

Go out to a soccer complex on the day of a tournament and you will see lots of teams warming-up before their matches. Lots of kids in lots of lines-usually in some of type of shooting drill. Coach kicking a ball, player makes a run, kicks at the goal, keeper rolls ball back to the coach, player runs to the end of the line. Sound familiar? Why are we wasting so much time with this type of warm-up?

Coaches may ask, "What's the big deal, it's a warm-up." The reality is that it is a big deal if you are not using the time efficiently. How much time do you spend in a warm-up? 30 minutes if at a tournament. Maybe 60 minutes if a high school match. That's a lot of minutes over the course of the season. Are you getting out of them what you should be?

Let's start with what should a warm-up accomplish. Three things:

1. Get the players body ready to move and be active
2. Get the players mind and muscles ready for match activities.
3. Make your team and players better.

Watch the three videos below. Which one accomplished #1-#2?

How #1 is accomplished depends on age. High school age players will need a long period of dynamic and static stretching. A team of U8 players don't need any and can jump right into #2. In order to accomplish #2 the activities you use must be match realistic. I have watched a lot of soccer and I have never seen a match in which players stand around waiting for a ball to come to them and then undefended shoot. Yet almost every warm-up has some variation of this basic non-match activity.

In short, to accomplish #2 the activities you choose must be close to what the player will actually be doing in a match. It does not have to be complicated. Rondos are excellent for this. A simple game of 3 v 3 keep-away. How about 3 v 3 "split" in which the players try to play the ball between (splitting) two players from the other team. Combine the groups and move to 6 v 6 keep-away or split. Have your keeper(s) warm-up with an assistant. When the keeper is ready to take shots from the team keep the game going and add shooting. For example, three complete passes and the team gets to go to frame or two splits and the team goes to frame. Once caught have your keeper play the ball back out to get his distribution warm-up in.

Now we get to #3. Use your warm-up as a mini training session. Why waste 30 minutes (or 45 or 60)? You can accomplish #1 and #2 and use the time to improve your team. What have you been working on in the week(s) leading up to the match? Incorporate those activities in your warm-up. Don't waste all those minutes. Use them to make your team better. Let's say you have 3 matches in a weekend at a tournament. That is 90 minutes of warm-up that you can also use as training sessions. For most ages that is the length of a normal practice. And there you have it—by using this technique you just found another practice session in an otherwise busy week.

Now, go back and look at the three videos. Which one accomplishes #1-#3? In which one will the players come away not only ready to play but also better players. Use every minute you have with your players to improve them and the team as a whole.

What's in a warm-up. Quite a bit, if used wisely and efficiently.