



After an extensive tendering process FA Learning appointed Alite Ltd as our educational consultants. The founder of Alite, Alistair Smith, has been able to devise a Learning philosophy and subsequent Generic Tutor Training programme to meet the needs of all tutors and students on FA courses.

Alistair is held in high regard by Educational authorities and institutions in the UK. He has provided presentations for the FA's UEFA Pro Licence course as well as the FA's Football Development Conference. Alistair will be providing FA Learning News with new learning hints and tips every month.

GO ON MY SON –SOLVE IT!

Last month I suggested that football is all about posing problems for your opposition and solving the problems they pose you, and that the ability to do this at high speed, for long periods of time and with a high level of technical ability is at the core of outstanding performance in football.

Coaches can be 'error focused' or 'solution focused' in their approach. Spotting errors and putting them right is one part of the coaching role, but surely it is better for the players themselves to own the solutions? Posing and solving problems should be at the heart of the modern coaching mentality.

The Harvard Psychology Professor Robert Sternberg suggests that 90% of problem solving is about seeing the problem from alternative points of view, with about 10% deriving from logic. By asking questions of players - now what will he do, what is he thinking, how can you trap him into the wrong response, how can you force him to make a decision – the coach requires the player to see it from the opponents point of view. This helps. Get your players to problem solve by changing the variables, for example in small sided games.

Numbers

Change the numbers and you change the problems. 5v3, 5v2, 3v2,3v1 all pose different sorts of problems for the players.

Touches

Vary the number of touches allowed: by team, by individual, by area of the pitch, by phase of play.

Outcomes

Different outcomes: changed goal areas; different rules for scoring according to the relative strengths of the two teams; different positioning of goals

Load

Some players have a bigger load than others: the talented centre forward must shoot on his second touch; the full back has to cross into the second third on receipt of a pass; the goalkeeper must throw each time he starts play

Time

Change tempo by changing time constraints: problem solving at speed is what you want so limit the time allowed in areas of the pitch; encourage switched play within a certain number of touches

Spaces

Players and teams are encouraged to use space better: change the dimensions and the shapes of areas in which skills practices take place

Areas

Some areas of the full size pitch carry more attacking threat than others: incentivise play which finds those areas; provide channels in which play must/must not occur

Roles

Allocate roles which have constraints built in and then change the constraints: a 'floater' can play for either team; a defender scores by 'touching' his man when they have possession but 'own goals' if he's touched when he has possession

Rules

Change the rules so that a different sort of thinking is immediately required. Let them know in advance so that they fully understand the rule change: suddenly it's two touch for a minute but with three points for a goal; only designated defenders can score; points for balls played into the channels

Mix and match from the above list. Young players will take your coaching sessions and re-create them with their mates after school in the park. By giving them the variables they can adapt and improve on their own. Treat your sessions as problem solving opportunities rather than drills or practices. On a muddy field on a Sunday morning, this means careful briefing before you start and de-briefing afterwards, always drawing out the problem solving in what they are doing. Remember, don't give your players ready made solutions! They need to come up with the answers - not you! Your creativity comes through designing practices which promote their solutions.