

THE FORGOTTEN ART OF CAPTURING THE FREEZE MOMENT

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It is fair to say that coaching tools and the use thereof is a frequent debate within coaching schools all over the world. The ability to recognize the best moment in which to use each tool is an essential skill for any coach. When the moments chosen synchronize well with the tool used, practices have wonderful flow and the players barely notice the coaching intrusions. I am both pleased and saddened to say that it is not one of those academic debates that is restricted to the classroom and theory. Any focused observer can go to the fields of the 7, 10, 12, 14, 16, college and professional players and see that it is a tool that coaches of all ages use. Far too many, unfortunately do so in an ineffective manner with an approach more akin to that of a butcher than a surgeon.

The educational justification for the approach is straightforward enough, players remember approximately 20% of what they hear and close to 70% of what they see, feel, do. If you add to this simple educational fact that when a coach stops the game (a freeze should only be used when big numbers can learn), **the FUN stops and THEREFORE ALL MUST BE EDUCATED**, it becomes simple to extract how the tool should look and when it is best used.

Indeed, it would be true to say that the freeze moment is the best way to combine decision making and tactics while also being able to address the associated key skills at the forefront of the action.

As Doug Lemov notes, "If you're trying to coach decision making and tactics, this is the one most important tool. It appears to be simple but it's complex to execute effectively. Plan to spend time mastering it. And then more time perfecting it. It will pay your investment back in droves."

Recently advanced research on how players learn, associated with the use of questions and check for understanding practices, combined with additional discussions on how perception impacts decisions are made, simply reinforce

how important the FREEZE tool can be and adds awareness as to how its best practitioners should utilize it.

In an attempt to breathe new life into what is a forgotten skill, I offer the following key points (Review, Rehearse, Restart):

1. It is essential that upon **FREEZING THE ACTION** the coach has a full understanding of the global picture, knows where each player was and through careful positioning of themselves and questioning of the players (on and around the ball) has a complete understanding of the moment they captured.
2. That the moment chosen and captured is truly frozen which means that the language, tone and volume of the coach freezing the action should truly stop them in their tracks and capture a moment in time. This is a moment and tone that needs practice. Your players should be accustomed to your freeze language, tone and volume. They should appreciate that you have spotted a key moment in time where a group “learn” can be achieved and should be well rehearsed in knowing when to “FREEZE!”
3. That upon freezing the play, the coach can quickly, through crafted questions and answers, establish the reason for the decisions made and take a player through a **REVIEW** of the action and in so doing raise their awareness of the situation and possible alternative options.
4. That linking this review of the problem a coach can articulately and skillfully guide all players to what a better solution is, one that is based on the games TTPs, and key qualities of a player, one that is proven to work and one that involves global movement. A great coach tries to move big numbers on a freeze, so all feel involved in the learning process. This stage becomes the **REHEARSAL**. The very best coaches also ensure that technical excellence is addressed throughout this stage.
5. That in helping the rehearsal be as effective as possible, the coach can either help demonstrate a key skill or guide a player to perform the key skills so that the picture created is vivid, clear and successful.
6. That having shown a different solution to a problem well-articulated and shown the coach has the skill to send the action live in a manner that allows the solution to be reproduced and therefore reinforced. The manner of the **RESTART** is indeed crucial.

7. That done well, the whole process takes less than 1:30, involves large numbers of players and leaves them excited about the fact that although the game was stopped, they have a new skill set and idea to help in the game.

It would be irresponsible to produce an article on the importance of using the freeze tool without giving some additional guidance on both best practices and common problems I have seen over the last 20 years when coaches have tried to use this tool.

Best practices:

- Have a definite and decisive one-word freeze command “FREEZE!” not “and freeze” or “freeze, freeze, freeze” or any other mumblings. You do not need to be moving players back to the blade of grass you think or know they were on.
- Install and make as a habit with your team that when you say “FREEZE!” players know it is their responsibility to stay put. The freeze only works if we can recreate the scene as it was. To problem solve, we must see the problem we were originally dealing with.
- Have a tone and emotional state that informs your players that you have identified a learning moment that many can learn from and that when you freeze the action, the growth mindset of all should be at a premium. That you and they see mistakes as simply opportunities to learn. If anything, they should sense your joy that you're delighted to help and that is why you coach.
- Be able to successfully demonstrate or guide a player to do so.
- Plan your language and questions. Yes, map out the moment you think it will go wrong and plan the language and questions you will use.
- Display an energy and positivity that helps all your players celebrate the fact that the more we can learn, the better we can become, and that training sessions along with freeze moments are key in the development process.
- Be a surgeon – be concise and get them playing again within a maximum of two minutes.
- Be a great sales person – your solution must be based upon the key principals of the game and must be sold – they players should all believe in your vision and understand why it works.

And so, some things to avoid:

- Ineffective freeze tone or voice – you try but they just play on – all coaches need a commanding voice at times one of volume, command, confidence and clarity.
- Use one word – you would be surprised at how long coaches can make the “ANNNNND” in “AND FREEZE.”
- No figment. You must know exactly the picture you froze it if becomes a debate you lose.
- Don’t go withering on. If it takes forever, you lost them.
- Use all three steps they must see, feel and do, which is experiential learning at its best.
- Do not freeze it for one player! How would you feel if the game got stopped and you were not invited to the party?
- Make sure your solution makes soccer sense and fits in with your overall game plan.
- Plan your questions and know how you will allow them to be answered, including how you will guide responses.
- Be aware, due to time constraints, that you may have to use some command (it’s okay, really).

In conclusion, it is true to say that in a quality player-centered environment that the freeze tool should be used sparingly and that the use of other coaching tools that protect flow should be more commonly used. It is also true that the importance of a good freeze when well executed is a priceless teaching tool.

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