

# 3

## ORGANISING TRAINING SESSIONS

*Jose María Buceta*

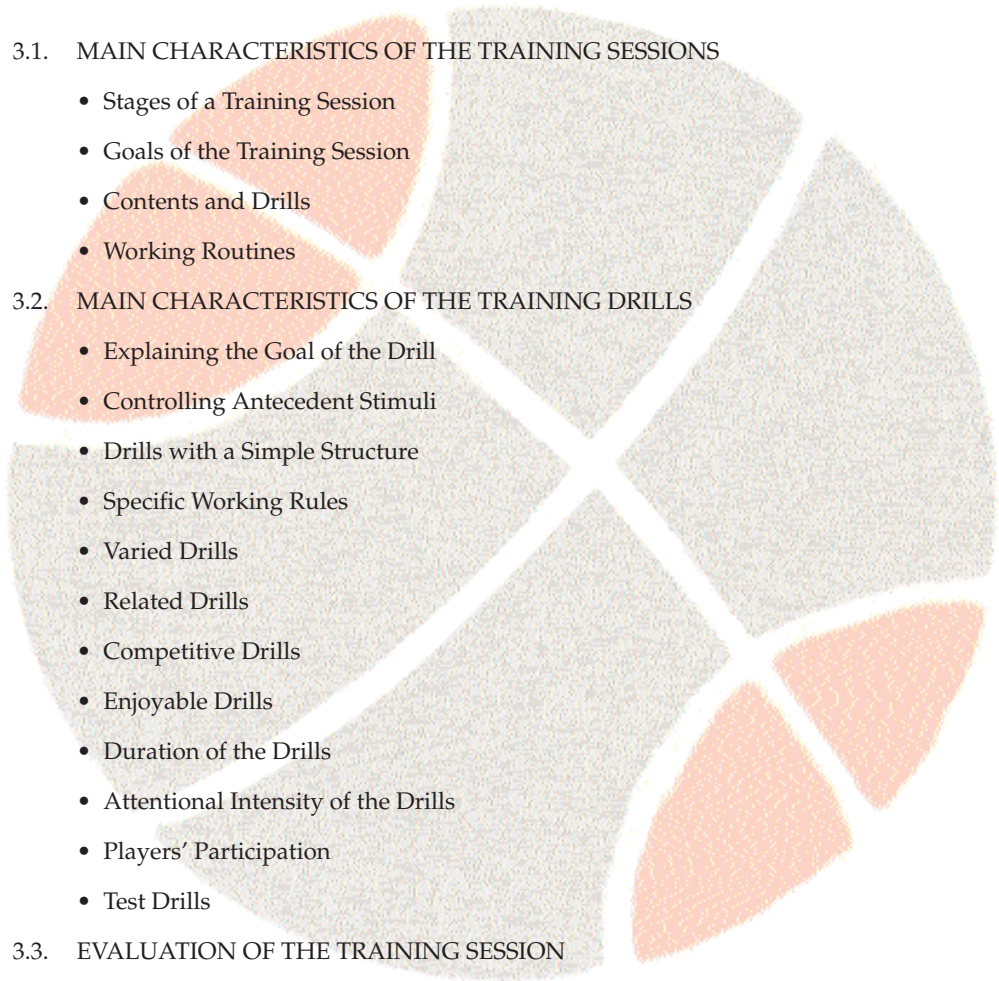
### 3.1. MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TRAINING SESSIONS

- Stages of a Training Session
- Goals of the Training Session
- Contents and Drills
- Working Routines

### 3.2. MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TRAINING DRILLS

- Explaining the Goal of the Drill
- Controlling Antecedent Stimuli
- Drills with a Simple Structure
- Specific Working Rules
- Varied Drills
- Related Drills
- Competitive Drills
- Enjoyable Drills
- Duration of the Drills
- Attentional Intensity of the Drills
- Players' Participation
- Test Drills

### 3.3. EVALUATION OF THE TRAINING SESSION



### 3.1. MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TRAINING SESSIONS

After planning the whole season, the mesocycles and the microcycles, the coach must organise each training session.

The coach should plan and schedule the session, bearing in mind duration, physical workload and psychological load. Specifically, he/she must define the goals, the contents and the drills of the session and decide on the schedule, distributing the drills throughout the available time (see Table-8).

#### Stages of a Training Session

In general, a training session should be divided into three stages:

- In the first stage, the aim is to *progressively prepare the players* to be in top physical and mental condition when they reach the central stage of the practice. Here should be included warm-up drills without the ball such as running, stretching, etc., and simple drills with the ball (low physical and psychological load) that, little by little, require greater concentration and physical effort.
- In the second stage, the coach should incorporate the *main contents of the session*, those requiring greater physical and psychological effort, combining drills of greater and lesser intensity (physically and psychologically speaking) in the proportion he/she deems most appropriate.
- In the third stage, the coach should *progressively reduce the physical and psychological intensity*, although not necessarily simultaneously. Thus, in the first part of this third stage, he/she could include a physically intensive drill requiring low concentration (for example, running up and down the court to improve physical shape or playing a game in which the players are free to play as they please). Or he/she can organise it the other way around, a psychologically intense drill with a low physical workload (for example, a shooting contest). Then it would be appropriate to end up with exercises that require little physical and mental effort, basically stretching exercises.



#### Practical Exercises

- Programme a training session of an hour and a quarter for a mini-basketball team.
- Programme a training session of an hour and a half for a team of 13/14-year-olds.
- Programme a training session of two hours for a team of 15/18-year-olds.

DATE: _____	TIME: _____
VOLUME: _____	INTENSITY: _____
PSYCHOLOGICAL LOAD: _____	

	GOALS	CONTENTS-DRILLS
<b>DEFENSE</b>		
<b>OFFENSE</b>		
<b>OTHERS</b>		

<b>SCHEDULE</b>	
<b>COMMENTS</b>	

**Table 8.** Example of tool to organise single training sessions.

## Goals of the Training Session

The coach must decide what the main goals of the training session will be and, based on this, select the contents to be included and the most appropriate drills, taking into account the time available and the physical and psychological loads that he/she considers most appropriate at a given time.

The goals of each session should be few and very clear to the coach. Two serious mistakes are:

- trying to do too much in a single practice or a single drill;
- the coach not knowing clearly what he/she wants to achieve during the training session as a whole and with each specific drill.

In general, the goals of a practice session can be grouped into four main blocks:

- **learning:** the objective is for the players to learn or perfect new skills or skills they have not yet mastered, both technical fundamentals (passing, dribbling, shooting, etc.) as well as tactical decisions (1 on 1, 2 on 2, 3 on 3 decisions, etc.);

- **repetition:** the objective is to rehearse skills that players have already mastered in order to consolidate them, perfect them or favour physiological change, as the case may be (for example: shooting series of twenty shots or running and passing during ten minutes);

- **exposure to real game conditions:** the objective here is for the players to train under real game conditions (mainly stressful conditions) so that they get used to these conditions;

- **specific game preparation:** the objective is to prepare the team to confront specific rivals who present specific difficulties.

- For a mini-basketball team, learning goals should predominate and, to a lesser degree, repetition goals. It is not appropriate to spend training time on the other two areas.
- For teams of 13/14-year-olds, learning and repetition should also predominate but it is also a good idea, to some degree, for the players to practice skills mastered in *non-stressful* game conditions. However, it is not appropriate for this age group to spend training time on specific game preparation.

- For teams of 15/18-year-olds, learning, repetition, exposure to game conditions, and specific preparation for games should be adequately combined.



## Contents and Drills

Contents included in the practice sessions should correspond to the goals (perfecting foot movement in 1 on 1 defense; repeating passes already mastered, etc.) and should be chosen based on the criteria discussed in the previous chapter.

In general, it is a good idea for the coach to combine offense goals contents with defense goals contents, although he/she may decide to emphasise one or the other.

In order to work with all of the contents, the coach should design specific drills. For example, to work on 1 on 1 defense, the coach should design a drill specifically for this purpose.

The drills are essential for making the most of practice time. A session made up of good, well-coordinated drills will benefit the players much more than a session with inappropriate or poorly coordinated ones.

Later on, we will discuss the main characteristics of training drills, and examples will be given, in the corresponding chapters, of drills for each of the three age groups (mini-basketball, 13/14-year-olds, 15/18-year-olds).

## Working Routines

Coaches should establish working routines that the players are familiar with. In order to do this, they should look at questions such as the following:

- How early should the players get to practice? When should they be dressed and ready to start training?
- How should the practice start out? Will the coach meet with the players in the locker room before going out on the court? Should the players go out when they are ready and start to train by themselves until the coach calls them? Should the players go out on the court and wait until the coach calls them before doing anything else?

- Who is in charge of the material needed for the practice? Who is in charge of the balls? Who picks them up after practice? Who has the key to the locker room? Who is responsible for the blackboard? etc.
- What happens if a player gets injured?; Who takes care of him?; What should be done?

Coaches should also establish simple rules when speaking to the players so that they pay attention to them.

\* For example: they could use a whistle when they want the players to stop what they are doing and listen to them; and they could whistle twice for the players to go over to them.

\* Coaches should also establish that when they meet with the players to talk to them, they should not be dribbling the ball, tying their shoes, talking to each other or doing anything else, but should look at them and pay attention to what they are saying.

Nevertheless, in order to keep the players' attention in these situations, coaches should make sure that their explanations are *short* and *very precise*.

Coaches should also establish procedures such as requiring the players to ask permission to leave the practice session (for example, to use the bathroom), concerning the type of clothes they should wear, whether or not they can sit down or drink water between drills, the relationship they should maintain with each other during practice (for example, it would be a good idea to forbid them to make negative comments to each other), the relationship maintained with visitors (parents, friends, etc.) or related to any other aspect necessary for the training session to work well.



### Practical Exercise

- Make a list of working routines that you consider interesting for the organisation of your team's training sessions.

## 3.2. MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TRAINING DRILLS

### Explaining the Goals of the Drill

Before each drill, the coach should very briefly explain the goals of the drill to his/her players, what it is exactly that he/she wants the players to do.



This way, it will be more likely that the players concentrate on these goals and work better. And, if the goals are attractive and attainable, the players will be more motivated and will therefore concentrate harder.

*The explanations given should be very brief.* The players cannot be standing still for a long time, listening to the coach give them long explanations. Coaches need only tell them, clearly and briefly, what the drill consists of and what they have to do.



## Controlling Antecedent Stimuli

*Antecedent stimuli* are those stimuli present in the drill (position on the court, participating players, balls, baskets, etc.). In order to control the players' attention and get the drill to achieve its purpose, the coach should make sure that all the stimuli relevant to the goals are present, *eliminating those that are irrelevant*. In general, the fewer the stimuli, the greater the concentration.

\* Thus, for example, sometimes it would be a good idea to reduce court space, working with small groups of players and limiting the actions permitted.

## Drills with a Simple Structure

Drills with a simple structure help the players to concentrate better on the goal and the contents of the drill. Drills with a complex structure, on the other hand, force the players to devote part of their attention to adapting to the structure, in detriment to concentrating on the key aspects.

\* For example: if the aim is to practise shooting, a simple drill will help the players to concentrate better on the task of shooting.



### Practical Exercise

- Choose an offensive fundamental and organise a simple drill to work on it.

## Specific Working Rules

Drills can be complicated only, and never excessively, by adding *working rules* that serve to centre the players' attention on their goal.

\* For example: the aim is for the players to dribble using their weaker hand. Half-court 3 on 3 games are organised, the sole goal being to dribble with the weak hand. If a player dribbles with the other hand (the stronger one) his/her team loses possession of the ball (working rule). This way, the players will pay more attention to the goal of the drill, which is to dribble only with their weaker hand.



### Practical Exercise

- Choose an offensive fundamental and organise a simple drill using a *working rule* that will help the players to concentrate on the specific behaviour that is the objective of the drill.

## Varied Drills

Just as drills using a simple structure help the players to concentrate on the goal, using the same drill again and again leads to lower motivation and concentration. For this reason, it is a good idea to vary the drills by changing either the structure or the goals or both.

\* For example: a different drill can be used to keep working on passing the ball in a straight line, or the same structure can be used but now to work on dribbling, or the coach can change to another type of drill to work on dribbling.



## Related Drills

If after one drill, another one is done similar to the first in its goal and/or its structure, the players will be better prepared mentally to perform the second, especially if the level of attention required *progressively increases*. Let's look at an example:

- The coach can begin with a drill with a *single goal* and a *limited number of stimuli*: in pairs, reduced space, with one ball per pair; the players should move without the ball and pass the ball to each other; the player receiving the ball should look at the basket while the player who is passing should immediately change position;
- the players continue with another drill having the *same goal* but with *added stimuli*: 2 on 2 situation, playing in a larger but still limited area; the offensive players should get free to receive the pass. If the defensive players steal the ball they change to offense and the offense changes to defense. The goal is still for the players to look at the basket when receiving the ball and change position as soon as they pass;



- the players now move to another drill, keeping a *similar structure* but with a *different goal*: still 2 on 2 but the goal now is to score using left-hand lay-ups;
- the players do another drill, keeping the *same structure* and *combining the two previous goals*: 2 on 2, the players should make at least three passes before the lay-up; the player receiving should look at the basket;

the player passing changes immediately to another position; players can only score using left-hand lay-ups;

- the players now change to another drill (*change of structure*) with the *same goals* but *adding more stimuli*: 4 on 4 half-court game; the players receiving the ball should look at the basket; the players passing should immediately change position; players must make at least five passes before doing the lay-up; they can only score using left-hand lay-ups.



### Practical Exercise

- Organise a sequence of four related drills, changing the structure or the goal of each one.

## Competitive Drills

Organising drills where the players compete among themselves or against themselves is a way to increase motivation and concentration, as long as they have enough resources to be successful. Here are some examples:

- divide the team into four groups, two at each basket. Organise a competition to see which group does more left-handed lay-ups in three minutes;
- divide the team into groups of three players each. Each group executes chest passes running from one basket to the other (at least three or four), ending with a lay-up. Each basket made is worth two points, with one point taken away for every pass not made in a straight line or not completed. The drill is to last five minutes; the point is to see which team makes more points. The second phase repeats the same drill but the aim is to see which teams can improve their first-phase score;
- two players play 1 on 1 (with specific working rules) until one makes three baskets;
- divide the whole team around all baskets available. The players work in pairs and shoot simultaneously (the player who shoots gets the ball and passes to the other player who is waiting, etc.). In three minutes, they have to make the maximum number of baskets. At the end of the time limit, the score is recorded. Periodically (once or twice a week) this drill can be repeated to see if the players can improve their top score and set a new record.

If used correctly (posing challenges that can really be achieved) and not used too often, these competitive drills increase motivation while incorporating into the practice sessions an important element in training young players, which is to *get them used to competing*.



### Practical Exercise

- Choose an age group (mini-basketball, 13/14-year-olds, 15/18-year-olds) and organise two competitive drills: one between different players and another in which the players compete against themselves. In both cases, keep in mind that the goal of the competition should be attractive and attainable.

## Enjoyable Drills

*Having fun is essential*, especially for younger players. In mini-basketball teams, the coach's main objective should be that the children enjoy themselves while training. For teams of 13/14-year-olds and 15/18-year-olds, too, this is a very important objective because serious training is not incompatible with having fun.

Enjoyable drills should not be disorganised or unproductive. Quite the opposite; they compensate the psychological load of the training session and help the training process by making use of interesting contents that work better in this type of drill.

Therefore, doing enjoyable drills is not to be confused with letting each player do whatever he/she wants or making an effort only when he/she wants to. Enjoyable drills are those that are attractive to the players, in a relaxed, non-stressful setting that allows the player to feel at ease and have a good time, but they should also have a purpose, working rules and require a certain level of performance.

\* For example: an enjoyable drill for a mini-basketball team might be the following: a group of players, each with a ball in the paint; they have to dribble the ball and try to get the other players' ball away without losing their own. The last player wins.

In this type of drill, the players work in a relaxed setting and have fun, but the drill has a purpose, working rules and requires a degree of performance, making it doubly useful: the players have a good time and they are working on contents that are important to their development as players.

## Duration of the Drills

When deciding how long the drills will last, the coach should take into account aspects such as *boredom* and *psychological fatigue* which lead to decreased concentration.

The drills should last long enough for the players to have enough time to understand and assimilate the contents, but if they go on too long, concentration decreases and, from that moment, productivity decreases as well. This is especially important for younger players.

In general, **the more attractive drills can last longer while the less attractive, more routine drills, should be shorter.**



## Attentional Intensity of the Drills

Concerning *attentional intensity*, some drills require the players to concentrate more than others. If the coach programmes various drills that require



a high level of concentration together in a practice session, the players will tire and their concentration will decrease.

For this reason, it is important to schedule *attentional rest periods* throughout the practice session by either planning complete rest periods or using drills that do not require a high level of concentration.

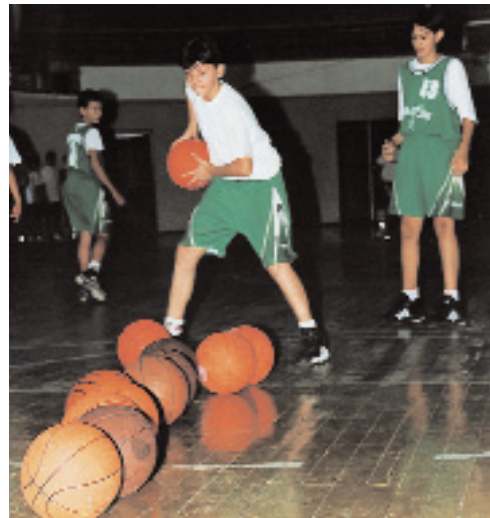


### Practical Exercise

- Design three drills that do not require a high level of concentration.

## Players' Participation

The coach should design drills in which all of the players participate frequently. For example, it is common to see training sessions where the children are lined up in a long line to do lay-ups; the children have to wait more than a minute to have their five-second turn (sometimes longer if the coach stops the drill to correct someone). It is also common to see practice sessions where some of the players spend a long time sitting down while their companions play a game.



Even if the resources available are limited (for example, a single ball and a single basket), the coach has to use his/her imagination to keep his/her players actively involved during the entire session (with the intensity that he/she esteems appropriate in each case). The lack of resources is no excuse, simply a problem that the coach should compensate for as well as he/she can.

\* For example: it is a good idea for the coach to divide the players into small groups, establishing specific goals for each group. If there are not enough balls or baskets, he/she will have to set up turns. This way, some groups can do drills without the ball and without a basket (defensive moves, fakes without the ball, plays without the ball, etc.), while others do drills with the ball. Then, the players switch.

The players should never be standing around except for short breaks to recuperate from an intense effort or if the number of players present makes this necessary.

If the number of players does not allow all of them to participate at the same time (for example, there are eleven players and the idea is to play a 5 on 5 game), the players who cannot participate should be the lowest number possible (in this case, one) and for a very short period, with the players rotating frequently.



### Practical Exercises

- Organise a drill in which the thirteen mini-basketball players who have come to practice are actively involved; you only have three balls and one basket.
- Organise a drill in which the seven 13/14-year-olds who have come to practice are actively involved; you only have one ball and two baskets.
- Organise a drill in which the twelve 15/16-year-olds who have come to practice are actively involved, taking maximum advantage of the available means: five balls and three baskets.

## Test Drills

If the goal of the training session is learning technical or tactical skills, the coach could include short test drills so that he/she can see how well the players have assimilated the work done.

Basically, these drills consist of incorporating more stimuli in such a way that the players have to concentrate on more requisites. If, when faced with this more complex situation, the players do not apply the skills that they have been learning, it would indicate that these skills are not yet sufficiently mastered and consequently, that the players still need specific work in a restricted setting.

\* For example: let's consider that, in a previous drill, the players had the goal of learning to take the decision of making left-hand lay-ups. They worked half-court in a 2 on 2 game during which they could only shoot using left-hand lay-ups.



\* Now, in the *test drill*, the coach organises a full-court 4 on 4 drill (more stimuli and consequently, greater demand) and watches to see if the players make left-hand lay-ups when they have the chance or if they continue to use their right hand. If the latter be the case, the coach may conclude that the goal of making left-hand lay-ups still needs more specific training.



### Practical Exercise

- Organise a simple drill to work on a fundamental and then organise a test drill to check up to what point learning has been consolidated.

### 3.3. EVALUATION OF THE TRAINING SESSION

At the end of each session, coaches should make a brief evaluation of everything that happened in order to better control their team's training process.

To do this, they could use a simple tool such as can be seen in Table-9, which permits them to compare their original plan with what actually happened during the practice and note down their most relevant observations concerning it. In this way, as soon as the session ends and before they forget anything, they can evaluate what took place and reflect on it in writing, in just five or ten minutes.

Obviously there are more sophisticated procedures for evaluating a practice session. But they will be totally useless if, because of their complexity, the coach forgets to use them or gives up after a few weeks. It is therefore more realistic for the coach to use a very simple procedure which he/she can easily incorporate into his/her daily duties.

The previous procedure can be completed with a more in-depth reflection at the end of each week. In this case, coaches could use a tool such as that in Table-10 to assess the work done during practice that week, dividing it into three categories: defense, offense and others. This information will help them control the week's events and prepare the training schedule for the following week.



<b>TRAINING SESSION RECORDING</b>
-----------------------------------

DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

GOALS: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

WORK PLANNED BEFORE SESSION	WORK ACTUALLY DONE
COMMENTS	

**Table 9.** *After training sessions coaches may compare work planned before the session and work actually done.*

<b>WEEKLY WORK RECORDING</b>			
WEEK: _____ GOALS: _____ _____			
<b>WORK ACTUALLY DONE</b>			
	<b>DEFENSE</b>	<b>OFFENSE</b>	<b>OTHERS</b>
MONDAY			
WEDNESDAY			
FRIDAY			
COMMENTS			

**Table 10.** Coaches may record work actually done during the week.



### Test Exercise-6

- Using the information from this chapter, mark the following statements True or False. The correct answers are at the end of the book.

	True	False
1. Before the training session, the coach should decide on the goals, later improvising appropriate drills on the court.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. Enjoyable drills should not have any rules.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. The antecedent stimuli of a drill are those which the coach uses to reward the players.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Drills should be varied in terms of goals but not with respect to structure.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. In general, organising a training session around related drills helps make practice time more productive.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. Competitive drills can be set up between players or between groups of players as well as with a player or a group against himself /herself or themselves.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. The important thing in competitive drills is to compete, regardless of the goal and the contents.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. For mini-basketball teams, the goals related to specific game preparation should be almost as important as learning goals.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. Attentional intensity should be high in all drills.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. Working with small groups simultaneously is not good because the coach cannot pay attention to everyone at the same time.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. Comparing the work done in a session that has just finished with the work scheduled previously for that same session helps the coach to control the team's training process.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. In general, it is a good idea to combine goals and contents related to offense and defense.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>