

GlenEd Soccer - Coaching Concepts

Topic 4: Creating Practice Themes

How we teach, how players learn *Q: How do you eat an elephant? A: One bite at a time.*

We are successful in picking up new concepts by hearing, seeing, and doing. The more we “do” the more we retain, so bottom line - talk less, let them “do more”. When faced with teaching new techniques, concepts and strategies we must provide bite sized portions so our players don’t become overwhelmed with all the instruction and become confused and as a result shut down. Having limited time at practice to teach, demonstrate, repeat skills or ideas is a challenging task but manageable if we are organized. The more we can transition from one phase of training to the next, the more the players will show up on-time, be ready to go, and as a result enjoy the sessions.

One way to ensure learning takes place is to provide the best environment - enough balls (with air), players with shoes tied, bathroom breaks taken care of, bibs, cones, and appropriate space to practice. Once the foundation is prepared for a practice session be sure to not overlook time to have fun early in the session to *give “fun” before we get “work”*. This idea is often referred to as a “soccer sandwich”. A slice of games/fun (beginning and end of each practice session) wrapped around work or repetitive skills training. If you keep this in mind it may help to keep the players attention and at the same time create a very good environment for learning to take place.

Practice Progression

Now that you have the field setup, bibs laid out, balls pumped up, and cones for exercises in place we need to consider the best progression for learning. Key factors for successful progression when setting up a practice plan: simple -> complex; no pressure -> pressure; no rules or direction -> directional play with restrictions; concluding with small sided game. The most important thing to remember is to **MAKE A PRACTICE PLAN**. Don’t wing it. We tend to have players run laps when we come late or are unprepared. Laps are a time waster and are not fun. When in doubt or as the need arises - set up 1v1, 2v2, 3v3 games as players show up providing you time to discuss session with your assistant coach, or just to reward those early arrivers with a perk - “a chance to SCRIMMAGE”!

Focus on a common theme and stick with it throughout the session. Let the players know at the beginning of the session what you choose to work on, and have that “theme” be discussed in coaching points throughout the session. If possible, be economical in your preparation. By that I mean don’t plan to run players at the beginning or end of a session - create a dynamic

session that will incorporate running, sprinting in the exercises. However possible incorporate the ball into every training element possible. This will more closely replicate the demands of the game and will better prepare the player to incorporate movement into their natural style of play. Keep tempo as high as possible and the duration timed so players push themselves to keep pace for the set time - making it manageable yet challenging. The trick is to have the activity mask the effort so players want to *exert effort due to the exercise, rather than making effort the focus.*

Preseason topics (Spring Training)

Every professional baseball, football, or soccer player starts every preseason with the fundamentals (**technical skill**)... for a reason. You have to set a solid base on which to build. No technique is too basic to practice. In order to help plan for your first game count backwards and determine how many practice sessions you will have in your preseason. Typically you will want 8-12 sessions. Below is an example of a 12 week preseason for most any age:

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|------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 Dribbling - basics | 2 Moves/feints/shielding | 3 Passing (short) | 4 1 st Touch |
| 5 Passing - (long/air) | 6 Shooting/finishing | 7 Attacking | 8 Defending |
| 9 Possession | 10 Combination passes | 11 Basic defending shape | 12 *Restarts |

**Restarts - start of game, corner kicks, goal kicks, indirect vs direct kicks... concepts and objectives should be reviewed so players know expectations (generally)*

To provide examples of economical training you obviously could combine shooting with all the sessions... or dribbling basics + moves/feints session, passing + receiving session, passing + movement + possession session, defending + attacking session and vice versa. The whole key to laying out a session is to only address or look to improve 1 common theme.

For session 1 on dribbling basics if you include shooting at the end of dribbling patterns, don't worry about if the player used proper form in shooting "that evening"... mention expectation once at the beginning... "at the end of the dribbling I want you to shoot on goal - try to aim for the corners and don't use your toe..." DEMONSTRATE what you want... then only focus on the dribbling aspect of the session.

Regular Season (Reflects game deficiencies)

It is also good to lay out the sessions you want to cover during the regular season (in advance) but then adjust it based on necessity. For example if you "planned" on a session on **SCORING FROM A CROSS** but the players were struggling with connecting passes and scoring at all recently, it would be better to build the strong base of **PASSING, MOVEMENT, SHOOTING...** before you add the complexity of where the pass should go and how you want them to score. But an idea would be to have a weekly **tactical concept** theme during the Regular Season and realize technical skills will be used - but now we want to clean up and assist players with the

concepts of play to build on the solid technical base. This is where patience is a must. Rome wasn't built in a day and it takes countless hours of individual skill training to couple movement, anticipation, speed of thought, and accuracy of passes to be more successful than your opponent.

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| 1 Transition | 2 Changing point of attack | 3 Possession - Attacking third |
| 4 Blind-sided runs | 5 Penetrating passes | 6 Possession - Middle third |
| 7 Defense - cover | 8 Defense - immediate pressure | 9 Defense - balance & shape |
| 10 Combination play | 11 Playing out of the back | 12 When to attack vs possess |

The cycle of teaching/learning should consist of preparation, game, evaluation, and back to preparation (based on deficiencies in play). You may have to focus on defense if your team is giving up a lot of goals. While you need to have a plan of tactics to cover "big picture" to ensure a sound understanding of the principles of play, you may need to adjust the order in which you cover topics based on skills or problems experienced during the games.

Coaching Points

Be specific and brief - no more than 14 seconds of instruction at a time. When possible inject your point during natural stoppages. If making a point during play - make it applicable to many players... avoid it being constant or it will sound like noise, not help.

If you choose to use the "freeze" or "stop, stand still" technique make sure the purpose is to provide a clear visual of the current shape of players in relation to the ball and potential "better options" for movement. Be careful not to overuse this style of coaching as it disrupts the flow of play. When possible have them learn, not be instructed on better options.

Write out the coaching points you want to stress before the session and reinforce those points. Avoid drifting with your comments; have them relate specifically to the theme of the session. Sometimes it's best to only coach ½ the players (if the focus is on attacking – don't worry if the defense doesn't provide immediate pressure, or if they are compact, etc.