

Running a High School or College Bowling Practice

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Monday, 06 November 2006
Last Updated Tuesday, 07 November 2006

I posted this recently at Bowl.com It will provide readers with an effective practice structure and process. I provide a 2 hour sample practice outline.

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Like any sport, you should have a season plan and a daily plan aligned with the season plan. Here is a sample 2-hour plan for practices that includes important elements that should, in my opinion, be included in each practice.

TEAM MEETING (5 Minutes) - Successful teams build team culture. Set the stage each day with a brief 5-min meeting. Talk about the practice goals for the day and what will happen. This is the time to honor effort and remind of upcoming goals. This time can be used to review recent performances, discuss planning, etc.

STRETCHING (5 Minutes)- Next should be a warm-up routine including stretching. As a sport, we need to do athletic activities. Stretching also builds team unity. You can add-in claps, team cheers, etc. But, the stretching should be completed prior to turning-on the lights and beginning the bowling warm-up on the lanes.

DAILY DRILL SEQUENCE (20 Minutes)- A practice should include a series of skill building drills that are good for all bowlers. For example, many of the Ritger Drills, the USBC new drills, etc. I have designed a new pushaway drill and a 5-step drill. But, I also utilize drills that are effective (kneel-down, balance drill, etc.). Every practice should focus on having some time for drills.

INDIVIDUAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT (30 Minutes) - Each practice should have some time set for individual improvement. As a coach, you should meet with each player individually throughout the season. Based on your try-out, you should have identified strenghts and weaknesses. The weaknesses determine the goals for individual development. SEE my Try-Outs post below We know from research that athletes work harder and gain more satisfaction when they work toward individual improvement. **SKILL NOT SCORE** should be the focus. You can honor individual improvement and set this as part of something that is valued in your team culture.

KNOWLEDGE BUILDING or KNOWLEDGE PRACTICE (30 Minutes) - Bowling is based on knowledge first. Knowledge + Practice = Competence. Competence leads to Confidence. But, it all starts with knowledge. At the beginning of the season, the first few weeks should have a plan to teach specific knowledge: releases, lane play, spare system, etc. Like a teacher, the coach should have a curriculum plan. At the beginning, you must teach how the following impact ball reaction: ball speed, axis of rotation, axis tilt, rev rate and loft. This provides the skills to play inside, outside, anywhere.... Knowledge + Practice = Competence & Confidence. After knowledge is taught, this section of time would be used to practice what has been learned. For example, strike around is a drill that you attempt to hit the pocket from all angles. The bowler tries to hit the pocket 10 times from each angle: the outside, inside and in-between. And, you can modify this to include playing different targets and angles down the lane near the breakpoint. This requires the bowler to implement the knowledge, gain comfort with playing all lines and practicing the different releases.

FUN TIME (15 Minutes) - Have a skill building or team game each practice to build team unity and just have fun. This is also a nice transition from the physical work to the mental game skill development.

PSYCHOLOGY TIME (10 Minutes) - Use this time to practice mental skills needed for success. We know that sport psychology can have a major impact on performance. So, it should be included in every practice. Goal setting, visualization, etc. These skills will help both beginner to elite bowlers.

CLOSING MEETING (5 - 10 Minutes) - Use this time to wrap-up, honor effort, do a cheer, discuss the future, team logistics, etc.

FITNESS - In addition to lane time, there should be a fitness plan and bowlers should be engaged in fitness 5 days a week. Running, weight room, etc. This will pay huge dividends during the season.

** TRY-OUT PROCESS **

When evaluating bowlers in a try-out process, you want to gauge a holistic picture of each bowler. I recommend that you evaluate the following: (1) physical game quality; (2) bowling skill; (3) committment to bowling; and (4) fitness level.

BOWLING SKILL

Start with several days of bowling on multiple lane conditions and on different surfaces if possible. Do what you can. If

you can have three days, five games daily, bowling on three conditions, then that will do. Have the bowlers collect data on their bowling. Ideally, you want to see pocket percentage, carry percentage, spare percentage (single and multiple pin conversion rates) and split leaves. You can also observe how each bowler plays the lane condition. With various patterns, you can determine the level of a bowler's knowledge of lane play. This will provide you as the coach with both an evaluation of the bowlers as well as data to develop an individual improvement plan. To find some challenging conditions, visit http://www.bowlingmembership.com/sportbowlingsite/lanemachine_index.asp These patterns will reveal the bowler's real ability and show you where they need the most one-on-one attention. Stay away from the bumper house conditions. By choosing a challenge, you are setting a standard of excellence from day one.

PHYSICAL GAME ASSESSMENT

During the bowling , you can evaluate the bowler's physical game strengths and liabilities such as timing, free swing, stance, foot placement, etc. In addition, if you can, try to gauge some of the characteristics of the bowler: speed consistency, rev rate, axis of rotation, etc. This will allow you to determine individual needs that can go into an individual improvement plan.

FITNESS LEVEL

In regard to fitness, research has shown that fitness level is correlated positively to bowling performance especially in females. Start with three simple tests: (1) time to run 800 meters; (2) time to do 25 push-ups; (3) time to do 25 sit-ups. Bowling programs should include fitness training during the season as well. Once again, you are establishing high standards from day one. This will allow you to see who is fit, who is in okay shape and those who are not in shape.

COMMITTMENT

Finally, you want to talk with each individual bowler during the try-out. Consider this an interview and evaluation of commitment. In addition, you will begin to develop a rapport with your bowlers from day one, an important component of high performing teams. What is their motivation for participating in bowling? What is their history in the sport? What are their goals? This will help you see a level of commitment to improvement and dedication to the sport. And, this will help you see who is a team player and who is participating for their own glory.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

The try-outs should not only measure who should be on the team. You are establishing the culture, expectations, routine, etc. Be sure to start with a warm-up stretch, team meeting and conclude with a cool-down stretch. Your commitment to the routine will make the transition to the team more smooth. In addition, the try-outs provides you with data to develop individual improvement plans. Coach effectiveness literature has shown that coaches that focus on the individual improvement of skills rather than score will have a more productive season. Specifically, bowlers will feel more positively, learning and grow more and have a better rapport with their coach. So, begin with the data you collected from the try-outs. Sit down with each bowler and have them work on weaker areas during part of the training. This will aid you and the bowler in establishing concrete, practical and measurable improvement goals.