



MAXIMISING MODERATE & VIGOROUS PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN COACHING SESSIONS

By Lawrie Woodman and Gene Schembri*

Recent research, including guidelines and recommendations from the World Health Organisation (WHO), has highlighted the inadequate levels of physical activity in most people's lives.

The Australian Government's National Physical Activity Guidelines recommend one hour per day of Moderate to Vigorous Physical Activity (MVPA) for children 5-18 years and 150 minutes per week of MVPA for adults. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare less than 45% of adults and 30% of children currently meet the physical activity guidelines (2019).

In 2021 there is an international push to promote greater levels of physical activity in communities around the world.

What is 'physical activity'?

Physical activity is any activity that gets your body moving, makes your breathing become quicker, and your heartbeat faster. Physical activity can be in many different forms and at different levels of intensity.

Intensity (moderate and vigorous)

Moderate intensity physical activity requires some effort, but still allows you to speak easily while undertaking the activity. Examples include active play, brisk walking, recreational swimming, dancing, social tennis, or riding a bike or scooter.

Vigorous intensity physical activity requires more effort and makes you breathe harder and faster ("huff and puff"). Examples include running, fast cycling, many organised sports, or tasks that involve lifting, carrying, or digging.

Sport

Sport, by definition, generally involves physical activity. One well-recognised definition (*Cambridge Dictionary*) is:

"A game, competition, or activity needing physical effort and skill that is played or done according to rules, for enjoyment and/or as a job."

Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on the everyday lives of communities around the world, including where and how they take part in sport and physical activity. According to WHO, these impacts have also been unequal, making it more difficult for some people to stay active and leading

to widening health gaps at a time when being active is more important than ever for mental and physical well-being.

A recent WHO webinar focused on how the impacts of COVID-19 have created a need and opportunity to reinvent and rebuild stronger, fairer, more inclusive physical activity and sports for everyone.

WHO Director-General Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said, “The time has come for a new approach that sees health not as a cost, but an investment that is the foundation of productive, resilient and stable economies.”

The role for coaches in optimising Physical activity in sport

Every sport coaching session and competition/game day presents the opportunity for coaches to assist the accumulation of MVPA for every member of their team.

Given the inherent levels of physical activity in sport activities, optimising the level of activity in any practice session or competition is worthwhile. **Quality, athlete-centred, coaching ensures that each participant gets the appropriate, and hopefully optimum, levels of physical activity and active learning time in training and competition.**

Coaches can optimise activity during practice sessions through a range of good coaching processes.

These can be summed up in the following three areas.

Start quickly – observe, analyse & teach – CHANGE IT (as appropriate)

Effective planning and delivery will ensure activity levels are up.

Good practice in these areas can be achieved by:

Planning – Every sport activity can make an important contribution to the physical and mental health of each player and MVPA should be considered as an integral part of the coach’s planning process. Look at your session structure. Does it contain high levels of activity?

- Plan each activity including how you will get it started efficiently. Aim should be to get every new activity underway within 1 minute. Write out the aim, activity set-up, demonstration, how it starts, key questions which athletes might ask, key questions which coach wants to ask participants to increase the challenges and learning.
- Include activities with goals that inherently produce physical challenges that increase heart rates and movement repetitions - without presenting (or measuring) them as “fitness training”.
- Include activities encouraging choice and decision-making.
- Plan your demonstrations. Even practice them before training, so you can do them automatically.
- Ensure all equipment and markings for each activity is set up or ready before the session starts.
- Use developmental stage (size, coordination, maturity) rather than age as a main guide in planning activities for children.

Delivering

- Start your session with activity – get all participants active within 1 minute of the start.
- Use warm-up activities for both practice and competition – make it a habit, ensure it is fun to do, and actually warms people up.
- Conduct some of your meetings on the run. If your meetings involve talking to the group and asking questions, this can be done while you are active, or during scheduled rest/recovery periods within activities.
- Continually observe and analyse how the session and each activity is going and make changes to ensure there is progress towards session and activity objectives (Use CHANGE IT principles)

CHANGE IT

CHANGE IT highlights elements of a game or activity that can be changed to make it easier or harder and to include and challenge all participants.

Some of the main elements are:

Area – step up (decrease the size of the area) or down (increase).

Numbers – what is the optimum number of participants for the activity? Is everyone engaged? Are participants waiting for turns or standing still? Use short lines, smaller teams/groups.

Game Rules – ensure there are clear objectives for each activity, set challenges and methods of scoring, create choice and decision-making opportunities. Use small-sided games to add appropriate layers of complexity.

Inclusion – increase attempts, touches of ball, rotate positions, avoid elimination games (unless there are re-join opportunities). Watch out for and modify:

- Domination by some participants (early maturers, physically stronger, dominant scorers).
- Participants of less ability missing or avoiding turns or chances.
- Fully including participants with a disability - implement inclusive practices and observations to ensure individual differences of all participants are recognised and needs met.

Discuss with participants how to improve the activity.

Time – set time limits for activity as a whole, scoring attempts (shot clocks).

These adjustments are aimed at providing the optimum challenge to keep the participants on task. If it is too hard, there will be a tendency for some to give up, or if it is too easy, to become bored.

For full explanation of [CHANGE IT](#) (Summary chart P3).

Participation principles

In competition/game day - ensure equal playing time where possible. Provide experience (opportunities) for all participants in all roles and areas of the field.

Post session evaluation

Coaches should evaluate each session regarding whether the aims or objectives were met, what worked, what needs to be changed for the next session. Ask (yourself) and reflect on the following questions.

Was the session:

- Fun?
- Enjoyable?
- Developing the participants?
- Adequate in participation/activity levels - what percentage of the session did the participants work at moderate or vigorous intensity? Did this optimise the opportunity for MVPA, and could this be improved/increased in future sessions?

Were participants:

- Motivated – through games, challenges, fun?
- Engaged – actively participating in the task, lots of turns, lots of (ball) touches?
- Challenged – improving skills, movement, and game knowledge?

Even when people leave sport behind – inevitable for many at various stages of life – some of it sticks, and some may play (or return to play) into their later years. The important message to instil is the value of physical activity (any physical activity) and movement in the longer term.

While physical activity is inherent in most sports, **through good use of effective coaching practices coaches can optimise the levels of physical activity for participants in practice sessions and competitions.**

Citation

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