



THE INDOOR

PRACTICE PLANNING SYSTEM

How To Run a Safe, Fun
and Effective Indoor Practice

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INTRODUCTION

Creating an indoor practice plan can be a daunting task, especially if the majority of your practices occur outside. However, it is a necessary undertaking for any responsible coach, because there will inevitably be days where you will need to bring the team inside.

A good practice plan should be created ahead of time, before you ever need it. It should take into account safety, necessary equipment, logistics such as which drills are best for indoors, and how to adapt your practice needs to the location you have inside. This guide walks you through the steps of planning a practice, including several valuable indoor drills that target the same skills as outdoor practices but for an indoor audience.

You can prepare yourself and your team for the event of an indoor practice. Take a look at the tips and tricks included here and customize the practice plans included at the end of the report. With a little pre-planning, you will end up with a lot less hassle later!

Planning Ahead

Nearly every coach will have to run an indoor practice during their tenure, but it is surprising how few coaches truly prepare for the possibility of an indoor practice. Long before you need your plan, you should have something down on paper that you can pull out when the need arises. This will keep you calm, help your players stay focused, and make the best use of your time and available resources.

A practice plan should include detailed information about the types of exercises you want players to engage in, how the room should be set up, and how long players should spend on each drill. If you have a basic outline of the time, you will be able to move players quickly through drills and stations so that everyone stays interested and involved.

This book provides several sample practice plans based on different practice lengths. These plans can be customized to fit your team's needs, but they are an excellent starting point for answering the hundreds of questions that arise when practice turns inside.

INDOOR PRACTICE SAFETY

Obviously there are different safety requirements for indoor practices as opposed to outdoor practices. Coaches should make sure to have plenty of the following:

- Nets
- Softtees
- Cages
- Protective gear for players

By planning ahead for these safety needs, coaches can ensure that everyone stays safe and healthy during an indoor practice.

Space Restrictions

Indoor baseball and softball practices require plenty of space. If players do not have enough room to spread out, they will not be able to use the practice time fully, as they will only be able to throw shorter balls, run shorter distances, and be careful to avoid getting in the way of other players.

There should be enough space in the practice area to allow for players to be broken up into different groups. This maximizes both the time and the resources of the team so that practice is as effective indoors as out.

In one section of the room, placed length-wise, should be any throwing or pitching practice. This should be done, if possible, in a cage or into a net. If there is a net, there is no real need for a catcher. If there is a cage, a catcher is still a good idea but is not absolutely necessary. This can free up catchers to work on other skills as necessary.

Opposite from those players, also length-wise, should be batters. Batters absolutely must be in a cage for indoor practice. There is no other way to ensure the safety and health of players and coaches. If a batting cage is not available, batting practice should be prohibited indoors.

In the middle of the room can be any other drills or skills practice. Indoor practice is a good time to teach new concepts and work on perfecting older skills, such as stance, the batting rhythm, or sliding technique.

(Continued)

INDOOR PRACTICE SAFETY CONT.

Intensity of Practice

Indoor practices affect players in a much different way than outdoor practices. There is more temperature control, so players will usually find themselves more comfortable indoors. There are also more chances for drink breaks and a chance to rest from the intensity of practice, which means that players will probably be able to handle a longer indoor practice.

Indoor practices also reduce the risk of exposure for environmental hazards, such as:

- Allergens
- Poor air quality
- Extreme hot and cold
- Weather concerns, such as lightning

Consider extending the length of your practices indoors or adding some elements usually missing from an outdoor practice. If you think your players can handle it, you should plan to start with conditioning work. This can last anywhere from 10 minutes to 45 and can be as intense or as light as you think your team needs.

By combining this important element with a regular practice plan, you work players in a new way by taxing the muscles more than usual. Because of this additional strain on the muscles, be careful to watch how you work players and be on the lookout for possible injuries or fatigue.

We have already discussed the benefits of indoor practices, but the lack of outdoor hazards can in itself be a threat to the safety and health of players. Because conditions are so much better indoors, coaches often forget to allow drink breaks and rest breaks for their players. Be sure to plan in time to rest and recuperate during the regular practice time so that you do not cause players injury or other harm.

(Continued)

INDOOR PRACTICE SAFETY CONT.

Coaching Staff

It is useful to have additional staff for indoor practices to watch all players and ensure that safety guidelines are followed.

Having a coach or other responsible adult on site with each group will help avoid any injuries. Someone watching the overall practice rhythm will have a good idea of when players are in danger and can help keep players safe.

It is also good to have additional coaching staff on hand for indoor practices because players tend to slack off or pay less attention during those indoor practices.

Because indoor practices restrict movement and push players closer together, clear focus and paying attention is critical to the safety of the team. With a coach's oversight, players will be more likely to keep their attention on the game and reduce potential injuries.

SPECIAL COACHING CONSIDERATIONS

Safety concerns are not a coach's only consideration when planning an indoor practice. Because baseball and softball are outdoor sports, there is a certain lack of value to many indoor practices. To help create practices that are useful and appropriate for players, coaches should consider these additional factors:

- Skills requiring extra practice or additional explanation
- Areas where technique is weak or mechanics are incorrect
- Ability to practice certain skills and drills in indoor conditions
- Alternative practice methods
- Level of intensity desired for an indoor practice

Indoor practices are a great time to address any lingering issues you have noticed with form, technique, or general mechanics of the sport. Because these drills are often stop-and-go, with analysis and slight corrections along the way, they are good activities for indoor practices.

These activities are especially beneficial indoors because players do not have the distractions normally associated with practice. Most players want to be involved in the most "glamorous" activity on the field, even if it is not what they most need to work on. By eliminating that mystique by bringing practice indoors, you gain the attention you need to help players really improve.

Coaches also need to consider what skills they can and cannot practice indoors. Some activities, such as catching fly balls, are not appropriate for indoor practice because of safety concerns, space restrictions, and improper surface conditions. However, other skills, such as batting technique and running bases, can certainly be practiced indoors. A good coach knows what their team can practice best indoors so that they are prepared in the event of poor weather or other extenuating circumstances.

ALTERNATIVE PRACTICE METHODS

Regardless of your intentions, sometimes indoor practices just cannot be as effective as outdoor ones. For some coaches, there is not an adequate indoor space available for their use. For others, indoor equipment is inappropriate or nonexistent. If you find yourself in one of these situations, fear not. There are still activities that your players can get value out of while working indoors.

Watching Game Videos

Game videos are a great way to help players see their mistakes and how to fix them. If you have had the foresight to videotape games or tournaments, play those tapes for the team and stop to discuss throughout. Although you can tell your players what they did right and wrong, a better way is to show them, because they will have a visual reminder of the event as well that will help to cement your critique in their minds.

While critiquing game videos, be careful not to embarrass players. It is ok to point out their strengths and weaknesses, but it should not become a critique session of only one or two players. This will make everyone uncomfortable and reduce the value of your practice.

Be honest and detailed in your critiques of game play. Players need to know not just that they did well but what they did well, so they can repeat it again. The same goes for poor performances. If you know that a player did not hit the ball correctly because of her head placement, say so. Do not keep these small but very impactful observations to yourself. Doing so only hurts the team.

Watching Other Training Videos

There are an abundance of training videos available covering every aspect of softball or baseball. If you have some in your possession, invite players to watch one if practice indoors is not possible. These videos can be from famous coaches or players or just coaches who know what they are doing. Most are well-made and contain useful information for you and your players.

If you have multiple videos and the technology to do so, split players into groups depending on what area they need to work on. Show the different videos and invite discussion afterward. Talk about what advice the presenter offers and how players can incorporate that into their own game.

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ALTERNATIVE PRACTICE METHODS CONT.

Strength Training

Though strength training can seem like a boring fall-back plan, it is a necessary and often overlooked aspect of sports. Players get good cardiovascular exercise during regular practice sessions, but a focus on strength training and muscle building is beneficial to any sports program. Baseball and softball players should follow a program that works the following muscle groups: Shoulders; Upper back; Core; and Upper legs.

These major muscle groups affect most activities in baseball and softball and deserve time and attention. The following moves are broken down to help coaches know what exercises are appropriate for what muscle group.

Shoulders

- Military press
- Lat pull-down
- Dumbbell raises to the front and to the side

Upper back

- Flyes
- Pulldowns with a cable
- Any type of rows—seated, inclined, bent-over

Core

- Crunches or situps
- Pilates
- Use of a stability ball
- Leg lifts

Upper legs

- Squats and squat leaps
- Lunges
- Leg press
- Leg curl

All these exercises can be done with or without weights. There are plenty of exercises that are very effective using just the resistance of one's own body weight. If you plan ahead for what is available in your facilities, there is no reason why you cannot create a focused, results-driven workout program using only what you already have.

ALTERNATIVE PRACTICE METHODS CONT.

Visualization

It may seem hard to plan a practice around visualization, and you may not want to spend the whole practice on this, but mental preparation is one of the most important tools you can use to help your team achieve victory.

Here is just one example of a visualization practice that can lead players to increased confidence, more awareness of good technique, and a relaxed and focused attitude. Players should begin by lying on the floor in a comfortable position, preferably on their back. Players should be spread out enough that they are not touching anyone else.

Players close their eyes as you walk them through relaxation techniques, inviting them to leave their stress behind and join with you as you visualize a perfect game. Once players are relaxed, after just a minute or two, you can begin walking players through a normal pre-game routine.

Tell players to imagine themselves walking up to bat. How do they feel? How are they walking? What is their goal? Once players are in the batter's box, tell them to stop and evaluate their form.

Where is their head? Are their legs bent? What is the arm position? The grip on the bat?

Continue this scenario until your players have both hit a successful ball and played their respective defensive position. By reminding players to visualize success, you help them prepare to meet their challenges with a clear head, more confidence, and a sense of calm.

DRILL #1 – DIAMOND BUNTING

Purpose:

Players learn to aim their bunts with more accuracy and they get practice strengthening their short game. The defense improves their ability to field a bunt by shortening reaction time and increasing cooperation.

Setup:

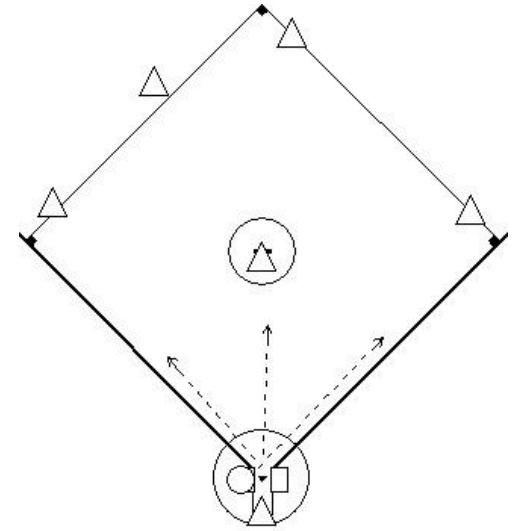
You need markers for each base; Wiffle balls; Bats; and offensive and defensive players.

Execution:

1. Batters take turns bunting to the different positions on a makeshift baseball diamond, aiming for each of the bases.

Coaching Tips:

- This drill is designed to help players develop accuracy and aim for their short game so pay attention to proper form and good focus.
- All batting drills not done in a cage should be done with a waffle ball to avoid injury.



Players bunt to each base in this indoor drill.

DRILL #2 – ONE HAND BATTING

Purpose:

Batters learn the importance of correctly holding the bat, aiming accurately, and controlling the swing. They increase strength in the hitting arm and test their control, concentration, and patience.

Setup:

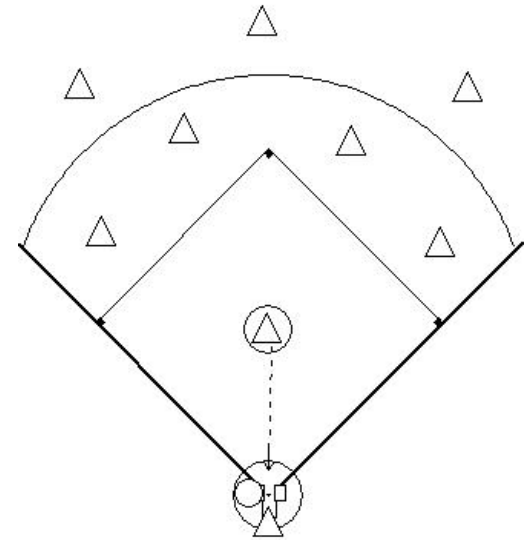
You need bats, Wiffle balls and a net, if possible.

Execution:

1. Batters hit a pitched Wiffle ball while holding the bat with one arm.

Coaching Tips:

- Watch for concentration, muscle control and aim from your batters.



Players bat one-handed against a full defense.

DRILL #3 – SOFT TOSS

Purpose:

Players get experience tossing and catching the ball from different distances and can spend more time focusing on their form rather than their speed or power.

Setup:

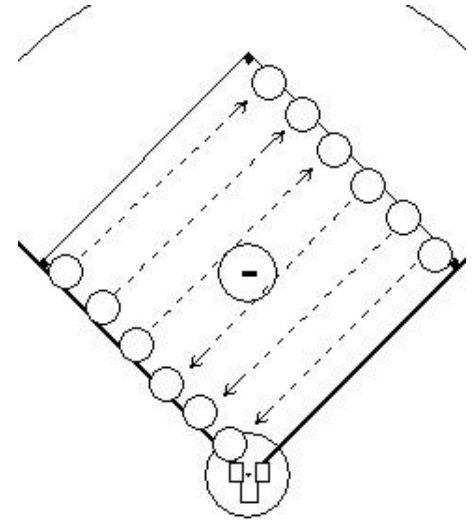
You need balls and gloves.

Execution:

1. Players toss the ball back and forth, working on absorbing the catch, improving their tossing and catching mechanics, and keeping their bodies loose and limber.

Coaching Tips:

- Keep an eye on your players baseball technique so that they create the right muscle memories in this drill.



Players toss the ball back and forth to each other.

DRILL #4 – PITCH SELECTION

Purpose:

Pitchers learn the grips for different pitches and how to prepare for them. They are tested mentally as they work to get the pitch off as soon as possible. They also practice accuracy, though this is a lesser focus.

Setup:

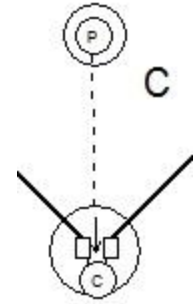
You need a catcher, cage or net and a ball.

Execution:

1. This is a rapid-fire pitching drill that forces players to become comfortable with the grips and throwing mechanics of different pitches.
2. Coaches or other third parties yell out a pitch name and the pitcher has to throw the pitch as quickly as possible.

Coaching Tips:

- Don't be concerned with speed or power , focus only on whether the pitcher throws the correct pitch.



Pitchers work on the grip and throwing mechanics for different pitches.

DRILL #5 – FIELDING DRILL

Purpose:

Players get experience fielding the balls as well as practice faster response time and quicker tosses to teammates, resulting (hopefully) in more outs in real games.

Setup:

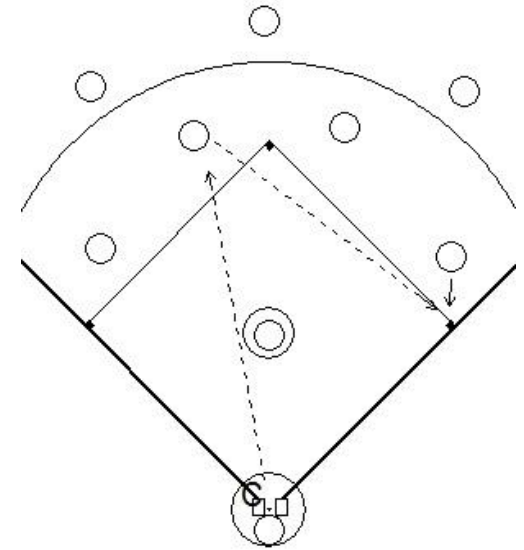
You need a third-party batter, a plastic bat and a Wiffle ball.

Execution:

1. Players assume their regular defensive positions. A coach or other third-party throws and hits various balls, with the intention of giving all players a chance to handle the ball.

Coaching Tips:

- Before the pitch is hit, a routine should be set so that players know that they should throw the ball to a teammate, as if they were trying to get an out.



Defensive players practice different fielding situations in this team drill.

DRILL #6 – WALL BALL HITTING DRILL

Purpose:

Players work on hitting line drives.

Setup:

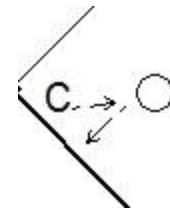
You need a wall, a ball, a bat, a coach and batter.

Execution:

1. To perform this drill, the batter stands approx 30 feet away from a large wall. The coach underhand tosses pitches to the batter, who tries to score by hitting line drives against the wall.

Coaching Tips:

- Make all balls above a certain boundary line fly ball outs, below the line without bouncing player scores 1 run. If the ball bounces it's a ground ball out.



Batter works on hitting line drives against a wall.

DRILL #7 – BLIND MAN DRILL

Purpose:

Players work on reaction time and catching skills in this drill.

Setup:

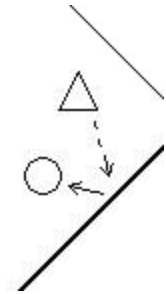
You need two players, a wall and a ball.

Execution:

1. Circle player begins with back to the wall.
2. Triangle player throws the ball off the wall and yells “Now!”
3. Circle player turns around, while the ball is in mid-air, locates the ball and catches it before it hits the ground.

Coaching Tips:

- Use a rubber ball for this drill to avoid injury and ensure a good bounce off the wall.



Player must quickly locate the ball to make the catch in this drill.

DRILL #8 – THREE PLAYER WEAVE

Purpose:

A good conditioning drill. Also focuses on ball-handling.

Setup:

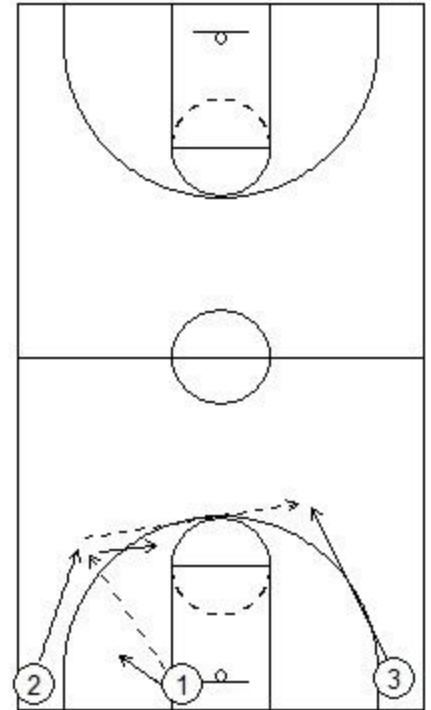
You need a ball and three lines of players.

Execution:

1. Start with 3 lines along the basketball baseline. The middle line has the ball. The players perform this drill barehanded – no gloves permitted.
2. The drill starts when the middle player flips the ball to the player on her right, then cuts behind her.
3. The right player catches the ball, then moves toward the middle of the floor. At the same time, she flips the ball to the left player, and cuts behind her.
4. The left player catches the ball, then moves toward the middle of the floor. The drill continues all the way down the end of the floor, then back.

Coaching Tips:

- If the ball is dropped, have the players restart the drill.



Players follow the ball in this drill, cutting behind the player they pass to.

1 HOUR SAMPLE PRACTICE PLAN

Time	Drill	Coaching Tips
<i>00 to :10</i>	<i>Light throwing warm ups</i>	<i>One knee, stationary, etc</i>
<i>:10 to :15</i>	<i>Light full body stretch</i>	<i>Shoulder, legs, groin, and lower back—just enough to wake up the muscles</i>
<i>:15 to :20</i>	<i>Batting tee</i>	<i>Practice batting off the tee, focusing on aim and bat placement</i>
<i>:25 to :28</i>	<i>Water break</i>	<i>-</i>
<i>:28 to :35</i>	<i>Diamond bunting</i>	<i>Teaches short game aim and technique</i>
<i>:35 to :45</i>	<i>Pitch selection</i>	<i>Teaches the proper grip for various pitches</i>
<i>:45 to :55</i>	<i>One hand batting</i>	<i>Teaches arm strength, batting aim and technique</i>
<i>:55 to 1:00</i>	<i>Cool down and stretch</i>	<i>-</i>

1 HOUR 30 MINUTES SAMPLE PRACTICE PLAN

Time	Drill	Coaching Tips
00 to :10	<i>Light throwing warm ups</i>	<i>One knee, stationary, etc</i>
:10 to :15	<i>Light full body stretch</i>	<i>Shoulder, legs, groin, and lower back—just enough to wake up the muscles</i>
:15 to :20	<i>Batting tee</i>	<i>Practice batting off the tee, focusing on aim and bat placement</i>
:25 to :28	<i>Water break</i>	-
:28 to :35	<i>Diamond bunting</i>	<i>Teaches short game aim and technique</i>
:35 to :45	<i>Pitch selection</i>	<i>Teaches the proper grip for various pitches</i>
:45 to :55	<i>One hand batting</i>	<i>Teaches arm strength, batting aim and technique</i>
:55 to 1:00	<i>Water break</i>	-
1:00 to 1:10	<i>Soft toss</i>	<i>Reinforces throwing and catching mechanics</i>
1:10 to 1:25	<i>Fielding drill</i>	<i>Teaches catching, throwing, and the rhythm of throwing batters out</i>
1:25 to 1:30	<i>Cool down and stretch</i>	<i>Stretch the muscles completely, allowing them to relax</i>

2 HOUR SAMPLE PRACTICE PLAN

Time	Drill	Coaching Tips
00 to :10	<i>Light throwing warm ups</i>	<i>One knee, stationary, etc</i>
:10 to :15	<i>Light full body stretch</i>	<i>Shoulder, legs, groin, and lower back—just enough to wake up the muscles</i>
:15 to :20	<i>Light jog around the outfield</i>	<i>Limbering up and preparing for drills</i>
:25 to :35	<i>Batting tee</i>	<i>Practice batting off the tee, focusing on aim and bat placement</i>
:35 to :40	<i>Water break</i>	-
:40 to :55	<i>Soft toss</i>	<i>Reinforces proper throwing mechanics</i>
:55 to 1:10	<i>Pitch selection</i>	<i>Teaches the proper grip for various pitches</i>
1:10 to 1:15	<i>Fielding drill</i>	<i>Teaches catching, throwing, and the rhythm of throwing batters out</i>
1:15 to 1:25	<i>One hand batting</i>	<i>Teaches batting mechanics and aim</i>
1:25 to 1:30	<i>Water break</i>	-
1:30 to 1:55	<i>Wiffle ball game</i>	<i>Players get game practice with plastic bats, waffle balls, and gloves optional</i>
1:55 to 2:00	<i>Cool down and stretch</i>	<i>Stretch the muscles completely, allowing them to relax</i>

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