



## **Preparing for your practice sessions**

Before each practice session takes place, it is advised that coaches spend some time to do the following:

### **1. Prepare a lesson plan:**

Using the structure guideline listed in the previous section, coaches should prepare a basic lesson plan.

This is a simple description of the activities and coaching points that you want to address during the coming practice. Here are the main things you should include in your lesson plan:

- **List each activity** you intend to run during the session **along with the time allocated to each.**
- For each activity, **list the coaching points** you want to emphasize to your players.
- If necessary, you can **sketch out diagrams** to help remind you of how your activities are to be laid out. You should be able to cover your entire lesson plan on a single piece of standard letter paper. Keep this with you during your session so you can quickly refer to it if necessary to help your session flow.

**IMPORTANT:** A lesson plan doesn't need to be complicated – in fact the simpler you can keep it, the better! **Each practice you hold should focus on no more than 1 or 2 main topics or themes and your lesson plan should reflect this.** The biggest mistake many coaches make is to try and cover too much content in a single session. The result of this is that players become confused and the important information gets lost amongst the clutter.

A lesson plan template is available for your use. You should keep blank copies of this template on hand for future practices. You should also feel free to share lesson plans with your fellow coaches and build your own personal archive of lesson plans.

**Take an expected attendance:** Ask all players to confirm their availability prior to each practice (and game). There's nothing more frustrating than planning a great practice session only for your plans to be thwarted because a few players didn't show up and you weren't able to run your session the way you wanted to. Knowing how many players will be in attendance will help you better prepare your practice by planning to that number of players.

### **2. Prepare your equipment:**

**Equipment Set-up:** Prior to your session, make sure you have all the equipment (lesson plan, balls, pinnies and cones) you will need to run the activities you have planned. Ensure your balls are properly

inflated and that your pinnies are clean and dry. Your players should be in the habit of bringing their own ball and water bottle to every practice and game.

**Initial set up:** Make sure that you have the spaces organized and plan for a smooth transition from one exercise to another. Minimize the number of cones that you have to pick up or reset.

**Review:** Take a few minutes just before the training session to review the session plan and the coaching points.

### **3. Best practices for coaching youth soccer players**

After all your preparation is done and it comes time to actually run a practice session, here are some useful things to think about when working with young players:

- Make your practice environment a **SAFE, FUN, CHALLENGING and EDUCATIONAL** one.
- **SET STANDARDS EARLY** – Explain clearly what your expectations are from your players (Punctuality, dress code, behavior, effort etc.) And reinforce them regularly.
- **BE ENERGETIC!** - The coach sets the tone for the practice so make sure you have fun, laugh with your players and remain enthusiastic throughout.
- **KEEP YOUR PLAYERS BUSY** - Don't allow long periods with no activity as this will result in your session losing its flow and your players losing their motivation and concentration. Try to move quickly from one activity to another with a short water break in between.
- Keep your explanations **SHORT AND SIMPLE** when introducing new skills or ideas.
- **GIVE SHORT, SLOW AND ACCURATE DEMONSTRATIONS** when introducing a new technique or concept. Progress to game speed eventually.
- **PATIENCE** – Young players may not pick up new things immediately so don't become frustrated if they don't get it right away.
- **COACH THE POSITIVE** – don't allow yourself to focus only on what the player does wrong but instead, focus on what they do well ("catch them being good").
- **ENCOURAGE CREATIVITY** – Encourage your players to try new things with the ball. Players who think "outside the box" are often the most exciting to watch.
- **ASK QUESTIONS!!** – Don't immediately give your players the solutions to the problem. Instead, see if they can come up with the answer themselves.
- **ENCOURAGE GOOD HABITS** – Body language, communication, attitude and leadership. Look out for and acknowledge players who show these qualities that have nothing to do with the ball.

- Don't use **LINE EXERCISES!** Find ways in which your players can get more touches without waiting in line.
- Avoid "elimination games" – the players most in need of improvement and repetitions are often the first to be eliminated.
- **COACH EVERYONE** – It's easy for the coach to become focused on the best

#### **4. During the session**

**Position during the practice:** Coaches should occupy a central but sideline position during practice which allows a clear, general vision of training and simultaneously permits the observation of small details.

**Flexible:** A good coach must be capable of adapting the initial plan of the session to the time available, characteristics of the players and time required for players to learn a given task.

**Coaching points:** Coaches should cover necessary coaching-points in the session plan depending on players' performance and adaptation. Treat your coaching points like tweets...**SHORT & TO THE POINT!**

#### **5. After the session**

**Discussion with the players:** Do not underestimate the value and impact of a positive comment or individual feedback to a player after the training session.

**Review your session plan:** Review the session plan at the end of the training session and note what worked well and what needs to improve.

**Evaluate yourself:** Do not be ashamed to ask for constructive feedback and the opinion of your colleagues in relation to your coaching management and structure of the session.