

LEVEL-O CERTIFICATE COURSE IN CRICKET COACHING

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Lecture 61: Efficient Conduct of a Practice Session

Hello everyone, and welcome. Today, we'll be discussing how to conduct efficient and engaging practice sessions in cricket coaching. To begin with, it's essential to understand the role of the "place of work" — the sports field. Why is this setting so crucial, especially for children? Without formal incentives, children are naturally drawn to sports and play for extended periods. This is not because of structured learning but because of the enjoyment, social connection, and personal growth that sport provides. Unlike the traditional classroom, where subjects like mathematics or history may feel rigid or boring, the sports field offers excitement and interaction. Children come to play because they have fun, make friends, and learn practical, enjoyable skills. Ultimately, as they mature in sport, they also begin to strive for competitiveness and success, to win. But before that, the journey must be enjoyable, skilful, and socially rich.

In coaching, practice sessions are the most effective platform to nurture this journey. Practice allows athletes to deepen their understanding of the sport and refine their technical and tactical skills. It also plays a vital role in building team unity, transforming a group of individuals into a cohesive unit. In a cricket academy, practice sessions occur throughout the day, and they should not be random or monotonous. Rather, they must be purpose-driven and thoughtfully designed.

A good practice session should always be pre-planned and publicly posted. The coach must prepare a detailed schedule in advance, specifying what will be practised and why. Each session must have a clear goal — whether it is to enhance batting, bowling, fielding, or physical conditioning — and should address both team strategies and individual player development needs. Tailoring drills and plans to the players' ages and skill levels ensures that the sessions are both appropriate and effective.

Variation is essential. Practice sessions should include diverse drills that challenge players both mentally and physically. They should also raise players' awareness, especially their tactical thinking and game intelligence. One way to achieve this is to simulate match conditions during training. Match simulations help bridge the gap between practice and real-game scenarios and prepare players to perform under pressure. These simulations

should be age-appropriate and skill-specific, offering the right level of challenge while maintaining fun and enthusiasm.

Fun and enjoyment are not secondary — they are central. An enjoyable practice session is usually loud with laughter, communication, and enthusiasm from the players, often louder than the coach's voice. This is a good sign that players are actively engaged and enjoying the game.

However, a coach will also face challenges during practice. These may include poor running between the wickets, confusion about fielding positions, poor shot selection (especially hitting in the air), and frequent no-balls or loose deliveries. Addressing these issues requires structured, pressure-based training. For example, to improve running between wickets, use drills that apply external pressure, such as timed runs or competition-based pair running. To enhance fielding awareness, integrate theoretical classroom instruction with practical on-field drills, assigning fielders to specific marked positions.

To discourage risky aerial shots, coaches can use a visible cue system. One method is to place a colored tape or rope one meter above the net — instruct players that balls must be played below this line. Field placements can also be reinforced by placing physical markers and involving players directly in strategising.

In the net sessions, ensure there is an umpire-like figure present. Bowlers can place cones or markers indicating where they expect fielders to be. All efforts — bowling, batting, or fielding — must be constantly encouraged and positively reinforced by the coach. Avoid criticism that demoralises. Support from assistants or experienced players can be extremely valuable here.

Video analysis, bowling machines, and varied surfaces (e.g., white backgrounds with white balls) are tools that can enhance learning. Bowling machines are particularly useful when bowlers are unavailable, and they allow for repeated practice of specific shots. However, they don't provide the perceptual cues of live bowling, such as the bowler's run-up and body language, which are vital for shot timing.

Cricket academies should include various types of practice sessions: Net sessions are the most common, helping batters and bowlers find rhythm and consistency. However, these can lose intensity over time. Open wicket sessions simulate match conditions and should be held weekly. They are excellent for developing game awareness and pressure handling.

Skill development sessions focus on specific technical aspects and should be held two to three times a week in smaller groups for more personal coaching. Planning and preparation sessions occur during competition phases, especially the day before a match, focusing on team strategies and individual readiness. Alternative sessions (indoors) are useful during bad weather and can include quizzes, video analysis, and motivational talks to maintain player engagement.

Safety is critical. The playing surface must be secure, bowler run-ups and delivery zones should be clear, and net structures must be tight with no loose areas. Proper lighting and visual backgrounds should be in place. All players must use protective gear, and coaches should supervise transitions between drills to avoid accidents.

Lastly, follow the “Keep It Short and Simple” (KISS) coaching principle. Deliver no more than one or two key points during instruction. This helps players stay focused and reduces cognitive overload. Coaching should aim to build confidence, not overwhelm players with excessive corrections.

This holistic, structured, and player-centred approach — supported by expert frameworks like the ECB Coach Development Framework (source) and the ICC Foundation Coaching Manual (source) — ensures that practice sessions are not only effective but enjoyable and safe.

Thank you, and may your coaching sessions continue to inspire the next generation of cricketers.