



Your Virtual “Practice Plan” Framework

Here’s what our virtual “team practices” look like right now and how we’ve been using them to build stronger bonds on our team:

Logistics

- We’ve been meeting twice a week - normally on Monday and Thursday afternoons at 3 PM - right when school would normally get out for us. We asked our kids whether they thought these meetings were better once a week or twice a week and most said twice, however we’re monitoring the attendance and if it starts to drop off, we’ll probably cut back to once a week in the interest of getting more kids on each call.
- We keep the meetings short - no more than 40 min (and usually about 10-12 of those minutes are taken up watching a high level wrestling match together). We don’t ever want it to feel like a drag for our kids because we want them to keep coming back! I know I can sometimes get a bit long-winded so the fact that Zoom cuts the meetings off at 40 minutes when you have the “free” account is probably super helpful for us!
- We recognized that not all of our kids have the same level of commitment, so we couldn’t just make the meeting all about training, and certainly not all about our coaches urging kids to get their workouts in - that was actually turning some of our kids off (surprise, surprise!). So we try to keep it as light, enjoyable and positive as possible.
- [Zoom](#) is the free online meeting software we’ve been using. For those who don’t want to use Zoom, [BlueJeans](#) is another great low-cost alternative that has the same “Breakout Room” functionality as Zoom.
- “Breakout Rooms”: One cool feature that we’ve been taking advantage of is the ability to split the meeting up into smaller sub-meetings in the middle of our “practice” to allow small group conversations and then pull everyone back into the larger meeting. More about how we use these “Breakout Rooms” below!

Here’s a rough idea of how we typically break down our 40-minute “practices”:

- We spend the first few minutes letting kids just catch up with each other while everyone logs in, we’ll usually get rolling after about three to five minutes. I’ll try to make sure to say “what’s up” to each kid as they join. The guys enjoy the chance to have this small talk and it’s kind of similar to our actual practice environment where guys are hanging around with each other before practice.

- We'll usually get going with a Joke of the Day. We'll just have one of the kids volunteer to tell a clean joke. We do this a lot at our regular practices too, so the kids know what's appropriate and what's not. I'll always have one or two ready in case no one wants to step up.
- Then we'll ask the kids if anyone has anything they want to share. This could be something noteworthy that happened to them the last few days, maybe a funny story or a tip for the rest of the team. Lately, our seniors have been able to share what their college plans are going to be, now that that's starting to come into focus for them. I know they've really appreciated being able to celebrate that stuff with the group.
- From there one of our coaches will share one or two things with the group. This is the part of "practice" where we try to focus on best practices of getting workouts in, keeping up with our nutrition, maintaining good habits and staying on a schedule. Essentially this is our time to remind our guys about the importance of staying on top of their training and taking care of business. Keeping that type of content to a small portion of practice allows us to continually give them the messaging they need without it becoming too redundant or overbearing.
- From there we'll give the kids a specific topic to discuss and send them out to the virtual breakout rooms I mentioned earlier. Zoom lets you decide how many breakout rooms you want and how many kids per room. I recommend no more than 3-4 kids per "room". This number lets them have good discussions with each other and keeps any of them from hiding out and not participating or falling through the cracks.
- One awesome feature of Zoom is that it will automatically split your group into these rooms randomly. This is pretty cool for us because it pairs together kids that might not necessarily interact that much otherwise. You literally hit one button and it takes care of it for you.
- We give the kids a specific topic to talk about to get them to share with each other and give them a set amount of time to do it - usually about 5 min.
- Some topics:
 - Your biggest highlight of last season
 - Biggest highlight of your wrestling career
 - Biggest life highlight
 - Most challenging hardship you've had to face
 - Who's your hero and why?
 - If you really knew me, you'd know...
 - Something you're really grateful for
 - Something you appreciate about each other member in your group

- Your top personal goal for next year and why it's important to you

- Having these conversations in the small-group setting allows for far more personal connection than we ever get in our normal practices and certainly more than you'd get in a full team video room with 20-30 kids. It's been leading to these much deeper, more personal conversations and creating more bonds with their teammates than they would have had otherwise.

- We've gotten a ton of feedback from our kids that this is their favorite part of our "practices" and that they feel closer to their teammates now than ever before!

- Zoom allows us to give kids a one-minute warning to finish up their conversations and return to the "main" meeting room.

- After that depending on the time remaining, we'll ask for a few kids to share their answers with the team and ask follow-up questions if appropriate.

- The last few minutes we'll watch a video together - usually it's a match film. We've used NCAA matches, senior level matches from the Olympics or World Championships or even one of our own matches from the season.

- Sometimes instead of a match, we'll watch a technique video, teaching our guys some technical skills or nuances on technique they already know. We'll try to make it something "cool" and interesting and not too mundane.

- If there's time we'll take a couple of minutes to ask guys to share what they noticed in the video or what they learned. This has been a really great way to get kids to internalize lessons they can take away from the video, gives them some pretty cool insights their teammates might have that they might not have thought of themselves and forces kids to pay more attention to the video itself, knowing this type of conversation is coming up after.

- Finally we'll remind kids the day and time of our next practice and we'll "bring it in" as a team. In "the real world" we end our practices by huddling up, each guy putting their hand in and breaking it down on three. As cheesy as it sounds, we've been doing the same thing over Zoom and the kids love it! Just another way to add a small bit of "normalcy" back to their lives!