



PRE-SEASON COACHING ADVICE

GETTING PLAYERS AND PARENTS ON BOARD

Consider how you can get parents and players on board and supportive of your philosophy and methods before you even start training, to avoid problems deeper into the season (especially in case results don't go your way). My strong advice is have a team meeting BEFORE your first training session or at worst after (don't waste training time by doing it during training). Outline your plans and objectives for the year, source helpers for anything you need help with (parents being involved makes them less frustrated), and establish some team rules, or better yet, engage the players and get them to. If you aren't sure what I mean or would like some suggestions, let me know. This can have a big impact on the parent support group and setting the tone for the season so I would definitely look to do something along these lines.

QUALITY IN TRAINING

It is very important that your first training session sets the tone for a number of things including attitude/behaviour, intensity and good habits. My personal suggestion is to do a session on transition into defence (recovering). As soon as players lose the ball, their instant reaction is to try to recover and win it back as a team. If you start with this then it will set the bar high in terms of the work rate you expect of players in every subsequent training session. Don't underestimate this - how high you set the bar now will affect the rest of the season, so you don't want to miss the opportunity.

Quality and intense defending provides you with realistic pressure when working on attacking concepts (possession in attack, playing out under pressure etc) so that your training is as beneficial as possible. There is also a good by-product of doing this as your first session: the team in possession will need to adapt to keeping possession under high pressure from the start, and even though this won't be the focus of your training until another session later on, it does get them used to it straight away.

They will get tired quickly and so drink breaks will be appreciated rather than an opportunity to muck around. If they do muck around, be firm but friendly and ensure this does not continue. Say they are there to have fun but not destroy the fun for others, and interruptions waste time they could spend playing! Put the responsibility for fun training back on them and try not to get too frustrated. Kids will be kids sometimes (all the time?!?).

The good habits relate to technical aspects of the team and individuals. Passing possession football, playing out from the goalkeeper instead of booting it long, working hard in defence, fair play and respect, taking a first touch, looking up, body shape, communication etc. No matter what the topic of your sessions, all of these things can always be reinforced, and should be. If you do all of this from the start, the players are more likely to continue with them throughout the year. Again, the pre-season period is key to establishing many things as early as possible so they have the maximum impact.

Having said that, do we need to do fitness then? Simple answer: No. Never! They are kids - they are fit. And even if they aren't, all fitness training in football these days is football based. A transition session like the one I detailed above will get them fit and work on football at the same time. Running is missing the football part, so as a club, we want to see lots of games and game based exercises at training, not running laps, or running exercises without balls. This all comes from our new club philosophy which will be released very soon, but is also in line with the national curriculum. I did lots of fitness as a player, and did it when I started coaching too, among many other things I now do differently, but that is the point. Not to waste any time on non-football stuff. Always do football. We want to progress and evolve what we do so we can do it even better!

EXAMPLES OF TRANSITION INTO DEFENCE (RECOVERY) EXERCISES

Basically you want one team to be attacking as normal, with all players involved in the attack, then when they lose the ball or shoot, the other team must counter attack quickly so the first team has to react to that. It is not enough to simply tell them to do this - the rules of your game should force the behaviour. For example:

Team A: cannot score until all players are in attacking half

Team B: if you win the ball you must score within 10 seconds max

Team A will then have to get everyone back to defend against a quick counter attack. Do this a few times then swap teams. This would be an ideal 'middle' game to be followed by a free 'end' game to finish the session. Some examples of smaller games to build up to this (after a quick warm up with balls):

1v1, 2v2 or 3v3 with a counter attack for the defending team

1v0 builds up to 1v2 counter attack, then 3v2 counter attack, 3v4, 5v4 etc

PRE-SEASON TRAINING PROGRAMS

What should you cover during pre-season? Given you are likely to only have 5 or 6 sessions before your first game, my suggestions would be to cover everything you think they need to know in basic terms, then after the season kicks off, address problems you identify in more detail on a week by week basis. My suggestion would be as follows:

Session 1: transition into defence (recovery) for good work rate in training

Session 2: playing out of defence (short passes into midfield under pressure)

Session 3: building up play (midfield possession into attack, lots of switching etc)

Session 4: building up play (midfield possession into attack under even more pressure)

Session 5: combination play in attack (through balls, 1-2s etc) and attacking corners

Session 6: defending as a team and defending corners

PRE-SEASON FRIENDLY MATCHES

If you can organise pre-season friendly matches against other Sandy teams or even other clubs then great. Some quick advice when scheduling these matches:

- players should shake hands in a line before and after games to reinforce respect and fair play regardless of who the opposition is
- there should be no need for referees if you emphasise that players should control the game themselves
- ensure all players get equal game time as much as possible and consider trying players in varying positions
- emphasis should be on good play as team (playing out, possession style etc) from the very beginning
- don't be concerned with results, it is better to get mistakes in learning how to play out of the system now instead of later
- don't be afraid to stop the game to coach the players or even walk on the pitch to talk 1-on-1
- avoid too much coaching from the sidelines though (observe, take notes for pre-season training, see where they are at)
- don't be afraid to mix your team up with the opposition to make it more even and more challenging for both

ASSISTANT COACHES

In some cases assistant coaches are already assigned to teams, but if you are aware of another volunteer that is keen to help you, please ask them to get in contact with me so that I can provide them with the same support as all other coaches, and also so that we are aware of who is working with each team (for WWCC and coaching qualifications).

If or when an assistant coach is working with you, it is important to establish their role in regards to all aspects of coaching the team. That may include planning sessions, preparing them, conducting them, and evaluating them, as well as planning, preparing, conducting and evaluating on match days. The more both coaches work together, the better the processes will be (two heads are better than one) and the better development for both of you, plus it will be a seamless transition if the assistant ever needs to take over a session or on match day. We want to see lots of consultation on all training sessions, and lots of coaching being done by assistants, whether that is pre-planned one-on-one coaching with players while the head coach runs the sessions, assistants doing some parts themselves, or both coaches swapping regularly between both roles, as well as (planned and deliberate) heavy involvement on match days.