

Joe Luxbacher
Director of Coaching & Player Development
USC Travel Soccer



Tips for Planning Practice Sessions

Young soccer players are not miniature adults, so a training session designed for an Under-15 team may be totally inappropriate for an Under10 group. The exercises should challenge players to achieve a higher standard but should not be too difficult to perform. *They should have an opportunity to experience success.*

The following general guidelines can be applied to players of all ages and ability levels and are provided to assist in planning your practice sessions. These are suggestions only and should be adjusted to accommodate the specific needs of your team.

#1. CREATE A POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

- Keep players active, involved, touching the ball.
- Practices should be organized and challenging but also provide an enjoyable experience for players and coaches alike.

#2. PLAN AROUND A CENTRAL THEME

- Do not attempt to cover too many different topics in a single practice session, particularly with younger players.
- Plan each practice around a central underlying theme, for example, passing and receiving skills
- Organize the practice around a series of exercises and small-sided games related to the central theme.

#3. CONSIDER PLAYERS' "SOCCER AGE".

- A player's "soccer age" refers to his or her level of competence.

- A player's "soccer age" may differ significantly from chronological age.
- Beginning players may have difficulty performing even the most fundamental skills, so you should not place them in situations where they have little chance of achieving some degree of success.
- Plan a realistic practice, one that challenges players but is also within their physical and mental capabilities

#4. AVOID LONG LINES AND LONG LECTURES

- The more times a player can pass, receive, shoot, or dribble the ball, the more likely he or she will enjoy the practice and improve skill level.
- Make sure that a large supply of balls, ideally one for each player, is available. An ample supply of balls provides more options for drills and exercises.
- Keep everyone moving and touching the ball

#5. KEEP IT SIMPLE.

Complicated drills or highly intricate training exercises will serve only to confuse and frustrate, rather than motivate, players. This principle applies to coaching all ages and ability levels.

#6. TEACH IN A PROGRESSION.

- Each drill/exercise should lay the groundwork for those that follow. Introduce the session with basic activities and progress to more match-like situations.
- Where to start in the progression depends upon the ability and experience of your players.
- Higher-level players will naturally begin with more demanding exercises than novice players.
- Each drill should relate in some manner to the central theme of the practice session.

#7. PLAN A "PLAYER CENTERED" PRACTICE.

- Use brief demonstrations, simple explanations, and get players actively involved as soon as possible in every practice session
- The less time players stand around the more productive the practice.

#8. MAINTAIN A SAFE TRAINING ENVIRONMENT.

- Soccer is a contact sport, and as such involves a certain amount of physical risk. Accidental collisions, bumps, and bruises sometimes occur.
- Make every effort to provide a safe practice environment
- This includes proper planning, adequate supervision, matching players with others of similar size and ability, and establishing guidelines for appropriate behavior.
- Take special care when securing soccer goals

#9. END PRACTICE WITH A GAME OR GAME-LIKE SITUATION.

- Conclude each practice with a game or a game-simulated situation. Small-sided games (3v3 up to 6v6) can be beneficial in many respects. Playing with fewer numbers per allows players a greater opportunity to pass, receive, dribble, and shoot at goal. Small-sided games also require players to make more decisions as they are directly involved in virtually every play, a situation which promotes tactical development. The emphasis on positional play is also reduced since each player must defend as well as attack, a situation that promotes total player development

#10. Enjoy the experience!