

Running a Youth Skills Clinic

By Will Smolinski

Youth clinics can be a valuable resource to players looking for a head-start to their Ultimate career. By being prepared and implementing some of the strategies below, many challenges of running a Youth Skills Clinic can be managed or avoided.

Preliminary Expectations

The first step is to try to get a preliminary idea of what the expectations are from the participants. A simple questionnaire that asks for their current skill level, knowledge and confidence with specific skills (throwing, cutting, marking, etc.) and what they would like to learn more about will help with designing your clinic. This will also help you become acquainted with players before they arrive.

Along those same lines, try starting off with an introductory activity where people learn names and you can gauge personalities (there are lots of silly games that involve a disc out there).

Make sure that when presenting skills, drills, and concepts that there are handouts for participants to bring back to their teams. With so much information being covered in such a short period of time it is good to have materials that will remind players of the most important cues or objectives of each drill.

Finally, split time between mass instruction with the entire group and one on one instruction as much as the size of your clinic permits.

Teaching Different Ability Levels

If there is a range of ability levels in the group there are a few techniques that will help differentiate instruction. The easiest is to break them into homogeneous groups. Although this might take some prep time or even some time observing to accurately assess

skills before breaking into groups, players will feel less pressure in a peer group that is close to their ability level. This also allows each group to focus on developmentally appropriate objectives even if they are working on the same drill. Adding different challenges or cues to each group is another way to tailor instruction according to each specific group's needs.

The opposite approach can be another successful solution. Pairing more skilled players with less skilled players can be beneficial in learning individual skills like throwing or marking. Allowing experienced participants to help with some aspects of instruction gives players with less skill more one-on-one time while deepening the understanding of the more skilled players. Teaching somebody else a skill forces the teacher to evaluate and breakdown each task into smaller components, which leads to a more thorough understanding.

It should be noted that mixing ability levels while teaching advanced concepts (such as team strategy or drills that involve 'flow') can be frustrating and should generally be avoided.

Planning the Day

If the clinic is going to last more than a couple hours it will be beneficial to break up the day with some forethought. Some easy tips include:

- Mix up running- and throwing-based drills to allow for some rest.
- Have several 5-10 minute throwing sessions instead of one 45 minute throwing session.

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- Progress the drills from individual skills to team concepts (forcing and downfield positioning do not matter if the mark is constantly getting broken).
 - Mix in disc games besides Ultimate, such as Double Disc Court, Disc Golf, or Keep Away.
 - 20 minutes for each activity (three minutes of instruction, 10 minutes of doing, two minutes of re-focused instruction, five more minutes of doing).
 - Finish tasks on a positive note by setting goals (i.e. 20 completions and we're done).
 - Allow five minutes of down time for every hour.

Managing Your Energy

Running a clinic is exhausting. Make sure to take care of your body throughout the day so you can bring the best version of yourself to each activity. That includes taking water breaks with the kids, eating small snacks throughout the day, and allowing for some participant-run activities where you can take a mental breather.

Participant Questionnaire

- Current skill level
- Strengths? (throwing, cutting, marking, etc.)
- What would you like to learn?