

The Importance of a Warm-Up

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To often warm-ups are used as time filler or time for coaches to quickly prepare there training sessions. So the players are sent off for a jog around the field or in many cases around the three baseball diamonds and then we give them time to stretch. We are then disappointed that the players are not ready to play. This would be a good warm-up for someone running cross-country or track because we just prepared are players to run at one speed in a straight line which doesn't happen very often if at all during a soccer game.

In general, the warm-up should consist of a mid to moderate intensity activity that introduces a soccer technique, or basic decisions related to the tactical objective of the practice, and allow players to get a lot of repetitions while preparing the body and focusing the mind for more rigorous activity.

The ball is the key element here although the playing space may also be important, perhaps defined by a grid and the size adjusted in order to provide more or less pressure without opposition. Toward the end of the activity players can be encouraged to move at game pace to increase the demand on their performance and further prepare them for the next phase of practice. Static stretching of the large muscle groups should be done at the end or interspersed throughout the warm-up.

For example, if you're going to focus on dribbling – specifically, turning away from trouble to maintain individual possession:

Each player has a ball and the activity challenges players to move in and out of traffic with the ball under control, to turn or change direction with the ball to avoid collisions, and to recognize and move into open space.

The coach observes the behavior of the players in this environment and makes coaching points to the group or to individuals as they work. The skill is isolated in a very simple form but players are moving, controlling the ball, and recognizing situations that are realistic to the game.

In closing, a warm-up is that transition activity from our non-soccer activities during the day to being in the right mindset and focused for soccer training. Here are a few variations of the activity above:

Have the players “tag as many of their teammates as possible without getting tagged themselves”. Right away you have added the element of competition, awareness of their surroundings, and getting their head up. Play for 30 seconds; whoever gets tagged the least wins, or can they improve their score.

Another competitive game you could add to the end of the activity above would be “**Knockout**”. The objective is simply to keep your ball and kick everyone else’s ball out of the defined area or grid:

When a player’s ball gets kicked out of the grid, they have two ways to get back into the game. If they can get to it before it stops moving they get a free pass back into the game. If the ball does stop moving before they get to it they must perform a skill, i.e. three ball juggles, to get back into the game.

This way, players are asked to perform a technique or skill through a competitive game.