

Kicking to keep possession

Why use the hand pass to retain the possession when accurate long kicking can do the same and carry greater threat?



John Morrison

RECENTLY I was asked to take a minor team for session on kicking. Before we started I gave their mentors and each player an A4 hand out on the breakdown of a kick. The heading on the sheet were as follows.

- Where kicking fits in the brain
 - Motor development
 - Mechanics of a kick
 - Types of kick. This was based on the clock effect and the foot angle / leg length effect.
 - Uses of kicks
 - Categories of kick
 - Common errors
- Contact me via Gaelic Life if you want a copy.

Knowing that kicking was already embedded into the players muscle memory, the session's theme became how does their present standard of kicking affect the quality of the game they play?

And so began four games of problem solving discovery. The first game was five to two. If a team gains possession in their own half they have up to five passes to score and up to two passes if possession was gained in their opponent's half.



Picture: Matt Browne / SPORTSFILE

GET YOUR KICKS...Kicking is a key strategic skill

The game went well with scores usually taking the five passes, few took four, times in nine minutes teams were blown up for taking six

passes. In the question and answer sessions with the players and mentors, they realised their game was

laboured, full of short passing and vulnerable to being turned over and most attempts at goal were inside 30 metres.

Overall their short game was good, but they hadn't understood the concept of five to two.

Asking them to continue only taking three passes with the allowed five they agreed to try.

The game now became more expansive. There were scores sometimes within two passes. They were willing to take risks with their long kicking and when we debated again they realised their concentration, control and confidence were better.

Scores were coming from long range and in close - thus defences were being stretched.

They were now adding a long ball dimension to their game and they felt better.

The second game moved the need to develop a long game on that bit further.

Those who know how I colour code the pitch into three parts: keep ball, set-up ball, score ball, can use this game.

Each team had two passes to exit the keep ball zone; five seconds to get through the set-up zone; and only one pass allowed in the score zone.

Thinking levels escalated, the game was faster, communication plentiful and more chances created.

Long kicking was still had its flaws, but was better in quality and was now the order of the game and they had not once been instructed to use long kicking.

They responded simply to the extra rules of each ten minute game. The third game - nine seconds to score, no matter where possession was gained on the field - now introduced a real game of pressure and yet although there were times when things such as skills, passing, first touch, etc., didn't go as expected the young players control on the ball, confidence in playing and concentration in application was clearly much, much better.

Game calls were now being devised for the future so that patterns of play would be automatic.

The fourth game of five versus five inside the three zones saw end-to-end long kicking up and down the field from zone to zone.

This proved the more difficult as player were waiting on the end of the zone for a shorter pass or the kicker felt obliged to kick high overhead to team mates.

The real learning experience was the need to develop the ability to thread long, lower passes to team mates between opponents in order to retain a 100 percent possession advantage.

As this game went on concentration levels reached a peak. When the session finished the players realised it had more to do with their mental abilities of concentration, confidence and control than kicking.

They realised that while thinking drives a game, skill underpins it, long and short. But then what's in a kick?