The ‘C’ system is a holistic coaching model that delivers on all fronts, supporting the development of the whole child – mentally and socially, as well as technically and tactically. In the first of a two-part feature, we take a look at three elements of the ‘C’ system: connection, confidence and competence, with the help of ConnectedCoaches member Jon Woodward.

- The ‘C’ system is a framework that underpins the traditional model of coaching by supporting the holistic development of children as performers and as people.
- It helps guide your thinking in terms of session planning and delivery, and how you relate to people.
- The values embedded in the system can enrich a child’s sporting experience.
- Which component of the system you focus on depends on the situation.
- The aim of a coach at any level is to ensure players feel connected to their sport and comfortable in the setting. Achieve this, and confidence and competence are likely to follow.

Sport is about so much more than winning.

Being able to execute perfect technique and showcase your skills in front of others, the unbridled thrill of competition, increasing your conditioning and level of physical fitness – all fabulous reasons why people get hooked on sport.

It is common knowledge that exercise releases adrenaline, endorphins, serotonin and dopamine, which
create a natural high that keeps you coming back for more.

But take away the camaraderie with your teammates, and remove the element of fun from the sporting equation, and playing sport just wouldn’t be the same. It would lose its allure, providing you with watered down memories.

Sport is attractive because it is multidimensional, with physical, tactical, technical, psychological and social elements all working as a team to provide a lasting legacy for those who take part.

The challenge for coaches is to ensure that each of these dimensions is developed in equal measure.

Unfortunately, the psychological and social components are often overlooked when coaching 5–12 year olds.

As ConnectedCoaches member and sports coach UK coach educator Jon Woodward puts it: ‘It is important to remember we don’t just coach players, we coach people. It is a message that sometimes gets lost.’

This is where the ‘C’ system within coaching comes in – a framework that underpins the traditional model of coaching by supporting the holistic development of players as performers and as people.

The easy-to-remember formula also serves as an easy reference tool for coaches to refer back to before, during and after their sessions.

**Confused.com**

The C system is not restricted to a set number of components, though it has been known previsouly as the 5Cs.

The five main elements are:

- connection
- confidence
- competence
- character and caring
- creativity

I know, that’s six, if you include character and caring as two separate elements. Contribution is another favourite. As is compassion (isn’t that the same as caring?). At this point, you probably want to add confusion to the list!

Probably best to erase the 5Cs label from your mind altogether. As Jon explains: ‘As soon as you put a number on it, you find yourself restricted.’

Paying close attention to the ‘C’ system can have a phenomenal effect on your coaching and on those you coach.

‘The values embedded can enrich a child’s sporting experience,’ says Jon. ‘It is the job of the coach, through innovative, fun and challenging coaching methods, to tease those values out.

‘The way it is set out, it makes you think about what you are planning and delivering, and how you relate to people – and helps you constantly think about how you can improve things.’

The aim of this blog is to examine connection, confidence and competence in more detail, and we will shine the spotlight on creativity in a follow-up article next week.
Connecting the dots

The Cs and the Ts (technique and tactics) are intrinsically linked. Improving an athlete’s skills through technical and tactical instruction is the essence of sports coaching, and adherence to the ‘C’ system can assist the coach in achieving that goal – with the added bonus of simultaneously improving a child’s (or an adult’s, for that matter) personal skills.

So where does a coach begin? Which C comes first?

‘I start with the connection angle,’ says Jon. ‘You have to relate to the person and the sport. If there’s no connection there, there will be very little development.’

Building a connection comes down to knowing your players, your team and what they need – and, get ready for another C, helping them feel comfortable in their club setting.

‘This goes for a local badminton club or an elite level coach. If the athletes don’t want to be there, they probably aren’t going to perform very well,’ says Jon.

FLYING START: Forming a connection is a vital first step for a coach

Virtuous circle

The opposite of a vicious circle is a virtuous circle, and this is how Jon sees the ‘C’ system, with those who understand the principles able to dip in and out, choosing which component to focus their attention on depending on the situation.

That said, you need to have built a strong connection first to ‘unlock’ these other elements.

‘I use the ‘C’ system all the time, and as I’ve said, the first thing I do will be to connect with people,’ says Jon. ‘If I’m at a workshop, that will mean shaking their hands as they walk through the door and saying
hello and making them feel comfortable and at ease.

‘Everything else follows after you build this connection. So you can probably build their confidence fairly effectively. If they have confidence and believe in themselves, more than likely, their ability to perform or understand will be there, and so their competence will increase.

‘It ebbs and flows. Some weeks, you have to probably focus on just one of the elements, and other weeks, you might touch on all of them. That’s why I describe the system as being like a circle.’

It is a great reference framework to come back to and guide your thinking as you go through the minute-by-minute ritual of asking yourself why you are doing something and how you are doing it.

‘Every tool is great if you can use it effectively,’ adds Jon. ‘So understand what we mean by the terms, how they can apply to different settings, and you will reap the benefits.’

**Canny ideas**

Example time. While Jon says the components of the system are interchangeable, he believes confidence and competence go hand in hand. I ask him if he can illustrate this via a simple, generic, skill-based activity.

He explains: ‘The challenge always is, out of a group of 10 people, for want of a better number, you will probably have to focus on the level of confidence and competence very differently for all of them in the same exercise.

‘Some will be nervous, others will have bags of confidence from the outset. Some will struggle with an exercise, others might find it simple.

‘If you know your players, and why they are there, you might develop your session by amending the skill level for certain players.

‘So each player might have 10 individual targets to work to. It could be the ability to throw and catch the ball five times for player A, but for player G, it could be catching it 50 times. It’s setting them their own targets but linking back to an overarching aim or target.’

If player A reaches their 10-catch target, their confidence levels will rise. However, a coach who fails to adapt the exercise to take into account individual ability levels, stipulating a single 50-catch group target, will risk shattering the confidence of player A.

That is a super-simplistic example, but you can embellish on the exercise. You could ask those who catch the ball 50 times to support those who are struggling to get into double figures.

‘All of a sudden, players are buzzing because their competence and confidence have improved, and the coach has tapped into the caring component too, building trust among the players of differing abilities.’

Even simple drills can be turned into valuable, character-building exercises.

The challenge moving forward is to continue to tweak and develop your sessions so the players don’t get bored, with the levels of connection, competence and confidence becoming stronger over time.

Jon advises that, the first time you introduce a new activity, it should be used as a reflective planning tool.

Can you identify where connection and confidence occurred? If so, try to understand why it had a positive impact on that child.
‘The idea is for it to become a proactive tool,’ says Jon, ‘increasing your knowledge of how to make your sessions better through activities, drills and game-based understanding programmes.

‘As a coach, you have to cope with a complex set of characters in a complex environment. I think the 'C' system can give you the tools to help you simplify it, and you will improve and develop your techniques over time as you continue to use it.’

**One STEP ahead**

Utilising one coaching tool will not turn you into Vince Lombardi overnight, but the use of several, at the right time, should certainly enhance your reputation – within your own club at the very least.

There is another system, entitled the STEPS formula, that works neatly with the ‘C’ system to double its effectiveness.

The acronym stands for space, task, equipment, people and speed.

Jon explains: ‘The theory is, if you change one of those elements, it can transform your practice fairly rapidly and effectively. My view is, you should only change one, maybe two at a time.

‘Going back to the throwing and catching example: You could change the task by throwing the ball to someone else and asking them to throw it back to you harder. You could change the space by shortening the distance between catcher and thrower. Then, to change the focus, you could change the equipment, swapping a tennis ball to a rugby ball.

‘It’s a really simple framework, but it can transform your practice and help you develop competence and confidence in your sessions.’

As with any framework, the onus is on the coach to make it work.

Think of the ‘C’ system like flat-packed furniture. It starts life in lots of pieces and comes with what appears to be a simple do-it-yourself guide.

It requires some elbow grease and a fair amount of time. It can be frustrating, and you may have to redo certain sections, starting again from scratch until you get it right, but the end result will be immensely satisfying and well worth the effort.

**What do you think to the points raised in the article? Join the debate by leaving a comment below.**

**Next steps**

If you are interested in learning more about the ‘C’ system to improve your soft and personal skills, sports coach UK has a number of workshops that go into more depth, including:

- [Coaching Children (5–12)](https://www.sportscoachuk.org/workshops/coaching-children-5-12)
- [How to Deliver Engaging Sessions for Young People](https://www.sportscoachuk.org/workshops/how-to-deliver-engaging-sessions-for-young-people)
- [How to Deliver Engaging Sessions for Adults](https://www.sportscoachuk.org/workshops/how-to-deliver-engaging-sessions-for-adults)

Visit the [sports coach UK workshop](https://www.sportscoachuk.org)
finder to find a workshop running near you.

You might also be interested in the blog 'Let the creative sparks fly: The ‘C’ system, chapter two'

This blog is also available as a podcast on a number of platforms including iTunes. Listen here.

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tags: coaching, c-system, children, competence, confidence, connection