

Beginners luck

Coaching players new to badminton, especially from an early age, is a critical part of the continued development and success of our sport as coaches look to instil good technical habits as soon as they hit the court at the same time as creating an enjoyable atmosphere that will make them want to come back again and again.

These fundamentals can often be overlooked, with the focus often cast on the coaches who produce the best players or the most successful clubs. However at the root of these successes will be the coach(es) who are highly skilled in the development of technique in a fun environment with the absolute beginners.

The tradition within badminton coaching is for newly qualified coaches work with younger players new to the sport, then as you become more experienced and more qualified, you “progress” to work with the more experienced players. While there is some logic to this, as the better players may require more complex skill development, it always means that the most receptive but inexperienced players often gain their first experiences of badminton from our least experienced coaches.

If we are going to increase the numbers of people playing badminton and improve their technical qualities, the coaches working with these “absolute beginners” need to be as effective as any other.

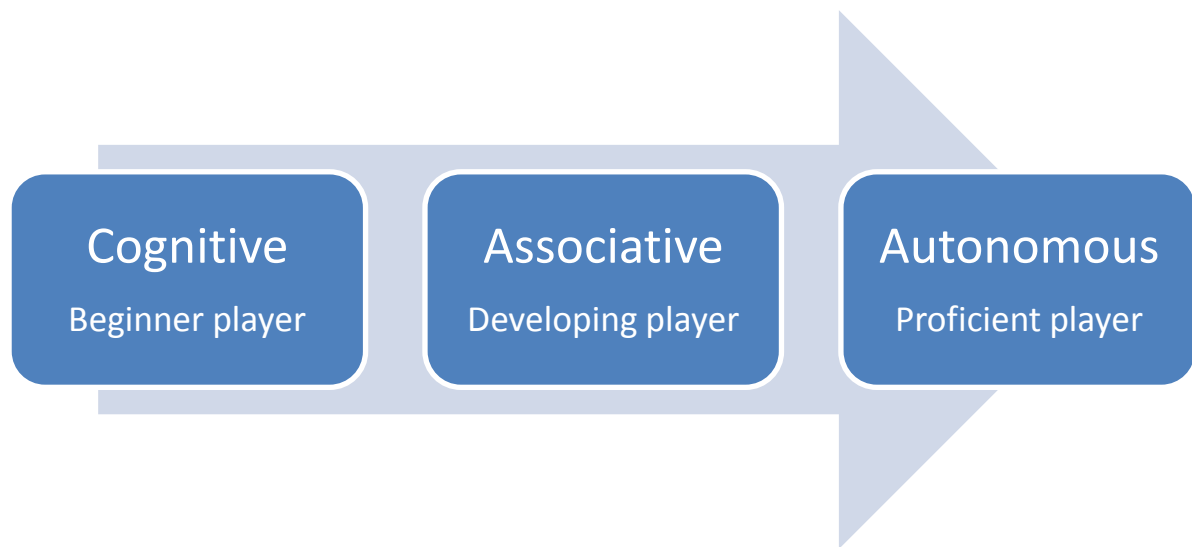
This article looks at a recommended focus for coaches when they are working with absolute beginner players, specifically for targeting young people. Similar principles would apply to beginner adult players, with the focus and theme of sessions being focused more towards the social requirements and motivations of adult players.



Stages of Learning

There are many theories linked to the learning process, with different learning styles and coaching methods being relevant. The other area of relevance is the idea about how attention is directed to learning and performance at the different stages of learning. One of the most popular theories

linked to skill acquisition in sport was developed by Fitts & Posner in 1967. They referred to 3 stages of learning; Cognitive Associative and Autonomous.



The absolute beginners are placed within the Cognitive stage, as the majority of their attention is directed at the performance of the new skill. This means that they cannot process much extra information, so having to make decisions about possible alternative shots and/or movements should be avoided. Players at the Cognitive stage are likely to make quite large gains in performance given then right environment, but equally their level of performance is likely to be inconsistent, so the coach needs to be ready for this and support accordingly.

Once the player starts to develop and can perform more the fundamental hitting and movement skills, then they transition to the Associative stage where they develop and refine their skills, then once highly proficient they would be within the Associative stage

So what exactly does it take to start the absolute beginner on the road to technical competence and a lifelong journey into badminton?

There are clearly many factors that determine this, with a number of these being outside the control of the coach. What the coach can control during the initial period of coaching should include the following:

- An enjoyable and supportive learning environment
- Opportunities to practice in a controlled fashion
- A coach that understands the fundamental hitting and movement skills involved in badminton and can deliver (sometimes adapted) activities that are at a relevant stage, pace and complexity for the individual players within the session

So how can the coach facilitate each of these elements?

Learning environment

In order for beginner players to feel that they are in a supportive environment, they need to feel that the coach is aware of their progress and cares that they are enjoying themselves. This can put a

time pressure on the coach if this beginner player needs more reassurance, but the players need to feel that this time can be afforded to them by the coach.



It is also important that the player feels that their successes (no matter how small!) have been recognised by the coach and that they receive praise and encouragement to continue. To achieve this, the coach has to be able to set an appropriate level of challenge within the practice so that the player feels they have achieved something when they complete it or do the skill correctly.

This is at the same time that the player feels confident that they will not be made to feel inferior if they cannot achieve at first. This aspect is crucial as the trial and error style of learning at this stage of development can be extremely powerful as players who are encouraged to problem solve (within the bounds of correct technical guidance) can develop the basis of sound technique this way.

Practice opportunities

As previously mentioned, it is important that when working with beginner players, the practice is challenging, but achievable and such that the player can focus all their attention on completing the task accurately. If the shuttle is not in exactly the right place, then the beginner player will have to react and amend their technique, (which has not yet developed) which may delay the learning process. Therefore, the feeding of any practice is critical to the technical development of the player and the feelings of achievement and personal development that maintain the player's motivation to improve.

To achieve this, the coach will have to either be able to feed accurately and consistently, or demonstrate the need for this level of quality in the feeding to other players and coaches. This means that the coach must have a consistent hand and racket feeding technique and be able to select the most appropriate feeding method for the skill being developed and the player(s) involved.



Fundamental skills

Having access to an absolute beginner is a great opportunity (and huge responsibility), as the foundations of a sound technique can be built without having to “unlearn” any pre-existing bad technical habits.

As the beginner player should be working on the development of the key badminton hitting and movement skills, it is critical that the coach is aware of what these skills are, the importance of this type of skill development and has the ability to communicate this information to players who have no prior knowledge of the sport. These areas should cover how the player holds the racket based on where the shuttle is, the shapes and rotations associated with overhead and underarm hitting and basic movement skills such as changing direction, jumping and landing and lunging.

As well as the more traditional ways of delivering this information, the effective coach should be innovative and creative in how these skills might be introduced to the player(s). This is the opportunity for the coach to use modified equipment, take skills out of the traditional context and apply them in more fun and enjoyable ways and to use the multi-skills philosophy to take advantage of prior skills development that players may have already gained from exposure to other sports.

How can I improve these skills as a coach?

The *Coaching Absolute Beginners* module has been developed by the Education & Training team at Badminton England and is a 3 hour practical workshop that is designed to provide coaches with some guidance as to the different ways to provide supportive environments for beginners to flourish and to provide practical ideas and key areas upon which to focus activity.

The module will support and develop a coach's existing knowledge to:

- Create a supportive learning environment
- Provide a range of feeding opportunities
- Use and adapt activities to develop fundamental movement skills
- Practically facilitate use of rackets and modified equipment in a way that encourages good technique

This module has been developed in response to requests from coaches to provide practical workshops in specific areas of the game to supplement and develop their knowledge and practical skills. The module forms part of the national MEDAL CPD programme developed by Badminton England, with a range of practical modules being available across the country.

As this is such a critical area in the development of the sport, Badminton England are making the *Coaching Absolute Beginners* workshop available nationally during November this year, at a reduced price of £30.

As with all the other modules, the *Coaching absolute Beginners* module is eligible for the award of 4 CPD points that contribute towards the new Badminton England Coach Licence.

For more information on the CPD programme or the Coach Licence, then please visit [MEDAL CPD programme](#) or email coaching@badmintonengland.co.uk.