

The Importance Of Warming Up

Some may say it is arguable but I think the Warm-up Phase before a practice session or before a match is as important as the main event. Especially with players aged 13 or older and specifically with players at the high school level.

But like other things, the warm-up phase is not given its attention by youth coaches. Most warm-up phases consist of a long jog and some basic static stretches. The most frequently asked questions in regards to warming up are:

- 1) How long should I spend on warming up?
- 2) How hard should the players warm-up?
- 3) How much stretching should we do?
- 4) How much running should we do?

All are good questions.

The warm-up is precisely that -- a phase that gets the players' bodies conditioned for the task at hand, either a practice or a match.

Let's deal with practice sessions first. A practice session should be broken into four phases at the youth and high school level: 1) Warm-up; 2) Technical; 3) Tactical; and 4) Cool-Down. Depending on the age and the level of players, the warm-up phase should be much longer in length than the Cool-Down, but not as long as the Technical or Tactical phases. But it needs to be long enough to accomplish one goal -- prepare the players for the session.

Now, contrary to popular belief, you should not stretch first. What you want to do is begin with a nice, easy "movement" type drill or exercise. Juggling is a great way to begin any practice session's warm-up phase. It's not hard on the body but will get the players moving and also teaches ball-control technique. Do this for 2-3 minutes.

Next, have the players line up along a sideline or goal line and mark out another line in front of them at about 10 yards. All the exercises from here on, will go from the starting line to the 10-yard line. (For high schoolers, have them start at the goal line and use the 18-yard line as the second line.)

Start this phase with some basic Skipping Movements, which are also known as "Dynamic Movements" (see list below). Skip to the second line. Skip Back. Skip to the second line but this time, have your arms straight out to the side at shoulder height and, keeping the elbows locked, make circles with the arms. On the skip back, bend the arms at the elbows, again, keeping them at shoulder height, hands in a fist and facing each other, and perform trunk twists. The next (or last) skipping movement would be one called a "power skip" where the player leaps high into the air on the skipping motion, performing an uppercut punching motion with the opposite hand (left knee up, right hand punches up and vice versa). The skipping movements will get the blood flowing and the heart beating.

Now the player is ready for stretching. And again, contrary to popular belief, static stretching (bending over and touching toes, for example), is not the preferred method. Not that we are going to fully eliminate static stretching from our session. We'll get to them...eventually!

"Dynamic Stretches" are the newest and, in my opinion, the best stretching routines available. The "Dynamic Stretches" (see list below) are designed specifically for the soccer player in that they emulate soccer movements while also stretching the muscles and ligaments used in running.

Once the stretching segment is done the players are now ready for either a movement drill (with or without a ball), a "speed, agility and quickness for soccer" drill, or a "speed, agility and quickness" segment. This is up to you, the coach, at this point and would depend on what you are

trying to accomplish with the practice session. If it is pre-season, you'd probably want to do a SAQ segment and get the players performing drills to help their fitness level.

>>>>>Coaching Point: All speed work must be done at the start of practice, not in the middle or at the end!<<<<<<<

Speed drills should contain as much Change of Pace and Change of Direction as is possible since soccer is a sport of not just linear (straight line) movement. Players are required to not only go from a walk to a sprint or a jog to a sprint in a split second, but many times that need to do so while also changing direction. As a certified "Speed, Agility & Quickness" trainer, I emphasize such SAQ concepts as planting, turning, decelerating, accelerating and so on.

One of the best drills to teach proper SAQ technique is one I call "CoP/CoD" -- Change of Pace/Change of Direction (see http://totalsoccerft.com/warmup/warmup_cop_cod.pdf). The beauty of this progressive drill is that it can be applied to any age or level of player and with the final segment being games of "tag", players will enjoy it. Many of the teams I train, actually ask for this drill. Imagine that: players asking for a drill that really does work them hard and teach them proper running mechanics!

If overall fitness and agility are something you want to accomplish in the warm-up, check out the two "Half-Field Fitness Circuits" (http://totalsoccerft.com/group_drills/fitness_circuit.pdf)

Once you've done a movement drill or speed exercise, end the warm-up session with some basic static stretching routines as toe-touches, hurdler (groin) stretch, trunk twists, etc. The warm-up should end with the players jogging 20-30 yards.

The whole practice warm-up session should take a minimum of 15 minutes and can last up to 30 minutes, depending on the age of the players.

PRE-GAME WARM-UPS

From what I've seen the past few years, Pre-Game Warm-ups are a crap-shoot at the youth level. Most coaches do not have a consistent program setup prior to a game. I would think that the main reason is that they don't have enough time to do a proper warm-up. I think it is important from the get-go, from Under-8 level up to high school, to have an organized, pre-game warm-up.

This warm-up should include dynamic movements, dynamic and static stretching, and ball work. The key is to get the players on the field at least 30 minutes prior to kickoff. Thirty minutes is enough time to properly warm up players of any age or skill level.

"DYNAMIC MOVEMENTS" ROUTINE -- Warm-up Phase

The following series of exercises should be incorporated into the "warm-up" session of a practice. The length of each exercise should be between 10-20 yards depending on the age and skill level of the players.

- Skip -- players perform a regular, slow skip
- Skip With Arm Circles -- arms straight out to the side, while skipping circle the arms forward and backwards
- Skip With Trunk Twists -- keeping hips square to the finish, players twists trunks while skipping
- Skip With Wing Spans & Claps -- arms straight out, while skipping players stretch arms backward then forward, ending with a clap of the hands
- Ankle Skips -- the skipping stride is quick and short with the feet never rising in height above the opposite ankle
- High-Knee Skips -- the skipping stride is longer with the knee being brought up as high toward the chest as possible

- Running Mechanic Skip -- while skipping, players move arms and legs and keep posture as if running
- Skip With a Kick -- while skipping, players raise knee so thigh is parallel to ground then kick out
- Skip With Straight-Leg Kick-Out -- while skipping, players keep leg straight and kick it out as high as possible
- Slide/Shuffle Right
- Slide/Shuffle Left
- Cross-Over Steps Right
- Cross-Over Steps Left
- Carioca Right
- Carioca Left
- Back Pedal -- backwards run with short, quick stride
- Back Pedal -- backwards run with longer stride
- Forward Run With High-Knee Motion
- Forward Run With Heel-Butt Motion
- Forward Run

DYNAMIC STRETCHES

The following series of exercises should be incorporated into the “warmup” session of a practice. The length of each exercise should be 10-15 yards, depending on the age and skill level of the players.

- Walk and stretch neck, moving head forward, back, side to side
- Jog back warming up upper body by having arms outstretched to the side and making big circles
- Skip
- SKIP back, making big circles with the arms in front of the body, with hands clapping overhead
- ANKLE FLEX: every 3 steps lift one foot slightly off ground and move foot forward, backward, side to side, circles
- Skip back performing trunk twists
- TOE WALK: walk distance on toes
- HEEL WALK: walk back to start line on heels
- KNEE HUGS: every 3 steps, raise one knee, grab with both hands and hug toward chest; alternate every 3 steps
- “KARATE KID”: every 3 steps, raise one knee so that thigh is parallel to ground, and slowly kick out foot, with toes pointed up
- “KARATE KID”: on way back, when kicking foot out, have toes pointed down
- “FRANKENSTEIN WALK”: every step, kick one leg straight out and up and touch with same side hand (Note: have arms straight out as if “sleepwalking” and try to “kick” hands with foot -- do not bend legs)
- “ROCKETTES”: similar to “Frankenstein Walk”, only this time touch foot with opposite hand
- “FIGURE-4s”: every 3 steps, left foot inward, grab foot with opposite hand, place same-side hand on raised knee and lightly push down on knee while lifting foot up
- “OUT-FLICKS”: on way back, walk or jog and on every step, flick foot and leg outward and slap with same-side hand
- GROIN STRETCH (OUT): every 3 steps raise knee so thigh is parallel to ground, then swing it outwards, keeping hips and upper body pointing straight away
- GROIN STRETCH (IN): the opposite of the above stretch -- every 3 steps, lift knee up to side and then swing it back in, again keeping hips and upper body pointing straight away
- SINGLE-LEG “HEEL-BUTTS”: while jogging, lift one foot up and back towards butt; do other foot on way back

- "HEEL-BUTTS": while jogging and with hands protecting butt, lift heels up and hit hands; go distance and back
- "HIGH-KNEE" SKIP: while skipping lift knees as high as possible; go distance and back
- BACKWARDS RUN: go distance and back
- SLIDE/SHUFFLE: turn one way and slide or shuffle distance; facing same way, slide/shuffle back to start
- "QUICK-STEP" CARIOCA: facing one way, perform carioca routine, with each step being short and quick; facing same way, carioca back to start
- "LONG-STRIDE" CARIOCA: facing one way, perform carioca routine with each step being longer (will work hips and trunk better than previous carioca); facing same way, carioca back to start
- "CROSSOVER STEPS": facing one way, perform a crossover step, moving, for example, the left foot over the right foot every step, always keeping the hips and upper body pointing straight away; facing the same way, do the same with the opposite foot
- "DEFENSIVE BACKPEDAL": assume a defensive stance -- one foot ahead of the other; backpedal 2 steps; switch stance by performing a "drop-step" dropping the front foot back. Example: right foot is lead foot, left foot is back, backpedal 2 steps, drop right foot back so that left foot is now lead foot
- RUN BACKWARDS back to start
- "POWER SKIP": at each "skip" jump as high as possible; go distance and back
- "FORWARD LUNGE WALK": take a long stride, go into a lunge position, with front leg bent at knee and trailing leg slightly bent at knee with that knee close to touching the ground; continue routine, taking long strides without stopping and having feet together -- walk, but with a lunge
- "BACKWARD LUNGE WALK": same as above now performing the routine backwards to start line
- JOG
- RUN BACK
- SPRINT
- WALK BACK

These warm-up routines can be seen on our website at the following locations:

http://totalsoccerft.com/group_drills/dynamic_movement.pdf

http://totalsoccerft.com/warmup/stretching_dynamics.pdf