

PLANNING A COACHING SESSION

INTRODUCTION

An effective coaching session begins with good planning. Without a plan, valuable time during the coaching session can be spent on organising and deciding what to do, rather than helping the players improve skills and prepare for competition.

Planning is an essential part of any successful activity. If you and your players are to achieve the goals you set together you need to plan where you are going and what you have to do to get there.

The focus of this module is how to plan, implement and evaluate a safe and effective coaching session.

- **UNDERSTAND THE PLANNING PROCESS**
- **APPLY THE PRINCIPLES OF AN EFFECTIVE COACHING SESSION**
- **EVALUATE THE COACHING SESSION**
- **PLAN THE ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE COACHING SESSION**

UNDERSTAND THE PLANNING PROCESS

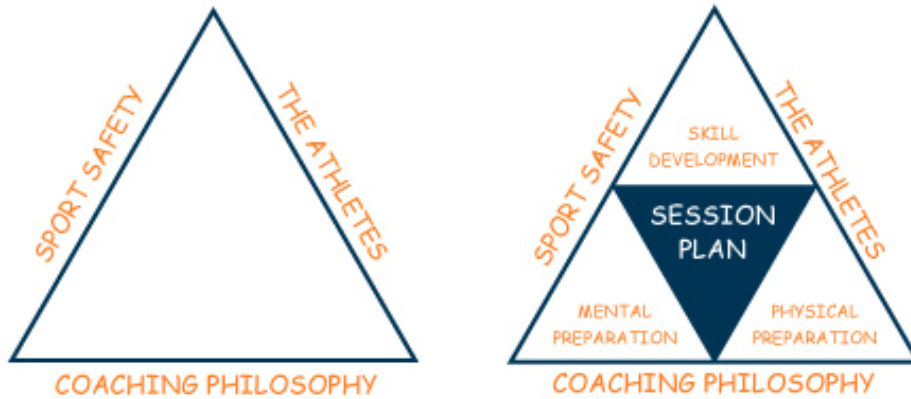
There are three steps to planning a practice

(adapted, by permission, from the National Coaching Certification Program, 1988, *Coaching Theory Level One Manual*. The Coaching Association of Canada, Gloucester, Ontario):

1. Setting the framework within which the coach will operate.
2. Deciding on the objectives and content of the individual coaching session.
3. Evaluating the coaching session.

SETTING THE FRAMEWORK

The first step in planning is to establish the framework within which the coach will operate. What are the factors that affect the coaching session?



Coaching Philosophy

Your coaching philosophy is a reflection of your personal values and beliefs. What you do as a coach is simply your coaching philosophy in action – it affects every coaching session you run. The coaching philosophy is discussed in Module One.

The Players

What is the player's stage of growth and development? The player's physical, psychosocial and cognitive abilities are always changing. The coach's expectations at training should reflect the level and interest of the players involved. Growth and development is the topic of Module Three.

Sport Safety

Before every coaching session the coach should ensure that the training environment is safe and take steps to minimise any potential risk of injury. The coach should also be prepared to deal with an emergency should it arise. Sport safety is covered in Module Eight.

DECIDING ON THE OBJECTIVES AND CONTENT FOR THE SESSION

The next step in planning the coaching session is deciding on the objectives for the session and planning the content to meet those objectives. There are three basic ingredients of a coaching session:

Skill Development

Includes activities that develop the player's technique and skill performance. Skill analysis and skill coaching are covered in Modules Six and Seven.

Physical Preparation

Includes activities that prepare the player physically for the demands of the sport, e.g. training the energy systems, flexibility, nutrition. The basics of this topic are presented in Module Five.

Mental Preparation

Includes developing the player's mental abilities. This includes such things as game tactics and strategies, concentration and motivation. It also involves the attitudes and values the player develops towards themselves and others.

When planning the content of the coaching session, the coach should first identify some specific objectives. It often helps if these are written down in the session plan. For example:

Skill Development

- *The player should be able to demonstrate the S-shape pull in freestyle.*
- *The player should be able to perform the forehand drop shot in squash.*

Physical Preparation

- *The player should be able to run 3000m in less than 11 minutes.*
- *The player should be able to bench press 75% of their body weight.*

Mental Preparation

- *The player should be able to explain the 'nose on ball' defence strategy in basketball.*
- *The player should be able to listen while the coach is talking.*



APPLY THE PRINCIPLES OF AN EFFECTIVE COACHING SESSION

When planning your coaching session, consider the following principles of an effective coaching session. These principles can be applied to all levels of sport:

Provide Plenty of Activity

Keep the players active throughout the session by providing activities that are specific to the sport and are planned to ensure maximum participation. Keep the 'waiting in line time' to a minimum.

Make Maximum Use of Time, Facilities and Equipment

Too much time spent talking or waiting in line means that neither the facilities nor the equipment are being used effectively. Remember many facilities are booked by the hour and the next group will not want to wait until you finish.

Variety

Players need to perform many repetitions to master a skill. However, variety is the 'spice of life' and by making small changes to the training routine or activities the coach can often stimulate a more enthusiastic and concentrated effort from the players.

Explanations and Demonstrations

Demonstrations should be planned as part of the coaching session. Wherever possible, keep your explanations and demonstrations simple and to the point. Remember, most players learn faster by doing rather than by watching and listening.

Appropriate Practice

Only perfect practice makes perfect – stop players when they are not performing a drill correctly, otherwise you or another coach will have to spend time correcting the incorrect technique at a later time. Also provide practice opportunities that reflect the real competition situation.

Appropriate Progressions

The activities should be appropriate to the abilities, interests and experience of the players. Don't expect players to perform complex activities before they have mastered the simple skills. The step from one level to the next should be small enough to be achievable but large enough to challenge the player.

Safe and Non-Threatening

The coach is responsible for providing for both the physical and emotional safety of their players. Unsafe, threatening environments lead to player anxiety and little learning.

Allow for Individual Differences

One of the many challenges of the coach is to provide all the players with maximum opportunity to practice and improve their skills. Remember that players are individuals and the coach should make provisions for them to learn at their own rates.

Involve Players in Planning

Keep your players informed and let them have some input into the planning and decision making. As a result they will become more committed to achieving their goals.

Be Organised but Flexible in Planning

While it is important to be organised, it is equally important to be flexible enough to alter the plan if needed. For example, adverse weather may force training indoors or you may need to change your plan if an activity is not working or continue with an activity that is working.



EVALUATE THE COACHING SESSION

The final step in planning is evaluation. Evaluation is an important part of any planning process as a guide to future planning, i.e. the next coaching session. There are a number of ways to evaluate your coaching session:

Feedback from Players

Both during and after the session by observing and asking specific questions, the coach can get valuable feedback on how much the players enjoyed the session and what they think they gained from it.

Coach's Log Book

By maintaining a log book over the season the coach can make notes on individual coaching sessions, record performance and competition results, and note any injuries. The coach's log book can be invaluable as a future reference for planning.

Feedback from Peers

It can be a useful exercise for a coach at any level of sport to have another coach, whom they respect, observe them in action and provide feedback on their coaching session.

Self-Analysis

Being able to analyse your own coaching performance is a valuable skill. An example of a coach's self-analysis form is provided at the end of this module or you may develop your own self-evaluation checklist.

Video Analysis

The video is also a useful tool for analysing coaching effectiveness. Have a friend video you during a normal coaching session and either analyse the video yourself or, better still, have a more experienced coach look at the video with you.

PLAN THE ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE COACHING SESSION

Once you have established the framework and identified the objectives and content of your coaching session you are ready to complete the details of your session plan. Keep in mind that some of your objectives will be achievable in one coaching session while others may take a number of sessions or even an entire season to achieve.

The basic elements of a coaching session plan are:

Introduction

Begin with a brief discussion on what you have planned for the session. Taking the time to explain the aims and purpose of each session will help the players understand why they are performing certain activities. They will also feel more involved and committed to the practice.

Warm-Up

The warm-up is an essential part of any practice. It prepares both the mind and the body for more strenuous activity and helps to reduce the chance of injury.

Skill Revision

Spend a brief amount of time revising previously learned skills. This may involve a demonstration followed by a couple of drills, or it may simply be a discussion to confirm understanding. Skill revision may also form part of the warm-up.

New Skill Learning

The optimum time for introducing new skills is early in the session, when the players are fresh and focused. Skill instructions should be limited to two to three key points and include a demonstration – beware of losing the effect of the warm-up with lengthy instructions and discussions.

Skill Practice

Provide the players with opportunities to practise the skills learned for this session and in previous sessions through games and drills. Remember to give feedback about skills, tactics and strategies. The skill practice may also be integrated with the fitness requirements of the sport.

Physical Preparation

In planning the physical preparation element of the session, the coach needs to consider the specific demands of the sport and also the energy demands of the other parts of the coaching session. If the planned skill activities are active enough for the particular level of the players, there is no need to add a fitness component.

Cool-Down

The cool-down is an important part of the recovery which is too often neglected at the end of a session. If the coach begins the season with a routine cool-down after every practice, run as a team activity, the players will treat it more as part of the session rather than as an inconvenient extra to be avoided.

Evaluation/Closure

The evaluation of a coaching session can occur both during and immediately after the session as part of the closure. Discussing the session with the players will not only provide valuable feedback for the coach, it will also help the players feel more involved in the process.

QUESTIONS & EXERCISES

Develop a written plan for your next coaching session incorporating all of the elements of an effective session plan.

FURTHER READING

Kidman, L. and Hanrahan, S., *The Coaching Process: a Practical Guide to Improving Your Effectiveness*. The Dunmore Press Ltd, Palmerston North, 1997.

National Coaching Certification Program: *Coaching Theory Level One*. The Coaching Association of Canada, Gloucester, Ontario, 1988.

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Coaching session template

Beginners- six week coaching course/sessions

| sessions | Group size | Duration | Basic techniques/skills | Rules and games | Equipment |
|------------|------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Week one | Maximum 6 people | 2 hours Include 10 mins feedback session | Warm-up exercises How to hold boule How to stand Throwing boule Choosing landing spot Game play – doubles Cool down exercises | Basic game rules Drawing circle Marking boule | PNZ Rule book Boules & jacke Measures |
| Week two | Maximum 6 people | 2 hours Include 10 mins feedback session | Warm-up exercises Overview of skills from previous session Pointing from crouch position Game play – doubles Cool down exercises | Practical application of the rules Set up ends with 'played' boule and discuss a specific rule relative to the end i.e. unmarked jack has moved | PNZ Rule book Boules & jack Measures Circles for landing spots |
| Week three | Maximum 6 people | 2 hours Include 10 mins feedback session | Warm-up exercises Overview of skills from previous sessions Pointing from crouch and standing position at 6 – 10 metres. Focus on landing spot and placing boule in front of jack Game play – doubles Cool down exercises | Practical application of the rules Set up ends with 'played' boule and discuss a specific rule relative to the end i.e. unmarked jack has moved | PNZ Rule book Boules & jack Measures Circles for landing spots Jack inside large drawn circle |

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| | | | | | |
|-----------|------------------|---|--|--|---|
| Week four | Maximum 6 people | 2 hours Include 10 mins feedback session | Warm-up exercises Overview of skills from previous sessions Pointing from crouch position Half lob from standing position Game play – doubles Cool down exercises | Practical application of the rules | PNZ Rule book Boules & jack Measures Circles for landing spots Jack inside large drawn circle Tyre for lobbing boule into |
| Week five | Maximum 6 people | 2 hours Include 10 mins feedback session | Warm-up exercises Overview of skills from previous sessions Fine tuning basic techniques Game play – doubles Cool down exercises | Verbal testing of application of rules | PNZ Rule book Boules & jack Measures Circles for landing spots Jack inside large drawn circle Tyre for lobbing boule into Tyre for lobbing boule into |
| Week six | Maximum 6 people | 4 hours Include 10 mins feedback session | Warm-up exercises Mini tournament – doubles Cool down exercises | Coach act as arbiter | PNZ Rule book Boules & jack Measures Information on next coaching sessions and levels Tournament calendar for the region |

COACH'S SELF-EVALUATION FORM

This form is a tool for self-evaluating your practical coaching skills. It should be completed as soon as possible following a coaching session. Photocopy this page and use it to review your progress regularly.

Name:

Date:

Strategy/Characteristic

Rating 1 (never) – 5 (all the time)

| | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| I planned and prepared well for the session | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I listened to my players | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I was positive | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I gave effective feedback | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I was enthusiastic | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I kept my cool | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I provided quality learning experiences | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I provided equal attention to all players | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| My demonstrations were understood | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| My explanations were clear and concise | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I provided coaching clues | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I allowed some player decision-making | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| My coaching actions matched my coaching philosophy | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| The training session was well organised | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I found the session enjoyable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Equipment matched the players' learning levels | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| The training environment was safe | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

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In evaluating your training session, on a separate piece of paper, write answers to the following questions:

1. What worked well during this coaching session?
2. What would you like to improve in your next session?
3. How did the players respond to your style of coaching?
4. How do you plan to follow up your suggestions for improvement in the next session(s)?

Teaching a skill

Coaches should demonstrate the correct technique of each skill including

- Preparation for the shot
- Holding the boule
- Entering the circle
- Balance and position
- Execution of the shot
 - Set up
 - Back swing
 - Follow through
 - Release of boule

