

Game Training (GT) Summary

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2020 Season for u12A and u13s



Under 12s – u13s are transitioning ages moving from the “Skills Acquisition Phase (SAP)” and into the “Game Training (GT)” phase.

Purpose of SAP	Purpose of GT
<p>To teach skills with the focus on individual technical development i.e. core skills of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First touch • 1 v 1 • Running with the ball • Striking the ball 	<p>Developing tactical awareness and insight i.e. learning how to apply the core skills in a functional way:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observe (the game - not just ball watching) • Decide (what is my best action) • Action (flawless execution of the core skill)

In these transitional years the development of tactical insight doesn't suddenly begin in the GT phase – tactical development was nurtured during SAP, just in smaller, simpler situations.

Likewise, the development of the 4 core football skills does not cease the moment 11 v 11 football commences.

Moving to a full-size field, having more players / positions / roles and tactics is a huge step up from 9 v 9 soccer, particularly for u12s (many other states and countries keep u12s at 9 v 9 for more age appropriate development). So, in these years I'd encourage coaches to consider that the team is made up of individuals who will be individually learning the positions and basic tasks of 11v11 rather than overnight expecting that your team will function as a cohesive high performance 11v11 squad.

What are players like at GT ages (u12/13 – u17)

The most important aspect of this age bracket is the fact that these players are in (or entering into) the puberty phase which is a phase of radical mental and physical changes. Physically they may sometimes suddenly look like adults but mentally they often are still children, something that may be unsettling for players and confusing coaches. Another aspect for coaches to consider is that in general, girls enter the puberty phase slightly earlier than boys.

The main mental characteristics of the puberty phase are:

- Sudden mood changes
- Resistance against authority
- Impulsiveness (first acting then thinking)
- Accelerated intellectual development
- Identity search which leads to a desire to be part of a group

The main physical characteristic of the puberty phase is a sudden acceleration in growth. One of the consequences of this growth spurt may be a temporary decrease of coordination and strength. Because suddenly the bones start growing fast and the muscles and ligaments as well as the nervous system need time to adjust to the new proportions, players may look 'clumsy'. Players are also prone to overuse injuries like Osgood-Schlatter disease (a painful bump just below the knee that is worse with activity and better with rest) during this phase.

It goes without saying that it's of the ultimate importance that coaches working with players this age to have knowledge and understanding of all these aspects to be able to guide youngsters through this critical development phase in a well-considered way. While during the puberty phase players' physical and technical development temporarily stagnates or loses ground, their intellectual development accelerates as does their understanding of and appreciation for teamwork. This makes the GT Phase exceptionally suited for developing tactical awareness and insight.

Developing tactical awareness, perception and decision-making is achieved through a game-related approach to training. This preparing players for senior football by teaching them to apply functional game skills in a team setting using 1-4-3-3 as the preferred formation. For under 12s there should be NO SPECIALIZATION of positions (even the primary goalkeeper needs field time and an alternate keeper needs time as a keeper). My suggestion for practicality is the u12 players should be competent through exposure in at least 3 different field positions in 2 of the 3 lines of play.

Training Themes / Main Moments:

Like the sessions of the SAP, the sessions of the GT Phase are also ‘themes based’. During the SAP the ‘theme’ of a session focuses on one of the four ‘Core Skills’ (first touch; running with the ball; 1 v 1; striking the ball). In the GT Phase the ‘theme’ of a session focuses on one of the ‘Main Moments’ and the Team Tasks (as well as the individual player tasks) within that ‘Main Moment’.

To arrange the Game Training Phase Model Sessions more practically, the “Main Moments” are subdivided the into ‘trainable’ themes.

“Main Moment” trainable themes are:

1. In possession of the ball (BP):

- Playing out from the back
- Midfield play
- Attacking

2. When the opponent is in possession of the ball (BPO):

- Disturbing/pressuring
- Defending/recapturing the ball

3. Transitioning (BP>BPO and BPO>BP)

- Team and player actions when we lose the ball
- Team and player actions when we win the ball

Since GT Phase sessions should strive for game realistic scenarios, **the practices must include game specific resistances such as opponents, team-mates, direction, rules and appropriate dimensions**. As a consequence, in GT sessions often all three “main moments” take place continuously, but the session focus is on only one of them per session.

GT Session Components:

Game Training Phase sessions consist of 4 components: Warm up, Positioning Game, Game Training, Training Game.

1. Warm up:

Starting points for the Warm Up are:

- Preferably with ball (e.g. passing practices)
- If possible 'theme related' including a level of decision-making i.e. avoid warm-ups that are more like conditioning sessions (i.e. relays or agility training with no decision making)!

2. Positioning games:

The main conditions for quality positioning play are:

- Maximal use of space in order to create more time on the ball (stretching the opponent)
- Triangles (no players in straight lines)
- Support play to create options for the player on the ball
- Anticipation and communication (verbal and non-verbal).

These basic principles form the foundation for proactive possession-based football and this explains the importance of the positioning games in training practices. Through positioning games young players:

- Learn to always create at least 3 options for the player on the ball (through proper positioning)
- Improve their decision-making (by learning to choose the right option)
- Increase their handling speed (less space and time forces quicker thinking and acting)
- Improve their technique (passing and first touch are essential technical skills)
- Learn to communicate both verbally (e.g. calling for the ball) and non-verbally (e.g. through ball speed and ball direction).

This is the reason why positioning games are on the menu of every Game Training Phase and Performance Phase session !!!.

3. The game training component:

This is the part of the session where conscious teaching and learning of the designated Team Task takes place. For a proper GT practice the coach must therefore:

- Create the proper scenario (organize the practice in such a way that the focus is on the designated Team Task);
- Organize the practice in the right area of the field (where this particular situation takes place during the real game) and with the appropriate dimensions
- Create the proper level of resistance (too easy = no development; too difficult = no success)
- Make effective interventions and provide quality (specific) feedback
- Ask smart questions to develop player understanding and enhance learning

4. Training Game:

This is the traditional game at the end of a session. In our approach however it should not just be a 'free' game. The definition of a Training Game in the context of a GT Phase session is:

- A game at the end of the session that contains all the elements of the real game but with rules and restraints that see to it that the designated Team Task is emphasised.
- During a Training Game the players are playing and the coach is observing if learning has taken place (little or no stop-start coaching but preferably coaching 'on the run').

Clearly, quality coaching is not as easy as it may look!

Resources:

Rather than me forwarding model sessions to coaches throughout the year, a more comprehensive overview of the GT phase and associated practices / training sessions are / will be available at:

Introduction to game moments: whiteboard sessions

<https://northernswfootball.com.au/coach-headquarters/whiteboard-sessions/>

<https://www.playfootball.com.au/coach/game-training-phase-sessions>

<https://northernswfootball.com.au/how-to-design-a-good-practice/>

<https://northernswfootball.com.au/how-to-plan-a-session/>

<https://www.playfootball.com.au/sites/play/files/2018-01/Game%20Training%20Participants%20Manual.pdf>

Summary:

Moving to a full-size field, having more players / positions / roles and tactics is a huge step up from 9 v 9 soccer, particularly for u12s (many other states and countries keep u12s at 9 v 9 for more age appropriate development). So, in these years I'd encourage coaches to consider that the team is made up of individuals who will be individually learning the positions and basic tasks of 11v11 (hence they need exposure to various positions) rather than overnight expecting that your team will be functioning as a cohesive high performance 11v11 squad.

The GT Phase has two main objectives:

- Preparing players for senior football by teaching them to apply functional game skills in a team setting using 1-4-3-3 as the preferred formation¹.
- Developing tactical awareness, perception and decision-making through a game-related approach to training.

As always if I can be of any assistance with your coaching please feel free to contact me.

Regards,

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¹ Note that whilst there are many successful styles and formations in football, the FFA considers that the 1-4-3-3 the most appropriate formation to develop an understanding of **team play** in young players.