

Excerpt from *Successful Coaching, 3rd Edition*

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2004

ISBN 978-0-7360-4012-9

BETTER PRACTICE PLANNING

You've heard the axiom failing to plan is planning to fail. Regardless of the competitive level at which you coach, your knowledge of the sport, or your years of experience, you'll benefit from an instructional plan.

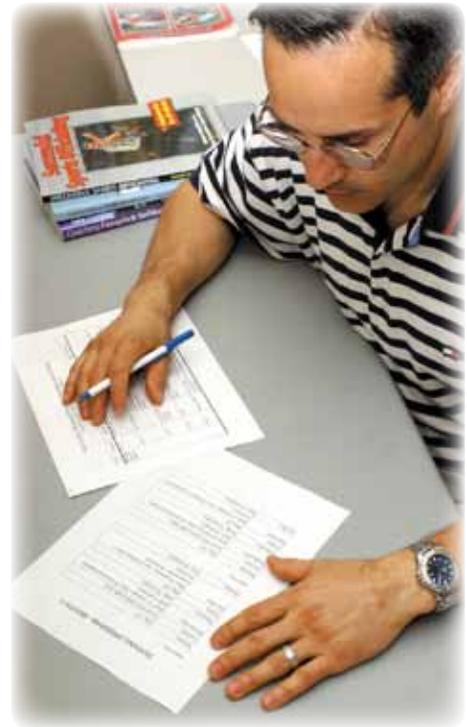
Intuitively we all know that planning is a good idea, but often the problem is having the time to plan—or failing to plan to make time! Although planning is time consuming and initially hard work, the benefits are many. A season plan is your road map to ensure that you will teach all that needs to be learned—not only the obvious technical skills and physical training required, but also the tactical, mental, and communication skills that are essential for success. A season plan helps you to keep on track and to sort out what's important. It also pays off over the course of many seasons because it's a framework for evaluating past seasons and developing a better plan for the next season. Think of instructional planning as an investment; it pays big dividends in future time saved.



Through planning you are far more likely to do the following:

- Keep your athletes actively involved, resulting in more learning and enjoyment during practices
- Provide challenging and relevant learning situations
- Teach skills in the appropriate progression to maximize learning and safety
- Pace the learning and conditioning so that athletes are not overloaded or overtrained
- Make the best use of available time, space, and equipment
- Minimize discipline problems
- Increase your confidence in your ability to manage the situation

Now that you appreciate the value of planning, you need to take this seasonal plan and develop specific practice plans for each day. This is really one of the fun parts of coaching; you get to orchestrate the learning experience for your athletes!



The basic elements of a practice plan are as follows:

- ***Date, time of practice, and length of practice session.***
Record this information so you know when you taught and how long you practiced certain skills. This information will help after the season when you are evaluating and revising your seasonal plan.
- ***Objective of the practice.***
Obviously you want to have one or more clear objectives of what you want your athletes to know or be able to do as a result of this practice session.
- ***Equipment needed.***
List the equipment needed for the practice (e.g., mats, balls, nets, weights, stop watches). Before practice, check the equipment you plan to use to be certain it is safe, clean, and operational. Also make any special arrangements required for the facility.
- ***Warm-up.***
Every practice should begin with a warm-up that takes 10 to 15 minutes. Its physiological purpose and function in injury prevention are discussed in chapter 13. Warm-ups can be done together by the entire team or individually, depending on the sport and your preference. Warm-ups can easily be made a routine, the value of which we discussed previously, but don't let warm-ups become so routine that they become boring.
- ***Practice of previously taught skills.***
As you plan your practice, you'll usually want to devote some time to previously taught skills. Often the core technical and physical training skills of a sport need to be practiced

Pace the learning and conditioning so that athletes are not overloaded or overtrained.

almost daily, but other skills may need only occasional practice. The time you devote to practicing previously taught skills will depend on the demonstrated skill level and conditioning of your athletes. As you plan the practicing of these skills, consider whether your athletes should practice them individually or as a team, and whether they should practice them through a drill or a game.



- ***Teach and practice new skills.***

Usually you want to teach only one or two new technical or tactical skills in a practice,

devoting 20 to 30 minutes to them. The steps for teaching technical skills are explained in chapter 10, and the approach to teaching tactical skills is explained in chapter 11. Mental, communication, and character skills are often best taught in a quiet setting initially, and then reinforced during practice games.

- ***Cool-down.***

Just as every practice begins with a warm-up, the activity portion of practice should conclude with a 10- to 15-minute cool-down. You'll learn about how to properly cool down in chapter 13.

- ***Coach's comments.***

Take 5 minutes at the close of practice to review how the team practiced, directing your comments to the whole team and recognizing any outstanding efforts or performances by individuals. This is not the place to criticize any individual. Point out what skills the team needs to improve further. This is also an opportunity to teach or reinforce a mental, communication, or character skill. Use this time to make any needed announcements about team business, and close by reminding them of the time and place of the next practice and what you plan to do in that practice.

- ***Evaluation of practice.***

Evaluate each practice as soon after its conclusion as possible. With input from your assistant coaches, indicate whether the practice objectives were achieved and make notes of athletes who may need special assistance in future practices. Then file each practice plan in a three-ring notebook or on your computer. You'll find these plans very helpful when planning future practices and next season's plans.

The actual form of practice plans will vary substantially depending on the sport, especially team versus individual sports. Two examples of practice plans have been provided below.



Sample Volleyball Practice Plan

Date: October 20, 2006

Practice start time: 4:00 p.m.

Length of practice: 90 minutes

Practice objectives: (1) Practice core ball-control skills of passing and setting: flat forearm platforms that redirect the ball to the target (minimize swinging) and setting “hands position” at forehead early with contact point on finger pads and thumbs closest to forehead; (2) Enhance player communication: calling first ball (“me” or “mine”) and where to attack (line or angle); (3) Continue first opportunity attack emphasis; (4) Develop physical recovery skills with short, intense physical bursts and timed recovery.

Equipment: Bring stopwatches, balls, net, and cones; players need knee pads and court shoes.

Practice Activities			
Time	Name of activity	Description	Key teaching points
4:00-4:07	Warm-up	Shuffle Passing Drill 10 to target and change direction	Emphasize posture and “quiet” passing platform
4:07-4:13	Warm-up	Wall sets—30 low/med/high, finish with jump sets	Emphasize hand shape and wrist position
4:13-4:20	Warm-up	Dynamic stretching	Emphasize full range of motion in stretches
4:20-4:21	Warm-up	Line jumps—forward, side, scissor	Quick feet physical training
4:21-4:22	Water break		
4:22-4:32	Ball control	Weave Passing Drill in teams of 3, 15 to target (both sides)	Emphasize adjusting platform and movement to the ball
4:32-4:42	Ball control	Small court games (pass or set only)	Emphasize ball control to win set only
4:42-4:52	Ball control	3-on-3 and 3-on-3 backcourt battle drill (winner stays)	Emphasize ball control, reading skills, and communication
4:52-4:55	Ball control	Line races (sprint, shuffle/back)	Physical training

continued



Sample Volleyball Practice Plan (continued)



Time	Name of activity	Description	Key teaching points
4:55-5:10	Offensive system 6 on 6	4 before 2 game	Emphasize first opportunity attack, look for best attack in each rotation
5:10-5:15	Transition	Continuous rally game	Emphasize quick recovery from physical and mental errors
5:15-5:23	Cool-down	Mat serving series	Emphasize serving routine and rhythm
5:23-5:25	Cool-down	Main muscle group stretch	Emphasize slow and complete stretch
5:25-5:30	Coach's comments	End-of-practice comments from the coach	General comments on how the whole team practiced Recognize any outstanding efforts or performances Point out what needs to improve Announcements

Evaluation: Ball control is improving with emphasis early in practice on technique. More transition drills are needed to get those proper techniques into more gamelike situations at this point in the season. Hannah and Keily are swinging their arms too much during their forearm pass, but both have good platforms. Setting to our hitters is still our greatest team challenge, but when our setter Michelle handles the ball, our offense runs smoothly.

Communication was much improved and should be reinforced as a positive at our next practice opportunity. Continue to work on our offense and add more serving as we prepare for West High School next Tuesday and some passers we can take advantage of.





Sample Middle-Distance Runner's Practice Plan

Date: March 12, 2005

Practice start time: 3:00 p.m.

Length of practice: 100 minutes

Practice objectives: (1) Reinforce technique skills: lifting the knees high, raising the foot directly under the butt, “pawing” the track on foot strike, avoiding overstriding, and driving the arms powerfully; (2) Develop speed-endurance, or the ability to run fast when tired; (3) Practice concentrating on efficient running form when tired; and (4) Develop the tactical skills of accelerating in the middle of a race and kicking at the end.

Equipment: Workout takes place on a 400-meter track; bring stopwatches and water; runners need their racing spikes.

Practice Activities			
Time	Name of activity	Description	Key teaching points
3:00-3:07	Warm-up	Easy jogging	
3:07-3:15	Warm-up	Dynamic stretching	Emphasize full range of motion in dynamic stretches
3:15-3:25	Warm-up	5 × 100 meter strides @ 3/4 effort with 100-meter walk recovery	Emphasize technique skills during strides
3:25-3:30	Water break	Everyone drinks 4 to 6 oz	
3:30-3:55	Technique drills	4 × 30 meters high-knee drill with 1-min recovery 4 × 30 meters butt-kick drill with 1-min recovery 4 × 30 meters fast-feet drill with 1-min recovery 4 × 1-min arm-pumping drill with 1-min recovery	Emphasize lifting the knees to be parallel to the track Emphasize keeping the foot close to the body and under the butt Emphasize “pawing” action, landing with the foot moving backward Emphasize “fast hands”
3:55-4:00	Water break	Everyone drinks 4 to 6 oz	

continued



Sample Middle-Distance Runner's Practice Plan (*continued*)



Time	Name of activity	Description	Key teaching points
4:00-4:20	Speed-endurance interval workout	3 sets of 1 × 300 meters and 1 × 200 meters with 1-min recovery between the 300 and 200, and 5-min recovery between sets	For the 300s, keep the runners on 1,600-meter race pace For the 200s, encourage a controlled, building sprint, adding a notch of speed every 50 meters Cue the runners to hold their form on the 200s
4:20-4:25	Water break	Everyone drinks 4 to 6 oz	
4:25-4:35	Cool-down	10-min easy jogging	Cue the runners to attend to any tightness or soreness, for extra stretching, icing, and massage
4:35-4:40	Coach's comments	End-of-practice comments from the coach	General comments on how the whole team practiced Recognize any outstanding efforts or performances Point out what the team needs to improve Announcements

Evaluation: Technique drills—Excellent job by all on high knees, butt kicks, and arm-pumping drills, but we're not quite getting the hang of the fast-feet drill, which is a problem because we've still got some overstriders, especially Shawna, Val, Marie, and Kim. Need to help them get the feet down faster so they land under their hips. For Friday, emphasize the fast-feet drill, making it a contest: Whoever has the most foot strikes in 30 meters gets to choose which restaurant the team will stop at on the return trip home from the next meet.

Speed-endurance interval workout: Marie and Val ran together, right on the assigned pace for their 300s (average 64 seconds) and 200s (average 38 seconds). Shawna, Kaella, Sue, and Kim ran the 300s too fast (around 58–61) and the 200s too slow (around 40–42). They didn't get the full effect of improving their acceleration and kicking skills. Next interval session, have Marie and Val set the pace for everyone. Nobody passes them, unless it's on a repetition intended for accelerating or kicking.

The heat was brutal today, and it's going to get worse. For the end of the next track workout, bring watermelon and turn on the infield sprinklers.



About the Author

Evaluate
each
practice.

Develop a
Season
Plan!

Sport has always been a vital part of **Rainer Martens'** life. He has coached at the youth, high school, and collegiate levels and has studied sport as a research scientist. The founder and president of Human Kinetics, he also started the American Sport Education Program, the largest coaching education program in the United States. An internationally recognized sport psychologist, Martens is the author of more than 80 scholarly articles and 15 books, including *Successful Coaching*, the best-selling coaching book ever published, and *Directing Youth Sport Programs*. He has also been a featured speaker at more than 100 conferences around the world and has conducted more than 150 workshops and clinics for coaches and athletes at all levels.

To order a copy of the book *Successful Coaching, 3rd Edition*, click [here](#) or call toll-free at 800-747-5698.

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