

THE MIND...

One good turn deserves...

Evasion skills are what make good players great, buying them the extra space to get off a difficult pass or shot



John Morrison

MY COLUMN title does not refer to the saying one good turn deserves another, but is instead more appropriate to Gaelic sport, indeed all sport, where one good turn takes a player round an opponent.

We have all marvelled at the likes of George Best, Pele, Brian O'Driscoll, Peter Canavan and others, at how well they could so easily go past opponents. We believed, probably rightly so, that these great players were born or blessed with natural evasion skills.

Modern sport, especially Gaelic sport has few of these type of players, those who can take a 'man on' and go round him like a 'will-o-the-wisp'. The sad fact is that evasion skills are not taught and have not been taught for many years.

'Give and go' has replaced 'breaking the tackle' and players are left to their own devices as to how to outwit an opponent and gain ground if stuck in a tight corner.

But we have all, however, experienced evasion skills in our life without even thinking of it as such. Well, those of us who have ever played 'tig' or 'tag' in the school yard have certainly experienced the thrill of

To all coaches the lessons we can take from playing 'tig' are three fold: Firstly, evasion skills are natural to a child's development and so, when young people naturally run and play 'tig' and run around at ages seven to ten years, that is the best time for coaches to teach the sports general evasion skills, which parallels the gross motor skill development happening naturally in the child.

Secondly, evasion skills can only be best developed when operated at speed, otherwise they don't work effectively, as in the game situation. Thirdly, when repeated and in the fun games situations at this early age the range of evasion skills become bedded into the muscle memory of the youngsters to use later in the adult sport.

Skills like Peter Canavan's low bounce and turn round an opponent or Peter's and Ronan Clarke's step outside, but bounce the ball inside and pass inside his opponent. Stephen McDonnell runs at an angle, then checks back behind and inside his opponent or side steps to shoot a goal. Owen Mulligan used the 'dummy solo' constantly and I wonder if Owen's 'dummy hand-pass' before scoring that goal against Dublin is legal. If it is, I feel it is a wonderful skill which young players would latch on to quickly. What about his 'volf' when going for a goal? Paddy Bradley is noted for his change of pace to go round players, while Joe Blythe in his heyday usually took a score after swerving inside his opponent.



NO MUG...Owen Mulligan is a walking dictionary of evasion techniques
Picture: Oliver McVeigh / SPORTSFILE

dived under the arm of the chaser or 'tigger' to avoid being 'tug'. It all changed your pace, side-stepped or left us breathless but was good fun.

Last Friday evening and Saturday morning I was working with firstly the Thomas Davis senior squad and then the club's underage coaches in Dublin. Joining me was an old friend and fellow master tutor, Cyril Kevlahan, a coach with the club. He asked me about my own approach to evasion and I finished by saying that currently I taught 23 evasion skills to players and am always trying to think up new ways of evasion.

My 23 ways are: side-step, reverse low bounce, swerve, double-swerve, feint with the foot, feint with the ball, reverse foot feint, reverse ball feint, roll or spin, back-roll, dummy solo, break the tackle, cut back or check inside, cut across to take space, a step over pick up then cut inside, change of pace, the wall pass using a team mate, reverse swerve and turn, palm off, an outside solo, cut inside on a bounce, an outside step, cut inside on a bounce, an outside step, cut inside on a bounce, moving backwards to dummy pass and turn opposite, combinations of the above.

Do you have any more? Let me know if you have.

In terms of behaviour, two good turns caught my eye in the 2008 championship. Francis Bellaw's gracious and calm acceptance of his sending off against Donegal and Owen Mulligan's calm walk away from the Hill without any gesturing after his goal against Dublin.

One good turn...

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