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"Can we play *that* game again?"

Whenever we teach games to children, they want to play the game. Children literally want to play the adult game that the motor-skills they are practicing represent (Hopper, 1994). However, when asked by the students, "Can we play tennis?" the teacher will normally reply, "Not yet, you need to practice some more. At the end of the lesson if you behave." Such a response does not encourage children to practice because they want to play. We suggest that children need to play games early in a lesson, but the games they play need to be modified to suit their physical, mental and social abilities. Unfortunately, modified games at first seem like poor substitutes to the 'real' games seen on television. The modified game is not enough to get students to play. The attitude of students to a modified game has to be one of excitement. Students' excitement grows from an understandings of how to play tactically, grows from an awareness of what makes a game play.

An approach to teaching games, known as Teaching Games for Understanding (TGFU), places the child's understanding of a game as the central concern before refining the skills to play the game. Thorpe, Bunker and Almond (1986) popularized the TGFU approach in the United Kingdom in the eighties. This approach is gaining wider interest in the United States (Rink, French, & Werner, 1991; Werner, 1996) and is being developed in Canada (Hopper, 1998). *TGFU approach enables students to realize from playing modified games "what to do" and a need to know "how to do it" is created as a pre-requisite to leaning a skill.* In this approach, instead of showing pupils how to do a

skill that the teacher knows they need to play adult games like volleyball and soccer; the teacher introduces the pupil to a modified game related to the adult game that focuses on a skill or strategy of play that the student needs to develop. Through a series of guided discovery questions the teacher enables the child to realize strategic (ways of playing), tactical (how to beat an opponent) and technical (biomechanics of skill performance) aspects of playing a game. In essence, in the TGFU approach the teacher teaches the 'why' of playing a game, before the technical 'how' of doing the skills for the adult game. This focus on the child playing the game before the child is taught a skill allows the child to understand what it is they are learning from a need to know. *Or, as Thorpe (1983) warns, "If the technique becomes too dominant and the children think that the teacher values this too highly then the feelings of failure may soon arise among all but the more able"(p. 18).*

Creating a modified game that all children can play and find challenging is difficult but not impossible. Making the progression from modified games to adult games is a complex and long-term commitment. Too often teachers jump (or even leap) from simple tag and ball manipulative games to adult games that overwhelm all but the most able students. An essential characteristic of the TGFU approach is that games develop from within a games classification system. The system enables low-organized, simple focused games to develop into lead-up, modified games that eventually become formal adult games (Wall & Murray, 1994). This paper uses a game classification system that identifies four game forms (Ellis, 1983; Thorpe, Bunker & Almond, 1986). These game forms are, (1) target (e.g., curling, lawn bowls, golf), (2) court or net/wall (e.g., volleyball, tennis, squash), (3) field or striking/fielding (e.g., baseball, cricket) and (4)

territory or invasion (e.g., rugby, football, basketball). For a more comprehensive analysis of how this classification system is developed refer to Hopper (1998). *All the games within each category evolve from the adjustment of the object, equipment, physical space, number players and rules that condition play. In developing towards a formal adult game the TGFU approach advocates that "game forms" should be modified to represent the advanced form and exaggerated to present students with tactical problems (Thorpe & Bunker, 1989). When teaching for tactical awareness "game forms" should be modified, or conditioned, to encourage students to think tactically.*

This article, by way of an example, will show how we, following Hopper's (1998) principles of play for net/wall games, develop modified games for net/wall category using a TGFU perspective. The first principle for a net/wall game is "consistency." It is the initial intent in net/wall games to get the ball in the play area more often than your opponent. This skill can be developed with co-operative games where students work with their partners to keep the ball in play as often as possible. The next principle is "placement and positioning." In this principle students make it more difficult for their opponents to get the ball in play by placing the ball in areas where their opponents will have the most difficulty returning the ball. If the students' opponents are doing the same, then they need to take positions to cover the play area effectively in which their opponents will try to place the ball. The final principle is "spin/power." This principle refers to how students hit the ball to make it more difficult for their opponents to return it. The "spin/power" principle requires refined technical skill to impart appropriate spin and to control the power transferred onto a ball. This principle develops more in advanced

game play. However, the foundation can be developed with modified equipment such as transition balls and short-handled, lightweight racquets.

We explain the following game, and its development as a common progression we have used in a game lesson with students of eight-years or older.

THE LINE GAME

After a suitable warm-up where students have moved vigorously, stretching as they move and manipulated a ball, organize the students into pairs. Ask the students to use two pylons to make a line approximately one and half meters apart. Preferably, the pylons are placed on a line marked on the ground (see Figure 1a). Simple rules to start the game are: "When you throw the ball it must bounce once on your side of the line and between the pylons. Your partner must catch the ball before it bounces again on his or her side of the line." Once the students start playing a cooperative simple throw, bounce, and catch game develops. At this point, it is important to have an array of different size, textured and degree of rebounding balls available so that the students can select a ball that as a pair they can throw and catch consistently. If students cannot keep the ball going, they may need to practice simple throw, bounce and catch tasks individually against the wall and then as they move about a space. In this way we can practice a skill, improve it, then return it to the game.

When the students can play the game, ask them the following tactical spatial-question focused on consistency. "Where should you throw the ball to make it easy for your partner to catch?" A possible answer could be,

"Aim for the middle of the pylons."

"Where should you stand to receive the ball?"

"About a step back"

"Why?"

"Because catching the ball is easier as it drops."

This initial round of questions helps students become more consistent because the children position themselves effectively in relation to the pylons and the bounce of the ball.

As the children start to play consistently, the teacher can develop the second net/wall principle of "placement and positioning." A new rule can be introduced to the game as follows, "In the same game as before, try to send the ball so that your partner has to move. After catching the ball you must send the ball straight away from where you catch it." The game is still co-operative but the following tactical spatial-questions are then possible:

"Where should you send the ball to make your partner move?"

"To the spaces either side of her."

"Good. Now, where should you stand after sending the ball?"

"The middle."

"The middle of what?"

Usually students will give you a puzzled look. Ask one pair to show what they mean. Often the middle means the middle of the two pylons. However, once the student sends the ball to the side of his or her partner who then has to move sideways to receive the ball, a new target area is presented to the player with the ball. Figure 1b shows that this new target area creates a large space to one side of the receiving player. Therefore, as shown in Figure 1c the receiving player needs to move to the middle of the target area

or else the sending player can send the ball to the open space where it may be too difficult to field.

INSERT - Figure 1: Diagrams of positional play of players in the line game

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As students start to move to cover their opponents' target area their ability to move side-ways is challenged. From a basic ready position students realize the need to push off the outside foot with bent knees to move side-ways effectively. The teacher can get the students to practice the skill and refine it outside the 'Line game' then the improved movement can be returned to the game. It is at this point that the children are usually ready to make the Line game competitive. *In our experience this co-operative game can be the focus of an initial lesson with students trying to catch as many as possible in a row whilst making their partners move. In subsequent lessons this co-operative game serves to warm-up students and get them ready for a competitive game.*

In a competitive relationship of 'Line game' the teacher can ask students the following. "Keeping the rules so far established decide how you will score your game and how you will re-start the game when a point has been won. When you play make sure you send the ball immediately after catching it." As the children play, their games remind them to cover their opponents' target area. If the students can keep the ball going in a competitive rally, moving their opponent from side to side, ask the following tactical force-question focused on the principle of play "spin and power."

"What happens when you send the ball hard then soft?"

"I can make my opponent move back and forward plus side to side."

"Good. Where should you stand if you make your opponent move forward?"

Usually children will need to play the Line game to explore the answer to this question. Condition the children's play asking them to drop the ball short and stay back, ask the receiving player to send the ball hard and then soft. The players will notice that when they stand back their opponents can gain an advantage if they drop the ball short because there is a big space in front of the receiver. In addition, a low bouncing ball does not give you much time to cover the space. If their opponent sends the ball hard, it just goes high in the air because they are so close to the line. A high ball gives the receiver lots of time to get set and ready to catch. From this experiment, the students will answer the positioning question saying something like, "When you drop the ball short go close to the pylons because your opponent will likely drop the ball short." *This experimentation will add to students' ability to play the line game and make simple throwing and catching challenging. As noted earlier students will need to work on their movement skills to play this game effectively, learning to automatically push-off with the outside foot. This can be the focus of another lesson as the students move from the co-operative game to the more competitive game.*

This awareness of how to use space in the simple 'Line game' enables students to develop the tactical awareness of playing net/wall games. It develops a conceptual schema for students to understand how to play all net/wall games. As students become more accomplished with playing the throwing and catching game, they can gradually be encouraged to hit the ball with their hands or with a paddle bat. More accomplished players may be introduced to this challenge in the earlier lessons, but generally it takes a

class of eight-year olds three lessons to get to the stage where they can strike a ball in a consistent manner using a hand or a light bat. To introduce the striking skill allow children touches to control the ball before hitting the ball down towards the line. This skill takes practice and should be taken out of the game and practiced against a wall and then with one player catching and throwing whilst the other strikes the ball. As children learn to consistently hit the ball, the ability to spin the ball enables students to realize that spin controls how they regulate the force they apply to the ball to keep it under control. *By about the fourth or fifth lesson many children are able to hit a ball between the cones after one touch control. The line game creates a frame of reference for net/wall games where a net and a defined area of play challenge students learn to strike a ball up in the air over the net and into a court.*

This example of a simple lead-up game is ideal for games like tennis and badminton from the net/wall games' category. However, it can be easily adapted with a wall used to throw against with the two players standing on the same side of the pylons. This set-up becomes an excellent lead up to squash and racquetball from the net/wall games.

For examples of modified games developed with a TGFU approach within each game category read the following articles:

- *Target games refer to the first part of Thorpe & Bunker (1989).*
- *Batting and fielding games refer to Hopper (1998) and Thorpe & Bunker (1989).*
- *Net/Wall games refer to Hopper (1994) and Thorpe, Bunker and Almond (1986)*
- *Territory or invasion games refer to Doolittle and Girard (1991), Spackman (1983), Thorpe & Bunker (1989) and Mitchell & Griffin, (1994).*

In addition, Griffin, Mitchell, & Oslin's (1997) book explains principles for tactical teaching and provides a wealth of practical material for teaching and assessment using a TGFU approach. Each of the 169 lesson plans includes a tactical problem, a lesson focus, objectives, appropriate games, problem-solving questions, and practice tasks.

We have found that developing a modified game and guiding students' mental ability to develop a play attitude to a game, leads to dynamic game playing. The conceptual understanding in a modified game naturally progresses to the demands of more adult like games, helping students to appreciate and experience the complexity of the play in adult games without being overwhelmed by the adult game. Then, as we often experience, you may have students say; "Can we play *that* game again?"

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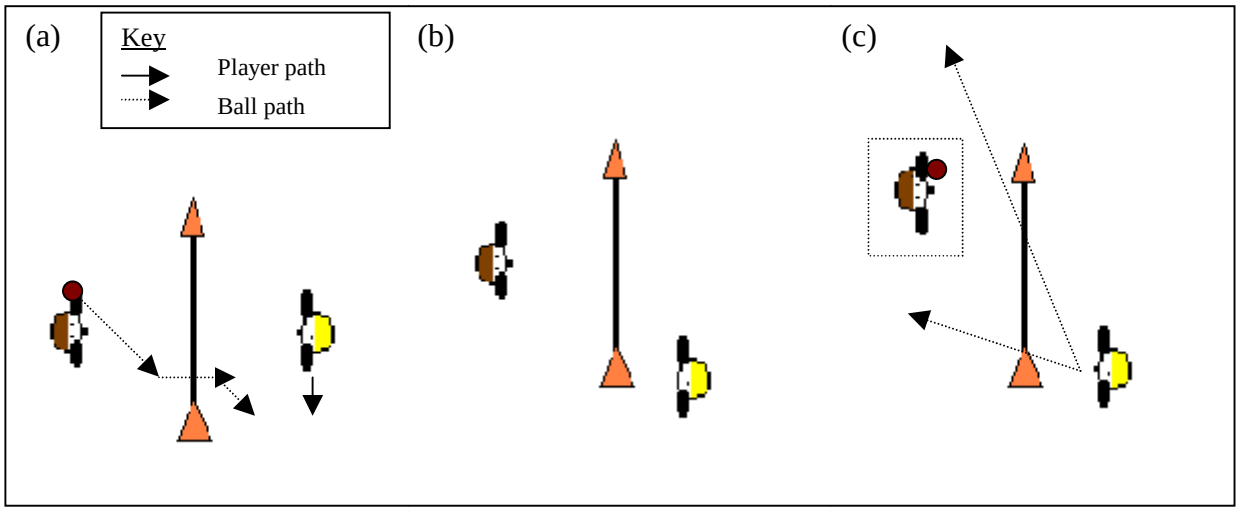

Figure 1: Diagrams of positional play of players in the line game