

90 SECONDS and counting



Whether you are advising players at the World Team Championships or team mates in a county league match, you should use the same technique, explains Simon Hartley

A few years ago I worked in Premiership football. I sat in on many half-time team talks. Often, the manager would sit the players down and explain to them where they were going wrong. He would then send them out for the second half and be always amazed that they didn't simply put things right. I used to see the constant frustration in the managers. The problem was, they had made a common mistake. They had assumed that pointing out the errors would automatically lead to the solution. The fact is, as human beings, we often need more than mere 'correction'. Being told where we went wrong is fine, but it is not enough. We need to understand the skills or tactics that are required, and to have practised them and be confident in them, before we can actually change our behaviour.

TRANSITION TIME

Coaching a player during the 90-second window between games is one of the toughest skills to master. When a player is doing well, sometimes the job is to simply say, "Great, keep going." However, when a player is struggling, the coach has a completely different challenge. How can you help a player who is getting frustrated and angry? How do you advise a player who is being overrun by his opponent? What can coaches (and team mates) do in this seemingly tiny window to help?

It sounds obvious, but the message needs to be very clear and succinct. The 90-second window only gives you only about 45 seconds to actually coach. When players come through the glass door, their heads are naturally still in the game. They are probably

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reflecting on the last few points or a refereeing decision. There is a transition time players need before they are ready to listen. That can be 20–30 seconds. Normally, there is little point in trying to convey anything during that period. Often the best approach is

simply to let them have a drink, grab a towel and take a breath.

Just as there is a transition period when players come off court, so there is a transition period when they go back on court. Players need time to let the conversation sink in and to prepare for the next game. This is often best done alone. Many players appreciate having 15–20 seconds on their own to get their thoughts together before re-entering the court.

CONTROLLING EMOTIONS

After the first transition period, the first challenge is often to help settle the player's emotions and quieten their mind. It is difficult to communicate effectively when someone is in a state of mental and emotional turmoil. Human beings tend to reflect each other's emotions. If the coach is anxious, frustrated or angry, this will usually be reflected in the player. However, if the coach is calm and measured, this is also likely to rub off on the player. One of the challenges for coaches is to make sure they get their own emotional state right before they engage with the player. Ask, tell, ask again

If a player is frustrated with their performance, they are likely to become defensive. It is a natural human reaction. But the last thing they want to hear is the coach pointing out their

mistakes during the break. In some cases, it is better to let the player do the talking than to talk at them. Let them show you that they know what is going wrong and to suggest solutions. Sometimes the best form of coaching is to ask, "What do you think?" and "What are you planning to do?". With this as a starting point, you can normally reinforce the important points or add a useful suggestion.

We need to ensure that we find the most important piece of information and deliver it with absolute clarity. Take out unnecessary waffle. Make sure that any information is presented in the simplest way. This is not easy. Normally it requires preparation and practice, and often this is the stage that is missed out. Even very good coaches often forget to take a moment to think about exactly what they wish to say, or the way that they need to say it. Coaches often deliver the message in the way that suits them best, rather than the way that suits the player best. And when they finish talking to the player, they assume that the player has understood and will go out and put things right. Simply by asking, "What are you going to do when you get back on court?", you can see how well the player has understood.

FOCUS

Perhaps the number one purpose of the coaching during the 90-second game break is to establish focus. What do you want the player to focus on when they walk back through the glass doors? On their positioning, length of shot or simply being patient? What is the key point of focus? That point of focus should be at the heart of our coaching.



SIMON HARTLEY

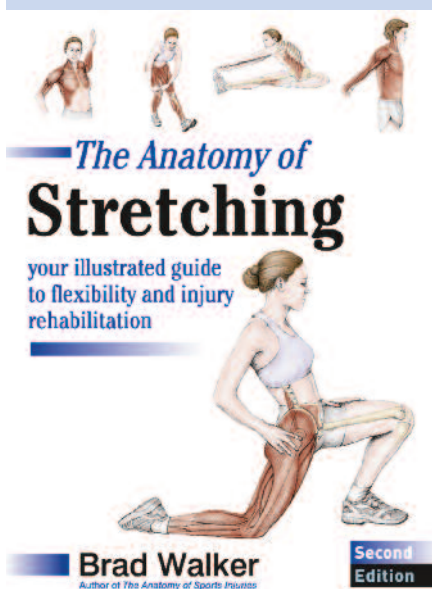
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Keys to success

- Give the player time to transition from the game to the break and vice versa
- Get your emotional state right before engaging with the player
- Prepare what you want to say, and how you want to say it
- Find the number 1 message and make it very clear and succinct
- Make the player understand what to focus on when they walk back through the glass door

book review



Chartered Physiotherapist Phil Newton MCSP SRP reviews a new edition of *The Anatomy of Stretching* by Brad Walker (Lotus Publishing ISBN: 978-1-905367-29-0)

This is a well presented book with detailed line drawings that do a great

job of showing you how to do pretty much any stretch that you could ever need to perform.

The opening couple of chapters are not too long and concisely describe some of the basic anatomical and physiological principles that relate to stretching. The remaining 12 chapters deal with specific body areas and it is in these chapters that this book's strength lies. However, there are some flaws.

The stretches are presented as simple line drawings, with the muscles and associated structures that are being stretched highlighted in red. Each stretch has a unique alpha-numeric tag and a brief description regarding correct technique, plus links to complementary stretches. Recommendations are made as to which sports injuries may be helped by the stretch in question.

This aspect of the book poses some potential problems. It is generally a bad idea to self-prescribe stretches for specific injuries. At best this approach can be ineffective and at worst will cause further injury. I found particularly troubling the stretch recommended for shoulder dislocations.

A couple of references are made to the potential benefits of stretching that cannot be backed up by any sound body of scientific evidence. These relate to

stretching being able to reduce post-exercise soreness and to reduce the risk of sustaining injury.

Another claim that should be qualified is that stretching can improve posture. Stretching exercises may indeed be helpful in mobilising restricted ranges of movement that contribute to certain body postures. However, to change posture requires much more input, such as muscle strengthening and movement re-education.

The integration of a sensible stretching regime into a general conditioning programme can result in improved sporting performance. So it is surprising that stretching is an often overlooked and underused aspect of physical conditioning amongst both recreational and professional sports people. The basic principles that should underpin good stretching programmes are presented well in this book. The excellent diagrams and brief technique notes that make up the bulk of the book are its strength.

This book provides a comprehensive and easily accessible reference work for anyone who needs to optimise their flexibility. However, I certainly would not recommend using this text as a self-help guide for the treatment of sports injuries.