Traditional Or ‘skill Based’ Coaching: An Instructor-oriented Approach To Fundamental Sport-specific Skills

Traditional or ‘skill based’ coaching is an instructor-oriented approach to fundamental sport-specific skills, where the learner is told what to do and how to do it (more of an autocratic coaching style). The coach organises highly structured drills and provides feedback to the players for correcting and improving skills. The traditional approach involves breaking sports down into their technical/ fundamental skill components. For example, in volleyball these skill components would involve passing, setting, blocking, digging, spiking, and serving. This approach dictates that players must learn and attempt to master these skill components in isolation, before applying them to a game setting.

By contrast, ‘game sense’ uses a player-centred approach to learning. This approach emphasises games before drills and skills. It encourages simple modifications to rules, playing area or equipment in order to highlight aspects of the game, for example ‘forcing’ passes into a specific zone or defenders employing a certain formation. The engagement of players in modified game strategies gives them an opportunity to develop an understanding of both game tactics and skills. The simple modifications in a game sense approach maximises challenge and inclusion as it is able to accommodate varying ability levels. It promotes the growth of ‘thinking’ players and can be described as discovery-based learning.

The traditional coaching pedagogy is considered effective at facilitating skill development in the early stages of learning. This can be attributed to its emphasis on initially teaching simple skills in a relatively predictable/ closed environment but also to a more regimented and instructor-driven approach that keeps the participants ‘on task’ and ensures the maximum use of practice time. In other words, prescribed learning goals are achieved through structured drills in an allotted period of time.

On the contrary, ‘skill based’ coaching can make players disengaged as it involves seemingly boring repetitious drills. It also puts the learner at risk of being unable to apply skills in a game situation due to the teaching of them in isolation. They may also become overly dependent on coach’s instructions for successful performance and therefore do not really develop decision-making skills. When put into game situations, they would be at risk of choking under pressure.

The new ‘game sense’ coaching pedagogy is effective as it allows players to discover what is required for active decision-making and successful skill execution. A player who learns a sport through participation in games is less inclined to compromise their skill execution under the pressure of competition. Participants become autonomous or independent learns who are not overly reliant on a coach’s instructions. They are better equipped to solve unexpected problems and challenges they may encounter in competitions. In addition, trainings are more varied and interesting, compared to boring and repetitive drills associated with traditional coaching.

On the other hand, players coached in a ‘game sense’ style may lack refinement in technical skills. It is also a less regimented and structured approach which may not suit coaching larger groups. Using this approach may take longer to achieve results because it is up to the players to discover strategies and tactics.

In conclusion, the ‘game sense’ coaching pedagogy is more effective than traditional or ‘skill based’ coaching activities. This is because skills developed are applicable to game situations as it is a heavy focus in training sessions. For ‘skill based’ coaching, it is more effective in the early stages of learning, whereas ‘game sense’ can be effective in any learning stage. ‘Game sense’ also allows for the development of tactical/ strategic awareness and decision-making skills which is not given in a traditional coaching style. Furthermore, skill performance is resilient to competitive pressure and participants are motivated to find solutions. It makes players more comfortable in a game environment which ultimately leads to success in competition.