With the new season on the horizon I am sure a lot of teams are thinking about or already started their pre-season training.
This article is just to raise some points that we as coaches and managers should consider when planning sessions and also to give some ideas on set ups and drills for your training sessions.

(Information below taken from FA Fitness for Football book by Richard Hawkins – Deputy Head of Exercise Science at the Football Association)

DIFFERENT TRAINING NEEDS FOR YOUNG PLAYERS – KEEP IT VARIED

As young players bodies develop there is an increased risk of injury - particularly as a result of excessive and repetitive movements that focus on a particular part of the body.
For example, if during a 90 minute training session, the coach runs three ten minute sessions of jumping and heading practice there would be an increased risk of injury to the knees and ankle joints. This is because this would be the area of the body taking the impact of this particular training drill.

If the same coach had devised a 90 minute training session that only had one jumping and heading practice, one turning with the ball practice and one shooting practice, the chances of injury would be reduced. This is because different parts of the body would be taking the impact of these training drills.
Keeping training sessions varied and interesting will not only help young players to improve their chance of avoiding injury but should also assist the young players interest and motivation levels.

COACHES NEED TO UNDERSTAND THEIR YOUNGER PLAYERS

The young player is physiologically unique from the adult and must be considered differently. Generally, the youngster will adapt well to the same type of training routine used by the mature athlete, but training programmes for children and adolescents should be designed specifically for each age group, bearing in mind the developmental factors associated with their age.

THE WARM UP

The warm up is designed to prepare the player for the ensuing physical activity, be it a training session or game, to enable players to perform optimally. There are several reasons why a warm up period should be given as part of a training session and before games.
Reasons for conducting a thorough warm up prior to training and matches include the following:-

- *To increase blood flow to muscular tissue.*
- *To increase muscle temperature.*
- *To reduce muscle tightness.*
- *To elevate body temperature.*
- *To stimulate reflex activity related to balance and co-ordination.*
- *To achieve full soft tissue extensibility – muscles, tendons, ligaments.*
- *To prepare the cardiovascular and respiratory system.*
- *To prepare the player psychologically for the coming activity.*
- *To familiarize players with the environmental conditions.*

Warm ups should be intense enough to increase the body temperature and resemble the activity that is going to be performed. The warm up should begin with movements of the large muscle groups, as these are the main areas to which blood is redistributed.
These include the following areas:-

- *Back lower leg – gastrocnemius and soleus.*
- *Front lower leg – peroneals (shin).*
- *Front thigh – quadriceps.*
- *Back thigh – hamstrings.*
- *Inner thigh – adductors.*
- *Back – erector spinae.*
- *Trunk – abdominal muscles.*
- *Shoulders and Chest – deltoids and pectorials.*

THE COOL DOWN

Following the end of vigorous physical activity it takes time for the body to return to its resting state. Large volumes of blood and waste products remain in the muscles that lead to a build up of pressure within the muscle, which results in excess fluid accumulating in the tissues and muscles.
When a player simply stops following a training session or game he/she is more likely to incur some form of muscle stiffness/soreness. By cooling down appropriately, the recovery process is accelerated.
The aim of the cool down is to encourage the gradual return of the heart, body metabolism and respiratory rate to normal. An active cool down promotes the clearance of latic acid and a gradual decrease in the exercise intensity and the application of controlled rhythmical movements will also assist in cooling the body as the transfer of blood flow to the skin will be maintained, which allows further heat loss.
One of the major benefits of an active cool down is that the ability to sleep is enhanced. This is crucial in insuring that appropriate regeneration of the body can take place.