

Games and Scrimmages in Training vs. Drills, Exercises and Activities.

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It's interesting because some coaches seem to feel that "drills" are the way to teach while others are strong believers that "the game is the best teacher" so they believe the best way to teach is simply to let the players play. I believe that most players will learn more if there is something in the middle where they do some exercises that build up to a game like situation.

The problem with coaches who just do drills, exercises and activities is that they will end up BORING the players to the point where they don't want to come to training anymore. While repetition is important, if the players don't see how it relates to a game like situation they won't get much from the repetition. An example would be if a coach were to make me strike the ball with my instep against a wall 500 times a day to get better at shooting. The truth is that this doesn't make me better at shooting. What it does do is make me better at striking the ball against the wall unless I can see how that builds into shooting on goal in a game.

On the other hand, if a coach thinks the way for players to become better at shooting is to have them scrimmage all the time and in these scrimmages the players are shooting with poor form, this isn't going to make them better since practice doesn't make perfect it simply makes permanent.

The most effective way to help someone become better at shooting would be to make sure they have proper technique by isolating the technique and working on it with no pressure (possibly by striking the ball repeatedly against a wall using proper form) and then having them do this with a small amount of pressure (a defender slowly coming at them) and then increasing the pressure (a defender coming at them at full speed) and then putting them against a live defense in a small sided scrimmage and then putting them in a position to do this in a full sided game. By doing this type of progression a player can work on proper technique and then slowly build up to where they see how it relates to a regular game like situation.

Many coaches who believe in the theory that the game is the best teacher don't understand how to use games as a way to teach. While players can learn a great deal through games there are ways to use modified games to increase the learning opportunities. For example, if a coach wants to work on taking players on in 1 v 1 situations, he can put in the rule initially that anytime you take a player on 1 v 1 you get a point. If you beat the defender in a 1 v 1 situation you get a second point and if you score a goal you get 5 points (you always want to make sure the players remember the ultimate goal is to score so reward goals accordingly). You could put other restrictions in play such as these 1 v 1 encounters only count in the offensive half of the field (you don't want to encourage players to take on an opponent in your defensive 18). By modifying games to work on specific parts of the game it allows the players to have fun playing while working on the coaches emphasis for the day.

If you have modified games follow some specific exercises that works on the same emphasis and then end with some unrestricted play, I believe you get the best of all worlds.

Whenever a coach uses modified games or exercises and activities the one thing I believe they should always finish with is an unrestricted game. There are a couple of reasons for this. First, the reason most players come to training is to get better AND TO HAVE FUN. Most players usually have the most fun while simply playing soccer so give them the opportunity to play. Another reason is that it gives the players the opportunity to try what they have been working on earlier in the training in a true game like situation. It would be like teaching multiplication but never asking the student to actually doing any multiplication. This just doesn't make sense and it doesn't make sense to not give the players an opportunity to try what they have worked on in a game like situation.