

"The real game" is the foundation for the practice

In the previous article we mentioned the route a coach should take to improve his players. When deciding on a certain route the coach must ask himself the following questions;

1. What is my objective? What do I want to achieve with the practice?
2. How do I want to reach my objective? Which exercises should I use?
3. How should I adjust the exercises so that the players learn to play efficiently and effectively?

The objective of a practice is based on "the real game". Thus, it is important to categorize the characteristic elements of the game:

- ✓ The objective of the game is to score more goals than the opponent; in short the objective is to win the game.
- ✓ During the game you have a team that has the ball and a team that doesn't have the ball. The team with the ball must attack to reach its objective (to score) and the team without the ball must try to prevent this by playing defense.
- ✓ During the attack the players must execute the tasks that go hand in hand with building-up and scoring as well as possible. Obviously the opposite counts for the other team; disrupting the build-up and preventing scoring.

In a diagram the above mentioned looks like this;

To Win	
Attack (score goals)	Defend (prevent goals)
Build-up	Disrupt the attack
Score	Prevent goals

When deciding on the objective of the practice the coach's plans are always based on this diagram. The choice of what the coach wants to achieve with the practice can never be disconnected from



the game itself with its specific characteristics. That's logical, isn't it?

WHAT EXERCISE?

Consider that the coach wants to improve the build-up. What exercise is suited for this objective? The choice is based on the age and the level of the players and what went wrong during the game. When talking about the youngest players we talk more about general objectives. In each age group we can kind of predict what the problem will be during the game. U13's, when moving up to 11v11, will be confronted with a larger space, bigger distances, more players, new rules and a different "allocation of tasks". The coach then must pay attention to: field positioning/ field occupation, team organization, distances between players, quality of the positional play (with and without the ball), depth in the team's play and the technical abilities. When working with older youth players and adults we base the practice more on the game itself. What went wrong during the game? This must be analyzed as clear and complete as possible. Based on this information we can formulate an objective for the practice.

Take for example U14 players. These players have been confronted with the larger space, the larger distances between players and what is generally expected from them (tasks and functions within the

team organization). With these players we must go deeply into their tasks. The tasks and functions must get more substance. Also the cohesiveness within a line (defense, midfield and offense) and between lines must be worked on to learn how to better improve build-up.

SMALLER DISTANCES

You could say: "Just let them play 11v11 and everything will be fine". The real game can't be copied any better than that. But you can question if the players then will really learn what was set as the objective. Simplifying the game means more chance for success. You can do this by making the space smaller and using fewer players. The effect is that the distances between the players get smaller, the overall picture becomes clearer and the players will have more touches on the ball. A good coach should choose an exercise in which the players understand quickly what the objective is and are able to make a link/connection o the real game. By using this method players make light work of the most difficult problems they are confronted with. See the drawings for an example of a complete practice.

