

# Organizing Your Practice Sessions

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There is one common theme that I use on a weekly basis:

**"If you cannot perform in practice – how do you expect to perform in a game?"**

Many coaches and players over-look the importance of putting a high demand on the performance of your players in a practice session. One of the greatest attributes of great players is that you can never tell whether they are practicing or performing in a game because they have the same preparation, focus, and energy levels in both arenas. These are the players that have the ability to slow the game down in competition and have a great sense of where they need to be physically, mentally and emotionally to play the game at a high level. Is this something that we can teach our players?

Practice is the foundation of developing the physical, mental and emotional skills of our players. We must first understand a very simple, but true, illustration of how the skill level and the challenge effect the development of the athlete. It has been proven time and time again:

- If you have an athlete with a low skill level and the challenge is too great, this will result in frustration.
- If the skill level is high and the challenge is low, the athlete becomes bored.

This is a very good thought to always consider when working with athletes, at *all* levels.

Softball is a process-oriented game that requires a basic level of skill. To develop these skills, as in anything that is complex, requires repetition to teach the necessary movement and to convert it to spontaneous reactions. I have used a saying for years: **"Softball is monotonous repetition of fundamental skills."** Our ability as coaches to teach young kids how to throw, catch, hit & run is the foundation of their ability to learn how to properly execute the game. If we can understand that it takes 10,000 repetitions to perfect a skill, we can begin to understand the complexity of the game and the importance of providing a quality learning experience in practice.

Your practice planning must adapt to many factors including equipment, field accommodations, time and the amount of help you have to run a practice. Obviously, my practices can look very structured due to the facilities, staff and equipment to which I have access. I have seen quality practices run all over the world that adapt to their particular situation, yet they all follow some basic principles of teaching the game.

### Planning Considerations:

1. Facilities (field, cages, warm up areas)
2. Time (daily, weekly, and monthly)
3. Equipment (balls, buckets, bats, gloves, tees, machines)
4. Numbers (players, staff, practice opportunities)

### What Needs to be Taught:

1. Warm-up skills (active warm up, throwing warm up, cool down)
2. Individual skills (throwing, receiving, fielding, hitting, bunting, sliding, base running)
3. Team skills (defensive responsibilities, communication)
4. Strategy (defensive and offensive strategy, communication)
5. Rules of the game

### Breaking Down the Game:

1. Lines – Individual skills
  2. Groups – Parts of the game
  3. Team – “The game”
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### Key Elements of Practice:

1. Warm up
2. Individual skill development
3. Team defense
4. Team offense
5. Batting practice
6. Game situations
7. Cool down