

How to get the most out of your practice time.

Today's topic deals with pre-practice activities.

We as coaches often waste valuable practice time by not having "pre-practice" activities planned. We lose 10 minutes or more at the start of practice waiting for all the kids to arrive. So, as they start showing up we let them "do their own thing". Too often, when young players (and sometimes not so young players) get to the field for a training session, the first thing they do is start shooting on goal. Personally, I have always felt that is a terrible thing to do for many reasons. First, they haven't warmed up at all so they start right off trying to hit the ball as hard as they can and end up pulling muscles. Second, one or two players are shooting and the rest are standing around waiting. Third, if two people shoot at the same time, there is a great risk of injury to the keeper (or whoever is standing in goal).

There are some great alternatives to the players lining up and shooting. It would be nice, if the players all know how to warm up properly so that, when they first get to the field, they don't have to wait for the official start of practice to warm up. Whether it's a short jog and then some stretching or a more dynamic stretching activity. If the players know what to do when they first get to the field, it can save time and also encourage good habits for the future.

Once the individuals are warmed up (and they should be able to do this on their own so that when the first two arrive, they can warm up, and start doing something fun) there are a few different options that work well.

One option is to set up a small sided field so that when the first two players are warmed up, they can play 1 v 1. When two more players arrive, they can play 2 v 2. As more players arrive the field can be made larger and more players can be added. If the coach or assistant coach isn't busy, they should join into the game as well. If too many players are there early, break into two games.

Another option, more for the older age groups, is to play "pig" (or some other variation). This is a juggling game where the players stand in a circle and juggle amongst each other. Whoever takes a bad juggle (resulting in the ball hitting the ground) gets a letter. The first bad juggle by a player

results in a "p", the second results in an "i" and the third results in a "g". When a player gets all three letters they are eliminated. The last player left playing wins. This game will result in arguments regarding who should get the letter (if the ball drops between two people, they will usually argue who was at fault) but that is part of the beauty of the game because it forces players to work things out).

The idea is to create an environment where players want to get to the field on time or early, and they get a lot of touches on the ball and have fun doing so.