

46 Tips for a Killer Football Practice

1. Plan for every minute of practice. Use a practice plan that details exactly what activities will be performed and how long they will be performed for.
2. Plan extra activities for individual skills and group work. The players might be getting some great reps in and you want to continue that momentum or give them a more challenging drill. Always have a couple extra drills that you can pull out of your back pocket if necessary. Have 15 minutes of drills ready for a 10 minute station.
3. Make sure that all coaches have a copy of the practice schedule. The head coach should create the plan and email it to the assistants the morning of practice if possible. Also bring printed copies for each practice to the field.
4. The head coach is responsible for controlling the tempo of the practice. Set a time for each drill and stick to it! It will teach both players and coaches efficient time management.
5. Use a quick whistle in drills and scrimmages to avoid injuries to players.
6. Make practice tempo as close to game tempo as possible. When running through your plays, it should only take 10-15 seconds from the whistle until both sides are lined up at the line of scrimmage and ready to execute the next play. Don't allow dawdling between plays.
7. Coach a kid on every play. Constantly give feedback to players - every play. Use that 15-20 seconds between the end of the last play and the start of the next one. Walk a kid back to the huddle and provide feedback on the way. This is a great way to keep your kids engaged and constantly learning, while keeping the practice moving with a good tempo.
8. Don't just go through the motions of running the play. Teach something on every down! Praise and reinforce good behaviors. Correct poor technique in a constructive way. Try to make personal contact and teach something to every kid at some point in the practice.
9. Use the whole team on each play if possible. Extra players can act as the scout team, chain crew, ball spotter etc. Don't let kids stand around doing nothing. This also frees up the coaching staff to work directly with the kids on every play.
10. Make your practices more game-like by moving the ball on each down. Communicate the tactical situation when you call the play.

11. In a 2.5 hour practice, spend roughly 30 minutes on stretching and agility drills, one hour on skills and techniques and one hour team/play review
12. Immediately after practice ends, huddle up with your coaching staff to share your thoughts for the day and assess the needs of the team. What did you do well? What do you need to improve? Take note of what skills or tactics you need to focus on, then put together a rough outline of the next day's practice. (which you can polish up and finalize later). This technique only takes 5 or 10 minutes, but you'll be amazed at how much it improves your practice efficiency and level of organization. It's also a great way to get your coaching staff communicating and functioning like a real team.
13. Don't assume the kids are in shape in August. Many kids are not active outside of organized sports. Ease into your conditioning work over the first few practices while you assess the fitness level of your players. Make sure to spend adequate time on warm-up, dynamic stretching and cool down to prevent injury. Drink plenty of water!
14. Start practice by having the kids running laps to warm up. This allows the coaches to get organized, and set up the field to get practice started.
15. Always warm up before you stretch. Stretching sessions should begin with the toes and move up to the head.
16. Have a player lead the stretching session each practice. Use this as a reward for prior practice performance. It's a great way to highlight a players accomplishments and hard work, and help him build leadership and communication skills.
17. Push-ups, lunges, squats, planks and sit-ups are all safe and effective ways to improve strength, and can be done with players of all ages.
18. The best way to increase speed is by improving running technique. After laps and stretching, set players into lines and do form running drills for 10 minutes.
19. Use a heavier focus on conditioning during pre-season. As the season goes on, the time spent on conditioning decreases and you will spend more time on skills and tactics.
20. Keep your kids hydrated! Always be aware of the weather and how it impacts fatigue and dehydration. Schedule a water break in a shaded area at least every 30 to 45 minutes. Sports drinks are recommended instead of water because they replace electrolytes lost in sweat and contain carbohydrates for energy.
21. Hydration Before Practice:

- a. 1 to 2 hours before replace: 4 to 8 ounces of cold water
- b. 10 to 15 minutes before replace: 4 to 8 ounces of cold water
- c. A good meal with containing food with high water content (e.g. fruits)

22. Hydration During Football Practice

- a. Every 20 minutes: 5 to 9 ounces of a sports drink or water, depending on weight (5 for a child weighing 88 pounds, 9 ounces for a child weighing 132 pounds)
- b. Any time a child feels thirsty
- c. Encourage drinking fluids during timeouts and breaks
- d. Encourage drinking from their own fluid container and avoid sharing with others
- e. Encourage the ability to drink whenever they want and not to wait until they are told to take a break
- f. Adjust fluid needs during practice according to the weather, amount of equipment worn, and practice duration and intensity.

23. Hydration After Football Practice

- a. Post-exercise hydration should aim to correct any fluid lost during the practice and help the body recover from replace:
- b. Within the first 30 minutes after exercise, drink chocolate milk or a specially formulated replace drink containing protein and carbohydrates such as Gatorade G3 Recover. Not only do they hydrate, but the protein helps the body recover from exercise by enhancing muscle repair, and the carbohydrate replenish glycogen stores in muscles, which are a source of fuel during prolonged exercise of an hour or more.
- c. Within two hours: 20-24 ounces of a replace drink for every pound (16 ounces) of weight lost
- d. Replace all fluids lost during exercise plus any lost after exercise through urination
- e. Eat a good meal with foods containing water

24. Use a circle stretch for cool-down at the end of practice. Use this as an opportunity to congratulate the practice players of the day, review the week's schedule, or make any other necessary announcements

25. Always start your drills or plays on cadence, not on a whistle. There's only one play that starts on the whistle - kickoffs. Everything else begins on a cadence or ball movement. Have your quarterback call the cadence to begin your conditioning drills or other team-wide exercises

26. Make conditioning fun by making it competitive! Use relay races, obstacle courses and small group competitions as part of your conditioning. Give a prize to the winners. Encourage cheering and enthusiasm as well!

27. Focus no more than 20-30 seconds per play during team period. Keep the tempo fast, coach a kid on the way back to the huddle and keep the practice moving.
28. Work out all blocking schemes before team period. Don't stop your plays in order to discuss or correct blocking schemes. Focus on getting the reps in while the team period is running. If you notice an issue, take note of it, and discuss during the post practice coaches meeting. Spend time working on it during the following practice.
29. Insist that kickoffs and punts are caught in the air!
30. Use your best athlete as the holder for the place kicker. If something goes wrong, like a bad snap or broken play, he'll make plays for you.
31. Spend 15 minutes on each Special Teams unit per week - 15 on punt, 15 on punt return, 15 on kickoff, 15 on kickoff return, 15 on field goal/PAT.
32. Teach clock management techniques and work on them during practice. Use a live clock during your team period and have your kids practice 2 minute situations, spike plays, calling timeouts etc.
33. Spend 10 minutes on Form Tackling in each practice. This is the key fundamental that coaches have to stress. The offense should also participate.
34. Make sure that QB, Centers, Long Snappers, Holders get enough reps so they can master their timing. Work on snaps with multiple combinations of snapper and quarterback. Practice snapping a wet ball (soak overnight in water) or a bad ball. Scout your opponents and practice your plays against the fronts and coverages you expect to face. Don't just practice your own defenses against your own offenses.
35. Have fun!! Football should be FUN for the players, coaches and parents. The keys to a fun practice are organization, efficiency and tempo. If you are organized, you won't be stressed out and you'll enjoy working with the kids. If the practice is efficient and runs with a fast tempo, the kids will stay engaged and focused.
36. Fundamentals are critical. Spend time on basic skills - tackling, blocking, agility, throwing, catching - at every practice.
37. Make sure that each player understands assignments and alignments - within formations, on specific plays, on defensive fronts, within coverages.

38. All players should have an understanding of the roles of each position. Rotate the kids through different positions to expose them to different roles.
39. Offensive practice is about poise, precision, execution. Defensive practice is more rah-rah, getting kids fired up and hitting stuff.
40. When working on individual offensive positions, try to find station drills that can combine more than one skill per position (ie. quarterbacks can work on drops and handoffs).
41. The two main focal points of a defense should be tackling for loss, and turnovers.
42. Evaluate your players on defense during practice and provide constant feedback
 - a. Was his alignment correct?
 - b. Was his assignment correct?
 - c. Did all 11 players get to the ball.
43. **2 whistle rule.** The first whistle ends the play. The entire defense swarms around the ball and continues to fire their feet while Coach hustles into the middle of the huddle. Coach asks his defense? "Did we get a turnover? Did we get a tackle for a loss? Why or why not?" Use this as an opportunity to make corrections to alignment and assignment for individual players. When that huddle is complete, Coach blows the second whistle and the defense sets for the next play.
44. The coaching staff should set the practice tone by hustling. If you hustle, the players will too.

45. Sample Practice Plan (2 hours)

10 min Laps, Dynamic Stretching and Form Run

10 min Rotating Stations (3 minutes per station)

a. Tackling Stations

b. Reaction Drills

c. Sled Drills

WATER BREAK

10 min Rotating Stations (3 minutes per station)

a. Strip Drill

b. Stance and Starts

c. Pursuit Drill

WATER BREAK

10 min Team Teaching (Motivational, Team Building)

15 min Position Drills (offense vs defense)

WATER BREAK

10 min Perfect Plays on Air (no defense)

20 min Team Work/Scrimmage

5 min Team Wrap Up

46. Weekly Practice Outline

Day #1

- Good tempo - High speed, lots of reps, quick transitions from drill to drill
- Hitting
- Heavy conditioning
- Teach plays based on scouting report - What defense/offense does upcoming opponent run? Who is their best player?

Day #2

- Good tempo
- Hitting
- Medium Conditioning
- Run Plays

Day #3

- Good Tempo
- Light Hitting
- Light conditioning - get it done through Team Period. Run plays every 10-15 sections - game pace.

Day #4 - Pre Game

- Medium tempo - more focused
- Spend a team period time
- Light hitting - wrap up, don't take anyone to the ground
- No conditioning
- Run perfect plays vs no defense

Day 5 - game day

Day 6 and 7 - rest

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