
Chapter 3

Effective Coaching Behavior

***“If a coach is constantly talking or yelling at players during the game, it prevents your players from thinking for themselves.”
Steve Sampson, Former Men’s National Team Coach, June 1998***

You have just volunteered to become a soccer coach for a youth program in your community. Congratulations! You have just agreed to pursue one of the most rewarding and difficult challenges in which you have ever engaged. To enjoy the best possible experience, you need to adopt a number of characteristics and behaviors. Few of us possess all the abilities required to properly coach young children.

The youth sport experience is all about children. Being an effective soccer coach requires certain traits. You must be a responsible adult at all times. You must possess a strong desire to work with children and to understand the complexities that exist within children of different ages, levels of development and maturity. How can you provide the best environment for children to grow, develop, and have fun?

There are dozens of positive characteristics that one must possess to become an effective youth soccer coach. Some are listed below:

Characteristics of Effective Youth Coaches

- **High Moral and Ethical Standards.**

Be an appropriate role model.

- **Honesty.**

Be fair, no one likes it if you cheat.

- **Respect of Players, Parents, and Community.**

Develop strategies to develop positive relationships with all involved.

- **Understanding Readiness Factors for Participation.**

Maturation — when to begin, how the game is structured.

Learning — what are children able to comprehend and how do they learn.

Motivation — internal desire to play and have fun.

- **Communication.**

Appropriate verbal and nonverbal responses (body language & gestures).

Appropriate language (words, tone, volume, rhythm, articulation).

- **Development of an Appropriate Temperament for Coaching Children.**

Be sensitive to each child.

Exhibit a calm personality.

Show patience.

Observe and Guide; Don't Direct.

Use your normal voice, not a whistle.

- **Ability to Motivate Positively.**

Develop high levels of self-confidence.

Positive coaching.

Don't yell.

- **Possess Leadership Qualities.**

Be prepared.

Be organized.

Demonstrate discipline — identify appropriate and inappropriate behavior and enforce team rules.

Learn to be critical of behavior, not a player's personality.

- **Be Dedicated to Child Development and the Sport of Soccer.**

Understand what is appropriate for different ages and levels of play.

Let every child play (and play a lot).

- **Be Enthusiastic.**

Your enthusiasm is contagious.

Celebrate!

- **Have a Good Sense of Humor.**

Keep things light.

Have fun.

Smile and laugh.

- **Must Have Current Knowledge of Coaching Youth Soccer.**

Learn about children and how they learn.

Learn the rules.

Learn appropriate practices, activities, and content.

Learn appropriate tactics and strategy.

Learn how to have fun.

Developing Practice Procedures (Protocols)

Equipment - Every player must have a ball to use at every practice. So much more can be accomplished if everyone can be engaged in play at the same time. Players who have to wait their turn will often become bored and disenfranchised with the activities. Coaches should always bring a couple of extra balls with them to practice in the event children forget their ball. Cones and disks help organize playing spaces and can be used to designate boundaries, goals or a target area. Colored scrimmage vests will enhance the practice settings by allowing different players to be placed in a group. It avoids "shirts and skins" which is helpful in direct sun or in coed situations. Both are inexpensive and can be easily obtained.

It is also important to keep equipment in one designated area and to teach the players the procedures for getting and returning equipment. This will help keep your practice space organized and will help you keep track of equipment.

Instant Activity — When children arrive at soccer practice, they are ready to play. They often arrive at different times and wait until the coach determines when

practice will begin. Prepare activities in which the children can engage immediately upon arrival. They can play with a ball by themselves, engage in practice with a coach, play 1 v 1 with a teammate, or get in a group and begin to play. By the time everyone arrives, they are all playing and you can sit back and watch for a few minutes. They come to play; let them.

Start & Stop Signals — It will be important for you to devise starting and stopping signals that the players can see or hear. How do you want activity to begin or stop? These basic concepts need to be taught so players understand exactly what the signal means. Many of the games played by young players have names (hospital tag, everybody is it, etc.). Allow players to find space and begin moving and then use the name of the game to initiate play. The word “freeze” is a common stop signal and players should immediately stop when they hear the word. Avoid using a whistle. Players need to hear voice commands.

Forming Groups — How do players get partners? What do you do when you have an odd number of players and the number doesn’t fit the activity you want to do. A coach needs to solve this problem. No player should be eliminated or have to wait their turn. Players are taught how to quickly get a partner (it doesn’t have to be their best friend every time), or to get in groups. If there is an odd number, the players need to sort it out by forming one or two different-sized groups that will adapt to the activity the coach has implemented. Everyone is accepted; no one is rejected.

Understanding the Potential Impact of a Youth Soccer Coach

- The coach is likely to be the first person of influence in the child's sport involvement.
- Have total respect for the players, parents, officials, the game and yourself.
- Never make physical gestures or verbal statements that are meant to embarrass or humiliate a player, opponent, parent, or official.
- Be sure everyone plays an appropriate amount of time regardless of the score.
- Set a language example and enforce it. No swearing or use of profanity ever!
- Be a disciplinarian! Enforce your philosophy.
- Demonstrate sportsmanlike behavior. Shake hands with the opposing coach and be sure to praise the opposition. Encourage your players to do the same.

Summary

A coach's influence on a young child is extremely important. The effect that a coach has could last for an extended period of time beyond the season. Therefore, your personality, action and words could have a dramatic positive, or negative, effect on each and every child. The value of understanding children, being fair and enthusiastic, as well as being a positive role model, cannot be underestimated.

