Third Edition

Teaching Sport Concepts and Skills

A Tactical Games Approach for Ages 7 to 18

INCLUDES DVD-ROM WITH VIDEO AND REPRODUCIBLE FORMS

Stephen A. Mitchell
Judith L. Oslin
Linda L. Griffin

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To Katie and Matt, who both make me so proud

—Stephen A. Mitchell

To Connie for her unwavering love and support

—Judith L. Oslin

To the WPG, which includes family and neighborhood friends and their appreciation for playing the game

—Linda L. Griffin

Introduction

We are pleased to write this third edition of *Teaching Sport Concepts and Skills: A Tactical Games Approach for Ages 7 to 18*. We received many positive comments on each of the first two editions of the book, particularly from those of you who teach at the secondary level. In this edition we expand the focus of the book to incorporate tactical games teaching at the elementary level, by blending content from our elementary book *Sport Foundations for Elementary Physical Education: A Tactical Games Approach* with the more secondary-focused material to create a book that is a resource for all teachers (hence the slight change in the title to include *for Ages 7 to 18*). We hope this book achieves that goal and becomes a useful addition to the growing literature on tactical games teaching. Regardless of the level at which you teach, you may already have knowledge and experience of tactical games teaching, perhaps gained from reading and using ideas from the original books. Do not be concerned, however, if you do not.

In part I of the book we begin with a thorough review of tactical games teaching and build a sound conceptual understanding of the approach. We provide thoughts on how best to prepare students for learning games through a tactical approach and also address some important principles of games teaching and learning, including the idea of tactical transfer and the process of teaching within the game. Tactical transfer is the understanding of how to solve the common problems presented across situations in similar game types. We have always argued that learning to solve the problems presented by one game can facilitate an understanding of how to solve problems in other games. A sound conceptual understanding is important to your ability to implement a tactical games approach. Also in part I we have moved forward the chapters on implementation (chapter 4), curriculum planning (chapter 5), and assessing game learning and performance (chapter 6), the latter reflecting the importance attached to assessment in the current educational climate. Chapter 6 on assessment addresses psychomotor, cognitive, and affective assessments in terms of standards-based curricula and provides examples of assessment integrated into lessons.

In part II we describe how elementary physical education teachers can use a conceptual approach to games teaching, beginning at about the second grade (ages 7 and 8). Lesson plans are included for invasion, net and wall, striking and fielding games, and target games using content from *Sport Foundations for Elementary Physical Education: A Tactical Games Approach*. We hope part II creates an effective link to the more sport-specific chapters in part III.

We carefully reviewed the sport-specific chapters in part III. Because the quality of teacher questioning is very important in tactical games teaching, we have reviewed and, where necessary, revised the suggested questions to ensure that they are consistent with lesson goals and game conditions, and that they elicit student responses that identify the need for skill practice. Within Practice Task segments we made a stronger effort to address broader ranges of student ability by providing task extensions where appropriate to increase the challenge when the need arises. Lastly, in response to requests from our own students and from teachers with whom we work, we added a chapter on flag football.

This edition also includes a professionally produced DVD-ROM that shows some of the lessons in action at both the elementary and secondary levels. This tool shows you not only how to implement the theory behind the tactical games approach, but also how to teach others in either a teacher-coach preparation setting or a youth sport or school setting. The volleyball segments show complete question-and-answer sessions, highlighting an effective method for making sure students are processing the lesson properly. A simple menu of demonstrated games makes it easy to find what you wish to review for yourself or to show others. The DVD-ROM also houses reproducible worksheets and assessments that you can print out for use in your classroom or with students. The following icon within the text of a lesson identifies that lesson or game as being included on the DVD-ROM. The icon also appears with thumbnails of reproducibles that are available on the DVD-ROM.

Games teaching and learning is a substantial part of most physical education curricula, and games playing

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provides an exciting and interactive environment for learning in all domains. We hope this book challenges all who read it. If you have experience with tactical games teaching, we challenge you to take it to other areas of the curriculum, to maximize the potential of tactical transfer through effective curriculum design, and to assess learning outcomes across all domains. If the idea of tactical games teaching is new to you, we challenge you to think deeply, to question your current practice as it relates to games teaching, and to adopt this new, student-centered approach to teaching and learning.

Acknowledgments

We are truly grateful for all that we have learned from the opportunity to have three editions of a book. The publication of each edition keeps us growing as teachers, scholars, and colleagues. We have many people to acknowledge, including our families and colleagues who have encouraged us along the way, the teachers with whom we have worked in field-testing our ideas, the staff at Human Kinetics (especially Ragen, our patient developmental editor for the last two editions), and all those who are advocates of teaching tactical games. In particular, for this edition, we must acknowledge the contribution of Shawn Bates, the PE teacher at Longcoy Elementary School in Kent, and Rita Covin, the PE teacher at Nordonia Middle School in Macedonia. Together with their students, these model teachers have provided excellent examples (as shown on the DVD-ROM) of how to use a tactical games approach in elementary and secondary physical education.

Contents

Introduction ix | Acknowledgments xi

Part I Tactical Games Teaching 1

Chapter 1 Tactical Games Explanation and Review 3

Rationale for a Tactical Approach 4
Game Frameworks 5
Game Performance 6
Levels of Tactical Complexity 6
Teaching Tactical Awareness and Skill Acquisition 8
Implementing a Tactical Games Approach Using This Book 10
Summary 10

Chapter 2 Principles of Games Teaching and Learning 13

Transfer of Tactical Knowledge in Games 14
Implications for Curriculum Development 15
Teaching During Game Play 16
Summary 18

Chapter 3 Preparing Students for a Tactical Games Approach 19

Training Students to Play Small-Sided Games 20
Teaching Appropriate Sport Behavior 21
Teaching Rules and Routines 22
Summary 23

Chapter 4 Getting Started With Tactical Games Teaching 25

Conceptual Framework for Planning Tactical Teaching 25
Putting the Planning Framework Into Action 29
The Teacher and the Change Process 30
Implementing Practices 32
Summary 35

Chapter 5 Tactical Games Curriculum Model 37

Assumptions Underpinning a Tactical Games Curriculum 38
Conceptual Framework 38
Model-Based Instruction 39
Summary 42

Chapter 6 Assessing Outcomes 43

Assessment Beliefs 43
Assessment Strategies 45
Assessing Learning Outcomes 47
Summary 61

Part II Lesson Plans for a Tactical Games Approach at the Elementary Level: Building Sport Foundations 63

Chapter 7 Invasion Games at the Elementary Level 65

Elementary Invasion Games Tactics 65
Levels of Elementary Invasion Game Complexity 66
Modifications for Elementary Invasion Games 67
Progressions for Teaching Elementary Invasion Games 69
Scope and Sequence 72
Level I 73
Level II 84
Level III 95
Teaching Cues for Invasion Game Skills 103
Summary 103

Chapter 8 Net and Wall Games at the Elementary Level 105

Elementary Net Games Tactics and Levels of Game Complexity 106
Modifications for Elementary Net and Wall Games 106
Progressions for Teaching Elementary Net and Wall Games 108
Level I 108
Level II 117
Level III 122
Summary 138

Chapter 9 Striking and Fielding Games at the Elementary Level 139

Elementary Striking and Fielding Games Tactics 140
Levels of Elementary Striking and Fielding Game Complexity 140
Modifications for Elementary Striking and Fielding Games 140
Progressions for Teaching Elementary Striking and Fielding Games 146
Level I 146
Level II 154
Level III 168
Level IV 180
Summary 196

Chapter 10 Target Games at the Elementary Level 197

Elementary Target Games Tactics and Levels of Game Complexity 198
Modifications for Elementary Target Games 198
Progressions for Teaching Elementary Target Games 199
Bowling as an Exemplar for Teaching Target Games 201
Target Games Lessons 201
Level I 202
Level II 210
Level III 215
Summary 219

Part III Lesson Plans for a Tactical Games Approach at the Secondary Level: Developing Sport Performance 221

Chapter 11 Soccer 223
Level I 224
Level II 235
Level III 243
Level IV 251
Level V 263
Summary 274

Chapter 12 Basketball 275
Level I 276
Level II 286
Level III 293
Level IV 301
Summary 309

Chapter 13 Lacrosse 311
Level I 312
Level II 326
Level III 338
Level IV 348
Summary 357

Chapter 14 Rugby 359
Level I 361
Level II 368
Level III 374
Summary 380

Chapter 15 Flag Football 381
Level I 382
Level II 390
Summary 399

Chapter 16 Volleyball 401
Volleyball Tactics 402
Teaching Volleyball 404
Levels of Tactical Complexity 405
Level I 406
Level II 418
Level III 428
Level IV 441
Level V 447
Summary 454

Chapter 17 Badminton 455
Level I . . . 456
Level II . . . 463
Level III . . . 469
Summary . . . 474

Chapter 18 Tennis 475
Level I . . . 477
Level II . . . 488
Level III . . . 497
Summary . . . 503

Chapter 19 Softball 505
Level I . . . 512
Level II . . . 523
Level III . . . 532
Level IV . . . 537
Summary . . . 544

Chapter 20 Cricket 545
Level I . . . 549
Level II . . . 566
Level III . . . 583
Summary . . . 598

Chapter 21 Golf 599
Safety . . . 599
Instruction Tips . . . 600
Tactical Reality Golf . . . 600
Level I . . . 603
Level II . . . 613
Summary . . . 624

Chapter 22 Bowling 625
Organization of Lanes and Equipment . . . 625
Instruction Tips . . . 626
Level I . . . 628
Level II . . . 634
Level III . . . 640
Level IV . . . 647
Summary . . . 652

Final Thoughts 653 | References and Resources 655
About the Authors 658 | DVD-ROM User Instructions 660

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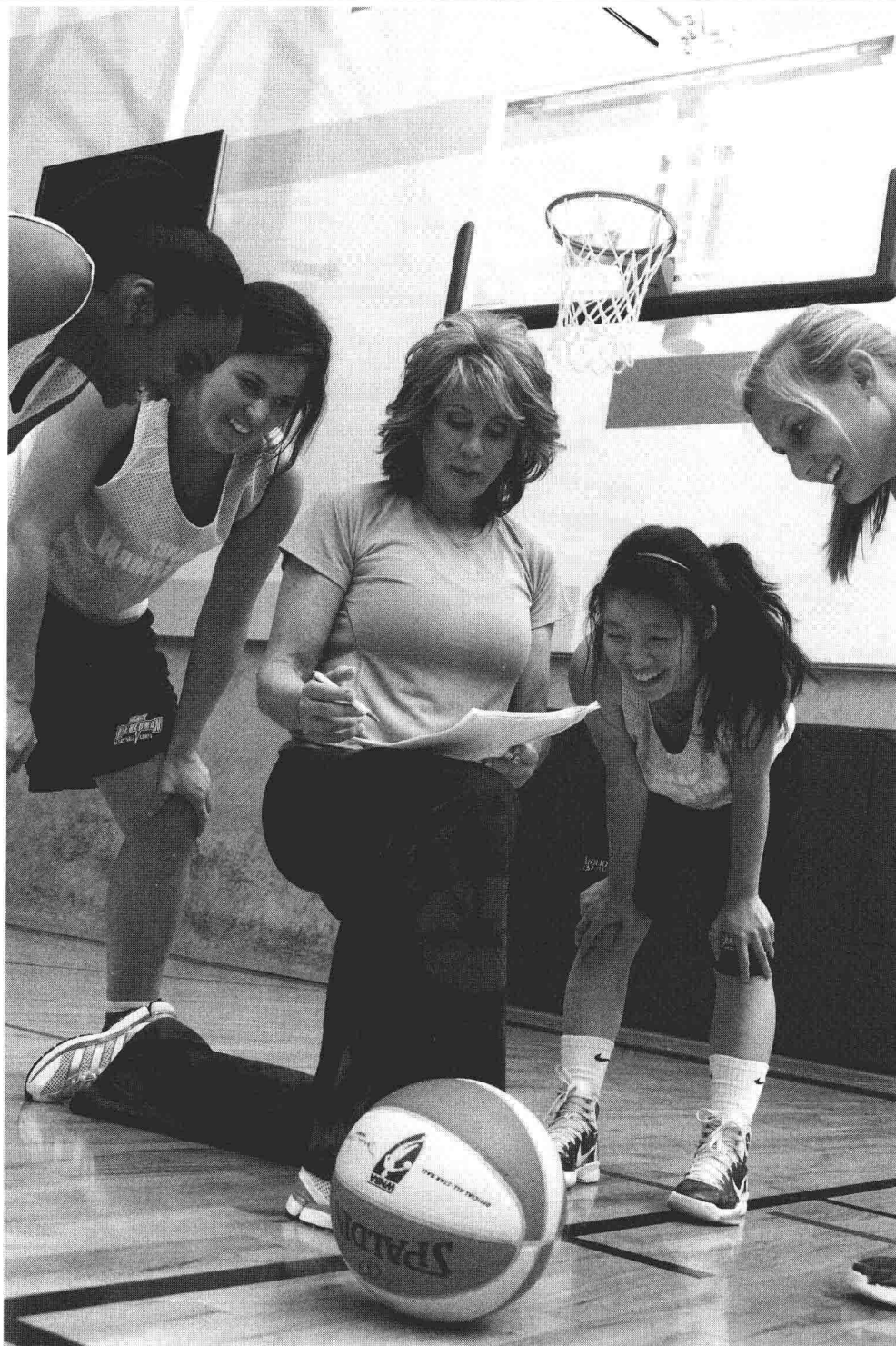
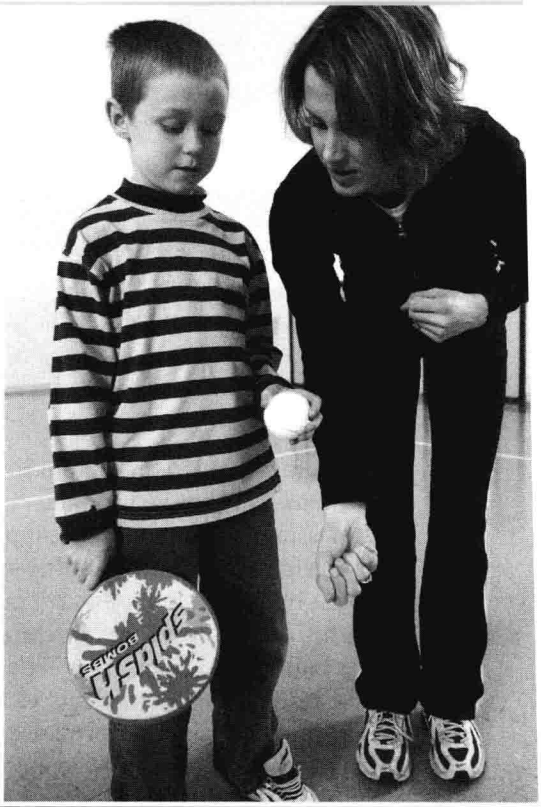
Part I

Tactical Games Teaching





Chapter 1

Tactical Games Explanation and Review

About two-thirds of a typical physical education curriculum involves games teaching and learning. We believe that, given this emphasis, physical educators must try to teach games effectively. Many people, particularly fitness advocates, have viewed sports and games negatively, labeling them as elitist, overly competitive, and not conducive to developing health and fitness. This negativity perhaps stems from an emphasis on large-sided, zero-sum games in which the winners and losers are obvious, and active participation is minimal for many students. We believe that sports and games can be fun, educative, and challenging and can enhance health and self-esteem. Although games teaching should remain a valuable part of the physical education curriculum, we concede that the way games have traditionally been taught is problematic. This is the reason we wrote this book.

Many physical educators teach both the skills and tactics of games but have problems linking these components. For example, in units on basketball in which classes spend several days covering passing, dribbling, and shooting, skill development is not apparent during subsequent lessons on game play. Skills have usually been taught in isolation, out of their tactical context. The approach we outline in this book links tactics and skills by emphasizing the appropriate timing of skill practice and application within the tactical context of the game.

Tactical awareness, critical to game performance, is the ability to identify tactical problems that arise during a game and to respond appropriately. Responses might involve on-the-ball skills, such as passing and shooting, and off-the-ball movements, such as supporting and covering. For example, a tactical problem in soccer is for the team to maintain possession of the ball. Players maintain possession by selecting and executing passing, ball-control, and support skills. In a tactical approach, students are placed

TIP BOX

The tactical approach aims to improve students' game performance by combining tactical awareness and skill execution.

in a game situation that emphasizes maintaining possession *before* they identify and practice solutions such as passing, ball control, and support. Another tactical problem in soccer is defending space. Players defend space by marking opponents, pressuring the player with the ball, covering for teammates, and clearing the ball from danger areas. The link between skills and tactics enables students to learn about a game and improve their performance, especially because game tactics provide the opportunity for applying game-related motor skills.

RATIONALE FOR A TACTICAL APPROACH

We believe that traditional games teaching in schools has done little to educate students about games playing. The tactical approach we advocate in this book promotes an interest in learning games, an understanding of game play, and the ability to play games.

Interest and Excitement

The traditional approach to games teaching is technical and focuses on teaching skills in answer to the question, how is this skill performed? For example, instruction in badminton often develops the techniques of service, the overhead clear, the drop shot, and the smash by concentrating on specific critical elements of these skills. Although this format might improve technique, it has been criticized for teaching skills before students can grasp their significance within the game. As a result, students lose the context of the skill, and games teaching becomes a series of textbook drills (Pigott 1982).

Drills often lead students to ask, "Why are we doing this?" or "When can we play a game?" For example, you might hear these questions during a volleyball lesson in which students must pass or set the ball against a wall. For many students, particularly those who are less skilled, the game that follows is characterized by aimless participation following a breakdown of techniques for passing and setting. This frustrates both students and teacher. It is possible that the only thing many children learn about games is that they cannot perform the necessary complex skills (Booth 1983). In addition, skilled students often perceive isolated drills as tedious and irrelevant to their performance during game play.

A tactical approach provides an exciting alternative through which students can learn to play games. Our research and the experience of others indicate that students find a tactical approach motivational and that teachers prefer it (Berkowitz 1996; Burrows 1986; Griffin, Oslin, and Mitchell 1995; Gubacs-Collins 2007; Hopper 2003; Mitchell, Griffin, and Oslin 1994). Another attractive feature of a tactical approach is its sequential nature, which eliminates redundancy in games teaching for both teacher and students.

Knowledge as Empowerment

Although skill execution is critical to game performance, deciding *what to do* in game situations is just as important. French and Thomas (1987) stated that "mistakes commonly observed in young children in various sports may stem from a lack of knowledge about what to do in the context of a given sport situation" (p. 17). Furthermore, Bunker and Thorpe (1986) proposed that the uniqueness of games lies in the decision-making processes that precede the use of appropriate techniques. Not understanding the game impairs the student's ability to identify the correct technique for a situation. Bunker and Thorpe (1986) also suggested that an increased understanding of games, achieved through teaching for tactical awareness, empowers children to easily and skillfully solve the problems each game situation poses.

The next time you teach a games lesson, observe the differences between the performances of students with high and low abilities. You will see more proficient skill execution by students with greater ability, but you will also notice better game-related decision making and skill selection in response to specific situations. Enhanced decisions reflect greater knowledge of the game, an observation supported by the research of McPherson (1994, 1995).

Transfer of Understanding and Performance

A tactical focus may help your students carry understanding from one game to another. Although some invasion games, such as rugby and flag football, have unique rules that set them slightly apart from others, most invasion games are tactically similar even though they require different skills. For example, tactical problems in soccer, field hockey, and basketball, all of which are invasion games, are similar. In our experience the best novice soccer players are those

with experience of other invasion games, because they already understand the spatial aspects of soccer. We can make a similar case for net and wall games (e.g., badminton, tennis), striking and fielding games (e.g., softball, cricket), and target games (e.g., golf, bowling) (Werner and Almond 1990). These similarities enable us to group games according to their tactics. We define invasion games as those in which the goal is to invade an opponent's territory. Net and wall games involve propelling an object into space so an opponent is unable to make a return. In striking and fielding games, the goal is to strike an object, usually a ball, so that it eludes defenders. In target games, the performer propels an object, preferably with great accuracy, toward a target. We elaborate on the importance and implications of tactical transfer in chapter 2.

Physical educators have suggested that a tactical focus in games teaching suits both the elementary and secondary levels (Bunker and Thorpe 1982; Doolittle and Girard 1991; Mitchell, Oslin, and Griffin 2003). In this book we address how physical educators can use a tactical approach to enhance students' game performance at various developmental stages by identifying, sequencing, and teaching the tactical problems of games at successive stages of development. We offer frameworks for games, provide a broader definition of game performance, and identify levels of tactical complexity for each game.

GAME FRAMEWORKS

An initial concern for those wishing to teach games and sport tactically is developing frameworks for identifying and breaking down relevant tactical problems, a process originated by Spackman (1983). By selecting teaching materials from a framework, you ensure that your students become familiar with the game and that any skills you teach relate to the game context. Table 1.1 shows a framework that identifies tactical problems and the off-the-ball movements and on-the-ball skills necessary for solving these problems. The example uses soccer, which is taught at all developmental levels.

Table 1.1 Tactical Problems, Movements, and Skills in Soccer

Tactical problems	Off-the-ball movements	On-the-ball skills
SCORING (OFFENSE)		
Maintaining possession of the ball	• Dribbling for control • Supporting the ball carrier	• Passing—short and long • Control—feet, thigh, chest
Attacking the goal	Using a target player	Shooting, shielding, turning
Creating space in attack	• Crossover play • Overlapping run	• First-time passing • Crossover play • Overlapping run
Using space in attack	Timing runs to goal, shielding	• Width—dribbling, crossing, heading • Depth—shielding
PREVENTING SCORING (DEFENSE)		
Defending space	Marking, pressuring, preventing the turn, delaying, covering, making recovery runs	Clearing the ball
Defending the goal	Goalkeeping—positioning	Goalkeeping—receiving the ball, making saves, distributing (throwing and punting)
Winning the ball		Tackling—block, poke, slide
RESTARTING PLAY		
Throw-in—attacking and defending	Defensive marking at throw-ins	Executing a quick throw
Corner kick—attacking and defending	Defensive marking at corners	• Short corner kick • Near-post corner kick • Far-post corner kick
Free kick—attacking and defending	• Defending—marking at free kicks • Defending—setting a wall	Attacking—shooting from free kicks

Table 1.1 identifies the major tactical problems in scoring, preventing scoring, and restarting play. To score, a team must solve the progressively complex problems of maintaining possession of the ball, attacking the goal, creating space while attacking, and using that space effectively. Each tactical problem includes relevant off-the-ball movements and on-the-ball skills. For example, to maintain possession of the ball, players must support teammates who have the ball and must pass and control the ball over various distances. Although we have done this for you in many of this book's chapters, you could develop similar frameworks for other games by asking yourself two questions:

- What are the problems in scoring, preventing scoring, and restarting play?
- What off-the-ball movements and on-the-ball skills are necessary to solve these problems?

GAME PERFORMANCE

The two questions at the end of the previous section suggest that a tactical approach defines game performance as more than simply executing motor skills. Table 1.1 shows that movements made by players who do not have the ball are important and should be considered in games teaching. For example, a player who can pass the ball accurately is of limited value unless she has potential receivers who have moved to support her. Off-the-ball movements are often ignored in favor of on-the-ball skills, but you should teach these movements to maximize students' performance. We believe in this strongly because, in any game, players possess the ball, Frisbee, or puck only briefly during play. Consider 30 minutes of a soccer game played by teams of 6 players. Dividing 30 minutes by 10 outfield players (each team has a goalkeeper) demonstrates that each outfield player possesses the ball for an average of only three minutes! What are the outfield players doing the remainder of the time? They are moving to appropriate positions to attack or defend and deciding how to contribute to the game. Yet in physical education, we rarely teach these aspects of game performance.

This book provides a broad definition of game performance. Game play involves not only the execution of motor skills but also components such as the following:

- Making decisions
- Supporting teammates who have the ball
- Marking or guarding opponents
- Covering teammates
- Adjusting position as play unfolds
- Ensuring adequate court or field coverage by means of a base position

This expanded definition of game performance has implications for your goals, content, and assessment procedures. Expanded goals and content appear in each of the sport-specific chapters, and ideas for assessment are presented in chapter 6.

LEVELS OF TACTICAL COMPLEXITY

Having identified important tactical problems and their associated skills for a particular game, you must ensure that the tactical complexity of the game matches your students' development. We provide a way to do this in table 1.2, in which we identify levels of tactical complexity, again using soccer as an example. The table identifies at which level various skills should be introduced to students learning the game. For example, under Scoring in table 1.2, the first row identifies what skills students must learn to be able to maintain possession of the ball. At level I, students are introduced to dribbling and passing and controlling with their feet. These skills aren't repeated in subsequent levels in this row because the students will already know them, having been introduced to them in level I.

One thing to note immediately in table 1.2 is that not all tactical problems are addressed at all levels because this would not be developmentally appropriate. So you will notice some blank spaces in the table. Simply, some tactical problems are too complex for novice players to understand. For example, novice players might understand the need to maintain possession of the ball and to attack the goal because those are the basic requirements for scoring goals. But you notice that we do not suggest a focus on defending space for novices because this would negate the success they might otherwise have offensively, and offensive success is a key motivational aspect of games playing. Likewise, notice that we do not suggest an offensive focus on concepts such as using width and depth when attacking in the early levels, because it would be unrealistic to expect these players to understand these more advanced concepts; such an understanding comes from experience playing the game.

You might present the same tactical problem at successive stages of development. Consider the problem of defending space in soccer. We can reasonably expect novice players to appreciate that defense is needed to

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