

ALTERNATIVE arena



Studying other sports is an effective method of coach development. Alternative training methods and transferrable game principles can often shine a light on a coach's own approach.

Here, *The Boot Room* sat down with England squash coach, Lee Drew and FA National Player Development Coach, John Allpress, to discuss the similarities, differences and areas of transfer between coaching football and squash.

The Boot Room: *how would you describe your approach to working with players?*



Lee Drew: Every sport is about expression and expressing yourself. That's why I believe strongly in coaching the individual and not just the sport. I can give the players tools – whether it is physical, technical, tactical or psychological - but it is down to the player to express it. This comes from their own mentality, which is different to all other players.

The underlying issues are often deeper than just the playing part. The coach should help the player understand the whole process: what they're doing, why they're doing it and how they're doing it. Once a player understands this process they are more content.



John Allpress: As the coach you've got to understand what your role is. That role changes depending on: who the players are, what their level of experience is and what they need from you. If you watch somebody struggle for a while, and they're actually stuck, you give them the bit of information that they need.

However, for me, this isn't the first premise. The premise for me is to keep the touch light. You set the task or the challenges, design the game or practice, encourage the players as they're going along but give them the opportunity to sort stuff out for themselves. You don't step in straight away and tell them how to do it.



How do you adapt your approach for different individuals?

Lee Drew: If it's a junior player, or young player, you might want to get your message across using skill games or fun games. It's about teaching them that if they can master one aspect of the game, there are rewards to come and it will help them do the next bits better. It's all about helping them to love learning and teaching them to love to learn. In this way concentration becomes natural, rather than a struggle.

John Allpress: Coaches have to be fascinated with their sport, but they also have to be fascinated with the way people learn. You might have a cricket coach or a squash coach who is fascinated with the sport but not with the players. It is crucial to have a balance between the two.

Lee Drew: It would be very easy to coach a team en masse, but actually you're dealing with a squad of individuals. Each player is completely different to another. One of Peter Moores' [ECB Cricket Coach, who has presented to English Squash] principles that stood out for me was that he would regularly sit down and consider each individual player for a few minutes, making notes on them. In turn this would format his future work with the individual. The notes need to include both strengths and weaknesses across all the areas of performance: physical, technical, tactical and psychological.

John Allpress: You pick up stuff as you go along that you don't even know you're picking up. It becomes intuitive just like the players. Coaches who have worked with lots of groups will have worked with similar types of kids before, it might not be the same person, but you may have met someone similar. The coach will be able to predict the sort of things they may need and how they might need it dropped in. You develop prediction skills as a coach or a teacher in the same way as you do as a player.

Observation is a key aspect of the coaching process. What do you look for when you're watching the players?

Lee Drew: I will step back to look at the bigger picture, observing the whole of the court assessing the player's tactical approach. An expert player will be viewing

everything: the opponent taking up their position, the space they are in, whether the racket is up [a cue for a hard shot] or whether their racket is low [for a softer shot]. So as a coach you're checking for awareness. I'll be asking myself different questions: are they selecting the right shot, are they hitting the space, are they rushing the opponent but remaining calm in their own mind. There's so many different things that you're looking for.

How difficult is it to assess all aspects of the game when observing a session or match?

Lee Drew: I'll have a clear theme for the session and will also know a couple of areas the players want to improve upon – this shapes the observation and subsequent questions and feedback.

It may be physical aspects of performance: are they slow into position, are they breaking down or collapsing in a shot, is their racket up early in a shot.

Alternatively you may be looking at aspects of performance which would be considered psychological: are they mentally strong? Are they willing to chase every ball?

How do you encourage young players to develop their awareness skills and to start recognising the cues and triggers that you mention?

With the youngest players you can play games in different sized areas to help develop their awareness. Playing within different parameters, even in tight areas, means there are always different pockets of space for the players to find. After letting them play I'll ask them questions and support them if necessary. I often ask players to consider the position of their opponent as they are taking a shot. The next time they attempt it you will see them think about it more.

How do you filter which observations you will discuss with the players?

If I can get a message across, without me saying a lot then it's even better. So I try and keep it as simple and basic as possible, and even keep the message hidden sometimes.

In this way it helps the players own the decision-making. I may ask leading questions, or ask them to ask me questions. It ensures the players are doing the thinking. It's an approach based on ownership, responsibility and empowerment.

The relationship in squash between coach and performer seems to be closer than in football?

John Allpress: I don't think it has to be. It can be an issue in football. Sometimes we just see a group of players, rather than seeing the individuals. It is important for the coach to understand what the individuals need. If you know the players well enough,

you can drop bits of information into individuals as the game or the practice is going on.

How do you know what players need at different ages and stages of their development?

Lee Drew: Admittedly there's a lot of trial and error. Something that worked with one player, may not work with another. You may have to find different ways of working with a player, until that aspect of performance clicks. You might have a ten year old, who picks up something quicker than a twelve year old. So it really is all about the individual. You have to constantly keep feeling, seeing and sensing where a player is up to with their development. If you check for understanding you get a feeling for that.

John Allpress: When coaches are working with young players they have time. It's like a long audition. The coach doesn't need to tell the player everything they know straight away – you've got the opportunity to drip things in over time. Work with players on a regular basis and get to know them.

Lee, can you tell us a bit more about the culture wheel [see overleaf] for success?

Lee Drew: It comes from the thinking around the different cultures and environments that are required to breed successful people – it can cross over into business, learning or other sports.

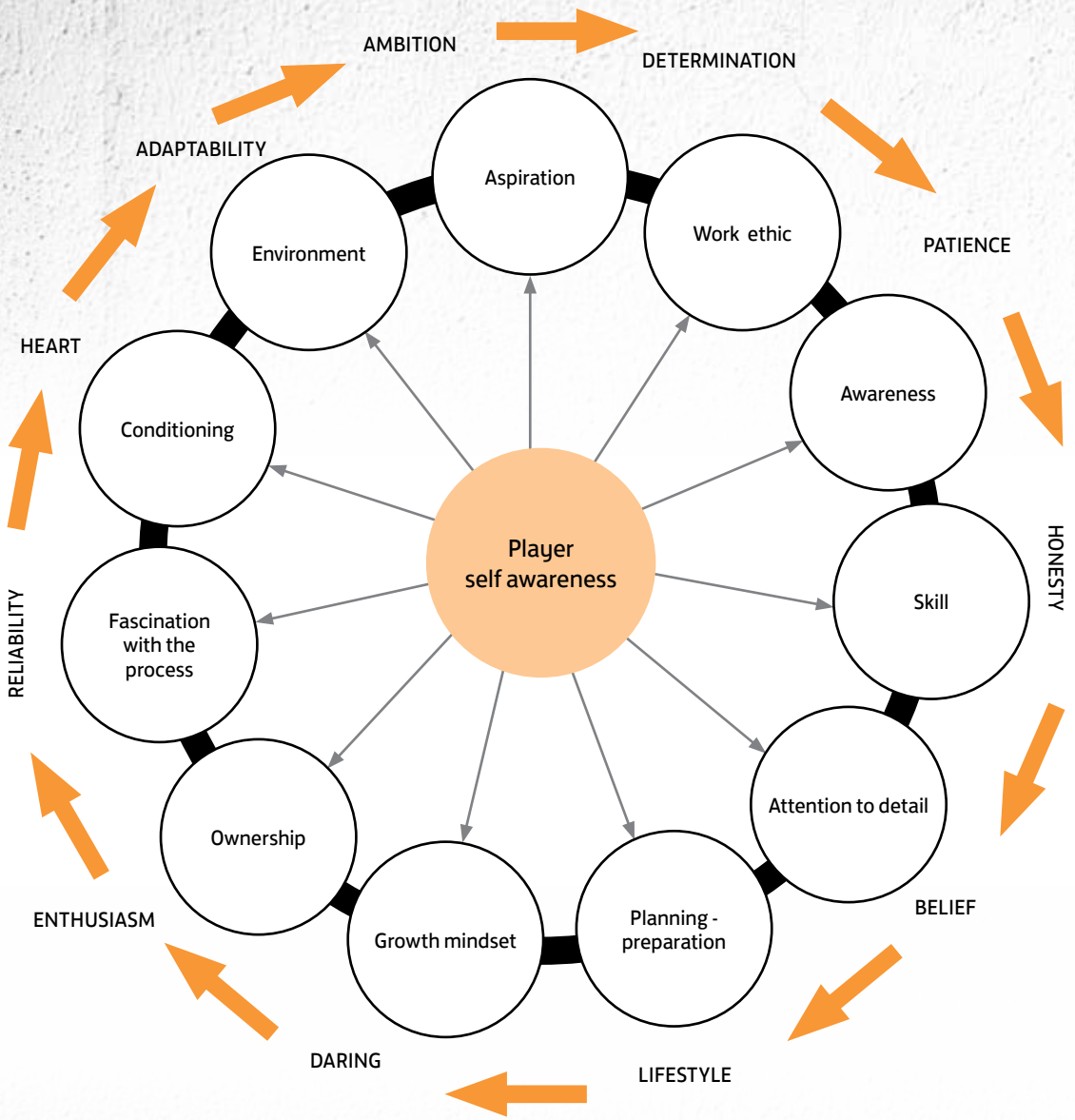
It considers the personality traits of successful people and the ingredients of a successful environment. When you start to consider all the facets that are included you can begin to benchmark and measure against it.

Players can self-reflect and start to think about the areas in which they are strong and also the areas in which they can improve. It's a process that can be supported by a coach or manager and lead to important discussions.

John Allpress: Ultimately, the environment is created by the leader and coaches are essentially leaders. If the leader shows generosity – which means letting the players know that they are there to help, to take an interest in them and to get to know them. As a result the environment is then built around building them as people.

The environment comes from the messages that the leader gives out – it is from here that a philosophy and the ideas about 'what we believe in here' and what the expectations are develop. It can take the players a while to learn what is expected in new environments.

Lee Drew: I very much like the players to take ownership of things. If something goes wrong, I want them to take responsibility for it. I want the players to think about what they could have done to avoid the problem. Instead of blaming other things the players are continually encouraged to problem-solve.



The Culture Wheel TO SUCCESS

CHARACTER FACETS TO GET THE WHEEL TURNING, BUILDING MOMENTUM TOWARDS ACHIEVING OUR GOALS:

- **Ambition** – Properly focused.
- **Determination** – Rise to every challenge.
- **Patience** – Good things take time.
- **Honesty** – With yourself and others.
- **Belief** – Be confident not cocky, respect but don't fear. Know you are ready and be comfortable with where you are.
- **Lifestyle** – Balance between work and socialising.
- **Daring** – Push boundaries and challenge yourself every day to be the best that you can be.
- **Enthusiasm** – Enjoy what you do and thrive within each challenge.
- **Heart** – The value of how we do things and persistence during competition
- **Reliability** – Be someone that others can depend on.
- **Adaptability** – Be versatile and cope with everything that comes your way.

SPOKES OF THE WHEEL:

- **Aspiration** – The desire and passion to achieve and strive for excellence. Always focus on the future.
- **Work Ethic** – There are no short cuts to Excellence. Anything that is worth achieving has a price. Be prepared to make sacrifices now and in the future to reap full rewards.
- **Awareness** – Be quick and alert in spotting strengths and weaknesses (yours and your opponents). Correct own weaknesses or use an opponent's weakness against them.
- **Skill** – Have an in depth knowledge of and the ability to execute the facets of the player model to a high standard.
- **Attention to Detail** – Make marginal improvements to the most minute of details.
- **Planning/Preparation** – Leave no stone uncovered. Plan and take care of every detail, including anticipation of future events.
"Chance favours the prepared mind" - Pasteur
- **Growth Mindset** – Love to learn, ask questions and study the game, reflect.
- **Ownership** – Own what you do and take responsibility for things; good or bad, win or lose.
- **Fascination with the Process** – Become fascinated and inquisitive about everything in your sport (history, past/current/new training techniques, what other players do, latest news). Enjoy nothing more than fine tuning every aspect of you and your game towards mastering your sport.
- **Conditioning** – Mental; Deep Practice, Physical; Rest, Exercise, Diet, Maintenance, Moral; Do everything the right way.
- **Environment** – Be in a positive place with access to everything you need. Surround yourself with knowledgeable and supportive people who understand your chosen path.

THE CORE:

PLAYER/SELF-AWARENESS
– KNOW AND UNDERSTAND YOURSELF INSIDE OUT.
CONTROL EMOTIONS AND KEEP THINGS IN PERSPECTIVE.

