

## Behavior Problems (Part 1 of 2)

Handling discipline problems presents a distinct challenge for soccer coaches. Many coaches are inexperienced in dealing with discipline or even identifying real problems versus child's play. Many coaches mistake immature behavior, which would be appropriate for youngsters, for behavioral problems.

A few factors influence the typical inexperienced parent/coach:

- a. **FALSE EXPECTATIONS:** Inexperienced youth soccer coaches begin with personal expectations of what goes on during games and practices. These expectations are, sometimes, inaccurate; these parent/coaches lack perspective. They forget that soccer is a child's game. It is "play". These coaches encounter reality in their first session with youngsters. They find out very quickly that working with youngsters does not meet their expectations of "coaching". This, in turn, causes feelings of fear and anxiety. These inexperienced coaches may, at times, react abruptly and may not successfully handle these situations.
- b. **PERSONAL CONCERNS:** New and inexperienced youth soccer coaches become concerned with "controlling" situations. They also are over-occupied with being well-liked. Many coaches see these two interests working in opposite directions: "If youngsters like me...I can't control them," or "I can control them, but they won't like me." Coaches either become over-ambitious to please players, or harsh. Both of these approaches have grim consequences. Coaches may feel betrayed if they are overly friendly and feel taken advantage of, while being too harsh causes youngsters to feel resentful or bitter. In the end, problems are unresolved and both the coach and youngster are angry or disappointed.
- c. **LACK OF RESPONSIBILITY:** Many times, inexperienced coaches have difficulty coming to grips with their inability to "manage" these situations. These coaches tend to blame players solely for problems. Some, on the other hand, allow serious problems to occur, repeatedly, but lack the insight which would allow them to prevent such situations from happening time and again.

After several experiences in attempting to "discipline" youngsters, coaches become increasingly frustrated. This results in the coach perceiving themselves poorly. For this reason, some youth coaches leave our ranks early. It is through coaching education programs that we should address their needs for appropriate player management.

These coaches must be empowered to help themselves overcome these "problems" and feel effective.

Real discipline problems are best described as conflicts of interest between the youngster and the coach. Are some of these interest predicated on the difference between the needs of young players and the role adults perceive youth sport to take? The answer is yes!

One of the real predicaments is to deal with behavior in a non-judgmental manner. Many times adults reprimand youngsters and embarrass them. The challenge for coaches is to address what is happening and modify their behavior without threatening. An adult's actions should imply that they are dealing with the behavior and not making the behavior into a personal issue. This might be caused if children are compared against one another.

Undoubtedly, dealing with behavior can be frustrating for rigid adults. It's best to recognize that you, as the coach, are frustrated. There is a decided difference between anger and frustration. Adults need to differentiate between the two.

Again, differentiate between the behavior that is disturbing and the individual child: the behavior is what's disturbing you.

May 22, 2014 from Coach Deck. Written by Dave Simone

## Behavior Problems (Part 2)

You must acknowledge that young players have feelings. In fact, while we would like to see them develop and improve, they must learn to enjoy the game. They have a genuine need for attention and inappropriate behavior is their way of soliciting attention. If, in fact you as an adult have difficulty acknowledging your own anger or frustration, how can you recognize and acknowledge these feelings in others? Most adults use methods that deal with behavior and discipline that are reactive versus proactive. This causes coaches to sometimes overlook how a youngster feels about their comments on the youngster's behavior.

In identifying behavioral problems, parceling out "punishment" is risky. Consequences must be meaningful to young players but cannot be confused with punishment. The difference is the factor of respect for young players versus making them feel demeaned.

The real gift exhibited by competent youth coaches is to manage people/players effectively. There are several factors associated with effective management of players relating to behavior:

1. Management of time
2. Management of environment
3. Effective communication

The availability of time is limited when working with young players. Practices are usually scheduled twice a week, anywhere from 50 minutes to an hour and a half in duration. This places a high priority on effective teaching/coaching. The time youngsters spend with the youth coach is minuscule in comparison with the time they spend away from soccer with family, in school, or other activities. The environment for youth players is a key ingredient.

Creating the appropriate games, activities, and conditions directly influence management of players and acceptable behavior. Typically, youth coaches attempt to arrange and manage players by over-organizing them. They place them in lines, with unrealistic absolutes, that do not allow them to move and play. It's great for adults since it resembles the adult perspective of discipline and order. Soccer is a dynamic game; one that exhibits and includes movement of the ball and players. The organization of "play" has direct bearing on boredom versus stimulation as well as interest and learning.

It's simple: there are no lines in "the game", let there be no lines at practice. The advertising for a Sega computerized game product which emulates NFL football says it best: if it's in "the game" (The NFL), then it's in "the game" (Sega). In one sense, those coaches who insist on over-organizing the environment are contributing to their own woes!

Effective communication has everything to do with all avenues to offer information. This includes body language, facial expressions and gestures, tone of voice, eye contact, and quality of content. Very simply, is the information useable in improving the player's enjoyment, development, or performance? Emotional outbursts, yelling, and screaming either at parents, referees, opposing coaches, or PLAYERS is really unacceptable. It's a tremendous sign of intolerance and a great indication of a lack of the necessary qualities to be an effective coach. The game, at all levels, must be the teacher and meet the needs of players. Youngsters learn more from their experiences in the game than from the coach. That's why the role of the coach is to create the appropriate conditions and let youngsters play! What youth coaches must ascertain is the distinction between a discipline problem or poor behavior as a result of unsuitable management. The nature of youngsters is to run, jump, be inattentive (from an adult's perspective), change their focus at a moment's notice, or gaze expertly off into the sky at a far away plane. If they are uninterested in the activities, it may be a problem of management. They come to soccer to be challenged and invigorated as well as to play, make mistakes, and learn. A phenomenal aspect of "play" is that the problems, challenges, disappointments, or rewards resemble and parallel life experiences. Learning for youngsters between the ages of 5 and 12 is a leisure activity that is accomplished through play. PLAY is a key part of PLAYER DEVELOPMENT! June 20, 2041 Coach Deck by Dave Simone

## **Coach Captain Obvious**

**Posted on December 23, 2015 by coach deck, By Tony Earp**

While sitting and watching a youth soccer match, you will hear a lot of things said from either sideline. Often we focus on things that parents say from their sideline that are not beneficial to the players, but what about what is being said by the players' coaches? Throughout the game, what information is being shared from the coaches' sideline to the players? This will change drastically depending on the type of coach that is working with your child. High level youth coaches provide information to help players solve the problems of the game and improve their level of play. When mistakes are made, information that is useful to the player to help them have success the next time is provided. Unfortunately, some players will play for coach "Captain Obvious" who does not provide information that helps the players as much as just pointing out mistakes and running commentary of the events of the game.

Think of it this way, it is not enough to just point out issues and mistakes on the field. That is not coaching. It is the lowest level of observation and thought by just stating the obvious over and over again. Also, when a coach only points on mistakes without any information to the player on how to correct it, then nothing is learned.

Does your child play for "Captain Obvious?" Here are some things you would hear from the sidelines from this type of coach and how I am confident most players would like to respond.

**"You can't lose the ball there."** *OK. Please point to the area of the field where it is fine to lose the ball. Next time I "INTEND" to lose the ball, I will do my best coach to make sure I am in that part of the field. Is there anything I could have done different before I got the ball or with my first touch to help me not lose the ball in this "can't lose it there" area of the field?*

**"Keep possession!"** *Ohhhh, I misunderstood the point of the game. I was TRYING to give the ball to the other team. I thought we got points for each time we lost possession. Any tips on how to keep possession?*

**"You need to finish those opportunities!"** *Are there opportunities that I do not want to finish? I thought this was one of those opportunities that it did not matter if I scored or not.*

**"Take less touches!"** *You mean take one less than the number I took right before I lost possession? Yes, I guess that would have been a good idea. I am not sure why I need the need to take all those touches. It is like some kind of addiction to have the ball at my feet. Personally, I wanted to give the ball up earlier, but my feet would not let me. How many touches should I take each time I get the ball? Is there some kind of chart for me to review?*

**"Better first touch!"** *Again, by "better" you mean one that does not cause me to lose the ball? Yes, again that would have been better. I am glad you said something. I was actually going to take a worse touch next time and see how that worked out.*

**"You need to win the ball!"** *By win the ball, is there some type of raffle, or do I just go and take it from him? I was under the impression that they are supposed to just give me the ball when they do not want it anymore. If I would have known I am supposed to go win it, I would have done it already. Thanks again coach! This game is so simple.*

**“You let him get by you!”** *Well, he asked nicely. He said, “hey man, can I get by?” So I said. “Sure!” Next time should I say no?*

**“You have to run!”** *Not True. Look up Carlos Valderrama. He rarely ever ran and was really good and I model my game after him.*

**“You are out of position”** *Can you perhaps put up some kind of markers, or maybe an electric fence to help me know when I am not in “position” during the game? Don’t worry about teaching about my roles and responsibilities, just point and yell.*

**“You dribbled right into the defender!”** *That defender ran right into me. It is his fault!*

**“Shoot when you get the chance!”** *Thank you for permission to try to score when I have a chance. I tend to wait till I do not have the chance to try to score, but I will try your way from now on.*

**“Get open, No one is moving!”** *I keep trying, but this guy keeps following me around. Can we ask him to stop following me? It would make it a much easier to get open. But if he is just going to keep following me, I really just don’t see the point.*

I know I am being overly sarcastic, but my point is simple. These types of comments are just observations from the sideline from the coach. They do NOTHING to help the player improve or better understand the game. To tell a player who just lost the ball that he just lost the ball, is not what I would consider high level coaching. To tell a player who just missed a shot on goal to hit the target, does not provide any information to help the player do what is being asked. Instead of telling a player to not lose the ball or score, a coach would provide information to help them be able to do that the next time they get the chance. The player does not need to be told what just happened. He was there and is well aware of what just transpired. What the player needs from the coach, is corrective information that the player can apply to the next time he gets the same opportunity.

Instead of “hit the target,” after a miss, a coach who is trying to teach may say something like, “Take a look before you shoot so you know where you are and get your feet set before your shot.”

That is just an example, but it gives the player something to try next time they get the chance to score.

This can be applied to most moments in the game. When coaches speak to the players during the game instead of just commentating on what just happened, it is much more helpful to provide the players with information to help them improve their level of play. All the examples I gave do not provide any helpful information to allow the player to have a better chance of having success the next time. Like any great teacher, comments should be designed to either spark critical thinking to solve the problems presented to the player or are hints/tips for them to discover how to find more success in the game. Stating the obvious may sound like coaching, but nothing is being taught (or learned).

*Tony has a Masters in Education from Ohio State University. Tony was a standout player both academically and athletically at Ohio State University, earning multiple honors both on the field and in the classroom.*



# Dealing with aggressive parents - like John's Dad

"Have you ever had to deal with a parent who was so aggressive you had to take him to one side and threaten to expel him and his child from your team?"

## Answer

YES! I have had to do exactly that.

Two players in my team had been winding each other up in school, and although I knew they had history, there were never any problems that spilt over into the team... until one of the dads got involved, that is.

A relatively innocuous incident in practice was enough to make the whole thing explode. John and Peter (not their real names) were on opposing teams in the small-sided game we were playing. The former had already scored two great goals - much to his watching dad's delight.

When he tried nutmegging Peter there was an untidy coming together, from which Peter emerged with the ball. "No, no, no," shouted John's dad, "I'm not having that! Free kick! You should be keeping your eye on this 'problem'".

I reacted only by explaining it was a fair tackle. But then a similar incident followed soon afterwards, and this time it was a foul. Before I could stop play John's dad was on the pitch pacing towards Peter. I had to intervene, calm him down and get him off the pitch. I'm sure what would have happened had I not managed to keep John's dad at arm's length.

We got to the end of practice with no further incidents, but when Peter's dad came to pick him up, I told him there was friction and it would need to be sorted at some point.

As for John's dad, under no circumstances can I accept this sort of behaviour at my coaching sessions. I told him I would ban him if it happened again. He accepted he had crossed the line and has promised to remain calm in future.

John is a great player and an asset to the club but if I did ban his dad he is likely to leave. Yet it is in the best interests of the club to reprimand a parent if something like this happens. Under no circumstances can repeated aggressive parental behaviour be overlooked; it sets a ridiculous example.

In the end, the team is more important than the individual, even when - such as in this case - you're talking about one of your best players.

Soccer is often about making tough decisions, but the best way to avoid them is to be open and upfront, and to nip any episodes in the bud before it escalates.

It's funny but Peter and John get on just fine - but there is still friction between the two dads.

Yours in soccer,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Clarke". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

David Clarke  
Head Coach, **Soccer Coach Weekly**

# Don't Be Afraid to Coach

One of the most difficult jobs youth league administrators face each season is rounding up enough volunteers to coach. If you've never coached a youth sports team before, it is natural to feel trepidation and to figure someone else can do a better job. But here are a few reasons why even you should have the confidence to say, "I'll do it."

I get it. It can be a little scary. I had a unique background in that my summer job for seven summers in high school and college was coaching in a recreational baseball league. I was on the field from 8:00 AM to 3:00 PM five days a week instructing kids ages 6-15. So when it came time for my own children to start playing sports, there was never a doubt if I would be the coach.

However, the first team I ever had was not in baseball but in pee-pee roller-hockey at the YMCA. I had never played hockey growing up. I can't even skate. I certainly didn't have any drills or practice plans. But I figured out some basic exercises for the kids to do and, most importantly, I was enthusiastic. I exhorted them to play hard, encouraged their effort, and was their biggest cheerleader. After the season, the parents all seemed to think I did a great job, and I know the kids didn't want to have it come to an end.

In the sports world, how many times have you seen a player with less talent outperform one with more ability because of hustle and hard work? It's the same principle here. You can make up for lack of knowledge and experience with enthusiasm and effort. If your main objective at each game and practice is to inspire your players to do their best, to eagerly praise every accomplishment, and to pick them up after each failure, then even if you're not the greatest coach your players will respond positively. And if the players are always giving 100% because they are following your example, if they are having fun because you bring humor and a positive attitude, then their parents will overlook any technical shortcomings. The parents of the hockey team I coached didn't know and didn't care that I'd never played or even skated before.

Say you'd love to coach but you don't have the time? I know people with very demanding jobs. But they ask for time off, make it up evenings and weekends, and their bosses understand. Let's say we're talking about two practices and a game a week. Maybe six, seven hours a week total for a few months. Couldn't you get into work an hour earlier, stay an hour or two later a few days a week, and make it happen?

And if it is your competitive nature that is standing in your way, put your ego aside. It's not that big of a deal if your team loses more games than it wins. Who's going to remember in five years? Can you be a positive influence on a group of kids? Can you teach them that winning and losing isn't as important as trying their best and being a supportive member of a team? Can you have enough fun during practices and games that they will want to come back again next season? You just read the job description for a successful youth coach.

Someone has to step up and volunteer to coach or there are no youth sports. We all can't simply expect it to be someone else's job. Who knows? Maybe you'll be good at it. Maybe you'll love it and you'll come back every year hereafter. And even if you decide that one season is enough, at least you gave it a try. At least for a couple of months you volunteered your time to help the community. No, years from now you probably won't remember your win-loss record, but when someone pulls out an old team photo of a group of smiling kids in their new uniforms, you'll see yourself standing tall behind them. And you'll be glad you decided to put yourself out there and let them call you "Coach."

Posted on May 25, 2014, by Coach Deck

Here are my seven tips on how to get the most out of coaching your sessions:

- 1. What is the problem?** Picture in your mind what it is that your team is doing wrong. Think about the type of session you need to help the team.
- 2. What is available to me?** What resources do you have that relate to the problem? **Soccer Coach Weekly** issues are a great place to start.
- 3. Have I used a session in the past to cover the topic?** Think about what you have done before when you have come across this problem. Did you solve it? Can you use it again?
- 4. How will individuals react to the session?** Some of your players will respond negatively to certain sessions you run. If you know your players well you should be able to spot problems before they arise.
- 5. Is it simple or complex?** How much guidance do you need to give your players? Sometimes simple is best. If it is complex make sure you explain it carefully before the players have to go and do it.
- 6. Are you reviewing work already covered?** If you are revisiting work, you need to quickly get the session going and work your players at the level you worked at when you last ran the session - they know the topic so the understanding should already be there.
- 7. During the session does it feel right?** Your gut feeling is often a good indicator as to whether or not the session is working. If it is, great, make a note of what went right. If not, don't despair. Write down what went wrong and change it next time.

For example this week my team were finding they were losing the ball easily when they had the ball in certain areas of the pitch and couldn't play their way out of trouble. So I ran through my 7 tips for better sessions, thought about the problem and came up with this session that covers passing out of tight areas.

Try the session from **Soccer Coach Weekly** which I used with my team [to help solve a passing problem](#) and get my players to be stronger in tight areas of the pitch.

Yours in soccer,



David Clarke,  
Head Coach, **Soccer Coach Weekly**

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## How to Behave like a REAL Coach on Game Day

1. Remember that the opposition is a bunch of kids, like yours, not the Mongrol hordes of Genghis Khan. Be nice, say hello to them, and ask how they are.
2. Shake hands with the opposing coach and after the game, regardless of the result. It's irrelevant what you think of him or her. Like you, they are giving up their spare time so that children can play soccer. If nothing else, respect them for that.
3. Do not try to control your player's movements. Leave the decisions to them and if they make a mistake, so what? It's a learning opportunity, not the end of the world. Let your players express themselves on the field.
4. Coaches who keep shouting "PASS!" "SHOOT!" or "GET STUCK IN!" need to have their mouths professionally zipped up. How would you feel if someone was trying to tell you what to do all the time? Make sure your parents understand this too.
5. Don't keep shouting a player's name. It's embarrassing for the child and can sound as though you are picking on them.
6. Touchline comments should be confined to encouragement. Say "Well Done!" "Nice Pass!" "Relax!" "Look Around!" etc.. Praise work by BOTH teams.
7. You don't need to tell your players that they should try to win the game.
8. No game is "vitally important." When Duane Thomas, NFL Rookie of the Year, was asked how he felt about playing in the "most important game of the year," the Super Bowl. He replied, "If it is so important, then why are they going to play it again next year?"

If you do some or all of these then you are going to look like a real coach and a good guy, and that really would be a good result.

Remember... success is a journey, not a destination!

Taken from an email received from Steve Footy 4 Kids

## Is More Actually Better?

Posted on July 21, 2016 by coachdeck

By Rick Meana

Nope, the direct opposite according to sports medicine doctors is actually the case. No two words have raised more concerns amongst those in the sports medicine field recently than overuse injuries.

According to most of the Sports Medicine Professionals I have spoken to recently report that just 15 years ago, overuse injuries accounted for 20% of patients visiting their clinics, now it's up to 70% and increasing year after year! What is interesting to note is that over training, early specialization and too little rest and recovery all contribute to overuse injuries. What is even more interesting to note (and very troubling) is that they point to the "youth soccer club mentality" for the "epidemic" that is affecting all youth sports across the board!

Overuse injuries develop when tissue is injured due to repetitive loading of a muscle, bone, tendon, ligament, that is too much physical activity and too little rest and recovery. It is also defined as the cumulative effect of many tiny injuries that cause pain and loss of function. Close to half of the injuries reported regarding youth soccer are overuse injuries!

### **So Why Are Kids Being Pushed To Play Sports So Hard?**

Parents? Coaches? Or a combination of the two? Are they being lead to believe they can get a college scholarship? "It's amazing how many parents project their children at professional levels," says Vern D. Seefeldt, director emeritus of the Institute for the Study of Youth Sports at Michigan State. Coaches feed the frenzy too. When a soccer guru urges playing another tourney or ratcheting up practice time, parents often don't object. They're being told by the coach: "Your son has amazing potential and needs to continue to improve".

"There are few people guiding the parents who have the welfare of the child at stake," says Dr. Eric Small, head of the Sports Medicine Center for Young Athletes in Mount Kisco, N.Y., and author of "Kids & Sports". Here is what Dr. Small says, "Making the injury list even longer is the trend toward sport specialization. A decade ago a peppy 10-year-old might divide his play among soccer, basketball, and baseball seasons. Now more are being channeled to one sport that they play year-round. The extra training improves skills but adds to the wear and tear."

One of the most popular women's soccer stars Mia Hamm's parents encouraged her to play a variety of sports. When high school soccer season ended, she played as a point guard on the basketball team. "I was a terrible shot, but fast," says Hamm. "My dad never said: 'Go out and work on soccer.' The decisions about playing came from me."

Hamm tells parents and kids to avoid early specialization.

All over the country Sports Medicine Professionals are advising parents to closely monitor how much time their children are putting in to organized sports. Be leery of the number of hours that coaches may be demanding to play and train. Parents are so focused on their kids being superstars that they think they're doing a service when training jumps from 10 hours a week to 30. They love their child, but they have blinders on. Dr. Small goes on to say, "Often those blinders don't come off until a youngster gets hurt, but by then a youngsters sports career could be over."

### **A Watch List for Parents, Coaches and Administrators**

Many injuries occur when organized practice time is ratcheted up from two days a week to five. A good rule of thumb to follow is physical activity should not be increased to more than 10% a week.

### **Be Aware Of Growth Spurts**

As kids grow, muscles can become less flexible and more susceptible to injury. Parents should watch for periods of rapid growth.

### **Early Specialization Leads To Muscle Imbalances**

Kids who play one sport year-round develop certain muscles to deal with the demands of that particular sport while others remain weak. A well balanced conditioning program of playing a variety of different sports and proper rest in between activity is healthy.

### **When There Is Pain There Is No Gain**

Child athletes and parents shouldn't ignore the warning signs assuming that injuries will magically go away. Have a doctor check out any minor pains in joints or bones before they become major ones.

**Signs of Overuse:** Weakness, Loss of Flexibility, Chronic Pain, Inflammation, Swelling. The inflammation is actually a degeneration of tissue caused by the micro trauma. Some others: Loss of Performance, (Hard to differentiate between a 'bad day' and overuse injury). "I don't know, its just a little sore", "I don't remember getting hurt". Soreness after workout is normal but it should dissipate after a day or 2 and soreness, aching and limping lasting 3 days or more may indicate overuse. The overuse injury is a process, and will take time to develop, starting 3 or 4 weeks into a season. Muscles affected by overuse injury tend to be tighter, more irritable and will become prone to an acute injury.

*Rick Meana has been the New Jersey Youth Soccer Director of Coaching for over 16 years and in that time he has directly impacted the education and development of thousands of players and coaches from all levels. Rick has served on both the US Youth Soccer ODP Region I Boys and Girls Coaching Staffs for more than 18 years and currently is the director of the Under-12 Boys South Development Camp. He holds the USSF 'A' License and National Youth License, as well as the NSCAA Premier Diploma.*

## [Make Them Want to Come Back](#)

Posted on March 25, 2017 by coachdeck

*By Brian Gotta, President of CoachDeck*

Over the past ten years I've written many articles on youth sports. One of my original and most often repeated comments is that your first goal as a coach should be that every player wants to come back and play again next season. Regardless of wins, losses, or anything else, if you accomplish this, you've succeeded. But how do you do this?

The first thing to realize is that you are the conduit between the player and the sport you are coaching. You represent the sport to the player. It will be difficult for a young player to like the sport, but not like the coach. One of the main reasons youngsters quit sports at an early age is not that they didn't enjoy the game itself – but rather, they did not like the person managing the team.

So make them like you. The easiest and most obvious way to do that is to smile. Doesn't mean you can't ever be stern or serious, but when the players are showing up at the field, make each one feel like you're glad to see them. Set the tone by joking around a little with them during warm-ups. I used to try to make a nickname for every player at the beginning of the season. Some didn't stick, but a few did and the kids loved it. You can be serious once practice starts, and it's OK to bring some intensity based on the age level you're coaching. But be sure that every criticism is balanced by something else the player did well, (e.g. "You've got to watch that ball all the way in. But I like the way you used two hands.")

Part of making them like you is running fun practices. A serious practice that teaches fundamentals and pushes players to perform can still be fun. I've recently seen several drill videos put out by national organizations designed to help their volunteer coaches. In them a professional coach demonstrates how to perform a particular skill, then proceeds to have 2-3 players mimic his actions. Not only is the drill boring, but when have you ever run a practice for just two or three players? Apparently the other ten kids are standing off-camera just watching. Each drill should be made into a game involving every player. All of the drills in our deck of cards have a "Make it a Game" feature that turns an ordinary drill into a competition the entire team will love.

What about being competitive and trying to win? Much of what is written about the "ills" of youth sports blames coaches who only care about stroking their own egos with victories, even if it is at the expense of some of the kids. And much of that is legitimate. Clearly, it is important to judge your audience. I've written many articles about when it is OK to get more serious about winning and how far it should be taken – I don't intend to get into that here.

But when I coached in the Majors Division of Little League, (ages 10-12) we wanted to win. And just about every other coach in the league did too. The kids wanted to win also. Skeptics will say we were over-the-top, that it shouldn't be about winning at that age. It wasn't *only* about winning, but we did try our best to win. One might say that philosophy is bad for the players who

aren't stars on the team, but I disagree. Because we made it a point after every game to go player-by-player and highlight something each individual did to help the team. In fact, we worked even harder to give recognition to the players who didn't usually contribute as much. If we weren't all trying to win, that praise wouldn't have been as significant. And when a youngster with just average ability rose up and did something great and made a huge, positive difference in a game, the thrill he got, the adulation from his teammates, that one moment might be enough to make him want to come back again next season. And when it's all said and done, that's exactly what we're trying to accomplish.

*Brian Gotta is a former professional youth baseball coach and current volunteer Little League coach and board member. He is the President of CoachDeck and also author of four youth sports novels and a baseball coaching book which can be found at [www.booksbygotta.com](http://www.booksbygotta.com). He can be reached at [brian@coachdeck.com](mailto:brian@coachdeck.com)*

# Not Sure How Many Will Turn Up At Practice?

Putting my "soccer fans" hat on, I have to say I hate the international breaks - I guess I'm so used to watching great games from across Europe (and America) that when it stops I'm fed up - and, keep this to yourself, but sometimes I find international friendlies just boring.

Although just seeing Lukas Podolski score a thundercrack of a goal for Germany against England in his final match last week almost made up for it...

I imagine the high-profile managers of Premier League clubs get fed up as well because they lose a lot of their players to the international teams - its fingers crossed they don't come back injured or worn out. And practice can be difficult with the few players left behind.

I'm sure Ronald Koeman at Everton did not plan to be without his star defender Seamus Coleman after he broke his leg playing for Ireland at the weekend.

But grassroots coaches have the same problem and much more often when school breaks up for half term or the scouts go away for the week. It makes practice very difficult. I've turned up for practice only to find half the squad were at a school Valentine's Day Disco, and on another occasion lost five players to a school rugby tournament!

One night I only had six players turn up. Now one thing I will always do is make sure the ones that are at practice have a good session, so they don't suffer from the other players' absence. I split the teams up and run some 3v3 small-sided games.

The players appreciate the focus and you are able to work much more on their individual skills. It's a great time for taking players to one side and pointing out areas of their game that they can improve on. One of my players was getting caught on the wrong side of the opposition attackers when we were defending corners. I pointed this out to him during one of our 3v3 games.

I told him I wanted him to raise his arm every time he got on the right side of the defender so that he was thinking about his position in front of goal when he was defending. He soon got the hang of where he should be because he was using his soccer brain to think rather than just wander aimlessly around the penalty area.

[Try this session called ATTACKING OVERLOADS](#) in which you can use different numbers of players - it's a really good session to give some individual coaching or to give a tactical session to your attacking players.

Yours in soccer,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David Clarke". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

David Clarke,  
Head Coach, **Soccer Coach Weekly**

# Should I give up coaching?

"The constant criticism from the parents of the players on my team is hitting my confidence and making me think I should give up coaching. Can you help?"

**- Under 10s Boys Coach**

## Answer

I think all of us have a dark side that turns us into critics. Some people can be more critical than others, but if you're on the receiving end you have to close your ears to the comments and just let the critics get on with it.

Working with grassroots teams I tend to hear criticism constantly and a lot of it comes from the parents at the side of the pitch. If their son or daughter has not played well, they think the coach hasn't been doing his job properly. If their son or daughter is substituted, the coach hasn't a clue what he's doing. And on it goes.

Remember, criticism is easy to make but your achievements are not. And it's easier to deal with criticism when you realize the reasons behind it. Criticism from parents is often a tool to defend their children and to defend themselves in the face of other parents with higher achieving kids - it's not an attack on you as such but it can be hard to ignore.

You are doing a great job so don't let them put you off. It is because you have given up your time and taken on the role of coach that you have been thrust into the limelight and unfortunately a lot of people will resent your position of importance.

When I first started coaching I remember that one of my teams went through a sticky patch in the middle of the season, having started out with four straight wins.

After one game a parent came up to me and told me that he had spoken to a few of the other dads and they had decided my tactics were wrong. I was taken aback and rushed home to go through my notes and think about what they had said. My tactics hadn't changed but the players were on a steep learning curve and some aspects of their play were just beginning to come through. At that time I felt quite nervous about the score in games - not like now, when I look at how well the team played before I even think about the score. In attacking me the dads had come up with reasons why their kids hadn't won the game, but it was their problem, not mine.

Now that I understand why people criticize, I no longer feel nervous about what parents think of me. Once you realize why people criticize you'll deal with it much better too.

Yours in soccer,



David Clarke  
Head Coach, **Soccer Coach Weekly**

## Teaching Kids to Be Good Sports

Posted on **May 20, 2016** by coachdeck

By *Dr. Darrell Burnett*

“Sports do not build character. They reveal it.” – Heywood Hale Brown

### **Youth Sports: The Last Vestige of Sportsmanship**

We're living in an age where the preservation of traditional values can no longer be taken for granted. It seems we need to have reminders (books, movies, newspaper articles, etc.) to maintain our awareness of the importance of preserving the basic human values which are essential to the survival of a community.

It's no different in the world of sports. The traditional value of sportsmanship is being challenged from all sides: professional, college, high school, and even in youth sports. There are some who say sportsmanship is becoming a lost art and that unless we remind ourselves of the essentials of sportsmanship and strive to maintain the basics of sportsmanship it will gradually fade as other values have done in our society.

In the midst of all this, it seems doubly important that we recommit ourselves to guiding our youth, reminding them what sportsmanship is all about, rewarding them for showing good sportsmanship and showing, by our example, that sportsmanship is still alive and valued in youth sports today.

Here's a 10-item checklist for kids to follow as they try to develop a habit of good sportsmanship.

1. I abide by the rules of the game.

Part of good sportsmanship is knowing the rules of the game and playing by them. If a player decides to play a given sport, it is the responsibility of that player to learn not only how to play but how to play according to the rules which have been established and standardized to allow competitive games to be played in an orderly fashion. The more a player knows the rules the more that player can enjoy the sport.

2. I try to avoid arguments.

Part of good sportsmanship is anger management. Arguing with officials, coaches or opponents is often simply a misguided effort at “letting off steam” in the heat of competition. A good sport knows that anger can get in the way of a good performance. A good sport knows how to walk away from an argument and to stay focused on the game at hand.

3. I share in the responsibilities of the team.

Good sportsmanship implies that the player on a team is a team player. In other words, the player understands that his or her behavior reflects on the team in general. Moreover, a team player does not condone unsportsmanlike conduct from teammates and reminds players that they all share in the responsibility of promoting good sportsmanship.

4. I give everyone a chance to play according to the rules.

In youth recreational sports the more talented players, if they are good sports, will look out for and encourage the less talented players on the team, cooperating with coaching plans to let everybody play. Unfortunately, some coaches may become so preoccupied with winning at all costs that they never play some players, regardless of the time and effort they put in at daily practices, even when the score warrants clearing the bench.

5. I always play fair.

Honesty and integrity should be an integral part of sports. A player with good sportsmanship does not want a hollow victory which comes as a result of cheating (“dirty” fouls, ineligible players, performance enhancing drugs, etc.)

6. I follow the directions of the coach.

A player with good sportsmanship listens to and follows the directions of the coach, realizing that each player's decisions affect the rest of the team. If a player has disagreements with the coach, the player discusses the disagreements privately in a civil manner, away from the public eye.

7. I respect the other team's effort.

Whether the other team plays better, or whether they play worse, the player with good sportsmanship does not use the occasion to put the other team down. In the field of competition respect for opponents is central to good sportsmanship. If an opponent out-performs a player that player accepts it, learns from it, offers no excuses and

moves on. If a player out-performs an opponent, that player enjoys the victory, but does not gloat, does not belittle, and does not minimize the opponent's effort.

8. I offer encouragement to teammates.

A sign of good sportsmanship is a player who praises teammates when they do well and who comforts and encourages them when they make mistakes. Criticizing teammates in the heat of battle simply distracts from the focus of working together and gives the advantage to the opponent who develops a sense of confidence when seeing signs of weakness or a lack of unity in the midst of the competition.

9. I accept the judgment calls of the game officials.

Part of the human condition is making mistakes. Arguing with an official over a judgment call simply wastes energy. The player with good sportsmanship knows that errors may be made, but the player also knows that a game is made up of all the plays and calls from the beginning to the end of the game, not just the call in dispute. The player with good sportsmanship may be upset, but that player also has learned to focus his/her energies back on the game and on doing the best he/she can do for the rest of the game.

10. I end the game smoothly.

When the game is over, pouting, threatening, cajoling have no place in the life of the players with good sportsmanship, who emphasize the joy of participating, regardless of outcome. They're not devoid of emotions but they know that their efforts to end the competition smoothly, without antagonistic emotional display, will help ensure that the games will continue in the future.

On a final note, a word of caution. We can't be so naive as to think that by teaching and valuing sportsmanship in our youth we will ensure that they will take these values with them into their young adult and adult sports lives. However, if we don't expose them to the essentials of sportsmanship, and if we don't guide them in developing a sense of good sportsmanship, we can all but guarantee that they will fall prey to the young adult and adult world of sports and athletics, with its continued tendency to minimize sportsmanship, and maximize winning as the only real value in competitive athletics.

### **Sportsmanship Checklist for Kids**

1. I abide by the rules of the game.
2. I try to avoid arguments.
3. I share in the responsibilities of the team.
4. I give everyone a chance to play according to the rules.
5. I always play fair.
6. I follow the directions of the coach.
7. I respect the other team's effort.
8. I offer encouragement to my teammates.
9. I accept the judgment calls of the game officials.
10. I end the game smoothly.

Sportsmanship is the ability to:

- win without gloating
- lose without complaining
- treat your opponent with respect.

Sportsmanship Tips:

- If you make a mistake, don't pout or make excuses. Learn from it, and be ready to continue to play.
- If a teammate makes a mistake, offer encouragement, not criticism.
- If you win, don't rub it in.
- If you lose, don't make excuses.

*Dr. Darrell Burnett is a clinical psychologist and a certified sports psychologist specializing in youth sports. He has been in private practice for 25+ years in Laguna Niguel, California. His book, IT'S JUST A GAME! (Youth, Sports, & Self Esteem: A Guide for Parents), is described at his website, [www.djburnett.com](http://www.djburnett.com), along with his other books, booklets and CDs on youth sports and family life.*

# The Importance of Substitution in Youth Soccer

## Question:

"We have a squad of 13 players. On my sons' team, the other assistant coach wants to involve all the players in the games and I agree with him. However, the head coach believes that the subs should only get a couple of minutes at the end.

If it was up to me all the players would get equal time but the coach tends to give them 10 to 15 minutes per game.

My son is one of the subs and to be honest while I'd like him to get more time am grateful he gets anytime at all.

Under the wishes of the head coach, he'd possibly be lucky to get 2 minutes. The coach also has some of the parents thinking the same way."

- Under 14s boys' assistant coach

## Answer:

I'm very much pro player development at the expense of results - because in my experience player development in the end results in a better squad and ultimately a better team with more chance of winning.

I admit that by playing the strongest 9 you will initially have a lot of success and get plenty of pats on the back from the parents of the children that are playing but you are building up a whole heap of trouble with the parents of the players who do not play.

I always state right at the beginning of the season that every parent pays the same for their child to play, so every child will be developed to the best of their ability and that means playing time on the pitch. In the long run this is always better for the team - if say your son is suddenly thrown into a match because players are ill or away and he has only played 10 to 15 minutes on average his concentration and therefore his match fitness will not be up to the test and that is not fair on him. He needs to experience playing full games right through the season - and be playing half a game for the rest of the season.

Experience of coming off the bench into a game that is in full flow is also something all players should be used to so in future they can come on and be up to speed - if say the team is 1-0 down with 10 minutes to play. Your "star" striker is on the bench. He needs to be able to take in what he has seen when watching the game then be at 100% playing speed to come on and

change the game.

You will also find that some of the players who were initially only getting off the bench for a few minutes are in fact great players who have not had the opportunity to develop and gain the confidence and show off their skills on the pitch. They should also play every position on the pitch so that you are developing their soccer brain as well as general skills.

I massively understand the pressures on coaches to play certain players and play them in certain positions. So, I can understand the pressures of playing time, but this is a corner you must argue for the benefit of all the players, the team and parents. The teams that sit the same subs on the bench every week little playing time, at the end of the season, coaches need to ask themselves if their team has progressed.

I hope this has been of some use to you, it is something i am very passionate about.

David Clarke,  
Head Coach, ***Soccer Coach Weekly***

# The most important coaching tool ever...

By Mike Woltalla

I've said various things to the opposing coach during the postgame handshake:

The standard "Good game"..."We got lucky..."Your team played great"... Or sometimes just a handshake and no words.

When I ref I usually just say "You're welcome" when coaches thank me during the postgame ritual.

But at times I've wanted to ask these questions:

Do you even like soccer?.. Do you enjoy coaching?.. Do you like being around children?

I want to know because for an hour I've watched them prowl the sidelines, screaming, charging, huffing and puffing.

They'd probably sincerely answer "yes" to my questions. Perhaps they simply don't know what they look like out there or they actually believe that's how a coach should act.

I get that it's difficult to control one's emotions around sports, and that we have an innate urge to advise and correct children. But we also know how counterproductive it is to coach in such a fashion. If yelling at kids – when to pass, where to run, when to shoot, when not to dribble – was the recipe for developing talent, American youth would be producing superstars by the thousands.

And while I think that overall youth coaching has improved significantly over the years, far too many children – while they are supposed to be enjoying the game and trying to figure out how to master it – are being interrupted by the screaming, prowling gesticulating coach.

"Part of that comes from the models of coaching they see live on TV, usually other sports but also soccer", says *Sam Snow*, U.S. Youth Soccer Coaching Director. "The camera pans on coaches when they're animated."

Says *Ian Barker*, the NSCAA Director of coaching Education, "Watch the game so that you can help the players with the game if you're very animated, you're probably not watching the game critically, you're just joy-sticking. .. The coach should open up the folding chair and sit."

Before his 2010-2013 stint as U.S. Soccer's Youth Technical Director, *Claudio Reyna* traveled the world to observe the most successful youth programs: "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."

So here's the most important coaching tool to bring to the field:

(Over)

# The Trophy Debate -- Give kids some credit

By Mike Woitalla

I'm not a big fan of trophies. They tend to be gaudy and overpriced. At the same time, I find it amusing when people get all riled up about kids nowadays getting trophies they don't deserve. As if that's really a major problem.

Many times, I've heard the diatribes about how when we were children we had to win to get a reward and now they give them to everyone. They call them "participation trophies" and the issue became big news recently when NFL linebacker **James Harrison** boasted on Instagram that he took away from his 6- and 8-year-old sons their participation trophies.

"I'm not sorry for believing that everything in life should be earned and I'm not about to raise two boys to be men by making them believe that they are entitled to something just because they tried their best," wrote Harrison.

Harrison was widely hailed. There is an irony in considering parenting advice from someone who was arrested for assault and [admitted](#) to slapping his son's mother in the face, and whose [pit-bull](#) sent his boy to the hospital for three days. Regardless, the participation trophy issue is much ado about nothing -- because children are much smarter than they're given credit by those who think a piece of plastic will make them soft and unambitious for the rest of their lives.

Kids keep score. They understand the difference between a participation trophy and a winner's medal.

I certainly don't think there's anything wrong with giving young children a memento at the end of the season, regardless of the win-loss record. Better than a trophy, I've always thought, is a team picture or a photo collage from the season. That's something they're more likely to cherish years down the road than a trophy.

## *11 Tips for Coaching the Little Ones*

1. If all you do is set up goals and have them play as much soccer as possible during that hour of practice – you’re doing a good job.
2. Familiarize yourself with the various age-appropriate games/exercises to facilitate individual skills – but don’t use ones that bore the kids. And if it takes more than a minute for 6-year olds to comprehend the activity – it’s the wrong one. (In other words, plan your practice but be ready to improvise.)
3. No lines, no laps, no lectures.
4. Enjoy yourself! If for some reason you’re grumpy, act like you’re enjoying yourself. Kids pick up on body language and you’ll get the best out of them if they sense you like being their coach.
5. Great each player when they arrive in a way that lets them know you’re happy to see them.
6. Always end practice on an upbeat, happy note. (Even if they drove you absolutely crazy.)
7. See the game through the children’s eyes. This will remind you that your main objective is helping them discover the joys of soccer. And not to expect a 6-year old to play like a 16-year old.
8. Do not yell instructions at them! Do not coach from the sidelines during games! This interferes severely in their learning process. It also makes you look rather silly – an adult screaming at young kids while they are playing.
9. Sit down during games, instead of prowling the sidelines, which only creates tension and unnerves your players.
10. Always have a first-aid kit (including ice-packs) with you.
11. Keep plastic bags in your coaching bag in case you need to pick up trash.

By Mike Woitalla, the executive editor of Soccer America

Furnished by the Greater Longview Soccer Association

# Worried parent helpers are taking over?

"I know I should be more open to the idea of parents helping out, but I'm worried about relinquishing control. What do you suggest?" **U9s boys coach and parent**

## Answer

It's not uncommon for youth coaches to find the idea of involving parents terrifying, but you have to remember you will always be in control of team affairs, and the additional helpers are only ever there to supplement what you do - they're not there to take over.

The simple fact is that many coaches are overrun with the duties of coaching and organising a team. It is an unrelenting job that requires knowledge and management in equal measure, and often has to run alongside the duties of a full-time job and other family commitments.

Coaches who fail to ask for help when they need it are not only penalising themselves, they're also penalising their players, because more hands on deck equals more ideas, more individual time and attention, and better development for the children in the team. The key thing to remember is that any parent who comes along to help will be under your instruction.

No one will be taking over (unless you want them to) and you might only need to take on one or two helpers for practice - it doesn't need to be a queue of people suddenly knocking on your door. The other thing about players' parents follows the old adage of "keeping your friends close and your enemies closer".

The coaches who alienate parents are usually the ones who end up coming in for the most criticism, or find themselves the subject of rumours or whispered conversations taking place just out of earshot. My advice would be to engage parents.

The majority are fantastic and care as much as you do - after all, you all have one shared interest!

If you invest in parental help it will be beneficial when you play sessions that require more than just you to run it - sometimes you need parents to help retrieve balls and sometimes they are needed for a more active role.

Use today's session - [Promotion or Relegation from Soccer Coach Weekly](#) - to get parents helping you out as well as rewarding the kids as the season draws to a close, or if your season has just started or is going strong. It makes a great change from the usual practice sessions.

Remember, without parents to help supervise the session below, it would be almost impossible to run!