

Striking/Fielding: Part I

Teaching Striking/Fielding Games for Understanding: Introduction

by Judy Oslin, Feature Editor

Welcome to this special feature about teaching striking and fielding games for understanding (GFU). It is our hope that the *TEPE* readership will enjoy learning about and using a games-centered approach to teaching the skills, concepts, and tactics related to striking/fielding games. Striking/fielding games such as cricket and baseball are revered in nearly every country around the world, and consequently are included in most elementary and secondary physical education and youth sport programs. Including cricket and baseball in the elementary physical education curriculum can be difficult, as even modified versions of these games result in low levels of activity and provide limited opportunities for children to execute skills. I hope the ideas and activities offered in this feature will help physical educators and curriculum developers overcome the limitations of striking/fielding games and encourage their integration into the elementary curriculum.

The purpose of this feature is to promote the GFU approach for teaching striking/fielding games at both the primary (K-2nd grade) and elementary (3rd-6th grade) levels. Bunker and Thorpe (1982) advanced the GFU approach after they and their colleagues, most of whom were public school physical educators, experienced the frustration of trying to teach students how to play games through various skill drills. They found that not only were students unmotivated by drills, there was minimal transfer from skill drill practice to student performance during game play.

Thorpe also pointed out (Kidman, 2001) that when implementing a traditional technical approach (a lesson beginning with a warm-up and skill-drills, followed by a game dominated by technical instruction) the teacher has absolute power.

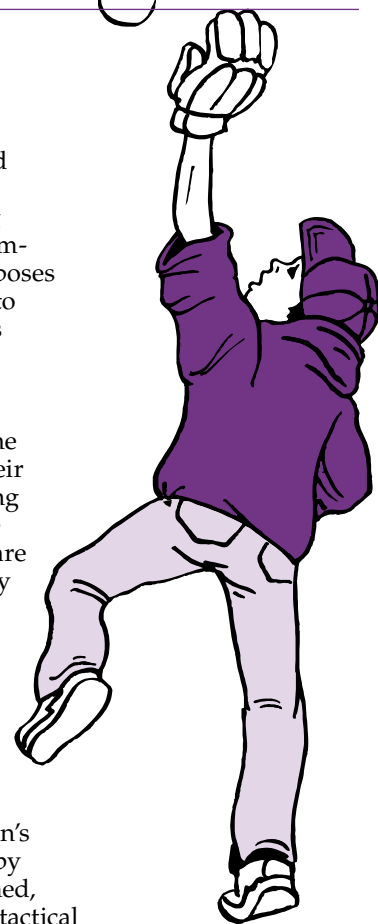
The teacher chose the skill (better called "technique" as it rarely had any perceptual, decision-making or contextual elements) and presented it often with little reference to the game it was to be used in. Clear demonstrations were applauded, despite the fact that in many cases, a good percentage of the children could not really aspire to the "perfect model" being presented and practice ensued. Conformity was expected. If practice of the technique was "good" in the sense of behavior, rather than performance or improvement, the children were rewarded with a game. What little teaching occurred in the game was normally in the form of directions from the teacher as to where to stand and what angle to run at, or more often what not to do. (Excerpts from an interview with Rod Thorpe, Kidman, 2001)

If children are to understand how to make decisions during game play, such as what to do and when to do it, they must be given the power and understanding to do so.

In the GFU approach, children are presented with conditioned games designed to help them achieve tactical understanding for themselves. Using a problem-solving approach, the teacher poses questions that guide students to solve various tactical problems that arise during game play. As a result, the GFU approach empowers children as players and encourages them to become competent and confident in their ability to make decisions during game play. If children perceive themselves as competent and are confident in their ability to play games, they are more likely to continue playing games.

Games, of course, are the central feature of GFU. Children love to play games, which leads them to constantly ask, "When are we going to play the game?" The GFU approach exploits children's motivation for playing games by implementing carefully designed, conditioned games to develop tactical awareness as well as game appreciation. Once children are "turned on" to the game, it is likely they will continue to play, gratifying the ambition of physical educators and achieving a major goal of physical education.

This feature is presented in two parts. The activities and progressions in Part I are more specific to skills and tactics in softball or baseball. Articles in Part II emphasize skills and tactics related to cricket. However, the tactics easily transfer from one striking/fielding game to another, as do many of the skills, which is the reason for organizing games according to tactical similarities. In the first article, Judy Oslin encourages teachers to take advantage of the transferability of tactics and skills by introducing simple target games at the primary level (K-2) and then progresses to simple softball- or baseball-like games. In the second article, Christina Sinclair introduces a game called "Batter's Choice," an appropriate choice for middle to upper elementary aged children (age 8-12). Sinclair provides a five-lesson sequence to illustrate the development of tactical awareness with parallel instruction of fundamental motor skills. In the final article of this issue, Jennifer Gorecki introduces an alternative striking/fielding game called "Over-the-Line." Gorecki provides numerous examples of tactical



decisions and identifies key elements of skill execution that can be emphasized during game play. She also provides many suggestions for game modifications, making "Over-the-Line" appropriate for a wide range of children from elementary through to the secondary level.

In Part II of this feature (the July issue of *TEPE*), Adrian Turner presents a framework for developing striking/fielding concepts in several modified cricket games. This includes teaching basic skills and tactics essential to the major components of such games: pitching (bowling), batting, and fielding, in both offensive and defensive contexts. Turner extends the use of small-sided games and practice, as well as equipment modifications, to create a learning environment appropriate for both elementary and middle school students. Matthew Curtner-Smith follows with an example of how to integrate GFU with Sport Education (Siedentop, 1994). In this extensive article, Curtner-Smith provides a twenty-five lesson unit, beginning with student role assignments such as *captain* and *coach*, and ending with a post-season tournament and awards ceremony. While the primary focus is cricket, the skills and tactics taught throughout the unit are also common to softball.

The final article promotes a method of assessment that encompasses the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. Connie Collier uses player profiles to demonstrate how teachers can design assessments that are consistent with their individual teaching or program philosophies. This system goes beyond assessment of motor skill proficiency to also include student engagement, socially responsible behavior, and decision making within the context of striking/fielding

games with an emphasis on methods for encouraging and holding students accountable for participation.

Through work with teachers, students, and colleagues, as well as personal teaching experiences, the authors in this feature have learned a great deal about the GFU approach. It is not easy to break away from a traditional skill-based approach, and it is not easy to learn a new approach, but the feature should encourage you to give it some thought and try some of the activities and suggestions. For those who already use GFU, this feature will help expand knowledge and understanding of the approach. The authors are interested in your questions, suggestions, or comments. (Please see About the Authors column on p. 4 of this issue for contact information.)

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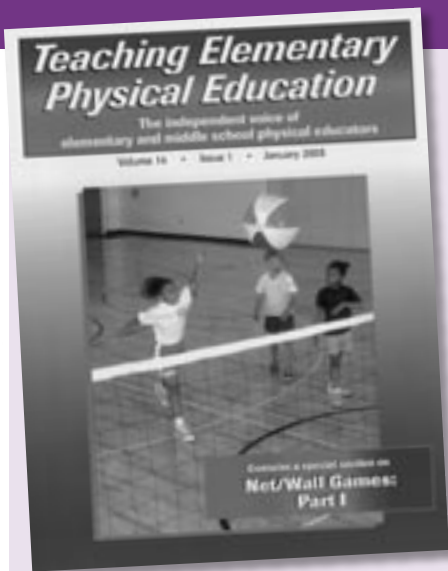
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