

Coaching Tips for Creating a Positive Youth Sport Experience

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doing so, coaches are letting the athletes and/or parents know what they have done well and are encouraging them to do it again in the future. For example, if a parent is particularly encouraging from the sidelines during the game, a good coach will take the time to thank the parent (publicly and privately) after the game for what they did.

5. Ask for feedback - No coach knows more about an athlete on their team than that athlete's parents. If a coach is having trouble "getting through" to an athlete, she may consult with the parents, because they may have some ideas on how to best communicate with their child.

6. Have an end of the year meeting/party - Parties are a great opportunity to thank the athletes and parents for what they have contributed to the season. These meetings are a fun way to celebrate success...even when there are more "L's" than "W's".

By following these guidelines, youth sport coaches can help make kids' sport experiences more fun and the relationships with parents more positive. Coaching at the youth sport level can be challenging, but by having beginning and end of the year meetings, clearly communicating with parents and athletes, being a role model, and focusing on fun and development, coaches can have a significant effect

on creating a positive sport experience for kids.



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Success in Life and Sport

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Sports can play a vital role in helping athletes develop valuable skills that can be transferred to many areas of life. Athletes often are exposed to challenging situations in which they learn about leadership, dedication, responsibility, motivation, teamwork, and communication. If sport is going to fulfill its promise as an activity that builds character, coaches, parents, and sport psychologists must help athletes learn to apply these skills and lessons in areas outside of sport.

Coaches are particularly influential in this process. Coaches, especially great coaches, possess an ability to translate their philosophy of the game into an action plan that helps their athletes be successful in competition and in life. Legendary UCLA Basketball Coach John Wooden has done this in his *Pyramid of Success*. In his pyramid, Coach Wooden has presented the principles that he believes are essential for success. The Center for Sport Psychology recently had the opportunity to talk with Coach Wooden about his *Pyramid of Success* and its lessons for teams, athletes and coaches. In this article we summarize his comments, hoping to bring you some of what he shared with us. We focus on three areas that Coach Wooden stresses as important to success: Industriousness and Enthusiasm (cornerstones of the pyramid), balance, and motivation.

Coach Wooden's accomplishments are renowned. Wooden coached at UCLA from 1948-1975. During his career at UCLA Coach Wooden's teams won 10 national championships, includ-

ing 7 in a row (1966-1973) and went to 16 final fours. Coach Wooden was named College Basketball Coach of the Year 6 times and is one of only three men to be inducted into the Basketball Hall of Fame as both a player and a coach. He has continued to influence people since retiring from coaching through numerous books and speaking engagements. In addition, Coach Wooden was awarded the prestigious Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2003.

Industriousness and Enthusiasm

These two concepts are literally and figuratively the cornerstones of Coach Wooden's "Pyramid of Success". Industriousness is a willingness to work hard; an approach that is essential for success. However, there is a difference between hard work and being busy. Coach Wooden's idea of Industriousness encompasses working hard towards your goals, not simply filling your time with activities. This important lesson is even more salient in today's technologically advanced world. In this age of hustle and bustle, cell phones and blackberries we probably all *feel* that we are busy all the time. However, just because we are busy does not mean that we are being Industrious. In fact, being busy may be an obstacle in achieving our goals. To "be" Industrious we must first define what goals are most important. Once we have our goals in place and prioritized we can begin to organize our time and our energies so that we are spending the most time on those goals that are most important to us. This approach

allows us to allocate our time and energies where we would like them most and to be industrious without the feeling of being overwhelmed with *busyness*.

Enthusiasm, which means loving what you do, is the other cornerstone of Coach Wooden's *Pyramid of Success*. Coach Wooden values not only those who work hard, but those who are passionate about what they do. Hard work without excitement, enjoyment, and passion can bring down even the most motivated person. Wooden exemplified this enthusiasm throughout his coaching career and his players emulated it on the court. Parents and coaches can teach young athletes the importance of enthusiasm and loving what they do. Coaches can display their enthusiasm for their sport through their attitude, how they structure practices and how they prepare their teams for competition. Coaches also can show enthusiasm for improvement instead of only being excited by victories. Focusing on improvement helps athletes, especially young athletes, begin to understand that sports can be an activity in which they can reach their potential and improve over time regardless of their short-term outcomes (i.e., winning). Parents can help athletes learn the importance of enthusiasm by focusing their praise on the *effort* of the athlete instead of the outcome of the performance. Parents and coaches that adopt these approaches provide an environment in which enthusiasm is rewarded and reinforced.

For Coach Wooden, reaching

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and performing at your potential is the definition of success. "Success is a piece of mind which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you made the effort to become the best that you are capable of becoming" (www.coachwooden.com). Coach Wooden does not stress winning in this quote, or being the best, or beating an opponent, instead his emphasis is on defining success through effort (Industriousness) and not outcome. According to Coach Wooden, people should not compare themselves to others, but instead compare themselves to their own potential. Coach Wooden believes this kind of comparison reduces our anxiety and helps to eliminate self-doubt. Parents and Coaches of young athletes can help the athletes pick realistic and appropriate self-standards based on their current skill level. Setting self-standards allows the young athlete to become successful and reap the reward of confidence that can occur through goal achievement.

Balance

Coach Wooden also stressed the importance of finding balance in one's life, such as between family and career. Balance means placing equal importance and time on things that you value, and being able to shift from one area of importance to the next as needed to reach your goals. Coach Wooden often talked to his teams about balance. He wanted them to be balanced, not only offense and defense, but also in their personal lives. Coach Wooden stressed not only physical balance, but emotional and personal balance as well. He believed that emotions and attitudes needed to be consistent. Whether they were winning or losing, he wanted his athletes to be positive. He did not want his teams' emotions to follow the roller coaster of wins and losses.

In life we can feel out of balance, struggling to balance careers, families, school, and friends. If we are

able to find a balance between these important, but often competing, activities then we will be more likely to appreciate and enjoy the activity or people with whom we are involved. There are several ways to begin to try and achieve balance. Setting and prioritizing goals (i.e., deciding what is important) is the first step. Second, learning to say no to those activities and people that may distract us from what we deem most important. Third, we need to learn to invest fully in each experience. By investing ourselves fully, we are able to focus our energy in an efficient and productive manner. Being balanced does not imply that we are going to always be successful in every aspect of our lives. However, it does mean that if we experience a failure or loss we will be better prepared to respond to the situation. Balance provides the psychological resources and energy that allow us to cope with loss or defeat and redirect our attention towards our goals.

Motivation

Coach Wooden understands that each person has different things that motivate him or her, and that coaches should not use a one-size fits all approach to motivating their athletes. He indicated that a significant part of his job as a coach was to understand his players well enough to know what motivated each one of them. In addition, Coach Wooden believes that people, including his athletes, respond best to positive reinforcement. Coach Wooden said that he found that a pat on the back was usually the best way to motivate his players, although he jokingly admitted that a few players also responded from "a pat a little lower".

So how should we motivate our athletes? Coaches, bosses, teachers, and parents often are looking for the one approach that will allow them to motivate those in their charge. This one-size fits all approach ignores

Coach Wooden's idea that people are motivated in different ways. Coaches can benefit from Coach Wooden's ideas on motivation by searching for the "Best approach for each athlete" instead of the "Best approach" method. That is, it is not "unfair" to use different types of motivation with different players. Some athletes may need a pat on the back, whereas others may need to be challenged. It is important to understand that people will respond differently to motivation at different times; what worked today may not work tomorrow. Think of your motivation techniques as tools. Some jobs (athletes) require a certain type of tool where others will require a different one. The more tools you have the more likely you are to fix the problem or motivate your athletes.

Coach Wooden's wit and humor kept us laughing throughout the interview, and his message about success was inspiring. His ideas on industriousness and enthusiasm, balance, and motivation reminded us about what is important in life and that we (as coaches, parents, and sport psychologists) do not have to limit our views of success to the win-loss column. It is significant that the Coach who won the most NCAA basketball championships of all time defines success as simply reaching your potential. Coach Wooden has been successful no matter how you define success, however his strategies for and his definition of success are the true benchmarks of his life.



Coaching Tips for Creating a Positive Youth Sport Experience

By Dustin Johnson, M.S. & Carmen Tebbe, M.A.

Youth sports have become more competitive as the numbers of select-level teams have grown exponentially, higher-stakes out-of-town tournaments have flourished, and parental expectations for their children's success have skyrocketed. In addition, many coaches have their own desires to mold future champions, which can add to the pressures. Coaching competition, status and ego can play a big role in why coaches push their young athletes towards winning. With parental, societal, and even their own expectations increasing, it can be challenging for coaches to keep youth sport in perspective. Thus, it's important to remember why young athletes choose to participate in sports...in most cases, it's because they want to have FUN. For kids, FUN equals a lot of things: learning new skills, being physically active, making new friends, learning about teamwork, playing games, and working hard to achieve a goal. Fun may involve winning, but for younger kids, it should be only a small part of the equation. When parents and coaches emphasize winning over other things, such as developing skills and learning to play as a team, sport can stop being fun. When this occurs, there is a much higher percentage of young athletes who will "burnout" and quit the sport. Therefore, it is critical that parents and coaches make young athletes' sport experience be positive and fun.

So how do successful youth sport coaches help create a positive and fun environment for the kids who play on their team? They set the tone for the parents and kids right from the start. Here are several things successful youth sport coaches do at the beginning of the season to create a positive environment:

1. Educate parents on how to be positive role models for their athletes - many parents are completely unaware how strongly their behaviors influence their children. For example, during a beginning of the year meeting, coaches can give a friendly reminder about how par-

ents can help their child by giving positive encouragement and by keeping the focus on learning and improving and not on winning.

2. Set expectations and guidelines for athletes' AND parents' behaviors for practices and competitions, including consequences for not complying - successful youth coaches let everyone know that the focus is on creating a fun environment and that certain behaviors can detract from that. For instance, parents may not understand how their behaviors in the stands or on the sidelines, such as yelling at referees or putting down opposing players, negatively affects all the kids' experiences. Kids learn how to behave by watching the adults around them...good coaches attempt to create an environment where kids are only exposed to positive role models.

3. Explain rules of the game - Part of having fun and being successful is learning how to play the game. Also, if parents understand the game they will enjoy it more and can be more supportive of the referees and the other team during competitions.

4. Explain coaching philosophy - Athletes and parents need to know what to expect from their coach. Therefore, many coaches chose to share their coaching philosophy before the season begins. The key is to be consistent with their philosophy throughout the year.

5. Communicate team goals for season - Communicating goals helps give athletes and teams something to shoot for, a reward and reason for all of the hard work they are asked to put forth. In addition, it gives coaches a way to monitor the athletes' progress and skill development. When setting goals, successful coaches make them about individual skills and team development, not wins and losses.

6. Explain procedures for voicing con-

cerns/complaints - Often parents and athletes won't always see eye-to-eye with their coach, but they can respect their rules for how and when to discuss their concerns. Successful coaches often let parents and athletes know when it is OK to discuss team issues and when it is not. For example, some coaches may not want parents talking about concerns at competitions, but may invite conversation after a practice.

7. Specify ways parents can be involved - Parents often are as eager as the athletes to be a part of the team. To get parents involved, many coaches give specific tasks/roles on how they can help out with the team. For example, a coach might ask a parent to assist in the planning of a team meal or in setting up at practices.

After the beginning of the year meeting, here are a few ways successful youth coaches keep the fun and positive atmosphere going throughout the season:

1. Be consistent in behaviors and in control of emotions - The way successful coaches behave toward youth athletes should always be the same...positive and supportive no matter how they perform. It is important to note that even good coaches get frustrated, yet they seem to remember that being upset at (yelling) the players or parents will not help the situation.

2. Be a good role model - Good youth coaches set the standard for how they want others to behave. If they treat the game as fun, it is likely that others will behave in ways that follow.

3. Communicate clearly and positively with parents - Successful youth coaches make sure their message is clear, appropriate for the situation, and respectful.

4. Reinforce positive behaviors - Good coaches praise an athlete or parent when they have behaved in positive ways. By

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