

7

CONDUCTING TRAINING SESSIONS



CHAPTER

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Planning and conducting practice sessions. It is important to continually stress to players that through practice sessions they will be taught skills and techniques that will lead to individual improvement, and that it is an opportunity for the team to develop into a cohesive offensive and defensive unit. As part of effective coaching, coaches should follow the **'Plan – Act – Review'** strategy, which will set them on the correct path. Training activities may be planned to emphasise various components of the game, including skills and techniques and decision making and tactical thinking.

PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE TRAINING

The coach needs to be aware of the general principles which ensure effective training. This makes it possible for coaches to formulate training programs and sessions which have a positive impact on both the team and individual. Coaches are able to design their training with appropriate consideration to the standard of the team.

Keep all players active	Maximise training time by keeping all players active and involved.
Give clear concise instructions	Learning improves when players know what is expected of them.
Demonstrations improve the accuracy of instructions	
Record progress	Certain drills allow measurement by which coaches and players can assess progress.
Give positive feedback	Emphasise and reward good performances.
Provide variety	Maintain interest by using various skills.
Encourage enjoyment	Training sessions should be fun and enjoyable.
Create progression	Learning improves if progression occurs from the simple to the complex.
Plan maximum use of resources	Ensure that you have the correct equipment (footballs, markers etc). A ratio of one football to two players is ideal.
Allow for individual differences	Allow for different learning rates among players.
Plan yet flexible	If a planned drill is not working or circumstances have changed (e.g. weather), be prepared to change immediately.

Keep drills and activities short

Shorter drills are more effective than lengthy ones. Unless practice time is pre-planned, drills may become long and boring to players and learning may be reduced. It is important to ensure players know the purpose of the drill being undertaken. Players tend to perform better when they know why they are working on a specific skill. The coach should also begin the session with a brief explanation of the session's goals. This will give the session more direction and relevance and players will be clear on individual and team goals for the session.

Conclude each practice session with an evaluation of the players' performances and the effectiveness of the session itself. This should include an honest personal assessment by the coach.



DESIGNING THE TRAINING SESSION

Many of the problems which new coaches have at training have nothing to do with their personality, their level of control, or football knowledge, but are due to their lack of preparation before training. Deciding what drills to include and in what order is fundamental to achieving your objectives.

- Time spent in organising the training session will make the problem of controlling the group much easier.
- Observe your players during the drills, moving to individuals or groups that may need assistance.
- During each session, the coach should stand back and assess what is going well and what needs to be improved.
- Never stop the group until you are sure of what you are going to say. If the drill is going well, let it continue.
- Be clear in your instructions. If you want the players to finish the activity, use one clear word 'stop' or a whistle.
- Bring the group in. Before speaking make sure you can see all players, then direct your voice to the furthest person.
- If a demonstration is called for, group placement is most important. A single file, square, circle or semi circle are all ideal learning formations.
- Keep instructions to a minimum by emphasising the main teaching points. Send the players back to practise.
- A skilful coach can judge when to stop a current activity and move on to the next drill. In most cases, it can be achieved with minimal disruption to the pattern of training.
- Take notes as soon as possible after training, listing the worthwhile drills and modifications to be made to existing drills.

The training session - in season

The primary objective during the playing season is to maintain the current level of match fitness of every player. In addition, it is important to develop individual and team skills through a good selection of drills.

A format for a training session is outlined below:

TRAINING DRILLS AND PRACTICES

Drills are the life blood of the training session and ultimately reflect in the team's on-field performance.

A long list of drills and activities have been used over the years at all levels of football.

It is not the intention of this section to describe specific drills, however there are some key fundamentals of training drills.

TYPES OF DRILLS

Drills can be categorised under three main headings:

1. Individual Skill Drills

These involve the basic skills and incorporate practice in kicking, marking, handball, etc.

2. Part of the Game Drills

Drills in this category refer to certain parts of the game and include centre bounce practice and centring the ball from the forward pocket.

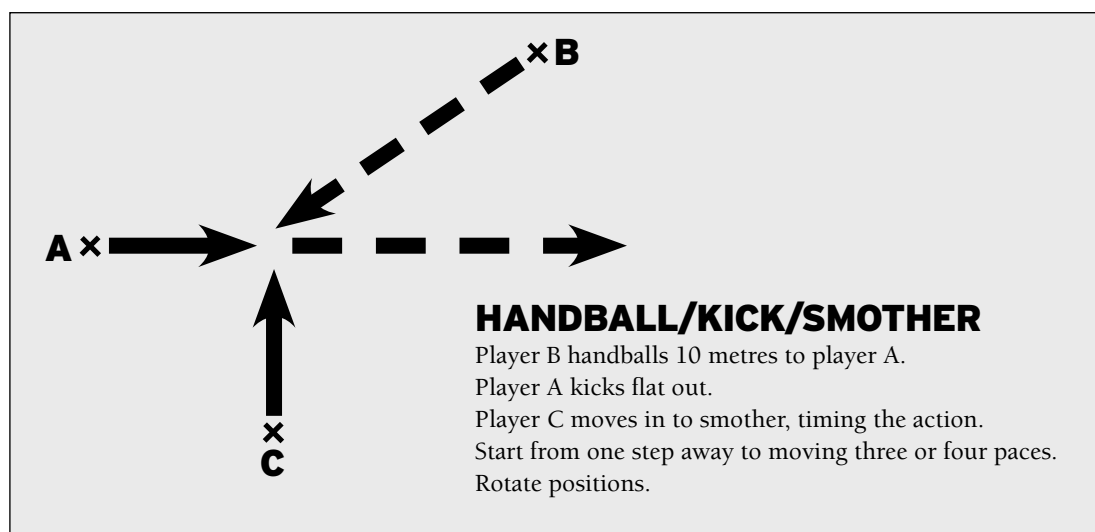
3. Team Pattern Drills

These include activities which practise an overall system of play. For example, moving the ball down the centre corridor.

Skill Drills

The selection of drills suitable for your team requires a great deal of thought and planning.

Drills should develop the running and possession skills so important in football today and at the same time prepare players for realistic match conditions. Skill drills should progress from simple to complex. When introducing a skill drill, begin with a basic drill, gradually building up the degree of difficulty. Repetition is the key to learning. As the players become familiar with the drill and your expectations, the skill drill will run efficiently with maximum involvement. The following is an example of a drill that has been developed from its simplest form into a realistic skill activity.



Training drills with purpose and focus

While there are many publications containing hundreds of football skill drills, the best drills and perhaps most satisfying drills you can use and implement are those developed by you for a specific purpose. Any drill or coaching exercise/activity must be aimed at giving your team the best chance of achieving its potential, both in the short and long term. You can choose almost any aspect of the game, however small, and design a drill or activity to practice it.

Before deciding which drills to incorporate into the team training sessions, a few key points must be considered:

- What are your themes for the session/week/month?
- What are the intended outcomes of the session?
- Why do you want to run the drill and for how long?
- Is the drill aimed at exploiting a particular weakness of the upcoming opposition or to use a particular strength of your team?



INTRODUCING A NEW DRILL

Often coaches waste valuable time and become frustrated at their lack of success when introducing a drill for the first time. A simple procedure to follow is set out below:

1. Have all the equipment ready

It may seem self-explanatory but it is an important part of running a successful coaching session. Coaches must be able to move players quickly from one drill to the next. A new drill can quickly lose its appeal, regardless of its value, if the appropriate preparation doesn't appear to have been made.

2. Rehearse selected players to go through the drills before the whole team is involved

If certain players within the group have an understanding of the drill, they will quickly be able to explain to other players what needs to be done. Communication among players builds a sense of team.

3. Give the drill a name

This saves the coach having to remind players of the drill each time it is to be used. If players are aware of the name of the drill, the team can immediately move on to it. A continuous training session is of enormous value.

4. Explain the aim of the drill

By explaining the aim of the drill, players will be able to see for themselves the inherent value of performing every part of the drill with enthusiasm. It will also serve as a guide to the type of skills the coach believes the team needs to work on.

5. Select players to walk through the drill

Similar to point two, players can observe for themselves the drill being performed, avoiding confusion which can quickly ruin a drill.

6. When the whole group is ready, begin by performing the drill slowly

A new drill should be eased into so that players can gain confidence in the way it operates, and concentrate more on the skills they are trying to develop than the actual machinations of the training drill.

7. Gradually increase the tempo and degree of difficulty

There are several ways to lift the pace:

- Adding more footballs.
- Having fewer players at each marker.

It is important to add variety to drills so that players believe they are continuing to gain value out of it. By adding more footballs you add to the pace at which the drill is performed, and players learn to quickly dispose of the ball.

Having fewer players at the marker means that players have less time not participating in the drill, thus alleviating problems of boredom/cooling down. Players must concentrate at all times, which also replicates a match situation more closely. As the players become more confident and drills are known, they often do not need the markers or explanations before performing the drill.

VARIATION IN TRAINING SESSIONS

The benefits of training indoors periodically or outside the normal training environment with footballs include:

- New venue and a break from normal routine, which can enhance player motivation levels.
- Smaller confined areas means skill level needs to be high and players need to focus on skill basics to ensure targets are hit.
- Smaller dimensions of distances between cones/lines can mean shorter recovery, which enhances aerobic conditioning.
- Indoor arena can lead to more noise being generated, which enhances morale and communication between players.
- Alternate training games and competitions can be used to enhance team morale throughout or at the end of the skill session, such as a volleyball competition or an indoor football game with a possession focus, where teams score a point by handballing the ball between a set of goals at each end.