

GSM International Coaching Education Articles for Developing Your Players

THE FUNCTION OF SOCCER IN THE LIVE OF YOUR PLAYERS

SOCCER CREATES A SENSE OF IDENTITY

If you coach serious soccer players and have a competitive team, then you will soon come to see yourself regarding your sport that your players live for the game more than you could imagine and maybe more than they understand. It's who you are and what they do that will change their direction positively forever. With your long-term investment and commitment of time, energy and pain over the years, soccer has become an integral part of who you are as a coach for your players. It's how you see yourself and how they see you might be miles apart or very close because of who you've become like a master coach. Soccer has become an extension of your sense of self and life. When you compete, this feeling of identity further expands to include the role that you play on your team both tactically and socially/emotionally.

MAJOR SOURCE OF SELF-ESTEEM COACHES FROM YOUR GOOD COACHING WITHIN THE 'BEAUTIFUL GAME'

Developing and young player growing up in a family with distant, and football serves as their sole source of self-esteem. It was one of the only things that I did that brought me recognition. I learned quickly, steadily excelled and, with each of their accomplishments, their ego is built up by their friends, coaches, other players and the media. It was the one place in the world where they know beyond a shadow of a doubt that they are okay. For most serious players, provides you with this same continual source of positive reinforcement and feedback. There are enjoyment and self-satisfaction in mastering new skills, overcoming ever more challenging obstacles and progressively getting stronger and better.

Furthermore, the outside recognition of their accomplishments by friends, family and your community stoke the fires of self-esteem so that they burn even brighter within you, the coach. Having a great match feels fantastic and provides concrete evidence that your hard work is paying off and that they are exceptional.

A CONSTRUCTIVE WAY TO COPE WITH STRESS IN THE GAME

There is no question that physical exercise helps you better handle stress of all kinds. Individuals who have no physical outlets in their life tend to internalize their stress. Since they have no way of getting it out of their bodies, the pressure stays there and may emerge as stomach problems, headaches, or other physical symptoms. The individual without a way to physically burn stress out of his body may even turn to drugs, alcohol or some other addictive, self-destructive behavior to help him cope. (This is not to say that exercise can't itself be used addictively and in a self-destructive manner because of course, it can.).

Furthermore, many soccer players discover that their involvement in their game is a constructive way to escape from the stress of a dysfunctional family or deprived environment. Their sport offers them a safe and productive way to channel their frustrations and aggression. Along these same lines, your competition can provide you as a player with a vehicle to a better life.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES OF PLAYER INJURY

What happens to all of these psychological goodies when an injury suddenly sidelines you? To put it simply, players become overwhelmed by a variety of internal and external losses. As the player struggles with the impact of these losses negatively begins to haunt them. If the injury is significant enough to keep you out of commission for a good chunk of time, the first thing that you lose is your identity as an athlete and team member. You lose your place and role on the team. Identity confusion sets in on and off the field. This can mean that they start to question who they are if they're not constantly in the pool of selected players, out on the field practicing and competing in their sport.

Without your sport, with its' daily practices and competitions, you suddenly have a potentially significant vacuum in your sense of self that you have to try to fill. This is only less extreme if you have been able to expand your involvement into other activities in other areas of your life. Unfortunately, more severe athletes commit so much of their free time to excelling in their sport that other, non-athletic activities are virtually impossible.

This personal identity confusion is compounded by the fact that your injury has suddenly changed your identity and place on the team! You are no longer the leader, workhorse or clutch performer. Now your position is on the deck, bench, or sidelines with the coach and your role on the team is suddenly unclear and questionable.

Hand in hand with this sense of identity confusion comes two other significant losses:

First, you lose your physical health and sense of invincibility. Many athletes are used to being independent and relying on their bodies to respond as trained and directed. With the injury, you have to face the cold hard fact that your body has somehow failed you. This can be a tough pill to swallow. Furthermore, injuries frequently make you dependent upon others, i.e. doctors, trainers, physical therapists, etc.; Most athletes have a strong independent streak and hate having to depend on anyone other than themselves.

Second, you lose a primary source of your self-esteem. If you get your goodies from being faster than everyone else, hitting the ball harder, throwing touchdowns or shutting an opposing player down, then you'll get precious few good feelings from standing on the sidelines helplessly watching the action. Suddenly, you're plagued with self-doubts and have to struggle with questions of your self-worth.

If you're not pushing others in practice, working hard on your game, and helping your team in competitions, then what real value do you have on the team? For many players, this is probably the hardest part of their injury. It's a huge blow to your ego. Suddenly, slower or weaker athletes are taking your place and doing what you should be doing, but can no longer do.

The other significant feeling that accompanies these losses is a sense of alienation and isolation. Robbed of the limelight, unable to fulfill your old role on the team, and unable to even practice with the rest of the team, it's common to struggle with feelings that now you are suddenly very different, that you no longer fit in.

Many players first meet their injury with outright denial. They may downplay or ignore the seriousness of the injury, falsely believing that everything's okay as a consequence, they may continue to train through the injury, only making matters worse. Frequently the injury is often accompanied by feelings of

intense anger. The athlete may adopt a "why me, why now" attitude and act hostile and resentful to coaches, teammates, and friends. Some athletes then get into an internal bargaining with themselves, i.e. "if I do this and that, then maybe I'll be able to get back out there."

At some point in this whole process, depression finally sets in as the player comes to directly realize the nature and seriousness of their injury and loss. The depression may entail a loss of interest in or withdrawal from once favored activities, sleep and eating disturbances (sleeping too much/insomnia, overeating/loss of appetite), little energy and possibly even suicidal thoughts and feelings. At the end of this depression stage, the athlete comes to accept his/her situation and make the best of it.