



**HOW TO GET
EVERYTHING LEARNT BY
OPENING DAY**

THE BEGINNING

I have my team and now how do I get them to learn everything they need to so that they are able to attend Opening Day?

Well firstly let me say that it is not easy. You need to carefully plan the build up to the season and that means work for you, as the Coach, over and above actual training time.

There are some basic principles that you need to be aware of:

- Children join sport for fun and camaraderie. Being fit and healthy is not their pre-requisite – it may be their parents but it almost certainly won't be the young child's.
- They want to get to know the other children in the team so that they can form friendships and feel part of the group
- They want to learn as much as possible in the shortest possible time and have fun while they are doing it.
- They want to be good at what they are doing

So to enable the above to happen training must have –

- An element of fun
- Achievable learning goals
- Time built in for the forming of friendships and the consolidating of these
- Sound tuition techniques to enable the final principle to be achieved – that is – to be good at what they are doing

So where to from here? Firstly let me say that the planning of the first few training sessions is absolutely crucial. This is the time when the child will either become 'hooked on marching' or 'not want to come back'. Once friendships are formed and achievements start to take place then it is easier to keep the marchers wanting to 'be there'.

The first training should:

- Be fun – definitely not boring
- Have full participation and success especially for the newcomers – this means doing not watching
- Have time for getting to know team members and forming friendships

So how to do it? Well the following are some guidelines to help you to hold on to those new marchers and to teach them all they need to know as quickly as possible.

PRE-PLANNING IS SO IMPORTANT

Your planning is important. At the first training don't mark down a pace ladder and have marchers marching up and down while you correct basic faults. For a newcomer, and for some that are unsure if they want to return, this could be extremely boring and a real turn-off. There is time for that later on – once they are hooked and understand the need to improve their basic drill. So make it enjoyable, have some games that help develop the skills of the sport.

How about a game of **Team Tag**

Basic skills that are being developed are:

- marking time (walking on the spot)
- pivoting (turning corners to get away from a tagger)
- keeping in time with music (have music playing and make a rule that you have to keep in time with the music)
- regulated paces (make a rule that any curved lines on say a netball court have to be done with shorter paces i.e. moving mark times)

or what about a game of **Memory Challenge**

Basic skills that are being developed are:

- listening to and following instructions
- keeping in time with music
- pivoting (e.g. walk along three sides of one of the third's of the netball court)
- marking time (add into the instructions some mark time beats at each destination e.g. walk to nearest fence and mark time 6 beats, turn around to face opposite direction by marking time six beats, walk home)
- side pacing (e.g. when you get to a tree you must side pace around it)

or a game of **Here – There – Where**

Basic skills that are being developed are:

- teamwork
- listening to and following instructions
- marking time
- keeping in time with the music
- pivoting

Make some variations such as 'when you get to the line turn around to face the centre by marking time six beats' or ' whenever you come HERE you have to mark time and/or salute' or 'stand still then side pace to the left then the right'.

There can be a huge number of games you could create and after a while you will become an expert at changing the rules to meet your needs e.g. add in commands/instructions like stand still for six counts, salute for six counts, mark time for six counts, or just stand and call out pivot, salute, mark time, side pace and the marchers have to follow the instruction quickly. You could divide the team into two groups and challenge them to come up with a game for the next training.

You could start each training with one or two of these games as your warm-ups. They are fun and will aid team member communication and camaraderie as well as developing the basic skills as listed.

The most important thing is to know the training area and the natural attribute e.g. trees, court lines etc and to pre-plan your activities. You cannot expect things to go well if you arrive at training at the same time as the marchers and then get out your book and decide what you might do.

So, PLAN PLAN PLAN, it will save time in the end!

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO LEARN

In order to be able to learn the Review & Inspection and the Technical Drills you need to teach the basic components required.

They are:

- marching in time with the music
- how to halt
- turns on the march
- marking time
- regulated paces
- side paces
- moving to attention
- standing at ease
- turns at the halt

I would start by ensuring my marchers could do the basic requirements of the Technical Drills and teach that component first. At the same time I would give them a copy of the Display music for them to listen to and to have fun with. You never know what wonderful drills (arm and leg) the marchers might come up with given the opportunity. Review & Inspection would come after the Technical Drills and then the Display

So for the Technical Drills they need to walk in time with the music, to halt, mark time, take regulated paces, and side paces. For grades above Under 12 they will need to learn any special or about turns as well.

Now my planning really starts. By the end of the first or second training I would want them to be able to perform all of the above. Not as written in the details but able to perform it well enough to learn the movements. I would not

even worry about how they held their hands or if they swung their arms. I would show them how the handgrip should be held and tell them that they need to swing their arms naturally when they march but that is all. For all I care they could be bending over slightly watching their feet perform the drills. It doesn't matter to begin with.. (Remember it's a build-up of skills).

The important part is what the feet are doing and the counting. The rest, as I said before, can come later. Arms will swing a little bit quite naturally and gradually as time progresses they will swing their arms higher if that is being modelled by yourself, experienced marchers or by watching the video. A video session would be very valuable so that the girls can watch exactly how the drills should be performed and can start to model themselves on the marchers in the video. A very powerful learning tool.

Near the end of the first or second training I would try and put the marchers into some formation that would enable them to start learning the movements. I would have a book for each marcher with the counts of the first movement glued in. Each child would receive one of these and be asked to learn the counts of the first movement before the next training. If I had any marchers arrive that I did not know about I would explain that their book would be ready for them at the next training. I certainly would have one for each position i.e. 10 books ready to hand out at the first training.

I would take each marcher through their counts individually showing them what to do in relation to the instructions written in their book. To do this successfully you would need to have marked out the movement on the ground prior to the start of the training session (use the graphs in the Technical Drills to help you do this). If you are in a hall then use masking tape but remember to remove it before you go home. It helps for lifting if you roll a little corner back on itself (making a small loose flap) so you can use that to rip it off the floor.

INCENTIVES TO TRAIN

Lollipops (or such) would be given out at each training for those that had taken up the challenge and had **MADE an ATTEMPT** to learn the movement. Any attempt would be 'lollipopable'. You want to start straight away and give the message that training at home is important. Later on you can make the reward more difficult to achieve so that more effort is put into training at home or with a buddy. But at first make every attempt a positive experience with lots of praise and of course a lollipop for work done at home.

IMPORTANT

Now you need to remember a very important point:

Children can only remember up to three instructions at one time (Adults up to seven).

So if we are giving counts, we should break them down into small sequences of only 3 instructions maximum. So think about what this means in a complex movement with a number of counts and with all the technical requirements we expect. It means that forget everything except exactly what is required to do the movement - counts and footwork.

Halt, mark time 2, step out. Three instructions

So don't start reminding them about posture, or handgrip, or toes in line. Just let them learn the counts. The other comes later as part of your basic training, which is then, incorporated into the movements.

So to get on the field at Opening Day learn what is required to perform the movements and learn the counts.

Once the counts are in the long-term memory then remembering the basics at the same time is not difficult. But the basics should be taught in isolation e.g. handgrip, arm swing, foot position in mark time etc. As the marchers become more expert they will be able to incorporate the basics in the movements quite naturally. But don't start the year with basics, basics, basics. Children of today want to learn something – because their parents will ask them what they have learnt – and they want action.

The point about remembering only three instructions at one time is very important because it gives you a greater understanding of how some children have so much difficulty learning something new. If you give four or five instructions they will forget the first one or two and so they can't even get started.

COUNTS OR ??

As a coach I tried to break down movements into easily learnt segments and use words rather than counts for the moves. I am not in favour of, for example, counting 1,2,3, & 4 for a turn or a halt.

I would rather say, for example, in, stand still, out when learning a turn on the march, but how do we put these words into movements? Well it can be difficult so time needs to be spent planning this as well.

I used to get the marchers to work out the chants to movements. Say a wheel of 4 could be:

"round the	wheel we	go to	day"
Beat 1	Beat 2	Beat 3	Beat 4

The emphasis is placed on the words round, wheel, go, day and it is said in a chant like fashion – "round the wheel we go today".

After a side pace where the marchers have to stand still for two beats use a chant e.g. Spice Girls. So the movement might go something like this:

Halt and (halt and hesitation) Spice Girls (step over) a natural hesitation then comes in after the words Spice Girls which is said quickly. Rather than on the left and right beats which would be slow. Spice is said on the left beat but Girls is said before the right beat. If you were completing a side pace after a halt it would be

Halt and Left and Right
Halt and Spice Girls then a natural hesitation

Wherever you have a one beat pause in the drills use the same chant e.g. Wait, two beats could be Stand Tall. Whenever you are wheeling for four or six use the same chant. That way the movements will be easier to learn and at the same time timing will be improved throughout which is a bonus for you as coach and for the girls because it will save training time in the end.

Now I am at home in front of my computer and I am marching around the house doing the drills to the counts but I have not tried these counts with a whole team. I reflect that each ranks counts are different and so if they counted out aloud they would confuse each other but I have a feeling that if they chant in a voice loud enough for each member to hear then there are times when their chant will be the same i.e. the first side pace done by two ranks and the march 4 and halt also done by two ranks, the final pause done by the whole team. So don't give up if it is confusing the first time you try. Have a few tries and then modify it if and only if you feel it is unworkable for YOU. Have the ranks/files practice it on their own before you put it together as a whole team.

Now you are going to have to do some pre-planning and work out some chants for the movements so that you can paste these into the book alongside the counts for each movement. The marcher can use the chants and if things don't quite work out can check the counts. An adult could check that the chant is being done correctly by checking the counts for the marcher.

You may not like the chants I have used. Perhaps no one in your team likes the Spice Girls – so change the chant. Always use chants that the children enjoy. Get them to come up with ideas of their own. Use your team name where ever possible perhaps in the one or two beat pauses e.g. Green Team. That way they will have ownership of what they are doing and that is always an added incentive to work hard for you and the team. And they can have fun at the same time because some ideas will cause a lot of laughter. Make sure teams have a laugh but are not nasty or mean to each other. That's your job to oversee – Coach.

GOAL SETTING OR TRAINING OBJECTIVES

It is a really valuable tool to set a goal at the start of each training session and to set goals for home training as well.

The goal for the second training session could be:

e.g. *That the whole team be able to perform Movement No 1 by the end of training.*

Remember lots and lots of praise, and then some more praise as well.

You need to tell the marchers what the goal is at the beginning of training. At the end of training you set the goal for home.

e.g. *Learn the counts for Movement No 2*

Remember lots and lots of praise for any attempts.

At the next training your goal will be:

E.g. *That the whole team be able to perform Movement No 2 by the end of training.*

Now not only can children only remember three instructions at one time they must perform a task numerous times over a period of a few days for it to become imbedded in the long-term memory.

If they achieve their training goal on a Saturday and then do not train again or practice at home before the following Saturday then there is every likelihood that they will have forgotten what they had learnt. Not their fault – just the way the brain and the memory works.

So what to do. Set home training goals and have someone check what they have practiced. You teach them on Saturday and then in their home book you have their checklist.

The first weeks check list could be:

Counts for Movement No 1

You need to discuss this with the caregivers and suggest that they get their child to practice a few times and then they will check it. They will have the details they are supposed to check in the front of the book e.g. counts for Movement No 1.

The marcher has to have their movement checked twice during the week. During that week they are also required to learn the counts for Movement No 2 as well. Not a big ask but one which will require them to have a little bit of

dedication to learning. You can enhance this by rewarding the hard work done at home. Lollipops are cheap and can save you hours and hours of training time over the season. They can also help to build the self-esteem of the marcher and improve the desire to work even harder for you and the team

IS EVERYONE THE SAME - NO!

Now the above applies to a brand new team with mostly new marchers. For teams with experienced marchers you should be able to learn more than one movement a week after the first week and after they get used to the way you are going to do things this season. So perhaps Week 2's goal will be to learn movements 2 & 3. Week 3's goal will be to learn movements 4,5, & 6. Or if you are training for short periods twice a week the goals could be a movement a training for new ones and one or two for experienced ones. You may find one movement that is more difficult than others and that may need training on its own. So you may have to adjust your schedule depending on the ease or difficulty of the movement.

Don't worry if one or two marchers get a little left behind or seem to be struggling a little. The more they go over it the better they will get, so remember about the long-term memory and just go over and over the movement until they can do it. Remember that COUNTS and WHAT THE FEET ARE DOING are the most important. The other basics can be worked on once the movements can be performed confidently.

CHALLENGES

You can add some challenges by betting them that they can't do it. Then act really surprised when things go well and praise, praise, praise, and then praise some more. Don't badger those who don't meet the challenge – praise, praise and praise some more those that did and IGNORE those that didn't (you never know what might have gone on in their lives to prevent them doing the home training!). They will feel it without you having to say a word and hopefully (normally anyway in my experience as a teacher) they will try harder and make sure they get the positive attention the next week.

DISPLAY

Once all the movements have been learnt, do the same for Review & Inspection and the Display. Breakdown the display into achievable portions. Write out the counts for the marcher to practice at home (remember the short-term memory will work on training day but to get it into the long-term memory it must be practiced a few times before the next training, if it is to be remembered at the next training). You may need to get a helper to help write up the books – a couple of parents perhaps. The marchers could have a break in learning and get the helper to write up their counts in their home book, this would help reinforce the counts for the marcher at the same time.

Perhaps you could have a display only practice that goes longer than normal trainings. Every half hour STOP, have a break, time for camaraderie and playing around. You might find the marchers practicing their bits on their own away from the pressure of having to be in time with others, perhaps in front of a classroom window (if you train at a school) and this is important personal training for the marcher who is less confident performing in front of others.

At this time they, or you and your helpers, write up their home books. It is not your break it is the marchers break from learning. Set little challenges after each break. 'Lets keep going until we learn 30 more beats' and then have a break. Keep reminding them how many beats they have learnt. Praise, praise, praise and then praise some more.

BUT if you have a long training session give caregivers plenty of warning so they can arrange their family around it. During it have lots and lots of breaks, have time for fun and camaraderie, perhaps play a game during the second break. Your marchers are going to spend time at competitions and so it won't hurt if, from time to time, they spend time at a longer training. In fact it would help prepare them for the longer time spent at a competition.

Many teams go away on weekend camps for display learning. This is a great idea and prepares marchers for the time when they have to go away for a competition. For young marchers let their caregivers come out and visit them. In fact encourage the caregivers to visit. Perhaps a BBQ after day one where the team show off what they have achieved. Powerful motivator for the day if they realise they have to perform what they have learnt.

On the second day of a camp be prepared to achieve only half of what you achieved on the first day. Don't get frustrated by this as the children may well be at their learning capacity by the end of day one.

If so, and things don't seem to be going so well then STOP, have a break, have a game, set a small challenge - "Lets try to learn 20 more beats and we'll have a big break". Or you could stop teaching any more and just go over and over what you have already learnt so that it becomes firmly imbedded in the long-term memory.

IT IS ALL LEARNT – WOW! – WHAT NOW?

Opening Day has gone and you were able to enter in all aspects of the day. Wow – what an achievement and one you and the team can be proud of. BUT don't stop there. Now is the time to perfect all the basic drills. So into the home book goes a wee write up about armswing. *Arms straight as the natural bend will allow, must swing in the line of march i.e. not across the body, must sing in a smooth even speed.* Now keep in place those same mid week checks. Any adult can tell whether the armswing is correct if they have the information telling them what to check.

So the home goal could be:

- To swing my arms in a straight line
- To keep my arms straight
- To swing my arms in a smooth even speed

The next week's check could be a Turn:

- I can stop with toes in line
- After I stop I can stand still without moving
- I can pivot my foot 90 degree when I step out
- My hands are in the correct positions when I stop

Just keep on having weekly goals that are related to the skills the marcher needs to develop. Keep the home goal very simple and remember to praise, praise, praise every attempt.

Can you remember how annoyed you got if your teacher did not mark your homework – why bother doing it soon became the call. So remember this and remember to check the home books each week to see what has been achieved.

Remember you have all season to perfect what you teach them so don't panic if it all seems too difficult in the beginning. Be methodical about what you have to teach, give clear simple instructions, make training fun and ensure success is gained through your careful planning and positive feedback.

Enjoy your coaching AND ensure your marchers enjoy your coaching.

My very best wishes for a successful season.

Trish Flanagan

Every decision we make has an impact on something or someone.

The difficulties we face are here to teach us and to help us grow.

Relax, enjoy yourself and have fun!

Use your time wisely – make every second count.

Focus on and commit to the task at hand and reap the rewards that will follow.

Extend yourself! Feel the fear and the excitement.