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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COACHES SIT DOWN!

Posted by STLCoach - 05 May 2011 08:39

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Claudio Reyna: 'Coaches should sit down'

By Mike Woitalla

For many reasons, Claudio Reyna was the perfect choice to be named U.S. Soccer's Youth Technical Director one year ago.

The New Jersey product, who captained the USA at two of his four World Cups, played American youth club, high school and college ball before embarking on a career in Europe that saw him captain teams in Germany, Scotland and the English Premier League. After finishing his playing career with MLS's New York Red Bulls, which he also captained, Reyna traveled the world to observe the most successful youth programs – including FC Barcelona.

Reyna's research, and his own experiences, culminated in the Federation's new curriculum for youth coaches (available for download at USSoccer.com).

Upon the unveiling of "U.S. Soccer Curriculum," Reyna spoke to us about what had impressed him about the youth programs that he found worth emulating.

"The coaches were guiding the training," he said. "They were not controlling. They weren't on top of the kids. They were not stopping the play for every mistake.

"None of them yelled. The only time they barked was when kids were screwing around. That's when they said, 'Hey, cut it out!' And boom, the intensity went back up."

It's important, Reyna says, to avoid the temptation to focus on mistakes:

"When you first start coaching young players, you see so many things, because, yes, they make mistakes, and if you see a lot of mistakes you want to correct a lot of mistakes. But these coaches were really letting the kids learn the game."

In the United States, youth soccer struggles to stifle the influence of traditional American sports.

"In our country, we feel we have to do things because of our other sports, which are very much dominated by calling a timeout, writing up a play, 'do this, do that,'" he says. "There is more of an influence from the coach in those sports to solve a situation for the players."

Another trait of the youth coaches at clubs that succeed at producing top-level players was that they "were very organized, professional, very prepared.

“You could see that they knew what they were doing from one exercise to the next.”

Reyna was struck by the humility of the youth coaches at the pro clubs:

“Very humble. Devoted to their jobs. I got to speak to so many coaches and it was almost when I asked them things they were embarrassed to talk about it. They’d say things like, ‘We’re a part of something else. The kids are students. We’re their teachers. We have to do this job, then we pass them on to the next coach and he does his job, and I get the next group in.’

“And it was very, very powerful to see these guys who were working behind the scenes. They don’t get any credit, no one knows who they are, and for me they were fantastic coaches.”

During games, Reyna observed that “at the best places the youth coaches are sitting down. And if they get up to give instructions, they sit right back down again.

“When the game is going on, all the coaches should just sit down. I think if you ask any player at the youth level, if the coach is on the sidelines standing, it brings tension. You can sense it.”

Coaches at the foreign pro clubs Reyna observed are judged by how many players end up reaching the highest level. And that’s what Reyna says should be the measure for American youth coaches.

“For me, it’s irrelevant if coaches win state cups, regional cups, national cups,” he says. “We get a lot of resumes -- I don’t mean people shouldn’t put that in their resumes – but how many trophies they have in their cabinet isn’t important to me. It’s about the kids, it’s not about you.

“We care about how many players you develop rather than how many trophies you win.

“What is the plan you have? What is your style of play? What’s your philosophy? What do you teach them? What do you do with your staff? If you don’t address that, then what are you doing? Going from week-to-week trying to win games?”

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

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A stoplight guide to supplements

Posted by STLCoach - 15 Jun 2011 14:20

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A stoplight guide to supplements

By Dev K. Mishra, M.D.

A "supplement" by definition is something you would take in addition to whatever you would eat or drink in the course of your normal diet.

Examples of supplements can range from commonly used and safe substances such as multivitamins, to generally safe performance improving substances such as creatine, and then to unsafe items such as ephedrine and pseudoephedrine.

There is another class of substances beyond these called Performance Enhancing Drugs, which include anabolic steroids and human growth hormone. And yet another type of abused drug would include medications that are prescribed for proper medical reasons but are then abused and used in inappropriate ways.

Ritalin, commonly used for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, is reported to improve focus or cope with jet lag in athletes.

For the purposes of this post I would like to focus on substances that typically would not require a prescription. Unfortunately, that does not mean they are all safe, and in fact the most dangerous substances are surprisingly easy to obtain in your local community or on the Internet. One of the biggest problems is that the supplement industry is unregulated so it is very difficult for the person using the supplement to be sure of the quality. Some supplements can contain a number of very unsafe ingredients.

Many young athletes are using and experimenting with substances supposedly useful to increase strength and muscle mass, improve endurance, and give them an edge on the competition. The pressures to use measures to improve sports performance are significant, and I expect these pressures only to increase as the years go by.

So let's take a practical approach to supplements and let me provide a very simple "stoplight" guide to common supplements.

Generally Safe Supplements Used For Dietary and Nutritional Support
Most of these items would be safe for young athletes to use but there may be some instances where it would be wise to check first with your physician before use. For example, it's possible to take too many multivitamins, too much protein powder, or eat a protein bar containing nuts when you have a peanut allergy. There's evidence that taking a daily children's multivitamin is a good idea for most kids.

* Daily multivitamin.
* Calcium.
* Sports drinks containing protein and multivitamins.
* Protein powders (obtain from a nationally reputable supplier).
* Fruit smoothies with protein boost or vitamin supplement

Probably Safe Supplements For Muscle Recovery and Increased Energy
In this category I would include creatine, used for muscle recovery and muscle mass gains; and naturally occurring stimulants such as caffeine, guarana, some B-vitamins, and kola nut.

Let me first be clear on one thing: there is no published credible research on the safety of creatine in adolescents or teens. Having said that, most trainers and physicians who take care of young athletes generally report that there are no "serious" side effects from creatine use, but stomach upset, dehydration, and muscle cramping are fairly common. Creatine use is probably fine, but check with your child's physician before starting use.

Caffeine is another substance that falls into this intermediate category. Caffeine is found naturally in more than 60 plants and of course it's found in coffee and sodas. For adults there is an upper limit on the amount of caffeine legally allowed in competitions such as the Olympics but again, we have no established limits for caffeine use in adolescents or teenagers.

Caffeine is a tough substance to avoid because it's found in so many things so the best you can do is to read labels and use as little as possible.

Unsafe Supplements - Definitely Avoid
This category includes substances for which we have solid medical evidence of potential harm from use. I would also place prescription medications being used for reasons other than they were prescribed here.

For example, using Ritalin to improve focus or concentration in an adolescent without ADHD, or using an asthma inhaler to improve airway opening in a teen without asthma could lead to very serious health consequences.

What follows is just a tiny list of the most commonly abused substances. Literally hundreds of "performance enhancing drugs" and other substances are on banned substance list of most organized competitions. Most professional sports league, the Olympics, and the NCAA have strict screening and penalties for illegal substance use, and some state High School associations are also starting random drug screening. If you have any question at all check with your physician but you should avoid all of these:

* Anabolic steroids.
* Human Growth Hormone.
* Androstenedione (Andro).
* Ephedrine, pseudoephedrine (Sudafed), ephedra (Ma Huang).
* 19-norandrostenedione (19-Nor).
* DHEA (dihydroepiandrostenedione).
* Ritalin for use in individuals without Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.
* Asthma inhalers in non-asthmatics.

(Dev K. Mishra is the creator of the SidelineSportsDoc.com injury management program for coaches. He is an orthopedic surgeon in private practice in Burlingame, Calif. He is a member of the team physician pool with the U.S. Soccer Federation and has served as team physician at the University of California, Berkeley. This article first appeared on SidelineSportsDoc.com.)

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Management Lessons from Youth Sports

Posted by STLCoach - 31 Aug 2011 09:50

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Management Lessons from Youth Sports
By Dan Coughlin – Author of Find a Way to Win

A few weeks ago I completed a really enjoyable five-year experience of coaching my son's recreational soccer teams. I was an assistant coach and a head coach for Ben's soccer teams from kindergarten co-ed soccer where we used nerf soccer balls in indoor soccer through fourth grade all-boys soccer where things were starting to become a bit more like competitive soccer.

If you've ever been in this situation, you probably have seen a number of parallels from this experience to that of being a business manager. I encourage you to coach a youth sports team even if you don't know that much about the sport. You will learn a lot about yourself and about human dynamics in scenarios that are hard to duplicate anywhere else.

Relationships with Players/Employees
In the end, being a youth coach is extraordinarily fun to do because of the relationships with the players.

It is truly priceless to watch kids literally go from holding hands during a game to working as hard as they can at practice after practice. As the memories wash over me of the multiple personalities and situations I encountered with the kids, it brings back nothing but smiles. Being with kids, at least for me, was pure fun. It was about trying to help them improve and encouraging them along the way. As they got older, it was about trying to teach them how to maintain focus and intensity and stay aggressive throughout an entire practice or game. Whether or not they improved in what they were trying to do was always the primary measuring stick of success for me. If the players worked hard and improved, then that's where the fun came in. It was just so neat to see them do things better and better and better and become more confident in their abilities. This created a sense of camaraderie and coach/player relationships that last for a long time beyond any one game or season.

Almost every business executive and manager I've ever talked with has said to me that the favorite part of his or her job was the relationships with employees. The excitement of working together with other people to try to achieve a certain outcome creates scenarios that you can never have if you are just discussing business situations at a cocktail party or on a committee. Watching employees evolve over time as they aspired to achieve great results is one of the main reasons why people go into and stay in management positions.

Patience

There is an aspect of youth sports that generates endless opportunities to see human dynamics happen in extraordinarily fast time frames. It is called "dealing with parents." The vast majority of parents in youth sports are wonderful to deal with. They are appreciative of your volunteer efforts and allow you to guide their children in the ways that you think are most effective.

However, and this is where the real learning happens, there are some parents who with the best of intentions will barge into the coach/player relationship and unleash an endless amount of criticism to the coach and direction to the players that is both unsolicited and undesired during the games and after the games. It is not uncommon for parents to stand three feet away from a coach and yell out directions to all of the players even though the parent has never attended a practice and has never played the sport before. This is all done with the belief that the parent is doing the best thing for the kids, which is what the goal of parenting is.

The most precious thing in the world to every parent is his or her child. Consequently, parents will intervene in youth sports and not blink an eye. They will send excessive emails filled with criticisms to volunteer coaches who live a few minutes away. They don't realize that these volunteer coaches are doing the best they can for their child. All they know is that they need to protect their child and to make the situation the best it can be for their child.

Parents will yell at their kids and at other people's kids about where to go during an entire game and never have it dawn on them that this is frustrating to the coaches, and even some of the other parents. Through it all, it is essential that the youth sports coach maintains a very high degree of patience and positivity. Through the crucible of coaching kids and dealing with parents, you will develop much greater levels of patience and self-discipline. Those refined characteristics can then be applied in the business world.

In business, managers experience these same types of unwanted interventions from their employees, peers, and bosses. Suddenly people who are not responsible for a group or who have no experience in the activity will start telling members of the group what to do and how to do it. They will give unsolicited criticism in the name of "tough love" or "just trying to help out." Throughout this unwanted chaos, the effective manager remains patient and positive and only sorts out these problems behind closed doors.

Learn from Coaching

If you ever really want to understand yourself better or to understand what motivates people, I encourage you to coach a youth sports team. You will learn in real-time situations how and when to intervene in situations that can be enormously frustrating. The primary source of this frustration will come from your interactions with other parents. However, that's a good thing because it's hard to recreate these types of situations in normal day-to-day business activities. You can then take the lessons you've learned from these youth coaching situations with parents and use them in business situations.

For example, when you are giving an important business presentation there will occasionally be a heckler in the crowd. If you are used to having people yell at you while you are presenting (i.e. parents telling you what to do during the game and in front of the players and the other parents), then it's much easier to stay patient with the heckler or know-it-all in a business situation. At first it may seem a little shocking to have another adult step right in front of you while you are coaching at a practice or a game, but once you get the hang of dealing with situations like that you will find that it is a very useful skill to have. There are many more examples like this where you have to think quickly in responding to unexpected circumstances in youth sports.

Understand the Roles Involved

In youth sports, adults play a variety of roles: head coach, assistant coach, parent, and referee. Each role has a purpose. When everyone involved performs their role in a given youth sports situation, the experience can be extraordinarily good for the players. The problems occur when people don't understand their roles or intentionally step out of their role because they feel they would be much better at someone else's role than that person. This can create utter chaos, enormous frustration, and a lot of wasted time and energy.

The same thing is true in business. It is very important that everyone involved in a business situation understands his or her role and focuses on fulfilling the responsibilities of that role. When front-line employees start changing the strategic direction of an organization or when a CEO steps in and tries to do everyone's jobs, you will quickly have an organization filled with problems. Whenever you enter a new business situation, work to clarify your role and responsibilities and then operate within that role.

Create Classroom Situations

I define a classroom as any way that people come together to learn from each other how to improve their performances. To me, the main objective of youth sports is to create as many classroom situations as you can. I learned a LOT from my players over the past five years and hopefully they learned from me. This is one reason why I enjoyed the practices more than the games. In a given practice we could create a dozen or more situations for the players to learn how to improve their performance.

In business, managers do not produce results. The biggest myth in all of business is that a CEO delivers results. Managers guide people who produce results. Front-line employees produce results. As a manager, your primary job is to consistently, although not constantly, create classroom experiences so that both you and your employees can learn how to improve future performances. If you do that on a regular basis and if you've hired good employees, you will have an impact on future performances within your organization. Don't just assume success will happen because you've hired good people. Create classroom situations where people steadily learn how to perform better and then give those individuals the freedom to deliver better performances.

Expect Opposite Reactions to the Same Approaches

As a youth coach and as a business manager, you will drive yourself crazy if you try to predict how people will react to your style. Many youth coaches have told me that one day they received an e-mail thanking them for doing a great job of coaching the kids and three weeks later the same person who complimented them will go behind their back and tell all of the other parents that they are a terrible coach. In business, you will receive praise when you think you bombed and criticism when you thought

you had done your very best work.

Responses from other people are what they are. Listen for a bit, see if there is anything you can learn from the feedback, and then move on. Don't let it attach itself to you. This can exhaust you in volunteer coaching and as an executive or manager responsible for generating better results.

Conclusion: Go Coach
Go be part of the solution in your community. Go volunteer to try to make a difference in the lives of kids in your community. Many kids don't get a chance to play because no one was willing to step up and coach. It can be a frustrating experience at times, but in coaching other people's children you will learn a LOT about yourself and that will help you to be more effective over the long term in your professional life. You will also build some wonderful relationships with kids that you will never forget.

About Dan Coughlin
Dan's purpose is to make it simpler to be a great manager. Visit www.thecoughlincompany.com. There you can sign up for Dan Coughlin's free, monthly e-newsletter, The Business Acceleration Newsletter, watch his Free Business Acceleration Video Library, and read his complete archive of articles on business acceleration. He is a business keynote speaker, seminar leader, and executive coach on leadership, innovation, and branding. He is also the author of four books on generating sustainable, profitable growth. His clients include McDonald's, GE, Toyota, Prudential, Coca-Cola, Marriott, Boeing, Abbott, SUBWAY, Kiewit, and the St. Louis Cardinals. Coughlin is also the author of Find a Way to Win.

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Crucial Concussion Evaluation Info for Coaches

Posted by sccysa - 03 Oct 2012 11:59

Crucial Concussion Evaluation Info for Coaches

By Dev K. Mishra, M.D.

How should a coach evaluate a young athlete for a possible concussion?

The key word in that first sentence is "possible," meaning that a coach who is not medically trained should not make the definitive diagnosis of a concussion. Your job is to assess the athlete and determine whether you suspect a concussion, remove that athlete from play, and send the athlete for evaluation by a medical professional trained in sports concussion management.

I highly recommend the Pocket SCAT2 concussion assessment tool, which you can download HERE, under the heading "Assessment Tools."

If your athlete has taken contact and has any one of the features noted on the card you should suspect a concussion and remove the athlete from play:

SYMPTOMS:
* Loss of consciousness
* Seizure or convulsion

* Amnesia
* Headache
* “Pressure in head”
* Neck Pain
* Nausea or vomiting
* Dizziness
* Blurred vision
* Balance problems
* Sensitivity to light
* Sensitivity to noise
* Feeling slowed down
* Feeling like “in a fog“
* “Don’t feel right”
* Difficulty concentrating
* Difficulty remembering
* Fatigue or low energy
* Confusion
* Drowsiness
* More emotional
* Irritability
* Sadness
* Nervous or anxious

The downloads available at the Sports Concussion Library offer more detailed information, and should be studied by coaches.

If the athlete is unconscious, do not move, shake, or attempt to rouse the athlete. Call for emergency medical transportation immediately. Stay with the athlete until help arrives. If the athlete is unconscious it is a medical emergency.

As our knowledge about concussion has improved it’s clear to us that the definition of concussion needs to change. Long gone are the days when an athlete needed to be knocked unconscious or close to unconscious before it was deemed a concussion.

We know now that even a headache that happens after contact to the player’s head, player’s body, or by the ground to the player’s body can be an early indicator of a concussion. Essentially, the definition of concussion is quite a bit broader than it once was.

What that means for the coach is that there are going to be a lot more suspected concussions. It means that you’ll likely deal with situations where you’ll ask yourself questions such as “it’s just a headache, do I really have to hold this player out after something like that?”

My advice to you: yes, you need to hold that player out of practice or competition and the player should seek medical attention urgently.

Use your best judgment and be overly cautious.

The final phrasing on the SCAT2 card says what you need very clearly:

“Any athlete with a suspected concussion should be IMMEDIATELY REMOVED FROM PLAY, urgently assessed medically, should not be left alone and should not drive a motor vehicle.”

(Dr. Dev K. Mishra is the creator of the SidelineSportsDoc.com injury management program for coaches. He is an orthopedic surgeon in private practice in Burlingame, Calif. He is a member of the team physician pool with the U.S. Soccer Federation and has served as team physician at the University of California, Berkeley. This article first appeared on SidelineSportsDoc.com.)

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Re: COACHES, REFEREES, PARENTS

Posted by STLCoach - 06 Mar 2013 11:03

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10 tips for the well-organized coach: presentation matters

By Don Norton Jr.

One area of coaching that is occasionally overlooked is how we present ourselves to our players at training. I do believe in the old adage that you "never get a second chance to make a first impression." By present ourselves, I am referring to how we look, the words we use when speaking, and the overall preparation that went into our session. The coaching schools in the United States and across the world stress to their candidates the importance of being prepared for every session and never “winging it.”

Here are my 10 Rules for every training session:

1. Arrive 20-25 minutes before every session, well groomed and wearing appropriate soccer gear. I have always told my players that if they arrive on time, they are late. They know that means they need to get to training before it is scheduled. (I do realize young players don’t drive themselves ...) When I blow my whistle all my players have water, their socks are pulled up, shinguards on and their shirt is tucked in. They are ready to train.

2. Check the field to make sure that it is safe to train upon. I always walk around and check all areas of the field and make sure that the goals are properly secured and that there are no holes in the nets. The environment that my players train in must be safe.

3. Carefully empty the ball bag, bibs and lay out all my cones for that day’s session. I never waste time putting cones down during training. Having cones laid out makes for a smooth transition from one activity to another, saves valuable time, and shows my commitment to the session. We all ask a lot from our players and we must give back just as much. Being prepared for every session is a given. And yes from time to time I will stop play and quickly “adjust” the distance of the cones that I laid out.

4. I welcome every player with a smile and a handshake. I am a role model. The words I choose when speaking are important. I know that my player’s experience in training and in the games can have a lasting impact on them.

5. Start every session on time. I bring all my players together and they know that “if I can’t see your face, you are in the wrong place.” I take the sun and position my players so that there no distractions. I give a very brief age-appropriate talk about the day’s activities and off we go. “No lines, no lectures and no laps.” In every session we play small-sided games. I try to have a relaxed tone to my sessions, meaning players are never afraid to make mistakes and are encouraged to “try moves.” Training is where mistakes are made, confidence is born and a love for the game blooms.

6. Have my training session written down on a notecard that I carry with me. Coaches of all levels

across the world carry them. If I need to refer to it, and I often do, it's there for me.

7. Deliver coaching points to my players using the PIP method. Positive -- "I loved your run down the flank." Information -- "Don't forget to lock your ankle and get your hips square when shooting." Positive – "Keep up the good work." I try to never "over coach," meaning I don't stop play often and strive to always have a theme and flow to training. I am always reminded ofAlex Ferguson's quote that "talking too much is a big danger for a coach. The words get lost in the wind."

8. Have our assistant coach lead parts of every training session. I value "my colleagues" knowledge and want him to know that I respect his talents. Former Scottish national team head coach Craig Brown spoke at my SFA course and said "I never referred to our assistants as my assistants, but as my colleagues as a sign of respect." There is no better way to show him (and the players) your confidence in his abilities than to have your colleague lead parts of training. No egos allowed; it's not about me, but always the team. The beauty of the game is that every coach brings his own style and unique perspectives to training and games. I believe that a player needs to hear different voices throughout his soccer career.

9. Bring all players together at the end of training and very briefly summarize a few points about the session and make some "house-keeping" points if needed. I always want to leave my players on a positive note. Coming to training and playing the world's greatest game should always be something that all players relish. I am the last person to leave the field.

10. Evaluate the session in my Log Book later that day. I grade myself regarding what went well during the session, were my objectives achieved and what could I have done better. We all learn from our mistakes and every coach has had training sessions that they wish they could do over. Even though we have a plan for our training being flexible is important. Sometimes our players lead training in a different direction that is to be expected. I begin to prepare for the next training session.

(Don Norton Jr. is the men's assistant coach at Rowan University. He has the USSF "A" license, FA Ireland "A" license (UEFA "A" License), Scottish FA "A" Certificate, NSCAA Premier Diploma and USSF National Youth License. He is a NSCAA associate national staff coach and a USSF state coaching school instructor for the New Jersey and Eastern Pennsylvania Youth Soccer Associations. His writings have been published in various soccer magazines. He has a BA from Gettysburg College and a MA from Rowan University.)

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Getting players to pay attention

Posted by STLCoach - 20 Mar 2013 15:55

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Getting players to pay attention

By Mike Woitalla

It's perfectly reasonable that children who show up to soccer practice might have a difficult time paying attention when the coach has something to say. They have, after all, spent an entire day at school listening to adults. And now it's playtime.

But even those coaches who follow the Three L's -- "No laps, no lines, no lectures" -- must at times

address the entire group.

So how do you get a group of chatty, fidgety youngsters to pay attention for a few seconds?

For young children, there are those methods used by elementary school teachers: “If you can hear me, clap once. … If you can hear me, clap twice, etc;” various clapping patterns for the kids to follow; “1-2-3 Eyes on me” …

“I just talk quieter until they realize they have to quiet down to hear the info,” says Julie Eibensteiner, coach at Minnesota’s Woodbury SC. “But I think how you carry yourself and your approach to practice usually commands attention. The more you say, the less value you have when you talk. If you only speak when you have something valuable to say, they will be waiting for it and tune in when you do talk.”

The coach’s positioning, posture and demeanor are crucial, explains Ian Barker, the NSCAA’s Director of Coaching of Education:

“Take off the sunglasses and baseball cap, so they can see your eyes,” Barker says. “Turn their backs to the sun. … Turn their backs to distractions (parents, other action, etc.)

“Get down to their level … squat or sit. Talk softly, so they have to listen harder. Tell a story or a joke to draw them in. Use first names or nicknames they respond to. … Sometimes I engage the most energetic child and his or her focus on me draws in the others.”

Sam Snow, US Youth Soccer’s Coaching Director, recommends initially making eye contact with all of the players, so that they know it's time to tune in.

Once you do get their attention, there’s the matter of retaining it.

“Older players also tune out during a coach monologue, they are just better at faking rapt attention,” says Snow. “When the players know the coach's talk will be just another long monologue their attention quite naturally wanders. By engaging the players with one or two questions at the halftime or at a natural stoppage during a training session activity, the coach has the players' attention.”

Michael O'Neill is the girls Director Of Coaching of New Jersey’s PDA.

“Keep it simple,” he says. “Quick and concise is the only way!”

To players, he stresses the importance of eye contact and that only one person can talk at a time. For his coaches: “Patience, tone of voice -- and eventually the good habits will take over.”

For sure, a coach's job with a bunch of 6-year-olds is mainly about creating an active environment for them to discover the joys of the game. But just because the players are older doesn’t mean the lecture is effective.

In his book, “The Talent Code,” Daniel Coyle investigated highly successful coaches and teachers. He reported that advice or instructions uttered by the great basketball coach, John Wooden, averaged four seconds: “No lectures, no extended harangues … he rarely spoke longer than 20 seconds.”

What the great coaches and teachers Coyle studied had in common:

“The listened far more than they talked. They seemed allergic to giving pep talks or inspiring speeches;

they spent most of their time offering small, targeted, highly specific adjustments. They had an extraordinary sensitivity to the person they were teaching, customizing each message to each student's personality. … They were talent whisperers."

Further Reading: YouthSoccerInsider Lecture them not

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