

Practices for Younger Players

I believe in the statement that you are going to play the way that you practice. **Sloppy in practice, sloppy in a game. Lazy in practice, not prepared for the game. Sharp in practice, sharp in the game. Practice hard, play hard.** As a coach, your job is to prepare for your practices. Plan out everything about practice for the day, have a plan for the week, have a plan for the month, and so on.

I use to tell people that I have a timetable in my head of where the team should be on a certain date (what we have already learned and what we still need to go over.) We had plans for what to accomplish during our fall scrimmage season, during our winter workouts, and on throughout the season.

Especially with the younger players and especially at the beginning of the practice season, a coach has to be organized and have the practices planned to the minute. After the players are conditioned to the style of practices the coach wants, the coach can be a little more lenient because the players know what is expected of them.

Here are some ideas for coaches on how to run a practice for younger players especially but all ages benefit from organized practices. All players dislike just standing around and not being taught or directed.

Always be at practice early to get all of the equipment out and set up with safety in mind in placing the equipment out. Look for potential hazards around the area and direct (especially) the younger players what they can and cannot do with the equipment as they come into the gym or field.

Have the practices planned to the minute and have them on a note card that fits in your pocket. The card makes it easier to refer to during the practice.

Be enthusiastic about practice and be very convinced of what you are doing. If the players think that the coach is unsure of what to do, who goes where during the practice, or how to do something, they will not listen. Not listening leads to distracting other players from listening to the coach. Show them that you are a very confident coach by being organized and definite in what you want them to do and how to do it.

Keep the explanations of a skill or drill short and to the point. Some skills can be broken down and learned in sections. Especially with younger players, explain one skill at a time and immediately practice the skill. Players cannot listen to long explanations and be expected to remember everything that was said. Keep the explanation short.

Keep the drills short. There are a lot of drills that can be done that work on the same skill. Do about four different drills that work on the same skill and do each one for a short time. The players will lose interest and the drill will be counterproductive if it is done too long.

HERE IS A SAMPLE OF A PRACTICE BASED ON A TWO-HOUR TIME SLOT:

Jog around gym (or infield if outside). While jogging in a line, have them toss a softie ball or a whiffle ball over their head to the next player. When the last player receives the ball, she sprints to the front of the line and repeats tossing the ball over her head.

AGILITY DRILLS:

Karaoke - high skips

Quick skip - hip kicks

Jump over a line with both feet as quickly as possible. Front to back and side to side with rings or a ladder.

There is a multitude of drills that can be done to increase the player's agility and coordination. For example:

One foot in, one foot outside of the ladder and go as fast as possible;

Two feet in the same space going forward;

Two feet in the same space going sideways;

Karaoke through the ladder-right, left, etc.

FOOTBALL DRILL: Works on running, sprinting, and hand/eye coordination.

One coach throwing, each player has a ball, the player hands the coach the ball and runs towards a designated spot, the coach throws a pass to the player.

Player can go left, then right, straight out, back in towards the coach; two players can go and zigzag with two coaches throwing, etc.

STATION WORK:

Vary the stations and drills day by day:

Tee work, swing the stick 100 times, bunting, grounders, slapping, outfield throws, double play pivots, etc.

You can fit as many stations as you can in the gym with whatever skills you are working on that week.

Rotate to another station after a designated time depending on number of players in each group.

Outfield practice with infielders running.

Infield practice with outfielders running.

Pitcher/catcher works while others are doing skill work on their positions.

SITUATIONS:

During the preseason, go over every possible situation that can happen during a game.

That way the players are not surprised when it occurs during a game. They have practiced it in the preseason and automatically know what to do.

Again, come into practice organized and with a definite attitude. Be wishy washy and you will lose them. Be confident and direct. Have a variety of drills for each practice and do each a short time. Longer and the players get bored - long enough to be productive, short enough to be exciting. Keep everyone involved, no standing around by anyone. That leads to talking and lack of focus. Show everyone that they have worth on the team, even the weakest player, and always be positive with all of the players. Encourage everyone in a positive way while still correcting

them so they do the skill correctly. For example, "That's close but try it this way," "Good, but let's change it a little" and so on. Never let the players continue to practice the skill incorrectly, walk around constantly to every player to help correct them. If a teacher or coach only stands in one place, they see things only one way. Walk among them to see all sides of the team and situation. The players will respond to organization, respect you as a coach, and play harder behind you.

Look for Cheleste's article next month.