

Brave ways to start a coaching session

Published 10/08/18 by [Dan Cottrell](#)

Coaching session starts can be tough. That's mainly because the players will arrive at different times, get changed at different paces and switch on their minds to training at different stages.

It would be great if you could blow a giant hooter. This would be the three-minute warning that the session is going to start and then, be ready to go, on time. Well, why not?

Or you could try out these brave ways to start the session.

Ticket to train

Put a load of post-it notes (or scraps of paper) and pencils at the side of the training area. Players must write down one thing they want to work on in the session on the post-it note and hand it to you before training starts. It might only be one word.

It might not help you start promptly, but it certainly focuses the mind.

And what happens if they can't think of anything? Give them some nudges. For example: which part of the last training session or game did you think you might have done better in.

I would tell them in advance of the session this is going to happen. Perhaps, a social media message might work, and they can send you their ticket back in a message.

At the end of the session, pick out a couple of players and ask them whether they managed to make some progress on their "ticket to train".

Theatre game entrance

Players love games. Start the session with a game (see below on how these might work). However, only let them join into the game at the right time. So just like arriving late at the theatre, you are only allowed to enter the game at a scene change.

Now, the late arrivals don't just wander into the game. They come in when there's an appropriate stoppage.

Players who must wait will know for next time: there's always a downside for not being ready on time. If you had started with some laps of the pitch or boring drill, then that might be different. They won't mind waiting until the end of that part.

Not just any game to start

Start with a game, but not just any game

Have a menu of games to start the session. Allow the players who have arrived on-time to choose a game from the menu. If, every session, they are constantly choosing one game above the others, then that's off the menu for next week.

However, whatever game they choose, they must run it, set it up and referee the game. You will stand on the sidelines, only intervening to encourage a player or to introduce late arrivals.

The outcomes should be games the players want to play. They are also under less pressure to conform, which is something they will want to do.

Set out an expectation

Building on the work of Mark Bennett, from PDS coaching, decide with the players how training should start. This is a conversation you might have the start of the season, or when you want to change the way training looks on a more permanent basis.

The process looks a bit like this. You ask a series of questions. Notice how open they are, and that you might not elicit the answers you want to hear.

- What do you want to achieve at training (Can you remember good training sessions that you enjoyed, does that help you think of ideas?)
- What do you want me to do to help you achieve that? (Can you think of good training sessions that you enjoyed and what the coach did?)

Now, you want to set some standards.

- What do you think is unacceptable in terms of us working towards that?
- What you think is acceptable?
- What do you think is exceptional? In other words, what might you do some of the time which goes beyond acceptable?

"Okay, now you've set out the rules, you will want to keep to your rules. I'm here to remind you."

This can work with all ages. If the players just say fun for the first question...that's what you are going to do. You can, of course, manipulate the session to help achieve that. Crucially, you've made it something that's theirs, not yours.

What do you think of these starts? Do you use them already or use others which are successful for team/athletes? Of course, a lot depends on the players and their current environment. I would love to hear what you've discovered on your coaching journey and let's continue to share best practice.

If you enjoyed this you can find all my other ConnectedCoaches blogs [here](#).

Login to follow, share, comment and participate. Not a member? [Join for free now](#).

tags : coaching, sessions