

# COACHING NOTES FROM COACHING CULTURE

## EPISODE 129 TRAINING NFL PLAYERS USING A GAME BASED APPROACH WITH SHAWN MYSZKA



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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Ap3obtskjl&t=5s>

### SHAWN MYSZKA

Has served primarily as a Personal Performance Advisor & Movement Skill Acquisition Coach for National Football League (NFL) players since 2008, working with approximately 12 players each year

Has partnered with 5 NFL All-Pro selections and 12 NFL Pro Bowl Team members

Operates a football-specific movement blog, Football Beyond the Stats, in which he uniquely breaks down the Developed content for the educational brand, Movement Mastery.

<https://emergentmvt.com/about/>

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### Research Confirms the Value of Random Practice

California Polytech conducted an experiment comparing a blocked and randomized approach to batting practice and found

*“The random group performed significantly better than the blocked group” in quality of contact under game conditions. (The MVP Machine, pgs. 153-154).*

The full study can be found [HERE](#).

*“It turns out the quickest way to acquire a new skill is to force yourself to do that skill with a constantly changing environment, implement, or activity. If you can vary one of those [elements] every single time, with the same goal, then your body acquires that skill a lot more quickly.” (pg. 152)*

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A baseball example is to use different-sized or weighted balls to make each throw feel slightly different “which forces the player’s mind to be active and his body to adapt” (pg. 153).

### Training an NFL Tight End to Play Special Teams

The first step is breaking the game into snippets - individual parts of the game that can be used to create a new challenge (such as open field tackling or tracking a punt in the air).

Each special teams play consists of a sequence of skills: blocking - release from the line of scrimmage - tracking the ball / returner - pursuit / tackling. When evaluating a player’s ability we analyze each piece of the sequence, identify weaknesses, and create learning challenges to target that specific aspect of the play.

Cones do not present a living, breathing, problem for the player to solve as they would on any given Sunday.

### Keys to Creating Learning Activities

Key ingredients of our training activities include perception, thought (decision-making), and action coupled together in each problem the athlete must solve. The athlete must interact with these training challenges in the same way they would experience them in a game.

**The Search Process** includes accessing information from the environment (identifying teammates, defenders, space, objectives, etc) and incorporating that into live decision-making.

**Repetition Without Repetition** - We present problems to the individuals and allow them to adjust their solutions based on the game-like scenario. We do not want them to repeat the same solution, but attempt to vary the problem so they repeat the process of finding and executing a solution.

### Three Areas of Constraints

1. **Manipulating the Organism** refers to changing the composition of the player - we can’t make them instantly faster, stronger, or bigger though we can enhance their abilities by changing the rules of the game (for example, to simulate defending a fast-paced transition offense allow the scout team to run the ball up the court without throwing it in or dribbling to enhance their speed).

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### 2. Task Constraints

- Altering the rules of the game
- Changing the size of the ball
- Manipulating the size of the goal / playing area
- Adding / Subtracting the number of players
- Constraining time
- Moving players into different starting positions

### 3. Environmental Constraints

- Change the amount of air in the ball
- Practice in a different facility
- Have players officiate or coach a scrimmage
- Use a crowd simulator to create game-like noise
- Bring people into practice to add social pressure to performance

**The Key Question** - Does the problem being presented to the athlete look, feel, behave, and act as it would on a game night?

### Four Essential Components of Learning Activities

- A problem to solve
- Information that is living and breathing in the environment
- Decisions that are unpredictable
- The athlete has the opportunity to adapt and respond to solve the problem

**A Games-Based Approach Enhances Culture** - Players recognize the game within our training and have a greater authenticity and ownership of their ability to play the game.

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