Game Sense (ASC, ACC, 1997)

Game Sense is a term that refers to coaching based upon learning in and through modified games designed to suit desired learning outcomes and the abilities of the learners, that emphasizes questioning. (Light, 2004).

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**Game centered focus** - game comes first

**Modification and/or exaggeration**

**Emphasis on player decisions and individual readiness**

**Teacher/Coach as facilitator and creator of problem situations**

**Tactical questions:**
- Time (when will you...?)
- Space (where is...?)
- Risk (which option...?)

*Adapted from Mitchell, S. (2005). Different paths up the same mountain: Global perspectives on tgfu (Keynote)*

As part of the mandate of the TGfU SIG to promote the teaching and coaching of games, we have created these pages that are open to SIG members to edit and develop. This page will offer a window into the essence of each approach as we educate the world in relation to what makes these game based learning approaches so important to enable all players to learn to play worthwhile and engaging games.
During the mid nineteen nineties Rod Thorpe worked with the Australian Sports Commission (ASC) and a range of experienced local coaches to develop a version of TGfU focused on sport coaching. The name Game Sense was used to distance it from schools and teaching. It drew on existing practices of coaching in Australia that employed games as part of coaching but it provided a more systematic approach introducing questioning as the core feature of its pedagogy. Game Sense is less structured than TGfU and is a term that refers to coaching based upon learning in and through modified games designed to suit desired learning outcomes and the abilities of the learners, that emphasizes questioning. Thorpe gave structure to the existing use of game based training by many coaches but his most significant contribution was the emphasis he placed on questioning (Light, 2004). Asking questions instead of telling players what they should do moved the focus of coaching from the coach to the players. In 1997 the ASC published a valuable set of resources that comprised a booklet (den Duyn, 1997), a video and a set of activity cards that drew on coaching practice in Australia showing a range of modified games for each of the four game categories. This package as a very useful resource for developing a Game Sense approach and it is still available on the ASC website.

Game Sense is used at all levels of coaching in Australia and New Zealand, the UK and in some other countries. For example, it informs the coaching used for the New Zealand national rugby team, the All Blacks, and the New Zealand rugby junior development program. It has had a strong influence upon coaching in Australia in terms of the increased use of modified games and informs coaching across a wide range of sports. However, while the use of practice games is universal, the athlete-centred pedagogy has had less influence on coaching. The ASC and local coaches wanted to avoid association with school-based physical education and being too prescriptive for coaches to encourage existing good practice while providing some structure for the development of Game Sense coaching and ‘thinking players’. There is therefore, no model as proposed by Bunker and Thorpe (1982) for TGfU. Games Sense is thus less prescriptive than TGfU and more open to different interpretations.

Not long after its introduction Game Sense was promoted by state and national sporting bodies such as in touch football (rugby) and soccer through professional development and accreditation courses but also had a significant influence in physical education teaching (Webb, Pearson & McKeen, 2006). When taken up in schools the differences between it and TGfU are often difficult to see, leading some researchers to suggest that there is no difference (see for example, Kidman, 2001). The two terms are often used to refer to the same approach to physical education teaching in Australia but there are significant differences and particularly in relation to the differences between sport coaching and teaching in school physical education.

Despite Game Sense being very similar to TGfU there are some differences. Its focus on sport coaching, the involvement of the ASC and Australian coaches in its development and its focus on coaches instead of teachers, lead to it being a less defined and structured approach.
than contemporary TGfU. This provides room for coaches to adopt it, to different degrees, according to their beliefs and established practice. Even when applied in physical education classes it is looser and leans toward sport coaching more than TGfU. This can, however, lead to a misunderstanding of Game Sense as being just playing modified games and neglecting its pedagogy. This is commonly an oversight made by governing sports bodies that just provide a series of training games under the heading, Game Sense. The fundamental features of Game Sense are that, 1) most learning is shaped and contextualized within game or game-like activities that involve competition and decision-making and that, 2) the coach/teacher uses questions to ask players about technique, tactics and strategy to stimulate thinking and players’ intellectual engagement.

References


