

Focussing on Beginners in the Cognitive phase

Developing Beginner's Skills and Routines

This is the stage when a player has to consciously think through the steps they are taking to make a coordinated movement to get a ball to progress to where they want it to go. They have to think through these steps while playing. That's why it is called the thinking or cognitive stage.

In this stage, players can be helped to develop Gateball skills by understanding the basic sequence of discrete movements/actions from the sport, either as a whole or broken into its parts. There is no major perceptual information that has to be processed e.g. understanding the strategy of the game. There is little to no decision making or modification of the skill involved. There is no development of complex tactics or strategy to achieve a successful outcome. The player is just in the process of building the basic motor pattern.

When the actions of the player are broken into a series of steps we call this a routine. It is important for Gateball players to **develop routines for stroking, sparking and sliding**. They need to become automatic.

The steps in the routines for stroking, sparking and sliding eventually progress to becoming automatic and applied to a variety of game like situations. At first skills should be introduced through demonstration followed by guided and individual practice of the steps involved.

The following rhyme is very useful in jogging memory about the steps that instructors should follow when these basics are learned.

***I do it normal
I do it slow
You do it with me
And off you go***

A more refined list of tips has been put forward by Sports Australia:

Sport Australia suggests the following when demonstrating a skill to players:

(https://www.sportaus.gov.au/coaches_and_officials/coaches/the_training_session#demonstrating_a_skill)

Demonstrating a skill

Everybody has heard the old saying that a picture paints a thousand words. Demonstrating a new skill is important.

Tips for demonstrating a skill

-Make sure the demonstration can be seen . Be aware of distractions such as the sun, traffic or other groups.

-The coach doesn't always have to do the demonstration. Other options include one of the players who you know can perform the skills, or a picture, diagram or video may help.

-Ensure that the skill is demonstrated in the context of the game situation, so that participants understand 'why' as well as 'how' it is done.

-Highlight the main points of the skill. Keep explanations simple and brief. Try not to emphasise more than two or three key points at a time.

-Avoid pointing out things 'not to do' as this will only overload the players.

You can break the skill into separate components for the purpose of the demonstration, but ensure you demonstrate the complete skill at normal speed first and at the end.

-Let the participants practice. New information stays with people for only a short period of time unless they are able to try the skill.

-Verbal instructions are sometimes unclear - accompany verbal instructions with a complimentary visual.

-Always show the correct skill last. If you are showing a player the difference between what they are doing and what you want them to do, demonstrate the correct skill after you have shown them their current method.

Explanation of the steps in a routine are important when error correction becomes necessary. Players need to know the reasons for the steps. For example, a player who does not stalk the ball is not orienting their body and the **resultant** swing toward the target can be off line

Players acquire skills by doing and need **repetition** to refine a routine. **Asking questions** when a routine is not followed can be helpful. Eg Did you set your sparking direction? Ideally, a player becomes self analytical and asks themselves their own questions when outcomes are not achieved. Sometimes those assisting may decide to delay their questioning if they can see that the player is analysing their own actions and making self corrections. Then an appropriate question can be “what did you do the second time that you did not do the first?”

The above example demonstrates that **the timing of the feedback** and the questions asked can be concurrent or delayed. Concurrent feedback might hinder learning as it can distract a player from their own leaning processes

For extrinsic feedback by observers to be effective, it should:

• contain no sarcasm	• contain positive non-verbal communication
• praise and criticise the behaviour, not the person	• be communicated effectively
• be constructive and meaningful to the individual	• be consistent
• use the 'sandwich approach'—give a positive statement, then corrective feedback, then a compliment (for example, 'Good pass, Juanita. Next time see if you can stroke a bit further and closer to the line. Keep up the great effort.	

Setting standards and goals are important. Players who improve their performance experience the “thrill of the skill” An important motivator!

It is worth noting that players may be in the cognitive stage for some skills or their refinement but in other stage for other skills. For example, a croquet player beginning to play GB will move immediately to the associative stage for stroking but will be in the cognitive stage for sparking. Players who may be in the autonomous stage for stroking, sparking and sliding may need to return to the cognitive stage for a jump spark.