

## *Chapter 4*

### **Parents as Coaches and Leaders on the Fields and Courts**

#### **Traditional Coaching Styles**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

It is quite likely that you will be asked or have been asked already to help coach a youth sport team once your youngsters are enrolled. The purpose of the chapter, the first of two consecutive chapters on coaching and teaching, is to provide you with basic coaching skills to carry you through your initial seasons. Keep in mind as you study these two chapters that having played sports does not make you a coach any more than driving a car makes you a mechanic. Coaching skills are distinct from playing skills. Furthermore, coaching skills are different from classroom teaching skills where students are seated nicely at their desks.

In today's society we are finding many people quite expert at non-work tasks like customizing and restoring cars, gardening and growing, fishing, collecting guns and butterflies, restoring furniture, and collecting all varieties of memorabilia from player cards to beer cans. These "buffs" take their avocations seriously, perhaps more so than their work. We would like to create among youth sport volunteers this same kind of enthusiasm and motivation to learn what there is to know. With this in mind, this chapter will focus on some goals that youth sport people might consider, plus teaching and coaching methods that help players learn sport skills. The latter section is presented for the new coach as well as the veteran and more traditional coach. It emphasizes understanding your own self as well as coaching methods.

#### **Goals**

What is your idea of a good youth sport coach? Take a moment to think about this. Now use the spaces provided below to list the main descriptive terms which signal a good coach.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Examine these descriptors again and rank them first (most important), second, and third most important.

Did you put winning on your list? How about developing good players who know the skills of the game. Many sport people would include some reference to making better citizens out of troubled and disruptive youth (i.e., character development).

If you were a coach in the Revenue Sports System, you would have to put winning on your list and rate it number one. It is probably the single most important factor in Revenue Sports. If these coaches do not win, they are fired. This same standard, winning, applies equally to the highly publicized college and high school programs. Winning is the name of the game in Revenue Sports.

Contrast this to the youth sport coach. They are involved with school age players, both male and female. They receive no compensation for coaching, nor the players for playing. Employment or income will not be lost based on game performance. Given this situation, what then is a good youth sport coach if winning is not used as a standard of judgment? There is no correct answer to this question. To provide some direction in answering this question, let us consider some goals of youth sport that have direct bearing on what coaches do on the fields and courts. These goals were developed for use in coaches' clinics, workshops and forums with youth sport leaders. They were published in Arena Review (Hutslar, 1982a: 10-11), an issue edited by Jack Hutslar.

### **Perspectives**

Our view of life tends to reflect what we have encountered or what we are involved with in our day-to-day lives. Take your pencil and write down the first thing that comes to your mind when you see these words:

tree \_\_\_\_\_

field \_\_\_\_\_

playground \_\_\_\_\_

coach \_\_\_\_\_

sport \_\_\_\_\_

kids \_\_\_\_\_

Examine your responses to see if they reflect your personal experiences with your family, work or play. When people think of play, they think of kids. Sport, however, is likely to evoke thoughts of your favorite team, certain Revenue Sports personalities, and beer commercials, all related to television.

We dwell on Revenue Sports because it dominates television, which many sporting types watch. Winning is made most important for people who adopt that perspective or work in that area. Players and coaches alike, as great as they perform from season to

season, commonly call each other winners and losers. Being called a loser by a sport person is the ultimate insult. Failing to win the big games, big tournaments or the national championships will bring you that label rapidly. In the 1970's, the Minnesota Viking professional football teams was labeled losers despite the fact that they had the best winning percentage in the NFL. Their failure was in not winning title games. Later, it was the Buffalo Bills for their failure to win Super Bowls. Other teams and coaches in other sports have also lived with this label.

Sport people continually type people as winners and losers because winning and losing is the most basic statistic at all levels of play. It is not surprising that our youth coaches and program directors adopt this same "winning perspective." They do this not because it is proper for youth, but because it is the most dominant feature of Revenue Sports presented day in and day out by the media.

Television is, without a doubt, the most influential teacher of youth and adults in our society today. People watch an average of six to seven hours of television every day. Revenue Sports saturates weekends and entire networks. Perhaps it is unavoidable that the "winning perspective" of Revenue Sports is transferred directly to youth sport. By in large, youth sport leaders have no method of teaching their participants about their perspectives that can compete with televised Revenue Sports.

Now examine yourself! Do you see patterns in your actions that are copied from Revenue Sports, knowingly or unknowingly? If you see this, and are aware of it, it would be appropriate to change your focus to the youth perspective. This perspective is closely related to that of the adult recreational players and education, rather than that of the paid Revenue coaches and players.

Here is a list of goals, defined as a terminal point or the focal end point of individual or organizational effort, that reflect our concerns about the purposes of youth sport. These goals were selected because they are easily justified by experimental fact, they have the support of authorities in youth sport, and are key elements in the development of youth. These goals are:

- fun
- participation
- learn skills or fundamentals
- safety
- balance
- social development
- effort
- physical maturity
- school studies
- sportsmanship
- fitness
- emotional control
- persistence

self-direction  
positive relationships  
good models

One of the outstanding facts of Japanese business and its success in the world market, is that it is based on principles rather than “the bottom line” as we call it in the USA. (Ouchi, 1981:60-70) We would like to present these youth sport goals for the principles they represent. It seems evident that five stand out for what they offer youth.

### **Dominant Youth Sport Goals**

Fun. Perhaps one of the most basic characteristics of sport is that it is fun. Adults find a number of things enjoyable including eating, sleeping and making love. Youth universally find sport and games enjoyable. If it were not fun, why would people do it? Why would youngsters spend every waking hour on hot asphalt basketball courts or dirty ball fields? The answer is truly simple. Sport is fun. When people have taken the opportunity to ask players why they play, they say because it is fun. When they have asked youngsters why they quit or do not play, they usually answer, because it is not fun.

Fun may not be a goal that you can regard as important. This is not surprising. Fun things are considered frivolous and non-serious. Perhaps that is why many people take sport so seriously. In fact, we appear to be moving toward a reversal of values over the past decade or so. We have become very serious about sports, particularly for our children, while we are looking for jobs for ourselves that are fun. We drive ourselves and our children in sport with the determination that was confined formerly to school and work. Now, when we make sport serious, no matter the intent or purpose, we run the risk of turning our kids away from the activity they do naturally and spontaneously when left alone -- play. If we do not keep sport fun for our youth, it is questionable how long they will stay involved. Make sport fun. It is a good philosophical position with factual support.

Participation. A recognized principle of sport is that you must “do it” to learn it. In sport, as in driving a car, laying bricks, solving math problems, or figuring out computer problems, doing it is essential. There is no substitute for doing or participation. Furthermore, players must continually use their skills to maintain them at an acceptable level. In sex education, there is a key phrase that illustrates this principle or goal of participation quite well. It is, use it or lose it. Sport is similar.

Let us now look at participation more closely. We cannot grudgingly allow our players to get in games for two or three plays, and say that we subscribe to the goal of participation. Getting to play one quarter is not enough, from a child’s perspective. Adults would not sit still for this. Adults want their share of the playing time and so do the kids.

Terry Orlick and Cal Botterill, two respected youth advocates from Canada, summed up the inconsistencies in our actions on the “behalf” of youth quite well. They wrote: (Orlick and Botterill, 1975:17)

We should field as many teams as there are interested kids to fill them. It is ridiculous to promote participation on the one hand, and then to cut interested individuals from the team, or to in any way limit their participation. This type of action provides the rejected child with massive negative reinforcement and counters our basic reason for existing (that is, to serve the children). To cut a child because he is not good enough negates our purpose and our responsibility to our children and to society. It is comparable to a doctor refusing to treat his sickest patients to insure that his win-loss record looks good. These people seeking athletic participation who are cut-off may be the ones who could benefit most from this experience. Just as the least lovable child is one who needs loving the most, the least athletic child may need athletics the most. The process of cutting is a vicious circle for the one who does not make it. He is cut because he is not good enough to make it and is consequently given no opportunity to practice on a regular basis so that he can become good enough to make it - - so he is rejected again the following year. (see footnote 1)

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*1 Used with the permission of Nelson-Hall, Inc., Chicago, IL*

There are two aspects of this goal of participation. First, it should be recognized that youngsters need to play as much as possible to develop their skills. When players sit on the bench they just get further behind those who are playing. A few bench sitters may get inspired, practice on their own, and work their way into the starting line up, eventually. Others drop out without ever having a chance to show how they could improve or develop had they been given opportunities to participate.

Consider these startling facts. A past officer of Pop Warner Football wrote that O.J. Simpson was cut the first year he went out for football and Gale Sayres was not good enough to play his first seasons. (Tomlin, 1980:11) Scottie Pippen of the Chicago Bulls began his collegiate basketball career as the student manager. Michael Jordan was cut from his high school basketball team as a sophomore.

How could any coach miss the talent of these future stars-to-be? What would football and basketball have missed had these young boys not returned to try again? How many equally good players do you suppose we have turned away because we did not give them a chance to learn? For the most part, it is difficult to predict which youngsters will blossom into great players, or in which sport it will occur, if it occurs at all. For the sake of all kids then, we need to get them participating.

A way to increase participation is to adopt the “equal playing time” plan for your team or league. With a little arithmetic juggling of players and game time, you can find out how much time each player must sit on the bench so all play equally in the game. By keeping the team roster down to what is termed, the “just over the limit” principle,

substituting players is an easy task. Here is a formula for determining Equal Playing Time (EPT): (Hutslar, 1980)

- (1) Minimum number of players needed to play the game  
X (times)  
Minutes in the game  
= Player/Minutes
- (2) Player/Minutes  
÷ (divided by)  
Players present for the game  
= Equal Playing Time
- (3) Minutes in the game  
- (minus)  
Equal Playing Time  
= Out time or bench time for each player so all play the same amount of time

In school and university intramural sport, small rosters are a characteristic of many teams. Basketball teams with six or seven players seem to have fewer problems getting their players to come to the games than do teams with just five or 10 or more players. For youth, football and soccer teams could have rosters of 11 or 12 players and play six to nine per side games. Baseball teams might have 10 or 11 players. Keep rosters small. It is best for everyone.

There is another way to eliminate the problem of getting substitutes into the games, and a few other problems as well. Burn your benches and LET EVERY KID PLAY EVERY MINUTE OF EVERY GAME. This is really 100% participation. A few youth programs do this and they are very proud of their growth and the enthusiasm their players show. Getting to play is motivating. You may feel that this is a radical idea but 100% participation is not new. In fact, 100% participation is the rule in bowling, tennis, swimming as well as several other activities.

Think about school. In most of their activities, 100% participation is a must. Can you imagine what would have happened in your fifth grade math class if your teacher would have said: "I will give books to all students in the front row. The rest of you listen carefully and watch. Learn what you can, work on your own outside class, and if you improve, I will give you books and work with you next year." This is what we have been doing in many youth sport programs. Instead, let the kids play. You will be pleased with the changes that occur in your programs. It will be apparent in the motivation and skill development made by your players. Incidentally, if you are worried about not having enough players to play when you adopt the 100% participation policy, just say: "Anyone want to play." You will have more players than you will be able to handle.

A second part of the participation goal is a philosophy of lifetime participation. Professionally prepared people in recreation and physical education emphasize playing now and playing forever. People who played as youth continue to play as adults. Our concern for youth must extend into adulthood. Play and sport participation should start in childhood, if not infancy. Find ways to get your youngsters into healthful sport activities and they will be participants for life. Incidentally, some of these kids will return to help you coach.

Participation is where it is at, to use a term from the 1970's. Not playing is no fun. Get your children involved in sport. Burn your benches and let them play. You, as coaches and parents, can do most to help achieve what you feel is important through sport by giving them ample opportunity to play.

Learn Skills Or Fundamentals. There is little agreement about the purpose of sport. Right now there is great emphasis on biological fitness and the prevention of heart disease. At the same time, the "soul saving" aspects of sport have been promoted for decades. While these goals are possible with planning, and are acknowledged in our list of goals, it seems that learning the fundamental skills of our sport activities has been neglected, particularly by those professionally prepared in sport. They seem always to look beyond sport for more respectable goals or purposes with which to identify. (Hutslar, 1981:90-91) In the process, they have lost interest in and or have turned their backs on what is unique about this thing in which we have so much interest.

It is our view, and it is shared by many, that sport skills are what is unique to recreation and physical education. Musicians, dancers, wood carvers, brick layers and sport people can talk about social development, studies, emotional control, persistence, and self-direction with justification. For kids, however, the skills used to play baseball, basketball, football, soccer and hockey are what attract them to sport. Sport skills are what youngsters enjoy doing. We could do a better job of attracting kids to sport and keeping them involved if we placed more emphasis on teaching the fundamentals properly and put less emphasis to the "side benefits." If we put too much emphasis on these other goals (e.g., character development) and neglect the basics of sport, the skills, then we will lose what attracts all of the players to sport.

Learning the proper, legal skills at an early age will give youngsters a foundation for moving on to the more difficult and complex skills. Learning the basics of each sport at an early age eliminates the need to correct years of improper repetitions later. Learning sport skill is attractive to kids. Teach them well.

Safety. When we think of safety, we usually concern ourselves with biological matters. However, safety can be extended to psychological and social concerns. The safety and welfare of our players is a primary and over-riding concern. It will be presented more completely in Chapter 6. The safety goal can be expressed succinctly with this statement: When a dangerous or hazardous situation develops, stop play. There is no reason to push youngsters into situations where injury will occur. This can be done thoughtlessly just by overstimulating them to "throw their body" into the game

without regard for life or limb. Again this is common in Revenue Sports. Likewise, there is no reason to ignore injuries, force or persuade players to play with injuries (i.e.. play with pain, as they say on television), or teach skills and tactics that produce injuries to players. Good health is valuable. It is not to be jeopardized for the sake of any game. Even the Revenue Sports athletes are coming to realize this.

The psychological and social safety and welfare of sport participants continues to receive considerable attention. Writers have focused on “prisoner of war” coaching tactics, as well as the social abuses that compel youngsters to ignore school work and social opportunities in order to devote 100% of their attention to sport. A number of organizations and causes have developed bills of rights to identify proper conduct. Youth sport people have done likewise.

The Bill Of Rights For Young Athletes, Table 4-1, is one such example. (Thomas, 1977:44) Study each point. It sets good standards of conduct for all adults who are involved with youngsters in sport. It emphasizes the rights that are important in the development of young minds and bodies. Use these items to evaluate your performance.

*Table 4-1*  
*THE BILL OF RIGHTS FOR YOUNG ATHLETES 2 (footnote 2)*

1. Right of the opportunity to participate in sports regardless of ability level.
2. Right to participate at a level that is commensurate with each child's developmental level.
3. Right to have qualified adult leadership.
4. Right to participate in safe and healthy environments.
5. Right of each child to share in the leadership and decision-making of their sport participation.
6. Right to play as a child and not as an adult.
7. Right to proper preparation for participation in the sport.
8. Right to an equal opportunity to strive for success.
9. Right to be treated with dignity by all involved.
10. Right to have fun through sport.

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*2 The Bill of Rights for Young Athletes was drafted in 1977 by the Youth Sports Task Force of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance and is reprinted with the permission of the American Alliance.*

Children vary considerably in their physical attributes, skill level, ability, desire to play, outside influences, history in sport, and support or encouragement they receive to play. Some do not even want to be there in the first place. It cannot be assumed that all players are involved in sport for the same reason, nor that they will respond to “bizarre” or aggressive coaching tactics favorably. Some coaches may feel that it is their

responsibility to “weed out” the poor players in order to cleanse the system. This “coach the best and bench the rest” approach has no long term value in most youth programs. It is short term thinking, selfish, and should be discontinued. Our goal should be to nurture the development of all players, regardless of their “potential” or lack thereof for stardom. Help them become as good as they can become while under our leadership. In both the long and short term, there is no substitute for providing a safe environment for learning and growth. This will help the players want to and be able to return and play season after season.

Balance. Balance, as it is used here, means that youngsters should be introduced to a variety of positions within one sport and then to a variety of sports. Parents continue to enroll their children in organized competitive programs at early ages. Perhaps this reflects the lure of million dollar pro contracts. Maybe it is just another sign of the post-industrial information society where programs take the place of parenting. Be that as it may, playing soccer, tennis, basketball or swimming 12 months a year is too narrow, confining and boring. In addition, specialization within one sport (e.g., pitching or distance running) contributes to injuries. These types of injuries, known collectively as the “overuse syndrome” are caused by repeating the same motion or skill. These problems usually do not show up until they become severe or chronic. It explains why pitchers’ arms “go dead” as they term it. Specialization leads to wear and tear and some bodies and body parts are more susceptible to this than other bodies.

As a coach and parent, we could aid the development of our offspring by helping them find opportunities to participate in a variety of sport experiences. Perhaps, by the age of 12, we should provide opportunities for our kids to play two team and two individual sports. After they have sampled these offerings, and hopefully others, they might consider specializing. There is some question, however, whether our players should ever be encouraged or permitted to play one sport at the exclusion of all other sport activities.

The second aspect of balance refers to league balance. Some organizations permit teams to keep the same players year after year. This helps perpetuate “dynasties” that, in the long run, reduce player interest, motivation and skill level. They yield one-sided games that are dull and provide little opportunity for player development. Evenly contested matches are much more fun and exciting.

To develop better leagues and better players, eliminate tryouts, drafts and team cuts. Keep everyone. Form balanced teams each season with new players on every team. Do it through the system of player clinics, evaluations, and player and coach assignments as was described in the previous chapter.

The third aspect of balance is the total development of the players. This is a commonly held value by people within the sport system. However, in actual practice the system falls short. Many writers have found extremely talented athletes who could neither read nor write. Make no mistake, there are high school and college athletes who cannot write a complete sentence, let alone read. This is not an exaggeration.

The balanced development (i.e., language, math, computers, music, art, social growth, family, church plus sport) of youth requires constant attention. Youngsters should not be permitted to grow up thinking they can make it in life on their sport skills alone. They need more than sports. In some communities it may be reading combined with sport programs. Elsewhere it may be music, art, alcohol and drug abuse prevention or computer literacy programs combined with sport.

It is obvious that our young players can go many directions socially and occupational when they are prepared for school and life. Many opportunities exist for those who have “the skills of life” compared to having “only” a great jump shot, bat, arm, or leg. There is no future in sport for 99.9% of those who seek to play for pay. Sport is not everything, but that is how some players and coaches view it. This is a roadmap for failure.

The most compelling reasons for youngsters to engage in a balanced variety of experiences include: (1) balance helps guard against overuse problems; (2) variety allows 10 year olds to become completely different 15 and 20 year olds, physically and mentally, and still have favorite sports; (3) balance makes it less easy to develop the false illusion, as do the sport specialists, that some type of financial reward for playing ability is probable; (4) balance provides talented professional athletes with avenues of expression and reasons for living during and after their short Revenue Sports experiences; and (5) participating in a variety of sport and non-sport activities develops a balanced approach to a fulfilling life.

Sport is fun and exciting, but it is not fulfilling without balance - - studies, family, friends, art, music. Once again, encourage your players to “go for it” if they have the talent, but remind them to take their schoolwork as seriously as they take their sport.

Words To Action. It is very easy, you may be saying, to make lists of goals. How do you make the transformation from the pages in this book to action on the fields and courts? Here are some examples of how these goals can be converted, or operationalized as the researchers would say, into action. See Table 4-2.

*Table 4-2*  
**GOALS: FROM WORDS TO ACTION**

#### FUN

1. \_\_\_\_ During the last two weeks of the season, the players will participate in two activities at practice that are designed just for fun, with only non-serious penalties, if any.

#### PARTICIPATION

2. \_\_\_\_ There will be no bench people on my team.

3. \_\_\_\_\_ Every youngster will play every minute of every game.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ Practice activities will be designed so all of the players are active 51 % of the time or more.

#### LEARN SKILLS

5. \_\_\_\_\_ Each sport season will start with at least six hours of player clinics to be conducted by either the coaches of the league as a group or by the local school and college players and coaches.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Each player will play at least one-half of a game at each position on the team during practice sessions and regular games.

#### SAFETY

7. \_\_\_\_\_ Players will rotate positions every two weeks to reduce or eliminate the possibility of overuse syndromes.
8. \_\_\_\_\_ There will be trained medical supervision (e.g.. doctor, nurse, certified trainer, physical therapist) present at each game and available for every practice session.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ Each coach will complete six hours of instruction in first aid, injury prevention, and cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

#### BALANCE

10. \_\_\_\_\_ In the case of ties, the team with the better school grades that week (or grading period) in math (or reading) will be declared winner for that day.
11. \_\_\_\_\_ The players will present one talent show, art exhibit, music concert and/or stage production each season for the league, organization or community.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ Each player will participate in at least one team and one individual sport during the calendar year.

Our five primary goals were presented as measurable objectives. Objectives, in contrast to goals, are “specific ends capable of attainment, and designated by a task, condition and criterion.” You can form your own objectives or operationalize the other goals presented above. Just follow the procedure outlined in Table 4-3. Developing Measurable Objectives.

*Table 4-3*  
**DEVELOPING MEASURABLE OBJECTIVES**

1. Identify a GOAL and define it in a brief sentence.
2. Establish a TASK, some type of action or behavior that you can see and measure, that satisfactorily represents your definition.
3. Set the CONDITION or conditions under which the task must occur. This is usually at practice, during the games or by some specific date while the players are under your leadership. It might also specific practice activities on their own time.
4. Then, set some numerical level, called the CRITERION SCORE, as a target.
5. Apply the test to yourself and your players to EVALUATE your performance as a coach.
6. Next, REPLAN your practice sessions, games and season. Restate your objectives and raise or lower your criterion based on what you feel you and your players can achieve reasonably.

Identify goals and write objectives for yourself. It can be a useful exercise that will give you direction with your players and satisfaction that is not linked to winning and losing. Objectives will help you specify what you are trying to accomplish. If you can answer yes to 85% of your objectives, you are doing well.

Other Goals. The other points of emphasis that usually receive some attention in youth sport programs will be mentioned briefly. Expand on these and develop your own list of goals that you wish to pursue.

Teachers are familiar with the notion that their efforts should result in the acquisition of new skill by students. Learning the skills of sport, the substance of coaching, should not be overlooked by new coaches. Force feed yourself these basic skills and your players will develop as well. Ignore it and the development of your players is left to the discovery process. Some will learn it on their own but do not count on it.

The social development of young people includes an emphasis on treating other people as human beings rather than as objects. It also covers "how we play the game." Being human and learning good social behavior is both a task of sport and daily living. Effort is trying hard and that is an important element in sport. It is no fun to play when your opponent is not trying to do well. Trying your best on every play and putting forth top effort to the finish makes our games quite exciting. Physical maturity is developed naturally through playing. The good physical stresses of sport will produce a more sound biological structure. The sport experience will help people move freely in the physical world that is so difficult for the sedentary and elderly to negotiate.

Without hesitation, school studies should be stressed by all youth leaders. In our increasingly technological society, there is little to substitute for learning the skills of life in school. Doing well in school does not guarantee a job, but having the basic skills of life (i.e., readin', ritin', 'rithmetic and recreation) will assure youth that many doors will open.

Sportsmanship, the manners of sport requires continual attention. Parents and coaches lead the way by modeling good behavior for the players to see and copy. Fitness can take many forms - - biological, emotional, social, spiritual and total fitness or wellness. Biological fitness can be achieved to a large extent by providing youngsters with opportunities to play regularly rather than sit on the bench. The other fitness goals need regular emphasis to make the conversion from words to action. Emotional control is highly acclaimed in sport. It is important for adult leaders and other models to stay in control. Stay calm and help the youngsters play under control. Persistence is not unlike effort, but we can speak also of staying at a task until it is learned. Some players learn skills easily. Others must work diligently at certain skills to perform them properly. It is generally believed that if players continue to work at these skills, they will eventually master them. Within certain physical or genetic limitations, this appears to be correct.

A facet of sport that receives inadequate attention is self-direction. Many people say youngsters should possess this. We can help them acquire the ability to think, plan and act on their own. It is done by providing them opportunities to practice these skills during the activities that surround their experiences in the sport setting. Positive relationships and how to be positive with people is stressed in many workshops and personal development seminars. It applies to youth as well as adults. Being a positive influence on youngsters helps them feel good about themselves and the sport experience. Finally, being good models are very powerful ways for adults to demonstrate the appropriate behavior for youngsters and adults to copy.

Review. The sport experience can be naturally fun and rewarding. Participation leads directly to learning and many of the other goals we seek for youth. However, safety should be an over-riding concern. The emphasis on sport should be balanced with an equal if not greater emphasis on the other aspects of life, particularly school studies. Goals can be meaningless words unless they are converted into action on the fields and courts. State your general plan of action, write your specific objectives, and then do it.

## **Coaching and Teaching**

The purpose of this section is to provide a basic understanding of the process called teaching and learning. Some attention will be given to how coaches influence their players. The application of these principles will help youngsters acquire new skills more rapidly.

There may be little agreement on the standard definition of a coach. Most people would agree that knowing sport skills is an important part of coaching. A second and

equally significant aspect of coaching is being able to impart that knowledge to others effectively. Many volunteers have no background or experience in either area. Yet, these are perhaps the two most central facets of coaching.

Another view of the coach was identified by Arthur J. Gallon (1974:18-21) when he noted their personalities. He called them authoritarians, nice guys, intense, easy going, and businesslike. Similarly, Ralph J. Sabock (1979:16-17) called them idealists, rolling stones, climbers, ambitious and hangers-on. Both writers were referring mainly to trained coaches in the educational system.

Gallon and Sabock gave the role of coach personal identities. If you examine these categories and compare them to yourself, it is likely that you will not be able to find exactly where you fit. The reason for this is that they, along with many writers, have neglected to consider that leadership tends to fall into three basic categories: authoritarian, democratic and laissez faire. These are useful ways to view all leaders and a good way to look at yourself in the coaching situation. This will be presented more completely in the next chapter.

There is yet another entire phase of coaching that Sabock identified. He wrote that coaches are: teachers, disciplinarians, sales persons, public relations people, guidance counselors, diplomats, organizers, examples or models, detectives, psychologists, judges and juries, leaders, mother and father figures, dictators, politicians, actors, fund raisers, directors, field generals, equipment managers, trainers, community citizens, and school citizens. (1979:53-79) About the only thing that was omitted from his list was custodian, which is also a frequent duty of the coach. From here, we can see that coaches adopt a variety of roles or duties according to what the situation dictates. In some cases, coaches take on more responsibilities than are warranted. This has been the complaint of former and current players where coaches imposed control over the players' lives beyond that which was needed or necessary.

In some situations, however, sweeping social roles for coaches are essential. At a recreation meeting, the discussion focused on sport and inner city youth. Here, where family instability and low income are common, as in other locales, coaches were viewed more as social workers as much as coaches. The leadership role of coaches touch just about every aspect of the lives of the youth - - human relations expert, advisor or counselor, teacher, parent figure, peace maker, and social worker. Honesty, love and attention are key skills for these coaches to possess while sport skills and coaching skills are of lesser importance.

It becomes apparent that the role of the coach can be expanded to include a number of elements - - sport skill expert, teacher of skills, informed person about safety and fitness gained from reading and studying, and human relations expert. Because sport exists in both the physical or performance world as well as the mental world of reading and studying, coaches feel that there is much to know about what they do beyond X's and O's. The role of coaches can be broad and complex. For some youngsters, coaches may be everything. Their involvement with their players can reach

beyond the fields and courts. They are frequently more than just teachers of skill. This may be due, in part, to the large amounts of time they spend with their players. It is also possible that in the sport scene, attitudes, motivations and actions are openly and truly expressed, more so than in other arenas.

In order to organize these many facets of coaching, the remainder of this chapter will be divided into a section for the new coach and a section for the traditional coach who may have some experience with kids and sport. The next chapter will focus on the contemporary youth sport coach - - a buff.

## **The New Coach**

If you are thinking of all of the reasons why you cannot volunteer to be a youth sport coach, you are probably like many other parents. If you have had no experience with sports, taking the responsibility for and making the time commitment that goes with a group of youngsters is a major decision. Relax! Here are some tips for people such as yourself. They will enable you to step into the coaching role with little or no experience or background in sport or with kids.

Self. The volunteer and the paid coach, both highly visible leaders, must recognize their own personality or self. We see many people presented through the media. They are stylized as bad guys or good guys, rough or smooth, and dictators or nice guys. After viewing these stereotypes all of these years, we may find that we try to copy one of these personalities from time to time. It must be emphasized clearly that people in leadership positions with youth do not need to adopt the “coaching personality” of some media sport personality in order to be a coach. When you adopt the “identity” of another person, it may lead to some confusion, not only with your players but even with yourself.

It is possible that the same approach may not work in all situations. Mike Reid, former Penn State and Cincinnati Bengal defensive lineman, was asked if there were similarities between being a defensive tackle and a concert pianist. He was accomplished at both activities. Reid stated that if he played the piano like he played football, he would destroy the piano. Some tasks do require different approaches.

If you are a nice, gentle person in most situations, then you will be comfortable being that type of person with your players. You may be well skilled in a job that allows you to be yourself. If you try this with your players and it is successful, continue. If problems develop, resist changing. Instead, teach the players who you are and how you function. Players learn “how you operate” with people just as they learn new skills. You will find that, in time, you and the players will come to know one another, adapt where needed, and then get on with the sport activities.

Experts will agree that the more you can be one person all of the time, the easier it will be on your system and your mental health. Be mother or father, worker, friend, club member, and coach, but be yourself. Act naturally. Develop relationships with your

players, parents and league officials as you would in other social settings. Be yourself. Treat the players as you would treat the members of your own family or your friends. Then, add to your coaching style your own personal interests plus the positive human relations skills presented in the next chapter.

Methods. It has been said that getting a group of youngsters organized and moving toward a common goal is like trying to push a rope or organize worms. As a new coach it is quite likely that you have never worked with a group of people any larger than your family. Just getting the attention of 10 to 20 perpetually moving bodies may be your first great challenge. Fortunately, help is just ahead.

First, it is suggested that new coaches acknowledge that they know little about sport or working with large groups called teams. Next, we would suggest strongly that you forget everything you have ever seen on television about Revenue Sports. It offers many bad examples. Instead, identify what you know and do well. Learn a little about sport skills you will need and build your coming season around those facets of your life.

As an adult coach, you will lead your players and they will follow you because you are “the coach.” Parents may even allow you greater control over the lives of these youngsters than they would grant to their teachers, even some relatives. That is the nature of the role of coach.

The easiest coaching method that you can employ as a new untrained coach is to get your players involved in game playing or scrimmages. These practice games emphasize executing a few key game skills at each practice rather than scoring and winning. Scrimmages are an informal method of coaching and teaching well suited to the new coach. It is similar to some physical education classes where the teacher instructs some, watches the players in action, offers a few suggestions during the games, referees here and there, and contributes when needed. This is an accepted, although not preferred, way to teach physical education. However, it is quite suitable for the new coach who has no training in sport, methods or youth. The emphasis in scrimmages, as in math homework or piano practice, is to play the game, focus on a few basic skills, identify strength, and correct glaring errors when possible.

There are several ways that players learn how to perform and perfect sport skills. They include: imitation, trial and error, manipulation, watching, reading, mental practice or rehearsal, and by doing. By far, the most effective way to learn all sport skills is through doing them. Through game playing and scrimmages, the players get to practice the skills that occur most frequently. However, more experienced coaches will recognize that certain skills come into play more frequently than do other skills. They will set up game-like situation and drills to practice the less common skills.

A note about trained coaches is in order. School, college and professional coaches who are on top of their profession plan practice sessions that cover all phases of the game. They know what situations are likely to occur most frequently so they will have their players prepared in advance to meet these situations. Volunteer coaches tend to

practice situations after they have lead to game problems. Trained coaches work on situations ahead of time so they do not become game problems. In fairness to the volunteers, it should be pointed out that trained coaches may spend a month or more, five to seven days a week, over several years, with the same players before they play their first game each season. Volunteers do not have that time with the players. As a result, they cannot begin to cover everything that needs attention.

As a new coach, the best that you can be expected to do is to meet with your players regularly and provide them with as many opportunities as possible to learn the skills of the game. The key for the new coaches, and perhaps all youth coaches, is to get through the season without losing any players (i.e., dropouts), keep all the players safe from injury, and have a good time.

For the benefit of the players and the new coaches, it would be helpful if the league would do two things for you. First, the league could conduct annual, pre-season coaches' clinics to help you learn how to be a good youth sport coach. Second, new coaches could be paired with more experienced coaches. Then, during the season, the new coach could be given opportunities to:

- plan practice segments
- plan complete practice sessions
- conduct portions of practice sessions
- conduct complete practice sessions with your coach as assistant
- coach one game or more during the season

It can be humiliating to throw new coaches into the heat of battle with experienced and seasoned volunteer coaches. Practice, through some of the techniques just reviewed, will ease the transition into coaching. It may also encourage more volunteers to get into coaching and return to coach year after year.

New coaches can help themselves in other ways. There are many books on sport skills and coaching methods. Some are basic, easy reading, and will provide you with the information needed to introduce sport to young players. Refer to the RECOMMENDED REFERENCES for a RESOURCE CENTER. Also, visit the Resource List.

## **The Traditional Coach**

The traditional coach in this scheme of things might be a second year coach or a new coach with some playing experiences in sport. This is a second step in the process of developing people who are known distinctively as youth sport coaches.

Self. Typically, volunteer coaches, whether new at it or former players, will have studied coaching very little. Former players should remember that their last contact with players and coaching may have involved more mature high school, college or even professional players, not kids. Other more experienced coaches may be avid fans who

know something about sports from watching, but actually know very little about kids and how to coach and teach.

If relatively inexperienced coaches, compared to trained coaches, are anything like new teachers, they are very certain about what they know and largely unaware of what they do not know. They want to control the situation so they can deal mainly with what they know and avoid bringing up what they do not know. As a new teacher, including this author and others, when new activities or subject matter was presented for the first time, we controlled the teaching situation very carefully. This prevented the students or players from backing us into a corner from which we could not escape gracefully. This strategy allowed us to handle that situation with less difficulty. We admitted what we did not know and then searched for the answer. As a new teacher or coach, it may be difficult to say "I do not know" but that is the thing to do. When we are new at something we have limited knowledge with which to work. Yet we like to present ourselves to others as reasonably competent. Know however that there will always be people in the stands who recognize that you do not know all that you pretend to know. Your methods are on display every bit as much as the skills of your players. Given that situation, it becomes much easier to admit your limitations rather than fool yourself into believing you know what you are doing. Be open. It is easier on everyone, particularly you.

**Methods.** The most basic element of coaching and teaching is planning. It is critical and can occur after you have met with your players and before the second or third practice session occurs. You may need one or two sessions with your players to evaluate them and determine what they can learn based on what they can do. Some of the players will know one another. They can help you determine starting points.

Try this approach! Lay out the season on a calendar so you will know how many practice sessions and games you will have. Determine the number of practice hours available. Identify the skills you want your players to acquire by the middle of the season. Purchase a pack of 3" X 5" cards and write each skill you want to teach on a card. Put each skill or drill on a separate card. Now, in order to conduct your season, all you do is sort through the cards, pick the appropriate activities or skills, and take them to practice for referral. Basic planning is complete.

It is important to plan your season and practices for several reasons. First, planning becomes a way of setting goals for the season. Planning is efficient. It allows you to move from one activity to the next with little wasted time or trouble. Planning keeps the practice session moving and players interested in what is happening.

**The Traditional Style Of Coaching And Teaching.** This method of coaching may appeal to the new coach. The traditional approach is rather formal compared to the relaxed and informal methods presented in the scrimmage methods. However, the traditional approach does not have to be rigid and authoritarian. Nevertheless it is generally viewed with the coach or teacher at the head with the information or material flowing down to the players or students.



In some cases this traditional approach is conducted in such a way that little flows from the player upward to the coach. This is not a highly desirable situation but it is likely to yield more skillful players than would be produced in scrimmaging and game playing. Of course, coach must know how to present the sport skills.

For years, dating back to the development of formal gymnastics in Germany in the 18th Century, this has been the most dominant style used in sport. It is still a dominant style but more democratic approaches are now being used with great effectiveness.

The traditional method, see Table 4-4, involves these elements: introduction, explanation, demonstration, participation or practice, evaluation, and review. In the introduction, coaches develop an overview of the skill or teaching objective to show how it fits in the overall scheme of things. The explanation about the task at hand becomes very specific. It is usually short. Next, a demonstration is presented to show what was just explained. Care should be taken with demonstrations to see that they are accurate. Many youngsters can learn a great deal from watching effective demonstrations.

*Table 4-4*  
**THE TRADITIONAL METHOD**

Introduction  
Explanation  
Demonstration  
Participation  
Evaluation  
Review

Participation, practice or activity follows next. This is where coaches and teachers are really important and where teaching is difficult. Some youngsters learn quickly and are ready to move on. Others need more assistance and time on the same skill. This forces coaches to be at least two places at once - - an impossibility. Nevertheless, coaches must divide their time to deal with players of varying levels of skill and abilities to learn.

Practice, in general terms, involves starting the action, stopping activity briefly to make corrections, add new cues, and then resuming participation. There is a tendency to work with the better players and let the others do as they can. In youth sport, it is important to help all players progress.

Evaluation can take two forms. It can be informal. As the players practice, coaches move among them, watching, and providing tips as well as positive and corrective feedback. Another form of evaluation is formal. It involves the use of checklists and standardized tests that measure their skill level or performance. As coaches go about their evaluations, an ongoing process, be aware that you are looking at both the players learning or absence of learning as well as your coaching or absence of coaching. Teaching and learning is an interactive process. Evaluation helps you identify where the best teaching and learning occurs.

coaching -----> learning.

Finally, review is essential in the learning process. It is likely that most of us do not learn sport skills, nor anything else for that matter, on the first time - - one trial learning. The exception to this, of course, is our own children who learn all of the wrong things after seeing them one time. In other realms, however, it is necessary to practice or review what we have seen to learn and retain it. Most sport skills need continual practice - - lay ups, fielding ground balls, passes to wide receivers, and non-dominant foot juggles. Perfect practice makes perfect.

The traditional coaching style can be used to present all skills. It works. The strengths of this style are that the coach or teacher has good control of the sport scene and what is presented. It is efficient with little wasted time. The weaknesses are: (1) the repetitive style can become boring; (2) there may be little interaction to find out what the players want or need to learn; (3) it tends to demand high conformity and thus can become dictatorial; and (4) it may not work well in situations where mixed skill levels exist.

Use the traditional approach but resist the authoritarian aspect of it. Here are some pointers or cues about coaching and teaching that will help you present material to your players more effectively. Incorporate them into your planning process. See Table 4-5, for Some Basic Principles Of Coaching And Teaching.

*Table 4-5*  
***SOME BASIC PRINCIPLES OF COACHING AND TEACHING***

1. Accept the players at their present level of performance and then help each of them progress, improve, and get better.
2. Work with everyone, both those who seem poorly skilled as well as those who are more talented and learn easily.
3. Speak with your players, listen to them, and learn what they would like to know and learn.
4. Treat your players as separate individuals with different personalities, abilities and motivations.
5. Plan every practice session as well as the entire season.
6. Plan your activities and drills to go from simple to complex in an orderly progression.

7. Break complicated skills, like a double play or a pick and roll, into more simple skills. Then put the parts into whole units.
8. Build doing into every plan you develop as well as every practice and game you conduct.
9. Plan 100% participation for your practice sessions and games.
10. Plan numerous short activities rather than one activity that consumes the entire session.
11. Design practice sessions and games with a variety of activities for the players and be able to teach the same skill in two or more ways.
12. Get the attention of all players before you present material.
13. Keep your verbal messages short (1-3 minutes or less) with three or less thoughts presented at one time.
14. Give your players specific rather than general directions and instructions. For example, ask them to “make 10 bunts toward third base” rather than “go practice bunting.”
15. Get your players mentally involved in practice sessions and games by having them participate in the planning, decision-making and coaching.
16. Have players help each other learn through demonstrations as well as through partner and small group instructional opportunities.
17. Set learning objectives at a specific number of trials or successful attempts to help the players progress.
18. Keep your players informed about their progress and development.
19. Pat the players on the back and encourage them frequently, both for their effort and their accomplishments. Be positive.
20. Expect your players to learn what you present.
21. Enjoy the moment when players are able to do something now that they could not do a moment ago. This is where the enjoyment and rewards from coaching and teaching occur.

Teams spend a majority of their time in practice sessions. This is where most learning occurs. Planning for good use of this time is essential, both for keeping the players interested and motivated, and for learning. Eugene Brown, of Michigan's Youth Sports Institute suggested this format for practice sessions.

1. Warm up
2. Short, intense drills
3. Skill review
4. Introduction of new skills
5. Strategy review
6. Small game scrimmage
7. Cool down/team talk
8. Evaluation of practice (Cox, 1982:51) 3 (footnote 3)

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*3 Used with the permission of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance. Reston, VA.*

This will not fit all situations. However, it does present a general format that can be easily modified.

An important facet of effective coaching is being able to use a variety of coaching and teaching methods to present and illustrate the material. Here is a partial list of methods that will add variability to your instruction. See Table 4-6.

*Table 4-6*  
***METHODS OF INSTRUCTION***

lecture  
group discussion  
problem solving  
video tape  
audio tape  
movie film  
poster  
chalk board  
magnetic board  
flash cards  
task cards  
notebooks

partner activities  
role playing  
demonstration  
trial and error  
visual mental rehearsal or mental practice  
exploration  
command  
guided discovery  
game like drills  
individual instructional plans

For more information about a systematic and progressive use of other teaching styles, readers are referred to Muska Mosston's book, *Teaching Physical Education: From Command to Discovery* (1966). He presented teaching skills in a developmental progression starting with the command style. The following and more advanced methods were then: teaching by task; reciprocal or partner teaching; small group; individual programs; guided discovery; and finally problem solving. Mosston reasoned, and others have taken the same view, that the best form of teaching is that which teaches a person how to learn on their own. That is problem solving and the basis of learning by buffers - - "youth sport buffers." This fulfills our self-direction objective for players and coaches.

## **SUMMARY**

Coaches, as well as program leaders, should establish clear goals to guide their actions in the sport setting. The primary task with youth is to take them from where they are and help them progress - - develop more skills and better skills in sport. Anyone can eliminate those who seem to be unskilled and work only with the talented. However, this causes us to overlook those who are immature or have received little or no instruction. A good youth coach, like a good teacher, helps everyone progress and develop toward their potential.