

# The Best Way to Develop Sports Specific Skills

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Coaches and athletes are always after the best way to develop sport skills. The sport skills I am writing about can be grouped into skills with the ball and skills without the ball. Every coach has his own way of structuring a training session. You have to ask yourself am I really maximizing my athletes skill development?

## **Sport skills that need developing**

I am grouping sport skills into two different categories. Skills with the ball would include skills like heading, passing or dribbling. Skills without the ball would include actions like sprinting, agility and quickness.

## **What are the two methods of developing skill?**

There are two main methods of structuring a practice or training session. The first way is called block practicing where an athlete goes out and practices a single skill over and over again for a block of time. The next way to structure a skill training session is to intermingle or mix different tasks in a single session. Basically the athlete is rotating from one skill to another never practicing just one skill in a single practice session. In extreme cases the athlete will never practice the same skill twice in row. (1)

## **So what really is the best way to practice?**

Most research has shown that random practice schedules produce better learning than blocked practice schedules. Research has shown that blocked practice will produce more immediate and temporary results. In some research the movements in the blocked type of practice are in the short term performed more successfully than the random method of practice. But when athletes used the random method of practice they were more successful when performing the movements at a later time. (1)

Since the whole idea of practice is to develop skills that will be reproduced at a later time for competition, the random practice method should generally be used in developing skills.

Some research has shown that during the initial stages of learning, blocked practice might be more effective. This applies to the first few attempts. (1)

There are various research studies that suggest the repayment of random practice will be greater, if the difference between tasks performed are bigger. (1)

## **Practical application of random and blocked practice sessions**

I have included two examples below on how to develop soccer skills with the ball and how to develop movement without the ball skills from the beginning level up. Beginners who are new to a task should start in the blocked practice schedule then progress to the random practice method. When learners acquire a rough development of a skill or movement, shift the practice to a random schedule.

### **Soccer Skills with the ball**

<b>Blocked</b>	Header, header, header, header, header Pass, pass, pass, pass, pass, pass Dribble, Dribble, Dribble Dribble Dribble
<b>Mixture of Blocked And Random</b>	Header, header, pass, pass, dribble, dribble pass, pass, dribble, dribble, header, header Dribble, dribble, pass, pass, header, header
<b>Random</b>	Header, pass, dribble, Header, pass, dribble, Pass, dribble, header, pass, dribble, header, Pass, header, pass, dribble, header, pass (1)

### **Movement Skills without the ball ( Developing sprinting technique)**

<b>Blocked</b>	Arms, Arms, Arms, Arms, Arms, Arms, Arms Posture, Posture, Posture, Posture, Posture Legs, Legs, Legs, Legs, Legs, Legs, Legs
<b>Mixture of Blocked And Random</b>	Arms, Arms, Posture, Posture, Arms, Arms Posture, Posture, Legs, Legs, Arms, Arms Legs, Legs, Arms, Arms, Posture, Posture
<b>Random</b>	Arms, Posture, Legs, Arms, Posture, Legs Posture, Legs, Arms, Posture, Legs, Arms Legs, Arms, Posture, Legs, Arms, Posture

As you strive to maximize the talent and production of your teams, keep in mind that how you structure your practices and skill development can have a huge effect on future development. When introducing a new skill to athletes it is better to use the block practice schedule until they get a rough idea of that skill. But, as athletes grow in skill and are trying to improve that skill you should move to a random type of practice schedule.

(1) Schmidt, Richard, Wrisberg, Craig, Motor Learning and Performance 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.