

THE PERFECT TECHNIQUE?

Peter Bristotte - August 29, 2020

There are several methods for teaching sports out there. For every sport, it is easy to find different methodologies, what to teach first, how to teach the sport specific skills, different points of performance to point out for each fundamental, key points, etc. There is the book of the “3000 drills for sport XYZ”, the “Bible of Named Sport”, the website with all the tips, details and secrets to succeed at coaching this and that sport. There is a number of coaching conferences and courses and certifications out there. There are so many options these days, that the coach, especially the new ones, might get overwhelmed. “What should I do?”, “what should I pick?”, “what should I follow?”, “how should I coach my kids?”

If answering those questions were easy, anyone with a little passion could become a great coach. Well, the fact is that it isn't, and it will never be. And why not? Because while humans are playing sports there won't be the right or the perfect answer.

Let's look at one of the most basic human motor skills, walking. Every human with no disruption in what is needed to walk, will learn how to walk soon in life and unless some unfortunate event happens, will hone that skill for the rest of their lives. Now, if we get a group of kids and simply videotape their feet while they walk we will see two major things:

1. What is common to all of them: everyone will place one foot in front of the other on the ground consecutively while dislocating in a controlled way their center of gravity.
2. What is different: The length of the step, which part of the foot touches the ground first, the way the weight of the body is transferred from one leg to the other, lateral balance, and several other nuances.

Now my question is: which technique is the best to walk? Which ones are correct and which ones are wrong? Aren't they all succeeding at walking after all? We could apply this to any other elementary motor task, and probably the best way to see this is: as long as the common and basic needs, meaning what is fundamental in terms of mechanics to perform such task, are met, and the task is performed with success, the nuances are only to differentiate one's style or at most will influence only a percentage of the final outcome.

The same happens in sports. When teaching sport specific skills, techniques, fundamentals (whatever is the term you choose), we should focus on the basic mechanics, what are the key points to enable one to perform. Not saying to excel, but to be able to execute such movement. Back to our example, walking, as long as one is placing one foot in front of the other while moving their center of gravity forward in a controlled way, everything else is detailed. Everything else, as long as it doesn't influence negatively the foot placement and the motion of the center of gravity, is not major.

Now one might ask how do determine what is paramount and what is not. Unfortunately you will not find the answer to this anywhere, because there isn't. And the reason for that resides in the fact that the subjects are not the same. You will be coaching human beings with:

- a. Different body types
- b. Different levels of cognition development
- c. Different levels of gross and refined motor coordination
- d. Different body composition
- e. Different reaction times
- f. Different understanding of the game
- g. Different previous exposition to a variety of similar scenarios, aka different background
- h. Different psychological grounds
- i. Different emotional grounds
- j. Different affective grounds
- k. Different social backgrounds
- l. Different families
- m. Different life stories
- n. Different everything

It would be naive, so to speak, to expect to find or to develop one single methodology or one single way to perform this or that movement that would be considered “the best one”. What can be done then? Well, when considering all these facts, it becomes easier to understand why every coach should also be a teacher meaning every coach should understand basic concepts of teaching to be able to do their jobs well.

We coaches should be constantly learning different methodologies and different techniques, at the same time to determine what are the roots of each skill, because each of our athletes will learn in a different way, each one of them will execute the skills differently, and at the end of the day, as long as the mechanics doesn't affect their health and development or the final outcome of said movement, what we are really looking for is whether or the expected outcome is achieved.

There is no single way. There is no perfect technique. There is no perfect method. There is no perfect progression. There are no such things. Remember, we are humans and humans are not all the same. We are not perfect and nothing we do is perfect.