



Always, Always Practice with a Purpose
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If you ask any of the veteran players on the Columbus Crew what is one thing that they have learned from me, many of the players would probably state the importance of practicing with a purpose. When they train with a specific purpose and goal, they inevitably have a more focused training session, and therefore, become better players and a team.

One of the greatest pitfalls of all athletes is not practicing with a purpose. It is sometimes difficult to train with a purpose everyday, but it is one of the mental skills utilized by the most successful athletes in the world. Furthermore, it is not enough to train .to get better. or .work hard.. These goals or purposes are too broad and vague. It is important to make a very specific purpose for each training or practice. Getting better and working hard are important components of athletic success, but when it comes to training, an athlete's purpose must be specific, focused and intentional. An example is the following: .I want to improve my crosses today. I will practice them during the training session as well as stay after practice if necessary..

How do you make certain you practice with a purpose? It is simply a matter of developing a positive habit. One of the ways that I have taught the Columbus Crew players is to have thought about their individual purpose for training before they step onto the field. I constructed a mental training card for each of them to place in their locker as a reminder to think about or create their goal or purpose for training on that day. Ideally, they would think about their purpose for training after the previous days training. They evaluate their performance right after practice, and based on this evaluation, set their purpose or goal for the next training session. For example, a defender may have had the purpose of moving the ball forward better, but did not feel he accomplished this task. He would then re-set this goal for the following training session. Furthermore, before training on the next day, they again need to think about their purpose for that day. They can even think about in while driving into training and/or again while getting ready in the locker room. Finally, as the team in warming up, a coach or captain can simply remind the players to finalize their purpose for practice that day. After doing this task for about 2-3 weeks, practicing with a purpose becomes a habit, and therefore, results in improved levels of performance.

It is also very important that coaches indicate to the players the purpose or purposes for each team training. Players need to know exactly what they are striving to accomplish on that day. If they do not know the purpose, they will not be as sharp, focused, and intentional in their execution. Thus, coaches need to take a few minutes before training to go over the exact nature and goals of practice. I frequently encourage coaches to communicate to the team, .These are the ways we will be different after today's training ... This statement makes it clear to the coaches and players the exact purpose or purposes for training.

Practicing with a purpose is simply stated, but it takes discipline to train your mind to begin thinking in this manner. So remember . always, always practice with a purpose.

Play Hard, Play Smart and Play Well!