**Questions & Answers, Long Term Athlete Development.**

Q: Why was the document written? A: To give Club Coaches guidelines on content and coaching practices.

Q: Would teachers be able to use it as a syllabus as well? A: Yes, and they would recognise the structure readily.

Q: In what way? A: P.E. Departments often divide their curriculum into manageable blocks of six weeks.

Q: Why six weeks? A: A disrupted four weeks is too short; eight weeks is too long for covering a lot of ground.

Q: Why start and finish with a game? A: Games are motivational and involve social interplay and co-operation.

Q: Why can’t they just run six laps as usual? A: They can if they wish, if that’s the instruction you give them.

Q: What’s this A, B, C? A: Agility, Balance, Co-ordination; these are recognised as aspects of fitness in national exams.

Q: Are they really just aspects of fitness? A: No, they are what they say they are; and possibly as much skill-based.

Q: I see you have a main theme next; how was it worked out? A: It was based on Community Run, Jump and Throw.

Q: How did you structure it? A: The choice was to repeat a theme two weeks in a row, or distribute it wider.

Q: What is your recommendation? A: That the Run occurs in Weeks 1 & 4, Jumps in 2 & 5, and Throws in 3 & 6.

Q: What other option did you have? A: I’ve spaced it out, but I could have massed it by revising the theme at once.

Q: So that would have meant the Run in Weeks 1 & 2; why not? A: Just for variety, and with the athlete in mind.

Q: When you wrote the original six week blocks, what was your aim? A: To give structure and create progressions.

Q: How do you know the activities are suitable for each stage? A: Instinct, and fifty years’ experience of teaching P.E.

Q: Coaching experience? A: National Coaching since 1970 at Commonwealth, African, European, and World levels.

Q: Why is Conditioning a feature? A: For its own sake: and without fitness, skills cannot be easily learnt or sustained.

Q: So is this mainly a skills-based document? A: Yes, skill-mastery is key; you’ll hear this again and again.

Q: Why not just run for Conditioning? A: Yes, for stamina and speed; but strength and suppleness are needed too.

Q: And anything else? A: Yes, the aforementioned Agility, Balance and Co-ordination.

Q: What’s this Reflection? A: You’ll find the universities put great store by reviewing and analysing each session.

Q: Is this something coaches do? A: Coaches often do this after competition and training to give and take feedback.

Q: What would a coach do with feedback? A: Coaches would modify their next session; so would the youngsters.

Q: What kind of feedback would you expect? A: Athletes will tell you if they enjoyed the session or found it too hard.

Q: Would some find it too easy? A: Yes, if it were a skill-based session, but that misses the point about learning.

Q: You mean there’s more to a session than blood, sweat and tears? A: I’d hope so, but that’s up to the coach.

Q: How were the blocks converted into lesson plans? A: The structure of eight six-week blocks allowed for it.

Q: In what way? A: The blocks themselves were progressive; they exhibited gradual build up.

Q: What’s that? A: Many skills in Athletics are too difficult to learn all at once, so we begin with simple basic skills.

Q: Can you give an example? A: Discus throwing is complex, but not if you begin by slinging a hoop.

Q: How does the progression build? A: With footwork for standing, cross-overs, reverses, clocks and rotations.

Q: Can all the Throws be built like this? A: Yes, with their own specific drills for pushing, pulling, slinging and heaving.

Q: What about the Jumps? A: Likewise, with skills for approaches, take-offs, actions in the air and landings.

Q: And Hurdling? A: Yes, from walking, to jogging, to running, to sprinting over.

Q: What about running itself? Yes, more complex than meets the eye, so it needs to be broken down and built up.

Q: Coaches will ask about distances? A: And pace, which needs to be addressed early; and intensity; and recovery.

Q: Should youngsters under 11 be running distance? Of course, progressively: we just don’t challenge them enough.

Q: What if I thought a lesson plan didn’t offer a long enough run? A: Then increase it – you’re the coach.

Q: Why isn’t there just running in it? There’s more to life than just running; kids may not come back.

Q: isn’t there supposed to be an obesity time bomb among the young? A: Yes, and it must be addressed at once.

Q: What intensity should the under 11s be running at? A: Physiologically, they’re aerobic, so moderate intensity.

Q: These lesson plans are complex; why not just write coaching points? A: Too simplistic and without context.

Q: What do you mean? A: If I’d written only coaching points, you’d wonder how I’d set them up.

Q: You mean I wouldn’t understand where you were or how you’d led into it? A: Exactly; you’d need the structure.

Q: So how did you solve it? A: I wrote a list of equipment needed per lesson and showed the formations.

Q: You mean you indicated pairs, or threes or files or waves? A: Yes, and tried to show exact positioning.

Q: Did you also write structures for collecting after Throws, for example? A: Yes; ideally the non-throwers collect.

Q: What’s this about return activities? A: Yes, research has shown there’s too much standing around; pointless.

Q: So what’s a return activity? A: If having to queue, the youngster performs another activity on the way back.

Q: What difference does that make? A: It increases activity by a factor of about three.

Q: What’s mass activity? A: It’s when as many youngsters as possible are all working at the same time.

Q: An example? A: Long Jump is boring and wasteful one at a time, so send then in from the side five at a time.

Q: What if that’s physically impossible? A: Then send them down in twos for a synchronised jump.

Q: Is High Jump even worse? A: Yes, set up multi-jumps at low heights for scissors; or use at least two areas.

Q: Isn’t Throwing dangerous? A: Not with footballs for Shot, hoops for Discoi, tennis balls for Javelins.

Q: How do you do a massed practice? A: Spread half along a line: they throw, and the back line collects on a signal.

Q: What’s proposed for competition? A: Clubs have league matches, inter-club and championships to compete in.

Q: No, I mean, any intrinsic competition? A: Yes, they learn to compete, so organise it: there’s a twist though.

Q: What’s the twist? A: Coaches can get hung up on statistics and objective performances, so we fix it.

Q: Fix what? A: Some of the intrinsic competition is subjective; points are given for style, for the technical model.

Q: What’s a technical model? A: It’s a way of delivering the skill using sound biomechanics.

Q: Where do we get information on the correct model? A: The IAAF models are included here, and will repay study.

Q: Can children imitate Olympic models? A: They’ll try: modify it for their strength and skill levels.

Q: Are there any other places to see these techniques? A: Yes, have a look on the web.

Q: So how do style points work? A: Some youngsters simply bash away; marks out of ten introduce some reality.

Q: Can you give an example? A: Yes, an athlete is tops with a 1.30m clearance in a V-shape Flop.

Q: That’s not bad for under 13s? A: Right, but it’s a style competition, so he’s last with 2 out of 10; rethink needed.

Q: Are you saying style is more important than result? A: I’m saying you’ve been looking at the wrong ‘result’.

Q: Have you just said performance is less important than style? A: At this stage, absolutely.

Q: So, are you disparaging good performances? A: Not if they’re stylish, but certainly if they’re just brute strength.

Q: So what constitutes a good performance? A: The one nearest the technical model.

Q: How do you judge that? A: Give the model ten points, and take one away for every lapse or flaw.

Q: So if a youngster won a Scottish title with poor style, you wouldn’t be happy? A: No.

Q: So how do you define winning? A: That’s the whole point – we all need to redefine ‘winning’.

Q: What do you mean by redefining winning? A: Every youngster should have simple intermediate goals.

Q: What do you mean? A: They can’t all be champions; can’t all jump 1.30m; can’t all get the model right.

Q: So how should we treat them? A: Better, by praising them more often for what they can do, not what they can’t.

Q: You mean ‘effort goals’? A: That would be a good start, praise for trying, and lots of encouragement.

Q: Back to competition? A: Yes, coaches to set simple goals and talk them through; it could be an aspect of skill.

Q: Such as starting? A: Yes, an athlete might have an indifferent 100m, but might have improved the start. Praise it.

Q: Any other ideas on competition? A: I once organised a postal competition with a distant school.

Q: So you agreed a date, the events and the numbers, and posted the performances? A: Yes, and we lost by 1 point.

Q: Nowadays you’d do it on the web? A: Yes, or on a webcam; saves money for transport.

Q: Any other competitive ideas? A: Yes, we used to aggregate our Jumps and Throws scores to get a result.

Q: You mean add them up? A: Exactly, and give 100 points to the winning team, 90, 80 and 70 to the others.

Q: Then do the same for Relays? A: Yes, for a 12 x 100m relay, all done in ‘class time [or ‘club time’].

Q: Other competition? A: Against scoring tables in Award Schemes; have a look on-line.

Q: What’s your over-riding philosophy? A: Skill-mastery is king; children need to be praised and encouraged.

Q: Anything else? A: Yes, Scottish children are very talented, but we need to tell them – they’re too self-effacing.

Q: How do we find good things to say about our children’s performances? A: Look harder.

Q: And fitness? A: Crucial, lots of running, circuits and flexibility should be encouraged, especially nowadays.

Q: Where is this heading? A: Encouraging the young gives them a good experience of sport, and self-confidence.

Q: What do you expect the outcome to be? A: Long Term Athlete Development; youngsters stay in the sport longer.

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