



BLUEPRINTS FOR COACHING SUCCESS

Positive leadership, organization and clear communication can produce an enjoyable – and winning – experience for your team **BY COACH TOM BASS**

COACHING FOOTBALL AT THE YOUTH LEVEL offers an opportunity to introduce young players to one of America's greatest games and a tremendously rewarding experience.

You strive to experience the pleasure of watching your players evolve from awkward, young athletes into a smooth, efficient team. To realize this goal, it is important to ask yourself what your role and philosophy is as a coach.

Remember, as a coach you are first and foremost a teacher. Considering the many complex issues facing coaches today, being a teacher may seem to take a backseat at times, but it shouldn't. All great coaches are great teachers.

Safety and Enjoyment

Your first responsibility is to provide a safe and enjoyable setting for learning. This involves:

- › Inspecting the field before the first player arrives for practice
- › Greeting each player by name
- › Making a quick check of each player's equipment
- › Pre-planning the practice, so drills are conducted in a safe manner and the techniques that are taught emphasize proper and safe body movements
- › Being aware of any strangers who may be

loitering around the field

- › Having one coach remain at the field until the last player has been picked up
- › Having a pre-arranged plan for any potential medical problem

Practice Preparation

Preparing yourself – and your assistants – to accomplish your everyday goals may make it necessary to meet as a staff prior to each practice, each meeting and each game in order to outline the goals for that day. Coaches need to understand not only what they will teach, but also how it fits into the bigger team picture.

Player Participation and Fun

Youth teams should be geared to allow even the least skilled players to enjoy participating in games and practices. During your practices try to:

- › Make sure every player participates
- › Use drills that teach only one skill, rather than running one drill that involves multiple skills, giving playing as many repetitions as possible
- › Keep lectures to a minimum
- › Keep it fun and always be upbeat

Positive Communication

Coaches always should communicate

in a positive manner. Consider what you want your players to do and instruct them in a step-by-step manner. In addition, stay positive in your conversations with parents, regardless of the subject being discussed. One of the greatest lessons you can teach your players is how to communicate with officials during a game. Show the officials the respect they deserve and save any discussions or questions for a time-out or at halftime.

Leadership

Your players are going to look to you for leadership during practice and at games, and their attitudes will reflect yours. Young players want and expect you to provide instruction, structure and discipline, so don't let them down.

Players come to the practice field wanting to learn and have fun. They hope you will understand that they will make errors and that they will need encouragement. Every player wants to play on a team in which everyone is coached with kindness rather than criticism.

Remember, coaching is a tremendous responsibility. Parents entrust you with their most precious possession; their child. It is your responsibility to treat each child with respect and care. 