

Most people think children as being elastic and so full of energy they are capable of running and playing without limits. Nothing could be further from the truth. Even nine and ten-year-olds need periods of conditioning in order to prepare them for playing the game of football.

There are many reasons to plan a deliberate period of conditioning. In fact, a well-planned conditioning program is the most important step a young first-year football player can undergo in learning the basics of the game called football.

Playing a game of football requires use of muscles in a physically and emotionally demanding competitive environment. The best way to prepare them is to do so under simulated game conditions using the basic fundamentals. Even the spark plug, who never seems to wear down, must gradually work up to the physical violence and strain of football.

Always keep in mind a kid home running around the yard, rests when he needs to. However, during a football game, he often has to draw on reserve energy when he'd rather be sitting down.

There are benefits of the conditioning period beyond toning the muscles. Conditioning can be used to teach youngsters the physical and mental discipline of preparing for all sports. Professionals know you do not rush into competition unprepared; however, nine-year-olds don't know that. The best way to teach them than in the preseason grind.

Before every game the trained athlete goes through a warm-up drill designed to loosen and stretch the muscles in preparation for the competition ahead.

Thoughts on the coaching philosophy for the parent and youth football coach

A coach's philosophy should be a concern of parents. Sportswriter, Grantland Rice once wrote, "It's not that you won or lost, but how you played the game." Skeptics have scoffed at those words ever since Rice wrote them.

Anyone remotely familiar with the game of football knows that competitiveness often surfaces as aggressiveness.

This is especially obvious in the physical area between the offensive and defensive linemen. This area is the most difficult area for a referee to detect inappropriate activities; therefore, rough play becomes inevitable. Some players will develop a style that includes deliberate gouging, tripping, elbowing, and

holding. All of these are covered and against the rules; however, kids hear about such dirty tricks and a few will ask to be taught how to do it.

A youngster at this age is most impressionable. Unwittingly, they are searching for values to carry the rest of their lives. A web site stressing fundamentals of football may seem to be a strange place for moralizing; however, since the athletic field is such a training ground for kids to learn honesty and fair play. I must not ignore this opportunity.

Teaching and condoning tactics that deliberately violate the rules is totally inconsistent with what should be the goals of youth league football. There is enough hypocrisy to go around, without introducing it on the football field.

In a more practical vein, the nine-year-old football player should have his hands full simply learning to make an effective block or tackle. If they are to go undetected, tricks to evade the rules are difficult in themselves. Trying to add them to the necessary fundamentals seems foolish.

Anyway, when he gets caught it will cost the team fifteen yards. Most likely, this would happen when team can least afford such loss of yardage. Your little leaguer will have plenty of time after he has mastered the fundamentals to learn to defend himself. At this stage of his life, the best protection is good execution. There is no place in youth football for dirty play.

Winning is another favorite subject. Winning, of course, is what football is all about. Everybody wants their team to win. No child should ever be taught that it does not matter, but neither should he be taught that a win at all costs is appropriate. The tough question facing coach and parent is where to draw the line between learning and the winning? There is no easy answer.

This concern becomes difficult when the coach is trying to give all of his players a chance to play against a better, more experienced team. Every time he replaces his best players, first team the opponents run all over his weaker subs.

Some leagues provide for this shortcoming by requiring each player to spend a minimum of time in each game. Another way is to play reserves during the second and fourth quarters, requiring teams to have equal numbers of players. All leagues should have and enforce such a rule; however, keeping track is sometimes difficult. Also, momentum is lost when the teams change. This can be discouraging to starters and their parents.

Who plays and how much is never an easy question when it comes to little leaguers; however, this is a question that each league and each coach should consider carefully. It is also something the parents must understand.

The use of parent and coach as a team in early development football should be considered. People who volunteer to go out on the field with these little guys to teach them how to play, are equal in rank to school teachers, Sunday school teachers, social workers, scoutmasters, and den mothers of the community. Their positions of influence make them teacher, advisor, and builder of youthful character to your children.

The parent who does not volunteer, nor provides support is delegates a heavy responsibility to those who do. This does not mean that coaching, even of little leaguers, can be a committee endeavor; it absolutely cannot.

The coach must be the undisputed boss on the field. Parents should stay away from players during the game. They should not even be permitted near the player's bench. They belong in the stands; however, When the coaches lack experience, as is so often the case, interested parents should know enough, and care enough, to want to provide guidance and assistance to keep things on track.

So whether you are on the field coaching or on the sidelines cheering, you have a responsibility. These kids are learning football, but they are also learning values that stays with them the rest of their lives.

Parents who are indifferent, or those who try to influence events to satisfy their own selfish ambitions, must do so with the full knowledge of the negative effects it will have on the kids. This greatly reduces the value of youth league football.

The football coach and the league

Football is a violent sport and an emotional game that is played to win. Youth coaches and youth leagues are dealing with kids with their first exposure to the game. There are a few basic rules that must be discussed before the season starts.

The first thing any football organization must do is to take every reasonable measure to keep injuries at a minimum. This usually starts with equipment, something that should never be scrimped upon. If there isn't enough funds to buy quality and complete uniforms, don't play. A complete uniform consists of:

1. helmet with face guard,
2. athletic supporter with protective cup,
3. shoulder pads,
4. pants with thigh and knee pads,
5. kidney pads,
6. mouthpiece,

7. shoes with soccer type or short cleats,
8. sweat socks,
9. jersey.

Almost as important is the conduct of the game. Most youth football leagues play by high school rules with at least two adult referees who are familiar with the rulebook. In fact, copies of the rule book should be made available to everybody associated with the league as required reading.

There are some aspects of the game that tend to lead to more injuries than other parts. For example, many leagues have instigated additional rules such as:

1. eliminating kickoffs,
2. eliminating blitzes,
3. limiting the number and duration of practices,
4. restricting the number of formations that can be used.

These and other plays that parents and coaches feel the need to eliminate, or control, should be based on the level of experience of the players.

Kickoffs and blitzing, for example, require special practice and depart from pure first-step fundamentals of football. Kickoffs, in particular, seem hard for beginners to handle. For this reason, they should be avoided until players have gained ability in downfield blocking and tackling. It is often easier to make a league rule eliminating them for players up to ten years old, Simply, spot the ball instead on the receiving team's thirty-five yard line.

Red-dogging or blitzing is harder to control, but is sometimes ruled out because of the element of surprise it creates. Restricting red-dogging does not keep a defensive back from reading a play, rushing across the line of scrimmage, and making the tackle in the offensive backfield, but it prevents the defensive back from making a premeditated rush, something that can play havoc with beginner's blocking assignments.

If anyone is worried that in leaving out elements of football play for the kids will be shortchanged, that simply isn't true. At least, in the beginning, they will be having enough trouble handling straight-ahead blocking and tackling, without complicating matters.

There will be plenty of time, later, to add complexity. The less they have to learn, at this age, the easier they learn those valuable fundamentals. Football is a game of reading keys and reacting. The simpler the environment at their beginning, the easier they learn to read and react.

Links to Football Drills

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Blocking

Blocking is the cornerstone of a good offensive football team. Teams use blocking to move a defensive man out of an area where they want to run the football and to keep defenders from getting to the quarterback. All players including the quarterback may be used as a blocker at times.

Drive Block

The drive block is a one-on-one block used most often when a defender is lined up directly over an offensive lineman and must be moved in order for the play to succeed. Emphasize the following points to your players.

- Explode from the stance with the foot closest to the opponent and drive your hips forward on the third and fourth steps.

- Use short choppy steps and keep the feet moving.

- Keep the feet wide when delivering the block, keeping the head up and the shoulders square.

- Punch hands or forearms into the opponent to establish momentum, and deliver the blow on impact.

- Keep your head on the side of the opponent toward the hole, and follow through with short, choppy steps.

Pass Protection Block

The pass protection block keeps the defender from getting to the quarterback before he can deliver the ball to a receiver.

The initial move and setup technique is extremely important in pass blocking. The lineman must set up quickly, stepping with his inside foot first. The lineman pushes up into a two point stance with his down hand. The movement projects the offensive lineman into a position with his head up, eyes open, back straight, rear end down, hand and arms up, and feet positioned to move back or laterally in a split second.

The lineman must position himself between the quarterback and the defensive pass rusher. He can do this by backing off the line of scrimmage quickly after the snap. Make sure that your linemen know that they should never get beat to their inside.

The blockers must be patient when pass blocking, keeping the legs under him and always remain in a good blocking position. They are not the aggressors while pass blocking.

Receiver Concentration:

Works on getting the receiver to focus on the ball and watch it all the way into the hands, even though they know they are going to get hit.

Have three players holding hand shields line-up 10 yards deep and 3 yards apart from each other in an equal triangle. Have a receiver run a pattern into the middle of the triangle. As the receiver enters the triangle the coach or quarterback should throw the receiver a high pass. The receiver must jump to catch the pass. When his hands touch the ball, the three players holding the hand shields should jam the receiver with their shields.

Set-up, Find Receiver, and Fire:

Improve the quarterbacks reaction upon setup, by: The quarterback takes a quick drop and sets to deliver the football. Station three or four players downfield, facing him in a horizontal line spread evenly across the field. Each player has an assigned number. The coach calls out a number, the quarterback must quickly set his feet in the direction of the designated player and throw the football.

Bag:

Teach players how to receive a proper handoff and keep the head up to make the proper read and cut.

This drill involves the center, quarterback and running backs. The quarterback takes the snap from the center and hands the football to the running back. The running back has his eyes up-field running towards a dummy, (the defender), held three yards away by a coach. As the player approaches the dummy, the coach will move it to the right or the left, indicating that the back should cut in the opposite direction. Players should be running at full speed.

Turn:

To force the receiver to get into a position to see the ball and concentrate on catching it.

Form two lines of receivers on each side of the field, with a quarterback throwing to each line. The receiver in each line has his back to the quarterback. The quarterback yells "go" as he passes the ball to the first receiver in line. On the commands the receiver must snap his head around quickly, locate and catch the ball, tuck it in, and turn up-field with it. Have the receivers change lines each time so they get used to turning over each shoulder.

Passing and Receiving Drills

The drills presented are not extensive, but are realistic in time required to practice. If what is presented is practiced diligently, constantly, without change, and correctly then you can expect your QBs to improve their techniques, especially in the area of the drop back, the set-up and the delivery of the ball.

There are many drills that could be used that are not included here. Take a few drills at each workout period and work on these that best suit you and your QBs's abilities. These are good drills and accomplish much of what you want. Taking everything into consideration, drills are fine, but you still must practice most those things you will be doing in the actual game.

Both knees drill

The purpose is to warm up the arm. At the same time, this drill teaches concentration on target and ball release.

Pair off about 10 yards apart directly in line with each other, kneeling on both knees. Receiver holds both hands up, giving the QB a target. Don't throw hard. Simply concentrate on target. Check for correct arm movement, high release and follow through.

Single knee drill

The purpose is to develop stronger arm and wrist snap. Put your knee on the throwing side on the ground. Place the ball on the ground. Gripping it with the throwing hand, lift the ball up with only one hand, cock it high with **two hands**, and throw to partner. Exaggerate follow through, pick up grass. Use the arm only. Switch the down knee for variation. Make sure arm movement is lead by elbow.

Feet parallel drill

The purpose is to warm up the arm and, at the same time, teach concentration on target and passing technique. Pair off about 12 yards apart directly in line with each other. Increase the distance as you warm up. Don't exceed 20 yards and do not take a step with your foot. QB should not throw with power but only with correct arm technique.

Opposite foot drill

The purpose of this drill is a warm up. It teaches how to throw off the wrong foot by simulating throwing off wrong foot while scrambling or sprinting out.

The Right handed player puts his right foot forward in heel to toe. Point the toe in the direction of the pass. Rotate hips with the throw. If thrown correctly, weight will be forced forward on the ball of your right foot.

QB should rotate shoulders and hips as much as possible to get them in a correct position to deliver the ball.

Normal foot follow through drill

The purpose of this drill is to work on the complete throwing motion. It is the same as previous, except step with correct foot. The Right handed player steps with left foot. Point the toe in direction of pass. Throw and follow through. This motion assures tip of ball will be up for soft pass. Emphasize the follow-through until it becomes an automatic part of throwing motion.

Circle toss

The purpose of this drill is to work on throwing on the run, like on a rollout pass.

Run in circle playing catch and reverse the action. Release the ball quickly. As a variation, one man can stand still and the other run around him. Change direction and switch positions. The shoulders and hips should always be squared up to target on begin of throwing motion.

Down the field

The purpose of this drill is to improve throwing on the run technique and conditioning.

Run the length of field and back playing catch. Keep 10 yards apart. Release ball quickly. Work to increase speed. Square the shoulders and hips to the target.

Sprint out drill

The purpose of this drill is to improve mechanics on throwing the sprint-out pass

Sprint right and left. Throw to other QB or target. Release the ball quickly. Practice throwback pass also. Get a depth of 6-7 yards. Square the shoulders and hips to target.

Set up drill

The purpose of this drill is to work on drop-back in combination with quick but precise release.

Concentrate on speed on getting back. Get depth, step up and throw to a target. Start at 20 yards and work to 40 with lowest possible trajectory. Throw hard and soft. Use centers if possible. May time drops.

If with centers - first priority: secure the ball, then quick drop. Second to last drop-step is shorter, QB should throw immediately after setup step, but never throw off balance.

Individual pass routes drill

The purpose of this drill is to improve the accuracy and timing of throwing to specific receivers on specific pass-routes.

In addition to working on the passing drills that have been mentioned, it would obviously be to your advantage to throw to an end or a back running any of our individual pass routes. You should work the most on the routes that are the most difficult for the QB to hit consistently.

Depending on the level you are coaching, you might have relatively big differences between receivers and how they run their routes (speed/quickness, accuracy). If so, let your QBs call out the receivers name to better remember the individual style of each receiver.

Watch for proper timing of QB, don't let him throw off balance just to hit a receiver quicker, rather work on quicker drop, nor let him throw too early.

Find the open receiver drill

The purpose of this drill is to improve the ability of the QB to scan the whole field and find the open receiver and make his footwork routine.

1. Set the QB up on the goal line. Scatter 10 - 15 receivers from sideline to sideline at varied depths ranging from 5 yards to 30 (be creative with your spacing).
2. Have the QB to face his receivers and then the coach, standing behind the QB, will point to one of the receivers.
3. After telling which one will be live, have the QB to simulate the snap and drop 5 - 7 yards and set to throw. All the while he should be scanning the field looking for the raised hand of the designated receiver (the receiver should wait 3 - 5 seconds before raising his hand).

4. Upon seeing this, the QB will have to get into proper throwing position and determine the depth.
5. Repeat this until all receivers have had one pass.

The coaching points are the proper use of feet to turn the body (making him ever ready to throw) and the non-stop scanning of the field.

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Linemen Stance Drills

Ready Stance:

To teach proper stance, players line up, each in the proper stance for their position. Inspect each player's stance, making necessary adjustments. Then the players fire out for 5 yards and properly execute a designated skill from the stance.

Quick Hit:

To get linemen or blocking backs quickly from their stance to a blocking position, Players line up in a circle in a good stance. On the coaches command, they pop up into a correct pass protection position - taking a quick step with the outside foot, putting hands up in a punch position, and assuming a squat position, ready to strike a blow. Have them continue this repeatedly - up, down, up , down.

Good Balance:

Help linemen and blocking backs keep their feet apart and keep their bodies from being pushed, pulled, or tipped from side to side. A good way to teach this is to have players line-up from each other and grab the shoulder pads of the player opposite them. On the coaches command, one of the players, the defensive player, tries to get his opponent off balance by pushing, pulling and tipping him from side to side. This forces the offensive player to get low, get a wide base, and move his feet to keep his balance. Switch offensive and defensive players and continue the drill.