

# Conducting a Practice Observation session



## BEFORE

1. Arrange the date/time you will attend a practice.
2. Have a pre-practice conversation. Encourage the coach to determine the focus of the practice. Have the coach consider the critical components and features of the skills he or she is teaching. Have he or she reflect on previous practices. Are there certain issues that are problematic? (ex: getting athletes to give it their all during practice, willingness to try a new, tougher drill, etc.)

Ask the coach to identify several components that he or she would like you to focus on during the visit. For example, a coach might say, "I want to try to use the Buddy system to get my guys to fill each others tanks. Would you listen to see if I explain this tool to the guys in a way so they can put it into practice?"

## DURING

1. Arrive ahead of time. Showing up early will be less distracting.
2. Record feedback information during the visit. As the coach instructs, consider the focus and record specific observations that will help the coach understand how well he or she executed the components he or she was attempting to incorporate. Your observations should be specific, accurate, non-judgmental and focus on the identified areas.

## AFTER

### Debriefing the Practice Observation

1. Break the ice. Break tensions by encouraging informal interaction. Thank the coach for inviting and allowing you to observe him or her.
2. Have the coach provide a quick general assessment. Ask the coach how well, in general, he or she thought the practice went. Be sure to ask him or her to first identify two or three things he or she feels went well in the session. Then identify things he or she would do differently next time. Doing this right after the practice observation will allow the coach to take the lead and get more out of the debriefing meeting. This focuses you both and sets the tone for a supportive, coach-centered debriefing.
3. Have the coach conduct a "mental walk through". Identify specific components and ask, "What do you recall about the (X) part of the practice?" Listen carefully to the coach's assessment of how well he or she executed. After the coach responds, share your observations. Your observations might support his or her assessment, differ or bring up other issues. When appropriate help the coach reflect on how she or he might improve in specific areas. Ask questions to allow the coach to solve the problem on his or her own. For example, you might ask, "How might you have responded to Sherry's shoulder shrugs? Anything in the Behavior Management tool kit that might be helpful in this situation?" When the coach needs or desires advice, be honest and specific. Remember, you are holding up that mirror so he or she can analyze his or her performance.
4. Agree on a follow up plan. To encourage the coach to reflect on further implementing the components of a Double-Goal Coach, ask "What would like to work on for the next practice observation and feedback session?" Then, discuss dates for your next visit. You might consider inviting the he or she to come observe you again.

Have the coach give feedback on the observation process. Allow the opportunity for reflection on the peer feedback process as a whole and your role as a mentor. Ask the following question: What was most and least helpful about this experience for you? Be open to ideas for future observations.