



## **Field Hockey Canada Coach Resource: Using games for skill development**

Using games with athletes is a great way to teach and practise tactical and technical skills. Not only are purposeful, or small-sided, games an effective way to develop skills, but they can also help build confidence in athletes while they master fundamental movement skills and fundamental field hockey skills and improve their physical literacy.

### **Principles**

When developing purposeful/small-sided games for training sessions, follow these principles:

- The game should be fun
- The game should be safe
- The game offers a graduated challenge, starting from simple and working to the more complex
- The game is not so difficult that athletes quit, nor so easy that they become bored
- The game includes many touches on the ball
- The game is played in a supportive environment where athletes encourage one another with compliments and cheering
- The rules of the game are easily understood
- The game should not exclude any athlete (avoid elimination games)

These games should be part of every training session and be used to reinforce skills, bridge from skill to game, and connect to physical literacy.

### Considerations

When choosing or designing a purposeful/small-sided game to play, take into account the following considerations related to the group of athletes:

- the athletes' specific needs
- the LTD and development stage you are working with
- the safety of the group
- the appropriate explanation and demonstration requirements
- the logistics of the training session, including the number of athletes, time, space available and amount of equipment provided



## Designing purposeful/small-sided games

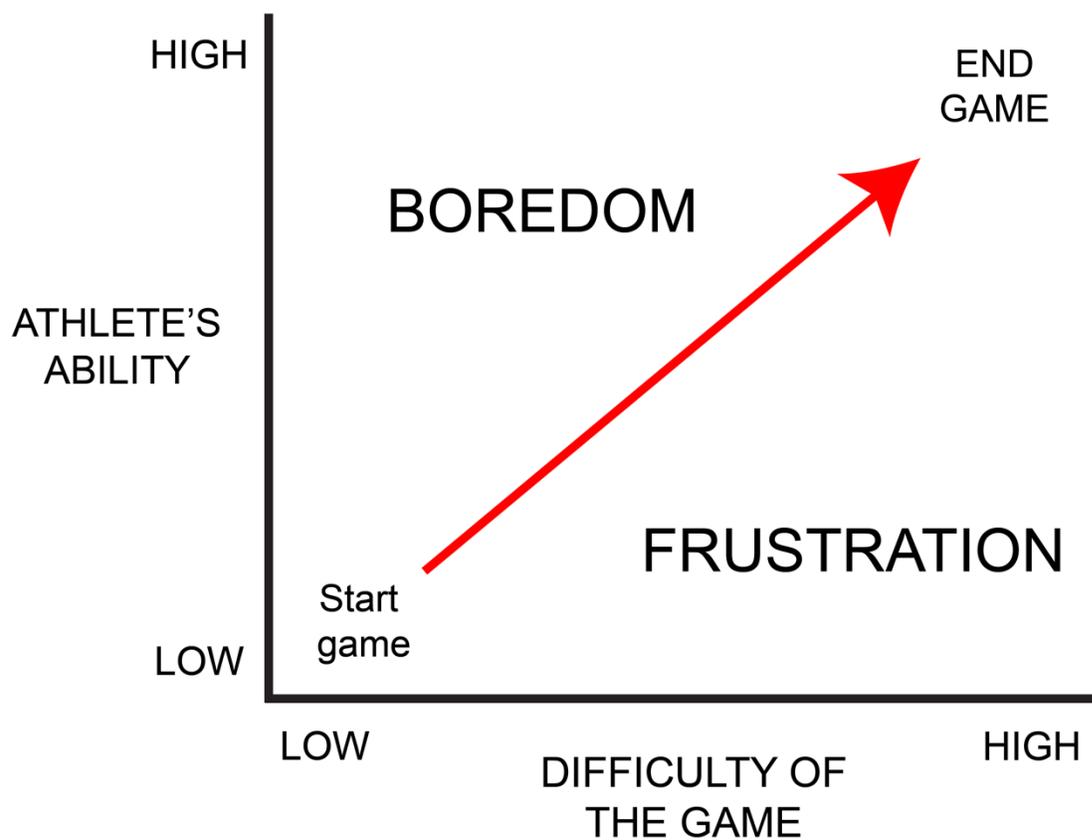
Once you have taken into account the principles and different considerations listed above, you are ready to select the type and conditions of practice that are most appropriate. This way, you can increase the probability that the desired learning or training effects will occur.

The following steps set out how to design or select the activities for a practice:

1. **Determine what you want the athletes to be able to do (your goal)** during the training session
  - This may be part of a long-term goal that may take several training sessions or even weeks to achieve
2. **Assess the nature of the task** you want the athletes to be able to do in terms of the skills (specific technical and tactical concepts and key coaching points) and the athletic abilities (physical, motor, tactical and mental) involved
3. Given the nature of the task and its demands, **ask whether it is appropriate to the athlete's age and developmental stage, as well as their stage of skill development**
  - If it is, proceed to Step 4
  - If it isn't, return to Step 1 and make the necessary adjustments
4. **Identify potential risk factors** associated with the activity, and take them into account in the activity you design
5. **Take into account the logistics of the practice**, including the number of athletes, space, and amount of equipment available, and how that will affect the design/selection of an activity
6. Design/select **an activity for developing the skill that is safe and ensures maximum activity, movement and touches**
7. Define the **measures of success for the activity**
  - The measure of success should answer the question "How do I know the performance of the skill is improving?"
8. Think about the best way to **explain** and **demonstrate** the activities to make it easy for the athletes to understand what the activity is about and how it should be performed
9. At the end of practice, assess its effectiveness in achieving your goal



# SELECTING/DESIGNING A GAME



Source: Adapted from J. Brunelle, D. Drouin, P. Godbout, and M. Tousignant (1988), *La supervision de l'intervention en activité physique*.



## Changing and modifying the game

Once you have designed the game, you should be prepared to adapt it. Situations may occur on the field that will require modification, and it is valuable to think through how you will adapt the game to address these scenarios.

- How could you adapt the activity in poor weather?
- How could you adapt the activity if there is a shortage of equipment (such as balls)?
- How could you adapt the activity if the athletes are unable to do the activity, unsuccessful or simply unfocused?
- How could you adapt the activity if there are fewer athletes present than you expected?
- How could you make the game more or less challenging for the athletes?

## Methods of modifying the game

When considering how to modify the game to have a different outcome, you should narrow the focus on skill development, or address the different abilities of the athletes using the CHANGE IT principle:

- C Change the **coaching** style
- H Change **how** you win
- A Change the **area** of play
- N Change the **number** of athletes
- G Change the **game rules**
- E Change the **equipment**
  
- I Adapt the **inclusion**
- T Adapt the **time frame**

## CHANGE IT – Coaching style

Coaches need to ensure they have clear objectives and focus points. You can change your coaching style based on the objectives of the game and the learning outcomes you are pursuing. Some coaching changes to consider:

- **Communication:** Can you change how you communicate, explain or demonstrate the activity?
  - Consider the abilities and needs of the athletes and use age-appropriate language
  - Consider visual, physical and auditory learners
  - Keep your instructions short and simple
  - Be aware of your positioning and what the athletes see when you are coaching
- **Feedback:** The amount provided, timing and delivery (individual or team) all impact the quality of game design



- For instance, when working on tactical principles, a coach may step in to “freeze” the game to provide immediate feedback and reflection on what has occurred
- **Objectives:** Set clear objectives and purpose for game play
  - Reward and recognize when objectives (technical/tactical) are achieved or even attempted
- **Who:** Do you want to coach individuals or the team?
  - This aligns with the timing of feedback and feedback relative to the objectives of the game

### **CHANGE IT – How you win**

The method of scoring can be changed to suit the technical or tactical focuses of a coach’s training session.

- Can you modify how score is kept in your game?
- Can there be multiple scoring options, different scoring values based on who scores, where they score from or what type of action deserves points?
- Does this game need scoring to get a positive outcome?

You should consider the technical or tactical goals of your training sessions and modify games to suit. Here are some ideas for consideration:

- **Goals** (standard game): Encourage normal game play with the objective of penetrating an opposition’s defence and protecting your own end of the field
- **Gates:** Randomized gates can encourage spatial awareness and awareness in transition from attack to defence
- **Scoring method:** Skills to score through gates could include dribbling (encourage individual skill) or passing (encourage team play)
- **Time/number of passes:** Time or number of passes in possession can encourage team play, which covers the principles of time and space
- **Ball:** Where should we move the ball to maintain the best possession and least pressure?

### **CHANGE IT – Area of play**

Changing the field the game is played in can result in different outcomes, and manipulating the field space can maximize involvement of the athletes or address different technical or tactical aspects. For instance, you can consider whether you need a bigger or smaller field area to create less or more space. Will this affect the level of challenge or make the game easier if necessary? The area a game is played on will affect time and space on the field.

- **Big field:** A bigger field encourages skills over distance and use of space for leading and receiving in motion
  - A bigger field will require more physical effort over distance
  - A big field with less athletes will create more space to move, and more time on the ball to receive, pass and make decisions



- As performance improves, you can add more players in a large space or progress to smaller field sizes
- **Small field:** Smaller fields encourage stick-to-stick passing and use of the body to protect the ball
  - A smaller field will require more changes of directions and agility to transition between attack and defence
  - In smaller spaces athletes have less time and space and are encouraged to make faster tactical decisions and to better control the execution of technical skills

### **CHANGE IT – Number of athletes**

Changing the number of athletes can change the outcome by making the game more or less crowded, which forces different decision-making or outcomes. The number of athletes can also be split based on development or ability to allow for greater challenge or greater opportunities for success. The number of athletes directly affects the amount of touches an individual can have. For example:

- **1v1:** High level of involvement, and athletes have the opportunity to practise various elimination and tackling skills
- **Small-sided games (5v5):** Less involvement than 1v1, but still high-level engagement from athletes, and athletes are required to make more decisions (such as pass or eliminate) and have greater defensive accountability
- **Full field games (11v11):** Low level of involvement, but full engagement of match play principles and team structures

### **CHANGE IT – Game rules**

Game rules can be changed to allow everyone to play at the level they need to play at. You can remove or simplify rules to make the game more accessible, fluid and enjoyable for beginners. Then, as skill and understanding increase, you can reintroduce targeted rules that focus on key technical skills or tactical principles. Here are some suggestions:

- Allow for more/less touches on the ball (unlimited touches versus 2 touches, for example) and focus on quality receiving to ensure the ball is in a good position to make next pass
- 3 seconds on ball: Requires athletes to look for their next pass and read play
- Play the way you face: Encourages athletes to face goal when receiving to encourage attacking play
- Change the skill: Type of distribution skill (push, sweep, hit), forehand passes only, lifted passes only, no running with the ball, no tackle
- Add communication requirements
- Reduce or remove competitive elements such as scoring or change methods of scoring
- Put limitations on the field space, such as playing zones that you cannot run or pass through



### **CHANGE IT – Equipment**

Make the game fun, interesting or different by adapting or modifying the equipment.

Here are some suggestions:

- Change the size of the ball
- Change the weight or bounce of the ball
- Change the colour of the cones/goals or balls
- Change the way you use the equipment
- Use equipment that is not traditional to the sport, for example by playing with a soccer ball and hockey stick, making the ball easier to trap and pass and the game more enjoyable for introductory athletes

### **CHANGE IT – Inclusion**

Adjusting inclusion means making sure everyone in the group or team has the chance to participate. You can adjust the setup of the game so that everyone has to touch the ball before the team can score, to make sure every athlete has their own area of the field, or to identify specific and different roles for athletes of different abilities.

### **CHANGE IT – Time frame**

Changing the time constraints within a game can allow for more effective participation.

- It can provide a competition element (for example, “how many repetitions can you achieve in 30 seconds”)
- It can create urgency (for example, “you have 5 seconds to pass once you receive the ball”)
- It can be used to elevate the intensity (for example, “work hard for 2 minutes and then we will have a 1-minute rest”)