



CHALLENGE

Challenging learning environments develop creative and resilient young players and people.



'Good coaching is allowing the player to fail and not giving them the answer to solve the problem, which instead enables them to learn. This is going to make the player think and find ways to solve the problem themselves.

Our job is to then pose questions and talk with the players to help provoke ideas, but only when required. If the player solves the problem our job is to then give them another challenge to put them under further pressure and push them again.

We must remember the age-old mantra that we learn most of all from mistakes. Although order is suitable for some areas of our lives, if we want to produce greatness we need a little chaos along the way.'

Stuart English, Head of Coaching, Sunderland AFC

HOW DOES C.A.R.D.S PROMOTE CHALLENGE?

The provision of **challenge** is crucial if creative decision-making and expression is to be fostered in young players, with challenging and enjoyable learning environments best placed to foster positive outlooks towards sport as children grow up. To effectively provide challenge to our learners, we incorporate three key features into our learning environments.

TASK ORIENTED AND MASTERY ENVIRONMENTS

*Encouraging players to focus on their individual and team **mastery of a task**, as opposed to comparing themselves and their perceived 'success' to others.*

This provides personal choice, involves students in setting their own goals and builds enhanced intrinsic motivation, key elements of **autonomy**. Mastery environments have been proven to help foster **resilience**, whilst the emphasis on improvement and working together also enhances confidence and motivation.

Some of the ways we look to achieve **Task Oriented and Mastery Environments** are:

- **Sessions with agreed and well-thought-out goals:** These agreed goals (or challenges) could be implicit (i.e., personal goals) and/or explicit challenges set by the coach (and/or players).
- **Task demands** that match the *current needs of each individual in the session*.
- **Coaching behaviour** that emphasises 'improvement, effort, cooperation, learning, and social relations...viewing mistakes as naturally associated with the learning process, and encouraging athletes to persist in overcoming difficulties' (Vitali et al. 2015)
- **The Use of Game Scenarios:** Manipulating the score and time left in games, to create emotion-laden challenges that can add context to actions.

A FACILITATIVE ENVIRONMENT

Facilitative learning environments, where both *challenge* and *support* are built into learning.

Challenge involves high expectations of what learners can achieve - which can nurture accountability and responsibility - while **support** builds trust, supports learning and fosters the development of personal qualities. At C.A.R.D.S, we will look to provide a **high challenge-high support** environment in our coaching, particularly as players progress through the *Illuminati* (10-12 years) and *Creator* (12-14 years) stages of learning.

We base this provision of challenge and support on the current needs of our learners. There will be moments where the pressure or challenge becomes too high, in which case more support will be required. Alternatively, if a child begins to consistently meet a particular challenge, the logical next step is to raise the challenge to take the learner back out of their comfort zone.

CHALLENGE MINDSETS

Switching negative outlooks for positive and constructive thinking.

A **challenge mindset** interprets and evaluates difficult situations and learning moments positively, rather than seeing them as threats or insurmountable challenges. Switching negative outlooks for positive and constructive thinking is central to this, through awareness of how negative thoughts can take over and the acceptance that how we react to and perceive events is a matter of choice.



Encouraging self-reflection is one example of how we might look to develop challenge mindsets in our learners. Evaluating setbacks constructively is a crucial part of a challenge mindset. Young players are regularly their biggest critics (often unfairly!) and self-reflection - such as the diarising of their journey - can help foster resilience. This can help learners become more comfortable with imperfections and making mistakes, helping them take the learning moments from these experience