

Another Battle Lost

My loss, my fault and my responsibility. I met with representatives of some Little Athletics Clubs and Athletics Clubs recently to hold a workshop on the Pathway to the Throws. After I had finished the theory / practical session the final questions and observations led me to believe that nothing will change, and the spectre of competition-specific activities will prevail.

My thoughts for the workshop were to grow the individual throwing events of Shot, Discus, Javelin and Hammer along a continuum from General (G) to Related (R) to Specific (S). I suggested that in the early parts of the journey a throwing movement vocabulary should be created with a major emphasis on 'general' activities (the fundamentals of Squat, Lunge, Pull, Push, Brace, Rotate, Hinge and Land experienced in every direction, plane, speed, amplitude, complexity; against a variety of resistance).

While the 'general' elements were being experienced so some 'related' and some 'specific' movement patterns and activities would also appear. As the journey unfolds the 'related' and 'specific' activities play a greater role. I gave lots of practical examples of how the GRS elements can be manipulated on a daily, weekly, monthly, yearly basis. It was also explained that each athlete would develop their own unique adaptation journey where they would probably need their own unique GRS pattern. While one athlete might explore more 'related' activities for a while another might be better served by continuing with more 'general' work. The decisions will always be based on how the athlete responds to the puzzles they are faced with. The coach just needs to manipulate the emphasis between GRS elements. I also mentioned that using the GRS process adds a deal of variety and variability to the session experiences which is an important aspect of learning.

Once I had given appropriate illustrations of the 'general' journey I then illustrated the 'related' journey where the coaches experienced a variety of throwing activities / puzzles mixed from the following toolboxes e.g.

Two handed, two footed One handed, two footed Two handed, one footed One handed, one footed
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Forwards Backwards Sideways Diagonal Forwards Diagonal Backwards Diagonal Sideways

Push two Handed Push one handed Sling two handed Sling one handed Overhead two handed Overhead one handed
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The implements used included, sand-sacks, sticks, bean-bags, medicine balls, tennis balls, golf balls, soccer balls.

Everything was aimed at trying to satisfy the foundation elements of throwing e.g.

1. Strong, slow forces work first, fast forces last (check out how the Legs, Trunk and Shoulder all act before the throwing Arm and Hand gets involved)
2. In many cases, there is a transfer of weight from rear to the front foot.
3. The forces start at contact with the ground and travel through body segments to the final release from the hand.
4. The Hips lead the Trunk leads the Shoulder leads the Arm leads the Hand in the direction of the throw (often creating a 'torque' between Hips and Shoulder).
5. In many cases one side (non-throwing side) is 'braced', braked, or stopped so the throwing side accelerates ahead which creates a stable pillar for the throwing action to work against.
6. Note that these comments are for able-bodied athletes so 'thinking / creative hats' on for the less able athlete.

The intention was to do a follow-up session that dealt with the 'related' and 'specific' journeys. I was hoping to show how one should 'earn the right' to progress to the competition-specific aspects of the events and not jump ahead too fast by ignoring a progressive journey.

While all this (in my mind) seemed to be enjoyed and understood I was inundated at the end with questions on how the athlete can progress faster so that local, regional and national championships could be won. How run-ups could be better put together for Javelin; how turns could be taught in Shot, Discus and Hammer. While some of these 'specific' elements are an accepted part of the journey I was floored by the intense focus on these performance matters. It all seemed to be quick-fix and fast-track towards competition and ranking results.

Obviously, I need to change the way I try to win the argument for a more patient, appropriate, progressive journey. I also need to find a way of overcoming some of the more unfortunate things learned from the sports-specific certification courses that these people have already attended and the perpetuation of these ideas within the Club coaching environment. Back to the drawing board.

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Kelvin B Giles MA, CertEd, AS
kbgiles@gmail.com