

Varsity Practice Organization: Reps! Reps! Reps!

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In twenty nine years as a head coach, I have been trying to improve the tempo and efficiency of our practices. I think that we are finally getting close to something I like. For many years, I organized my practice like I remember my college practices. Something like this:

Our tempo was slow, with a lot of players standing around coaches standing around while the head coach or coordinator stopped the play to correct something, or walk through the play. We really didn't get a lot of repetitions, just a lot of talk. Water breaks lasted from five to sometimes 15 minutes, with players and coaches taking a break together.

Warm up and stretch took 20 minutes while the players drew it out as long as possible and the coaches waited for it to get done. Individual drills often were good drills that we copied from colleges at clinics, but they didn't always carry over to our system.

The worst periods were group and team time, where the coach would select plays at random and we would be lined up against our defense anywhere on the field. The offensive starters and the few who rotated in would run the plays, while defensive players made up the scout team, while starters waited on the sidelines for their turn.

I believe the old way really limited the number of repetitions each player got on a daily basis and our tempo made the day seem to last forever! We lacked enthusiasm and I think our players got stale and bored.

A major change was for us to use the summer (June/July) to work hard on our drills. We work out three days weekly and have to do two week camp in July. Those days are built around drills to start each workout. Because of this, we don't really do many drills when pre-season practice starts. We just review them for 5-10 minutes per day. The rest of the practice is getting reps! A typical practice looks like this:

3:45 = Defense starts watching film of our opponent

4:00 = Specialist and offense go out,

defense continues to watch film, unless they are specialists

A. Specialists = Punters, kickers, holders, snappers, and returners work on their specialty

B. Offense = "Noose drill" – QB's, RB's, Centers and all receivers

a. Centers snap to QB, then steps to block a nose guard, receivers work on release and in a five yard area, he plants hard and squares up to QB. QB works on footwork and throws to receiver; receiver tucks ball and turns straight up for five yards. All offensive linemen are centers,

"The Old Days"

Warm up = 10 minutes

Stretch = 10 minutes

Individual = 30 minutes

Group = 30 minutes

Team = 30 minutes

Special Teams = 30 minutes

Conditioning = Until the coach was happy

or nose guards. All work at about half speed.

4:15 = Warm up – Defense comes out, all players go through a warm up consisting of position specific drills with their position coach. Any stretching needs to be done during this period, if necessary. Each coach is responsible for warming up his players. (15 min.)

4:20 = Individual – Each position coach gets this period to rep our offensive plays for that week.

A. Offensive line can continue drills, but must get to the plays of the week, or protection of the week during this period.

B. QB, RB line up on the line split hose and each back runs each running play we have two times. QBs snap to each



other and we go as fast as we can. (10 minutes, 20 plays)

C. Receivers move to releases, route running or stalk blocking.

D. Defense is doing similar breakdown work (10 minutes)

4:30 = Special Teams – Punt team every day – Scout defense vs. punt #1 and #2. Left over offensive players go to the other end and run screen drill, routes on air, PAT-N-GO, or blitz pick up. Rest of team = Drink water. (10 min., 20 plays)

4:40 = Inside/outside – Scripted 7 on 7 – (1 vs. 1 and 2 vs. 2)

A. Two groups of QB, RB, and receivers go every other play, defense rotates in the secondary while one set of linebackers plays coverage, the other set is involved in inside run session.

B. At halfway point, QB, RB and LBs switch from inside (run) to outside (7 on 7) and vice versa. Plays are repeated.

C. Both inside and outside are filmed from end zone, if possible (20 minutes, 40 plays)

5:00 = Special teams #2

A. Another special team works against a scout team.

B. Rest of offense goes to the end of the field for

a. Screen drill, routes on air, blitz pick up, etc. (10 min., 20 plays)

C. Rest of team – Water (10 min.)

5:10 = Team – Scripted

A. Offense vs. Scout Team

a. Receiver coach sets secondary each play

b. Offensive line coach sets defensive front seven and places the ball on proper hash/yard line

c. Offensive coordinator follows script

i. Back up QB signals in plays

ii. 20 minutes, 40 plays

B. Defense vs. Scout Team

a. Younger coach is scout team QB

b. Plays are run from cards

c. Defensive line sometimes stays on line scrimmage so LBs and DBs can see backfield action (20 minutes)

C. Both groups are filmed

5:30 = Film of that day's practice – 30 minutes

A. Offense/Defense in separate rooms, if possible

We have used less time than the old format, we actually start full speed physically practicing at 4:15 and end at 5:30. One hour and fifteen minutes of repetition has really helped our execution improve. More players are involved and learning. We have run approximately 140 offensive plays in one practice, if all goes well.

Keys to efficiency:

1. No water breaks

a. Water must be portable

b. Managers must move around practice at all times, pushing water on

players

c. Players must be taught to drink every chance they get between plays, or drills

2. Use a timer

a. Get an automatic clock, if possible

b. Use a manager with an air horn

c. When horn goes off, everyone must move

3. Coaches must coach on the run, can't stop the tempo, especially the head coach

a. Use a pre-practice meeting to go over stuff

b. Talk during film session at end of practice

c. Can't fix it on the field, must be done in film meeting, can't run it "one more time"

4. Script Everything

a. Each coach and managers has a copy

b. Coaches can take turns scripting a session each day

5. Set up field before players arrive

a. Train your managers

We are still trying to improve our practice schedule every year, but I think we are getting a lot more done than ever before. Our players get accustomed to the fast pace and we actually get in shape by practicing faster.

We obviously adjust the time segments during the season depending on what kind of things need more work, but we try to keep the actual practice time under 90 minutes.

Our players love it.

Our coaches love it.

We get more plays run.

We condition while playing the game.

We hydrate better than we did before.

We watch more film (best teacher there is)

We stay fresh (mentally and physically)

Good luck and I hope you can use some of these ideas -kimnelson@edina.k12.mn.us

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