

Practices: Recreational vs. Competitive



Recreational and Developmental Leagues

Often, in many recreational and development leagues, coaches have only one practice a week with their teams.

And depending on facility scheduling, it is often a short one.

This necessitates even more careful practice planning and should tip the balance toward teaching and filling players' Emotional Tanks.

Sophisticated skill drilling is less important here than character and emotional development and encouragement. Technical and strategic mastery will come as these players progress up the ranks. And they will do so if, in the development leagues, they acquire a love of the game and good feelings about themselves.

Participation

At the recreational and developmental level, parents often have the skills and the ability to help out at practices and games.

Encourage this! Help from parents is a valuable resource for a coach at this level. It makes your job easier, and it allows for more individual attention to your players, which encourages them and makes them feel better. Parental participation can be particularly valuable in situations where practice time is limited.

Getting parents involved at this level (as your assistant) will encourage them to coach in the future, and more coaches are always needed at the youth sports level.

Competitive and Elite Leagues

At the highly skilled and competitive levels, everything, including practices, can get more intense, particularly when college recruiting and scholarships become part of the mix.

Hence, it becomes even more important in practice to remember and stress that sports are a time to have fun! Remember to schedule in a least one drill per practice that the players love to do and have fun completing.

This will allow your players to relax, and then they can better focus on the next skill drill.

Perfection

Also, it is important to stress that mistakes are okay – and especially important to stress this in practice so that it carries over into games. Elite-level athletes often feel as if they should perform perfectly with no mistakes. You must remind them that in order to improve and to move to the next level, they must be willing to push themselves, and when they do this, mistakes are bound to happen.

As the coach, you will also have to work hard to vocally reinforce all of the things that your team is doing well.

Elite-level athletes tend to play their mistakes over and over in their heads, and they need to be reminded of what they are doing well.

It would not hurt to remind them that athletes who are enjoying themselves and who are not inhibited by the fear of making mistakes actually perform better.