



DECISION-MAKING



The skill to select an effective action in all situations.

The ability to make good decisions under pressure is a common characteristic of the very best sports players, but what exactly leads to effective decision-making? We consider decision-making from an ecological perspective, founded upon **the relationship between the player and their environment** (i.e., *the game*). This approach sees decision-making as strongly influenced by an individual's uniqueness as a performer.

For example, one player with excellent passing ability (i.e., Kevin De Bruyne) may see a gap between two defenders as an opportunity for a pass to a team-mate making a forward run. However, another player with excellent dribbling skills (i.e., Lionel Messi) might see this in a different way, preferring the opportunity to dribble through the gap. Effective decision-making is therefore strongly linked to the skill of awareness. **Rather than coaching all players to decide on the same solution, we encourage players to make decisions based on what information the environment (i.e., *the game*) is affording them, based on their own individual skillsets.**

HOW DOES C.A.R.D.S LOOK TO DEVELOP DECISION-MAKING?

Representative Learning Design

Designing **representative learning environments** is vital in enhancing young players' decision-making abilities. Incorporating critical information sources - such as team-mates, opponents and goals - into practice can achieve this, leading to meaningful practices that can help transfer learning to games.

At C.A.R.D.S, we prefer the use of active decision-making activities, rather than 'drills' that isolate actions from the performance context. **Small-sided games (SSGs)** are an example of this. Often performed in tight spaces and involving smaller numbers of players, the characteristics of SSGs can help optimise decision-making, whilst simultaneously developing technical actions like passing, dribbling and shooting.

Coaching Style

We do not subscribe to traditional coaching approaches - such as *command-style coaching* - due to evidence that this fails to positively impact the development of decision-making. Instead, we adopt a facilitative approach, where tasks/problems are designed with the solutions in the hands of the players. We like to use more **implicit feedback techniques** to help and guide learners where necessary, with *questioning* one such tool.

Opportunities for Play

Childhood experiences of soccer-specific play can also lead to enhanced anticipation and decision-making skills, a dynamic found to occur as early as 8 years of age. Experiences with different sports and other games can also promote decision-making. Netball is a good example of this, where decision-making challenges are even greater than other invasion games such as soccer (i.e., having to pass the ball within 3 seconds).

Opportunities for play are a key part of the C.A.R.D.S program and an important medium that can help foster decision-making.