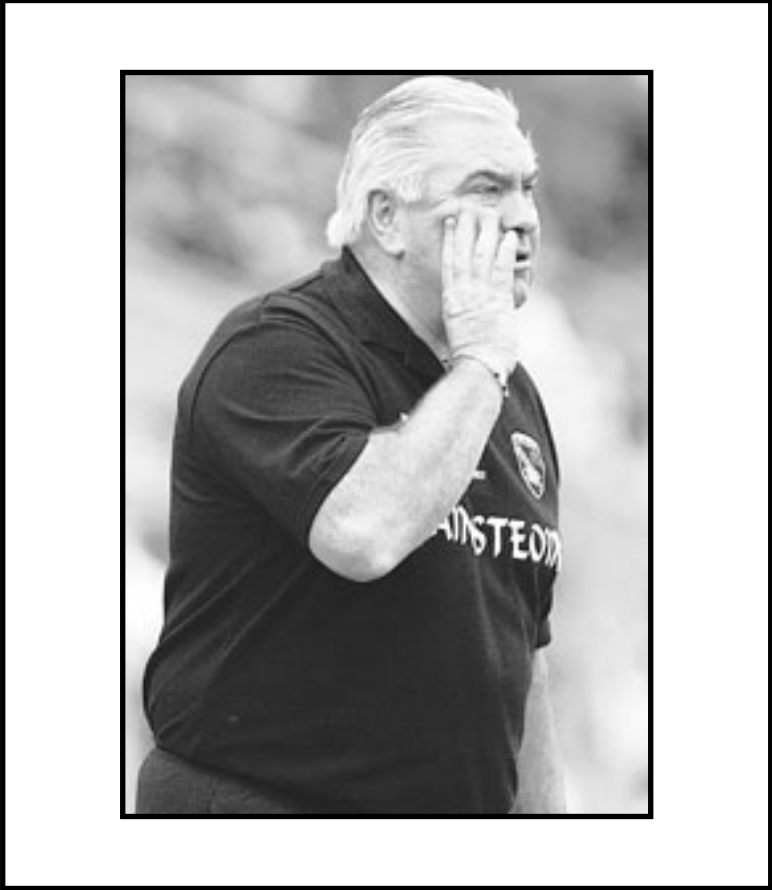


Coaching Tips By Philip Kerr



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Coaching Tip Number 1

Drills v Games

As players develop, their technique improves more rapidly than any other part of their game. They can usually learn to kick, catch, fist, block, solo etc. with a fair degree of comfort. The better players often practise these skills at home and come on faster than those who only rely on drills in coaching sessions once or twice a week.

What they find more difficult is to develop the ability to make the right decision in a game – when to pass, who to pass to, where to run, how to pass.

A coach who prepares a squad through sessions filled with drills, is only working at one part of the game.

How can a drill solve problems like 'forwards bunching' or 'lack of midfield support' or 'no width' or 'poor use of quick frees'? The answer is...it CAN'T!

If a player is a poor kicker of the ball, there is work done to solve that problem. What are we doing to help the player who takes the wrong option more often than the right one in a game?

Get working at games. Remember...Games = Problems. Start solving the problems!

Coaching Tip Number 2

From Technique to Teamplay

One of the more difficult things to coach to young players is the need to modify their individual styles for the good of the team.

If you have spent time ensuring that players are comfortable on the ball, it means you have worked on kicking, catching, lifting, blocking, tackling, shooting, evasion skills and solo running. The most attractive of these skills to a young player is very often 'solo running'. The feeling the player gets when he/she can run while making a ball spin from toe to hand is tremendous. Many players want to use this technique as often as possible. So, when you step in to coach team play and take players to another level, some see it as a denial of the right to try out this great skill of solo running.

However, it has to be done. There are no easy answers, but if you explain that you recognise their position and, at the same time, remind them that your job is to take them to higher and higher levels of play [i.e. adding more skills to their repertoire] you may find it easier to introduce. Conditions, limits, modifications...whatever you choose to call them, must be set for players to experience the beauty of good teamwork and to learn how passing, support running and shooting can bring as good a feeling as individual solo running.

Remember you may only have to limit a few players at a time, rather than impose a blanket ban on all solo running. One trick is to take a team aside [e.g. in a 9v9 game] and choose two of the players from one team who must play the ball immediately. Only inform their team-mates [not the opposition] and let them respond to this for a five or ten minute spell. The roles may be rotated among the team to let all practise.

This lets you see how well two players can change their games to benefit teamplay and how quickly their team-mates learn to make themselves available for passes from them. Try it out - soon!

Coaching Tip Number 3

Cut The Queues!

One of the most annoying sights in coaching is a long queue of players lining up to take part in a drill or an exercise. Who can state a valid reason for a queue of 8, 9 or 10 players [or more], each waiting in turn for two seconds of action? All coaches, when designing drills or exercises, should look carefully at how the WORK:REST RATIO pans out. If an exercise means that a player has 2-3 seconds of movement for a ball, followed by 30-40 seconds of lining up for the next bus, there is something wrong with the drill set-up. Think the exercise through and divide the group or increase the number of footballs being used – do anything except let the queue continue to form and the players continue to lose out! If the drill involves jogging, a good rule of thumb is a work:rest ratio of 1:1. Should the emphasis be on speed, then set a ratio of 1:4 or 1:5. In effect, this means that you simply include two players in a queue for the jogging exercise and five or six players maximum in the speed drill. The numbers used will determine the work:rest ratio.

Coaching Tip Number 4

Probables v Possibles

Many people will associate this title with Rugby. For years now, Rugby coaches and selectors have played 'probables v possibles' games when coaching. This simply means that they pick the strongest team on paper and play them as a unit. The opposition is made up of the remainder of the squad. Ask any top Rugby coach and he'll tell you that this system helps in a number of ways: Those players most likely to make up the first team get the opportunity to play together, get used to habits, patterns of play etc. Those players on the 'possibles' who stand out and catch the eye will have done so against better opposition. Those on the 'probables' who find it tough may find themselves replaced by a 'possible' who really wants a place.

In Gaelic Football we tend to take a squad of 30 players and play our strongest backs against our strongest forwards. There is nothing wrong with this if you wish to play like v like, but it will never give the best 15 a chance to play together, blend and prove themselves. Nor will it give the coach/selector a true picture of the reserve player who shines. So, if you are blessed with a big squad, think about promoting the use of 'probables v possibles'. Go a step further and always 'bib' the probables in your own club colours. The task for every 'possible' is to win a bib and the task for every 'probable' is to retain it.

Coaching Tip Number 5

Develop Your Shooting from Distance

Let's assume you have a squad of 30 players and only one pitch on which to train. You'd really like to work on shooting from distance in a game situation but the 15v15 set-up doesn't lend itself to it. Well, here's one recipe! Take out two goalkeepers and put them in goals at either end. Set out a line of markers across the pitch about 30m from goal. Do likewise at the other end of the pitch. Now take your players and create four teams - red, blue, green, yellow [7 outfield players in each]. Play Red v Blue inside the zone created by the two lines of markers [i.e. in the middle 70m of a typical pitch]. No outfield player may enter the 30m zones close to either goal. Effectively these become the goalkeepers' areas only. Ask the 'keepers to take kick outs as normal and let play develop. To speed up play, the goalies should always have a spare ball set up for the next kick-out. Players may only score from outside these zones. Play a 10-minute game.

So...do the Greens and Yellows simply wait about and get cold while this game progresses? Not at all. If you think about it, the 30m zones at either end of the pitch should only be used for kick-outs. Why not set up a drill inside each zone, staying closer to the corners than to the goals? For example - run a tackling exercise for 4 minutes in one corner and a catching exercise in the other corner for the same period. The drills will not get in the way of the game. Swap the Greens and Yellows over, run the drills again and there's the 10 minutes used constructively.

Now play Greens v Yellows in the game and let the Reds and Blues work on the drills. Swap once more and you have a 45 minute session after warm-ups.

You'll find that the game not only promotes shooting from distance, but also shows players the value of ball being played quickly and accurately upfield rather than across the park. The game also forces players to work harder and to get the ball into the shooting area before the other team has an opportunity to regroup.

Coaching Tip Number 6

The Three-Part Pitch

Here is one way to develop teamplay. It also allows you, the coach, to step back, spot where things are going wrong and move to fix them. Think of the pitch as three separate zones: The first, Zone A, runs from your own team's end line to the 45m line. Zone B lies between the two 45m lines and Zone C is that section from the far 45m line to the opposition's end line. When your team is in possession, watch carefully what happens in each zone.

Priority in Zone A is 'KEEP BALL', with the emphasis on keeping possession through close passing and plenty of support play. Once in Zone B, the focus changes to 'SET UP'. In this area a player should aim to use the ball quickly and directly to set up team-mates who are inside the opposition's 45m line. The ball must not stay in this zone for any longer than 3-4 seconds or for more than 2 passes. Zone C is the 'SCORE' zone. In here the aim is to get into position to either go for a score or to directly assist a score. Aim to reduce the passes in this zone to no more than 2 before a shot is taken.

NB. It does not matter which player is in which zone.....the task remains the same.

Coaching Tip Number 7

Spot and Fix

Find the player with no technical problems in his or her game and I'll find you a leprechaun in return. All players need specific technical coaching at some time during their careers. Granted, this is best done at an early stage [e.g. between the ages of 7 and 11], but the reality is that coaches deal with many older players who still have problems with kicking, catching, tackling, blocking, evading, lifting, fist passing etc. that were probably not fixed years ago. If you coach, then you should be able to 'spot and fix' faults in technique. To ignore such problems is tantamount to saying....'He never could do it and he never will'. Let's hope you're not the coach who recognises the problem, but prefers to work on physical fitness instead – there are plenty about! So, how do you fix once you have spotted?

The secret lies in the phrase 'Head, Hands, Feet for Better Technique'. If you watch a player perform a technique [e.g. a shot for a point] you must look for head position, hand position and feet position during the execution of the technique. This sounds so complicated and yet it isn't. Take the example of a player kicking for a point with his right foot. More often than not, he misses to the right of the posts. Some coaches may try to solve the problem by asking the player to 'aim left', but that is like asking a golfer who slices to aim down another fairway so that the ball can curve back. Better to look for the following – HEAD...is his head up as he kicks? This will cause the player to lean back and push the ball further to the right. HANDS...is he dropping the ball two-handed, cross-handed or is he holding the ball too far from his body? FEET....is his standing foot pointing nowhere near the target? Is he playing the ball off the outside of his boot?

Think about coaching through HEAD, HANDS, FEET.

Coaching Tip Number 8

Gaelic Football's Lost Tribe

Is it not time that we rethought the role of half forwards? Flavour of the month is to bypass this group when attacking and employ them more and more as defenders who track back to block opposition attacks and close in to look for breaks from midfield. More than any other group, we need half forwards to help the team keep its shape. A centre-half forward should be a creative player...one who orchestrates, who has great passing ability [preferably with both feet] and who has a tactical brain. Wing half-forwards must be blessed with both stamina and pace, for they are link players who have to fetch, carry and support more often than any other group.

So, how about looking at your own team! Have you a playmaker pulling the strings at CHF? Do your wing forwards have the necessary characteristics to take them through a game? Or have you simply created three extra defenders who help the defence and watch long balls fly over their heads at such a rate that a Derby horse would do well to get up in support?

Oh...and one more thing they should be able to do.....SCORE!

Coaching Tip Number 9

The Three Second Game

One of the traits a good player has, is the ability to look up when in possession and scan the area ahead. He/she is scanning in order to make the right decision.

It is this very decision-making process that we, as coaches, must help players to speed up. Too often we simply admire the player who appears to have an innate ability to receive the ball, scan and make the quick and proper decision. This allows us a 'get-out clause'....the most famous one in coaching.....

"You can't teach that....it's instinctive. You either have it or you don't." Not so! You may not be able to coach players to the very high standards set by the instinctive footballer, but you can certainly close the gap and improve both players and team when doing so. One of the easiest methods is by running the 'Three Second Game'. This simply means playing a match or a backs v forwards game and introducing the rule that allows each player a maximum count of '3' on the ball. To highlight this, the coach should referee the game and think "1, 2, 3" when a player receives the ball. Should the ball be played on the count of '2' then the coach begins again as the next player receives the ball. Should any player still be in possession after the count of '3', a free may be awarded to the opposition. The same count applies to the free kick.

The 'Three Second' approach has proved much better than the traditional 'one toe-tap, one bounce' game, for many players took this too literally and made sure they got in a toe-tap and a bounce before scanning for possibilities. Counting to '3' forces more players to look up first and, indeed, leads to more team-mates making better-timed runs for passes. A few coaches decry such conditions, saying they do not mirror the real game. The same coaches, however, never seem to be able to suggest an alternative way to help speed up decision-making. They still prefer to hide behind the call 'You can't teach that..it's instinctive'. Which type of coach are you?

Coaching Tip Number 10

'Increasing the Traffic'

Many drills and practice exercises on the pitch are excellent, but often they do not mirror reality. For example: A coach may run two or three drills in different areas of the pitch, all involving passing or catching or solo running or lifting etc. and all happening at the same time. Small groups of players take part in each and there is always plenty of space in which to work. This is fine up to a point. If coaches took two different drills, let players get used to them first and then moved the cones to superimpose the exercises one on top of the other at different angles, this would allow players to practise skills and techniques while others moved among them and around the same area. Players who can learn to cope with 'increased traffic' in a smaller area will be able to carry this through to a game, where there are team-mates and opponents getting in the way of passes etc. Go on...try it!

Coaching Tip Number 11

Double or Quits

Here's a game from Derry's coach, John Morrison. He could have kept it to himself but he chose to share it, so that others may try it and benefit from it.

If you want your 'free' takers to practise in a realistic environment, where they've been running in the game, making tackles, breaking tackles, passing, shooting etc., and if you want to recreate a degree of pressure on the 'free' taker, do the following:-

Set up a practice game between two teams on a full pitch or near enough a full pitch [teams from 10 v10 up to 15 v15].

Before the game starts, scatter five or six flexible fleximarkers [not the domes!] in an area between the 13m line and about 40m from goal. Do likewise at the opposite end.

Play the game as normal until one team gets a score from play. Now let a 'free' taker choose which marker to shoot from and let him take a 'free' from that spot. If he scores add this point to the original one scored from play. If he misses, take away the original point. If he scores, remove the marker from that spot. This forces him to choose another marker next time. If he misses, leave the marker there, so that he'll have to take a 'free' from that spot again sometime later in the game [i.e. pressure] To ensure that the game flows and there is not a lengthy delay as the 'free' taker prepares, have at least two footballs behind the goal. Let the 'keeper set up a ball ready for the kick out, while the 'free' taker is getting set. Once the shot is taken, the other ball should be kicked out.

Think about it. The 'free' taker has the added pressure of doubling the score rather than the double whammy of missing and wiping out the original one that earned him the 'free'. Try it. It works a treat!

Coaching Tip Number 12

Where is the 'Extra Man'?

How many times have you seen a Gaelic football team earn an 'extra man' and still lose?
How many times have you seen the same happen in soccer?

Unfair comparison? - team size different? Number of players different? These are only smokescreens behind which a coach may hide.

Fact - When opponents lose a player, they will reorganise and this reorganisation will determine who is left free on our team. So, for the first few minutes, our coach cannot claim to nominate the 'extra man'.

Fact - The player left free is, more often than not, a defender. This comes about when opponents lose a defender or a midfielder or a forward. In the latter case there is little or no reorganisation needed. If they lose a defender or a midfielder, they will withdraw a forward to plug the gap. In either case, our side is left with a spare defender.

Fact - Few, if any, coaches prepare for playing with an 'extra man', so decisions are often made on the spur of the moment, rather than with any method.

Fact - Players must know and have experienced the various options re. using an 'extra man'. So, whatever strategies you devise as a coach for such an eventuality [e.g. playing the 'extra man' wide on the wing to receive passes, doubleteaming on a particularly dangerous opponent, patrolling the area along the 45m line, acting as a 3rd midfielder to mop up loose ball etc.] must be practised if you want it to work rather than just

hope it will work. My own preference is to practise using the 'extra man' wide. Opponents find it much more difficult to mark width rather than depth. It tends to stretch them much more and gaps begin to appear. Playing the 'extra man' wide also provides a release player for others on the team. Players are not lulled into a false sense of security about the 'extra man' covering for them if they mark loosely.

What's more, if the opponents move a player to mark this 'extra man' after while, the response is simple - move the new 'extra man' wide on the other side of the pitch. Believe me, it does work and it has worked!

Whatever you decide, make sure you practise it. Gone are the days when any of us can afford fill sessions with endless drills and without reference to the 'what ifs' that appear in a match!

Coaching Tip Number 13

Silent but Deadly!

Here's a simple idea for use in either small-sided games or full practice games, best used for short periods at a time [e.g. 5 minutes]. One of Ireland's top coaches, Brian McIver [Ballinderry's All-Ireland Manager], uses it regularly. Rather than point out the advantages of such a game, I'm going to leave them out. Let's see first if any coaches and players will post their own thoughts on the Derry guestbook re. The advantages
Here are the rules:

Start the game as you want to play it, be it a small-sided or full-sided one, be it on a shortened pitch or not. Let the game run for a few minutes to get the flow going and then introduce a single rule. **NO SPEECH ON THE PITCH!** That includes...no calling for passes, no reminding team-mates to mark opponents, no speaking to the referee, no issuing instructions of any kind. Should any player break the 'no speech' rule, award a 'free' to the opposition.

Remember...impose the rule only for short periods at a time [e.g. five minutes on, five minutes off]. The concentration required and the frustration endured will prove too much for some and the game will lose its zest. You may decide to tell players beforehand your reasons for running such a game or you may decide to let them find out for themselves. So, think about it and start posting your thoughts.

Coaching Tip Number 14

Caution - Ladders in Use!

A word of warning to all of those coaches who have been swept away by the craze that is 'Ladder Work'. Without doubt, ladders have their place in coaching. They are useful tools to aid the development of fast footwork, balance and coordination.

However, such is the interest in this approach, that some coaches are overdoing ladder work. Will this lead to a generation of footballers who are both nimble and evasive, but have forgotten the absolute need to develop long strides instead of short ones in order to break a tackle, complete a good lift and make ground more efficiently? Last year I watched a player jink his way about the pitch, looking busy at all times. It wasn't until I saw him up against a long-striding opponent or two that I realised he was busy going

nowhere and that the speed of his footwork was doing nothing for his pace over the ground. Only sustained work on lengthening his stride improved his effectiveness.

Coaching Tip Number 15

Your Session Checklist

How good is your coaching session? How well does it address the needs of your players, be they 8, 18 or 28 years of age?

Here's one suggestion for a checklist...a guide to follow when planning a coaching session. In every session you should be working to develop:-

TECHNICAL ABILITY
ATHLETICISM
SPEED OF THOUGHT
TEAMPLAY

Forget the idea that there should be whole sessions with no ball involved. Design your sessions to include each of these four elements and the players will not only develop more quickly, they'll enjoy doing so. Working on **TECHNIQUE** means seeking to improve each player's first touch on the ball. First touch is often only applied to receiving the ball, but if you think about it, first touch covers all techniques - a better kick pass, a better block, a better lift etc. You must be prepared to help players to develop the correct techniques and never let bad habits linger.

ATHLETICISM is an umbrella term for all physical fitness work. You may be able to develop this using the ball or you may have to set aside a specific part of a session to work on it. Whatever the case, there is little reason to work on it in a forest, on the roads or on a mountain - do it on the pitch...but not to the exclusion of everything else.

SPEED OF THOUGHT is the part of any session that frightens coaches. Many tend to steer clear of it and argue that it's something that a player either has or hasn't. No chance! All you have to do to develop speed of thought is to set appropriate conditions on a drill or a game during the session. Do you want your midfielders to release the ball earlier? - put a two-touch condition on them to help develop the correct instincts. But don't just do it in one session and never again. Repetition is the key - even for 10 minutes of every practice game.

Just think about ways you'd like a player to change - then work out a method to do so in practice - simply hoping for it after a chat will not work!

TEAMPLAY - Does your team have any game plans? How often do you practise them? Do you simply talk about them and expect players to act it out? Think about it - does a director of a play simply hand out the script and put the actors straight onto the stage in front of the audience? - rehearse, rehearse, rehearse!

So...look at your next session - have you included work on these four elements? If not, do it now! Any questions? - post them on the guestbook.

Coaching tip Number 16

Kicking the C or Kicking the J

A few years ago I met Dave Alred. Dave is Johnny Wilkinson's Kicking Coach. He was running a coaching clinic in Limerick and a number of us got the opportunity to try out some of his ideas. One of these was directed at 'free' takers, be they from rugby or from Gaelic football. He suggested that many players swing their kicking foot around in an arc after they have struck the ball; or at least they think they do it AFTER they have kicked. In actual fact, the arc has started

BEFORE the ball is struck and it can cause problems with the direction and flight of the ball. Imagine a left-footer who has this problem. He will trace the letter C in the air with his foot. The bottom of the C is where the swing starts; the middle of the C is where contact is made and the top of the C is where his foot ends up; quite a definite arc.

Alred suggested that the best swing would trace the letter J in the air. Now for a left-footer you must imagine the J to be back to front. The swing starts at the hook of the J; contact is made as the J straightens and the foot ends up at the top of the J. This gives the kick a correct follow-through. I watched Dave Alred apply this theory with top Gaelic players from Munster and Leinster. It had a significant impact on their technique.

So, if you're a 'free' taker...try kicking the J rather than the C.

Coaching tip Number 17

Tackling with your Feet!

A foul, I hear you say...and indeed a foot block or a sliding tackle or a foot in when someone is lifting the ball is a foul. But we're looking at how few players use their feet properly to get in position for a successful tackle and dispossession. You must have seen the player who makes ground to catch an opponent, only to lean forward from the waist [while still running] to reach for the ball. You must also have witnessed the player who stands flat-footed in front of an oncoming opponent, only to be knocked offbalance at the first contact. And finally...what about the player who rushes in to the tackle and is easily rounded by a deft side-step or feint?

To remedy these situations a coach must look first at the footwork of the players who tackle poorly. Run tackle drills of course, but ask players to focus on staying balanced and flexible, to concentrate on good footwork to get them in position to win the ball back. What takes a boxer into position to throw a punch or to evade a punch...sharp footwork. John Morrison talks of the four Ds in tackling.... DELAY [the player], DENY [him space], DISPOSSESS [him of the ball] and DEVELOP [the next move]. To do the first two, think FEET!

They'll take you where you want to go.

Coaching tip Number 18

The Plight of the Two-Footed Jumper

It sounds like the title of a weird Hollywood movie, but it's just another problem we have to address in coaching. We've all seen them. The players who run to the point where the ball will drop from the sky, get there a second early, stand with both feet on the ground and jump straight up to make the catch. Now let's get something clear. These players do catch the ball at times. However, they generally jump about six inches off the ground instead of sixteen inches and they they make a vertical leap rather than one that takes them along a path to meet the ball in flight.

So...problem spotted..how can we fix it?

Here's one tried and tested way. If a player was faced with a leap across a stream or river, he/she would never run to the edge of the bank, stop briefly and take off two-footed. The jump is led by one leg, and the leap is not only across but up, to gain extra distance. Apply the same process to the high catch at midfield and you have the template. Set up the river, using two lines of multimarkers. Decide on a realistic width for the river [test the jump without the ball first]. Coach stands midstream and either holds the ball above head height [for younger children] or lobs the ball [for older players]. As the players get used to the exercise, the idea should be to widen the river and work on technique through HEAD, HANDS and FEET positions.

Head - Watching the flight of the ball

Hands - Reach long with the arms, W shape with hands to catch

Feet - Plant one foot and drive the opposite knee up to give the lift [a natural jumping action to cross a stream].

Land running with the ball. And when players need reminding during games, tell them to 'JUMP THE RIVER'.

Coaching tip Number 19

Freeze Frame

What are you doing to improve your forwards' concentration and ability to switch roles quickly and win the ball back when the ball is lost to the opposition? Here's one to try. Imagine the situation in a game where forwards have been in possession and in attack mode. Each forward is looking for space and trying to get away from defenders.

Suddenly the ball is lost near the opposition goal and their backs can counter. Why are these backs usually able to build reasonably easily as they move out of defence?

Answer - because the forwards find themselves in no man's land, are slow to react and tend to watch the ball.

Choose one half of the pitch. Set out 6-8 multimarkers, as if they were forwards in various attacking positions. Pair off defenders and attackers and ask each pair to stand at a marker. Then tell the defenders to take three big steps away from the multimarkers.

Leave the forwards where they are. You now have a FREEZE-FRAME situation, a moment captured in time. Start the ball in the goalkeeper's arms. To begin the play, let the goalkeeper throw the ball in the air and catch it. The game is now on. Forwards must work out how best to close down defenders and win the ball back before the backs work it out and over the halfway line. Forwards must learn to switch from attacking mode to

defending mode faster and faster until it becomes instinct. In other words, these mini-game situations will only work if you, the coach, are prepared to run twenty of them rather than just one or two. Players can take up positions again in a few seconds and the exercise can be run again and again. Practice makes permanent.

Coaching tip Number 20

He's fit...but not 'match fit'.

How many times have you heard someone say of a player.....He's fit, but he's not match fit.? What does it mean? How can we be sure that a player is match fit? What can we do to get players match fit?

Match fitness can only come through playing games.

Unfortunately, some have taken this to mean that a player needs to wait for a competitive game against another team before he can work on his match fitness. This is not true. As I have said already, the only way to get match fit is to play games. If the right game is played in training then the coach can not only bring a player up to speed in terms of match fitness but can also set the limits for all players. You see, match fitness is about how quickly a player can make a decision, how well he can react to a situation, how aware he is of the play around him. It has to be founded on physical fitness [particularly sharpness] but it is a 'brain' thing more than anything else. When you hear people say that a player can't cope with the speed of the game, it doesn't mean that he cannot run as fast as the other players. It means his thinking, his reactions and his awareness are not as sharp as they should be. So....what can coaches do?

The best games are based on the clock. Try playing a game, with normal rules except for the condition which allows each player a maximum of 3 seconds on the ball. Just count 1,2,3 when a player is in possession. This is better than calling for one toe-tap and/or one bounce. The best way to play this is to use one coach to referee and another to run the 3 second rule and blow only when this is broken.

If players really respond, cut it to 2 seconds. You will really only be able to do this after a number of weeks working on the former.

Another way to use the clock, is to decide on a certain number of seconds during which a team may score. Imagine the keeper kicks the ball out and a player gathers the ball at midfield. The coach/referee calls out a countdown.....10, 9, 8 ,7 etc. The team must shoot for a score before 0 is reached. If the opposition wins the ball, the coach decides on the number from which to start the countdown [e.g. the opposition wins the ball only 45m from the goal.

The coach needs to speed up their play, so he begins the countdown from 5.]

There are many modifications to such games...all based on working towards match fitness at speeds where opponents cannot hope to compete.

Coaching Tip Number 21

Corners Don't Count

For all those players who win the ball in the midfield area and look up before delivering a telling pass, I have a message....corners don't count and crosses don't work! Next time

you see that forward scurrying towards the corner of the pitch, screaming at the top of his voice for a pass, ignore him.

Let him run...the team may need his run to take a man away and open up the opposition defence...but the team certainly doesn't need the ball to follow him. Should the passer give the ball into the corner, it usually takes at least two passes to get it out of there and into a scoring position. The time taken allows opponents to filter back and defend en masse.

Sometimes the player in the corner is bottled up and tries to manufacture a cross [get to the by-line and cross it!] which stuns everyone in the square, ends up missing them all and rolls harmlessly over the far touchline. The most successful attacks are still those where the ball is worked into the area between the stop-nets as quickly and accurately as possible. Play it wide, of course, but switch it back inside before the 20m line to increase your team's chances of scoring.

How do you work this into your drills and games at training? – let me know!

Coaching Tip Number 22

Off the Laces Please!

Whatever age group you coach, whatever standard your players have reached, I'll guess that you've seen many of them bear down on goal, reach 20m out and still screw the ball wide. Let them practise at a coaching session and, odds are, many will continue to kick the ball wide from this position.

Shooting technique is vital for increasing a player's scoring average. The answer to this particular problem is quite simple - but it isn't stylish, so players don't like it.

Players love to get into this '20m from goal' position and do one of two things - play it off the instep [a la soccer free kick] or strike across the ball with the outside of the boot. Both look good, both make the ball swerve, both will get scores, but neither will ever beat "TOE DOWN, HEAD DOWN - OFF THE LACES!"

To practise this technique set out three or four lines of fleximarkers that bear down on goal from different angles. Each line should be 10-15m long and finish approx. 20m from goal, pointing right at the centre spot on the bar.

Ask a player to run tight to a line and shoot "toe down, head down - off the laces" when he/she reaches the end. Make no mistake - if you start this with seniors, it will take them ages to change - but they can do, if they really want to. Start with U8s and U10s and you'll really reap the benefits.

Good Luck!

Coaching Tip Number 23

'Work to Rest' Ratios...a Vital Balance

The third batch of Level 2 coaches from across Ulster have just completed their course. Among the many things discussed was the danger of burnout for certain players. These players are often the better ones and, as a result, they are pulled every way by club, county and school demands. What goes unnoticed is the amount of work demanded of these players.

Take the case of a 17 year-old who plays McRory, County Minor, Club Minor and Club Senior football. Which of his four coaches will be the first to contact the others to plan a common approach to training? Which coach will recognise that the player's health is at risk if he must play a full part in all training?

I suggest that all four will acknowledge the risk but few will be prepared to do anything about it! The same experienced coaches are, no doubt, fully aware of the importance of WORK:REST RATIOS when running a coaching session. These same coaches know that if they work on stamina, they usually afford players a ratio of 1:1 [e.g. work for a minute, rest for a minute] to allow for proper recovery. Similarly, they know that if they work on speed, the ratio has to change to as much as 1:5 [e.g. work for 5 seconds, rest for 25 seconds]. So, how about planning for recovery in the 'bigger picture'? It's time coaches got together to find out what demands are being made of the top young players, made decisions for the players' good and reaped the benefits as a result.

Coaching Tip Number 24

Think how you mark!

Teaching your players to think about how a direct opponent plays the game is a worthwhile thing to do, but a difficult one to practise. Here's one approach that helps players get used to reading other players. Who knows what advantages it may bring in a competitive match.

Pick two teams for a practice game during training. Before the throw-in, call aside one or two players who have been matched against good opponents. Ask each player to work out some things about how his/her opponent likes to play the game.

Ask the players to focus only on one or two aspects: e.g.

Does your opponent usually fist pass or kick pass the ball?

Does your opponent kick with his/her left foot, right foot or both feet?

Does your opponent usually pass the ball immediately, take a bounce or toe-tap before deciding or does he/she usually run with it?

As the game develops make a note of what your own answers are to these questions. Stop the game after 10 minutes and call both players over to check their answers. See if they match yours. Now ask them to concentrate on one aspect of the opponent's game and do something to counter it. Make no mistake, this is a long-term coaching strategy. Players will find it tough, but it will make them better footballers.

Coaching Tip Number 25

Working on Width

If a squad of U10s made up of players from Primary 4, 5, 6 and 7 can master the principle of play that is 'width', then there's hope for Gaelic Football.

To introduce any principle of play you may have to create a false situation on the pitch - one which the purists [or is it the dinosaurs?] will trash as soon as they hear of it.

Next time you pace up and down the sideline, calling for players to stay wide, think about the next coaching session when you'll force the issue with the use of a couple of lines of multimarkers [fleximarkers].

Before a practice game, run two lines of markers along the length of the pitch, each line creating a five metre wide zone between it and the sideline. Pick your teams [Greens and Reds] and take one player from each to act as a 'LINK PLAYER' running inside these zones. The green player works in one zone, the red player works in the other. The rules of the game are simple. Play a normal match, but insist on the following: if a team takes possession of the ball it must use its link player at least once during the move towards the opposition goal. At no stage may the link player be tackled and at no stage may he move outside his/her zone.

The Link Player may only move to receive a pass and play the ball within the count of '3' back into the game proper. This offers a great opportunity to practise diagonal passing and support running.

It also shows players the value of width and allows them to practise it without direct opposition, until the notion of how to play 'link' beds in.

Good luck!

Coaching Tip Number 26

Attack and Break!

A simple message for all coaches this week -

Make sure you work regularly to get your players to attack the ball when going for it and to break the tackle when moving forward with the ball.

To let players away with waiting for a nice bounce, stopping when faced by an opponent or trying to kick through them will only lead to a generation of average footballers in our county - don't let it happen...always work to make them the best we can!

Coaching Tip Number 27

Pay the Price

What about a game to allow defenders to work on tackling without fouling? What if the same game gave forwards the incentive to get closer to goal and even draw 'frees' from the opposition?

Let's say you have 21 players; set your pitch from the far '45 to one set of goals [i.e. approx. 75m in length]. In front of the goals create a large semi-circle of multimarkers. This must start on the end line, 20m from the left post, arc out to 30m in front of goal and then arc in to finish 20m from the right post on the end line. Play 11v10 with one team made up primarily of attackers and the other of defenders. The goalkeeper plays for the defenders.

Start each play with a kickout. Let the forwards attack the goal when in possession. Only points count. Should they shoot and score from outside the semi-circle, they are awarded 1 point. A score from inside the zone earns 2 points. A 'free' scored from inside the zone earns 3 points. Defenders must work to keep the scores to a minimum, so they must make sure they do not commit fouls inside the zone and that they mark tightly enough to keep down the number of 2 point scores. Defenders can earn scores for themselves, by winning the ball and working it up the pitch to cross the far 45m line while still in possession. The coach can determine how many points should be given.

Try it...show defenders that if they are too rash and lack organisation they will pay the price!

Coaching Tip Number 28

T.I.P.S.

This is a method of spotting potential future stars for professional soccer. It is used by scouts and those who wish to sign the young players who may make it big. So what has it to do with Gaelic Games? We can use it to encourage players to change.

T stands for TECHNIQUE....

I stands for INTELLIGENCE.....

P stands for PERSONALITY.....and

S stands for SPEED.

Three of these always seemed sensible and were easily understood. Scouts looked for players who had good technical skills, made quick and proper decisions on the pitch and were fast, both in reaction and speed over the ground. But what exactly did personality mean? Did they reject players who were sullen or quiet or dull or loud or volatile? No! It seems they determine personality as a 'willingness to learn from mistakes and openness to new ideas'.

So, if you know of any player who simply wants to play his own game and has no 'personality', tell him to find one quickly – his future in Gaelic Games depends on it!

Coaching Tip Number 29

A Moving Pivot

How many of us set up drills and exercises that involve a pivotal player? This is the person who, in a line drill, stands in the middle, receives a kick pass from a player, feeds it back as the same player runs by and then turns to wait for the next pass from the opposite end. Acting as a pivot does mirror the game, but only if the pivotal player builds movement into his/her role. There is little or no point in standing still at any stage when playing this part. To let players do so, will only lead to them copying it in a match. A pivot should always keep on the move, mimicking the movement from a match when he/she is jogging or walking about, while being marked by an opponent.

The pivot should do this as he/she weighs up the situation and decides when to change pace and move to receive the pass and return it. In a game there will be a brief window when this is possible, so in a drill it must be the same.

To sum up - never leave a standing pivot to dig a hole in the one spot on a pitch. Keep that player on the move, even when the ball is not being passed. Then build in a change of pace for the pass. Try it in your next session. The game demands it and so should you!

Coaching Tip Number 30

Kick It - Run It

Last year I took part in a coaching course in Cavan. I ran this game with U-12s and U-14s. The key to it is really to let the players experience the problems and work out the solutions for themselves. If you decide to use the game, do not be tempted to give players the answers. If they think it through themselves, they'll learn to use their ideas in a game proper.

Create a mini-pitch [approx. 40m x 25m]. At one end only, set up goals using cones or posts. Choose two teams of four players each. Start one team in a line across an end-line. Give the ball to the other team and start them from the end-line that has the set of goals, but with only three of their players lined across it. The fourth player does goals to allow a 3 v 4 situation to develop outfield. On the whistle, one of the three kicks the ball high and long towards the opposing team of four. Both teams advance quickly to meet each other. The team of four should now be in possession of the ball.

The four must work the ball past the three to get in a shot for goal. A score is only awarded if the ball is kicked low into the goal [on or close to the ground]. Should the three win the ball back, they simply work it out to the far end-line.

After each play, the teams switch roles, rotate goalkeepers and start again.

Not much to it! So it seems. Quite a boring game then! Not so! What happens is that the team of three will win the ball back and score more often than the team of four. This is not due to any slick move on the part of the three, but on poor use of players by the team of four. You, as the coach should let these situations develop for a while, before taking the four aside and suggesting that they come up with a better decision re. how they use the extra player.

In no time at all, the game will switch in favour of the four. Remember...let them make the decision...and let them think of new ones each time so that the opponents cannot counter. With regard to contour-moves, you may also find that the three will sort out some defensive ploys themselves. So much the better. Everybody develops, everybody wins and you get a taste of what players can do for themselves [with a little coach input, of course]. Good luck.

Coaching tip Number 31

Don't do drills, teach situations. I picked this up from an Aussie Rules website - we can use it too. Never underestimate the ability of young players to learn, especially if you as the coach have been able to convince them why this is the best choice. Don't just tell them that they must make a specific choice because you as coach said so. Explain to them why it is best to make a certain choice. You as coach must be able to back it up with evidence. This doesn't imply that we complicate the game for young players. We set the range of options relevant to their age and technique level. We can stimulate and challenge young players especially those that have flaws in their technique that often detract from their enjoyment in performance. Decision-making means relating to team mates, that is one of the primary reasons why we play a team sport like Gaelic Football.

Coaching tip Number 32

What can you add? When a manager or coach has to leave players out of a team and resign them to a spell on the bench, he often finds it difficult to explain why they haven't

made the team. Those players rarely find themselves in the mood to listen anyway, for most believe they should start. Come the time for a substitution, a coach calls for the sub to warm up; then he generally gives a few instructions before the player takes the field. Should the change be one that is tactical rather than as the result of injury, the substitute might well be asked "What can you add to this team, that the first-choice player could not?" Such a question may not lend itself to an immediate answer, but it does focus the new player and remind him that he must not simply replace someone, but must work to retain his place by 'adding something to the team'. Perhaps this little reminder will serve to motivate those who can't wait to get off the bench and onto the field.

Coaching tip Number 33

SCORES AND TURNOVERS

Here's a game to focus players on working harder to turnover the ball during play. It is particularly useful for coaches who are keen to improve forwards' work rate when the opposition has the ball. Play normal Gaelic rules. Set up a pitch to suit the number of players. Run a line of fleximarkers across the halfway line. To win one game in a mini-series [e.g. best of five] a team may either score four times or turn the ball over twice inside the opposition half. A 'turnover' is only awarded for an interception during play, a tackle that wins possession or a block that leads to possession. If a team manages to turn the ball over, play does not stop; rather it continues until the next break in the game [e.g. score, wide, free, sideline] So, a team that finds itself 3-0 down in scores and with 1 turnover earned, may still win the game if one of its players forces one more turnover in the opposition half of the pitch. Such a situation will also highlight the need for defenders to make sure the ball is not lost inside the defending half of the pitch.

If players respond by working a tight fist-passing game, they may find that this leads to even more opportunities for the opposition to turn the ball over. If they decide to simply kick the ball into the other half to avoid the turnover, it invites another attack from the opposition team. The right balance must be found between keeping possession and delivering a telling pass into the other half for a teammate. To those who complain that the scoring team is being unduly punished, remember...the game is deliberately designed to force a higher work rate from attackers when opposing defenders have the ball.

Forwards are being given an incentive to win the ball back.

Coaches are free to change the ratio of scores to turnovers [e.g. to win, a team needs 3 scores or 2 turnovers].

Coaching tip Number 34

WIPEOUT Game

A game to try as part of a series: Choose two teams [e.g. 7v7 up to 15v15], bib them and adapt the size of the pitch to suit. The game is normal Gaelic football with one twist. To win the game, a team must score 3 times consecutively [without their scores being interrupted by an opposition score]. Should the opposition score before 3 consecutive scores are taken, any scores earned are wiped out and the opposition are now deemed to be winning 1-0. e.g. Team A scores a point and then a goal. They are now winning 2-0 in

scores taken. Team B scores a point. Team A's two scores are wiped out and Team B leads 1-0. The first team to reach score consecutive times wins the game and goes 1-0 up in the series. Run the series to suit [e.g. series is over when one team wins five games]. A modification of this involves delaying the 'wipeout' element until a certain number of scores has been reached. e.g. Teams play first to get five scores on the board, but 'wipeout' rules only apply after 4 scores. So, both teams keep playing and scoring as normal until one reaches four scores. Should this team manage a fifth without the opposition scoring first, it wins the game. However, should the opposition score, the four scores are wiped out. Why bother play this game? It focuses players much more and leads to a higher degree of intensity. Players are keener to defend, to find space, to shoot sooner and to turn the ball over.

Coaching tip Number 35

THREE TO SCORE

One piece of Gaelic game analysis suggests that winning teams keep up an average of at least one score for every three times they take possession of the ball in the opposition half of the pitch. Anything less often spells defeat. This game is designed to simulate such conditions and force players to work to keep up the scoring rate. Set up a pitch to suit numbers on each team, and then run a line of fleximarkers along the halfway line. Play with normal rules. Point out that each team **STARTS** with a score of 3.

For each time that a team attacks [i.e. takes possession in the opposition half] and does not score, 1 is taken off the starting score of 3.

The first team to have its score reduced to 0 loses that game [usually one of a series of games set by the coach]. If a team scores before the 3 becomes 0, the rate is maintained and a new '3' is awarded. e.g.

Team A misses with its first shot and has its score reduced to '2'.

The next attack from Team A is turned over and the score is cut to '1'.

Team A now has one last chance to score.

Team A scores on the next attack.

The team's score is set at '3' again and the game goes on.

So, each time a team scores, the score is reset at '3'.

Try this game and see how it focuses players. At first you may find it leads to a lot of tight fist passing as players attempt to keep possession. However, they should learn quickly that such a method of play will allow the opposition to regroup and spoil attacks more easily. Soon they'll find that a more direct style of play [with quick support to front players] is best.

Coaching tip Number 36

SWITCH THE PLAY [GAME]

A game that only takes effect for one team when in the opposition half [or for forwards in a backs v forwards situation].

Set out two lines of fleximarkers [not domes] running from the half-way line to the end line. Both should be approx. 20m in from each touchline. The lines create 3 channels [wide channels of 20m each and a centre channel of 35- 40m on normal pitch].

The rules are simple. Should the attacking team have possession in any of the two 'wide' channels, the player on the ball must switch play into the middle channel rather than give a pass down the wing. The game is designed to ensure that any attack does not end up in the corners and that the main thrust is through the centre. This does not mean that players should pack the centre channel. Players may move freely between channels to create space, but the ball should be played from wide to centre as much as possible.

Coaches should only inform the attacking team of the ploy so that defenders have to work it out and counter it. Coaches must also convince players of the need to make decoy runs into these wide channels in order to draw defenders out of the scoring zone.

Coaching tip Number 37

Opportunities v Time

A top coach who guided his club team to an All-Ireland championship in the early nineties, regularly switched or even substituted players during the early stages of games. When asked why he didn't let players have more time to settle before he acted, the coach answered: 'Time has little to do with it. I only count opportunities, not time.'

His idea was simple yet brilliant. If a player had four chances to win the ball and lost out on three, then he had to be changed before his confidence was shattered altogether. It didn't matter if these opportunities came in the first five minutes or over the period of one half of the game.

The same coach maintained that it was vital all players were aware of this practice. They had to know that a switch was not a way to say 'You're not good enough', but a chance to remind them that 'this is not your day in that spot...let's start again somewhere else'.

So, if you are a coach who prefers to make changes based on 'time', think about looking for 'missed opportunities' instead.

Remember to make sure your players know and understand the idea and see if your tactical work on the line improves.

Coaching tip Number 38

Hit the Crossbar!

If you coach our youngest gaels, those who play with a size 3 or size 4 football, you may have noticed that many tend to kick pass the ball anywhere between ground level and 10 metres high. Coaches will always try to reduce the number of low daisycutters or vertical bombs that these young players kick. We all want to see the perfect kick that is played over 20-30m, reaches no more than 3m at its highest point and can be caught by the receiver, either on the full or after one bounce. But how can a coach get through to players who can't quite grasp the idea of 'head down, toe down' and can't execute or even begin to imagine that perfect kick pass?

One way that clicks with some of them is the idea of 'hit the crossbar'. Take aside a few players that are having difficulty and run a short, fun competition from the 13m line.

Each should try to hit the crossbar of the main goals as many times as possible.

Now remember, few will hit the bar more than once, but most will eventually strike a ball or two that gets close.

When these players return to drill work or even games, remind them that a good kick pass is like hitting the crossbar. The same technique that they use in the competition will enable them to hit better kick passes. All they have to do is be brave enough to try.

Coaching tip Number 39

Kick for Position

Here is a small-sided game to try. It is simple to set up, easy to run and with one slight modification, it can help young players [or older ones] learn the value of forwards playing deep and leaving space to run onto a pass from midfield or defence.

Choose two teams [6 players in each].

Each team will have 1 goalkeeper, 2 backs, 1 midfielder and 2 forwards.

Set out a pitch area to suit age/skill level [e.g. U12s might play on a pitch 60m x 30m whereas seniors might need an 80m x 45m one].

Use cones or poles for goals at either end. The only scores that count are shots that beat the 'keeper when hit along or close to the ground.

Divide the pitch into two halves, using a line of fleximarkers. During the game backs and forwards may not cross this line. Only midfielders may cross [this helps them work on supporting runs]. Add one more rule before you start the game.

All passes across the line of markers must be **PROPER KICK PASSES**.

Coaches must insist that players do not simply work the ball close to the line and tap a five metre kick across the line].

How does this help? Forwards will no longer hug the halfway line waiting for backs to work the ball out and offer a short fist pass. Each team has only two forwards. Running from deep allows the midfielder to get up in support. The game also forces forwards to make lateral and diagonal runs, watch the play closely and change pace to win the ball. Without the line and the kicking rule, the players will bunch, forwards will run away from the pass [like wide receivers in American Football] and midfielders will not work as hard to support]. Try it, stick with it and rotate the positions to let everyone experience playing different roles.

Coaching tip Number 40

The Lazy Ball

Into modern Gaelic football has come the scourge that is called the low ball. Don't get me wrong, now. I'm not advocating a return to the sky-high balloon kick that gives those at ground level ample opportunity to have a picnic before the ball re-enters the atmosphere. I'm complaining about the grubber-style pass along the ground that a player uses to thread the ball through to a forward who has made a break towards him. The player who bursts out like a train [with defender in tow] is given a pass that is well-nigh impossible to gather cleanly. It may have been tucked neatly under an opponent's block, but the receiver has to change pace, direction, stance and even his mind to collect such a pass. This type of pass comes originally from rugby, where it is used to slip the ball between defenders for a team-mate to run onto and score - and there lies the difference. The receiver in Rugby is moving with the ball player. Our forward is coming to meet the pass. Enough of the complaining - what about a solution? I call this pass 'The Lazy Ball', because the kicker is doing the minimum to evade his opponent and make space for a pass.

Players must work hard on evasion skills that throw an opponent off balance enough to be able to get a good pass away to the runner. If coaches made these demands and sought to cut out this lazy ball, we might get more fluid attacks and fewer blasts on the whistle. Watch for the lazy ball in the next game and think about changing it!

Coaching tip Number 41

Fitness Testing.

Before the new season, think about the types of fitness tests you use for your players. Remember, our games are 'multisprint'; therefore they call upon the anaerobic energy system more than on the aerobic system. Put simply, this means they are not filled with long runs lasting several minutes; rather they are punctuated by runs of up to 20 seconds, short breaks [walking etc] and quick bursts of less than 6 seconds duration. However, before you dispense with the longer runs, remember that they do have a role. The aerobic energy system [heart and lungs - using oxygen] is vital for recovery between these short bursts on the pitch - so it must be well developed. The more developed and efficient the aerobic system is, the shorter a player's recovery time will be between bouts of hard work on the pitch. So, do not dismiss the longer runs pre-season. Make sure they are done on grass [not on roads!], use a proper test to check fitness levels and tailor your training to suit the results [i.e. what will you do with a player who scores 3000m+ in the Cooper Test as opposed to a player who scores 1900m?] Now you can check the internet for the protocols associated with the Cooper Test.

Coaching tip Number 42

Poor Shooting - A Matter of Angles and Passes

How many times have you watched a player run towards goal with the ball and, without pressure from an opponent, make the shooting angle narrower and narrower as he gets closer? {I have deliberately omitted 'she' as girls tend not to make this mistake}.

The bad habit is borne out of the desire to clip the ball off the instep and curl it over the bar. It does work at times but, more often than not, such a kick ends up as a wide or a ball dropped into the goalkeeper's hands. Give footballs to players before a coaching session or a match and you'll see plenty of these clipped, curling shots sail over the bar from different angles. So why the difference during the game proper?

Well, add pace and the pressure of time on the ball and the execution of this type of shot changes dramatically. Few players can maintain the necessary balance when in full flight, so very often the result is a horrible slice or a skied shot that drops into the hands of the goalie. Now for a possible solution to the problem; a solution that must be embedded in our youngest players, for trying to get senior footballers to change is like attempting to turn back time. I mentioned earlier that girls tend not to make this mistake. So, what does a female footballer do rather than narrow the angle for shooting? She turns towards goal while still in possession {and breaks a tackle if necessary}, then she PASSES the ball over the bar. Quite literally, she will strike the ball off the laces while on the run; more often than not the 'pass' will become a point.

The message is, then, if you want to increase your players' shooting success, you must make sure your youngest footballers take a leaf out of the female book; and, during the exercise, as a sop to their masculinity, throw in a few tackle bags.

Coaching tip Number 43

No Straight Ball! Try this game with your teams.

Only play it for about 10 minutes at a time and point out beforehand that your intention is to force players on the ball to look left and right for a pass and to encourage those who want the ball to move left and right to receive. The ball must not be passed into the corners of the pitch [dead space] but players may make decoy runs into these areas. So, a player in possession may not play the ball straight up or straight down the pitch. Every pass must be diagonal or lateral: All support runs likewise. Played at its best, this game will lead to the ball ending up in front of goal, with players constantly running to support or to draw opponents away from the action. It may be used with teams as young as your top U10s or as experienced as your seniors.

Coaching tip Number 44

Make Room - Move the Ball!

The 'average' player is identified by a number of traits; not least among these is his/her tendency to 'take too much out of the ball'.

Take a few minutes to watch the better footballers on your team [or on the opposition team]. They will often win the ball, make room and move it on. Such players looked so composed, they exude confidence and yet they are often missed in favour of the mazy solo runner who contributes little to teamplay. This is especially prevalent at underage. Work your players at each level to ensure they can use a variety of ways to make room [e.g. one sidestep, one feint, one swerve, one checked run, one break of a tackle etc.]. Bring the practice into games and reward those players who work hard to learn the skill of making room and then moving the ball on [be it as a pass or as a shot] and say goodbye to the mazy solo artist!

Coaching tip Number 45

Striking A Balance

Take time to watch some footballers as they strike the ball for a point. Those who score more often than miss from different positions are a rarity. What sets them apart from the rest? One of the secrets of success is balance. Each of these players is as balanced after the kick as before. Rugby coaches always emphasise the need for good balance while kicking the ball. It should be the same for us in Gaelic football. Those who take 'frees' from the hand and have a poor scoring rate might want to follow one of the most successful tips from rugby:

" Before striking the ball imagine that after you have taken the kick, you must finish squarely on a gymnast's balance beam. The beam is only four inches across - just wide enough for your boot. This will keep your upper body from swaying or tilting and you will be less inclined to look up too soon. Your kicking contact and accuracy will improve with practice."

As I've written in many other coaching tips - go on, try it!

Coaching tip Number 46

Progress or Regress

For those of you who coach our youngest gael, think carefully before you break for the winter. Calling time at the end of September and resuming again in March, will mean for some, little or no activity for up to five months. Granted, quite a few will fill the gap with other sports and activities, but few will hone their gaelic football or hurling or camogie skills during the close season. If you're lucky enough to have access to a hall or gym or leisure centre, why not devise a weekly programme for players based on developing both sides? There is no better way to work on left and right sides than to use a rebound wall in a hall. Coaches can spend time in a confined area and with smaller numbers, checking technique through the 'Head, Hands, Feet' method and preparing children for the forthcoming outdoor season. The secret is to identify groups of no more than 20 and to ensure that the coach to player ratio is at no more than 1:5. And remember - it's a coaching group, not a crèche!

Coaching tip Number 47

The Two Ts of Possession by Paddy Flynn (St. Pius X College.)

At any one time in a gaelic football match, there is only one member of a team in possession of the ball. That player may have lots to focus on and little time to do so. The onus is on the ball player to maintain good technique - catching, soloing, kick passing, fist passing, shooting etc. Of course, the same player must develop good decision-making, but the best decisions are often the result of sharp thinking by his/her team-mates. Each player 'off' the ball should be thinking and working on things like: - Am I in the best place for a pass? How can I give my teammate an option? Can I create space for others? Am I calling for a 50/50 ball? So, if you intend improving teamplay...push the two Ts at your players....

Technique ON the ball...
Thinking OFF the ball.

Once players get the message and put it into practice, teamwork will be the winner!