



Testing the Coach- An alternative approach to Skills Testing in Gaelic Games

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Traditionally testing in team sport has been used to measure the fitness levels of a group of players prior to the season's start. Physical tests such as 20m dash, vertical jump, hamstring flexibility, and VO2 Max, may all raise their head prior to or during the early stages of a season.

Recently, more and more teams are now testing at the end of a season, to ensure that players return to the next season in "good shape", rather than having to spend the first 6 weeks getting ready to start training.

Traditionally skills' testing is associated with hurling, but is also on the increase in football. Although skills testing can help coaches focus their training, its overall usefulness is somewhat limited. Accurate feedback cannot be obtained for off the ball skills such as tackling and marking,

being that skills involving reaction are much more difficult component to measure. A lot of the time players will intuitively know whether a skill is improving or not. For example, during a 30 m passing drill, the player will know if they are passing better than the previous session, simply by counting the number of passes that they successfully complete. Free takers will often adopt this approach.

What type of players do we want to produce? In the modern game, many top players are comfortable in most areas of the field. Just look at Cha Fitzpatrick or Paul Galvin.

So is Skills testing worthwhile? Perhaps, but encouraging your players to test themselves in a simple systematic way may be a more time efficient approach. As a coach you should provide opportunities for the players to do this. This may mean running the same drills at certain times.

Can we assume that if a skill is being coached properly that the players will improve? The answer to this is not necessarily, there will be many other factors at play, including player motivation and desire to learn. But in general, we can assume that if we coach the skill, then the chances of players improving will genuinely increase. This takes us on to

another interesting point. What type of players do we want to produce? In the modern game, many top players are comfortable in most areas of the field. Just look at Cha Fitzpatrick or Paul Galvin. Every player on the pitch requires basic skills, so it is our job as coaches to coach these skills.


So why not test ourselves, as coaches, not at performing the skills, but at how often we **coach the different skills over the year**. The advantages of this approach are, firstly it will help develop well rounded players, secondly it will ensure we do not shy away from our weaknesses and only concentrate on what we do know, Thirdly, it will allow us to calculate how efficient our training was, and finally it will make us more accountable for player development.

Although players will learn a certain amount as they mature, **If something is not coached at training, then don't expect it to be done during a match**. How often do we see coaches, blue in the face shouting instructions to players during matches. As coaches we should ask, "Have I given the player the knowledge to know what to do, and then coached the ability to do it", before we start roaring from the sideline.

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Considering this type of scenario, the "**testing the coach**" approach can be much more beneficial than a skills test for players. Some people will argue that Skills testing can be used to highlight weaknesses, so players can work towards improving those. This may be true, but there are other means and ways to do this, which would represent an article in its own right. Secondly if the skill is being coached at training, then we are increasing the chances that the skill is being improved upon. If we know its being improved then we should not need to formally test the skill.

This table below only represents a sample of skills that could be coached. The full table is contained at the end of the article.

Skill	5 Feb	12 Feb	19 Feb	26 Feb	01 Mar	08 Mar	Total
Block	10		10		10		30
Catch		10	10			40	40
Hook	10	10	10		20		50
Strike	20	10	10	20		20	80
Low catch		10	10				20
Jab		10	10		20	5	45
Roll		10	10		20	5	45
Go Games	40	20	10	60		10	140
Total time	80	90	80	80	70	80	

Across the top we have a section for the training date (Green), across the bottom shows the complete training time (Blue) for the date. Down the left hand are the skills (Pink) High lighted in Orange is the total time spent on each skill over the months

So lets just look at the **block** at the very top of the skills list what we see is that it over all the training sessions has only been coached for 30 minutes
 Now in comparison to the **strike**, this has been coached specifically for 80 minutes.
 Which do you think would be the most improved skill over the 6 training sessions?
 This allows coaches to self evaluate themselves and improve, so that they can see what areas need extra attention. It will also highlight a coach's own weaknesses, in that they will be able to see areas that they have shied away on, perhaps because they feel coaching as in this example, the block.

The coach will also be aware from this table, how long each session was. This will also give valuable information as to the effectiveness of each session. For example, if there is too much time being wasted between drills and games the coach will know that the difference between training from 6.00pm to 7.30pm is 90 minutes but only 60 minutes of effective training have been recorded then they are 33% inefficient. To finish up, some people will have asked why Go Games (or conditioned games if coaching adults) are included in this. It is because they teach the very important game related skills of vision, playmaking, and most importantly decision-making. **They provide the fire in which the skills are tempered** and tested more than any skills test ever will.

As coaches it is our responsibility to coach all the skills of the game. The following skills checklist goes into a lot of detail on each individual skill and its variants. It is important that each skill should be taught to all players if we are to produce well rounded players. These descriptions of the skills tie in with the skills table to be completed by the coach which is at the end of the article. The suggested skills are by no means exclusive, indeed you could add in more skills, the templates are provided as a guideline and should suffice for the majority of coaches.

Hurling Skills Samples

Catching

There are three distinct types of catch.

Jump /High catch

Low catch with palm facing up

Middle catch between head and waist with out jump

These catching skills are progressed first by catching standing then moving toward the ball then by running at speed to the ball, it is important that all as well as moving towards the ball to catch it the hand also moves towards the ball stretching to catch, The catching hand should always be protected. The player should never be allowed to catch the ball with the hand that holds the top of the stick.

Lifts

Roll lift

Jab lift

These skills are performed firstly by player standing and lifting a still ball to progressing to performing these skills with increased ball movement either away from to towards player. Generally the roll lift is only used to lift a ball that has become still.

Strikes

Always work left and right sides evenly always on the run if the players can. Once able to hit the ball standing the player should always move to striking the ball on the run. All these strikes can be further varied using the short or long stick, as well as the position of the ball detailed below. They can also be advanced further by coaching the double on the ground or in the air.

Pull ball (Ground)

Strike from hand/stick ball at shoulder height

Strike from hand/stick ball at hip height

Strike from hand/stick ball at knee height

Strike from hand /stick ball over shoulder

Overhead Batting ball

Hand pass from hand

Hand pass from stick

These skills can be increased in difficulty by increasing the distance and speed at which the receiver is moving, this familiarises the player with the control of the pass

Tackling

Block ball on ground

Block ball in air

Hook ground strike

Hook aerial strike

Flick ball to prevent lift

Press down on ball to prevent lift

Flick ball to prevent strike air or ground

Shoulder tackle

Using body to prevent lift*

*This is when the player uses his body to keep the player behind him/her while keeping the ball in front. The ideal practice of this skill would be that the player doesn't need to move the ball but is able to hold off the attacking player by pushing back and spreading the arms and legs shielding the ball.

Dead ball skills

With all dead ball skills it is important to vary the targets distance when learning the player should work back from a short distance to a further out distance e.g. once player can hit target 10/ 10 times they increase the distance by three meters this results in the player building a confidence level on a solid foundation. This should also be done with the angle of the target.

Sideline cut

Free/Penalty

Puck out

Travelling skills

4 Steps tap ball +4 more

Solo run

It is important that players are taught not to solo as a priority but to take there four steps as a must and then tap the ball on the stick exposing it for a second only to put it back in the hand as it is safer than the solo on the stick where the ball is exposed and has more chance of being dispossessed

Football Skill Samples

	Skill	Counter skill
<u>Catching</u>		
	Low catch	Getting a hand in
	Body Catch	Getting a hand in
	High Catch	Breaking the ball
<u>Lifts</u>		
	Pick up	Getting a hand in
	Chip Lift	Getting a hand in
	Using the body to secure possession	Using the body to secure possession
<u>Passing</u>		
	Punt Kick	Block/Slight “push” off Balance
	Hook kick	Block/Slight “push” off Balance
	Outside of Boot Kick	Block/Slight “push” off Balance
	Fist pass	Strike through holding arm
<u>Travelling</u>		
	Solo	Near hand tackle/Force to weak side/Shouldering/ Frontal Tackle
	Bounce	Near hand tackle/Force to weak side/Shouldering/ Frontal Tackle
<u>Evasion</u>		
	Side Step	Force to weak side/Quick feet/ watch the mid rift/ Frontal Tackle
	Feint	Force to weak side/Quick feet/ watch the mid rift/ Frontal Tackle
	Dummy pass/Shot	Force to weak side/Quick feet/ watch the mid rift/ Frontal Tackle
	Cross over Bounce	Force to weak side/Quick feet/ watch the mid rift/ Frontal Tackle
	Roll	Counter roll
<u>Tackling/Dispossesing</u>		
	Near hand tackle	Hand off
	Frontal tackle	Evasion Skills
	Blocking	Dummy pass/Shot

There are many more skills and ideas that you as a coach will have, so add them to your list, and help ensure you will produce more rounded Hurlers and Footballers.

Below are the skills record sheet for both hurling and football.

Date														Total Time	
<i>High Catch</i>															
<i>Mid catch</i>															
<i>Low catch</i>															
<i>Roll Lift</i>															
<i>Jab Lift</i>															
<i>Stick Control</i>															
<i>Hand Pass</i>															
<i>Pull</i>															
<i>Aerial strike</i>															
<i>Over Head Block</i>															
<i>Block Ground</i>															
<i>Block aerial Strike</i>															
<i>Hook ground</i>															
<i>Hook Air</i>															
<i>Flick ball</i>															
<i>Press down</i>															
<i>Shoulder Tackle</i>															
<i>Using body</i>															
<i>Sideline Cut</i>															
<i>Free</i>															
<i>Puck out</i>															
<i>4 steps +tap</i>															
<i>Solo</i>															
<i>Go Game or Conditioned</i>															
<i>SessionTime</i>															

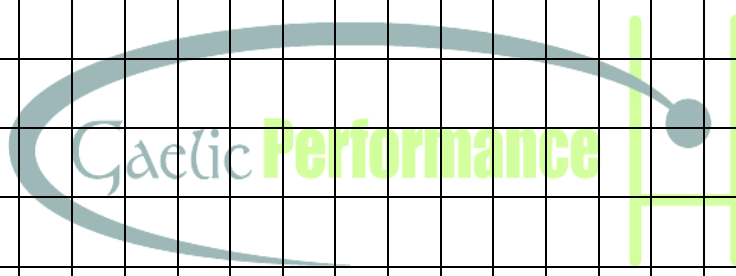


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Date															Total Time
Skill															
<i>High Catch</i>															
<i>Mid catch</i>															
<i>Low catch</i>															
<i>Pick up</i>															
<i>Chip lift</i>															
<i>Using the body</i>															
<i>Punt Kick</i>															
<i>Hook Kick</i>															
<i>Outside of boot kick</i>															
<i>Fist Pass</i>															
<i>Solo</i>															
<i>Bounce</i>															
<i>Side step</i>															
<i>Feint</i>															
<i>Dummy Shot/Pass</i>															
<i>Near hand Tackle</i>															
<i>Frontal tackle</i>															
<i>Blocking</i>															
<i>Hand in</i>															
<i>Breaking the ball</i>															
<i>Knocking off balance</i>															
<i>Force to weak side</i>															
<i>Watch the mid rift</i>															
<i>Go Game or Conditioned</i>															
Session Time															



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