Why not start and finish with a Game?

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Introduction:
The introduction of the AFL Junior Football Match Guide has highlighted the need to introduce young players to the game through modified rules regarding player numbers, ground size and regulations. This concept also promotes the value of using a games approach in your practice sessions – the benefits being more touches on the ball, more opportunities to make decisions and more actual play. One of the keys is that players will be more active and will begin to understand the importance of team mates, playing and working together.

Which would you prefer?

Warm Up Games:

There are a range of games you can play with your players (whether they be juniors or seniors) to add variety to your practice sessions – so why not start with a game as part of the warm up or to practice skills taught in a previous session. Think back to games you played when you were young and how they can become ‘footyfied’.

A good example is **Scarecrow Tiggy** – set up an area using cones, have at least one ‘tagger’ and two to four ‘release’ players who handball the ball between the legs of the scarecrows (stand like a star with legs apart) to get them back into the game. Keep changing the ‘taggers’ and ‘releasers’.

Another is **Pegs** – set up the space, have players wear pegs on their jumpers, two or three chasers to collect the pegs, once you lose all your pegs you become a chaser. These are warm up games – running (who needs laps?), dodging, evading, watching hips for tackling, tagging, releasing using handball skill, team play and plenty of fun.

The AFL Junior manual has a range of games which allow players to practice their football skills and game sense.
Skill Games:

Game skills are about applying individual and team skills in games. These games are not necessarily AFL games but games with a clear focus. Some benefits of these games include:

- The modified version is as fun and exciting to play as football from which it was derived. Thus, players will still remain motivated to participate.
- It is challenging enough for the younger players, but still in a controlled environment.
- It offers a great avenue for skill development and facilitates the natural growth and progression of your player.
- It can offer an even playing field for players of all sizes, ages and skill level.
Skill game: Force back (teams)
2 groups of 6 children

In the centre of the designated space, the teams position themselves facing each other approximately 30 metres apart. Team A kicks the ball as far as possible in to Team B's area. If the ball is marked by a member of Team B, the child can take five steps forward and kick the ball back in to Team A's area. If the ball isn't marked, it must be kicked from where it was gathered. The team forcing the ball over the end line of the space is the winner.

Skill Game: Running mat ball
2 groups of 6 children

In an area the size of a basketball court, each team has a mat or marked area approximately 2m x 1.5m for goals. Teams select a catcher who stands on the team's mat (goals). The game is started with a ball-up between two centre players. Players use handball only to pass ball. A goal is scored when the team catcher receives a handball in the goal area. After a goal, play is restarted with a ball-up in the centre. If the ball goes out of bounds, a ball-up is held between two matched opponents to restart the game. Team scoring the most goals wins.

Rules:
No player other than the catcher may step on the mat or enter the goal area. A free shot for goal from the penalty spot is awarded.
Player may run with the ball.
No body contact is allowed. Free pass from where offence occurred or free shot for goal from penalty spot is awarded.

Skill activity 2: 5 versus 6 (11 players)

- Players on opposing teams set up in a square about 150m x 150m. One team has six players whereas the other only has five. The aim is for the team with the ball to control possession inside the square by selecting the right option and executing the skill by hand or foot. If the team with six players control the ball for three minutes, then teams swap roles and the other team then has the extra player.

Teaching points:
- Focus on isolating an open player and correctly executing the kick before defenders can attempt to spoil.
- Don't rush when in possession and wait for the best option.

Skill Game: Kickers and handballers

Children form a kicking and a fielding team. The first kicker kicks the ball in to the field (if ball goes wide the kick is taken again) and the entire team runs around the field as a group to the finishing line. The fielders gather the ball and handball it to each other. When all fielders have touched the ball they call out “stop”. Each member of the kicking team that reaches the finish line before “stop” is called scores one point. Each member of the kicking team has a turn at kicking before the teams swap.
As the coach you can also become a game developer:

• Have an aim or theme for each game. What are we trying to achieve?
• Use small teams – for example 2 - 6 players to maximize the number of decisions and/or touches of the ball - repetition
• Are there match scenarios that occur frequently in a game to replicate?
• Length – games need to be long enough to allow plenty of repetition to develop “experience” but need to consider ‘work rate’
• What are the main rules? The size of the area? (can adjust during game)
• Prepare variations for the game eg. What is the next progression? Make it easier or harder – change the rules
• Develop questions to assist in the learning process

Conclusion:

Using these games to add to your coaching program will benefit your players as they can practice their football skills in a range of activities, learn the essence of team play and communication, most of all have some fun.

Have a go at developing your own games – time to be creative!

Just to finish off - how about a game that has stood the test of time – Footy Baseball!

- Team 1
- Team 2
- Two teams with even numbers.
- Batter kicks the football into the diamond from home plate.
- The fielding team gathers the ball and must either kick or handball the ball between the fielding team players to either a base (1st, 2nd and 3rd) or home plate before the batter (kicker) arrives at the base.
- You can play 3 out, all out or bat the entire team, then change over.