



TSD

George Kuntz - Technical Soccer Development

Hawaii Youth Soccer Association – Technical Director and Director of Coaching
info@teamsoccerdirect.com

Practice Planning for Success on the Field and Beyond

Practice planning takes an investment of time.

How much time is a coach willing to invest in preparing his or her practice so that each practice is a special learning environment? Is the coach bringing a passion to their teaching with encouragement and enthusiasm? Coaches in general must be ready to plan a practice that is effective, fun, and full of action for the players. Make sure you have what you need for practice. Are there soccer balls for every player, cones, vests, first aid kit, roster with emergency numbers, goals, etc.?

Coaches must have a **Short Term Plan** for development – today, this week, the next game
Coaches should have a **Long Term Plan** for development – monthly, season, yearly

Another aspect that is important for coaches to know is the players they coach. Each session should have an objective and a purpose that is appropriate for that particular age group and skill level.

1. What is the skill level of the team?
2. What is their age?
3. What is the level of the players/teams tactical (decision making) ability?
4. Do the players have mental and physical maturity (depends on the age)?
5. Are the players new or experienced?
6. Where is the team in the season (beginning, middle, or end)?
7. What are your goals for the team?
8. Are you preparing for a game, the season, a tournament, or a championship?

While a plan is necessary coaches must be flexible because the variables of your practice may change with inclement weather, field surface, field space, travel, injuries or players missing from practice. Coaches must adapt to the needs and demands of the team and the age group they are coaching.

Winning or losing is not the focus of the development stages of players. The fact is that players will compete in exercises that are dynamic and engaging. It is unhealthy for development of players at the youngest age groups when the focus is on winning all the kids should be doing is simply enjoy the game. They must enjoy the soccer playing experience and be yearning for more after each practice.

Coaches tend to tell kids what is going to happen before they do it. A better approach would be to simply let the players know the name of the game or the topic, the rules of the exercise, then get them started. Corrections can be made within the exercise/game without stopping the flow of play or at a natural stoppage unless it is a technical or tactical issue that should be addressed with the entire team. For the most part the fewer instructions the better. Encouragement is welcome.



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Before a coach starts the practice preparation know the age group and the appropriateness of the training for the age group. Terminology and the names for things in the game or on the field are important for players and coaches to learn.

Coach George's 8 Keys to PRACTICE =

- 1) **P = Have a Plan** - Have a topic for every practice
- 2) **R = Repetition** - Use exercises that kids can see improvement
- 3) **A = Action** – Activities should be dynamic versus static, inclusive versus exclusive
- 4) **C = Communication** - Make sure the players understand the exercise and the rules
- 5) **T = Timing** – Know when to teach a topic and select the right moment to make corrections
- 6) **I = Improvisation** – Utilize and encourage creativity, be flexible throughout practice with changes that may be necessary
- 7) **C = Concentration** - Focus on technical or tactical issues with a clear constructive message
- 8) **E = Execution** – Expect that the players can execute at a higher level and they will

Is the session Tactical or Technical?

Step 1) Warm up (Small Space or Open Space)

Step 2) Match Related (Topic) Activity / Exercise

Step 3) Match Related (Topic) Activity / Functional Exercise (Should look like a game)

Step 4) Game – Let them play

There is no limit on the amount of topics that can be coached. The most important focus is on the technical elements of the game especially at the younger ages. Incorporate some incremental pressure by limiting time, adding a defender, or reducing the space of the exercise. This will encourage players to be challenged in tighter spaces with incremental pressure. There is no need to reinvent the wheel. Many exercises can be found on websites are correct for your topic and team. It makes a coaches life easier if the practice flows from simple to complex. Make time for small sided games at each training unless preparing for a game and there is a need for larger space tactics.



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If all else fails get your team into small sided games for your practice time. They will love it and they will develop, get more ball contact, make more decisions, and be more engaged.

It is our responsibility to challenge our players and provide a meaningful experience for them. We should be creating an experience that they will fondly remember and foster more involvement in the game as a player or as a fan.