

RULE CHANGES IN COMPETITIVE BALL GAMES TO INCREASE GAME PARTICIPATION IN PLAYERS WITH LOW ABILITY TO PLAY

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ABSTRACT

A key issue in physical education (PE) is the comparatively heterogeneous abilities and motor skills of students. In individual sports this issue can be addressed by methodical-didactic alternatives (e.g. internal differentiation) offering motor tasks of variable degrees of difficulty. In team sports internal differentiation is a particular challenge. Sports games do not only require equal teams for a balanced competition, but also individual differences in performance within the teams. Observations during PE demonstrate that in teams with highly variable playing skills strong players often dominate and play with each other. Thus, the inclusion of weaker players is limited and may result in loss of motivation. Experiences from practice show that participation of students with weaker playing skills can be improved through basic rule changes in competitive sports games. For example:

- Separate the playing field into zones in which only specific players of both teams are allowed.
- Include several goals or targets per team.
- Mark areas from within it is forbidden to aim for the target or goal.
- Restrict individual players' movement with the ball.
- Assign different players with varied ball handling and/or movement options.
- Replace intensive body-involving forms of defence with symbolic defence actions.

Keywords: movement game, didactics of movement games, internal differentiation

PE/Sports teachers know how competition-oriented games in school sports settings typically work: some students are dominating the game, predominantly play with each other and score goals and points at will. On the contrary, students with less developed playing skills are far less active, are only included occasionally in the game and hardly ever possess the ball. When they receive the ball they are often not able to pass it along to their team members, and, therefore, they are included even less often.

Thus, negative playing experiences and stabilizing experiences of failure create a downward spiral. In many cases this leads to the permanent withdrawal of students from the participation in competitive games. They either refuse to play or act passively during the game. On the contrary, students with advanced playing skills stridently demand competitive games. For them successful participation also leads to an increase in self worth.

PE/Sports teachers are confronted daily with the challenge to create playing lessons that allow everyone in an – in many cases – highly heterogeneous group of students to participate actively. A key question is how the dominance of some students with advanced playing skills can be counterbalanced to enable students with basal playing skills equal participation.

As follows some basic principles of game alteration are presented in order to facilitate equal participation of students with heterogeneous abilities and skills in a competitive team-sports game.

Separate the playing field into zones in which only specific players of both teams are allowed.

Often it can be observed that in common sports games strong players secure the ball quickly, push the ball forward and also finish the attack themselves.

However, games like Korfball or Netball with a specified separation of the field into playing zones, which only some team members (with specific functions) are allowed to enter and not allowed to leave, demonstrate not only a more balanced course of the game, but also that ball possession is more equally distributed among the players. Matching players with approximately equal playing skills in the playing zones leads to more opportunities to participate for players with basal playing skills because they are not playing directly against players with stronger playing skills. It is recommended that after a certain number of successful playing actions positions are changed as in Korfball so that players can act in different positions.

Introduce alternative forms of catching and stopping the ball or playing object

A common problem of players with basal playing skills is that they cannot properly catch and stop the ball or control and pass along the ball if they are in ball possession. Alternative forms of catching and stopping the ball, for example with cones (cf. Kolb, 2005b) can solve the problem of withdrawal from the game due to deficient playing skills. In Cone Football players grab the tip of the cone and catch the ball – if possible a soft Swoshball – with the open reverse side of the cone. In Cone Soccer the ball is stopped with the reverse side of the cone and then passed along with the foot.

Assign different players in a team with varied ball handling and/or movement options.

Deficient mastering of important playing skills can be tackled by introducing the following rule: one part of the players in a team is only allowed to use a certain playing technique, for example stopping and passing the ball only with the foot, the other part exclusively uses another technique, for example catching and throwing the ball only with the hand. Within the teams players can decide by themselves who uses which technique. (Cf. Ha-Fu-Kopfball: Glorius & Leue, 2010, S. 253-256 or Yum-Yum: Kössler, 2002).

Include several goals or targets per team

In common sports games only one attacking target per team exists. In general this leads to the positioning of many attacking and defending players in front of the attacking target. In many cases the players with stronger playing skills are the ones who successfully throw or shoot at the target or goal.

If more goals or targets are included in the game, in most cases a fast decentralization of the playing action can be observed. This offers players with weaker skills better chances to initiate target actions. The game Tchoukball serves as an example for such a regulation because both teams can score points at both frames.

Do not place targets or goals at the end of the playing field, put them into the playing field

Attacking targets, which are placed at the end of the playing field, can only be thrown or shot at from one side. The concentration of players in front of the playing targets is also promoted.

Playing targets put into the playing field, for example a part of a gymnastics box that is laid out flat alongside the playing direction, provoke an increased and faster passing game around the attacking targets clearly integrating more players.

In target-oriented games arrange the targets or goals low, in a small-area or flexible and play without a goal keeper

The comparatively large and high attacking targets in common sports games lead to the following: players with physical advantages and the ability to throw or shoot hard aim for the target from great distances. Many of the players with weaker playing skills are worried to be hit by playing objects, which are sometimes thrown or shot hard at face level. Therefore, they – understandably – withdraw themselves from the dangerous zones in front of the attacking targets.

With attacking targets reduced in size and kept low, for example handball goals laid down on their front side, which reverse side serves as target, players make the experience that throwing or shooting playing objects from great distances is not a successful playing strategy. It can be observed that smaller and lower attacking targets lead to the development of a clearly improved attacking game with the goal of bringing the playing object close to the attacking target.

Mark areas from within it is forbidden to aim for the target or goal

Marking areas which players are not allowed entering shifts the playing actions away from the targets or goals and leads to a more intensive running and passing game around the forbidden areas. According to experience players with basal playing skills are then included more often in the game.

Only allow indirect aiming or targeting towards the goals

Actions aimed directly at the target are normally dominated by players with a solid throwing or shooting technique.

Actions aimed indirectly at the target, for example when a ball cannot be thrown or shot directly, but only indirectly after bouncing back from a wall or the floor, not only ease the target actions, but also provide better chances of success for players with basal playing skills. Famous examples of games with indirect aiming or targeting towards the goal are Tchoukball, Jokeiba, Bounce-Ball, Hand-Headball or Backwards-Ball.

Replace intensive body-involving forms of defence with symbolic defence actions

In common sports games players with strong physical characteristics (more strength, height and weight) often dominate. Especially smaller and more light-weighted players only have small chances to defend successfully against physically dominant players. If they constantly make experiences where they can hardly stop attacking players due to their weaker physical characteristics and, furthermore, are regularly pushed out of the way not conforming to the rules, they will avoid such challenges as a precaution in the future.

In simplified versions of end-zone games like Flag-Football or Touch-Rugby an alternative to direct and intensive body-involving forms of defence was developed. Attacking players are stopped by pulling out a flag or touching them. According to experience such symbolic forms of defence lead to considerably better chances for physically disadvantaged players for successful challenges.

Restrict individual players' movement with the ball

In common sports games there are comparatively good options for players to move around by dribbling or bouncing the playing object or ball. Players who are not proficient in these playing techniques have a significant disadvantage.

Restricting the individual movement with the ball strengthens co-operative playing within a team. Thus, players with basal playing skills are also better included in the game. Korfbal, Netball and Ultimate Frisbee are games in which restricted forms of movement through the limitation of the number of steps are part of the rules.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that these principles of rule changes in sports games are based on practical teaching experiences and have not been tested sufficiently in scientific studies. However, for suggestions concerning practical changes in sports teaching it seems to be essential to build on teaching experiences and plausibility considerations, which are then empirically verified or falsified.

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