



Coaching Coaches

Developing Players

PRACTICE TEMPO TO SIMULATE GAME CONDITIONS

Practice. Every good coach knows that championships are won in practice.

Over three decades of coaching winning football, I have refined how I structure and run my practice many times. I am confident that the information found in this article will be helpful as you structure, set up, script and run YOUR championship winning practice.

Over the past three seasons, Calloway Football has a record of 29-1 with 3 straight championships. In the past three years, the offense averaged over 41 points and nearly 400 yards per game. Our offense averaged 11.84 yards per play! If the yards per play aren't impressive enough, the offense only gave up 1 sack and 1 interception while competing over 67% of their pass attempts. The running game was equally impressive averaging 7.95 yards per rush. On defense, Calloway Football only gave up an average of 7.2 points per game and led the league in sacks and tackles for loss. That is a winning formula at any level!

The main key to that level of success is the way we practice.

At Calloway Football, we primarily employ an uptempo, no huddle approach. The modern no huddle, fast tempo offense is entrenched in the college and high school game and is beginning to gain traction in the NFL. Our success has proven that the same offensive system and concept can be taught and successfully used in both the high school and youth game. As a youth coach, you can dominate your competition if you understand how to properly practice and use fast tempo concepts.

For our staff, learning to coach football in a new way didn't happen overnight. There was a 3 year learning curve as we adapted to coaching in a new system. We learned to structure and run our practices at a tempo that would help us dominate on game day. We revamped our practice schedule, our coaching methods, and the different periods and drills we use each practice.

We shortened each period to establish a flow, avoiding lulls in practice. Our periods are normally only 5 to 10 minutes. The exception to that rule is our team 11 on 11 periods. They can run a little longer depending on the day. With the standard practice periods being 5 to 10 minutes, we are constantly moving and transitioning in and out of reps and drills, preventing our players from standing in lines and becoming stagnant. We don't give them time to mentally wander off or physically become lazy. It dramatically increases the amount of actual practice each player is getting exponentially. Our players are getting more actual practice reps and instruction in one practice than our competition is getting in an entire week or more. Imagine the advantage that creates as the season progresses...

There are four elements woven throughout our practice structure:

- 1) Warm up/Fundamentals periods
- 2) Instructional coaching (INDY) periods
- 3) Reps and tempo periods
- 4) Conditioning is woven throughout each period.

COACHING KEY: I cannot stress enough the importance of tempo and the pace of every stage of practice.

Warm Up/Fundamentals Periods

Start out with tempo from the very beginning. Practice begins with what we call “Dynamic Warm Up and Stretch”.

COACHING KEY: We assign a coach to be the “Pre-Practice Coordinator”. In this role, the coach is responsible for getting the team focused, warmed up and ready to get the max out of every minute of practice.

As part of our warm up, we transition from Dynamic Warm Up and Stretch into a 5 minute period where the skill players go to the “Noose Drill” and the offensive line goes to a group warm up period.

As we come out of the “Noose Drill” the momentum and energy of practice has picked up quite a bit. The “Noose” period is followed by our “Pat-N-Go” drill. During these periods, we are focusing on fundamentals and conditioning.

During Pat-N-Go, players run sprints in between pat-n-go lines. The overall fast pace of practice integrates conditioning into every drill, freeing up more time to rep skills. We then transition straight into a 10 minute team period where we go into our

tackling circuit.

During tackling circuit, even players that do not play defense focus on learning tackling. You will need offensive players to transition to defenders and make a tackle after a turnover. The tackling circuit is a very important 10 minute period. There are multiple stations performing different tackling circuit drills at rapid-fire speed. Each station is only 2 minutes long. We like dividing up into 4 different tackling stations which leaves plenty of time within the 10 minute period for player transition from station to station.

COACHING POINT: DO NOT stop the lines from flowing. Players should not wait in a line longer than 15 to 25 seconds before it is their turn again.

If you must pull a player out of line to instruct them you need an instructional coach at each station that can perform this coaching moment without stopping the drill. You may need 6 coaches to run 3 stations, one coach to run the drill and one coach to be the instructional coach when needed.

By the end of this stage of practice, players will be warmed up and will have built up a good sweat.

Instructional Coaching Indy Periods

After tackling circuit, transition into Individual (Indy) and Every Day Drill (EDD's) periods. These periods are more fundamental and teaching/instructional focused periods. We use these periods for install and position specific fundamental drills.

One of the most important elements is how our coaches are making corrections during periods. In many cases, if a player took

a wrong step, you see the position coach stop the whole drill/period to make the correction.

COACHING POINT: The drill should never stop. Position coaches who aren't running the drill should be ready to step in to coach a player without the drill stopping for the rest of the team.

First thing you need to do is define the periods on our practice schedule as either “Tempo” or “Instructional” periods. Again... we do not slow down or stop the team to teach one player. Define what is “Tempo” vs. “Instructional” periods.

In the instructional periods (Indy and EDD), things can be slowed down when necessary, providing time to teach in a group environment. Typically, instructional periods include our install process for game planning. Installing in our Indy periods allows us to install position-specific game planning with the right player personnel. There is no need to have the entire team standing around while you are coaching the RB what his portion of the install is going to be. Having the OL listen to the RB responsibilities are not a good use of practice time for the OL. The OL gets the install from their position coach in their Indy period. It allows us to be more efficient and more detailed with each position group without wasting time.

Rep and Tempo Periods:

During our “Rep” and “Tempo” periods, “Perimeter”, “Quick Game”, “Dropback Game”, “7-on-7” and “1v1” periods, the only way our position coaches can make corrections is by pulling out the player and putting in the back-up. This is helpful for two reasons. The 1st reason is that we do not slow down or stop the practice period. The 2nd reason is that you are getting reps for your backups and they are thrown in at the spur of the moment

and must execute their responsibilities, just like in a game situation.

A typical tempo period will last 5 to 10 minutes with a goal of getting 25 to 30 plays off in a 5 minute period, or 50 to 60 plays in a 10 minute period. This helped us tremendously come game day. Tempo periods gave us the best opportunity to simulate game speed. Our players became mentally conditioned that once the play is over, sprint to the line and get ready to snap the ball again. This will become 2nd nature for you players because it is something that they will do every single practice.

Scripting:

To be able to snap the ball as quick as we do in our tempo periods, we must prepare for practice like we prepare for games. We make sure that we have all the plays that we want to run in each period scripted. We script EVERYTHING. Not only the side of the ball we are working on but what we feel we are most likely going to see used against us on game day. When working offense, we script plays we want to run and in team periods we also script the defensive looks we expect to see matched up against our formations. This will allow you to snap the ball quickly without thinking of what play you want to see next. This also helps your coach running the defensive scout team, as he already knows what defense needs to be called.

“Situational Tempo” Periods

Preparation and planning is a major key to our success. In our situational tempo periods, we are preparing and planning how we are going to react in various situations that we may come up against on game day. An example is our “run fit” drill, which is our goal line offense.

This period is not only preparing your players, but preparing your coach who is calling the plays. During this period, you will need people to spot the ball, hold the chains, and a coach to blow the play in and a coach who controls the time. The coach controlling the time will always be updating the play caller with how much time has passed. I want as much pressure on the play caller as possible. This gives your play caller a realistic preview of what he will face in a game situation. This is a very important period. This will give you a sense of how your team will react when they move the ball the down field.

This will help you exponentially on game day. You will have put your team in almost every situation that they will face in a game.

“Practice Like It’s a Game”

To get your team and coaches accustomed to a game tempo, you must practice like it is game day. This means that during all rep tempo periods, you are moving the football, signaling in plays from the sidelines etc. During our tempo periods, someone should be spotting the ball and someone should be controlling the play clock. Our coaches will do what they do on game day. If they are responsible for signals, they are signaling. If they are responsible for personnel, they are making the appropriate substitutions.

If the coach who calls the plays is in the press box, you should bring out your headsets and have him communicate to the coach signaling the plays. A tempo period should be considered a game simulation. For a team installing a no huddle offense for the first time, these periods are critical to your team. Tempo periods will help everyone. Your team will become better aware of what to do at the end of the play. They will instinctively run to the line of scrimmage (LOS), get set and look to sideline for the next play to be signaled in.

A few extra coaching points that will be very helpful for you

“Determining Tempo”

After countless meetings, hours of research and speaking with other coaches, the 1 thing that I was still unsure of was “how fast do we want to go”. I thought it was a pretty simple question. It turns out, that almost every coach I spoke with had a different answer. This is something that you and your staff will have to come up with. The way that we came up with the tempo that suited us was to ask ourselves a few questions:

- Are there a minimum number of plays that we want to run in a game?
- Is there a specific time on the play clock that we want to snap the ball?
- Are we concerned about time of possession?
- Do we want to have multiple tempos?

Once you can answer these questions, you will have an idea on how fast you want to go. Obviously, you will have different tempos you use throughout the game. However, I found it extremely important to practice faster than the fastest tempo you will be using. By doing this, things will seem slower for your players on gameday and that will be critical in a 1st year high tempo offense.

My philosophy is simple, make practice the hardest part of the week and put your team in the most unthinkable situations. Come game day, they will be relaxed knowing that they have already faced the hardest situations at practice.

Conditioning

When you practice at turbo speed, your players will be the best-

conditioned athletes on the field, prepared to dominate on the field both physically and mentally. We do not end practice with wasting valuable time running sprints across the field. Our entire practice is a sprint and our players are well conditioned.

Conclusion

The best advice I can give to new coaches looking to implement the no huddle offense is to stick to and trust the system.

It is important for your program to come up with your own identity. Calloway Football's identity is to Play Fast, Compete and Be Physical. We filter everything we do through this view or we do not do it. You need something to hang your hat on. The brand that I want for my program is that we are going to line up and snap the ball at a feverish rate, compete on every snap, and play physical football. I want the opposing coach to concern themselves more with my tempo than my schemes. By doing this, you will have an advantage before you even snap the ball. The best compliment I can receive from an opposing coach was to hear them tell me that they had no chance of simulating the tempo they saw from us on game day during their practices. When you hear this, you know you are on the right path for running a high tempo offense.

Coach Calloway