

Planning Practice: Part 1 by Guy Baker, Head Coach, Women's National Team

This will be a four part series. The first part will focus on the general guidelines we follow when developing a practice plan. The second part will go into more detail our specific methods of designing practices and drills.

Training is the foundation of our program. The goals of our training are to develop a team that will be in shape, fundamentally sound and be able to execute our system under pressure. Each component of our training is coordinated. We have three major categories that are divided into smaller phases or components.

1. **Yearly**
 1. Preparation Phase
 2. Competition Phase
 3. Transition Phase

American sports traditionally follow a seasonal plan. Preparation phase would be the off season and pre season time period. Competition phase would be the season and post season. The transition phase would be the time between end of the season and the start of the off season. It is possible to have two preparation, competition and transition phases in a year.

2. **Major Training Categories**
 1. Physical
 1. Conditioning
 2. Technical
 1. Fundamentals
 3. Tactical
 1. Game Strategy
 4. Psychological
 1. Confidence
 2. Mental toughness

3. **Water Polo Categories**
 1. Defense
 2. Counter Attack Offense
 3. Offense
 4. Counter Attack Defense
 5. 6x5
 6. 5x6
 7. Game Situations
 1. End of Game
 2. Time Out
 3. After Goal
 8. Position Training
 1. Center
 2. Defender
 3. Goalkeeper

Each step of our planning revolves around the phase of the year, the training category and the water polo category. All components are coordinated. Each part of our training is a building block to reaching the yearly goal. Each weekly plan supports the goals for the phase. Each practice supports the goals for the week. Each drill supports the goals for the practice. Etc....

We constantly ask ourselves the following question. What are the goals and purpose of the year, phase, week, practice and drill?

We work backwards when planning a year. In addition, we work backwards when determining our water polo system. We determine tactically our defense, counter attack, offense, 6x5 and 5x6. Then we determine what technical skills will support each tactical component and then we determine the physical requirements to support the technical and tactical components.

This method will work at all levels. The goals should be the same whether a player is on the National Team or an age group player. The goal of each practice is too improve. All players want to have the feeling of coming to practice and knowing they are going to be better water polo player when the practice is over. What I am going to learn today environment? Today, I will become a better player. It is the responsibility of the coach to provide that type of environment for their team. The only difference between an improving National Team athlete and an age group athlete is the speed of the game and an age group player may take longer to learn the exact same skill. **Each practice session should be focused, challenging and dynamic with an appreciation for good play.** In addition, players can improve by practicing with better players. At different times of the year inter mix the players on your club; younger and older players together. Young players can improve by watching and imitating the older players and the older players will master their skills by teaching the younger players.

The first step to designing a practice is to establish the goals of the week. The weekly goals are the building blocks for reaching the goal of the training phase. Goals should be specific, challenging and realistic. For example; the technical and tactical goals for the week are to improve the offensive press attack. By the end of the week the perimeter players will improve their ability to control their water, drive, release, pressure pass, draw a foul and pass the ball to the center position. The centers will improve their ability to start in the face to face position and then turn, spin and seal to gain and then maintain ball side position. The center will focus on maintaining ball side position by sealing the defender with a breast kick. In addition the centers will snap to the ball every time the ball enters the center position. The focus of this particular week is only in one area of the game. Each practice and each drill throughout the week is designed to improve the offensive press attack. After establishing the goals of the week then begin to design practice plans for each practice. Each daily practice should be coordinated with the weekly goals and the goals of the practice. It is important to note these key points. The goal of each practice is to improve either physically, technically, tactically, psychologically or combinations of these four categories. Don't try to do too much; one to three goals for each practice. Be specific and narrow down the goal. The clearer the goal, the clearer it will be for the players.

PRACTICE BREAKDOWN

Warm Up: 10-20%

Related to the Main Activity
Physical and psychological preparation

Main Activity: 40-60%

Goals of the practice
Related specifically to the game

Concluding Activity: 10-40%

Related to the main activity

Warm Down: 5-10%

Use the time to positive reinforce and recap the practice

The end result should be a focused practice which closely resembles the pressure of the game and in which the players improve.

The second part of this series will discuss how to determine practice needs and how to design and implement the drills to support the practice.