

GSM International Coaching Education Articles for Developing Your Players

Coaches Tasks Putting Your Efforts All Together

Your players learn the game of soccer not only through the directed learning experiences that coaches provide in practice and game play but also through indirect means by observation and imitation. As a sports leader, you are a powerful and lasting role model for athletes by your thought, word, and deed. Parents and coaches can serve as a player's greatest ally or worst nightmare depending on the attitude, behavior, and motivation adopted for sports involvement. Remember, the game is for the kids. It is not for the ego or bragging rights of adults. Your role, as coaches, is to provide an opportunity for participation for all interested youngsters, access to appropriate and safe environments for instruction and competition. Exposure to caring and your competent leadership, holistic consideration of the entire development (physical, cognitive, social and psychological) of the player and an unwavering belief in the worth of their abilities. Players will succeed at their unique level of supervised playing accomplishments. When coaches expect every player to achieve, it's amazing how many of them do.

Rather than measuring success regarding numbers in the win/loss columns, perhaps the ultimate standard of our success as coaches should be judged by our ability to teach players to love and enjoy the game of soccer. To feel more confident and self-assured in their abilities and knowledge of the game will require an experience mutual respect from both teammates and coaches. Most importantly, players feel appreciation and pride in the opportunity; they had to play soccer they love under your direction as their coach.

Perhaps the most appropriate summary can be found in the "Bill of Rights for Young Athletes" (NASPE, 1977) written by medical, physical education and recreation experts in the hope of creating guidelines to maximize the beneficial effects of athletic participation for all.

Bill of Rights for Young Athletes

1. Right of the opportunity to participate in sport regardless of ability level
2. Right to participate at a level that is commensurate with each child's developmental level
3. Right to have qualified adult leadership
4. Right to participate in safe and healthy environments
5. Right of each child to share the leadership and decision-making of their sport participation
6. Right to play as a child, not as an adult
7. Right to proper preparation
8. Right to equal opportunity to strive for success
9. Right to be treated with dignity by all involved
10. Right to have fun through sport

How important is sport psychology to performance in soccer?

Many players and coaches are beginning to realize that it is the mental side of the game which often makes the difference between good and poor performances. Listed below are some of the main reasons for poor performance in soccer:

Players lack confidence to perform well, especially in key games

- Players become nervous before games
- Dues to these nerves players lose focus on what they should be doing
- Players lose focus at key points in a match e.g. first five minutes, just before half time, just before the end of a game, after a mistake, after they have scored
- Nerves also cause players to tense up and, as such, they are more likely to perform badly and are more prone to injury
- Players talk negatively to themselves
- Players fail to recover effectively from mistakes
- Players become emotionally driven and make weak tackles, become too aggressive, fall out with their team, coach or parents, and can end up being carded or sent off
- Players made slow, poor decisions when they feel under pressure
- Players lack mental toughness and quickly fall apart under pressure / in pressure games
- Players lack the confidence to score goals

Sport Psychology is Important for Coaches and Here are Some Important Aspects to Relate When Coaching Your Players

- How coaches motivate players to perform well
- How coaches communicate with players
- How coaches develop players confidence
- How coaches get players to work together as a team
- How parents can best support their children without causing them anxiety or putting them under unnecessary pressure

Why should I see a sport psychologist?

Many players go to a sports psychologist when they have a problem with a mental aspect of their performance. However, Sports Psychology is much more proactive than this. Many also think sports psychology is only for professional players. In fact, most research shows that all players can benefit from mental training, and the younger players start learning mental skills, the more useful those skills

become. Therefore, anyone with the desire to be a better player would benefit from seeing a sports psychologist.

What can I expect if I begin working with a sport psychologist?

You can expect to be asked lots of questions, watched perform and given recommendations for improving your performance. Some of these are self-help, and some are direct interventions by the sports psychologist. All information is strictly confidential.

The Sport Psychologist will raise your awareness (which is the most important step to bringing about change), and will help you develop your mental skills (much as a coach improves your technical/tactical ability) such as: developing your confidence, improving your focus, enabling you to control nerves and anxiety, remaining active under pressure, and developing mental toughness to excel under pressure. A Sports Psychologist also teaches specific mental skills such as how to use visualization in sport, and how to think and speak positively.

So, if you know a mental aspect of performance limits your ability, or you want to become a better performer, see a sports psychologist.

Don't coaches teach this anyway?

The coaches primary job is to teach players the technical and tactical aspects of the game. Most qualified coaches have some knowledge of sports psychology, but the information they have is insufficient in scope, and it is unrealistic to expect your coach to be able to develop player's mental performance in the same way as a qualified sports psychologist.

Managing Mistakes to the Player's Advantage

Learning in Football

Learning new things can be like riding a roller coaster for the learner – some day's things seem easy, other days almost impossible – things can vary depending on what you're doing, how you're feeling, whether you're growing and lots of other things too.

Learning new things can be the best experience or the scariest thing you've ever done because if you're truly learning, you don't know what to do – so learners can be fragile or strong and this can quickly change. There are so many factors involved that are also constantly evolving, developing and changing – but there is one constant – the learner. The ultimate responsibility for learning sits squarely with the player and not the coach.

Coaches are not there primarily to show or tell players what they know; they are there to create environments for learning that are varied and challenge the players, but also give them enjoyment, and a degree of security and support. Coaches should also give players a choice and ownership allowing them to practice and experiment with the new techniques, skills or tactical ideas they present in their training activities.

Practicing, Experimenting and Competing

We learn football through three different modes which are:

- Practicing the match
- Experimenting in Training and some parts of the match
- Competing in matches

These modes require different mind sets and training those mind sets to be creative.

While there is no substitute for practicing to get better at things in the game, experimenting and competing must have a significant role in the process. As coaches' our understanding of where these different modes of play sit within learning is vital if the players are to be supported effectively.

Research has shown that it takes around 10,000 hours of practice and experimenting to get good at something complicated like football skills. Interestingly the very best players spend a larger percentage of their 10,000 hours working away from their coaches on their own or with their friends in informal activity.

In football when practicing passing, receiving, shooting or dribbling the aim should be precision, efficiency and reliability and such repetition leads to smooth, effortless, automated expertise.

But simply practicing can also make players rigid and predictable. So after practicing for a bit, players need to try something different. They need to mess around with the techniques, skills, and tactics and see what happens.

A simple example may be to try out new techniques and skills with the weaker foot or see what happens when you cross the ball into the penalty area earlier or later than the coach has suggested. Players need to experiment with the new skills and concepts they have practiced. Practice gives players the foundation for experimenting.

Experimenting develops flexibility and the ability to be unpredictable; the perception to see the tiny differences in an opponent's body position or a team mate's movement that cannot be seen by the coach from the side – lines. Experimenting helps develop creativity, innovation, and inventiveness – hallmarks of the best and most capable footballers.

But experimentation can lead to things sometimes going wrong and mistakes being made. When young players compete in matches, they are not the finished article. They should always strive to win but never be afraid to push the barriers and experiment even during games. For this to happen, the coaches need to be mentally healthy and to understand their temporary place in the evolution of the developing player – in other words; the coaches should Endeavour to put the learning needs of the players first and model learning and all the behavior that goes with it. Send out a message that you don't like experimenting and the players will stop doing it and their learning will probably be hindered as a result.

Firstly, players need to know whether they are expected to practice or experiment. Practicing is aimed at precision, efficiency, and reliability. Experimenting at pushing the limits of our practice so that we can

see what may happen if we try it this way or that. If coach and players get their wires crossed and one thinks it practice and the other experimenting chaos and breakdown in communication will occur.

Secondly, coaches need to clarify the learning objectives for the players - i.e. what is this activity or drill all about?

Understanding how players learn is central to the whole process – some knowledge is almost instantaneous, but some takes the time to mature and become fluid and natural. Players that take more time to learn are not bad learners; they may simply need more time – fast learning is not necessarily the best learning.

After setting up a new learning activity the coaches first task should be to conduct a needs analysis – who needs my help? Or am I just being self-indulgent and showing the players what I know?

Listening to the players is a vital skill and one that coaches need to develop; also asking the right questions in the right way and at the right time. Instructions should be clear and precise and directed at those players who need them. Players who do not need help should be given the time and opportunity to practice or experiment without interruption.

How Do Mistakes Help Learning?

We might not like our players making mistakes, but they do happen even when the players are experienced and know a lot about what they are doing. The fact that we talk about learning through trial and error suggests that the error part is not going to be eradicated, unless at the expense of practice, experimentation, and learning.

There is also our recognition that to win games of soccer; there is often the need to take risks and try out the new things from the training field. This may mean attempting more complicated techniques, applying new skills or experimenting with new strategies or tactics i.e. taking the training into the game.

If as coaches, we encourage our players to take the actions that are required to learn new things we have to recognize that there will be errors. The question is how do we as coaches respond to our players making such mistakes?

High Lighting Mistakes

Learning new things is a high-risk business for the players. It means daring not to know, and it may mean facing up to the fact that you may not yet be as competent as others within your group or team.

Therefore, the player must see the relevance of the new technique, skill or tactic otherwise they may perceive the risk of daring not to know as too great and not bother to try - just staying within the boundaries of what they can already do instead. So, the motive to learn is high on the agenda.

During this transitional state, a player could be fragile and only highlighting their mistakes may not be the best way to encourage them to practice and experiment with new things.

Players need to be given the license by the coach to experiment and try out the new and exciting things thus pushing out the boundaries of what they currently know or can do – moving on into the unknown. Highlighting mistakes may send out the message that not being able to do something is a personal flaw

so players may not want to risk being seen as incompetent or inadequate within their group and again not try.

If coaches create the right learning challenge for their players sometimes the most helpful response to mistakes could well be a sort of skill-full neglect. In other words, leave the players alone as much as possible to work out as much for them-selves as they can.

The coach needs to recognize and acknowledge how players may be feeling when faced with new or difficult tasks e.g. We're now going to work with our weaker foot. I understand that things may go wrong and sometimes passes may not be as good as you would like but that's okay. Just try to improve that weaker side steadily.

Become Your Own Coach in Side Your Head

It is possible to reflect on mistakes later when the emotion of the moment and the match has drained away. Some players will find developing this questioning process useful:

- Where did the mistake occur?
- When did it occur?
- What did you do?
- How did you feel about what happened at the time?
- Why was it a mistake?
- What did you learn?
- How will you improve?

Coaches can help players develop this process.

Possible Problems with Mistakes

The biggest limitation of mistakes is that fear of making them may well hinder our development and evolution as learners and players. That is why it is important to reassess the role of mistakes in player development, recognize that they are merely staging posts on the learning pathway and can never be completely avoided. They can be costly in competitive matches but if we are talking about player development which is a long-term process. The short-term reversal versus the long run gain should be a price worth paying.

Mental Strength for players

Champions players aren't made in a gym. Champions are made from something they have deep inside them – a desire, a dream, and vision. They have to have the skill and the will. But the will must be stronger than the skill.

In soccer, as in most sport, the differences in skill and ability levels between players who have reached the elite leagues – be it as a top amateur, semi-professional or professional - is far less pronounced than it is among young players.

In the majority of cases, talent will have been recognized and nurtured early. Intense and high-level coaching over some years will have imbued technique and skill, a thorough understanding of tactics and excellent physical fitness that sets them aside from the enthusiastic weekend player.

So, what is it that gives some the edge over the others? What is it that means they can hold their nerve in a penalty shootout, shut out on and off the pitch distractions and climb right up to the top of the pile?

Mental strength is as every bit as vital as physical strength. It is what ultimately defines winners and losers.

Match Day Nerves

A standard soccer term for a player who appears determined and fully focused on the challenge facing them is that they are in the 'zone.'

Many sports psychologists believe that a certain level of nervous before a game is a good thing. In broad terms, channeled correctly it is a stimulus towards optimum performance. However, if it becomes anxiety and nerves, the players vacate the zone and do not perform to their potential.

Making Mistakes

Winning matches at all costs coaches abhor mistakes, believing that if they iron out all errors the team will be more successful. However, sports physiologists almost unanimously believe this to be a misguided approach.

Making mistakes is often the result of players being prepared to take risks, to do the unusual. Attempting to cut this out of a player's game stifles creativity, produces a disciplined approach, and takes the fun out of playing.

Those who are encouraged to take risks and express themselves take ownership of their decisions and are therefore more likely to fully absorb the consequences of mistakes and understand why they must be put right.

Soccer history proves that it is the risk takers who win games. That individual, automatic flash of unorthodox brilliance is time and time again proved to be the difference between two otherwise evenly matched teams.