

Planning and reviewing – a training session

Good training sessions don't happen by chance. If you are to ensure that you have everything you need for a training session (eg, an appropriate training area, necessary equipment, enough helpers, and players).

Benefits of planning training sessions

Each training session should be planned carefully so that all players are able to learn new skills and build confidence. This means being aware of individual differences within the team and appreciating that all people develop at different rates. The emphasis at training should be on improvement and enjoyment.

Planning each training session:

- assures maximum use of the time available
- assures efficient coverage of all phases of the game
- leads to improved skill development
- maintains better player interest by ensuring there is a variety of drills and less time is wasted
- allows evaluation at the end of a session and aids in planning for future sessions
- ensures that each session is progressive, safe and fun

Considerations when planning a session

When planning a training session you need to consider the following:

- time available for training
- number of players available
- type and amount of equipment required
- age and ability of players
- physical condition of players
- condition of the playing field

Deciding on the goal/s for the session

The first step in planning a training session is to decide on the goal (or goals – no more than two or three) for the session. What is it that you would like to achieve from the session? What should the players be able to do by the end of the session (or a series of sessions)?

Your goals should be SMART goals:

Specific	Clear not vague
Measurable	Can be measured in quantity, or time
Achievable and Realistic	Challenging but achievable and realistic in terms of the time and resources available and the ability level and experience of the players. The 'A' in SMART can also stand for 'Agreed'. If the players agree it is a worthwhile goal, then they will work harder to try and achieve it.
Time-bound	Specify when the goal should be achieved by— the end of the session? The end of the week? The end of the program?



The goal or goals for the training session should take into account the players' skill levels and their own motivations for being involved (is it to have fun, make new friends, learn new skills, something else?). Some goals may be achievable in one session, others may need several sessions to realise. Be flexible and be prepared to adjust the goals if they are too difficult or too easy for the players or if required equipment is not available or the environment presents a safety hazard (eg, a slippery surface due to rain).

The primary goal of a training session will be to develop some aspect of fundamental softball skills or team play but there are a number of secondary goals to be considered when planning a training session. These may relate to some aspect of fitness, knowledge of the rules, working together as a team/team spirit, developing a positive self-image in the players or having fun.

Examples of <u>NON</u> SMART Goals	SMART GOALS
To improve fundamental skills	To execute an overhand throw to a team mate by the end of the session
To increase knowledge of rules	To explain what a 'strike' and what a 'ball' is by the end of the session
To improve fitness	To incorporate conditioning activities within the skill activities each training session
To make new friends	To develop 3 friendships with children who have similar interests

The goal or goals for the training session will help guide the activities that you include in the session. What activities will help you achieve the training session goal/s with the players you are working with?

Elements of a training session

The traditional training session plan should be completed before the actual training session.

A traditional training session plan has six elements. Some of these are necessary for every training session while others may be excluded according to the needs of the team based on the:

- skill level of the players
- time of playing season
- time and space available, the facilities being used
- objectives of the session

The elements of a traditional training session and the suggested duration of each element are:

- Warm-up (15-20 minutes)
- Skill development (20-25 minutes)
- Game application (20 minutes)
- Conditioning/recreation (15 minutes)
- Cool down (5-10 minutes)
- Review and evaluation (5-10 minutes)

The suggested durations of each element are designed to provide sufficient time to achieve the objectives of each element. You should vary the duration according to the age, fitness level and ability of the players eg, shorter duration for younger children or players with low levels of fitness or ability.

1 Warm-up

The warm-up is a vital part of any training session or game. The warm-up serves two basic purposes:

- helps prevent injuries by raising the temperature of the muscles and increasing the circulation around the joints
- prepares players mentally for the training session or game in order to improve overall effectiveness through concentration

A proper warm-up includes:

- a general body aerobic component (eg, jogging) to increase body temperature through increasing blood circulation. A good indication of an adequate warm-up is a light sweat
- flexibility ie, stretching exercises to stretch major muscle groups and mobilise major joints (you might just use range of movement activities for very young players, rather than formal stretching exercises), and
- simple softball activities (eg, throwing, catching, fielding)

All around dynamic warm up routine which includes the rotation from one activity station to another.

Using games as part of the warm-up will help make the sessions more fun and enjoyable for children. Select games that when played, will achieve the desired outcomes of the warm-up. Don't choose games that have stop-start activities or long periods of rest.

Examples of suitable games that will develop agility, flexibility, speed and strength are:

Fox and the Geese

Divide the group into subgroups of five or six. One is the fox, the others are the geese. The geese must be linked by holding the waist of the person in front. The front goose tries to protect the others by blocking the path of the fox, who is attempting to tag the last goose. After a few minutes, rotate positions so that there is a new fox.

Progressive Relay

Form groups of four or five. The first member sprints to a marker and back to the team, collects the second player and, linking arms, they sprint to the marker and back. This continues until the last team member is collected.

Donkey

All players jog inside an area, (eg a diamond) until the coach calls out a designated target, eg 2nd Base. Players run and line up behind that target. The last three to arrive are each given a letter of a word. The object is not to be the player who gets all the letters (**note:** the coach can control this activity by calling out a target close to one of the slower players.)

Circle Run

Six to eight form a circle, standing several metres apart (depending on skill level). One player has a ball. On 'Go', he/she throws the ball to the next person and then attempts to run around the outside of the circle in reverse direction before the ball is relayed around to its starting position.

Rats and Rabbits

Divide the group into two teams called 'rats' and 'rabbits'. Each team is given a home line (eg, home to 1st base, and, 2nd to 3rd base). The players jog inside an area, eg the diamond until the coach calls one of the names. If 'rabbits' is called, they must chase the "rats", in order to tag as many as possible before the 'rats' reach their home line.

Giants and Dwarfs

One of the group is the giant, the rest are the dwarfs. The giant stands in the diamond facing away from a baseline about 15 metres away. The dwarfs start from the baseline and advance slowly towards the giant. On the call of 'go', the dwarfs turn and run back to the line, the giant chases them and tries to tag as many as possible. If a dwarf runs outside of the diamond, they are considered tagged. The dwarfs tagged become giants and help chase the next time.



2 Skill development

This element has two components - revision of previously acquired skills and/or strategies, and introduction of new skills and/or strategy.

- Demonstrate the skill (break the skill down into parts, starting from the simple and gradually becoming more complex) and progress at the appropriate time
- Ensure each child can see clearly and understand
- Group children according to ability level
- Organise to ensure realistic training ie, a related training activity that has the new skill as its focal point. Each skill situation should be put into a miniature game as soon as possible so the players can see the relevance
- Allow repetition (have sufficient equipment to form more groups with small numbers of players to reduce waiting time rather than a small number of large groups)
- Observe
- Praise good technique
- Correct fundamental errors, concentrating on self-improvement
- Set tasks to boost confidence
- Make the activity more challenging

3 Game application

The goal of this element of the training session is to have the players perform the new skill(s) in game situations by setting up activities which simulate the part of the game to which the new skill applies.

Follow these basic steps:

- Identify the game situation(s) where you will apply the skills
- List the activities you will use and their progressions
- Increase the competitive aspect of the activity in gradual steps

Players will play and react in a game situation directly relative to what they have been practicing and the more closely coaches simulate game conditions in their training sessions, the better the players' performance in the game will be.

As the level of arousal increases (competition stress) the more important the principle of specificity becomes. This is because, under stress, the response that has been trained (dominant response) will be even more likely to occur ie, the player will revert to automatic reactions. Thus, be sure that the automatic reactions that you instil in your players through training are the reactions that are required in the game situation.

4 Conditioning/recreation

If conditioning is included, it should occur after skill training and there should be some progression from training session to training session. If recreation is the goal, use games or competitions to stimulate interest.

For younger children, the emphasis at training should be on learning the basic skills. Developing fitness through the enjoyment of learning skills will establish a platform on which more formal conditioning can take place in the future.

Conditioning can be developed by a vigorous, skill-oriented session that builds the fitness base of the player. Intensive skill training sessions will in themselves ensure that an adequate level of fitness is achieved without emphasising any one physical element. As the player matures and progresses, the coach can develop a conditioning program to match the capacity of performance. If speed training is included in a training session, this needs to be done immediately after the warm-up, before the players get tired.



5 **Cool down**

A proper cool down allows a player's body temperature and heart rate to decrease slowly and helps clear the lactic acid that is built up in muscles during vigorous activity. Like the warm-up, the cool down should be fun but not too active – you need to select activities which will relax the group, not get them excited. Stretching, walking or gentle jogging are suitable activities.

An effective cool down consists of a gradual reduction of activity levels for 5-10 minutes followed by a comprehensive stretching program (or 'disguised stretching' – range of movement activities – for young children).

6 **Review and evaluation**

After a training session you must review the activities and results with your players. This allows you to check how well the objectives were achieved and to reinforce points or ask questions to ensure players understand what was covered. This should occur either during or immediately after the cool down. The information gained during this time contributes to the planning of future practice sessions.

A session planner template is provided at the end of this Module.



Session planner

Date: _____ Venue: _____

Group (level) _____

Goal/s for the session: _____

Equipment and space required: _____

Safety considerations _____

Element	Activities	Time
Warm up		
Body of session		
Cool down		
Review and evaluation		

Things to remember for next time	
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Injuries or incidents: (attach an Incident Report Form)