

First and Ten - An Open Playbook to Coaching Success

By Johnny Tusa, American Football Coach Association

Reasons to Coach:

Each year many young men and women decide to enter into the teaching/coaching profession. These young men and women set out to follow a dream, pursue a career, and embark on a journey to change lives. From the very first day that one stands in front of adolescents to lead, he or she begins to transfer a very real and tenuous power of influence.

The reasons for getting into the coaching profession should be encased within the parameters of two basic questions; first, do I love working with young people enough that I would do it for free. Secondly, can I live without coaching and be satisfied. These two questions, if answered yes and no respectively are the cornerstones for success in the coaching profession.

Success is the key word that produces numerous definitions. Success in my book has nothing to do with winning and losing. Success to me has everything to do with running a consistent first class program. The process put forth to achieve such a program should include those activities that would lead to an outcome that showcases a maximum performance by each team member. By focusing on the process, the energy exerted by staff and participants in each endeavor, is free and clear of uncontrollable outcomes. Doing your best is a clear goal that relieves each team member of false and meaningless yardsticks. Ultimately, the will to win (succeed) is in direct proportion to attitude, work ethic, and passion.

So, if you've been led to believe that winning and losing is the sole criteria for judging the success or failure of an individual or team please think again! The truth of the matter is that although the won/loss record can be a contributing factor, it is by no means the primary factor. And, if it is portrayed as the primary factor, the institution involved is fostering a concept that is damaging to everyone involved or associated with said institution. The goal of any well run program should be geared to produce a well-rounded, responsible, and accountable citizen. Anything less should be unacceptable.

How important is coaching today? More important than ever. Why? The landscape of the family structure has changed dramatically in the last half century. Below are some startling statistics that make a strong case for the need of male role models in coaching and teaching. These statistics were gathered by the U.S. Census Bureau in 2009.

- There are approximately 13.7 million single parents in the U.S. today.
- These single parents are raising 21.8 million children or 26% of the nation's children under 21 years of age.
- 84% of custodial parents are female (approx. 11.5 million)

of which 60.9 % are under the age of forty.

- 34% of single mothers have never been married.
- 49.8 of single mothers have full time jobs.
- 27% of single mothers and their children live in poverty.

The above statistics indicate a strong need for males in our schools. Every child needs a balance in parental guidance. Coaches and teachers often times must fill that gap. The 21st century has a great need for coaches who can teach the game along with the solid values of life.

The fallout from single parent homes is numerous. The empirical evidence of single parenting is manifested in their children in many ways. The most pronounced manifestations are:

- The lack of afterhour's supervision.
- Inconsistency in supervision e.g. grandparents, relatives, neighbors, peers.
- Dependency on outside transportation to get to school.
- Chronic tardiness.
- Poor nutrition.
- Inconsistent guidance, encouragement, and support.
- Absenteeism.
- Children forced into adult roles financially.
- Older siblings are responsible sometime during the day for younger siblings.
- Parent unable to attend important meetings and activities of children.

Coaching can only be effective after the staff has a plan for each player dealing with his or her circumstances. Until the distractions of everyday life are removed, it is very difficult for a child to focus, flourish, and learn.

One of the most effective ways to deal with individuals who lacked sufficient parental help was to let them know you were there for them off the field. Once you proved to players that you cared about them as individuals, and then great strides could be made in giving them the personal skills to handle their circumstances. In summary, developing the total child should be the ultimate goal of any top notch program. ■