The Games Approach: Having Fun while Accomplishing Goals

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Summary of Presentation

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education has developed the National Standards for Sport Coaches, in which Domain 5 focuses on teaching and communicating (NASPE, 2006). Specifically, Standard 23 focuses on utilizing appropriate instructional strategies to facilitate athlete development and performance and also encourages the use of a variety of instructional methods that encourages learning through problem-solving activities and games-based learning.

The games approach is based on practice being as closely aligned with competition and requires a skillful analysis of the game by the coach (Thomas, Launder & Nelson, 2001). The games approach allows coaches to more successfully motivate athletes because practices are much more enjoyable and become more athlete-centered rather than coach-centered.

High school cross country athletes (N= 28) participated in a 10-week structured games approach program. The traditional warm-up, drills, workout and cool-down were reviewed to see how closely they aligned with competition. The skills required, tactical component, and incorporation of mental and character development skills into practice were also analyzed.

The traditional workouts were replaced with running games that were based upon the planned objectives. The running games were grouped into the following categories: icebreakers, warm-up and cool-down, tag, relays, games, fartlek, distance, and specific workouts.

The athletes felt the program was effective as they were able to develop physically and mentally while having fun. Improving fitness levels, as well as learning skills and tactics, do not happen automatically. A coach must intentionally plan, teach, and model for these outcomes to occur.
Resources


Author Bio

Dr. Mark Stanbrough teaches at Emporia State University primarily in areas of exercise physiology, sports psychology and coaching. He has coached at the collegiate and high school levels. He has served on the National Council Accreditation of Coaching Education board and currently serves on the NASPE Sport Steering Committee.