

Planning Practice: Part 4 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 18 and under.

Development of team play for 18 and under

Realization of a player's potential depends upon their own efforts, the support of teammates and the guidance of their coach. They must be consistently exposed to a training and competition environment which challenges and broadens their technical, tactical, physical and psychological capabilities. They must have a sound understanding of the system of play. Players should show emotional stability when confronted with pressure situations. Demanding and challenging training sessions and games are a must.

SYSTEM

Creating a successful system is very important today and the system is everything. This would be the time during player development to start implementing a system. The first three parts of the player development are very important part of the process for implementing a system. The first three parts are the building blocks for the system. The technical, tactical, physical and psychological progressions have to be followed, so that a player will have the proper foundation for understanding and implementing a system. Water Polo is a team sport that requires all the players to be interdependent upon each other. A team can have an individual who has the best talent and skills in the world, but if that player does not play within the system, their actions are unpredictable or selfish, the system will fail and the team will lose.

A system is not only tactics. It is the combination of the technical, physical and psychological standards required to implement the tactical system for defense, counter attack, offense, 6x5 and 5x6. For example; what are the technical, physical and psychological standards to play a press defense? What are the technical, physical and psychological standards to attack a zone defense? What are the technical, physical and psychological standards to create an effective counter attack? What is the best system for the team? What is the experience of the team? A system connects the defense to the counter attack to the offense and back to the defense. A system connects the offense to the 6x5 and the defense to the 5x6. A system connects the center to the perimeter offensive players, the defender to the perimeter defensive players, the goalkeeper to the 5x6 field players.... A system is created so every player has a role in every situation in the game and all the players understand not only their responsibilities, but the responsibilities of all the players.

Coach must be: Charismatic, experienced, up to date, articulate, managerial know how and no doubt about who is in charge.

Technical:

- All techniques practiced at game speed, demanding excellence
- Individual skill covered during warm up and competitive practice situations
- There still has to be a strong emphasis on the technical component
- Technique is everything

Tactical:

- Increase tactical speed (game decision making) with increased pressure and competition. Having the ability to change and adapt to game dynamics, flow of the game, clock management and end of game situations.
- Individual: The majority of time spent in functional training environments
- Small group: 3x3 and 4x4
- Position: Players play specific positions; attacker, center and defender. Practices should be designed to include specific position training; especially for the goalkeeper and the center.
- Defense:
- Press and zone defense
- A clear understanding of the quality of pressure affects the ability of team defense
- Switch from a press to a zone defense
- Counter Attack:
- A clear understanding of the connection between the defense to the counter attack to the offense
- A clear understanding of Primary, Secondary and Transition counter attacks
- Offense:
- A clear understanding of how to attack a variety of defenses
- A clear understanding of the importance of possession and clock management
- 6x5:
- A clear understanding of how to locate the 3x2
- Active post play
- Rotations
- A clear understanding of how to attack a variety of defenses
- 5x6:
- A clear understanding of positional and shot blocking responsibilities
- A clear understanding of how to defend a variety of 6x5 attacks
- Team:
- Clearly defined team tactics and roles
- The ability to execute a game plan

Physical:

- Conditioning should still take place with and without the ball
- Conditioning without the ball emphasizing water polo movements
- Flexibility: Static and dynamic
- Importance of warm up and warm down
- Swim Training: Aerobic and Anaerobic
- Strength Training: Core, upper and lower body
- Nutrition: Proper diet pre and post game and at tournaments
- Importance of rest and recovery

Psychological:

- Increased concentration
- Leadership and player responsibilities
- Discipline
- Respect for the game
- Establish pre-practice and pre-game routines

- Goal setting
- Training and competitive mentality
- Encourage players to watch college and National Team games