

Take these five steps before you kick



John Morrison

Taking kicking as an example, John Morrison explains the processes that coaches should use in order to properly teach a particular skill

FORMER Armagh All-Ireland winner and former All-Ireland-winning manager of Crossmaglen, Tony McEhin in his keynote speech at a recent Ulster Coaching Conference said, "The leadership for the GAA has to come from within the coaching community. That change has to focus on the technical skills and abilities of players."

Paul Earley, Ireland's current International Rules manager, also in his Conference keynote speech, endorsed Tony's sentiments. Paul said, "Many administrators, managers and coaches in the GAA expect a lot from their players but how many of the 'experts' actually inspect how well what they've delivered impacts on players' abilities."

Inspect what you expect was Paul's firm advice.

He added, "Australian Rules players have a slicker hand pass than the GAA. It hits the target more of ten (belly button passing I call this). They hit the target out in front with accuracy and a straighter thus quicker delivered trajectory. They achieved this by concentrating 'hours' on their skills."

How do they do that? By breaking down the global parts and coaching these in the required sequence needed to execute the particular skill.

At the Ulster Conference, Terence McWilliams and I were asked to deliver "The Analysis of Kicking" to attending coaches.

We informed coaches, through 'interactive' exchanges and videos, that the ultimate skill of kicking is to Master the Movement through the combination of two principal movements/acting, viz (i) Rotation of the body into impact and (ii) Flexion of the kicking leg into the ball.

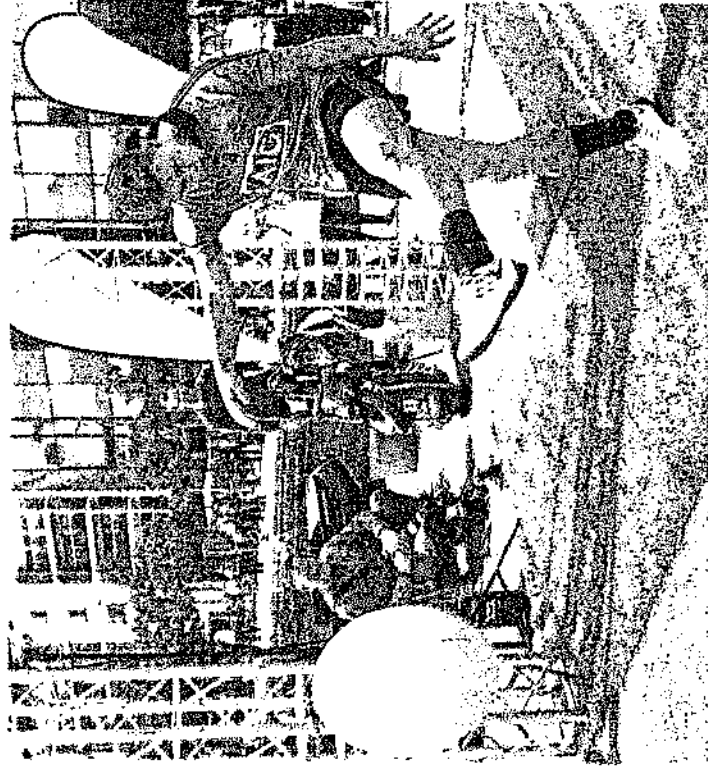
'Accuracy' in a kick is the result of control and the less rotation you have the more control and accuracy you get.

Power comes from being able to sequence the combination of turning the body and flexion/extension of the leg into/out of the ball, on top of the momentum created by the approach or run-up which actually is an accelerating stride (fast leg).

This sequence of kicking takes hours and hours of dedicated, and at times, frustrating practice. In coaching skill (any skill) there are five stages:

1. Absorb the whole skill

Coaches can use tablets to take pictures of a player kicking the ball. Using these, the coach and player can look at the hands and feet movement to 'spot and fix' what's working or not working in the player's kick.



PERFECT FORM... John Morrison advises using photographs and videos to analyse a player's kicking form

2. Chunk it - Break it down into global parts

Each part must be coached to perfection through the sequence of kicking, for a kick the chunk/global parts are:

(i) Head Locking - The locking of the torso on the target by keeping the head down during the kick.

(ii) Contact - Toes pointing down to kick off the tops of the laces, this is called 'Hard Foot'.

(iii) Power - Generated by the fast swing (whip like), of the leg through flexion (boot to ball/cock), to extension (follow through to a high level) - this is called 'Past Leg'.

(iv) Chest On - Where on kicking the rotation of the body (chest) stops locked on to the target. The kicking hand (shorter) drops down beside the kicking thigh while the 'locking' hand (longer arm) helps the body control the rotation and balance of the kicker.

3. Slow it down

Here the 'chunks' are practised (best without a ball), in very slow motion 'till the player is able to execute and hold the skill perfectly throughout the sequence of movement in the kick, so that the kick becomes embedded in the players'.

muscle memory

4. Exercise the process

Once, and only when the movement has been mastered completely should players practice individually or in small-sided kicking activities or games (the kick at or near game pace. Kicking accurately should be the aim of the games above all else).

5. Learn to feel it

Here players are coached to 'feel' their kick and not be afraid if it's not working. The coach through the previous four steps will have given them confidence and understanding to enable a player to fix it or strengthen it themselves (if it feels good).

The problem, however, was cited clearly by both Tony and Paul in their keynote address. As Tony stated, "In the GAA, we just accept coaches/people can coach the skills. It's wrong to make that assumption." The GAA, maybe other sports also, is now faced with the challenge to promote two things to rectify the inability to coach skills fully in our game:

1. Produce a Handbook/Highway Code Of Skills - To ensure all know the global parts of each skill and use a standard phrase everywhere to ensure a common language for the coaching of skills.

2. Train Every Coach - Intensely and extensively and for as long as necessary to do so to make every coach a perfectly competent teacher of our skills.

After that the powers that be in the GAA must, rigorously, inspect what is expected of coaches in the coaching of our basic skills.