

Coaching teenage players

Being a coach to teenage hurlers and footballers can be a difficult job. At this age, players are developing physically, psychologically, socially and emotionally. Where this stage of development begins and ends is hard to define exactly, as each player will develop at a different rate.

Coaching teenagers places unique demands on the coach. Depending on the player, the coach may need to adjust their activities to cater for changes in coordination, balance and growth. The coach may be required to offer words of encouragement to players who become frustrated with some of the difficulties of growth and how this affects their ability to play. The motivation to play differs slightly from that of children.

Teenagers get involved in Gaelic Games because of:

- Enjoyment - Gaelic Games are fast and fun games, often high scoring
- Skill - Gaelic Games are considered very skilful games amongst teenagers
- Social Recognition - Teenagers, perhaps for the first time, recognise that playing Gaelic Games can provide a higher social standing. As well as being skillful, Gaelic Games are seen as being physically demanding and tough games, where courage and determination are important. Showing proficiency at such games can lead to a player developing high self esteem, and be recognised amongst other teenagers
- Possibility of Success - Many teenagers continue to participate as they have aspirations to play at higher levels - whether that be at adult Club level or Inter County level.
- Coach - The coach can be the most important factor in whether a player continues to play at this stage. Situations arise where the coach's goals and the player's needs can lead to players becoming disillusioned and dropping out.
- Participation - Low involvement through poorly designed training sessions, or through a lack of games are some of the most serious causes of drop out. Being pigeon holed into one position, especially one seen as a less glamorous one, can be an issue here.
- Training and Games - Games can be fun, but if training is dull or set at too high a level, players can lose interest quickly.

Special challenges to Coaches of Teenagers

Adolescence is a time when players:

- Have conflicting commitments - Teenagers like to be involved in a number of different sports, or with a number of different teams (within the Club, school and/or County set up). Many also take part-time jobs to provide some income
- Seek Independence - Teenagers often want to display a higher level of independence by not having to rely on their parents
- Pressures from School - The later years of second level schooling places additional pressures on teenagers.

Some practical consideration that a coach can make for teenagers to assist them at this time include:

- Use school facilities for training purposes – reduce the need for students to travel to participate in Gaelic Games. Developing a good Club/school link can help in this case, especially where training and competition schedules overlap
- Provide flexible schedules to accommodate the demands of study, and/or work
- Carefully follow the progress of each player, offering encouragement and advice where necessary
- Provide quality training equipment and facilities

The Transition to adult Gaelic Games

Teenagers are in a phase in their lives where there is a distinct change from the fun filled environment of childhood play, to a more structured type of organised training and competition seen at adult level. Coaches should always maintain the enjoyment factor in sport, and many teenagers will attempt to keep this through trying something different, some tricks or touches that they have developed through individual practice.

Some of the problems associated with the progression to adult Gaelic Games include:

- Adult training regimes imposed on less developed teenage bodies and minds
- Player skill levels may not match the demands of performance in adult situations
- The player may not be sufficiently developed cognitively to understand and implement the coach's instructions - especially when dealing with Team Play issues
- Coaches may question the player's commitment and discipline as they struggle to come to terms with the more demanding nature of teenage play over childhood play.

Coaches may find that they become disillusioned if they do not adequately take notice of the above issues. Coaches must be prepared to change their expectations in response to accelerated growth and emotional development

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