

## Feedback

### **Slide 2**

In the first class, we talked about the best way to learn. We learn most effectively and lastingly when we ask ourselves questions. This is what we call "production learning" or "guided discovery". In other words, when players are guided to discover answers for themselves through questions, their learning is more solid and lasting.

Additionally, we also touched on the topic of "open tasks" and "closed tasks". Open tasks are those where players have the freedom to make many decisions, which facilitates learning. On the contrary, closed tasks are more restrictive and do not offer as many opportunities to make decisions, which can limit learning.

This concept directly relates to global methodologies and analytical methodologies in training. Simply put, global methodologies allow more freedom and decision-making, similar to open tasks, while analytical methodologies are more restrictive, like closed tasks.

To sum all this up, the worst thing we could do as coaches is simply give orders, or be what I call a "PlayStation coach". It's not a good practice, especially for young players in training. When coaches are not present, players' performance decreases if they have only learned to follow orders. And this can have many negative consequences, most of which are easily predictable.

### **Slide 3**

First, let's pose a crucial question: What happens if, as coaches, we give all the answers and do not allow our players to think, explore, and solve problems on their own?

*(Pause for reflection)*

### **Slide 4**

Some of the possible consequences for the player could be:

Less confidence, as the player feels they need to depend on someone else to make decisions.

Less knowledge, because they don't get the opportunity to learn for themselves.

Less independence, as they always wait for someone else to tell them what to do.

Now, if you're a coach who only thinks short-term or has a big ego, you might feel you're winning matches and feel important. But remember, the goal here is not us; it's to educate the players. We cannot measure ourselves by the matches we win or how well the team plays.

### **Slide 5**

So, how should we measure our success as coaches?

By what we are able to teach.

By our ability to empathize and understand the needs of our players.

By helping them learn how to solve problems on their own, not giving them all the answers. That is, teaching them to "fish" instead of giving them the fish.

Always look long-term. A good measure of our success is to see how enthusiastic players are about learning and coming to train.

Finally, respect is earned not by making players dependent on us, but by making them feel capable and important.

### **Slide 6**

In today's class, we will focus on these questions. On this "feedback".

- On why we don't give solutions.
- The value of a good question.
- And how to treat mistakes.

### **Slide 7**

Why not give solutions?

We should have a rule that is never to tell players what they can learn or discover for themselves.

Our goal is for our players to understand the game, be creative, find solutions to the problems they encounter during matches, and all of this starts in training. First of all, teach them and in a way force them to think.

Traditional approach vs current

In traditional training, which most of us have been a part of, we usually don't make many decisions but mostly execute. When the player makes a mistake, the coach corrects; usually shouts what the mistake was and what the solution is. In this way, as we have said, the player simply executes; they don't think, there's no reflection.

We are creating players who are very good at doing what the coach tells them, but their ability to analyze, interpret the game is limited, and their ability to understand the why of the solutions is also limited.

## **Slide 8**

Focus on the long term

As we have repeated during this course, for us coaches, it is much more comfortable to work by giving instructions.

It is more comfortable for several reasons; the first is because it is much faster. We will see results much faster if we tell them what to do and the players simply execute. It is much more comfortable because the problem is solved without the need for more trial and error.

If instead of giving the solution directly, what we have to do is let the player experiment, think about what the mistake was, think about what question we can ask the player to understand the mistake, think about what question we can ask the player so they can sense or guess a solution. All of the latter is obviously much more complicated, much more complex, requires more effort, and is slower.

But the most important thing about not giving solutions is that learning is more lasting, it creates better players, smarter, more independent, and who understand the game and the possible solutions.

In addition, we have all seen matches of youth soccer teams where the direction from the sideline is authoritarian and orders instructions from the bench.

## **Slide 9**

Self-assessment, winning vs. learning

Here it's crucial to undergo an internal reflection, almost psychological, where we must understand that most of us like to win; our instinct, our internal reward system, tells us: "you have to win, to prove you're a good coach and for everyone to see it, you have to win."

We all want to have a high status in society, and many people involved in the world of soccer equate status with winning matches, especially the parents of the boys and girls we coach. Often, other coaches judge us based on whether we win or lose matches; people from the club, our family when we get home, ask us about the result. It's rare for someone to ask: "how was what you worked on during the week reflected in the match?"

We need to work on our internal confidence and trust that this is the right path; sometimes we feel judged, and some people won't understand what we're doing, but we must have self-confidence, we must believe in ourselves.

## **Slide 10**

### Practical example

Returning to training, when we create an exercise as we've seen in previous classes, we shouldn't explain the solutions to the exercise. For example: we've seen that if the goal is to have players open on the wings, a good idea is to say that the defending team can't occupy the wings until the ball enters there.

This is where our explanation of the exercise should end.

We shouldn't say: "Ok, if the defensive players can't occupy the wings, where should the offensive players be?" Or even worse: "Ok, girls, since the defensive players can't occupy the wings, I want you wide open on the wing to receive and have time and space."

In these last two cases, we're spoon-feeding the answer, and the players don't think.

If we end our explanation of the problem where we mentioned earlier, it's likely that some players won't understand that when their team has the ball, it's a good idea to be open on the wing, as they'll have time and space and can receive the ball with an advantage.

Here we shouldn't intervene; we should let the game flow, or rather, not flow, let them experiment. Having patience is crucial, and after a time of experimentation, it's time for a joint reflection.

## **Slide 11**

### The value of asking good questions

A good question invites the player to think in a certain direction and reflect on their actions.

The answers to our questions will be the tools they need to solve the situations they encounter in exercises or matches.

The goal of our questions is for players to internalize and understand everything we've learned so far; for example, the guidelines for technical actions, tactical actions, and collective play.

As we've mentioned many times during this course, soccer is a broad sport where many things happen at once. So our goal with more questions is to focus the player's attention on the learnings we want or expect to arise in a particular exercise or action.

Therefore, ask open-ended questions. This means questions that aren't answered with a yes or no; questions that invite reflection.

One way to achieve this is to use what, how, why, when, where. Why do we lose the ball quickly? How can we solve this? Where can we have more advantage than the opponent?...

## **Slide 12**

Trial and error

One of the most important things: once the player has proposed a solution, one of the best answers is: "Perfect, let's try it."

And here again, we have to fight against our ego, because perhaps the solution they proposed isn't the right one (although generally there are many good solutions), but let's say for this case that it's a bad solution, that with our experience and knowledge we know it won't work.

Regardless, the best answer is: "Perfect, let's try it."

And we experiment once more, trying to use the answer they've given us; we let them try, let them get frustrated, let them think again, and then, if necessary, we take another break and return with questions. Is what we thought working? Why or why not? Have we improved anything?

## **Slide 13**

Feedback and error

A mistake is an opportunity to learn.

Many times we do something right by chance and haven't reflected on what happened. If this is the case, there hasn't been any learning because the next time we might make the mistake. We thought we knew how to solve that particular situation, but what happened is that we solved it by chance.

On the other hand, the second time, when we've made a mistake, we'll reflect, think: what happened? And here we have our opportunity to learn.

The trick isn't in not failing or not making mistakes; the trick is in learning from failures and mistakes and trying not to fail or make the same mistake several times.

Therefore, every time we see a mistake, a failure from our players, we should think:

"Perfect, an opportunity to learn."

The more mistakes that occur in training, the more we can improve.

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If players don't make mistakes, there are two possibilities:

1. The players know how to do everything (unlikely).
2. The proposed exercises aren't challenging enough (very likely).
3. We don't see the mistakes (likely)

Therefore, if players don't make mistakes, it's our fault; we should propose more complex exercises so that these mistakes or errors appear, and thus we can improve. We should also pay more attention to observing mistakes.

While we're experimenting with some exercise, the player is reflecting, making decisions, adapting their behavior, and evaluating mistakes and successes... At this moment we have two opportunities to give feedback:

1. The first is during the exercise without stopping it.
2. The second is during a break in the exercise, where we'll all gather and reflect collectively.

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Let's look in detail at each of them, but first, let's look at some of the important points we need to consider to improve the quality of feedback:

1. We must be clear about the objective of our reflection, our question, or what we want the player to think about. For this, it's important and necessary to observe the exercise, observe the mistakes, and draw our own conclusions.
2. We should think about what questions we'll ask. We should transform the information we want to give them into questions for them to reflect on.  
For example: if the goal is for the player to conclude that they should control with the foot furthest from the defender, we should ask a question that makes them reflect on this and come to this conclusion themselves. Can you think of any?
3. It's important to name the players' successes. Here we can be much more direct and say things like: "Well occupied space, good control, very well using the far leg..."
4. We should also focus on the actions and not on the player performing the action. First, because the player making the mistake or error might feel attacked, and second, because anyone can make that mistake or error, so everyone needs to understand that it's a situation that can occur at any time and they'll listen more attentively, feeling that the feedback is directed at them, that is, at everyone.
5. We should also consider which team we're coaching, and how accustomed they are to this type of feedback and questions, and adapt to it. It's not the same to arrive at a team on the first day and introduce questions as it is to have been training that team for six months with the same dynamics, where we can ask questions that pose a greater challenge when trying to answer them.
6. Feedback (questions) is our tool, and it's very important, but as important as intervening and asking questions is not doing it.  
Giving players time to experiment and come up with solutions on their own without our intervention is also very important.

## **Slide 16**

### Interventions during learning

#### 1. Intervention during the exercise or task

While the player is performing the exercise, they are aware of some of the mistakes and successes that occur, and based on these, they adapt future actions. As we have mentioned, the most important thing is to observe to be clear about what to correct.

- We must avoid general and shallow information. And as we have mentioned, do not give orders. Saying: "Pass well!" doesn't help, asking: "Why don't you pass well?" doesn't help either. We must be more specific. "Why did we lose that ball?" or "What happened with that pass?" is a more specific question.
- In this type of feedback, we cannot ask very deep questions, as logically the player is playing and will not have the capacity to reflect deeply. We will ask short questions, reminders of things we have discussed in group reflections or during other training sessions. For example: "Can you receive where you are?" questions that, rather than seeking a verbal answer, seek reflection at the moment, focus, as we mentioned earlier, with these questions we seek to focus the player's attention on what we are working on.

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#### 2. Collective reflection breaks

We will make this type of break once the players have experimented with the exercise for a prudent time. We must let them experiment, seek solutions, get frustrated, and get out of frustration.

In this process, we can use the intervention or reflection during the task that we talked about in point one.

Once the players have experimented, we can stop the game for a theoretical maximum of about 2 minutes to make a collective reflection on the problems we are encountering, how we are trying to solve them, and what solutions work, which ones don't, and what we can do.

We cannot use this break too often as we cut off the "flow" of the exercise. As a general rule, we will stop a maximum of twice the same exercise to make a collective reflection.

For this reflection to be as useful as possible, we must consider:

- We will talk, reflect, and seek solutions to the situations we are training (or that we have trained in previous days if we organize ourselves like that).
- When we stop the exercise is important. We can stop it at some point where the intensity drops to take advantage of this, reflect, and then start stronger, or

we can stop it at a key moment and use the disposition of the players at that moment so that the feedback or reflection is more relevant. We can ask questions about where we are with the players in those places, with more time to think and therefore with more capacity to reason an answer.

- We must be open to answers different from the ones we have in mind. Sometimes we want them to answer one thing, but the players find another solution; this can be as valid as the one we had in mind or not. In these cases, as we explained above, the best strategy is: perfect, let's try.

### **Slide 18**

End of session feedback

At the end of the session, as we explained in topic 3, we will hold a post-training talk where we will summarize what happened. Through questions, we will also reflect on acquired learnings and competencies to improve.

It is vitally important to end the session with a positive talk. We must emphasize the positive aspects, even if these have been the number of errors, ergo, the number of possible learnings that we take home. Greet each player one by one and have them greet each other is the way to end the session.

### **Slide 19**

Individual feedback

Ideally, we will have individual development talks with each of the players.

The recommendation is to do them throughout the season (starting after at least one month of starting, to have things to talk about); in this way, we can take one player per session at the end for 5 or 10 minutes and thus not have to gather everyone on the same day.

Sometimes during sessions that end in a playful way, such as matches with three teams, we can use this time and especially if we have assistant coaches who can take responsibility for training these matches and hold these talks at that time.

Everyone organizes themselves as they can or want, the important thing is to do them.

Ideally, the player self-assesses, we can use a Google Forms or simply talk at the moment about what they consider they have to improve and what they consider are their strengths.

Then, as coaches, we will share our impressions with them, always, even here, using questions. For example: "What is your goal on the team?" "What is your individual goal?" This will guide us when giving feedback.

The player likes to receive honest feedback since we are their coach and, as we talked



about in the first class, there is admiration that comes with the job. Our opinion is very important to them, and we must always be positive, emphasize the good things, and the ability to improve.

We must always start with positive feedback, whether it's their effort, improvement, or anything we see, and then talk about possible aspects to focus on to improve.

It is vitally important to compare the player always with himself and never with other players. We compete against ourselves.

## **Slide 20**

### ***Feedback in matches - Before the match***

Before the match, we will hold a talk that will not be feedback, but it will be a pre-match talk, and during that talk, the first thing we will reflect on will be what we have trained during the week, what we have learned during these trainings, what problems we have encountered, and how we have solved them.

We will go into more detail if necessary about the different technical or tactical actions if we have trained them during the week, that is, we will talk about the specific guidelines, and we will reflect on why those guidelines are important to play soccer well.

As we said earlier, the warm-up will be based on everything we have trained during the week; that is, we will perform a rondo just like one of the ones we have trained during the week, a possession, and, if we have time, some finishes or waves.

As we have said on many occasions, our goal should never be to win the match, although we want to win it, that is not the goal, so what is our goal?

Our goal must be to perform as best as possible all the actions we have worked on during the week. And that's what we will focus on.

Ideally, we will decide objectives related to those actions. For example, if we have worked on centers to the area, we can set a goal that is to make "X" number of centers to the area, or if we have worked on the one-on-one offensive, we will have a goal that is to try the one-on-one every time we have a chance, or if we have worked on mixing short and long passes, we will have a goal to change the ball from side to side after making two or three passes on the opposite side.

These objectives ideally will be the players themselves who will tell us, although this is not mandatory, it is a very good idea. You can start experimenting with it and see how it helps you and the players to change the focus of the match from the result to what we have worked on during the week.

This can put us in the situation of having won the match but not having met the objectives or having met the objectives perfectly but having lost the match. We dissociate the match result from having played well or poorly.

## **Slide 21**

### ***Feedback in matches - During the Match***

It's crucial not to give orders during the game. This turns us into the "PlayStation" coach. Once again, ego surfaces, and we use commands to achieve quick results, which isn't the goal.

Instead, we should assist players in finding solutions through questions. These should be brief questions or reminders of our pre-match discussions.

For instance, if we've discussed the importance of ball control, during the game, we can pose a quick question like, "Which foot do we use to control when a defender is close?" or we can be more direct: "Remember the guidelines we discussed about receiving the pass!"

There are times in some matches where, due to various reasons, the game becomes chaotic and there's no learning. In such cases, we need to intervene more, ask more questions, and remind them of what we've been working on this week and previous weeks. The goal is to focus on the objectives and make the experience more enriching.

Ideally, we wouldn't speak at all, indicating that players are making ideal decisions at all times.

Note: Making the right decisions doesn't always equate to success. For example, I might make the right decision to pass to a distant player after several short passes, but if the technical execution is poor and we lose the ball, it's a good decision but poor technical action. In such cases, we should reinforce the decision: "Good thinking!" "Next time it'll be perfect!" "Great idea!" is the necessary feedback at that moment.

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### ***Feedback in matches - During the Break***

We shouldn't start talking immediately. It's essential to calm down, drink water, and breathe.

After a reasonable time, we should:

Diagnose the situation: What's happening?

This open-ended question allows players to speak freely. They might discuss the score (not recommended), the opponent's strategy, challenges we're facing, or how we're achieving our pre-match objectives.

It's a good idea to ask questions to guide the discussion towards our challenges and objectives.

Once we've identified challenges or potential improvement areas, we should discuss possible solutions. What can we do to address our challenges or even enhance what

we're already doing well?

Conclusion: Use positive reinforcement + improvement + positive reinforcement to conclude the discussion.

This proven psychological technique boosts confidence and gives more weight to improvement feedback.

It's beneficial to summarize our discussion to ensure clarity for the players, especially the younger ones.

### **Slide 23**

#### ***Feedback in matches - After the Match***

Stay positive; it's essential to end on a good note. We tend to remember the beginnings and endings. It's in our hands to stay positive.

Discuss the objectives we set at the start of the match and always seek improvements compared to previous matches and training sessions.

Separate the game's outcome from our discussion, regardless of whether we won, drew, or lost.

Remember, we're educators. Our goal is for players to continue wanting to learn, and the best way to learn is to practice, practice, practice.

The same goes for you as coaches; the best way to be a good coach is to learn and then practice, practice, practice.

### **Slide 24**

#### **Final Words**

Closely related to the previous point, continuous learning and self-improvement are vital for a coach. However, there's a catch.

Many spend their lives seeking knowledge, watching YouTube videos, browsing exercises on Instagram, enrolling in courses, and searching for free resources online. But remember this: learning without application is like an unopened book; it's there but serves no purpose. Yes, it's essential to watch YouTube videos, enroll in courses, and learn from every possible source. But the most crucial part is applying that knowledge. Browsing a hundred books is pointless if we never apply what we've learned.

Of course, having a theoretical foundation is essential. Knowing what and why we're doing something, understanding what to train at different ages, and the key aspects of passing and tactical actions are all part of the puzzle.

But the most crucial aspect is practice, making mistakes, learning from them, and reflecting on our successes and failures.

It's vital to understand that mistakes are learning opportunities, not just for the players but for us too. Yes, we'll make mistakes—we all do. Sometimes they might be minor, like forgetting the balls during training. But every mistake is a disguised lesson, a chance to grow, both for you and your players. We need to learn, and to learn, we must make mistakes and practice.

Remember, our role goes beyond coaching; we're educators. Our goal is for players to learn, love the sport, understand it's a team game where everyone helps each other, and the best way to help is to give our best and be there for our teammates.

Teach them that discipline is good; it helps us achieve goals and stay focused. Encourage them to decide their discipline level, one where they feel comfortable and see improvement.

Our influence as soccer coaches extends beyond the soccer field. If we teach them discipline, teamwork, respect for opponents and referees, leadership, problem-solving, and decision-making, these lessons will benefit them throughout their lives.

We have a significant responsibility. We're not just shaping soccer players; we're molding human beings. And that, my friends, is one of the most rewarding and challenging tasks anyone can undertake.

Good luck.