



Should Line Drills Be Called 'Suicides'?

This resource stems from a question submitted to the Ask PCA blog. Responses come from our experts including PCA Trainers, who lead live group workshops for coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes.

"My 8-year-old daughter's basketball coach uses the word 'suicides' for line drills. Does that seem right? I am hoping a more positive approach will be used for this drill."

PCA Response by Ray Lokar, PCA Trainer—Los Angeles

If it were ever appropriate to call running drills "suicides" it is no longer. Too many adolescents have taken their own lives, and your players may know someone who has. Use of that term should be eliminated immediately from every coach's vocabulary.

There are also other good reasons to not label conditioning with such a negative name. In youth sports, especially at the U-10 level, conditioning should be multi-purpose in nature and done with a ball as often as possible. Practice time is so limited that any time spent with the ball is invaluable and running for the sake of running, or even conditioning, is a less productive use of time.

At that age, fun is most important, so instead of drills, coaches should couch skill development as games or competitions. Instead of running as a punishment, players should learn that it's "fun to run," and they should take in their best effort at every challenge. How coaches present these activities, in both name and design, goes a long way toward placing the players in a proper mindset.

Coaches want players to practice hard and focus because it is the right thing to do and, due to a well-planned practice, is impossible NOT to do. Coaches shouldn't want them to practice hard for fear of running. A coach can't stop play in the middle of a game and tell players to "Get on the line for suicides," so coaches must help players learn to gain focus on their own.

A simple reminder or "attitude adjustment" time in practice (sprint up and back, run a lap, etc.) can get players' attention and help them re-focus in practice, but punitive running on a regular basis loses its effectiveness and is counterproductive to achieving the real objective: playing the right way. Running at the end of practice may cause players to "save" themselves by not practicing as hard as they can, which also undermines the players' development.

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Finally, if the last thing players do before leaving practice is something they dislike, the coach is developing a negative atmosphere. It is better to end practice on a positive note, and have everyone looking forward to getting back to work at the next practice.

PCA Trainer Ray Lokar has coached a variety of sports for over 25 years at the youth, high school, and college levels, including his son and two daughters who have gone on to play college athletics, as well as an 8-year old son currently playing youth sports. Ray was the Head Basketball Coach of the 2002 California Interscholastic Federation Champions while at Bishop Amat High School and is a Past-President of the Southern California Interscholastic Basketball Coaches Association.

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