

Great Coaches – questioning

Great coaches coach ‘knowledge-of’ the game and they coach ‘knowledge-in’ the game.

What’s the difference between the two?

1. ‘Knowledge-of’ the game refers to task-specific expertise – procedural knowledge ‘stored’ in long term memory visually and/or verbally. This can relate to principles of play, game models, tactical responsibilities, and general game understanding (the logic of the game).
2. ‘Knowledge-in’ the game refers to situation-specific knowledge – knowledge that updates as new information emerges as the game unfolds. Unpredictable behaviours and opposition tactical adaptation are relevant here.

Great players possess both ‘knowledge-of’ the game as well as the ability to utilise ‘knowledge-in’ the game in order to adapt appropriately.

‘Knowledge-of’ the game can be seen, for the most part, as top-down delivered information from an expert coach. In contrast, ‘Knowledge-in’ the game can be seen as a form of self-organised bottom-up brand of knowledge, either worked out by the players themselves, or guided by a coach within the coaching process.

The latter can be placed under the rubric ‘game intelligence’ and is very challenging to coach, but not impossible.

To help players improve their ‘knowledge-in’ the game coaches need to train anticipation and decision-making. They need to help players scan, identify relevant information quickly, and make quick decisions based on the information they’ve seen and processed.

This is (probably) optimally done by asking players questions

around what they're looking at and what they're seeing (looking and seeing are likely two different things – one player can look at an opposing player and just see a player in front of them, another might see the relationship between hip movement and body weight – a more perceptive player!)

“I saw you looking at your opposite number in that one vs one, what specifically were you looking at and what did you see?” Questioning directs player attention, and helps players to consider what they're looking at and what they're seeing. When done skilfully, this questioning process can help players link scanning with anticipation with decision-making (and then with skill execution) And this questioning can be accompanied by a more traditional form of direct instruction:

“So you were looking at the ball. I'd like to suggest you focus on your opponent's body. On these next few reps I'd like you to look at your opponent's body, and give me some feedback as to what clues tell you which way she's going to try to dribble it around you”

Here, the coach is deliberately directing player attention (onto the body), but asking the player to experiment with her scanning – what she's looking at and seeing – and then to report back what she saw and how what she saw might help her successfully challenge the opposition.

This use of direct instruction and questioning are examples of how you can coach 'in-game' knowledge and thus improve game intelligence