

Drills – some general observations

They are certainly good tools to use for learning, but they must be there for a purpose. Far too many sessions are made up of drills because it is what most people do. Many have become a part of the language and vocabulary of coaching yet often do not make a difference to the actual competition-specific action and posture required.

Drills should only be chosen for their 'transferability' to the required movement pattern. They can be used as an action-posture reminder for the athlete along the coaching journey.

I see lots of athletes looking efficient at drills but who still have the ongoing technical error when they compete.

They are useless if the athlete gets good at the drill but can't then apply the action into the total movement pattern at the required speed, under appropriate pressure.

I always try to use the total movement pattern within which to try to make technical changes. E.g. *"run fast, and try to do this while you are at high speed"*. Sometimes this works and the process of integration is pretty immediate.

There are also times where the concept you are trying to get across does not readily get understood so a drill can be used to illustrate what you mean in a more benign environment. The key will be to take this understood and learned action or posture or 'feeling' and apply it to the required competition-specific movement pattern.

The drill is only learned when it can be applied. The important thing is to keep on applying the learned drill action into the competition-specific environment. When the technical change is permanent under speed, fatigue and pressure then it is time to move on and just use the drill as a 'reminder'.

Here we are talking about the 'whole - part - whole' learning structure.

Maybe the mini-hurdle 'wickets' or use of a skipping rope are good examples. Using these small hurdles or getting the athlete to run fast while rotating a skipping rope is done for a purpose – to get the athlete to experience 'Toes-up; active foot landing from above' alongside 'Heel to hamstring recovery after contact'. These two drills force the athlete to do the two actions. The question is how much transfer do they have to the sprinting action at high speed? Do they know why they are doing it? If they are aware of the destination of the drill – the WHY? - then I believe the drill works a lot better.

Some of the best coaching operations I have seen shows different athletes doing different drills – WHY? – because each athlete is chasing different components for change in their technical model.

Use drills as part of the pathway towards "don't just practise until you get it right; practise until you never get it wrong."

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