

Session management

The coach should plan and conduct his/her coaching sessions on sound principles, which enhance the learning process for all their players and the team. The following model provides a systematic approach to delivering effective sessions to assist the coach in achieving this.

Planning

Session planning is often overlooked by coaches, especially at grassroots level. The tendency to repeat sessions every week with no specific aim is demotivating for the players and can be detrimental to their learning and improvement.

It is recommended to write down your session beforehand and to have a list of 'Key Points' you wish to make during and after the session.

A simple session sheet as shown in diag 1(in the attached PDF) is a good way of organizing your ideas so you can carry it with you throughout the practice for reference. This will ensure that you have all the essential information to hand and will give you confidence when coaching.

Organising

The key to effectively organizing your session is in the planning. Make sure you arrive 15 minutes before the players so you have enough time to set up the cones, goals, balls etc.. Players appreciate a structured practice session and they like to get on with things, so spend as little time as possible setting things up while the players are there.

If you have a number of drills planned for a single session, ensure that these are all set up in the 15 minute period you have given yourself before the session starts. This will enable a smooth transition from one activity to another.

Watching

When observing the players during training it is best to take up a position where you can see the whole picture. A position of height is a great advantage. Where you stand should be dependent on what you wish to emphasise during your session. For instance, if you wanted to work on the defence, then taking up a position behind your defenders could be advantageous to see exactly what needs to be worked on.

In general, a central position is best as you can observe the entire team and can jump in when you wish to explain any relevant coaching points. The only rule of thumb is not to be in a position that stops the general flow of the session.

Coaching

A useful coaching formula that should be used as often as possible is 'explain', 'demonstrate' and 'imitate'.

- The idea is to first explain the skill or technique you wish to coach so that the players have a firm idea of what is expected from them.
- Secondly, provide a demonstration. This reinforces the explanation and players prefer it as they get to see the skill/technique in action.
- Thirdly, get the players to imitate what you have just shown them so that they attempt what you are coaching. This gives them confidence in delivering what you have asked of them.
- It is important to watch your players in open play first so that when any opportunity to coach your 'Key Points' arises you can step in. Always be specific when coaching any technical detail as this is easier for the player to take on board.
- It is important to coach at the ball first. This means actually coach the player on the ball, whether it be his/her positioning, skill or awareness that is at fault.
- Secondly, coach the players near the ball. This means coach the players around the man on the ball and help them with their positioning and awareness.
- Thirdly, coach away from the ball. This means coaching the players furthest from the play as all players are relevant and it is important they know how they are affecting the game even if they are far away from the ball.
- It is advised to work through the three areas gradually through the session starting with the player on the ball first.

As a coach it is essential that you are enthusiastic when making your points and that you are sure about what you are saying. Players often pick up any signs of uncertainty, which can breed a lack of confidence in the information you are giving.

Developing the session

After the session has finished it is important to evaluate any ways you can develop the session for future practices. There are two key questions to attend to when evaluating:

- If some players are struggling to cope with the session, how would you adapt it to make it more achievable for them?
- If some players are finding the session too easy, how can you adapt the session to make it more demanding for them?

Progression of practice is important in keeping players motivated and improving their performance.

Self-evaluation

When reviewing your sessions there are a number of questions you need to ask:

- Were arrangements and organization appropriate - i.e. facilities, equipment, etc.?
- Did the session meet the player's needs and expectations?
- Was your coaching style and communication appropriate to the players?
- Did the player's performance improve as expected?
- What feedback have you had from other people involved in the session - i.e. players, parents, other coaches?

- If you were to coach this session again what might you change?

After going through these questions you should have a good idea of how to improve the practice for future use. In this way you can detect weaknesses so to avoid problems and design better practice sessions for future use.

So, for referral, the key aspects for planning your sessions are:

- Pre-planning
- Organising
- Watching
- Coaching
- Developing
- Self-evaluating