six handball football played over a field of 30m x 20m.

This change in role should not be interpreted as a lesser role for the coach. In fact, it requires greater planning of activities and organisation on the part of the coach. Although many coaches take on coaching as a short-term proposition, perhaps for just one season, game sense is about the long-term development of players. Providing an environment where players can develop the strategic side of their game, as well as becoming an independent thinker, is a long-term goal. Coaches at all levels can contribute to this side of a player's development.

Traditional v game sense training session
For many years, coaches have adopted a traditional approach to training, which would look something like this:
• 2-3 laps warm-up.
• Stretches.
• Technique drills such as lane handball and kicking.
• Skill drills.
• Game drills such as full-ground game plan specific.
• Cool down, including stretches.

A game sense approach to a training session may look something like:
• Warm-up game.
• Questions, challenges and discussion about game (particular theme).
• Return to game.
• Questions/challenges.
• Extension of the game.
• Further extension of the game, incorporating other team plans and themes.

Modifying games for a purpose
With a game sense approach to coaching and teaching skills, the coach as facilitator plays a very important role in modifying games to emphasise or exaggerate a particular aspect or theme, for example:
• Number of players.
• Number of possessions.
• Length of time a player can hold the ball once tagged (1 sec, 2 secs etc).
• Size of playing area.
• Scoring areas.
• Equipment used (such as a soccer ball if playing a game of International Rules).
• Structure of scoring system.
When developing games for a particular purpose, as a coach you must have answers to the following questions before explaining the drill to your team. Some questions to think about when developing your game sense drills can include:

- What particular themes or tactics do I want to focus on in the game?
- What will be the main challenges to the players?
- What are the rules and who will umpire?
- What will the dimensions of the playing area be?
- How can I extend or modify the game to continually challenge the players?
- How can I construct bias if necessary to make individuals work harder than others?
- How can I include all players in the game?
- Will I carefully pre-select teams or will I run with several captains choosing teammates?

When discussing game sense, one very important aspect is that of questioning players on specific outcomes or focusing on specific aspects, which have been evident or not evident during the game.

It is important not to spend too long questioning the team as part of the success of a game sense approach is in fact the playing. Questions will generally relate to aspects of the game and are used to enable players to reflect and then visualise in a match-day situation.

**The types of questions a coach might use include:**

- “What happens when you handball short?”
- “How can you create more time for the receiver to decide and dispose?”
- “How can you identify if a team mate is clear?”

**Player empowerment … players as game-designers**

So far, information relating to game sense has been coaching-team facilitated and led. Once players are familiar with the concept of game sense and its relationship with aspects of the game, players can then be empowered to work in small groups or individually and presented a task of developing a game.

This can be an exciting, enjoyable and valuable process in reinforcing key concepts, tactics and themes and assists in the development of leadership within the group.

In this approach, the coach would explain the concept and construct some clear guidelines which players would use to develop a game. Some guidelines might include:

- Your game must run for about 15-20 minutes.
- It must focus on a particular aspect of the team plan (themes or guidelines).
- How will you explain the game?
- Will there be a scoring system?
- Who will umpire the game?
- How will teams be selected?
- What are some examples of player behaviour you might see, and how will you explain this to the group with strategies to improve this area?
- What equipment is required? Who will organise this?
- What will the playing dimensions be? Can this be extended?

**Coaches, step back**

It is necessary to stress that the young player’s interest in processing information and problem solving at the same time will only be possible if the coach steps back from the practice and allows players the time to confront the challenges on their own and/or with teammates. Well-designed practices will ensure that the desired outcomes are achieved according to program guidelines. During practice, coaches should concentrate on providing accurate feedback and prompting. If it is essential to accelerate the learning process beyond what is occurring during a particular mini-game, the coach should attempt to interact by asking questions rather than offering a series of commands. By using the above coaching approach, the coach can provide the player with a balance of interactions which contains a healthy mix of ‘do as you are told’ and self-discovery practices.
SAMPLE GAMES

Following are two examples of ways to organise games which can be used to develop game sense.

**Keepings Off**

**Themes:** Clear communication, protect ball carrier at all times, follow your skill disposal.

**Equipment:** Football, different coloured tops for “chasers”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chasers (3 players)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possessors (9 players)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Instructions/Rules:**

1. Ball can be handballed only. Once an unforced disposal occurs, “chasers” team get possession of the ball from the point at which ball was released.
2. Compulsory rules are:
   - Must nominate who the player is handballing to (communication)
   - Must make a concerted effort to protect the receiver (teammate) by blocking and then tagging your receiving teammate after delivering ball (protecting ball carrier and following possession as in a game situation).
3. The aim of the game of “keepings off” is for the team in possession to maintain possession using quick hands and following team guidelines, each time “chasers” touch the ball or the ball hits the ground as an ineffective disposal then a point is awarded to “chasers”. Game lasts 1-2 minutes before three more chasers rotate.
4. Game can be played by any number but field must be adjusted particularly if introducing short kicking. Other extension ideas include playing seven players in possession and five chasers, and ultimately even numbers.

**Corridor football**

**Themes:** High skill disposal in pressure situations, hard attacking running and accountability

**Equipment:** Cones as boundaries, football, two different sets of jumpers/T-shirts. (Full length of ground can be used. Cones or portable goals can be used for a shorter playing area.)

**Basic rules**

1. Seven to eight players per team
2. Each half seven to eight minutes with a one minute interval
3. Normal AFL rules with the following modifications
   a) Player last touching the ball prior to it crossing the boundary loses possession to the opposition who return it to play from behind the line with a kick or handball.
   b) Goals may only be scored if all members of the attacking team are on the forward side of the centre line when the ball passes through the posts.
   Scoring as for normal AFL rules.

There are many other games in use, including touchball (tackling and non-tackling, indoor and outdoor), touch rugby (handball), forwards and backs, front and square grid ball, centre square clearance game, end ball, etc. Coaches are encouraged to develop various aspects of game skills.
PLANNING
Chapter 6
Planning

INTRODUCTION
There are many factors that are important for effective coaching. However, if there is any one area that is perhaps more important than the others, it is the area of planning.

THE YEARLY/SEASON PLAN
A yearly plan is an essential component of effective coaching for players intending to optimise their development. Players involved in the lower levels of sport often achieve some success without a yearly plan, but few will reach their full potential and go on to become high-level players unless they have a structured training and competition plan. School, club, zone, state and national programs should all be linked together, and through optimal calendar planning should ensure a progressive structure and sequence of training and competition.

The yearly plan helps players maintain a balanced lifestyle, prompts the coach to organise facilities, equipment and transport well in advance, enables parents and schools to cater for the needs of the participant (and allows the players to organise training and competition around school requirements) and provides an objective measure which coaches can use to assess the effectiveness of their program.

Yearly plans vary between sports, players and cultures. Many factors affect the composition of such plans, including:
• Family and school commitments.
• Characteristics of competitions.
• Level of maturity and ability.
• Resources.
• Climate.
• Attitudes.
• Demands of the sport.
• Coaching events.
• Time of day.
• Access to athletes

PHASES OF A YEARLY PLAN
In order to be successful, the coach must be well prepared and plan ahead. The importance of planning cannot be underestimated. A major reason for having a yearly plan is to schedule the various phases throughout the year in order to bring about optimal performance so that the playing group is at the peak of its training at the time of competition. A team’s training schedule should be organised and planned to also ensure individual and group goals are achieved. The planning process therefore should be an organised, methodical and scientific procedure which assists the players and coach achieve predetermined standards.

A yearly training program should be simple and flexible. All coaches should have a yearly plan dividing the training year into small phases. Each of these phases will have specific training objectives. This enables the coach to work within manageable segments.

A yearly plan can be divided into three phases:
• Off-season or transition phase.
• Pre-season or preparatory phase.
• In-season or competition phase.
PLANNING THE TRAINING PROGRAM

Off-season phase (October-November)
This eight to 10-week period follows the intense competitive season. The aim during this time should be to maintain physical conditioning and facilitate recovery:

• The following principles apply to the off-season phase.
• Maintain a general level of fitness around 50-60 per cent of the in-season phase.
• Change the training venue and later the type of training.
• Analyse past performance and construct a yearly plan for the new season.

During this period, players should stay active to maintain endurance fitness and control body weight. Off-season recreational activities are useful. This period is the most suitable for overcoming weaknesses in body structure, conditioning and skill. Weight-training programs, speed work and skill development can be carried out.

Pre-season phase (December-March)
This is the period which immediately follows the off-season phase. During this time the coach should plan to develop the players’ capacity for effort, general physical preparation, techniques and strategies. After a base has been established, speed and power activities should gradually be incorporated with endurance activities decreasing. Skill activities should be the focus of training.

During the pre-season phase, activities should be structured to:

• Progressively adjust the physical and psychological components according to the requirements of competition.
• Provide a high volume of training with only 30-40 per cent devoted to high-intensity training.
• Improve endurance, strength and speed as the physical groundwork for further performance accomplishments.
• Devote the later portion to specific exercises directly related to the skills and/or technical aspects of the sport.

The intensity of training should increase but the total volume of training will be reduced by 20-40 per cent.
• Improve and perfect techniques and tactics.

In-season phase (April-September)
Training during this period should be appropriate to football. Activities should be selected to maintain pre-season fitness and develop individual and team skills.

During the competitive phase, activities should be structured to:

• Maintain the physical standards acquired in the preparation phase.
• Perfect techniques and tactics.
• Gain competitive experience with the aim of improving game skills and mental capacities.

TRAINING VARIABLES
The training variables that need to be taken into consideration in the yearly planning process include the volume, intensity, frequency and specificity of training and training load.

In the practice of planning:

• The volume of training relates to the amount of time spent training or total number of repetitions per exercise.
• The intensity of training is related to the amount of effort required.
• The frequency of training refers to the number of training sessions performed within a given time frame (i.e. day, week).
• The specificity of training refers to the content or to the ‘direction of training’ performed within a given time period, or to the percentage of training performed with reference to sport-specific versus general training.
• Training load includes the quantitative and qualitative components of training, that is, combined volume and intensity of training.
• The volume and intensity of training are related in that when training volume is high, the intensity should be low, and vice versa. When training volume is low, the intensity should be high.

The general operating principle of planning is to start with high volume, low intensity in the pre-season and move towards high intensity, low volume during the season.
PLANNING A TRAINING SESSION

The training session is the basic building block of coaching. It is essential that coaches thoroughly plan each training session. At training, football skills are learned, conditioning and fitness levels are achieved and team confidence is developed. In football, the training session will contain various drills and training activities set between a warm-up at the beginning and a cool-down at the end. To decide on what drills are suitable for a particular session, the coach must first evaluate the team performance and then plan for optimal practice time. Goals should be established before each segment of a training session. This will ensure individual and team deficiencies and strengths will be focused on.

When planning a training session, the following considerations should be noted:

Venue

Various venues can be used during the football year, particularly in the pre-season period. In addition to the home ground, coaches should seek alternative venues ranging from an athletics track or swimming pool, to a well-grassed hilly surface, indoor gymnasium or basketball court. If carefully selected, these venues can greatly improve the general standard of training.

Equipment

The well-prepared coach will have a variety of equipment on hand at training. This can include:
- Footballs, pump.
- Witches hats.
- Whistle, stop watch.
- Handball target.
- Tackle bags, ruck bags.
- Portable goal posts.
- Training jumpers and an adequate supply of water for players during and after training.

Outline of the training session

Many coaches now provide the players with an outline of the training session before training. Players can be informed on the overall aims of the session, in addition to the approximate length and intensity of practice.

Be specific

Training must be specific to the demands of the game. With running training, the distance covered, the intensity and the number of repetitions must be appropriate to the game and the various playing conditions. It is essential that running work be supplemented with activities using footballs.

Quality not quantity

In general terms, the emphasis should be on a quality, non-stop training session rather than one of low volume and long duration.

TRAINING DIARY/PLANNING SHEET

Coaches of all levels should use a system for planning and recording details of training sessions and competitive performances of their players/teams. This will enhance sequential development of players. The following sample pages from a football coach's diary illustrate one method and you can use any diary or notebook to develop your own if you wish. A sample training session plan, which you can copy and use for planning your sessions is included on page 69.
**SAMPLE TRAINING DIARY**

**Training Plan: Pre Season or In Season**

- **Phase of Session:** In season
- **Time of Session:** 75 mins
- **Aims of Session:** Work on individual level ground skills - Open forward line
- **Venue:** Ripplebrook Res - U/15 Team
- **Assistants:** P Clogg, J Johnson
- **Equipment Needed:** Bump Bag, 15 balls, Focus Pads

**Reminder Notes for Team Briefing:**
- Map out training: chase up forwards from weekend re congestion and on-ballers, organise forwards vs backs

**Session Outline (Don’t forget hydration breaks)**

- **Warm up/Conditioning - 15 mins**
  - Lane warm up - Stretches
  - Include low-to-ground pick up
  - Introduce Bump Bags
  - “Bag Barge” in warm-up Library

- **Game Specific Drills**
  - **Assistant:** As above
  - “Feed the Forward” - see Full Ground Library
  - “Forwards vs Backs” - see Full Ground Library
  - “Feed the Forwards” - Set up forward lines as shown. Coach kicks to groups of 3 at A, B and C (throughout drill), group deliver to half-forwards or full forwards and follow kick until goal scored.

- **Warm Down**
  - **Assistant:** Lane cool down

- **Extended Drills of Game Sense Extensions**
  - **Assistant:** N/A

**Game Sense Questions to Ask**

- How can we create space in forward area?
- What do forwards need to do to create space?
- What can backs and on-ballers do to help keep forward line open?
### Managerial Outlines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLAYERS TO TALK TO</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
<th>TEAM MEETING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peachy</td>
<td>Running backwards into spaces</td>
<td>TEAM MEETING: 15 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Browny</td>
<td>Not offering second lead</td>
<td>VIDEO POINTS:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sticks</td>
<td>Poor timing of lead</td>
<td>Show self-inflicted congestion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>Poor decision making re delivery into forward line</td>
<td>Show good fibers in defence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smithy</td>
<td>Fantastic tight game at full-back</td>
<td>Show fumbling by on-ballers and forwards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**STATS HIGHLIGHTS:**
- Ball-ups inside 50 m
- Marks taken by key forwards “one on one”

**OUTCOMES:**
- Reduce ball-ups inside our forward 50m
- Increase marks taken by our forwards “one on one”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INJURY STATUS</th>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>INJURY</th>
<th>PERIOD OUT</th>
<th>REHAB PROGRAM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Harry</td>
<td>Hamstring</td>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>Pool, physio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sticks</td>
<td>Corby</td>
<td>1 week</td>
<td>Pool, physio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ando</td>
<td>Knee</td>
<td>1 week</td>
<td>Resume training at 3/4 pace</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Session Evaluation

**TRAINING:** Rate and comment on the following:
- Duration of Session: Adequate
- Equipment: Need more bags and ruckbag
- Assistants: Clogg - more info re delivery to forwards
- Outcomes Achieved: Ciff still running backwards into space
- Drills Used: Good
- Motivation Level of Players/Staff: Good

**MENTOR FEEDBACK:**

**PLAYER TRAINING PERFORMANCE:**
- Random notes on performances you noticed:
  - Ellis looked “hungry to play seniors”
  - Jeff looked lethargic
  - Stan got aggro in forwards v backs drill

**AREAS TO FOCUS ON AND IMPROVE:**
- Forwards prepared to sacrifice leads
- Clogg needs more input from me

**AREAS TO CONTINUE WITH:**
- “Area coaches” will work
- Sharp video highlights were good - use more positives

---

**Coaches Diary created by Anton Grbac**

---

Page 23
Recovery
Optimal hydration, nutrition and recovery activities such as swimming can facilitate recovery and maximise team performance. It is extremely important that appropriate recovery strategies are included following games, particularly, and training to ensure complete recovery of all team members. In addition to this, massage, relaxation and stretching should either be an integral part of the cool-down procedure or be completed following training and competition. After the season has finished, it's important for players to have active rest, which can be anything from 8-18 weeks, depending on the level of football. This time is for recovery and vital in preventing symptoms of overtraining/fatigue. Players should also significantly reduce the volume/intensity of training and focus on other recreational pursuits.

Tapering
As part of the coach's yearly plan, it's important that they include periods of tapering in the program. There are several times throughout the yearly plan when coaches should consider tapering and these include:
• Following the pre-season period or at the beginning of the season.
• Mid-way during the season.
• If the team is looking likely to contest finals, taper again for the finals.

Coaches can incorporate tapering into the yearly program by reducing the quantity of training. This will allow player fitness levels to be maintained while also continuing to refine and develop technical and tactical skills. Scheduling appropriate times to refresh the players is also important to limit wherever possible the risk of injury and overtraining.

THE WEEKLY PLAN
Just as the football year can be divided into three main phases, so too can these phases be further subdivided. Training progresses in cycles of activity usually considered to be of seven days' duration. The format of these cycles will depend on the number of training sessions held each week. In planning the typical competitive week, the coach should take into account both the volume and intensity of training. The coach must allow for the physical nature of the game and the limitations of his/her players in coping with heavy loads without adequate rest. Overtraining is a real problem and can lead to a sudden drop in performance. The coach must be able to evaluate all these factors in planning the weekly program. The effective coach must monitor the players’ performances and tailor the volume and intensity of training to have the team at a peak before each game.

Most clubs organise two or three training sessions per week with rest days between sessions. A complete rest day or a light training session becomes an important consideration during the normal rigours of a football season. This ‘hard-easy’ approach to the planning of a weekly training program is a sound principle to follow. It allows players to progressively adapt to a greater level of work without suffering undue fatigue.

GOAL-SETTING
The words “goals”, “aims”, “objectives” and “targets” essentially mean the same thing – they are statements by which the success of a team can be judged. Goal-setting is one of the most basic preparation techniques. Goals set targets for achievement over a certain period of time. They help in planning and monitoring the development of skills and other abilities. They are also natural and powerful motivators because they focus attention on relevant activities for progress towards desired results.

The coach should involve each individual and the team as a whole in the goal-setting process. Under the coach's guidance, players can set appropriate goals that they are eager to work towards. Process goals (factors which can be controlled by individual effort) should predominate over outcome goals which can be too dependent on external factors. Both long-term and short-term goals should be set.
Goal-setting is an important part of the planning process. Goals should follow the SMART principle. They should be:

**S** **Specific**
Set goals specific to your players/team's needs. Identify weak areas in your game and develop appropriate strategies that address these weaknesses. Specific, challenging goals are most effective in improving performance via behavioural change.

**M** **Measurable**
Goals need to be expressed in measurable terms. Quantify everything wherever possible by identifying target times, etc., e.g.
- Each player will get equal time in games over the season.
- The team will finish higher in the league than last year.
- Players will better their score on a skill circuit.
- Players will better their times by 10 per cent.

**A** **Achievable**
Goals need to appropriately reflect your player's and team's potential. While some goals should be challenging, it is important initially to establish goals that can be achieved before progressing to more difficult goals. Coaches should also discuss the goals within the group to convince their players they can reach the standard set.

**R** **Realistic**
Coaches need to set goals that are difficult enough to challenge but realistic enough to be achieved. A way to ensure the goals are realistic is to use past experiences as a guide, thus indicating what you are likely to achieve in the future.

**T** **Time bound**
Identify target dates for accomplishing your player's/team's goals. Setting dates helps motivate coaches and players and is a continual reminder of the urgency of achieving such goals in a specified, realistic time frame.

**Other essential goal-setting tips**
- Set positive goals on a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly basis.
- Set goals for both training and games.
- Develop strategies for each goal.
- Write goals down and keep them where they can be reviewed regularly.
- Provide for goal evaluation. Recording your goals and evaluating your feedback is essential if goals are going to be effective in enhancing individual and team performance.
- Be flexible in the approach. Unforeseen circumstances may cause you as coach to re-evaluate your team goals and develop alternative strategies.
- Ensure ownership over goals. Goals become motivating when the whole team has direct input into them and feel accountable to achieving the goals.

**Long-term goals**
To provide a blueprint for a season, long-term goals should be set from the beginning. The first step is to map out the training and competition schedule for the time period under consideration. Then the coach and players should decide on what they would like to have achieved by certain dates. The majority of long-term goals should be process-orientated and focus on development of physical and psychological abilities through means controllable by the player.

Goals are set not as an end in themselves, but as a guide to and measure of achievement. Monitoring and adjusting goals is an essential part of that process. It is rare that a goal is exactly achieved and people either fall short or exceed a goal. The coach should help players understand that each evaluation of goal progress is simply a way of determining whether to adjust the standard to a more reasonable level or raise it to a new, more challenging one. Long-term goals should be reviewed on a regular basis.
Short-term goals
While long-term goals determine the desired destination, short-term goals describe the steps to get there. These are the daily and weekly goals which promote continual development. They should be process goals which are challenging enough to be motivating, but also achievable. Good short-term goals focus on things that improve abilities relevant to achieving the long-term goals.

Short-term goals can be set for:
- Fitness – conditioning, weight training, flexibility and endurance.
- Specific skills – development of new skills, maintenance of well-learned skills.
- Performance strategies – overall style of play, contingency plans for varying circumstances, decision making.
- Emotional control – controlling arousal levels, coping with frustrations/anger, remaining positive.
- Team play – communication, coordination of players' performances, cooperation.
- Social aspects – friendships, cohesion, managing life around sport.

To get the most out of training and competitions, clearly state specific short-term goals before each session. This will help direct attention to working on these aspects. After the session, ensure that any evaluation is based on how well these goals were achieved. Much of the value of goals is in the evaluation of progress and the adjustment of goals for the next time.

No one can focus effectively on a large number of goals at the same time. On any given occasion, players should be directed towards only a small number of goals (no more than four). As skills develop, earlier goals will be achieved automatically and new ones can be put in their place. In addition, alternating the goal focus from session to session will help to keep players fresh and motivated. Finally, recognising successful advancement on goals through verbal praise and occasional rewards is crucial. It is just as important to provide lots of encouragement when players fall short of their goals. Great coaches will help players to get over the temporary failures and eagerly move to the next challenge.

PLANNING STRATEGIES FOR KEEPING ADOLESCENTS IN THE GAME
The following information proposes a set of principles for designing training and practice activities for adolescents. These principles are aimed at increasing the young players' desire to participate not only in the game but also the training program for an extended time over several seasons. It must be remembered that in a structured coaching program, the effective design of activities alone will not guarantee that a player will participate for a long period of time and/or realise his/her potential. Therefore, the following principles need to be supported by quality interactive coaching behaviours, effective management and organisational techniques and an applied knowledge of sports science.

PRINCIPLES FOR DESIGNING TRAINING ACTIVITIES
Field time
Most sporting organisations now include in their codes of coaching behaviour for children's sport that coaches must give all players equal time on the field. With adolescents, the concept of providing maximum participation for all players tends to demand a more sophisticated interpretation than just the amount of time on the field.

Adolescents will assess the fairness of their injection into a game according to the ratio of 'opportunities to respond' (moments of competitive activity) to 'time in the game'. An acceptable ratio will be situationally specific. Also more mature adolescents will fully understand and accept the complexities of their sport and will adjust the ratio according to the position they play. A back pocket player in football will not expect to have as many possessions as the rover.

Effective coaches will ensure that all of their players have adequate opportunities to respond, not only to develop their playing abilities, but also to satisfy the player's participation expectations. This principle needs to be applied to training and practice as well as to competition. For example, if a footballer has had their allotted amount of time on the field compared to their teammates, but has not had the opportunities to perform their prescribed function, then they should be left on the field until there have been reasonable opportunities for them to perform their function.
“What’s next?”
A feeling of worth is usually associated with successful completion of tasks and/or achievement of standards that are either defined by the players themselves or by others (coach, team, community and/or the sport culture). Players who have sound self esteem regarding their ability to perform will adopt the attitude of “what’s next?” at training or in competition they accept the challenges that will take their abilities to a higher level. To nurture the self-esteem of adolescent players, coaches should design activities which guarantee a positive outcome. This can be achieved by varying the terrain, the regime and/or the drill so that each player has the opportunity to use their strengths and avoid overexposing their weaknesses.

When using competitive team drills at training, it is appropriate to consider using grids and to divide the team into practice units. The number of players in each unit and the ability of the players per unit will determine the success of each of the competing players. For example, when teaching players to use a variety of passing plays to evade the opposition, the slowest and least skilled players could be in a larger grid with fewer players in each team (unit) while the faster and more skilful players could be in a smaller grid with more players on each team (unit).

Peer acceptance
One of the more difficult factors to control when designing training activities is an adolescent’s feeling of peer acceptance. On many occasions, friends will choose to participate in a sport to play on a team together. Even before they start training and competition against other teams, there is a feeling of acceptance between them. Continuing to have opportunities to play together to achieve a common goal is often important to them. If the anticipated link between friends is not maintained by the coach then they may choose not to play the sport. All other factors being equal, coaches should endeavour to provide opportunities for friends to work together in training drills and practices and for them to play on the same team.

In the more common situation where young people independently join a club to become a player, the coach needs to develop inter-player confidence, respect and acceptance. Structuring activities so that players have the opportunity to gain the respect of their peers is important. When improving players in difficult and new training situations where the chances of success are minimal, the drills should be designed so as to limit the opportunities for players to observe other players’ attempts at achieving the task. When players consistently reach a level of performance that the coach knows will be acceptable to other members of the team, then the pressure of the drill can be increased by introducing extensions to the drill.

During training, practice and games, the coach should use every available opportunity to place players in positions of responsibility. The behaviours required in these positions should be understood by all team members. When a player fails to meet the intended criteria, coaches need to immediately confirm that it was not due to a lack of commitment or ability on behalf of the player, but rather the circumstances that surrounded the event. This can be achieved by quietly talking to them about the event and by outwardly acknowledging respect for their interpretation of the event. At this point, the player and coach should be seen to be working on possible solutions should an error occur in the future. By modelling respect for players, the coach encourages similar attitudes in team members.

Creating a convivial atmosphere allows the coach to structure drills where all players constantly have to work with all other athletes and therefore cope with the ineptness of some and the wizardry of others. Through these experiences, teammates learn what each of their peers are capable of doing and also learn to support their teammates when they are below their best and acknowledge them when they exceed expectations.

Success
Obviously there is no greater motivator than success. Grading players into appropriate competitions, sequentially increasing the level of difficulty of training drills, resetting the required performance standards and establishing realistic coach expectations of the player are well-documented principles that coaches should adopt when designing their programs. This principle applies to all stages of player development and probably warrants equal attention at each stage.

Coaches and adolescents are often overheard discussing the significant dropout of players that occurs in the mid-to-late teenage years. While the above principles do not pretend to solve the dropout problem, they will enhance the quality of the experience for all participants and therefore increase the probability of them remaining in the sport for longer periods of time.

Effective coaches will ensure that all of their players have adequate opportunities to not only develop their playing abilities, but also to satisfy the players’ participation expectations.
ADOLESCENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Some coaches may feel apprehensive about including players with a disability in football. It is important to remember that every individual has the right to participate in sport. Including players with a disability is not difficult – it simply requires enthusiasm and understanding.

When involving players with a disability in your club, remember to:

• Encourage the carer/parent to be involved and assist in activities and be responsible for the needs of the player.
• Work with what the player can do and if you are not sure, ask their parent or carer.
• Introduce the player to other members and create a ‘buddy’ system with other players.
• Make simple modifications to various activities. This will allow greater participation by everyone.
• Allow the player to participate in all aspects of the day’s activities.
• Provide activities where players can succeed and develop self-esteem.
• Encourage all players to participate in all activities.

COACHING FEMALE PLAYERS

When coaching female players, whether they are members of an all female team or as individuals in predominantly boys’ teams, the most important thing to focus on is that you are coaching people. Therefore, all of the general coaching advice provided throughout the manual applies equally to coaching female players.

Generally female players come to a team with similar motivations to male participants and they respond to training with the same physical, physiological and skill development outcomes as their male counterparts.

Each athlete is an individual and has a unique set of circumstances under which they will perform at their best. Female players (and generally all players) will be best served by a coaching process which pays attention to the following:

• Be welcoming, supportive and ensure safety and an absence of any forms of harassment – a safe, supportive environment is the key to encouraging girls to become or stay involved.

• Coaches, particularly males coaching females, must be sensitive to the impact of personal proximity and be aware that unnecessary touching is inappropriate and may offend. Ensure physical contact with players is appropriate and necessary for their skill development. Contact should only be used to facilitate learning or safe participation. (For more information about this area, see Australian Sports Commission, Harassment-free Sport Guidelines for Coaches – www.activeaustralia.org/hfs/Coaches.pdf)

• Conduct programs where individuals experience success and skill development.

• Respect each player’s abilities – do not water down activities specifically for females.

• Spend equal time and attention with all players to avoid perceptions of favouritism or neglect.

• Do not treat females in a totally different way or continually draw attention to the fact that they are girls.

• Ensure female players have a say in program planning and any issues discussed by the team.

• A person’s sports performance should not be a measure of their self-worth.

• Learn as much as possible about young female athletes and be open and professional with players about specific issues related to their growth and development as outlined in Chapter 1.
## TRAINING SESSION PLAN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Session no:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aim of session:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WARM-UP</strong></td>
<td>(Generally includes activities to increase body temperature, stretching, ball handling and movement specific activities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SKILL DRILL/SKILL DEVELOPMENT</strong></td>
<td>(Generally reinforces skills taught or tactics introduced or can include introduction of new skills to players)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time:</td>
<td>Skill drill:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EXTENDED DRILL ACTIVITY</strong></td>
<td>(Generally drills designed to extend skill level to game situation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time:</td>
<td>Extended drill:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GAME ACTIVITY DRILL</strong></td>
<td>(Generally use drills that reinforce the method or pattern of play the team should adopt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time:</td>
<td>Game drill:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>WARM-DOWN</strong></td>
<td>(Generally used to assist in the recovery of players after training sessions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONDUCTING TRAINING SESSIONS
Chapter 7
Conducting Training Sessions

Planning and conducting practice sessions. It is important to continually stress to players that through practice sessions they will be taught skills and techniques that will lead to individual improvement, and that it is an opportunity for the team to develop into a cohesive offensive and defensive unit. As part of effective coaching, coaches should follow the ‘Plan – Act – Review’ strategy, which will set them on the correct path. Training activities may be planned to emphasise various components of the game, including skills and techniques and decision making and tactical thinking.

PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE TRAINING
The coach needs to be aware of the general principles which ensure effective training. This makes it possible for coaches to formulate training programs and sessions which have a positive impact on both the team and individual. Coaches are able to design their training with appropriate consideration to the standard of the team.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keep all players active</td>
<td>Maximise training time by keeping all players active and involved.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give clear concise instructions</td>
<td>Learning improves when players know what is expected of them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrations improve the accuracy of instructions</td>
<td>Certain drills allow measurement by which coaches and players can assess progress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Record progress</td>
<td>Emphasise and reward good performances.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Give positive feedback</td>
<td>Maintain interest by using various skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide variety</td>
<td>Training sessions should be fun and enjoyable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage enjoyment</td>
<td>Learning improves if progression occurs from the simple to the complex.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create progression</td>
<td>Ensure that you have the correct equipment (footballs, markers etc). A ratio of one football to two players is ideal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan maximum use of resources</td>
<td>Allow for different learning rates among players.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow for individual differences</td>
<td>If a planned drill is not working or circumstances have changed (e.g. weather), be prepared to change immediately.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Keep drills and activities short
Shorter drills are more effective than lengthy ones. Unless practice time is pre-planned, drills may become long and boring to players and learning may be reduced. It is important to ensure players know the purpose of the drill being undertaken. Players tend to perform better when they know why they are working on a specific skill. The coach should also begin the session with a brief explanation of the session’s goals. This will give the session more direction and relevance and players will be clear on individual and team goals for the session.

Conclude each practice session with an evaluation of the players’ performances and the effectiveness of the session itself. This should include an honest personal assessment by the coach.
DESIGNING THE TRAINING SESSION

Many of the problems which new coaches have at training have nothing to do with their personality, their level of control, or football knowledge, but are due to their lack of preparation before training. Deciding what drills to include and in what order is fundamental to achieving your objectives.

- Time spent in organising the training session will make the problem of controlling the group much easier.
- Observe your players during the drills, moving to individuals or groups that may need assistance.
- During each session, the coach should stand back and assess what is going well and what needs to be improved.
- Never stop the group until you are sure of what you are going to say. If the drill is going well, let it continue.
- Be clear in your instructions. If you want the players to finish the activity, use one clear word ‘stop’ or a whistle.
- Bring the group in. Before speaking make sure you can see all players, then direct your voice to the furthest person.
- If a demonstration is called for, group placement is most important. A single file, square, circle or semi circle are all ideal learning formations.
- Keep instructions to a minimum by emphasising the main teaching points. Send the players back to practise.
- A skilful coach can judge when to stop a current activity and move on to the next drill. In most cases, it can be achieved with minimal disruption to the pattern of training.
- Take notes as soon as possible after training, listing the worthwhile drills and modifications to be made to existing drills.

The training session – in season

The primary objective during the playing season is to maintain the current level of match fitness of every player. In addition, it is important to develop individual and team skills through a good selection of drills.

A format for a training session is outlined below:

TRAINING DRILLS AND PRACTICES

Drills are the life blood of the training session and ultimately reflect in the team's on-field performance. A long list of drills and activities have been used over the years at all levels of football.

It is not the intention of this section to describe specific drills, however there are some key fundamentals of training drills.

TYPES OF DRILLS

Drills can be categorised under three main headings:

1. Individual Skill Drills
   These involve the basic skills and incorporate practice in kicking, marking, handball, etc.

2. Part of the Game Drills
   Drills in this category refer to certain parts of the game and include centre bounce practice and centring the ball from the forward pocket.

3. Team Pattern Drills
   These include activities which practise an overall system of play. For example, moving the ball down the centre corridor.
**Skill Drills**
The selection of drills suitable for your team requires a great deal of thought and planning.

Drills should develop the running and possession skills so important in football today and at the same time prepare players for realistic match conditions. Skill drills should progress from simple to complex. When introducing a skill drill, begin with a basic drill, gradually building up the degree of difficulty. Repetition is the key to learning. As the players become familiar with the drill and your expectations, the skill drill will run efficiently with maximum involvement. The following is an example of a drill that has been developed from its simplest form into a realistic skill activity.

**HANDBALL/KICK/SMOTHER**
Player B handballs 10 metres to player A.
Player A kicks flat out.
Player C moves in to smother, timing the action.
Start from one step away to moving three or four paces.
Rotate positions.

**Training drills with purpose and focus**
While there are many publications containing hundreds of football skill drills, the best drills and perhaps most satisfying drills you can use and implement are those developed by you for a specific purpose. Any drill or coaching exercise/activity must be aimed at giving your team the best chance of achieving its potential, both in the short and long term.
You can choose almost any aspect of the game, however small, and design a drill or activity to practice it.

Before deciding which drills to incorporate into the team training sessions, a few key points must be considered:
- What are your themes for the session/week/month?
- What are the intended outcomes of the session?
- Why do you want to run the drill and for how long?
- Is the drill aimed at exploiting a particular weakness of the upcoming opposition or to use a particular strength of your team?
INTRODUCING A NEW DRILL

Often coaches waste valuable time and become frustrated at their lack of success when introducing a drill for the first time. A simple procedure to follow is set out below:

1. **Have all the equipment ready**
   It may seem self-explanatory but it is an important part of running a successful coaching session. Coaches must be able to move players quickly from one drill to the next. A new drill can quickly lose its appeal, regardless of its value, if the appropriate preparation doesn't appear to have been made.

2. **Rehearse selected players to go through the drills before the whole team is involved**
   If certain players within the group have an understanding of the drill, they will quickly be able to explain to other players what needs to be done. Communication among players builds a sense of team.

3. **Give the drill a name**
   This saves the coach having to remind players of the drill each time it is to be used. If players are aware of the name of the drill, the team can immediately move on to it. A continuous training session is of enormous value.

4. **Explain the aim of the drill**
   By explaining the aim of the drill, players will be able to see for themselves the inherent value of performing every part of the drill with enthusiasm. It will also serve as a guide to the type of skills the coach believes the team needs to work on.

5. **Select players to walk through the drill**
   Similar to point two, players can observe for themselves the drill being performed, avoiding confusion which can quickly ruin a drill.

6. **When the whole group is ready, begin by performing the drill slowly**
   A new drill should be eased into so that players can gain confidence in the way it operates, and concentrate more on the skills they are trying to develop than the actual machinations of the training drill.

7. **Gradually increase the tempo and degree of difficulty**
   There are several ways to lift the pace:
   - Adding more footballs.
   - Having fewer players at each marker.

   It is important to add variety to drills so that players believe they are continuing to gain value out of it. By adding more footballs you add to the pace at which the drill is performed, and players learn to quickly dispose of the ball.

   Having fewer players at the marker means that players have less time not participating in the drill, thus alleviating problems of boredom/cooling down. Players must concentrate at all times, which also replicates a match situation more closely. As the players become more confident and drills are known, they often do not need the markers or explanations before performing the drill.

VARIATION IN TRAINING SESSIONS

The benefits of training indoors periodically or outside the normal training environment with footballs include:
- New venue and a break from normal routine, which can enhance player motivation levels.
- Smaller confined areas means skill level needs to be high and players need to focus on skill basics to ensure targets are hit.
- Smaller dimensions of distances between cones/lines can mean shorter recovery, which enhances aerobic conditioning.
- Indoor arena can lead to more noise being generated, which enhances morale and communication between players.
- Alternate training games and competitions can be used to enhance team morale throughout or at the end of the skill session, such as a volleyball competition or an indoor football game with a possession focus, where teams score a point by handballing the ball between a set of goals at each end.