### Integrating Cue Reading and Decision-Making into Skill Development

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<tr>
<th>STAGES of PLAYER LEARNING/DEVELOPMENT</th>
<th>CUE READING &amp; DECISION-MAKING PROGRESSIONS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initiation</td>
<td>Should be fairly limited at these early stages, yet nonetheless be incorporated into tasks.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Acquisition</td>
<td>Method 1/Acquisition drills: Focus should be predominantly on self, immediate surroundings, and target. Coaches should insist that athletes focus on aspects such as: awareness of position of own body or body part(s) before executing the skill (not during execution); awareness of own position on the court (all times); location of target or partner; awareness of ball position; assessment of ball velocity and trajectory. Decision-making will primarily involve aspects such as: remaining on the spot vs moving right, left, front or back to perform the skill; direction in which the ball should be hit; level of force and speed to be applied when contacting the ball.</td>
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#### Initiation

- The first contact the athlete has with a particular skill. The athlete may have no idea of what to do to perform the skill.

#### Acquisition

- The early stage of learning where the athlete becomes capable of (1) coordinating key components of movements and (2) executing them in the correct order, thus performing a rough form of the skill. The movements are not well synchronized or under control yet, and they lack rhythm and flow. The execution is inconsistent and lacks precision. The athlete has to think about what he or she is doing while performing the skill. Both form and performance tend to deteriorate markedly when the athlete tries to execute movements too quickly or is under pressure, as may be the case in a competitive situation.

### At this stage, athletes need to…

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<td>Have a clear mental image of what correct execution looks like (good demonstrations). Understand the fundamental positions, stances, and patterns involved in the action. Feel safe when performing the skill. Reach a comfort level with some movements or feelings that may be unfamiliar and that are part of the skill to be learned.</td>
<td>Understand clearly what they have to do, why it fits into the ‘game concept’, and have a good mental picture of the task about to be performed. Perform a lot of repetitions of the whole skill at their own pace and under conditions that are relatively stable, easy, and safe. Practise on both sides, if appropriate. Learn how to shift their attention quickly and cyclically from the ball to their surroundings. Find some solutions by themselves through trial and error, based on some feedback from the coach.</td>
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### When Playing the Game (Simulated Play during practice, or competition)…

- See recommendations on the following pages.
Guidelines: Using Simulated Play with players who are *New to the Game*

**Purposes**

- give players an opportunity to enjoy the game,
- learn about the game itself
- increase understanding of the game
- learn the rules

**Suggested formats**

Alternate acquisition drills/activities with Simulated Play.

Modify the game or set restrictions to increase the use of the skills being learned (e.g. 2 vs 2, short court, passing and setting only, game to 7).

Use skills that are associated in the cycle of actions (e.g., serving and passing; passing and setting; setting and attacking; etc.).

Exploit teaching moments to introduce key concepts about rules, cycle of actions (becoming familiar with the phases of play and what must be done in each), how to use the skill during play, etc.
Guidelines: Using Simulated Play with athletes who are in the Acquisition stage for some (or all...) skills - but have some playing experience

**Purposes**

- give players an opportunity to enjoy the game
- further the understanding of the game and the rules
- nurture a competitive attitude
- add new challenges for players
- assess players ability
- prepare players for competition

**Suggested formats**

Alternate acquisition drills/activities with Simulated Play. Increase number of skills that are associated in the cycle of actions.

Modify the game or set restrictions to increase the use of the skills being learned (e.g. 4 vs 4, hitting line only, game to 11).

Use all skills i.e. those being learned and those athletes are already familiar with. Reward players for correctly executing the skill during Simulated Play.

Continue exploiting teaching moments to introduce or reinforce understanding of rules, cycle of actions (phases of play and what must be done in each), how to use the skill during play, etc.
Guidelines: Using Simulated Play with athletes who are in the Acquisition stage for some skills - but have a fair amount of playing experience

Purposes

- give players an opportunity to enjoy the game
- nurture the competitive attitude
- provide challenges for players
- assess players’ ability
- prepare players for competition

Suggested formats

Alternate acquisition drills/activities with Simulated Play. Use all skills that are associated in the cycle of actions when possible.

Modify the game or set restrictions to increase the use of the skills being learned (e.g. 6 vs 6, tooling the block gives 2 points, game to 25).

Use all skills i.e. those being learned and those athletes are already familiar with. Reward players for correctly executing the skill during Simulated Play.

Continue exploiting teaching moments to introduce or reinforce understanding of tactical concepts, both individual and team, and how such concepts fit within each phase of play of the offensive and defensive cycles of actions.
## Integrating Cue Reading and Decision-Making into Skill Development

### STAGE of PLAYER LEARNING/DEVELOPMENT: CONSOLIDATION

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<td>The athlete can execute the movements or the skill with correct form. Movement control, synchronization, and rhythm are good when performing the skill under easy and stable conditions. The movements can be repeated consistently and with precision under these conditions. Some elements of performance can be maintained when the athlete is under pressure, conditions change, or demands increase, but performance remains inconsistent. The athlete begins to develop a more personal style.</td>
<td>Athletes must continue to focus on self, immediate surroundings, and target. However, in Steps 2 and 3, the goal is to expand and build the player’s decision making capacity, so that he/she can produce a response that is both correct and well executed when presented with specific cues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Method 2/Early Consolidation Drills - The skill/action is used under “directed play conditions”; the coach provides specific cues that the player(s) must read correctly, then make the right decisions, and then execute the related skill(s). The coach must first explains the pattern of the drill, how it “connects” with a game situation, what the cues are, how to read/interpret them, and what a “good decision” would be under the circumstances. Initially, the coach selects 2 cues. He or she then creates situations whereby the player(s) is/are presented with one of these cues; the player(s) must read the cue correctly and produce the proper response, i.e. make a good decision + execute the skill correctly. Initially, the options are therefore limited (cue A or cue B; and decision A or Decision B). <strong>Important:</strong> It is preferable to give the same player(s) multiple repetitions before switching roles, as this allows them to assimilate more efficiently the « problem-solving process » of the drill. When the athlete(s) is/are comfortable (rate of success is about 70 % or 2 out of 3), the exercise may be « loaded » (see table for loading options) and/or more options may be introduced (i.e., Cue C, Cue D, etc.).</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Method 3/Late Consolidation Drills - Athletes must now read cues, make decisions, and execute the skills against a “live opposition” BUT they benefit from a slight “time or space advantage” at the beginning of the drill. This increases the probability that the player(s) will be successful, but forces them to read cues and make decisions quickly, and with some element of pressure being present. Some key decisions players must make include: (1) selection of adequate action(s) to perform given the play situation; (2) choosing optimal timing for execution; (3) determining optimal trajectory and direction to impart the ball; (4) choosing optimal position on the court relative to teammates, opponents, and the net.</td>
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### At this stage, athletes need to…

**Be exposed to a variety of situations, and perform a lot of repetitions under varied conditions.** Have clear objectives for both form (correct execution) and the result of actions. Be challenged by more complex and demanding tasks or conditions, and find more solutions through trial and error, based on less frequent feedback from the coach. Practise the movements or the skill in conditions where fatigue prevails or that replicate competitive demands, and deal with the consequences of errors.

### When Playing the Game (Simulated Play during practice, or competition)…

See recommendations on the following page.
Guidelines: Using Simulated Play with athletes who are in the Early Consolidation stage for some skills - and have playing experience

Purposes

- give players an opportunity to enjoy the game
- further the understanding of the game and the rules
- nurture a competitive attitude
- add new challenges for players
- assess players ability
- prepare players for competition

Suggested formats

Vary Method 2 drills/activities (and other methods as necessary) with Simulated Play. Use all skills that are associated in the cycle of actions when possible.

Modify the game or set restrictions to increase the use of the skills being learned (e.g. 6 vs 6, digging the ball to the centre of the court gives one additional point, game to 25).

Use all skills i.e. those being learned and those athletes are already familiar with. Reward players for correctly executing the skill during simulated play.

Continue exploiting teaching moments to introduce or reinforce understanding of tactical concepts, both individual and team, and how such concepts fit within each phase of play of the offensive and defensive cycles of actions.
Integrating Cue Reading and Decision-Making into Skill Development

<table>
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<tr>
<th>STAGE of PLAYER LEARNING/DEVELOPMENT: FINAL STAGE of CONSOLIDATION &amp; REFINEMENT</th>
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<tr>
<td>What it is, and what to expect as a coach…</td>
<td>Method 4/Refinement Drills - At this stage, the players must become capable of reading cues, making decisions, and performing the skills correctly (1) under variable conditions that replicate typical game conditions and intensity, or (2) when they are exposed to the most challenging competitive situations that can be faced at their level of play.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The athlete can execute the movements in a way that is very close to the ideal in terms of form and speed. The performance is very consistent and precision is high, even under very demanding conditions and in situations that are both complex and varied. Only minor fine-tuning may be necessary to achieve optimal execution, and a fairly personal style is established. All components of the movement have been automated, which enables the athlete to focus on the environment while performing and to make rapid adjustments as necessary. The athlete can reflect critically on his or her performance to make corrections.</td>
<td>To provide an adequate challenges, the coach must create complex and demanding situations whereby the athletes are required to:</td>
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<tr>
<td>At this stage, athletes need to…</td>
<td>• Perform correctly in game-like conditions. • Read cues, make correct decisions, and use the skills in simulated game conditions, but in disadvantaged situations (e.g. late start relative to opposition; outnumbered situation; etc.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflect critically on their own performance after the action. Learn how to adapt and solve the problems they encounter on their own.</td>
<td>When Playing the Game (Simulated Play during practice, or competition)…</td>
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Guidelines: Using Simulated Play with athletes who are in the Late Consolidation stage for some skills - and have playing experience

**Purposes**

- give players an opportunity to enjoy the game
- further the understanding of the game and the rules
- nurture a competitive attitude
- add new challenges for players
- assess players ability
- prepare players for competition

**Suggested formats**

Vary Method 3 drills/activities (and other methods as necessary) with Simulated Play. Use all skills that are associated in the cycle of actions when possible.

Modify the game or set restrictions to increase the use of the skills being learned (e.g. 6 vs 6, slowing down the ball on a block gives one additional point, game to 25).

Use all skills i.e. those being learned and those athletes are already familiar with. Reward players for correctly executing the skill during simulated play.

Introduce new tactical concepts, both individual and team, involving the skill; continue exploiting teaching moments to reinforce understanding of how the various tactical concepts the athlete has been exposed to fit within each phase of play of the offensive and defensive cycles of actions.
Using Simulated Play with athletes who are in the Refinement stage for some skills - and have playing experience

**Purposes**

- give players an opportunity to enjoy the game
- further the understanding of the game and the rules
- nurture a competitive attitude
- add new challenges for players
- assess players ability
- prepare players for competition

**Suggested formats**

With this type of athletes, most of the activities used during practice will likely involve Method 3 drills and Simulated Play. All skills that are associated in the cycle of actions must be used when possible.

Modify the game or set restrictions to work on specific individual or team tactics, and practice the implementation of game plans.

Use Simulated Play to replicate specific game situations in which athletes have to make appropriate tactical choices under some pressure (e.g., team down by 3, the serve has to be in, and difficult enough to pull the opponent’s setter off the net).