

Planning Practice: Part 2 by Guy Baker, Head Coach, Women's National Team

The curriculum for designing a practice must be appropriate for each age level. This article will focus on 12 and under and 13-14 age groups.

1. Create an environment of passion and love for water polo.
2. Plan practices in advance and keep the practice and all activities short and crisp.
3. Determine the appropriate length of practice, not too short or long; 1:15-2:00.
4. Keep practices fun and interesting by maximizing activity and minimizing lines.
5. Have a ball for every player and try to involve as many players as possible in practice activities so as many players as possible are active.
6. Plan the amount of time you will spend on an activity and stick to it.; End practices on time. Wear a watch and use it.
7. Spend 80-100% of the practice time on activities that have a high ball ratio, water polo movements without the ball and small sided (1x1, 2x1, 2x2, 3x2 or 3x3) attacking and defending. 0-20% of the time in activities that involve low ball ratio for example scrimmages, with one ball and a lot of players.
8. Build competition into the practice. Competition is fun and prepares players for real water polo games.
9. The game of water polo is played at a minimum 60-70% in the vertical to semi-vertical position. Remember this when planning a practice.
10. Make conditioning fun; include ball, partners, groups...

12 AND UNDER: Development of individual and small group tactics

This is the golden age of learning and the most important age for skill development. Demonstration is very important and the players learn best by doing. This is also an important time to introduce and teach the basic principles of play. It is important to establish discipline from the beginning.

Coach must be: An enthusiastic and positive teacher, possess water polo awareness, ability to demonstrate or utilize someone who can paint a good picture, (older player, assistant coach), knowledge of key factors of basic skills, give encouragement.

Technical:

- Develop a good overall base.
- Develop movement and skills with and without the ball.
- Emphasize defense and offense individual skills.
- Develop the individual skills under the pressure of time, space and an opponent.
- Increase technical speed.
- Encourage taking risks.

Tactical

- Individual: Start 1x1 situations offense and defense
- Small group: 2x1, 2x2, 3x2 and 3x3
- Position: Players must play a variety of positions. They must develop an awareness of the game. Emphasize the complete player and the basic principles of play
- Defense: Basic principles of press defense
- Offense: Basic principles of press offense

- Team: Team tactics do not take a priority at this age. Focus is placed on body positioning and the skills. Players play a variety of positions and emphasis is placed on player development instead of getting results.
- System: Put players in the water for the love of the game, without spending much time coaching a system. Focus on teaching the fundamentals as opposed to systems

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Physical:

- Conditioning with the ball
- Conditioning without the ball emphasizing water polo movements
- Condition with partners and groups
- Use fun and engaging activities

Psychological:

- Keep it fun
- Encourage decision making
- Imagination/creativity
- Increase demands of training
- Emphasize discipline
- Encourage players to watch high school, college and National Team games

14 AND UNDER: Development of individual and small group tactics

The pace of development quickens at this time due to the acceleration of physical and mental maturation. The demands of skill training as well as training loads should increase, thus provoking improvement with mental toughness and concentration. Awareness of tactics within the game becomes an important facet of the learning process.

Coach must be: Enthusiastic, patient but demanding.

Technical:

- Build on the press defense and offense
- Begin zone defense and offense
- Continue to emphasize the development of individual skills under the pressure of time, space and an opponent
- Continue to increase defense and offense technical speed
- Begin counter attack individual skills
- Begin 6x5 and 5x6 individual skills

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Tactical:

- Increase tactical speed (decision making under pressure)
- Individual 1x1 Press and Zone Defense and Offense situations
- Small Group: Continue with 2x1 to 3x3 and add 4x4
- Team: Start Teach possession of the ball concepts. Goalkeeper becomes involved in the counter attack. Base 6x5 and 5x6 structure.
- System: Base concepts for defense, counter attack, offense 6x5 and 5x6. Keep it simple. Love of the game and the fundamentals are still more important. There should be a great deal of coaching in 2x2, 3x3 and 4x4 situations.

Physical:

- Conditioning with and without the ball
- Flexibility: static and dynamic stretching
- Agility: Coordination with and without the ball
- Strength: non-weight bearing and core strength
- Speed and endurance activities

Psychological:

- The game should still be fun and enjoyable. Players should have a passion for the game.
- Imagination and creativity
- Increase demands
- Establish practice goals
- Maintain discipline
- Encourage players to watch high school, college and National Team games