COACHES, REFEREES, PARENTS

Posted by STLCoach - 04 Mar 2010 07:52

Before you scream at a ref ...
December 17, 2009 | Comments (0)
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By Donna Olmstead, for Soccer America

Sometimes as I slouch down in my lawn chair watching my grandchildren's soccer games, I indulge in wishful thinking. Only skillful, focused players on the field. Only knowledgeable, supportive parents on the sidelines. Only coaches who remember the bottom line is character development and not just winning games. Only top-notch officials running the lines and the field. Never going to happen. Like I said - wishful thinking.

Not that I'm an expert on the soccer subject. But I have spent 32 years immersed in youth soccer. As the chauffer. As the team mom. As the team grandmother. And any other position that needed a warm body. Some knowledge of the game is bound to rub off after awhile.

Now my daughter and granddaughters are referees as well as players. And I'm seeing games from a whole new angle.

Sitting on the bleachers watching my 14-year-old granddaughter play at a Disney tournament recently, I got annoyed at our parents for criticizing the assistant referee's seeming inability to be in position to make good calls.

When the parents grew vocal enough for the AR to hear, I decided to muffle the criticism. Duct tape would have done the job, but I used something more personal - an incident that happened to my 16-year-old granddaughter Emily at a different game the day before.

Emily was running the line on the parents' side and they gave her a bad time about her offside calls. The coach even went to the center ref after the game and complained about her. Fortunately, the center ref had been paying attention and said Emily's calls had been correct. This is a tough situation for a young referee to handle, and probably why the attrition rate is so high.

When I told our parents about Emily's experience, they were indignant about anyone's criticizing Emily. After all, she's one of ours. We know her. We know she's conscientious and unbiased. She knows the game both as a player and a certified official. How dare those parents and coach give her a rough time?!

Then I pointed at the AR running our line and said, "She's somebody's Emily."

I know that, in the heat of competition, everyone forgets that the officials are somebody's Emily or Tom or Dave. Parents demand superhero officials. Which, in most cases, means officials that make only calls the parents agree with. And when most of the parents don't even know the difference between being offside or being in an offside position, that would be an impossible demand.

You couldn't pay me enough to take the abuse that soccer officials take. I'd probably take the field armed with a whistle and a small caliber handgun. And because I know that about myself, I stay on the sidelines. And try to encourage parents to send positive energy toward the field. And to try to help them remember that the every official is somebody's Emily.

(Florida resident Donna Olmstead has been involved in soccer through both her children and her grandchildren, as well as housing professional players and owning and running an indoor soccer facility. She is a freelance writer and spends weekends trying to remember which tournament she's supposed to be cheering at.)

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Improve Individual Performance

Posted by STLCoach - 20 May 2010 07:14

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Improve Individual Performance

Coughlin: What does it take for an individual to become an extraordinary performer?

Michler: Motivation plays a big part. It’s always best if the motivation is intrinsic where the players want to get better, but sometimes I have to provide some additional motivation for them. If I need to be with a player at every moment to motivate him, then that’s a problem.

There comes a moment when the player is on his own. If he can’t motivate himself, then he’ll never be an extraordinary performer. Some players need constant reinforcement, and those players just aren’t going to become extraordinary performers.

Intrinsic motivation is important because no player can be an extraordinary performer without having taken his technical skills to a very, very high level. To do that requires thousands of hours of practice with effective coaches over a period of 10 to 12 years. No player will be willing to do that if he is not motivated to improve, and most of that motivation has to come from within the player.

Management Insight
Are your employees intrinsically motivated, or do you have to provide constant motivation for them to perform? If you always have to be there for them to stay motivated, how will they create and deliver more value for the customers when you’re not there?

If they are not intrinsically motivated, you may very well have the wrong group of employees.

Coughlin: Anders Ericsson, a professor of psychology at Florida State University, is one of the premier experts in the world on expert performance. After years of research he has landed on the concept of “deliberate practice” as the critical factor in developing great individual performers.

I call this “thought-filled practice” because it’s the type of practice where the performer is thinking about what he or she is doing before, during, and after the activity. I summarize his process of sustaining thought-filled practice as the following six steps:

The Process of Thought-Filled Practice

1. Select the role you have passion and strengths for doing.

2. Clarify the five critical aspects of that role.

3. Create simulations of the actual performance that allow you to focus on improving one or more of the role's critical aspects.

4. Gain relevant feedback from a skilled observer on the simulated performance in a timely manner.

5. Consider the feedback and make adjustments.

6. Repeat steps three to five for 10,000 hours.

Terry, what do you think about “thought-filled practice” and the role it plays in the off-season for the players?

Michler: I think sustaining thought-filled practice during the off-season is crucial to becoming a great soccer player. When the players are practicing after the high school season is over there are three simple steps for them to keep in mind: present, receive critique, and tweak.

They should present their skills in a practice or game, receive a critique from an experienced observer who hopefully is not too close to them like a parent or a friend, consider the advice, and tweak their performance as they feel it is appropriate.

Keep in mind that observation tells you what needs to be done. When my players are playing for a club team, they should conduct a game analysis, go back to practice to make refinements, and then go back to the game. The game will tell them if their desired objective has been achieved.

If not, then they need to go back to the drawing board and analyze the shortcomings. It’s not practice that makes perfect. It’s perfect practice that makes perfect. Do you know what it takes to make perfect practice? Repetition and repetition and then even more repetition are the answers. The response must become automatic.

Here is a great example from our CBC Dutch Touch camp last summer. Harry Jansen, a Dutch coach, was conducting a passing session with his group of players, which consisted of players from Holland and from the United States.

The drill was organized with four players to a group and one ball. The players were in a line across the field with about 30 yards from the deepest players. The sequence was player 1 passed to player 2 (about a seven-yard pass), player 2 returned the pass to player 1, player 1 then played a long pass (25 yards or so) to player 3, and then players 3 and 4 repeated the sequence and the ball returned to player 1.

There was nothing special per se about the drill. It was very basic. However, the attention to detail that Harry incorporated into each phase of the drill became VERY challenging to the players. Every part of the sequence had a SPECIFIC way that it needed to be done. He wanted the passes to be clean and precise, not casual and haphazard.

The quality of the passes, the position of the passes, and the direction and timing of the movements to get the ball back all had to be done in a CERTAIN way time and time again. Harry continued with this drill without any variation or break for 45 minutes!!!

He kept demanding that it had to be done the right way EVERY time. The players from the United States struggled with this because they are NOT used to this kind of technical discipline. They are used to just doing it without being critiqued and analyzed and forced to do it correctly every time.

Harry's message was about MASTERY of the technique and not just doing it for real purpose. He kept running the drill over and over. He made the players do the same thing endlessly until he was satisfied

that it was getting better. It was a classic Dutch moment, and the Dutch players in camp were SO much better than our local players. They did it without any squawking while our players were getting restless and impatient.

My take on this was that our players have not been asked, or expected, to perform in that manner. We have a casual way of thinking that says just do it for the sake of doing it. The Dutch attitude was to do it right so it became an automatic process.

Management Insight
The best time to improve your performance as a manager is when you are not in the act of managing. Your “game time” is when you are managing. That’s when you demonstrate your skills, but the improvement of your skills happens between the management moments.

You will steadily improve as a manager by identifying specific skills you want to improve, gaining feedback on your execution of those skills, tweaking aspects of those skills, practicing them over and over in the specific way you want to do them, and then trying them again in real management situations.

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LET PLAYERS TAKE RISKS

Posted by STLCoach - 01 Jun 2010 06:19

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Don't be afraid to let your players take risks
I was watching an U7s match at my local school last week. There was a lot of aimless running around going on, and most of the players were trying to get within touching distance of the ball.

They were tackling each other, falling over and some were standing around watching the birds fly past. A fairly typical U7s match, in fact.

Suddenly, one girl burst out of the melee and started to run with the ball towards goal. The only problem was, it was the wrong one.

When she got about ten yards from the goal she stopped, looked up and realised she was staring at her own goalkeeper. After a quick about turn, she started running the other way.

She ran past three of four of the other team, evaded several attempted tackles from her own team mates and finally got within striking distance of the other goal - about two feet from the line - where she promptly took a swing at the ball, missed it and fell over. She got up with a huge smile on her face.

Sadly, her coach was not impressed.

He was first shouting, "you're going the wrong way, WRONG WAY!". When she realised her mistake and started running towards the correct goal, he was shouting, "pass the ball, PASS IT!". Some parents were heard muttering, "she never passes the ball", "she's not a team player, is she?" and "someone needs to teach her how to pass".

When she finally fell over, the coach shouted, "I told you to pass, didn't I?"

All through the game this coach was telling his players where to go and what to do as though they were little robots.

Why all this instruction?

Because the coach was afraid one of his players would make a mistake and the other team would score as a result. Ultimately, he was really worried his team of six-year-olds would lose.

And, crazy as it sounds, there are lots of coaches like that in youth soccer. Coaches who think they are helping their players by giving a constant stream of instructions and forbidding them from taking risks.

This U7s coach might notch up a few quick wins in the short-term, but he is storing up problems for the future. By stifling his players' creativity and not allowing them to find out what happens if, for example, they play a weak square pass across their own penalty area, he is manufacturing a set of players who don't have the ability to think for themselves.

These are players who, if they don't hear an instruction from the coach, don't have a clue what to do with the ball.

Ignore the final score

"Worrying too much about winning and losing gets in the way of development," says Manfred Schellscheidt, head of US Soccer's U14 programme. "There are always shortcuts that you can find to win the next game. That doesn't necessarily mean you'll be winning five, six years from now... We should be concerned about the players' performance, not the final score."

If you want to be standing on the touch line eight or ten years from now, admiring the dribbling and shooting skills of the players you have as U7s today, you have to let them take risks.

You need to let your young players dribble, run and pass without fear, and without any 'advice' from the touch line. Applaud risk taking. If it goes wrong, your players will have learnt something from the experience - it's not the end of the world!

Finally, remember to smile a lot on match days. Enjoy yourself. You're watching the soccer stars of the future!

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When a ref ... be ready!

Posted by STLCoach - 04 Jun 2010 09:25

When a ref ... be ready!

By Randy Vogt

You have been assigned to referee three games this Saturday and two on Sunday.

The referee who physically trains for these games and watches officials during other soccer matches will most likely be a good deal more successful than the person who does not think about these assignments all week until putting on a referee uniform that weekend.

Many new referees are surprised at the commitment needed to become a successful official. As I like to say, based on Galatians 6:7, "You reap what you sow."

Training

If you believe that refereeing one or two days per week will make you fit without physically training for it, you are sadly mistaken. Soccer is played at its own pace -- some games are fast, others are slow-moving. With relatively unskilled players, there is even some acceleration of play in spurts. Games will be played at a given pace whether the officials can keep up with play or not.

Those officials who do not move up or down the field are the first to complain about overly enthusiastic spectators and often quickly determine that refereeing is not for them. If you are properly prepared for the physical demands of soccer, you will enjoy it much more.

If you have led a sedentary lifestyle, please get the approval of your doctor before becoming a soccer referee and taking on all the physical training that goes with it. The farklet training method works best for me, as it mimics a soccer game. Rather than just jogging, you jog, sprint, jog ... with an all-out sprint at the end. If you are currently out of shape, start slowly and gradually work up to a mile.

As officials need to run backwards and sidestep during the course of a match, try to incorporate both of these moves in your training.

Also, Rocky Balboa and Kenyan marathon runners are on to something -- running up and down steps or hills helps endurance. In the Rocky movies, Rocky concluded his runs through the streets of Philadelphia with a sprint up the steps of the south entrance of the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Kenyan marathoners run up and down the hills of their country. Jogging and sprinting up and down some hills or steps will make running on a flat soccer field easier.

Game Day

Take the attitude that you are being given the privilege to officiate your games that day. After all, you will meet new people, have the opportunity to make a positive difference in other people's lives, get exercise and, hopefully, have fun, all while earning a little money.

Refereeing is also not about the money. The best refs bring out the best in everyone, including themselves. With officiating, you can help others while you and they are having fun. If you can earn some money on the side, great!

Arriving at the Field

The referee and assistant referees should come to the field at least 30 minutes before kick-off to have the time to properly inspect the field and teams plus to stretch and warm up. Let's talk about the do's and don'ts of your arrival. After all, you never get a second chance to make a first impression.

Officials should be well-groomed with a clean uniform. Arrive at the field with a smile on your face. Perhaps you don't feel like smiling-- maybe you don't feel well or did not get a good night's sleep. Smile anyway. It could even put you in a better mood.

Attitudes are contagious. If you're having a very good time, you would be surprised how many other people you are affecting with your positive attitude. Those song lyrics often come true, "When you're smiling, the whole world smiles with you." Why look unhappy, especially since frowning uses six times more energy than smiling?

You Have the Best View of All the Action

What helps keep me young and enthusiastic about officiating is knowing that even after more than 7,000 games, I routinely see something happen on the field that I have never seen before. Such as:

* Players in the Boys-Under-8 age group chasing a butterfly instead of the ball.

* A Girls-Under-11 defender kicks the ball near her goal line and loses her shoe in the process. While the opposing team collects the ball, she decides to sit by the goal line on the ground and put on and tie her shoe. The opposing team comes down, crosses the ball and scores with the defender tying her shoe leaving everyone onside.

* A double rainbow over the field after rain in a Boys-Under-14 game.

(Randy Vogt has officiated over 7,000 games during the past three decades, from professional matches in front of thousands to six-year-olds being cheered on by very enthusiastic parents. In "Preventive Officiating," he shares his wisdom gleaned from thousands of games and hundreds of clinics to help referees not only survive but thrive on the soccer field. You can visit the book's website at www.preventiveofficiating.com/
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REFEREES, How to position

Posted by STLCoach - 19 Jul 2010 04:04

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Refs on top of the action: How to position

By Randy Vogt

The referee's diagonal that he or she runs goes from corner flag to corner flag.

Actually, a referee who strictly adheres to this diagonal will miss seeing a number of fouls. I like to think that the referee's positioning isn't a diagonal as much as it is a modified version of a half-open scissor -- corner flag to corner flag and penalty arc to penalty arc. The referee is not a slave to this positioning, but it is a rough guide to follow, especially for the newer referee.

I have seen many youth soccer games when the referee made an important call -- sometimes correctly, sometimes incorrectly -- and loud dissent followed since the ref was 40 yards away from the play. I have seen just as many games in which the call was completely missed by an out-of-position referee.

Just as with phones, long-distance calling can be very expensive. The preventive officiating technique is to be fit enough and to hustle each game so that you are close to the play.

Teams are much more likely to dissent from referee decisions when the ref is far away than with the same decision when the ref is 5-10 yards from the ball. After all, presence lends conviction.

Should you blow the whistle for a foul in which you are too far from the infraction, continue running to the point of the restart. You will appear to be closer to the play than the ref who simply blows the whistle and stands there.

During the course of the game, you might encounter 1-2 players on each team who are causing problems. Modify your diagonal so that every time one of these players receives the ball, you are less than 10 yards away. Players rarely commit fouls when the referee is right there.

The Assistant Referee's Position

During normal play for nearly the entire game, the assistant referee's position is parallel with the second-to-last defender. The first defender is almost always the goalkeeper.

It is very challenging for new assistant referees to have the discipline to stay with the second-to-last defender instead of watching play develop 40 yards upfield, especially when the ball is in or near the other penalty area. Half the challenge of being an assistant referee is having the discipline to be exactly in the correct position.

For example, should the other team take possession of the ball and launch a long pass to your half, you will know if the player running toward the ball is offside by being parallel to that second-to-last defender.

Should 21 players be in the other half of the field with only the goalkeeper in your half, the assistant referee's position is not with the second-to-last defender in this instance but at the halfway line.

Another exception to being parallel with the second-to-last defender is when the ball is closer to your goal line than the second-to-last defender is. Your position would then be parallel to the ball.

Other exceptions are during the taking of a corner kick and penalty kick. The assistant referee's position both times is at the goal line.

On a corner kick, the assistant ref is behind the corner flag.

On a penalty kick, the AR is at the intersection of the 18-yard line and the goal line.

Summarizing, the referee's perfect position can vary but the assistant referee's position almost always needs to be exactly in line with the second-to-last defender except with the situations noted above.

How Officials Position Themselves as a Team
Watch professional games and concentrate on the officials, paying special attention to their position and signals.

You will notice that referees like to keep the ball between them and an assistant referee. It's easier to officiate a match when there are two relatively close views, from different angles, of play around the ball.

You'll also see that referees often jog when play is in midfield, such as in or by the kickoff circle, and the ball might be 15 yards away. But referees sprint to get closer to the ball when it is in one of the "hot areas" such as in or by the penalty area or by the benches.

The penalty area is hot since it's by the goal and important goal-scoring opportunities happen there. The area in front of the benches is hot as coaches and substitutes have a close view of play by the touchline and will probably be upset should you miss something against their team.

(Randy Vogt has officiated over 7,000 games during the past three decades, from professional matches in front of thousands to 6-year-olds being cheered on by very enthusiastic parents. In "Preventive Officiating," he shares his wisdom gleaned from thousands of games and hundreds of clinics to help referees not only survive but thrive on the soccer field. You can visit the book's website at www.preventiveofficiating.com/
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How adults can 'teach' kids by playing along

Posted by STLCoach - 29 Jul 2010 06:40

How adults can 'teach' kids by playing along

By Mike Woitalla

One of the best ways for adults to coach children is to play along with them.

It’s certainly no secret that children learn more from what they see than from what they are told. Just try explaining how to strike a ball without demonstrating.

Whether it’s at a practice scrimmage or a casual kickaround, children playing with and against adults pick up all sorts of soccer skill and knowledge.

But, of course, there are risks when children play a sport with persons three times as big, and the adults must play without causing injuries or invading on the children’s playtime.

From my own experiences and a survey of several longtime youth coaches on the subject, here are some key points to consider when taking part in children’s soccer-playing:

* DON’T JUMP. Leaving your feet – whether to head the ball or lunge for a loose ball – means you're going to land, and coming down on a little one can hurt them.

* BE CAREFUL WITH HIGH BALLS. It’s tempting to chip the ball across the field to an open player, but when you’re on the field with a 4-foot-5 players, a mis-hit can strike a face. Obviously, an adult playing with little kids shouldn’t be blasting the ball at full force.

* USE A ‘SOFTER’ BALL. With young children, play with a ball that is slightly less than fully inflated. This will reduce pain if an adult’s shot does smack a kid.

* CONSIDER YOUR SKILL LEVEL. Adults who aren’t experienced players must be especially careful when playing with children. It’s very easy to kick a foot instead of the ball if you’re not a skilled player. Besides, if you’re not a good player, there’s not much the children will learn from you.

But the inexperienced adult can learn the game with the kids by playing pass-back or juggling together. If adult soccer-novices play in games, they should avoid one-on-one battles or getting into the middle of the action.

* DEFEND JUST A LITTLE. If a youngster is trying to dribble past you, create one obstacle. Preventing them from dribbling to the left of you, for example, and if they try to beat you to the right, let them go past you. Against more mature players, it’s OK to make the challenge more difficult. A kid who easily dribbles past all his peers needs the challenge. But you’re not out there to win anything.

* DON’T BE A ‘GOALKEEPER.’ For some reason, adults in pickup games often park themselves in front of the goal. That serves no purpose but to frustrate the children.

* BE A TEAMMATE. Don’t micromanage the play and positioning of young children. Speak to the players as a teammate would, not a coach. With older children during a practice session, playing along does provide a good opportunity to make quick concise comments.

* PASS, PASS, PASS. One of the biggest benefits of playing along with young children is that the adult can deliver passes to the players who haven’t seen much of the ball and get them involved in the play.

Young children simply don’t comprehend a passing game. They aren’t inclined to sharing the ball and they shouldn’t be forced to while they’re exploring the game in their introductory stages.

When coaches play along with their teams at practice, they can constantly demonstrate passing. And when coaches pass the ball back to the player they got it from, they send the message that sharing pays off.

* BE A NEUTRAL PLAYER. A great option for a coach, or an older player invited to take part in practice, is to play a neutral role in games. The neutral player doesn't defend or score, but provides a passing option and helps his or her team keep possession.

* DON’T BE THE STAR. It’s OK to show off a flashy move now and then, because the kids learn by seeing good skills, but they’re the ones who should be scoring the goals and preventing them.

* ADJUST TO THE AGE. As always, appreciate the stage of development the children are in. The younger and smaller they are, the more cautious the adult must be, while adults can play a more active role in a game with older, bigger players.

(Mike Woitalla, the executive editor of Soccer America, coaches youth soccer for Rockridge SC in Oakland, Calif. His youth soccer articles are archived at YouthSoccerFun.com.)

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