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Plan your practice:

All practices should be planned in advance and should focus on a specific technique or tactic, which in turn guide the activities for that session. The practices you select in your coaching plan should: teach; practice; improve; and refine the particular skill using the progressive model outlined previously. Write your practices down (or download practices from thechallengerway.com) and take them with you to the field.

Coaching Grids:

Most coaches use coaching grids to organize their practice sessions. Grids are marked areas that define the space being used for a practice or game. Grids help provide boundaries, supply pressure and organize players. The size of the grids will depend upon the ages, ability and number of players involved. Coaches should select grid sizes that allow for successful repetition of the technique or tactic being practiced. If a practice is breaking down, the coach can help the players by making the grid larger which will provide more space and time on the ball. Most practices will progress from smaller grids with fewer players into larger grids with more players.

Individual Grids are traditionally set up 10 yds wide by 10-15 yards long. When setting multiple the grids up, coaches should consider the activity being coached. Some activities such as shooting, may need to avoid sharing common boundaries between adjacent grids.

Multiple small grids can quickly be adapted to create larger playing area for Small sided games. These are normally played on 20yd x 30yd or 30yd x 40yd grids depending upon the age and number of player.

Get them Going:

Players should be encouraged to be there early to lace shoes and put shin guards on which will allow you to always begin your practice on time. Having explained the theme of the practice to your players do not stand there talking for long periods of time. Your practice time is limited and so is the attention span of the players.

Stop:

When you want to stop the practice to make a coaching point of change the activity, it is helpful to use short sharp commands such as FREEZE or on a 'catchy' command; such as, "STOP STAND STILL". Try to avoid stopping the activity every time you see a mistake. Players will become frustrated and will no longer be motivated to learn if they are repeatedly stopped and talked at.

Start:

When you are ready for the players to resume activity, you can prepare them with a cue such as, "Ready to play, PLAY!" or "3-2-1 LIVE". This additional cue draws their attention and prepares everyone to be ready to start the activity together.

Come in:

When you require young players to run over to you, you can use make the activity of running fun by issuing the challenge: "You have 5 seconds to get to me, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1," or, "Who can be first to me?!"

Coaching Points:

Give the players a clear picture of the technique you are coaching and a limited number of coaching points each time. Allow them to get used to the activity and to get plenty of repetitions - resist the urge to jump in and make immediate corrections, the players should be allowed some time to feel their way into new skills and learn the correct body mechanics through discovery. Be prepared to make both general coaching points to the group and to step in and make corrections to specific players' techniques. Make sure that every player is looking at your when you address the group.

Communication:

Do not continually talk throughout the practice or the players will eventually tune you out. Speak clearly and slowly and be specific. Do not use 10 words when 5 will do. Do not stand in one spot, you should move continually throughout the practice area and be seen to be watching all players equally. When you make a coaching point, ensure that you are facing into the sun so that the players can see clearly what you are saying and doing.

Questioning:

Try to avoid talking at the players in your practice, involve them in the process of guided discovery.

Ask them questions such as:

"How can you do this?"

"Can you do it this way?"

"How many ways can you do this?"

The player "discovers" the solutions through experimentation and reinforcement occurs with successful repetitions.

Recap:

Conclude the session with a recap of the key areas covered and check to see if the players can remember the coaching points.