



Practice Approach – “We’re Talking About Practice”

Dr. Pete Temple

Allen Iverson, former All-Star point guard for the Philadelphia 76er’s, once infamously talked with reporters about missing a practice. Iverson suggested in his tone and repeated statement – “We’re talking about practice!” – that practice was an unimportant inconvenience. Perhaps this is why one of the most talented players to play in the NBA never won a championship. However, make no mistake about it, the best players and the best teams understand the importance of practice. Michael Jordan, arguably the best player of all time playing on one of the greatest teams of all time, was notorious for his practice intensity and insistence that his teammates match it.

Practice is where players become good. Practice is where good players become great. Practice is where you fix things, polish things, master things. Practice is where muscle memory is created. Practice is where habits are formed, good or bad. One of my favorite quotes is, “Practice doesn’t make perfect, it makes permanent.” This emphasizes the importance of *how we practice*. If we practice with poor mechanics, we’ll develop poor mechanics. If we practice without intensity, we’ll play without intensity.

I think the biggest challenge for young athletes when it comes to practice is seeing it as something to passively endure. Show up, do what the coach says, and go home. If your goal is to become the best athlete possible, you have to begin to look at practice differently. You have to have a specific *Practice Approach*. By approaching practice differently – having a plan and the right attitude - you will find that you get much more out of it and your game will really take off.

Here are some suggestions for developing a *Practice Approach* to get the most out of your abilities and develop your full potential:

1. Assess your current attitude towards practice. Is it positive or negative? Do you see it as an opportunity to become better and work towards your athletic goals? Do you even think about it? Or, do you just go through the motions? Be honest and then make the changes necessary to have a better, more positive attitude (negative attitudes deplete energy and focus = “going through the motions”).
2. Set goals. Most athletes can relate to the concept of goals for a game or season, but for practice? Absolutely! Goals provide focus and motivation. Practice goals will give a sense of purpose to your effort. I suggest setting three goals before every practice:

A Skill Goal: This is a physical aspect of your game that you will work on.

A Mental Goal: This is a mental aspect of your game that you will work on.

An Attitude Goal: This is a quality of your athletic character that you will work on.

For example, an athlete might say, “Today I will work on my defensive footwork (skill goal), my concentration on free throws (a mental goal), and be a positive leader in every drill (an attitude goal).

3. Commit yourself to the practice. Check in with yourself before practice begins. Get your head right, think about what you want to work on and commit yourself to having a good practice. Commit yourself to bringing an intensity and intentionality to practice. It can be helpful to think of a cue word or phrase, such as “It’s time to get better,” that can help you regain focus and intensity after a break or if you begin to stray.
4. Dedicate yourself to practice. If you play a little but you’d like to play more, or if you’re good but you aspire to be great, practice provides you an opportunity to go the extra mile. Think about what you can do before or after practice to take advantage of this opportunity. Dedicate yourself to doing something extra every practice.

Following these four steps will help you develop a *Practice Approach* that will help you consistently get everything you can out of the most important and valuable time in an athlete’s day. It will also help you get the most out of your ability and the opportunities that come your way. There is no question that games are more fun than practice, but practice is where those memorable moments are born.

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