

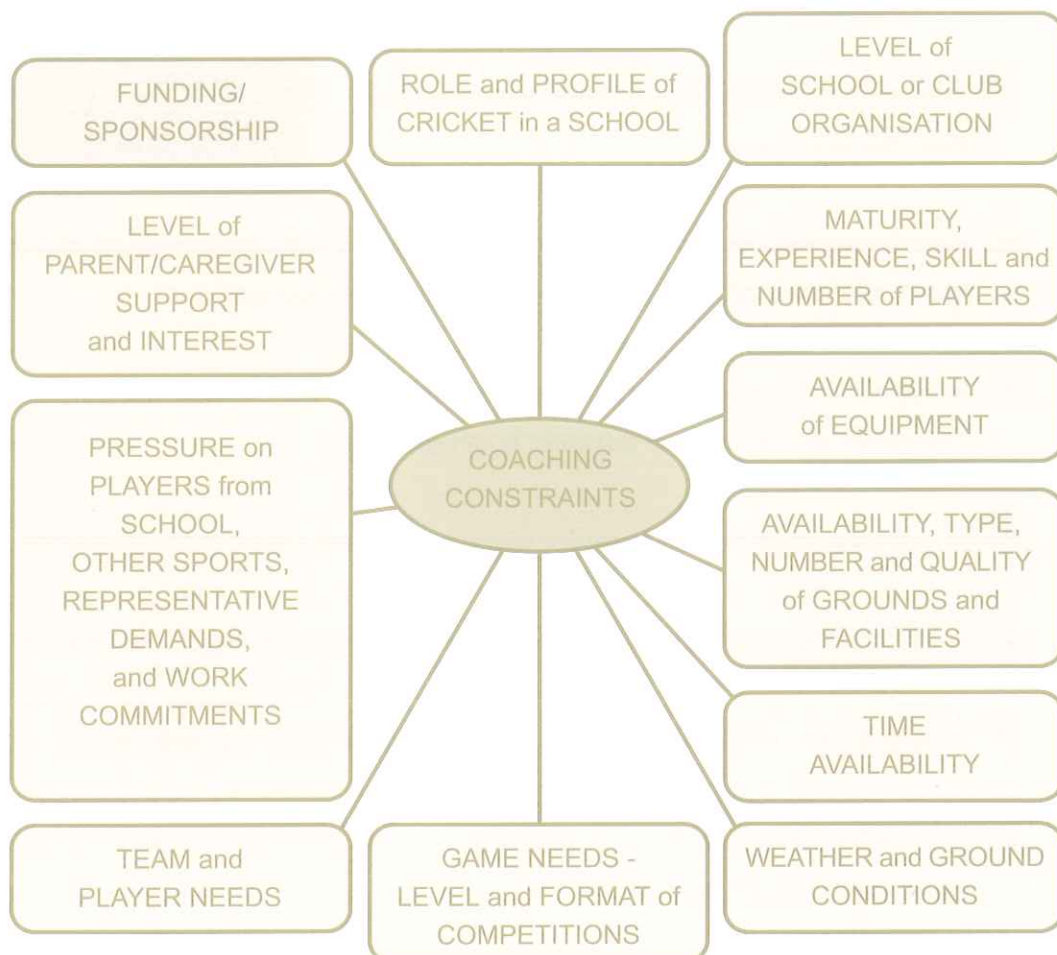
The Coaching Plan

Too many coaches make the mistake of showing up for the first practice with no particular plan in mind. These coaches frequently find that their practices are disorganised, their players are inattentive and the extent of their skill development is limited. Planning is crucial to successful coaching.

As a coach spending some time pre-season preparing a **COACHING PLAN** for the season [also known as a '**PERIODISATION PLAN**' and then breaking down the plan and mapping out objectives and a structure for each practice session is an invaluable exercise. While a number of variables may influence the end result of a practice session having something to work from is essential.

Coaching Constraints

Despite your best intentions there are a number of factors that can impact on your coaching plan. To be effective as a coach it is important to be aware of these factors and, where and when necessary, to have the flexibility to adjust your programme to suit the situation.





Team Support

As a coach you should work to build a strong support network with the parents or caregivers of your players. Their ongoing assistance can be crucial to ensuring your effectiveness and to optimising your players' experience of the game. To foster the full involvement and positive contribution of parents or caregivers it is important:

- 1 To inform them of your coaching background, objectives, goals and approach [see 'Team Culture and Values'] and also the philosophy and rules of the school or club in relation to junior and/or youth cricket.
- 2 To inform them of the season's activities, including any anticipated financial implications and any social occasions you would like them to be involved with such as a barbecue, or going to a family restaurant.
- 3 To provide a schedule of practice sessions and matches.
- 4 To prepare and distribute a team list with players' names, addresses, telephone numbers, email details and the names of parents or caregivers [see Appendix 1].
- 5 To ask them to communicate any concerns they may have about their child to you.
- 6 To ask them to keep you informed about anything [e.g. illness, injury, family holiday/occasion] that will mean their child is unavailable for a match or practice session.
- 7 To find out who can supply or organise transport to and from practices and matches. If necessary, get the parents or caregivers to arrange a roster.
- 8 To encourage them to attend practice sessions and involve them in the experience.
- 9 To encourage them to make an effort to come and support the team when they play their matches.
- 10 To ascertain who can assist at matches with scoring, umpiring and general supervision.
- 11 To let them know what clothing and equipment is required and where it can be purchased - especially that related to safety.





A Coaching Plan For The Season

A coaching plan is a written outline of your coaching programme for the season. The preparation of a coaching plan provides the opportunity for a coach:

- 1 To plan ahead.
- 2 To be better prepared and organised.
- 3 To structure the season.
- 4 To be more effective in delivering a progressive and coordinated coaching programme.
- 5 To meet his/her coaching objectives.

A coaching plan provides a broad overview for the season and incorporates the following pre-season, competitive period and end-of-season activities. Although the depth to which each activity is covered tends to vary depending upon the age, ability and competitive level of the team.

Main Activities Covered In A Coaching Plan For A Season

PRE-SEASON	DURING THE SEASON	END-OF-SEASON
AUGUST - OCTOBER	OCTOBER - MARCH	APRIL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fitness training ● Personal preparation ● Pre-season coaching and practice sessions ● Goal setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Coaching and practice sessions ● Matches ● Tournaments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review of the season ● Evaluation of the team and individual player performance in relation to their goals for the season ● Evaluation of coaching approach and performance

A coaching plan must take into account the facilities and equipment available for practice sessions and the age, ability, and competitive level of your team. It usually comprises:

- 1 A calendar of events highlighting **WHEN** and **WHERE** practice sessions will be held and matches will be played [see 'A Coaching Plan for a Typical Month'].
- 2 A set of **CORE SKILLS** that cover the essential generic game and team needs you have identified, together with a list of appropriate **DRILLS** to develop these. These skill drills need to be prioritised, then divided up and spread through your coaching plan. They can be used as the basis of your weekly practice sessions.



A Coaching Plan For A Typical Month

Key

	Matches
	Allocated practice night [90 minute sessions]
	Skill session + planning and preparation session
	Open wicket session
	Net session
	Skill session + net session

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2	3	4	5 v. Collegians at Turner Park
6	7	8	9	10	11	12 v. Centurion at Hockley Domain
13	14	15	16	17	18	19 v. Wanderers at Hadlee Oval
20	21	22	23	24	25	26 v. Nomads at Crowe Park
27	28	29	30	31		

- An outline practice plan for each session detailing **WHAT** the coaching focus will be and **HOW** it will be achieved [see 'A Sample Practice Session Plan']. Each one of these practice sessions should form part of a sequence of sessions in a coordinated coaching programme.
- A range of procedures for measuring each player's performance and level of skill development at practice [see 'Key Performance Indicators'].



Pre-Season

Planning

Effective coaches begin planning well before the start of the season. Among the pre-season measures that will make the season more enjoyable and rewarding for you and the players are the following:

- 1 Familiarise yourself with the school or club you are involved in, especially its philosophy and rules pertaining to junior and/or youth cricket.
- 2 Check out the availability and quality of equipment and facilities needed for practices and matches.
- 3 Prioritise your coaching objectives regarding having fun, developing players' skills, and winning.
- 4 Assist with the registration of players for your team. Then after they are either allocated or select into your team have them complete a player information form including their names, addresses, telephone numbers, email details and the names of parents or caregivers [see Appendix 1].
- 5 Hold an orientation meeting with the players in your team and their parents or caregivers to seek their support [see 'Team Support'], to provide a schedule of practices and matches and a team list, and to inform them of your coaching background, objectives, goals and approach [see 'Team Culture and Values']. Also give them an overview of the philosophy and rules of the school or club pertaining to junior and/or youth cricket.

Player Preparation

Depending upon the age and ability of the players in a team, and if time and facilities are available, it is possible to begin pre-season preparation once players have registered and a team has been selected. This is may be in August/September with a school team or just a week or two prior to the start of the season with a club side. Pre-season player preparation covers fitness, personal training for players to check their techniques, skills and equipment, team coaching and practice sessions, and setting goals for the season.



Fitness

In August/September young cricketers involved in winter sports will be coming to the end of their season. It is important that the fitness levels achieved in these winter sports are maintained into the cricket season. A high level of fitness goes a long way to improving performance and reducing the mental tension that arises during a game of cricket.

As a coach it may be appropriate, depending on the age and ability of the players in a team to set up a fitness training programme for September/October in preparation for the season. This may include a combination of running, sprint work and stretching exercises to sustain or improve endurance, speed, flexibility and the quality of performance.

Personal Training

Prior to the start of the season players can begin their own preparation:

- 1 By working on their technique, which in many cases, they won't have needed to use or think about since the end of the previous summer. They can do this by practising:
 - Batting in front of a long mirror - check the grip, stance [especially feet and head/eye positioning], backswing, front and back foot strokes.
 - Batting using a ball on a sting.
 - Bowling in front of a long mirror - check the grip and basic bowling action [especially feet, hips, shoulders, arms and head positioning] by walking up and bowling an imaginary ball.
 - Bowling with a tennis ball or taped ball against a wall or at a target on the ground and/or a wall.
 - Fielding by throwing a tennis ball against a wall or at a target on the ground and/or a wall and catching it.
- 2 By playing any small ball games [e.g. table tennis, squash, golf] to improve concentration, eye and hand coordination, and 'fierce focus' in terms of carefully watching the flight and/or impact on the ball.
- 3 By ensuring personal equipment is in top condition, especially bats and cricket boots, and that cricket clothing still fits and new gear is broken in properly.



Coaching and Practice Sessions

Pre-season sessions provide an opportunity to develop and revise skills, improve technique and get players into form, and to assess team strengths and weaknesses, build team spirit and establish standards and expectations. These sessions should include a number of different types of practices but with a focus on planning and tactics, skill and net sessions [see 'Types of Practice'].

SUGGESTIONS FOR PRE-SEASON COACHING and PRACTICE

- **BATTING** - concentrate on footwork, timing and technique. Do not try and hit the ball too hard.
- **BOWLING** - concentrate on line, length and technique. Medium and fast bowlers bowling at half to three quarter pace. Spin bowlers taking care with soft spinning fingers.
- **FIELDING** - remember the hands are soft so do not hit catches too hard [Use a progression of tennis balls, taped tennis balls or incrediballs, indoor cricket balls and old 'soft' cricket balls]. Do not try to throw too hard or too far.

Goals For The Season

As a coach sit down with your players prior to the start of the season to set goals and/or targets for individual players and the team overall.

In setting goals for the season it is important:

- 1 For the players to enjoy the season and to approach every match and practice session with commitment and enthusiasm.
- 2 To write down what you and your players' expectations are for the season and to establish a plan of how you expect to achieve these goals.
- 3 To make sure such goals are challenging but realistic in terms of the age, maturity and ability of the players in the team.
- 4 To aim at improving team skills [e.g. running between wickets, fielding and field placings, tactics], knowledge and understanding of the game - its rules and etiquette, and its values [e.g. teamwork, playing hard and having fun, but at the same time showing respect for umpires, coaches and other players, learning how to win with class and how to lose with grace].



- 5 To assess the progress of each player and to assist them revise and improve their basic skills, technique and performance. For example:
 - Batsmen must be taught how to build an innings, how to approach different targets and how to handle different types of bowling.
 - Bowlers must be taught to look for batsmen's weaknesses, how to bowl a variety of deliveries, when to use the crease and how to bowl in varying circumstances.
 - The wicketkeeper must improve reflexes, learn how to keep on different types of pitches, when to stand back and when to stand up, and how to keep to different bowlers.
 - The captain must be assisted in handling his/her players, and helped with tactics and field placings.

After you have defined the skills and tactics you want your team to learn during the season, you can plan how to teach them to your players at practices. But be flexible! If your players are having difficulty learning a skill or tactic, take some extra time until they understand it - even if it means disrupting your plan.

8 During The Season

As the season progresses it is essential then as a coach:

- 1 To vary practices in order:
 - To keep them interesting.
 - To meet the needs of the team and individual players.
 - To take into account the team's fixture list or draw so provision can be made for special types of practice prior to certain matches or a tournament, or to counter the conditions at a specific venue.
 - To allow players to rehearse previously taught skills, especially those they are having difficulty grasping.
- 2 To develop a number of alternative options, so that if it rains or facilities are not available, practice need not be cancelled.
- 3 To continually assess, and where necessary refine your approach to ensure the goals set for the team and individual players are being achieved.

Designing a Practice Plan

A **PRACTICE PLAN** is a written plan that outlines your practice; reminding you what you want to do and when you want to do it. You may be the type of coach that can organise a practice off the top of your head and accomplish what you want in the desired time. For most of us a practice plan is a critical part of a running a successful practice session. It provides a written outline with enough detail to allow us to run a practice session in a structured and organised manner.



A practice session is more effective when it is planned with objectives and a structure, and it forms part of an overall coaching plan in which skills and tactic awareness are progressively taught and developed.

To assist you as a coach to successfully plan, organise and run a practice, each session should be 90-120 minutes in duration and structured around the following practice plan format:

A PRACTICE PLAN FORMAT	
DATE:	SESSION NUMBER:
TIME:	VENUE:
MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE SESSION:	
REQUIREMENTS - EQUIPMENT and FACILITIES:	
SESSION OUTLINE:	
1 INTRODUCTION: [5 minutes]	
2 WARM UP: [10 minutes]	
3 TYPE OF SESSION: [65 minutes]	
4 COOL DOWN: [5 minutes]	
5 CONCLUSION: [5 minutes]	
EVALUATION:	

Objectives

A practice plan should start with **OBJECTIVES**. These are the aims, reasons for, or focus of the practice. They are **WHAT** you want to accomplish during the practice session. Try and keep these to three to five bullet points.

Most of your objectives will focus on the needs of the team and individual players and will be derived from your coaching plan, and your observation and analysis as a coach of the previous, current or upcoming match, the competition format, possible opposition and the conditions likely to be encountered. Once you have established the objectives for a practice session they will determine much of the structure of the practice in terms of the type of practice, the facilities and equipment required, and the skills and drills to be taught.

'Plan your practice to accomplish your objectives.'



Session Outline

Introduction

5 minutes

- The introduction establishes your control - needing to listen carefully to instructions sets the tone for the session.
- Players should be greeted as they arrive and gathered together for a brief outline of the objectives and requirements of the session.
- This is the time to also provide or receive any feedback on the previous match and/or practice session.

Warm Up

10 minutes

- The warm-up activities assist players to prepare for the increased physical demands of the practice session and to focus their minds on the requirements of the session.
- The warm-up activities should be competitive drills with a bat or a ball designed to reinforce the batting skill of running between wickets and the skills of fielding, together with some static or dynamic stretching to limber muscles and reduce the risk of injury.

NB: Ensure warm ups and cool downs are more cricket skill drills rather than physical fitness exercises.

Type of Session

65 minutes

- The type of session - net, open wicket, skills, planning and preparation or an alternative option, or a combination of these - will depend upon your overall coaching plan, the availability of facilities, the needs of your players, and of course, the weather.
- Devote part of each session to having players practise previously taught basic skills, before building on these by teaching players new skills to practise each session.
- Ensure that each session:
 - Has a structure and objectives.
 - Is varied, interesting and challenging.
 - Is well organised and run.
 - Is competitive, but also cooperative, with players assisting and encouraging each other.
 - Attempts to cover all skill areas - batting, bowling, fielding and wicketkeeping - using competitive drills and modified games to create game-like conditions.
 - Maximises participation by giving every player something to work on.
 - Has plenty of equipment.



Cool Down

5 minutes

- This section allows players to wind down and recover after the exercise of the previous skills section. This may include light jogging, performing simple fielding skills, and some stretching.

Conclusion

5 minutes

- While the players are recovering, the conclusion allows you to:
 - To ensure all the equipment has been collected.
 - To provide constructive feedback and comment on the efforts of the players during the session [and thank supporting parents].
 - To summarise the main points of the session with several key questions.
 - To encourage the players to continue practising some of the skills in their own time.
 - To clarify the arrangements for the next practice or this week's match.

Evaluation

Once you have completed a practice jot down how the session went. What worked well? What did not work well and what you would do differently to improve the effectiveness of your next practice session? It is also important to note the skills you need your team and/or individual players to work on in future sessions.



A SAMPLE PRACTICE SESSION PLAN

DATE: Wednesday 12 November

SESSION NUMBER: 6

TIME: 3.45 - 5.15pm

VENUE: School field and nets

MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE SESSION:

- To prepare for a one day game - briefly discuss batting targets [i.e. run targets per 10 overs].
- To have batsmen practice turning over the strike by placing the ball into gaps [use marker cones in the net to show field placements] in the field to ensure run targets are achieved.
- To get bowlers to put batsmen under pressure and restrict run scoring by bowling to set fields and have an 'umpire' call 'no-balls' and 'wides'.
- To encourage fielders to attack the ball in the infield and return it quickly and accurately to the wicketkeeper/bowler.

REQUIREMENTS - EQUIPMENT and FACILITIES:

- 2 bats, 3 sets of batting pads and gloves [one set for left-hand batsmen], 3 boxes, 1 set of wicketkeeper's pads, gloves and inners, 3 sets of stumps, 10 cricket balls, 6 marker cones.
- Availability of school artificial nets - 2 lanes.

SESSION OUTLINE:

1 INTRODUCTION: [5 minutes]

- Discuss with the team last Saturday's match. Identify match highlights and what needs to be covered to improve performance and also to be worked on to prepare for the first one-day game of the season.

2 WARM UP: [10 minutes]

- Use a running between wickets drill to warm up.

3 TYPE OF SESSION: [65 minutes] [Net Session]

- Explain to players the objectives of the net session.
- Divide the team into 3 groups of 4 players - give each group something to work on:
 - GROUP A - 1 batsman, 3 slow and/or spin bowlers in net 1
 - GROUP B - 1 batsman, 3 medium and/or fast bowlers in net 2

NB: i. Each batsman to have 10 minutes batting - 5 minutes in each net against the different types of bowler then change over - with the aim of placing the ball in the gaps between the marker cones.



CONTINUED

ii. Bowlers in each net alternate the 'umpiring' role and/or record key performance indicators.

- GROUP C - Drill 1 - 1 wicketkeeper, 3 fielders - attacking the ball and underarm throwing.

NB: After each interval of 10 minutes groups rotate to ensure everyone gets the opportunity to bat, bowl, field and wicketkeep.

4 COOL DOWN: [5 minutes]

- Use a close catching drill to cool down.

5 CONCLUSION: [5 minutes]

- Reinforce the main points of the session in terms of what has been taught.
- Briefly discuss tactics for this week's game.
- Remind players about this week's game - opposition, venue, travel arrangements and meeting time.
- Thank players for the session and encourage them to do their own practice at home.

EVALUATION:

- Evaluate how the session went. Identify areas you can improve on and the team and individual players need to practise in future sessions.
- Running between wickets, especially 'backing up' and 'calling'.
- Bowlers bowling to their fields [Bowlers to think about setting a field for their bowling].
- Batsmen placing the ball in the gaps.

End of Season

The end of the season offers a time as a coach for reflection and review. It provides an ideal opportunity to evaluate your own approach and performance, and also that of the team and individual players in relation to their goals and objectives for the season.

"A good team coach...

strives to create an environment where every player wants to play again next season."

[John F. Reid, 2000, Team Coaching, Keynote address to New Zealand Cricket Coaches' Association Conference, p12]