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## SHORT COMMUNICATION

### HOW TO TEACH TECHNIQUES AND TACTICS IN TEAM SPORTS

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Skill efficiency is one of the fundamental conditions to reach optimal performance. Technical-tactical efficiency in a match can be compared to the skills of a musician in concert. The dexterity acquired through long hours of practice is summed up to create a momentary performance. Technical-tactical efficiency can be defined as successfully executing the right action for a specific situation at a given moment. It becomes apparent that to reach a high success rate is a long-term process, requires a great number of well executed repetitions, carried out under conditions created by the coach. However, coach education programs do not always prepare coaches to play that important role. In the following we present an operational framework composed of five key conditions to teach technical-tactical elements to athletes, and then we describe a learning activity to help coaches (volleyball) develop drills related to the athlete's level of development.

#### ***Operational Framework***

Preparing athletes to perform in competition requires a complex and harmonious blend of the following five conditions.

#### ***Condition #1. Teaching the Mechanics of a Skill***

At the beginning of the technical-tactical development, no matter the method, the coach requires the athlete to imitate as closely as possible a model. The model is usually the coach or a successful athlete who demonstrates repeatedly the proper execution of a technique. To reproduce the model exactly, the player must have an accurate mental image of the skill. Audio-visual aids can help in this regard. It is important however, to emphasize only the key technical elements essential to learning the global skill. To facilitate learning, the athlete is exposed to artificial, controlled, conditions and then under easy and constant conditions. The coach must make sure the drills are properly executed if the goal is technical-tactical efficiency. It becomes important that the coach sets attainable success rates (about 2/3) for motivational purposes.

Finally, no learning can take place if the player is tired, therefore the learning of new such skills should occur early in practice sessions, as well as training microcycles.

### ***Condition #2. Consolidating/stabilizing Basic Skills***

At this stage, task requirements move closer to the game context as far as individual performance is concerned. All artificial conditions are eliminated. The choice of drills and their sequential order must reflect a certain progression in terms of the difficulty of the task imposed on the athlete, from a perceptual point of view as well as a motor learning point of view. Motion and movement on the court is as found in the game. In a nutshell, carrying out the training task when stabilizing the skill calls for perceptual-motor requirements related to reaction time, movement time, body awareness and control, as well as motor accuracy.

### ***Condition #3. Developing Tactical Intelligence***

Once the player has a "repertoire" of motor skills, the coach shifts the emphasis onto individual tactics. The application of successive skills is the cornerstone of team play. In a game, a sequence of motor skills is quite often the player's response to a tactical problem confronting him/her. Once the athlete does not require to a conscious focus on skill execution, selective attention is oriented on tactical problem solving. This combination of skills will then be guided by kinetics sensations and perception (Cardinal, Boulonne, & Caron, 1975). The athlete should be able to rapidly pick-up relevant information on teammates and opponents and to act in time rather than react too late to a situation. Through training and competition, the player seeks to develop an awareness and rapid comprehension of the actual playing situation (what is happening) and a corresponding solution (what should be done).

### ***Condition #4. Integrating Player/Skills into a System of Play***

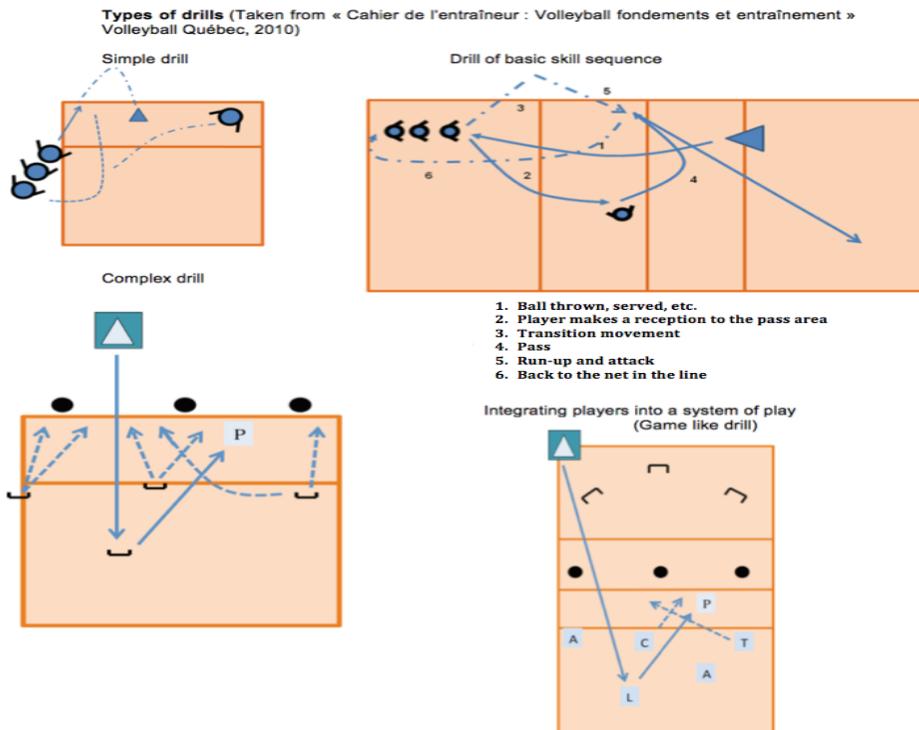
According to Theodorescu (1965), a system of play can be defined as follows: "A general pattern of organizing offensive or defensive actions of players with specific team formations and certain playing tasks related to the position and role of the individual, as well as certain principles of cooperation among teammates". At this stage of development, the player must relate to the whole team on the court in an operational framework that respects absolutely or approximately game like conditions. It is essential to offer players drills that will help to: (a) increase team tactical knowledge (team formations and combinations being used), (b) develop a system of associative solutions (linking perception of a situation to a tactical solution), and (c) match-up with key players (players will get particular instructions).

### ***Condition #5. Monitor Player/Skills Efficiency in Competition***

Once the match starts, the athletes are the artisans of the anticipated performance. In order for the coach to effectively help the team, he/she focuses on the following variables: (a) the implementation of instruction relevant to the game plan, (b) the pursuit of the same immediate objective by all team members, (c) the same interpretation of opponent's intentions in certain tactical situations, (d) the speed of execution, synchronization, and cooperation between players in implementing tactical combinations, (e) that skill execution is fluid, rhythmic, coordinated, and (f) a variety of responses by the team for the same tactical situations.

### ***Teaching Coaches How To Develop Players***

One of the main tasks of the training process is to choose the appropriate drills to reach specific objectives in the training session. The choice and sequential order of drills is not done randomly. Drills taken from a textbook or a clinic are acceptable only if they fit adequately within the training session framework and the objectives pursued. Indeed, it is not a matter of keeping the athletes actively involved over a period of time but rather to solve an actual team problem by seeking to reach, through drills, short term training objectives (see Appendix A).



**Figure 1.** Type of drills

We present below a learning activity aiming to teach volleyball coaches how to develop a series of drills that respect an adequate progression (see Figure 1).

### ***Simple Drills***

The simple drill is mostly used for motor skill acquisition. The operational framework is generally 1 player/1 ball and is characterized by one motor response, determined beforehand. The player must focus attention on the technical elements of the movement. The athlete is placed in artificial conditions or constant and easy conditions designed to facilitate learning. The drill will require a high number of ball contacts coupled with sub-maximal effort.

***Task #1 - Designing a simple drill for basic skill acquisition (volleyball).*** Once motor skill acquisition is completed, simple drills can also be utilized for skill stabilization if certain principles are respected. The conditions created by the coach tend towards game-like individual performances involving spatial orientation and court movement culminating with correct skill execution. The coach manipulates the volume and intensity of the drill by varying the length of the drill, rhythm, speed of execution, ball flight, and rest intervals between repetitions and sets. Task requirements are related to ball flight assessment, proper technique, and accuracy.

***Task #2 Design a drill for skill stabilization or maintenance involving individual tactical decision to a playing situation.*** Developing tactical intelligence can also be trained with the simple drill. In this context the player is faced with a tactical task and an opponent's opposition. The focus is on the proper motor response to the situation. Evidently, the player must have a relative mastery of basic skills and a few variants of the basic skill before the coach introduces conditions involving a choice of solutions to the situation at hand.

***Task #3. Design a drill of basic skills sequence aiming to consolidate or maintain basic skills.***

***Drills of basic skills sequence (simple action sequences).*** The drill involves simple action sequences, meaning that the player should be able to perform effectively several motor skills in succession. The execution of two or three actions can be done with or without partner assistance. The training task is known beforehand. Its successful implementation requires ball flight assessment coupled with proper technique execution. The focus is on the transition flow from one skill to another. Simple action sequences are taken from game situations. The drills aim to improve elements related to the proper execution of the task or to consolidate basic skills.

***Task #5. Design a complex drill: developing players' tactical intelligence coupled with synchronization and cooperation running combinations.***

***Complex drills (complex action sequences).*** The drill involves complex action sequences. The athlete is introduced to a competitive situation involving cooperation-synchronization with teammates as well as an opponents' intervention. The drill requires 2, 3, or 4 players involved in a temporary and partial phase of the game. The training content illustrates the team's tactical combinations. The focus is on getting it together, getting it to work out. To solve the training task, the player must be able to rapidly analyze the situation, that is read the relevant clues revealing teammates' and opponents' playing intentions and then come up with the proper motor response. The aim of these drills is to develop the players' autonomy and efficiency in implementing tactical combinations.

***Task #6. Design a game like drill: running tactical combinations from team formations***

***Games (modified, game like drills, scrimmage, preparatory competition).*** A game as a means to develop players implies, on one hand, cooperation and synchronization among teammates and, on the other hand, an opponent's opposition. The goal is to ensure that the players can organize themselves on the court and take charge of their confrontation with the opponent. For the individual player this competitive situation aims at efficiently solving tactical problems encountered in a game. The various types of games the coach can use judiciously are: modified games, game-like drills, scrimmage, preparatory competition.

## **Conclusion**

Do not start teaching Techniques and Tactics activities without having defined the 5 W's (What, When, Where, Who, Why). This definition is formulated in terms of objectives, deadlines, and resources. What is important is not what the coach says but what the participants/athletes do. The coach sets-up athletes in learning situations that represent a challenge which will gradually lead to player autonomy on the court. The end result of teaching is that the athlete is able to do today what was impossible yesterday.

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### Appendix A

The training objective determines the type and nature of the drill used by the coach.

#### **Teaching the mechanics of a skill**

Objective: Motor acquisition

Means: Simple drills

#### **Skill Stabilization**

Objectives: Perform the skill automatically or skill consolidation. Development of technical details related to proper skill execution. Maintain basic skills.

Means: Simple drills

Drills of basic skills sequence (simple action sequences).

#### **Developing tactical intelligence**

Objectives: Develop player autonomy on the court (improve reading clues and proper motor response).

Means: Complex drill.

Modified games.

#### **Integrating player/skills in the game**

Objectives: Increase team tactical knowledge related to game situations.

Develop a system of associative solutions.

Means: Game like drills.

Scrimmage.

Preparatory competition.

Based on knowledge of the technical-tactical training model coupled with the types of drills, the coach is now able to choose or design drills for the training session. We recommend the following systematic procedure:

- Identify the training objective or task.
- Determine drill procedure.
- Identify success criterion.
- Establish the coach's focus (indicators or reference points).
- Assess if the training objective was reached or not.

Submitted: January 23, 2018

Accepted: June 7, 2018