



BY RICK WOLFF

# Organization Makes For A Perfect Practice

"I'd love to help coach my child's team during practice," a parent confided recently, "but honestly, I have no experience at all coaching kids. I wouldn't know where to begin!"

Relax. Putting together a successful practice session—especially at the youth level—requires two basic ingredients: organization and enthusiasm. Oh sure, it helps if you know something about the sport your son or daughter is playing, but believe me, you can still get quite a bit accomplished even if you can't dribble a soccer ball or sink a free throw.

## 1. Get Organized

The biggest mistake volunteer coaches make is waiting until just before practice begins to start thinking about organizing the session. They try to scribble a few ideas on paper, grab a whistle and hope for the best as the kids assemble.

Plan ahead! You owe it to the kids and yourself to sit down during the week and organize the practice. Let's say the session lasts an hour on Saturday morning. Break down the 60 minutes into the various exercises, skills and drills you feel should be covered. Put together an outline for each activity, complete with how much time should be devoted to each drill. For example: 10 minutes for warmup calisthenics and stretching, 10 minutes for passing, 10 minutes for defensive work.

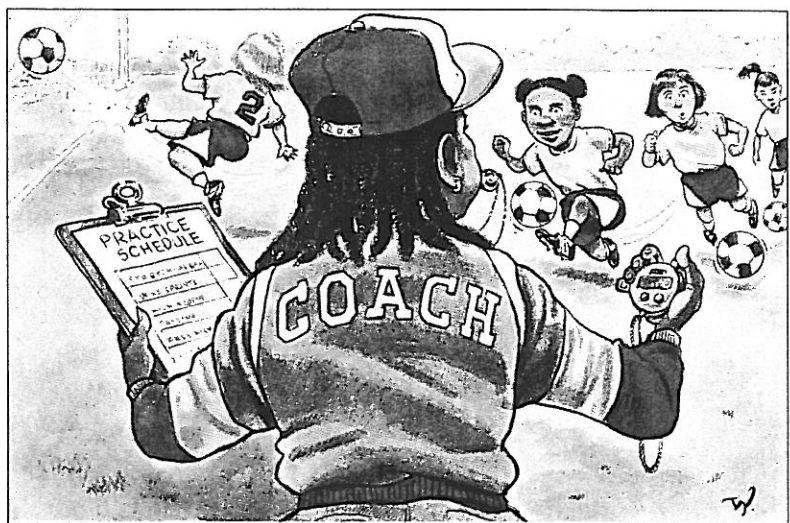
## 2. Stick to Your Schedule

Make certain you always have a watch so you can stick to your schedule. You can accomplish more with athletes if you keep them hustling from one drill to the next and do it right on time. After all, the worst aspect of disorganized practices is kids standing around doing nothing for long periods of time. That's b-o-r-i-n-g.

## 3. Be Enthusiastic

Youngsters will follow your example, so if you run practice with lots of energy, praise and a spring in your step, the kids will copy you.

Show them you're having fun. Give them lots of smiles. That will encourage them to have fun and smile, too.



A SCHEDULE THAT KEEPS KIDS BUSY IS KEY TO A WORKOUT THAT WORKS.

## 4. Set Up Mini Competitions

Most kids hate to be told to run to get into shape, because they perceive running laps or sprints as simply hard work. But as soon as you introduce the relay race to them, they forget they're running hard. To accomplish this, occasionally break the team into two or more competing squads. Example: Set up a relay race between groups of comparable ability. You'll find that these mini competitions go a long way to keep the enthusiasm level high.

## 5. Don't Talk Too Much

Perhaps the biggest mistake youth coaches make is lecturing their teams too much. Kids 5-12 really aren't interested in learning strategies, hearing post-game analyses, or reliving how the sport used to be played. They just want to play.

Of course, you must address the troops at times. Just make certain your speeches are short, to the point, and that you get them back to on-the-field action right away. In other words, organize your thoughts first. In coaching, that's always the key.

### Some Friendly Advice

- ✓ If you're lucky enough to have an assistant coach, let him or her know before practice what your plans are. Give your assistant a copy of your outline before practice begins.
- ✓ Remind the kids and their parents to always be on time for practice.
- ✓ At the end of practice, bring the team together and make any announcements about the next practice session or upcoming game.

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