CO138| Decision-making practices during coaching sessions in grassroots youth soccer: A mixed- methods investigation

Presenting Author: André Roca
1 Research Centre for Applied Performance Sciences, Faculty of Sport, Allied Health and Performance Science, St Mary's University, Twickenham, London, UK

Other Authors: Sebastian Suarez 1, Chris Pocock 2, Paul R. Ford 1
2. Institute of Sport, Nursing and Allied Health, University of Chichester, UK

Introduction

Decision making ability in players during match-play is mostly acquired through practice activities with the same underlying structure as competition (e.g., [1]). However, researchers have not fully investigated how coaches design practice sessions at the participation level of the sport (i.e., "grassroots") or of why they used a particular activity at a specific time point. The aim of this study was to investigate the practice activities used by youth soccer coaches working at participation level in the UK and gain insight into their intentions.

Methods

Altogether, 12 male soccer coaches participated working with players aged 9-11 years within 10 clubs at the participation level of soccer in London, UK. A total of 35 practice sessions were observed in situ. Sessions were analysed for the proportion of time spent in activities containing 'non-active decision- making' (e.g., unopposed technical skills practices, fitness training) and 'active decision-making' (e.g., small-sided games, skills practice with opposition). An interview with the coaches about the session purpose took place after each systematic observation.

Results

Coaches had players spend similar amounts of time in activities with active decision-making (M = 41%) and non-active decision-making (M = 42%) with the remainder spent transitioning between activities (M = 17%). There was more non-active decision-making activity during the first half of the session (M = 64%) when compared to active decision-making activity (M = 16%). However, there was more active decision-making activity in the second half (M = 66%) when compared to non-active (M = 20%). Therefore, the session progressed in a traditional manner from predominately non-active decision-making activity early on to mostly active decision-making activity later. Interviews revealed that the coaches believe players require frequent isolated (unopposed) 'non-active decision-making' practices to acquire technique initially in the session and during the season.

Conclusion

Our findings show that coaches had players spend nearly half of session time in non-active decision-making activities that are deemed less relevant to improving soccer match performance. Findings highlight a potential gap between science and practice in the coaching of young participation level soccer players.

References
[1] Roca A, Ford PR (2020). Sci Med Footb. 4, 263-268.

E-mail address: andre.roca@stmarys.ac.uk