

## **FA Youth Award - Module 3**

### **Questioning Techniques – Asking the right players the right questions in the right way at the right time.**

When using question and answer techniques it is wise to have a couple of strategies available when grouping the players. Often players find that questioning the group as a whole is a more daunting experience than when the coach breaks the squad down into more manageable numbers (say threes or fours) where more people are likely to respond and have their say. This also allows the coach to be more strategic in group selection e.g. all the quiet ones together; all the loud confident ones together; all the forwards together; allow them to pick their own groups etcetera

#### **Simple and Complex Questions**

The aim of effective questions is for the coach to involve the players in their learning process by enhancing their technical mastery and tactical understanding. Through appropriate questions the coach can promote both the simple and complex thinking that aids problem solving and decision making. These two forms of thinking require different types of questions.

When players need to remember specific ideas or concepts simple questions like – ‘what part of your head should you contact the ball with to strike at goal?’ are good. This type of question serves as reminder cues that may be essential to a learning sequence. Simple questions are often focussed on what or where? Questions that may be asked more during technique or drill practices; they are factual and generally with only one possible answer.

While simple questions may be appropriate for some circumstances the coach should also strive to ask the players more complex questions thereby extending the players’ chance to self evaluate.

Complex questions challenge players to apply, analyse, synthesise, extend know how and create knowledge. They are generally more appropriate for developing tactical awareness and more difficult skills.

Although groups ranging from young children to elite adults respond well to complex questions (as long as they are framed appropriately), it is to the coaches’ advantage to plan their questions according to their players’ developmental needs.

When using complex questions a questioning sequence is more appropriate to encourage independent learning i.e. where players are required to think about things in greater depth and can search for multiple answers.

Examples of complex questions in a football context include

- ‘How can we counter attack quickly?’

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- 'How can we beat a retreating defence?'
  - 'Why should we aim to spread out as a team when we get the ball?'
  - Why should we aim to get closer together when we lose the ball?'
  - 'How can we best play out from the goalkeeper?'
  - 'How can we inject a change of speed into our attacks in the final third of the field?'
  - 'How do we ensure we attack to advantage in the opposition penalty area?'

Why and how questions enhance players' ability to make informed decisions. If players are having difficulty coming up with the answers the coach should re-phrase the question but not give the answer as it takes ownership of the problem solving and decision making process away from the players. With complex questions there can be no 'wrong' answers as players will usually interpret the questions at their own level of understanding.

The coach must listen closely to the answers deduce the significance and respond accordingly. Often players produce answers that the coach may well find useful to involve and apply in training or match play. By listening attentively the coach can learn a lot from the players.

### **Tactical and technical questions**

Questions that call for decision making and problem solving with respect to strategy can be considered tactical in nature. Command style coaches often want to decide on their team's game plan and then direct it from the bench; but unless the players understand why the game plan exists and take up ownership of it the coach will often find the players have difficulty in agreeing accepting and understanding it.

Using the co-operative style a coach will set up tactical situations as problem solving exercises. These can either be out on the pitch or in player meetings or workshops.

Two examples of this could be as follows:

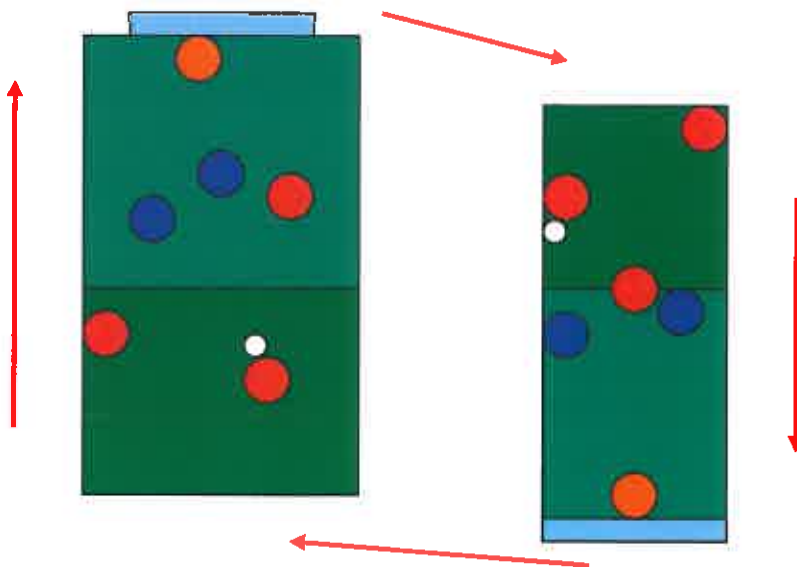
Firstly the coach wants to discuss 10 man scenarios with the players in a workshop situation. The squad is divided into four groups and each group given one the following four scenarios to discuss.

- You are 1 – 0 up with 20 minutes left to play and your central midfield player is sent off. How do you re-set your formation and how do you play tactically for the remainder of the match?

- You are 1 – 0 down with 20 minutes left to play and the opposition have a centre back sent off. How do you re-set your formation and how do you play tactically for the remainder of the match?
- You are 1 – 0 up with 20 minutes left to play. The opposition have a forward sent off. You need to win the match by two goals to stay in the tournament. How do re-set your formation and how do you play tactically for the remainder of the match?
- You are 1 – 0 down with 20 minutes left to play and have a centre back sent off. You need to draw the match to win the league. How do you re-set your formation and how do you play tactically for the remainder of the match?

The group discussions would last for 10 minutes the coach would then get the groups to change around so that members from each mixed together. They would then discuss what conclusions they came to from each scenario for a further 10 minutes. All the while the coach would act as facilitator to the groups listening to the conclusions and gauging their understanding of the problems and the solutions they came up with while maybe prompting and probing when necessary.

Secondly out on the pitch the coach could set up a 'fat pitch thin pitch' attacking practice as outlined below and ask comparative tactical questions.



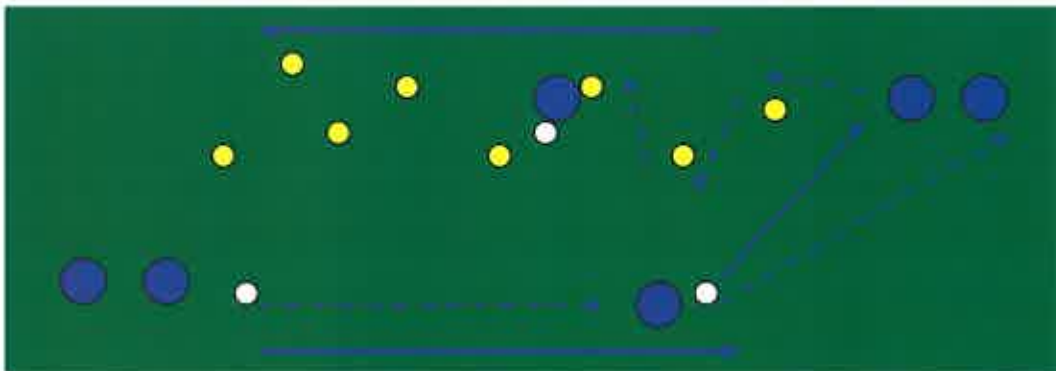
In the above practice the reds attack 3 versus 2 up one channel and then repeat their attack down the other channel. The coach could ask the following tactical questions:

- What have you noticed about the spaces on both pitches?
- How can we best attack given that the space is different?

- Where may we have to play more quickly?
- Where are the 1 v 1 situations more likely to occur? How can we play to bring this about?
- What skills can you use to inject more speed into your attacks?

Designing questions for players to become more aware of their techniques helps to provide them with purposeful feedback. Again the coach may find a practice where players can compare different techniques and where and when to use them useful.

For example in the practice outlined below players can compare the techniques involved in receiving to dribble the ball and receiving to run with the ball. The questions the coach could ask are set out below.



- Where could you use a bigger touch?
- Where did you have to use more touches and closer control of the ball?
- Where did you need fewer touches of the ball?
- Which course could you complete more quickly?
- How did you use your feet to keep the ball under control? How was this different dribbling to running with the ball?

In this instance to help the players gain kinaesthetic awareness the coach gets them to compare the two techniques. The purpose of working in this way is to enable the players to become more self aware and to take more responsibility for making technical decisions.

Asking the right questions in the right way at the right time encourages the players to take a more active part in their learning. Shaping the questions properly will help the players do this more effectively.

For example:

- How many touches do you need to turn with the ball?
- Don't tell me now – have a go and I'll ask you again in a minute or so.
- Repeat the question when the players have had a go.
- Listen to the answers and let them show you what they have come up with

Then ask questions like

- How did you see you had the space to turn?
- When can you no touch turn?
- What stops you no touch turning?
- How can you turn when there is little or no space?
- How did you position your body to see behind you and receive the ball?
- How can the passing player help you?

Formulating meaningful questions is a key element in establishing an effective questioning environment. Planning the questions for the training session ahead is a most important step especially if it's new to the coach who is trying to learn it then add it to their coaching repertoire.

To plan meaningful clear coherent questions a co-operative player centred coach will:

- Consider the content to be worked on and the players' readiness to contribute.
- Practise the questions for the session by writing them down or running them past a colleague.
- Ensure the questions have variety challenge and interest and are relevant for the players involved.
- Ensure that there is an outcome to work towards (and know the outcome) with the questions planned to lead methodically to the planned outcome.
- Design the questions appropriately for the players talking part in the work i.e. questions around when to press or when to drop off when

losing possession of the ball may not be best for players under seven years old.

In planning questions it is always good to be adaptable and take up a flexible stance; the real art of questioning is to 'read' the players, look at what is happening in the practice and ask the relevant questions when the players are ready or need to solve a problem. The best way is probably to plan some general questions then in training ask further meaningful questions based on the situations that present themselves.

Asking the right question to the right player in the right way at the right time is an art that needs to be practised and learned and it takes time. But coaches have many opportunities to learn these questioning techniques; all they have to do is have the courage to take them up.

There is no formula for the right time to ask a question. The answer is that it depends on those 'learning moments' when the coach can usefully support players and whether the player has managed to sort things out; is struggling to sort things out or needs a 'clue' that helps to sort things out.

The ability of the coach to ask questions at the right time will depend a great deal on their willingness to try out the question and answer methodology because often success will depend on the coaches' instinct experience and intuition.

Normally though the timing of a question can be a key to its success and this may well depend on the player and the nature of their experience. If the players' experience has been positive and pleasant then questions may be asked straightaway. If the players' experience has been negative and no so pleasant then the first priority may well be well being of the player and questions relating to the experience can wait until later.

### **Wait time**

When asking questions the coach needs to be comfortable during those uncomfortable silences that will occur from time to time; this is quite a challenge when first learning how to question players. An appropriate wait time is probably three to five seconds. Once 'wait time' has been mastered by the coach who no longer calls for an immediate response to questions the players will gain more benefits from the question and answer technique.

To support the notion of wait time the co-operative player centred coach will:

- Listen to players' answers without repeating what they have said (coach echo) and give them some time in silence while they are gathering their thoughts.

- Be careful not to identify a player by name immediately after asking a question; once the coach picks out a player to answer a question the others tend to turn off their thinking processes.
- Show you are listening by affirming answers e.g. 'OK. I understand.' But avoid a 'Yes but...' reaction which signals that the players' idea is rejected.
- Allow the players to provide the answers.

### **Re-enforcement**

The co-operative player centred coach will base much of their methodology on the concept of focussed and 'justified' praise. For example they will:

- Give a great deal of non-verbal encouragement and reinforcement through eye contact, thumbs up, smiling, nodding, clapping their hands etcetera.
- Praise players for attempting answers and their responses to questions.
- Praise honestly and genuinely.

The coach should encourage youngsters' innovative ideas; if the players find no sincere support for their ideas they will be much less inclined to give them next time.

If a comeback to a player's answer is - 'what a stupid idea!' How will that player (and the group) be affected? Would the players feel they had the respect of the coach? How would the individual player feel?

The idea of asking questions is to give confidence to the players to strive for solutions and to develop their own reflective processes not necessarily to hit on the right answer straightaway.

### **Prompting**

When prompting players the coach uses cues and clues to remind the players of something by promoting hints and tips.

For example - 'Remember it's accuracy before power; think about that ball contact'. It's important when giving cues and clues the coach does not give the player the whole answer because the hints and tips are designed to help players gain the confidence to find the answers out for themselves.

## **Probing**

Probing is a question and answer strategy the coach can use where follow up questions are asked of the players in order to extend and develop their answers. Here is an example of how the coach can achieve this:

Coach: 'How can we inject a change of tempo into our attacks?'

Player: 'Dribble.'

Coach: 'Is there any other way you can do it?' (Probing question)

Player: 'Quick passing.'

Coach: 'That's a good answer. What have we been learning that will help you with that?'

Player: 'One touch football.'

Coach: 'Great. Now what is it about one touch play that makes it work well?'

Player: 'Accurate passing.'

Coach: 'Good. Anything else help?' (Probing question)

Player: 'The speed of the pass and the support play.'

Probing and reinforcing promote player learning by extending current thought processes and encouraging players' answers.

Many coaches believe they must tell and show their players exactly how to perform a correct technique or execute a tactical ploy in order for them to learn how to do it. This is interesting but not wholly accurate. Techniques and tactics do not have to be 'taught' explicitly as players at all levels can often work out what is needed if given the chance and the right degree of support and encouragement.

The effective use of meaningful questions asked in the right way to the right player(s) at the right time can give co-operative player centred coaches a huge advantage in affecting players' learning power. It will add a great deal to the coaches' tool kit and enhance their abilities as effective teachers of the game.

Good coaches welcome the challenges individuality creativity and novel player solutions bring to their operations. On the other hand poor coaches limit their players by directing them towards their own answers thereby restricting the players' imagination and inventiveness and the decision making problem solving skills that go hand in hand with good learning environments.