

DESIGNING A PRACTICE

The design of a practice, gives you the coach the opportunity to place your own personal input into the development of your players. The design of the practice should follow careful consideration of the following issues:

ENJOYMENT

Players play for enjoyment. Try to incorporate elements into your design which are light hearted and fun but do not lose sight of the practice goals and objectives.

INNOVATION

Try to be innovative with the design. This may mean altering some of the practice or introducing a different way of scoring an activity or game. Do not be afraid to change any part of your coaching session.

MAXIMUM ACTIVITY

Try to avoid practices that involve young players having to stand and watch for long periods. Attempt to set up activities so that everyone is working.

DIFFERENTIATION

It is possible to set up your practices so that it can challenge the more developed player and the least developed player and both feel they have achieved success.

COMPETITIONS

Most children enjoy playing in competitive situations. Attempt to design your practice to incorporate this by setting lots of short term goals, such as show many points you can score or how many times you can perfect a certain technique in a limited amount of time.

PART II: PLANNING AND ORGANIZING A PRACTICE

When planning and organizing a practice, the following points should be considered:

THEME

Each practice should have specific goals and objectives. These will be short term which are linked into the long term plans of the season. In order to achieve these objectives, a single theme for the practice should be chosen. Encouraging an individual theme for a practice session aids the learning and understanding of all players. Despite the enthusiasm to coach all aspects of the game, coaches should concentrate solely on the theme of the practice. Age of the players should be considered when planning a practice. For proper guidelines, see the "Thresholds of Training" guidelines.

TIME

The length of the time allocated for practice will influence the planning and design. See the suggested Individual session format guide.

EQUIPMENT

What equipment do you require to successfully coach in your practice? It is recommended that the coach have 8-10 balls, 20-25 cones, 10 pinnies and a basic first aid kit.

FACILITY

Several important factors should be taken into consideration such as weather you play indoors or out, the size of the field, the surface and the availability of goals.

WEATHER

Extremes of weather can cause you to adapt the design of your practice.

DEVELOPING A PRACTICE

The development of a practice can contain several key components, all of which should be geared towards achieving the goals and objectives of your practice. It is noted that the session format below can/ and should be altered and changed based on the theme and the ability of the players. The guidelines are a framework and any deviation from it can be justified if learning is taking place:

WARM UP

A series of activities, linked to the theme, to prepare the body (players) mentally and physically for the rest of practice. Coaches should utilize the use of soccer balls during the warm-up phase wherever possible. The warm-up is a good way to introduce the technical points related to the theme.

FUNDAMENTAL

The fundamental section of the practice will continue to build upon the technical points that were introduced in the warm-up which are related to the theme of the practice. The coach should present these concepts using simple, logical coaching points. As progress is made, pressure can be added to allow techniques to be progressed into skills. All players need to experience success at this stage, however it is understood that the extent to that success will be different for each player.

GAME RELATED

A technique becomes a skill when it is performed regularly under pressure. Pressure can be added by increasing/reducing both players involved and the playing area.

An > or a < in time or space will result in a change in the intensity and pressure of the activity.

GAME CONDITION

Conditioning a game allows a situation to occur while still encouraging concentration on a particular theme. Ask yourself what do you want your players to do? What are you trying to achieve? Placing restrictions on players is artificial but can *encourage* the desired behavior.

MATCH CONDITION

NO RESTRICTIONS; The final stage of a practice is unconditioned play, which allows the coach and the players to see how much has been learned. Players need this time to make as many decisions for themselves as possible. Allow at least 15-20 minutes free play in a 1.5 hour session.

EVALUATION PROCESS

This is a vital, but so often a neglected part of coaching. It involves such questions as:

- What went well and why?
- What did not go so well and why?
- What was achieved; and
- What is needed in the future

The answers to these questions form the foundation of your planning for future coaching sessions and also a valuable resource as to feedback on your own coaching delivery techniques.