

Chapter 5

The Youth Sport Coach . . . a buff: a new approach

Introduction

We would like to suggest in this chapter that we begin to work toward developing a style of coaching that is appropriate for kids. The coaching styles presented in the previous chapter are easily learned. They are simple and commonly used. A youth sport coaching style does not exist or is not so prevalent or common that people call it by name. The traditional styles of coaching were not developed for youth nor do they seem to be something that volunteers need to learn. As a matter of fact, even the dictatorial coaching style has become a less common method of teaching for use with adult athletes.

If you feel that you have to run a tight ship with an iron fist to be a good coach, think again. Not long ago, Dan Millman, gymnastic coach at Stanford University, told his players something like this: "I will be in the gym every day during practice hours. If you want to come in then, I will work with you." His players won the conference championship. Of course, as many coaches know, the single most important factor in winning is having the better players. It is difficult to win without the horses.

We have been thoroughly convinced, not only in sport but in other realms of life, that one must be a dictator to be an effective leader. This style has dominated sport, but Millman among others (Amdur, 1971; Lenk, 1977) has shown that other styles are successful.

Researchers who study teacher education or the preparation of teachers have identified a number of factors or criteria that contribute to student achievement and performance. (Rosenshine and Furst, 1971; Travers, 1973; Miller, Cheffers and Whitcomb, 1974:21-51)

Some of these criteria were reemphasized by teacher education leader, Daryl Siedentop. He wrote that five teacher variables were "consistently related to achievement." They were: clarity, enthusiasm, variety, task oriented and business-like in behavior, and the content material covered. (Siedentop, 1983:43) There was nothing to indicate that tight-fisted, authoritarian teaching styles lead to superior student achievement. In fact, where pertinent, most factors were at the opposite pole - - the democratic style. These factors, to be explained later in this chapter, were identified through educational research. They are quite important and at the heart of developing the "youth sport buffs" in the voluntary, not compulsory, youth sport.

The Challenge of Democratic Leadership

There has been much research in social psychology concerning three styles of leadership: authoritarian, laissez faire, and democratic. The authoritarian style has

dominated sports. An iron-fisted, dictatorial coach is an image that many regard as THE WAY to coach. This authoritarian style is very familiar to many of us. Some of the coaches have been glorified on television. We can also recall that this has been the way our parents, teachers, and bosses have managed us.

The laissez faire style, in contrast, can be characterized as leaderless. It may not be a useful approach in certain situations but it can be effective. Where motivation is high and a minimum amount of direction is needed, the laissez faire style can work well. This style was the basis for leadership by the new coach presented in the previous chapter. The players are usually motivated, but in that situation, the new coach knows little about sport. Therefore they exert little influence on skill development in comparison to trained aches. Their role then is to get the activity started, scrimmages or game playing, and then stand back until there are obvious needs that they can address. When new coaches have no idea what they should be doing, then the laissez faire style permits them to “supervise” with a minimum of preparation in sport or methods. A number of school baseball, golf and tennis programs are conducted like this in the absence of “expert” coaches.

Without hesitation, it can be noted that the most effective style of leadership is democratic. It is ironic that, in U.S. society, this style has not been widely used and is regarded as ineffective and inefficient. Yet, according to Dr. Arnd Kruger, West German sport scientist, this was not so with what was formerly the East German sport system. They had adopted the democratic coaching style, and they dominated world class Olympic sports.

Look at the list of criteria that relate to effective teaching and learning mentioned earlier. Note that indirectness, absence of negative criticism, types of questions, and probing all relate to the more open and warm democratic style of leadership than to the other styles.

In sport, as in teaching, knowledgeable coaches know exactly what the players need to know in order to perform well. If the players do what they are told, they will progress rapidly, or at least they should. So, why take time and go to all of that effort to establish democratic procedures?

Difficulties arise in the application of the authoritarian style. Players are asked to follow lock-step procedures. This usually requires little mental involvement by the players. They do what they are told and they are “encouraged” not to ask questions. Authoritarian methods are neither interesting nor motivating. In reality, coaches find that they spend a great deal of their effort getting the attention of the players, motivating them, and maintaining control of the situation. Before long, compliance with the authority of the coach becomes a major goal. Exercising control can become more important than learning or the kids themselves. This is not unlike what occurs in dictatorial systems, whether it is sport, business or government. These problems are predicted in the social psychology literature.

The following chart, Table 5- 1, summarizes the positive and negative aspects of these three leadership styles as they are commonly presented in the social psychology literature. Examine the index of any text in the area such as that authored by Marvin E. Shaw (1971) to obtain more detailed information on these styles. It is interesting to note from the preceding chart that there appears to be little difference in production when democratic and authoritarian styles are compared. However, the satisfaction of the people is greater and the end product is better under the democratic style. In the authoritarian style, frustration is higher and it is reflected in greater hostility, aggression, and scapegoating. The authoritarian style comes out ahead on efficiency. However, when the quality of the finished product is considered, the dictatorial style may be considered both ineffective and inefficient. This means that we may have to live with and compensate for our errors, and that is neither effective nor efficient.

Table 5-1
LEADERSHIP STYLES

Factors used to evaluate leadership style	Authoritarian	Laissez Faire	Democratic
- Worker response to leaders	less liked	liked	liked
- Workers find work satisfying	less	uncertain	more
- Productivity of the workers	positive	mixed	positive
- Quality of the work done	negative	positive	positive
- Source of motivation	external	internal	internal
- Worker frustration	hi	mixed	low
- Work considered satisfying	no	mixed	yes
- Work time used efficiently	positive	negative	positive
- Work considered meaningful	negative	uncertain	positive

- Overall
evaluation

poor

mixed

good

Our youth would receive more benefits from their programs if they were designed so that they have input in the planning and decision-making processes. If the players in particular do not know how to function democratically, we can teach them. Remember, we should not let them flounder in the laissez faire style, under the guise of democratic style, in order to prove a point ---- that things will collapse unless we assume authoritarian control. Teach players to function democratically in your sport situation.

An educational philosopher (Brubacher, 1962:131-144) provided some basic principles that will help us develop more democratic conditions for youth activities. He identified these four principles as: respect for the dignity of the individual, equalitarianism, freedom, and sharing. Let us take the same approach toward "operationalizing" these principles as was done when goals were presented. Here is how these principles can be converted into action. See Table 5-2.

Table 5-2
DEMOCRATIC LEADERSHIP: WORDS TO ACTION 1 (footnote 1)

RESPECT FOR THE DIGNITY OF THE INDIVIDUAL

1. _____ I will make no nasty remarks to players to slander them or make them feel unworthy or inept. Be positive.
2. _____ I will treat players as I would wish to be treated by other people. Be kind and considerate.

EQUALITARIANISM

3. _____ I will ask nothing more of my players than I am willing to do myself.
4. _____ Weekly team meeting will be held, and more if necessary, to discuss, plan and evaluate the team's progress.

FREEDOM

5. _____ Players will be permitted to play the positions they desire.
6. _____ Players will be given the option of whether to come to practice and games without pressure or penalty.

SHARING

7. _____ Players and leaders will plan the activities for the team for the season, including deciding on options.

8. _____ Players and leaders will set goals for the team.
9. _____ Players will share with the leaders the task of coaching season games.
10. _____ The players will select the starting line up for each game.

1 The four basic principles of democracy were developed by John S. Brubacher. They were used here as the basis for preparing 10 operational definitions or behavioral objectives of those principles with the permission of the McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York. NY.

It can be predicted that your first response to these objectives is: "If I do this with my players, we will not win a game and our team will fall apart." Our response is, what are you trying to accomplish with your players? You might wonder how you can have control over the situation if the players run or decide everything? That is a logical question? The answer is, in part, what kind of control do you want or need? Absolute control, as is presented by some Revenue Sports personalities, produces poorly motivated, unthinking robots. It yields highly dissatisfied people who seem to lose purpose once the losses outnumber the wins.

In the dictatorial system, power or control rests with the top position first, and the person who occupies that position secondarily. In more democratic systems, power and control rests with the people who have gained the trust and respect of the other participants. This comes by demonstrating that they have the knowledge and skills the participants need to complete the tasks at hand. Both systems produce results but one system is based on position power and the other is based on the power of knowledge. The authoritarian system is known to drive kids away from sport. This is most evident in certain college sports that attract players who will not stand still for authoritarian leadership. They are smart, well skilled players who have seen that the authoritarian system robs them of their ability to think and use their heads.

The greatest benefit of the democratic style of leadership is that it gets the participants mentally involved in what is going on. While the authoritarian style produces followers, and may in fact develop them, the democratic style develops motivated participants who care about what happens. It succeeds because it is based on the participation of the players in the planning and decision making. When we are commanded to do something, we may comply but our enthusiasm, care and performance may be less than adequate. People tend to do well and assume greater responsibility for those things we help form.

Let us illustrate the point of player involvement in planning and decision making in the following situation. At the first meeting with your basketball team the players might know or come to realize that it is important for them to be in good shape to run full-tilt game after game. In the discussions and planning that take place, the players decide, with knowledgeable guidance from the coach, that a vigorous conditioning program is needed to get them in shape to play well. Some will then make the "psychological

commitment” to run. They see its value. Now, it is just a matter of preparing the running program, a combination of sprint and endurance running and game-like drills, to get the players where they need to be when the season begins.

Compare players wanting to run with players who are forced to run. The latter group may feel more like they are being reprimanded, particularly if you use running as punishment. They will try to avoid it. The former group recognized running as an important part of basketball, and other sport activities and may do it with dedication, if not enthusiasm.

While on the topic of conditioning, it should be pointed out that essential sport activities like running should not be used as punishment. It establishes a negative association between conditioning and punishment. This, in turn, discourages the players from doing the hard conditioning exercises that contributes to good performance. For many youngsters, teachers have found that sitting out can be sufficient punishment.

The challenge here is to practice democratic leadership. The present youth sport system is without an overall philosophy or approach to leadership. This democratic style would seem to be useful in producing motivated, thinking players who are capable of unlimited development as human beings. The challenge is here. Will you accept it?

Coaching and Teaching

Take A.I.M. On Time

It has been stressed repeatedly that players learn sport skills by doing. Doing is participation. It is opportunity to try, trials, and time on the task. Let us focus specifically on time. Your practice sessions can be divided into four types of time: Activity Time, Instructional Time, Management Time and a most unproductive time or troublesome time called Standing In Line Time.

Suppose that you have 12 practice sessions for the entire season and that each session lasts one hour. This means that you will have 12 hours to make your points and get the players performing as well as possible. What can you expect to accomplish during these 12 hours? For starters, it should be pointed out that in college sport activity classes, unskilled students require about eight to 10 hours of group instruction to play a new sport with understanding and skill. College students are 18 to 22 year old novice players. For youth, the learning period is longer because of their mental and physical maturity. Let us look at this time factor in more detail.

Management Time. Management time is the time used to get the fields and courts ready for action, move players here and there, get drinks and make announcements. Setting out markers, moving bleachers, passing out practice equipment, fixing goals, nets and bases, and setting up charts are other examples of management time. These tasks are indispensable to the learning process but contribute nothing to learning when

it comes to hitting, fielding and throwing. Management time is necessary but unproductive. Therefore, try to keep this down to no more than 10% of your practice time. At this rate, you will consume 1.2 of our 12 days during the season moving people and objects into position to start active learning. (e.g., 10% x 60 minutes x 12 practice days = 72 minutes) Make this time short.

Instructional Time. Instructional time is important in learning, obviously. This time is devoted to telling, demonstrating, and otherwise passing the skills, fundamentals and strategies along to the players. Teaching players how to run, pass, and head are instructional activities as are evaluative chalk talks and motivational pep talks. It is best to keep your instructional time short. Again, devote about 10% of your practice time to instruction. This consumes another 1.2 days. We have now used 2.4 of the 12 practice days without ever taking a shot. Keep instruction short.

Incidentally, you may feel that beginners need to be given more instruction than the more advanced players. Actually, beginners cannot absorb as much as can the more experienced players. For beginners, pick out the key points you want to emphasize. Stop the action. Present no more than three related thoughts, and then get the players moving quickly.

Activity Time. The best time to learn in sport occurs during activity time. Active learning time is the time spent hitting, shooting, catching, passing, and playing the game. This should occupy about 80% of your practice time. Players are in activity time when 51% of them are active at the same time.

Standing In Line Time. There is one additional time unit that merits attention. This is SILT. It is not active learning time even when it looks like you have your players well organized. SILT is most evident during baseball batting practice and basketball lay up drills. In these situations, most of the players stand around doing nothing or are looking for something to do when the coach is not watching. Standing in line produces trouble in line time - - TILT. Any time we organize players in lines, we expect order. We expect straight lines, the players to be quiet so we can talk, and everyone to pay attention and learn from the mistakes of others. Before long, we may be expending more energy controlling the people in line than coaching. Order can become more important than learning. We can eliminate SILT or TILT by using more equipment in less rigid and more informal drills. For example, rather than allowing just two players to carry the puck down the ice and shoot while the others wait in line, use a puck with every two players. The players get more activity and the coaches have more opportunities to offer instruction. Allow two, four or six pairs to go at the same time and standing in line is all but eliminated.

Doing takes time. Management, Instructional and SILT Time are important, but they contribute little to learning and performance when compared to doing or Activity Time. Active learning time is where the acquisition of skill occurs. When planning, make 100% activity the standard by which activities and drills are included and excluded. If the

activity does not involve 100% participation, rework the drill, look for a better drill, change the activity, and replan. We all learn best by doing. Plan for 100% activity.

Coaching Or Teaching Stations

In order to eliminate SILT and increase Active Learning Time, many coaches and teachers employ coaching stations. The concept here is to have three or more compatible activities going at the same time. Activities are selected so that each can be conducted without interfering with the safety in the other groups. All activities must have dangerous conflicts removed. The team is divided into small groups and the players spend five to 15 minutes at each station. They move systematically from one station to the next. One coach can conduct the entire practice while supervising the new, difficult or more dangerous stations. The players conduct the other stations on their own as has been previously learned.

The use of coaching stations yields low management time and high activity time or learning. SILT can be eliminated as well as the obligation to “keep the players in line.” That alone is a relief for everyone. Activity time can consume most of your practice sessions.

Referring back to the previous time segments, if we have only 9.6 hours (i.e., 12 practice hours - 2.4 hours of management and instruction) to practice with the players for the entire season, we will want to make the best possible use of that time. Set up coaching stations and let the players practice on their own - - learn by doing. This will give them opportunities to practice self direction without constant supervision. Here is how coaching stations could be designed for the batting practice.

- Station 1. Batting practice, under hand toss, direct batters to hit the ball toward the third base side only, four or five players
- Station 2. Pitchers cover first base with first base and second base people, near far right field corner along foul line, four or five players
- Station 3. Bunting drill in right centerfield, 45 feet between players, one-half speed tosses, four or five players
- Station 4. Option. Conducted outside the fences while batting practice is in progress: practice swings, rope jumping pepper, pop up drills, water or shade break, rest

Players change groups every 10 to 15 minutes. Each station can use a “guard” to watch for a stop all stray balls coming from another group.

For other sports like basketball or soccer, divide the area into three or four stations. Break out all available equipment. Get the players moving. Working on any skill is more productive than standing in line. The bonus is that it will reduce the need to be a

taskmaster and disciplinarian. The players will learn to control themselves in these stations when you show them how to do it.

Increasing Player Achievement

Certain factors are known to be important links between teacher performance and student achievement. (Rosenshine and Furst, 1971; Travers, 1973; Miller, Cheffers, and Whitcomb, 1974:40-47) In recent times, teaching and learning have come to be viewed as an interactive process in marked contrast to the more primitive dictatorial style. Let us take each factor or criteria related to student achievement and put them in behavioral terms. This will illustrate how to use these standards to improve “coaching” ability. Keep in mind as you read and study these “operational definitions” that some of the 11 criteria can be put into practice in a number of ways. If just one term could be singled out as most important in learning, it would be “opportunity to learn.” Other important criteria, when focusing on just a few to start, are: being task oriented, being positive, and indirectness.

Perhaps you feel that too much attention is being focused here on teaching and learning. Remember however, that coaching is teaching. It is not motivation or nutrition. Good teachers are well prepared, and know how to transmit fundamental skills to their students. Sport skills are what attract the kids to sport rather than carpentry, sewing and fishing. Teaching these skills well will help players develop more interest in good, healthful sport activities.

Table 5-3
INCREASING PLAYER ACHIEVEMENT 2 (footnote 2)

CLARITY

1. Face the seated and quiet players and speak distinctly without distracting players through unnecessary actions or noises.
2. Organize your thoughts on paper and present no more than three thoughts at one time particularly when players are not taking notes.

ENTHUSIASM

3. Dress appropriately for the activity so you can demonstrate and participate when necessary.
4. Get excited and active about what you are presenting once per practice session.

TASK ORIENTED

5. Follow your written plans but do not be afraid to deviate when that would be more productive.

6. Tell your off task but interesting stories before or after practice unless they are short or help illustrate a point.

7. Practice the skills that are used in the games.

8. Design drills that simulate game situations.

VARIABILITY

9. Use at least two different coaching methods in each practice session (e.g., lecture, group discussion, problem solving, posters, partners, mental practice, flash cards, etc.)

10. Be able to teach each skill in two different drills.

OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN

11. Conduct practice sessions where 51% or more of the players are active in each drill or game.

12. Plan specific material for the players to practice.

13. Plan for each player to participate in at least 50% of each game.

INDIRECTNESS

14. Ask players to solve two sport skill or strategy problems at each practice session.

15. Present material that raises questions from the players at four practice sessions. Then incorporate their questions and statements into the next session.

USE OF CRITICISM

16. Make at least one positive comment to each player every day.

17. Respond to an inquiry about skill technique with a specific and corrective statement that helps performance.

18. Praise each indication of effort or trying.

MULTIPLE LEVELS OF QUESTIONING

19. Ask three questions at practice related to material presented at your previous meeting (i.e., basic memory).

20. Ask questions after presentations to determine if the players understand or comprehend your instructions.

PROBING

21. Draw information from players by asking three questions of them at each meeting.

22. Respond to a question with a non-threatening and open-ended question.

LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY OF WORK

23. When players are not able to complete the task or skill after ten trials, break it down into more simple steps.

24. Ask questions or demonstrate actions that show their ability to understand what they are trying to accomplish.

USE OF STRUCTURING COMMENTS

25. Present an overview when new material or concepts are introduced.

26. Present cues or hints as the players practice the skills.

27. Help them organize their ideas and thoughts at the end of a session or unit with examples or presentations that produce closure.

2 Barak Rosenshine and Norma Furst, Research on Teacher Performance Criteria” in Research in Teacher Education: A Symposium, ed., by B. Othanel Smith, 1971, pp. 446-54. Adapted by permission of Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, NJ.

Putting Fun Into Practice. Fun, like many desirable outcomes, can be planned for it to occur. Some coaches will respond to this notion by saying: “Winning is where the fun is in sport.” This is true, but sport people spend 50% of their time losing. We produce even fewer league winners. So, there must be other ways to seek fun in sport.

From the archives of coaching and teaching, as well as from the tales of our colleagues, it is known that the last two weeks or so of the sport season can be a little slow and uninspiring. Players begin to look toward the next thing on the calendar, particular if the team record is not too hot or the coach is not among the more entertaining people on Earth. If this describes your situation, spice up these last few sessions, what educator Bill Purkey referred to humorously as The Death March, with something different and fun. This helps break up the monotony of regular meetings and recharges the players.

This spice can take the form of new skills, variety spots in the middle of practice, trick plays, players' choice, and goofy games related or unrelated to your sport season. Borrow something from the upcoming sport season that can be fun. For the school players who have been practicing every day for three months, just cancel practice.

As you develop your coaching packet of cards, think of games you have played that could be used with your players. Here are some specific examples of fun activities that will help spice up your late season practice schedule.

Fun Activities

- a new play
- a trick play to be used in a game
- a goofy golf tournament with flying discs
- sliding practice on a watered plastic or rubber hall runner
- no bounce basketball
- backward baseball or softball
- crab or cageball soccer
- change positions or sides in order to end game in a tie
- blanket volleyball or tennis
- nearly any type of relay race

Toward the end of the season, there may be very little that can be done to help players learn things that you have been working on all season. So, review the old skills and put some fun into the last few sessions. Be creative. It may be that things are so bad that your goal might be just, finish the season. If that is the case, make it fun.

A last note about fun needs emphasis. Kids can be very funny. They say and do funny things, as do adults. Use what is said and done to spice up your season. Remember, however, to laugh with them and not at them. Help them see the humor in their activities and your actions. Wit and humor are valuable assets in coping with life's situations and it is a source of great satisfaction, particularly when nothing else is going right. Do not get too serious about how the kids play. Have fun.

Review. Researchers are learning what makes a difference in how students acquire new skills. In sport, the application of these principles will help the players learn at more rapid rates. With thoughtful planning, we can attract players to our practice sessions. Then, we will not have to "require" them to show up by threatening them with "bench time" on game days. When we do that, you can consider yourself a "good youth sport coach."

Being a Positive Influence

There are great opportunities in youth sport for adults and other youth leaders to have a very positive influence on how youngsters acquire skill and develop. The following material represents coaching skills to be learned just as players learn sport skills. When applied, it helps set youth sport apart from other forms of sport. However, it can be seen that coaches at all levels of play are beginning to recognize the importance

of these skills. They improve, not only playing skills but, the overall sport scene for all participants.

Be Yourself

Ask yourself, what do I know best and what do I do best. The answers to these questions are the first step toward developing a positive relationship with your players. It is safe to assume that volunteer coaches do not place sport skills, coaching methods, safety information, and knowledge about how to work with youth high on their list of things they do well. Bring what you can from your non-sport life to the players and build on it. Being a positive influence starts with being yourself. Recall, if you will, the image of our grandfathers and grandmothers who had infinite patience in showing us how to carve, sew, print, mend or cut. This is a good image to remember as we work with young players.

Communications

Being positive is to have open lines of communication with those people around you - - players, parents, other coaches, officials, and league directors. The absence of communication leads to nothing at best and confusion, false assumptions, inaction, conflict, and disaster at worst. Establish an atmosphere where people may speak freely with you about any topic. Open, two-way communications leads to understanding and progress. When speaking with others, take some time to think out and plan if necessary what you wish to say. Be clear both about what you are trying to say and how you present it. Then become a good listener through active questioning to determine if what was said was understood. Keep this little saying in mind:

I know you believe you understand what you think I said but I am not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant.

Speak with people so that all parties understand what the other is saying. Be aware also that non-verbal messages are conveyed. Folded arms, lowered eyebrows and scowls indicate defensiveness and questioning thoughts. Open arms, nods of approval, and close personal distance between people indicates warmth and receptivity. All in all, it can be said that if you are not communicating, you are making no progress toward your objectives. Communication leads to cooperative action. (Martens, 1981:21-39)

Program Structure

The way things are structured will be addressed more fully in the following chapters. For now, it is important to be aware that you and your team members are not isolated social units free of outside influences. You cannot set your course without regard for others. The team is a part of the league and the organization. There must be some degree of conformity to the rules and policies. When a team or the adult leaders take off on their own, the others will suffer. Conflicts over trophies is a case in point. At the same time, when the organization or the team begins to take priority over the lives of

the players, then turmoil and conflict might eventually occur. In youth sport, the players should remain first in our attitudes, motivations and actions. If this is not the heart of your program, return to the previous section on goals. Determine where the emphasis should occur. Everyone benefits by doing this regularly.

In certain organizations, there may be elaborate coaching staffs or playing locations that keep people separate from one another. When this occurs, there is little opportunity on a daily basis for people to become familiar with each other, develop social relationships, and discuss or even agree on common directions. People who do not interact cannot be expected to develop relationships. This is most evident in racial segregation. However, when coaches, parents, officials, directors and players come together to share information and discuss common concerns regularly, positive outcomes can surface. Establish and maintain team and league committees, groups or panels that can keep people in touch with one another for the benefit of the players, the other participants, and the organization.

Socialization

Educators have addressed teaching and learning in terms of what is caught and what is taught. There are two aspects of socialization. They are: how youngsters get involved in sport, and then what they learn through the sport experience. Here, we shall focus on the latter. Youngsters learn a great deal from the people with whom they associate. What they “pick up” is not limited to that which is formally presented as sport skills and strategies. Youngsters learn from the way they are treated, how adults act, and how they are taught to play the game. They learn a multitude of good and bad things from the other players, and some parents. If we knew nothing at all about sport, youngsters would still learn from us. Our personal interests, whether they are fishing, guitar playing, stories, trivia, or computer games, are what the players will learn, if nothing else.

Once involved in sport, youngsters learn certain attitudes, motivations, and actions. They can be negative and positive. Most people would prefer that youngsters acquire positive feelings about sport. However, professionals who work with youngsters know that most of them come into sports with a positive outlook. This is the nature of kids. However, as they age, they encounter people who make their life unpleasant. Some kids are different, less smooth, more abrupt, or unclean. These kids do not fit the image of what we think they should be. Sometimes these children are ignored or unnecessary interpersonal battles arise between child and adult.

A positive outlook is the nature of children. By in large, all kids come into the sport situation highly charged and ready to learn. Our task, really, is not to re-shape or motivate them. Our task is to channel their drive, to keep them looking at sport as a positive experience, and to keep them turned on to sport. Think for a moment about all of those classified ads seeking self-motivated, self-starters, and internally motivated workers. We have these very characteristics among our young players. As ironic as it seems, our task is to show them how to use their enthusiasm. It is not to weed them out

or turn them off. Here are some examples of how you can keep your players turned on to sport, if not life:

Be a person who makes things happen through praise and encouragement.

Teach the players all that you know about sport skills and strategies.

Make playing fun.

Teach the youngsters about playing by the rules, honesty, and fair play.

Help them understand the values of cooperation and team work in team sport activities.

Help youngsters understand and identify their feelings about physical exertion, effort, fatigue, stiffness, persistence, and the joy of participation in vigorous physical activity.

Take time to explain both sides of situations that may influence their future actions.

Accept them with their individual differences

Accept them with their individual strengths and weaknesses

When youngsters become involved in any sport program, they will learn both positive and negative things from adult leaders as well as the other people with whom they associate. Kids will learn these attitudes, motivations and actions whether they appear in formal plans or informal messages. They learn based on their associations with others. Be aware of what we are teaching our players - - what they are catching from us.

Positive Reinforcement

Positive reinforcement is a motivational technique in which a reward is linked to a specific action. Youngsters come to learn that they will receive a reward when they act in a certain way. Rewards that are commonly used in the youth sport scene are smiles, pats on the back, hand slapping and clapping including “high fives,” “ata boys and ata girls,” thumbs up, plus assorted kind words of praise and encouragement. In sport, getting to play is considered “a naturally occurring reward.” Physical activity is enjoyable for many kids and adults. As a result, they will do or put up with many things in order to “get their turn.” Such is the power of play.

Feedback is a central feature or principle of positive reinforcement and learning. Skill and intellectual growth develop faster with it than without it. In order for feedback to be most useful, it should be provided in this manner. First, feedback should be immediate. It should occur as soon after the event as possible. Chalk talks seven days after the game are not as useful as between inning or after the game. Next, feedback should be corrective. It should provide information about “proper” form, skill, techniques or strategies. Do not dwell on errors, particularly with beginners. Provide accurate information about what should have taken place.

A note of caution is repeated here. Coaches can offer small corrections or coaches can ask players to completely change a way of doing some skill (e.g., from two hand to one hand free throws). Make only small changes during games. Make bigger changes in practice sessions, in the pre-season, or after the season is over. This will allow players to concentrate on the game, rather than think about confusing changes, during the game.

Next, feedback should be specific. Give players or your team detailed instructions (i.e., coaching tips) about what they just did and how it should be done. For example, suppose your forwards missed several passes because they were looking in the wrong direction. Specific feedback to them could be offered like this. "The rule of sport is always watch the ball. Always know where the ball is. Always expect to receive the ball." This type of specific information will help the players do it properly the next time.

Last, feedback should be presented in a positive manner. Some people correct errors by also "getting in their digs" at the player's parents, brothers and sisters, lack of attention, smelly clothes and nearly any other complaint they harbor. One has to feel sorry for these kids because all they did was miss a pass. More importantly, it does nothing to help them correct their mistake. Instead, relate the correct information to them in a calm, cordial fashion without emotions. The more feedback that can be provide to players in an immediate, corrective, specific, and positive manner, the easier the players will be able to change and learn from the coaching.

Positive reinforcement is positive feedback. There are certain actions in sport that are very desirable for players to exhibit day in and day out. See Table 5-3.

Table 5-3
DESIRABLE PLAYER ACTIONS

- Be on time for practice sessions and games.
- Effort, try hard all of the time.
- Help carry equipment.
- Hustle, hurry on and off the fields and courts.
- Listen when it is time to listen.
- Help others who have difficulty.
- Know what is going on in the game.
- Be a good sport about winning and losing.
- Treat referees and umpires with dignity and respect.
- Work hard in practice sessions and games.
- Behave mannerly.
- Show self control.
- Do something nice without being told.
- Encourage your teammates.

Coaches can teach players to adopt these "desirable actions" toward their sporting activities by following the procedure outlined in Table 5-4. Follow this procedure with

other traits as rapidly as the players are able to learn them. We may need to choose between helping the players learn a few traits well or “half-learn” more of the desirable traits. It is your choice. This can be accomplished more effectively when the league establishes policies where teams focus on specific traits at certain ages.

Table 5-4
HOW LEADERS CAN DEVELOP DESIRABLE PLAYER ACTIONS

1. Identify one activity from the previous list or one of your own choosing that you feel is important for youngsters to exhibit
2. Present a very brief chalk talk about the topic to your players
3. Send the players out to practice or the game activities
4. Every time a player exhibits the desired behavior, provide that player with some type of positive reinforcement about that specific action. Single the player out by name, reaffirm what the player did, and give them an “ata boy” or “ata girl” immediately.
5. Take a moment at the end of the practice or game to evaluate how the players are progressing on this one desirable trait.
6. Repeat your brief talk in other versions and forms until you are satisfied with the performance of the players.
7. Now, introduce a second desirable trait that the players should learn. Continue to provide positive reinforcement when the first trait appears but gradually withdraw it.

The use of positive reinforcement increases learning when a reward follows a desirable player trait or skill. Another important part of teaching is correcting errors. Some people just do not want to hear this. The most positive way to correct player errors (as well as the errors of other people) is to apply the CCE Principle. Call the youngster to the side if possible and follow this procedure.

1. *Compliment* the youngster on some aspect of his or her past performance, effort, hustle, attention, persistence, or ability to learn. (e.g., You have really been trying hard today.)
2. *Correct* the problem or error with feedback and instructions that are specific, and positive. (e.g., Watch the ball. Know where the ball is. Expect to receive the ball all of the time.)
3. *Encourage* the player to try it and continue to work at it. (e.g., I know you can do it if you keep working at it. Give it a try). (Smoll and Smith, 1979:10-11)

People respond to positive reinforcement because people like to be praised. It makes them feel good. The behavioral psychologists say that the reward is what causes the desired actions to occur. Therefore, youth sport leaders should be aware of what they are rewarding. The same reward can be used to cause an increase in both positive or negative behavior. Use positive rewards to bring out socially acceptable actions.

Test yourself. Go through an entire practice and then an entire week at practice and games using only positive reinforcement for positive actions. Omit all negatives from your thoughts and actions. Try it at home, even at work.

We know you have good intentions. We know you can be positive and we think you will be pleased with the results. Give it a shot.

Expectations

When you gather your players together for your initial practice session, some will be playing for the first time, even in the older age groups. None of your players will be “polished veterans.” They will be novices who need helpful instructions and a lot of activity time. Yet, they will respond to instruction, but at different rates.

An important element in the research from this area needs emphasis. Many youngsters fail in school and other places because we have convinced them through “our” actions that they are not very good. As a result, they quit trying. It is significant that they quit trying because of the way we treated them, not for some inability to learn. Therefore, it is important that we establish an open and warm climate for the players. This will help them feel free to receive your input and give you feedback.

It is most important, whether dealing with kids or adults, that we treat people as valuable and worthwhile human beings who will get better if we spend time working with them. As with communications, improvement can be expected to occur when positive interactions occur. Give each player attention, time, help, instruction, and feedback. This will provide them with the climate and motivation to improve. Expect them to fail and treat them like they are terrible players, and they will remain or become terrible players. Expect them to improve and they will get better. Coaches should be, not the cause of failure, but one of the reasons youngsters succeed. (S. Hutslar, 1981; Rosenthal, 1974)

Modeling

Modeling is closely related to socialization in the area of learning. It may be that youngsters learn more from imitation and modeling others than in other more direct ways. Westcott (1979) wrote that there were four primary factors that increase the probability that one person will copy another person: nurturance or caring, similarity or resemblance, competence, and positive reinforcement. In addition, just “being around” someone will lead to a certain amount of modeling. This occurs among delinquents and

criminals according researchers. (Bandura and Walter, 1963) Modeling is a powerful teaching tool.

Coaches can have great influences on youngsters because they spend so much “good time” with the players. Most coaches care about their players (nurturance), and dress in the same style as the players (similarity). They are identified coach/leader authorities (competence), and control the rewards, including playing time (positive reinforcement) of the players. In these sport situations, coaches set the standards of behavior for the kids to copy. Therefore, it is quite important that coaches, plus the other adults connected with the program, act as good models for the players to emulate. The next time we decide to argue with an official or a referee, think about whose eyes are watching every move. Be aware of how we act, how we dress, what we say, and what we eat. Remember whose eyes are watching. We must be aware of our behavior in all situations so that when our players model your actions, we will have presented them with a good model to copy.

Summary

Adult leaders can have a remarkable influence on what youngsters learn and how they develop. Coaching and teaching can be done successfully by using democratic leadership and applying positive human relations skills in “high participation” sessions.

The common tendency in sport has been to force players to obey their leaders through verbal abuse and physical intimidation. We would like to challenge adult leaders to discard these primitive actions and accomplish their objectives by being positive. Evaluate how the players respond to your “style” of coaching through The Player’s Questionnaire that follows. See Table 5-5. Administer it several times during the season and repeat it at the end of the season. In some cases, it might be desirable for a neutral person to administer this questionnaire. It will help obtain unbiased answers. Develop your own questions to provide more feedback about your performance.

The most dominant finding about human behavior by researchers and training instructors as it pertains to sport is this. Positive words and actions make coaches more effective, make sport more enjoyable, and produce better players. Be positive. It works and everyone benefits.

Table 5-5
THE PLAYER’S QUESTIONNAIRE

Directions: Youth leaders and parents, and coaches in most cases, should read every word of the directions and each question with the players. Fill in each blank with the name of the sport. Read the following statement to the players: This is a test. Read these questions with me. Answer each question after we have read it aloud. Answer the questions about this (sport) season. Put a mark that shows how you feel.

- A. This is an I LIKE IT or I AGREE mark. Put an X on it.
- B. This is an I DO NOT KNOW mark. Put an -- on it.

C. This is an I DO NOT LIKE IT or I DO NOT AGREE mark. Put an O on it.

Now, answer these questions about how you feel.

D. I like ice cream.

E. I like school.

F. I like sports.

The practice questions are finished. Do you understand how to mark the test? If not, raise your hand and ask for help right now.

1. I like this sport of _____
2. I got to play in the practice sessions as much as I wanted to play.
3. I got to play in the games as much as I wanted to play.
4. I got to play all of the positions I wanted to play.
5. I learned a lot about how to play _____ during this season.
6. I had a lot of fun during this _____ season.
7. I like my parents to see my games.
8. I want to go out for this same sport of _____ next year.
9. I would like to have this same coach again next year.

Finally, please answer these questions. Print the answer. As the questions are read, raise your hand and ask for help if you do not understand how to mark the answer. Use the blank space for your answer.

_____ 10. Print the name of your team in the space.

_____ 11. My age is?

_____ 12. Are you a boy or a girl. Print the answer.

_____ 13. My team's won-lost record is?

_____ 14. How many seasons have you played this sport?

_____ 15. What sport do you like to play best of all?

_____ 16. What do you like to do best of all?

Now, draw a picture of yourself in the space below.