Jay Martin (Ed.)

The Best of Soccer Journal

The Art of Coaching

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Jay Martin

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Re-examining Traditional Soccer Coaching Methodology and Introducing Brain Centered Learning in Soccer

Michael Barr

Eastern Pennsylvania Youth Soccer

The following two articles deal with new teaching methodologies.

I was fortunate enough to have Eastern Pennsylvania Youth Soccer send me to a coaching symposium in London the weekend of the Champions League Final. The event took place at Bacon College, which has a working partnership with the Fulham Football Club. The main presenter was Michel Bruyninckx, trainer/coach of the Royal Belgium Football Federation who has caught the attention of many coaches in

Europe based on his curriculum of "brain centered learning in soccer."

Former England International Chris Waddle sees a real need for the FA to re-examine the coaching methods used in English soccer because players in England have little flair, movement, or confidence in their game. The lack of success internationally for England could be a direct result of following traditional training and not keeping up with newer accelerated methods to train youths. Bruyninckx may be just what English soccer needs and what American soccer should examine very closely as new training curriculums are presented to coaches, parents and players alike. With his methods endorsed by ex-Belgian National coaches Paul van Himst and Robert Waseige, Bruyninckx estimates 25 % of the 100 or so players he has coached have gone on to play with top professional clubs or national teams. It is pioneering work; better still it has broad applications across many sports besides soccer.

Bruyninckx began his presentation with a quote from Dr. Paul Bach-y-Rita: "We see with our brains not with our eyes."

Bruyninckx feels we can make better players in a neural way in order to optimize rhythm, timing and space. In watching Barcelona against Manchester United, they are a clear reflection of what the outcome could be if those areas are emphasized.

In addition, Bruyninckx sees the need for young players to control emotion and show respect to teammates, opponents, referees and the game. Again, look to how the Barcelona players conduct themselves on the field and off.

Slaven Bili, the National Team Coach for Croatia, has stated, "systems are dying, and it's about the movement of ten players." Bruyninckx's training involves constant movement and concentration.

He also believes in the strength of a strong social network in order to lower physical aggression during matches, stimulate cultural integration and improve school performance.

Dr. Marc Comerford of Australia is a proponent of the strength of the pelvic area in preventing future problems and persistent injuries for soccer players. Bruyninckx thinks that one reason for the lack of pelvic strength is due to not developing players to be strong with both feet, which keeps the pelvis in the correct position and utilizes both sides of the body. Without strength in the pelvic area, injuries develop in numerous areas of the body. Prevention of recurring injuries in players should be a major concern. Bruyninckx points out that over half of all the World Cup players in 2002 and 2006 took anti-inflammatory medication during matches. All of his training sessions utilize skill and comfort. Players are told that tackling is a last resort to win the ball. Often times warm-up exercises with the ball are done without soccer shoes. Bruyninckx showed that the FIFA 11 was found to be a cause of pelvic issues and is now in the process of changing.

Spatial awareness and vision is impeded if coaches do not develop training utilizing peripheral training but continue to use central sight training. This vision can only be achieved when technique is introduced in small groups and the spatial organization of the exercise is based on external focusing. Success of a training session is based on cognitive readiness, spatial reasoning, temporal

processing, skill acquisition in a soccer context and developing perceptual awareness and skills. Also players will learn with greater speed and precision if reinforcement and encouragement is constantly administered. Bruyninckx shares the idea that competent players need 500,000 touches on the ball per year, but he is not a proponent of Malcolm Gladwell's 10,000-hour rule because it leads to false expectations.

For a training session to be effective and for the brain to retain the information, the session should peak curiosity, increase motivation, provide interest and be fun. Bruyninckx says, "the environment plays a larger role than genetics when developing players." Emotions shape the brain and help store information. In fact, Bruyninckx feels strongly that you can change lifelong behaviors and patterns even with professional players. He practices what he preaches because in addition to soccer, he works with elderly stroke victims in recovering stability and memory. Brain plasticity makes for lifelong learning for everyone.

The other issue that he feels strongly about is the weeding of players born in the last half of the year. How can we as coaches deprive players of quality training because of the time of year he or she was born, especially at early ages?

His research shows that synchronized tasks in training harmonize both team and individual learning. The four pillars of training should be emotion, attention, concentration and motivation. His exercises often include double tasking with a strong external focus on what an individual may be doing and leading to a final result. All his exercises start in a simple way but lead to differential learning where players are challenged to find optimal solutions. He believes in variable

repetitions as opposed to repetitions in the same manner. This may include utilizing different sized balls in an exercise, counting or posing questions as the exercise takes place. In each exercise there should be continuous synchronization in an attempt to reduce perceptual time.

He feels strongly that through Ballritmics you can improve coordination, agility, confidence and the strength in all parts of the weaker foot. You can see Ballritmics in action by searching "Michel Bruyninckx" or "Ballritmics" on the Internet.

Bruyninckx's training information is in complete agreement with leading educators in the world, who are attempting to improve education worldwide by compressing the time it takes to teach and learn the basics of a curriculum through the use of learner centered principles and practices. His goal is to creatively engage players' multiple learning systems, resulting in faster, deeper, and more proficient learning, which is the same as newer education curriculum models worldwide.

We make connections with both sides of the brain during physical activity, where we crisscross the right and left side of our bodies. Motor stimulation directly impacts brain development and academic achievement for all ages. We can absorb more information faster if it is presented in a way that interests the learner. Positive emotions in a relaxed, alert state improve both learning and motivation. Threats impair any growth within the brain.

Internal rewards (e.g., a sense of pride and satisfaction with one's accomplishments) work better than external ones (e.g., candy, money, special privileges … trophies?). Brain research tells us that

we are we are naturally motivated by curiosity and novelty, meaningful activities, and successes (Jensen 1998, 65).

As learners, we take in more information visually than through any of our other senses. Our brains actually perceive information in images. Muscle memory helps us recall certain skills; it also helps us recall information associated with certain actions. When children, from birth to about age ten, engage in physical activity, it stimulates the growth of neurological pathways in the brain needed for learning.

I will be corresponding with Michel Bruyninckx in the future and plan to have him show coaches in Pennsylvania the numerous exercises he now utilizes with different player ability levels in his training. Hopefully, our Region and US Soccer will have an interest in exploring the successful methods he employs. His training methods should not be ignored. It may offer our country the opportunity to produce consistent, confident, well-rounded players and coaches in the near future.

Five Reasons to Visualize

Lindsey Wilson

Visualization is a powerful tool for optimizing athletic performance. While most coaches know this, few are able to speak to the myriad benefits of proper visualization. If you are a coach looking to guide your team through visualizations, a clear understanding of the "why" will help them buy in to the exercise. Here, we share our top 5 reasons to visualize.

Reason #1: Build Confidence

Quite simply, visualizing success helps build confidence. If you visualize success in your training or racing, you subconsciously improve your belief in your abilities. This has a profound impact on your performance. We all compete according to how we see ourselves, and when you know you can do something you dig deep in the energy reserves, you bring the required focus, you do what you need to do to get it done. Changing how you see yourself changes your performance.

Here is a quick exercise to illustrate: Take a moment and write down your Top 7 moments—in your personal life, sports, your career. Think of seven times you were at the top of your "game." Write them

down. Then take a deep breath, close your eyes and replay all seven of those instances in your mind.

Did you do it? If you did, I bet you feel more confident in your abilities and sure of your enormous potential. Visualization is powerful stuff; it is simple, but it brings out your best.

Reason #2: Manage Emotions

Managing emotions is one of the most important aspects to mental training — staying calm under pressure, reacting appropriately to adversity, getting hyped for competition, ignoring unhelpful emotions in the heat of the moment. These are all critical parts of our performance. Even the Navy SEALs have begun to train in visualization techniques to control their emotional reactions in life and death situations. While athletes generally do not face life and death experiences, anxiety, stress and the fear response can creep in and become a huge barrier to peak performance. If this begins to happen, visualization is one of the best tools available.

Some things to try: When you feel nervous or anxious, focus on your breathing and imagine yourself being calm and confident. If you're feeling fatigued, see yourself as powerful and courageous to pump yourself up. You'll be amazed at how your body follows your changed mindset. Sometimes we forget how connected our body and mind are and how much control we really do possess.

You can also practice working through stress or discomfort ahead of time so you are more prepared for that emotion when it happens in real life. If you have a particular situation that causes you stress, visualize yourself in that situation, feeling all those negative emotions. Imagine all the causes and sources for this unproductive

emotion, then slowly imagine all of them morphing into positive emotions like courage and confidence. When you mentally rehearse controlling your emotions, you'll be ready for them in real life.

Again, your body very willingly follows your mindset. Change your mind and everything else will change with it.

Reason #3: Develop Skills

Visualization can improve your skill development. Simply visualizing your sports skills (with no physical practice) will cause your brain to trigger the same muscle patterns as if you were actually performing the skill. Neuromuscular science is proving that visualization can actually affect your nervous system in the same way the actual movement does by exciting the same muscle patterns. But you don't get tired!

A study done at the University of Chicago (Dr. Blaslotto) did research on visualization and free throws. The researchers divided people into three groups and tested each group on how many free throws they could make.

After deciding their baseline free throw percentage, he had each group do something different:

1. Group #1: practiced free throws every day for an hour
2. Group #2: visualized themselves making free throws
3. Group #3: did nothing

After 30 days he tested their free throw accuracy again.

This is what he found:

1. Group #1: (physically practiced free throws) improved 24 %
2. Group #2: (visualization) improved 23 %! All without touching a basketball for 30 days.
3. Unsurprisingly, Group #3 did not improve.

Physical practice is of course important. But imagine using the power of the mind along with physical practice. After all, there is only so much physical practice you can do; your body may wear out, you might get fatigued and practice bad habits, or injuries may prevent you from practicing. Visualization can be a great addition to any training program — it's safe, efficient, and effective!

Reason #4: Injury Recovery

Speed Recovery from Injury

Believe it or not, visualization can increase the speed of recovery. In a study done by Achterberg and Mark S. Rider (Dossey, Meaning and Medicine, 167), researchers measured the effects of visualization in altering the immune system. The subjects were divided into two groups. Each group was asked to visualize images of the shape, location, and movement of one of two types of white blood cells. Blood counts were taken both before and after each twenty-minute visualization sessions.

Results showed that the highly directed imagery was cell-specific; that is, it affected one of the two types of white blood cells toward which it was intended or directed, and not the other. This study illustrates the power that the mind has over what is happening in the body. Visualizing a sprained ankle being repaired and active again can decrease the injury time. Visualizing getting better from a cold

can speed up your recovery. In the unfortunate case that you are injured or get sick, try visualizing and see what happens.

Prevent Skills from Deteriorating While Injured

A study looking at brain patterns in weightlifters found that the patterns activated when a weightlifter lifted hundreds of pounds were similarly activated when they sat in their chairs and only imagined lifting. In a study at the Cleveland Clinic Foundation (Yue 2004), researchers compared "people who went to the gym with people who carried out virtual workouts in their heads." He found a 30 % muscle increase in the group who went to the gym and a 13.5 % increase in the people who just imagined going to the gym! This is powerful stuff. While clearly an athlete needs proper physical conditioning, when they aren't able to do this due to injury, visualization can help them stay on track until they can.

Reason #5: Break a Pattern

Sometimes athletes hit a slump or a plateau, or they are stuck in a pattern of performance that they can't seem to change. When this happens, athletes often over-think the situation or get tense and stressed out, which can make the situation worse. This can be frustrating and lead to some very negative and unproductive mindsets. When an athlete is working hard physically and still not improving, or working hard and not able to perform the way they should, the reason is usually mental.

Visualization can help the subconscious relax around a situation. When success is visualized, the mind becomes more patient. During visualization athletes often see the root of the issue. They can work through their performance patterns in the following ways:

- Visualize past successes and learn from them.
- Study their ideal mental performance state in a controlled environment.
- Explore places for improvement away from the intensity of competition.

Conclusion

Visualization works, pure and simple. I'll leave you with a study by Soviet sport scientists leading up to the 1980 Olympics.

The study explored the effects of mental training through visualization, on four groups of world-class athletes just prior to the 1980 Olympics in Lake Placid. The four groups of athletes were divided as follows:

- Group 1—did 100 % physical training to prepare for the Olympic Games.
- Group 2—did 75 % physical training and 25 % mental (visualization) training.
- Group 3—did 50 % physical training and 50 % mental (visualization) training.
- Group 4—did 25 % physical training and 75 % mental (visualization) training.

What researchers found was that Group 4, the group with the most visualization training, showed the greatest improvement of all of the other groups! Group 3 did better than Group 2, and Group 2 did better than Group 1.

Of course, physical training is important, but imagine what combining physical and mental training could do for your athletes!

About the Author

Co-Founder of Positive Performance, Lindsey Wilson has been teaching, writing and speaking about mental training for the last five years. Lindsey regularly writes on mental training and has been featured on ESPN's HoopGurlz.com and in Coach and Athletic Director magazine, as well as the NYTimes.com, VISIONS magazine, FullCourtPress.com, and the American Volleyball Coaches Association. She can be reached at lindsey@positiveperform.com. And you can learn more about her mental training services at www.positiveperformancetraining.com

Kinesthetic Soccer Visualizations

Dr. Keith Wilson

Visualization is one of the first skills that comes to mind when soccer coaches start thinking about performance skills for their players. Unfortunately, most players do not understand how to utilize this skill and then take it to the soccer field. It may feel like an interesting classroom experience, but it does not easily help their soccer game.

I believe this problem is based upon two factors. First, the visualization alone is not internal or kinesthetic. Second, the athlete is not taught concentration or focusing skills, which enhance the visualization. This article will present stepping stones to help the athlete make their visualizations more internal and kinesthetic.

In order for the visualization to be effective in improving skills, it needs to be internal. The athlete needs to be able to see, feel, smell, and hear the actions of the athletic skill and environment as well. One has to turn on all the senses in order to make this visualization most effective. This is the part of the visualization where most beginners begin to lose faith in visualization. They are not able to feel their muscle groups move in the scene, they cannot

hear the action on the field, and they cannot see the action through their own eyes. Consequently, the visualization does not connect to an "on the field" performance.

Kinesthetic Connection

However, telling an athlete "just visualize the scene" is like telling an athlete to dribble faster without giving specific instructions that will help her dribble faster. It is challenging to add the kinesthetic experience to visualization if it does not come naturally. The importance of visualization being kinesthetic cannot be overstated. This kinesthetic dimension enables the visualization to utilize the muscle groups and thought patterns necessary to help build the mental and physical skills into an automated performance pattern.

Performance hypnosis offers one skill that is designed to help the athlete internalize performance visualization. Performance hypnosis can accentuate this skill. Achieving an alert trance state through performance hypnosis can easily be demonstrated. The athlete knows there has been a change in the way her body is reacting. She can see and feel it. This experience helps to build belief that what the player is visualizing is helping to create a change in her mind/body connection. The hypnotic skill, which is taught in this exercise, is a self-hypnotic skill and can be used safely by anyone who reads the article and follows the directions. While the athlete can reach a deep level of immersion utilizing this protocol, they are always in full control and can respond to interruptions if necessary during the visualization immersion.

Kinesthetic Primer

One effective hypnotic tool that enhances this kinesthetic mind/body connection is called the "kinesthetic primer." To illustrate it for the athlete, write these numbers and words on a dry erase board like this:

- 5-4-3-2-1
- Sight
- Sound
- Sensation

When the athlete first sees this on the teaching board it will not make sense to her. It is best to demonstrate the skill to enhance the learning process. State that the exercise consists of two hypnotic components: 1) Decreasing numerical count; and 2) Repetitive connection to the kinesthetic mind/body connections. Suggest that the athlete sit in a comfortable position and begin to focus on the three kinesthetic elements.

The facilitator should begin to note the kinesthetic cues, inviting the athlete to "come along." An example is as follows:

Five things I see (name five things in the environment that are seen — examples are given):

- I see the — (table)
- I see the — (lamp)
- I see the — (chair)
- I see the — (shoe)
- I see the — (tissue box)

Note: Tell the athlete that during this exercise they may experience slight confusion. For example, they may lose track of the items

counted. If so, tell them to enjoy the pleasant sensation of the self-induced trance. They may simply continue the round, wherever they decide to begin again.

Five things I hear (name five things in the environment that are heard—examples are given):

- I hear the — (traffic)
- I hear the — (air conditioning)
- I hear the — (music)
- I hear the — (traffic)
- I hear the — (music)

Note: It is acceptable to repeat kinesthetic cues — if only three sounds can be heard then they can be named again.

Five things I feel (name five things in the environment that the body senses or is experiencing —examples are given):

- I feel the — (vibration of my voice)
- I feel my — (hands touching each other)
- I feel my — (feet touching the floor)
- I feel my — (arm resting on the armrests of the chair)
- I feel my — (toes inside my shoes)

Note: This element refers to physical sensation rather than emotional feelings. This is not meant to notice anxiety/arousal levels or temperature of the physical surroundings (hot, cold, etc.).

Now move to round four. Naming four things in each of the categories.

- Four things I see (name four things in environment that are seen).
- Four things I hear (name four things in environment that are heard).
- Four things I feel (name four things in the environment that the body is experiencing).

This progression continues until the athlete completes an entire round of one thing seen, heard and experienced.

This hypnotic exercise accomplishes at least four things:

- It helps the athlete become more focused on their mind/body connection.
- It slows down their breathing.
- It helps the athlete to block out other distractions.
- It enhances the athlete's ability to visualize and feel bodily sensations while in an alert trace state.

Maximizing the Basic Kinesthetic Primer

There are two problems that an athlete will often raise as they learn this relaxation/visualization skill.

First, they are concerned that the skill will take too long to do when they need it and second, people will think that they are crazy when they do this out loud with people around them. Each of these is a valid concern.

This hypnotic skill is most effective when the athlete has made it a very familiar skill. Just as the athlete must practice corner kicks and dribbling skills, so must this skill be practiced in its entirety until it

becomes second nature to be able to relax and be centered using the basic performance hypnosis primer.

Once the skill has been well learned then it can be shortened in two ways. First, the athlete can start to practice this silently. It is possible to get the same rhythm silently in the mind when the athlete takes the time to do the exercise. This can be done in pre-game time or riding the bus. As the athlete establishes and reinforces this relaxation platform, it is easier to stay at the optimal level of intensity during the game. Second, the athlete can start at three and count down through the senses. This shorter version can be effective when the skill is well learned as it allows the athlete to stop the negative anxiety spiral quickly.

Advanced Kinesthetic Primer

The basic kinesthetic primer is also a great building block for use with more extensive performance hypnosis visualization skills. By enhancing the kinesthetic mind/body connection, the athlete can improve their visualization powers. This is further illustrated by the last step in this skill acquisition. One needs to be able to take this kinesthetic skill to the competitive environment.

The following is an example of the way this visualization exercise can be done with an entire soccer team. This example is shortened to accommodate the space of this article:

1. Use a quick induction (start at 3 or 5 from the basic primer depending upon the skill of the group) to get into an alert trance state
2. Begin to focus on the sights of the soccer pitch.

- See the grass and notice the color
- Notice the lines and condition of the field
- See your opponents on the field
- Notice their uniforms
- Notice the soccer ball at your feet
- Check out the color and design of the ball
- Continue this section until the athlete is comfortable with the visual sense

3. Begin to focus on the sounds of the playing field.

- Hear the sounds of people on the sidelines and in the stands
- Hear the sound of your opponents as they talk and warm up
- Hear the sound of the ball as you are dribbling, passing and shooting
- Hear the sound of the ball as your teammate is receiving the ball
- Hear the sound of the ball as it is flying toward the goal
- Hear the sound of the goalkeeper as he moves to stop the ball
- Continue this section until the athlete is comfortable with the audial sense

4. Begin to focus on the sensations of the playing field.

- Notice the texture of the playing surface
- Notice how your soccer boots feel on your feet
- Notice the feel of the ball as your foot strikes the ball
- Notice how the ball feels as it leaves your head after doing a header
- Notice the power of the ball as it strikes the back of the net
- Notice the feeling of running while moving to receive a pass

- Continue this section until the athlete is comfortable with the sensations

5. Bring the athlete back to the here and now by counting 1-10. While counting, pause along the way to highlight the skill they have been practicing. Highlight the confidence they bring into the present by focusing upon their kinesthetic visualization experience.

Continuing to Build the Visualization Skill

Now that the player is able to experience kinesthetic visualizations, it is possible to advance the soccer skill visualization. You can do group visualizations when the leader helps the teams be kinesthetically grounded while practicing soccer skills, like set plays.

The individual player can also do kinesthetic visualizations at home or during team practice when instructed to practice a specific skill.

There are three types of visualizations that are helpful in the athletic environment.

1. **Learning** a new skill or strategy.
2. **Perfecting** a skill or strategy.
3. **Practicing** a skill or strategy **repeatedly** to build confidence in that skill.

The coach or performance consultant can continue to design visualization tasks that match the technical and emotional skills that are being taught to the team. The visualizations that are done in a kinesthetic style will be more effective for the team and individual.

The Sky Is the Limit

The mental toughness of the team will continue to improve when the proper relaxation building block is taught to the team. Once a soccer player knows how to handle pressure better then they are able to make better decisions on the soccer field. The great bonus of teaching kinesthetic visualizations is that the player learns how to relax and create effective soccer visualizations.

About the Author

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Are Your Players Doing Their Soccer Homework?

Don Norton
Assistant Coach at Rowan University

From 2002 to 2009, I had the privilege to serve as the men's assistant coach at Haverford College with Joe Amorim. Joe is a brilliant coach and a wonderful person. I learned much about the game and life from him. When I joined his staff I was glad that we won our first game of the season. The preseason had gone well; the team had talent, good chemistry and spirit. I was excited about the team's chances for that season.

On Monday, after Saturday's first game victory, I watched as all our players walked down the hill and prepared for afternoon training. One by one they all gave Joe a piece of paper that he nicely folded together. After training that day I asked Joe what the players had given him. He replied that players had turned in their "required homework" from Saturday's game.

I asked Joe about the player's homework and what was required from them. The rules for players' homework was simple he said. The players were required to write at least one page about their performance for every game. Homework was required for every

game and due at the beginning of the next practice. No exceptions. If you didn't play, you still had to turn in your homework. Joe asked that every player look in the mirror and examine their performance and discuss what they felt; what they did well, what they did poorly, and what they needed to work on individually and collectively as a team. No "bitching" was allowed about playing time or teammates. Also you were to mention the amount of sleep you got and the foods you ate to prepare for the match. This was your time to look in the mirror. On the bottom of the page, you gave yourself and the team a grade from 0 to 10, and you signed your name. Your game reports were kept on file, and they were between you and the coaches.

At first, I have to admit that I was skeptical about players doing homework about their performances. After all as coaches aren't we the ones who are supposed to let them know how they played? Many of us "grade" every training session, etc. As time went on, once I began reading the reports, I saw the many benefits of having our players spend time reflecting upon how they had played in the previous match.

Reading the reports that each player submitted gave me valuable insight into them and how they thought they had played and how they viewed the game. As coaches we certainly want every player to always be aware and think and react with positive actions for themselves and the team. The comments I read really helped me better understand them as players and what they thought was important for success. The one thing I can say with certainty is that the players who really go into the most detail and were critical of themselves on the smallest of matters were our most important players. They are the players who hold themselves to very high standards. Often we would meet privately with that player to let him

know how much the coaches, players, etc., appreciated their effort and contributions to date. Some players expressed that they felt more comfortable writing down their thoughts as opposed to speaking among the other players.

Reading the homework allowed me see just how much our players were aware of changes that occurred in matches. I always read about how the other team switched formations due to score lines and what that switch meant to various players' responsibilities and overall performance. Often I would see snippets of our pre-game, halftime and post-game coach's points about speed of play, first-touch, team shape, compactness, playing out of the back, etc., reflected in those reports. I saw our players insert a sentence or two suggesting from time to time that we work on certain aspects of the game more in our daily training. Our staff always respected those suggestions and the spirit in which they were given because we wanted our players to "take ownership" of their team.

As the season went on, the homework turned in by our players became clearer, and they were now able to identity team and individual problem areas that had been lingering with themselves and the team from the start of the season. They commented on our lack of quality possession and passing in the attacking third, and a few other problems. We saw in our players' reports an even deeper understanding of how they needed to play and prepare for the games.

I have to admit that I would occasionally read a player's analysis and think to myself, what game was he in? But because that player was required to write it down, it allowed the staff to privately speak with him. The meeting would hopefully clear up any misconceptions, and

we could continue to discuss his thoughts as opposed to not knowing what he felt about particular aspects of his game. Having players do a game report increases the communication within the team. We all want our players to be "students of the game" and having them evaluate themselves forces them to examine how they approach and play within the game and gives coaches another window into our players' thoughts.

When the season ended, we asked the players to summarize their season and that of the team. I asked several players when the season had ended what they felt about being required to evaluate themselves and the team after every game. My players all agreed that as young adults they were responsible for each and every game/performance. Doing the reports forced them to spend some time away from the field to think about how they prepared for and played in every game. All my seniors agreed that although they had more than enough schoolwork, doing their "soccer homework" made them better players. They reflected upon what they did well, what they did poorly and what they needed to do to improve upon. At the end of the day, the "homework" they did made our players and coaches better.

Mental Toughness: What Is It? How Do You Get It?

Be World Class
Simon Hartley

Mental toughness is a term that's being used a lot these days. Coaches know the importance of having players with mental strength. However, I've spoken to many experienced coaches who have seen these characteristics become increasingly scarce in recent years. It seems that toughness is becoming a highly prized commodity.

But what exactly is it? How do we recognize players who display it and how can we develop mental toughness in our players?

I believe that the first step is to understand what genuine mental toughness is and is not.

What do tough players look like, sound like, and behave like?

Some people would say that the tough players are those who shout the loudest and bang their fists on the locker room doors. They are the players who try to intimidate their opponents, physically and verbally. Are those players really mentally tough? What about

players who push themselves physically, put their body on the line and risk injury? Are those the tough players?

As a sport psychologist, it is something that has always fascinated me. I often see players and teams that crumble when they hit tough challenges. I have seen some teams that have imploded at crucial times during a game or during a season. Some panic if they get behind or when they have a bad run of form. Some even panic when they find themselves exceeding their expectations. They go to pieces when they make the finals or find themselves fighting for a league championship.

Teams often seem to throw their game plan out of the window when the opposition asks some searching questions. What happens when Plan A doesn't work as expected? How do the players respond? For many years, I defined mental toughness as the ability to stick to the game plan, no matter what. Obviously, I recognize that "the game plan" needs to be flexible and adaptable. However, we should not abandon it completely and start panicking at the first sign of trouble.

How do athletes respond to criticism? What happens if that criticism comes from 40,000 screaming fans on a Saturday afternoon? What if the television, newspapers and media compound it? While working in a Premiership football club a number of years ago, the coaching staff developed a saying — "when the going gets tough, the tough hide under the treatment table." We used to see the number of injuries rise (and take longer to heal) when the team was struggling and the fans were booing the players. The players were actually using the treatment room as an escape! Coincidently, our captain (who did the shouting and fist waving) was the most regular visitor to the treatment room if we lost at home. Perhaps the genuinely tough

players are not the ones who make most noise, shout loudest, wave their fists and bang on the dressing room doors. Maybe those are not the best indicators of true mental toughness.

When I look at tough players, I don't tend to see fists banging. In fact, the toughest players that I've seen don't tend to be physically or verbally intimidating either. Maybe they don't need to be. Instead, the players who show true mental toughness tend to display three distinct qualities.

1. Resilience

   - Commonly seen as "bounce-back-ability" and the ability to thrive in adverse situations.

2. Tenacity

   - The ability to keep going and push to the very limit.

3. Composure

   - The ability to make really good decisions and execute skills at a very high standard, while under pressure.

To me, these qualities characterize mentally tough players. As a sport psychologist, I look to see how players respond when they hit challenges. I believe that actions, rather than words, are the best indicators. Here's a simple example—do players opt to do what's easiest or what's best? Will they push themselves to do everything they can or just do what's necessary? A player's actions on a daily basis can tell us a lot.

What happens when they encounter the really tough challenges? For example, how would they respond if they suffered a serious injury?

How do they respond to criticism or when they make mistakes? Will they become despondent? What about a poor run of form? Will they come back stronger, or will they wither? Do they tend to hide? Do you hear excuses and blame or see players taking responsibility? In a Premiership dressing room at halftime, I once heard a player explain that it was not his fault he'd played poorly in the first half. The equipment manager was to blame because he'd given the player a long sleeved shirt, and he couldn't play in long sleeves.

What about if the team was 4-0 down with 15 minutes to go? Would they take their foot off the gas and give up or fight to the very end? I recently saw my hometown team in exactly this position. Unfortunately they imploded and ended up losing 6-0.

How do players respond in high-pressure situations? Would they lose the plot, or would they be able to produce a peak performance?

The answers to these questions will tell us a lot about mental toughness in players. Often the toughest players are not the ones who shout loudest, make the most noise or appear the most intimidating. Sometimes fear can be dressed up as toughness. Bravado tends to be a façade — "fake toughness." I suspect that it is a sign of weakness rather than strength. Mentally tough players are often the ones who step forward and take responsibility. They will respond to setbacks by applying themselves, focusing, practicing, training and preparing better. When you know what to look for, mental toughness is fairly easy to spot.

Like any skill, mental toughness can be developed and learned. It is not simply an attribute that is inherent within people. Therefore, coaches can actually help to foster mental strength and toughness in their players, and players can develop it in themselves. Once we understand what genuine mental toughness looks like, we have a fantastic starting point!

About the Author

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Can Three Major Changes in the Landscape of US Youth Soccer Put Athletes at Risk of Burnout?

Amanda Ferranti

Much has changed in the landscape of US youth soccer over the past several years. Most notably, players are competing with multiple teams in multiple leagues, they are performing in 2 to 3 games per weekend, and they are being recruited at an increasingly younger age. Although psychological barriers are a natural part of athlete development, I propose that these changes may disproportionately influence the experience of psychological barriers in areas of goal orientation, motivation, and attention. Not all players will experience psychological stress in this evolving environment, however for those who do, it is the leading cause of performance setbacks as well as burnout or early termination. In this article, I aim to build awareness by discussing three major changes in youth soccer and how each change can affect a player's experience of psychological stress and continued participation.

Do you have multiple rosters for different leagues?

With the existence of two leagues that operate simultaneously, the youth player of today is competing with multiple teams in multiple leagues during a single season.

On the one hand, teams and clubs are able to attract talent and develop a competitive training environment that parents and players are seeking. Many look for the best opportunity to compete at the highest level and those opportunities are more accessible today.

However, consider what player movement indirectly communicates to the participant—"I need to be on the best team, the most winning team, and the team playing in the x league." Such a mindset is indicative of an athlete who judges and perceives achievement with an ego orientation. Goals, in this case, are focused on what a player can do to show superiority. This is most easily accomplished by obtaining impressionable statistics.

An ego orientation toward goal achievement can increase psychological stress because it is largely dependent upon uncontrollable factors, like scoring a goal, winning a game, getting onto a certain team, etc. On the contrary, an athlete with a task-mastery orientation will set goals that aim to improve the technical, tactical, physical, and psychological skills of soccer. Since all facets of soccer skill development are controllable, a player has more opportunities to feel proud and successful.

As a coach today, it is important that your players are balanced with both an ego and task-mastery orientation, where they are motivated to improve skills in a competitive environment. In the table below, I aim to present the mindset of both orientations while considering the distinctiveness of player judgment versus perception.

What is your ratio of practices to games?

A player's **motivation** to participate in soccer is largely dependent upon the experience of rewards. On the one hand, positive reinforcement is readily experienced from extrinsic factors like scoring a goal, wining a trophy, or being praised. However, consider what happens in the face of unfavorable outcomes—motivation fluctuates and psychological stress increases. Subsequently, it is important for a player to be intrinsically motivated by enjoying the process of acquiring skills and feeling accomplished after working hard.

In today's landscape, the youth player experiences an excess of extrinsic rewards. With teams registered in multiple leagues and players traveling with multiple teams, there is upward of three organized games per weekend, which is equal, if not, more than the number of practices in a given week. Not only are there more opportunities to win/lose, score, be praised, etc., but the organized game itself is a steady reward. As a result, a young player can lose sight of inherently pleasurable reasons for participation, regardless of his or her consciousness.

How many of your players juggle in the backyard or kick around with a friend? As a coach, a major indicator of motivational style is whether your players are driven to spend time with a ball on a day off. If you notice that love of playing soccer is being undermined by the prevalence of games, reemphasize the joy of gaining skills and performing advanced tactics. Naturally, coaches want athletes who are competitive and driven to win, but the most powerful motivator to perform and perform successfully is drawn from autonomous rewards, which can be experienced whether in an organized game, practice, or while playing in the yard.

Are your players being recruited?

It is widely agreed upon in the psychology literature that adolescents are in a time of identity exploration. They are constantly questioning, "Who am I?" and "Where am I going?" Now consider a player who is asked to expedite the journey and decide the next step in life at 16 years of age. The stress can become overwhelming, especially since the decision is largely determined by academic and athletic performance.

When college coaches are watching, a player may have unrealistic performance expectations and may imagine the worst possible outcome. For example, internal thoughts like "I need to play my best!" "Don't mess up!" or "The coach won't like me!" are common in those who desire to be recruited. Such thoughts shift a player's **attention** away from the process of performing and place a heightened emphasis on the outcome of his or her performance. Although a subtle difference, when the focus is on performing your best and being noticed, there are two possible emotional outcomes: success or failure.

With this style of black and white thinking, a player's confidence is constantly at risk. Imagine a player who misses an open shot or gets beaten one on one. When attention is focused on outcomes, perceptions of failure thrive and self-worth is questioned. However, if attention can be refocused on the performance of specific tasks and skills, a player is more likely to problem solve in unfavorable situations, and emotions are likely to remain balanced. As a coach, you can be a great source of relief by reminding your player of three key components to having a task focus.

What have you done in the past?

Remind your players of performance strengths by communicating some skills or plays that he or she has done well in the past. The recollection of positive past performances has been found to enhance confidence and optimism in future performances.

Psychological Mindset of Goal Orientation		
	Ego	Task-Mastery
Judgment of Competence	Compare to those in proximity of age and skill level	Compare to previous performances
Perception of Success	Statistics — scoring a goal, winning a game, getting onto a certain team, etc. Feelings of dominance	Improvement — new skills, better tactics, quicker, etc. Feelings of pride and satisfaction

What is your role?

Reminding your player of his or her role serves two purposes. First, it seems that the recruiting process strikes a fear of not being noticed. However, a player may do more harm than good when trying to play outside of his or her skill set. Second, a role provides a player with a clear focus toward performing the tasks of his or her position, as well as the skills that he or she has to offer to the team's overall success. In essence, having a clear role helps the player stay focused on what is needed to have a good performance in contrast to being noticed.

What is within your control?

If something is out of your player's control, they have to let it go. Energy is a limited resource and can be exhausted on thoughts about coaches watching, bad refs, or a rainy day. My college coach would say, "control the controllables!"

The landscape of youth soccer will continue to evolve throughout the years. Whether there is player movement, an excessive amount of organized games, or pressure to stand out, players will always be faced with psychological barriers that are unique to an individual's situation. In this article, I have presented three possible areas at risk of psychological stress in today's youth soccer environment, including goal orientation, motivation, and attention. Altogether, it is most important that young, influential players are taught to examine from within in the face of external noise and judgment. As a coach, you can be a great resource to your players with the power of awareness.

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Fun or Fear?

What Motivates Young Players?
Terry Michler

He has fun when he plays football (soccer) and that's great. That's why he can play as well as he does." Henrik Larsson said this of Ronaldinho—"He comes in every morning with a smile on his face."

Andy Barton, a sports psychologist, of the Sporting Mind clinic works with athletes across the board, including Premiership players and youth Academy players and here is his take on the state of youth soccer.

His experience was that this love of the game was being squeezed out of players at an even earlier stage. "I get 11-year-old kids in here who are from academies—and they may be from Chelsea, Arsenal, from Brentford—and they have lost their sense of fun and enjoyment, and they've gained a sense of fear, because their fear is of whether or not they're going to make it through the next year. So their mind goes from being this 10-year-old who's carefree—trusting their instincts, beating every player there is in sight, passing fantastic passes, scoring fantastic goals—to be going—'Oh God, I don't want to miss this tackle. I don't want to mess up this pass, I

don't want to screw up. I don't want to look like an idiot in front of my manager.'"

"There comes a point where they think that they have to take it more seriously, and being serious means being down on yourself, beating yourself up, being hypercritical. So you lose your carefree element because, well, if I'm being carefree, I'm not taking this seriously enough."

Simon Barnes in The Meaning of Sport says that "commentators say again and again: 'And now it's all about who wants it more.' Actually, the victory can often go to the one who wants it less: the one who can take the competition in their stride with relaxed muscles and mind. The one who thinks it really is life and death can get consumed by the madness of the occasion."

Too often when someone misses an obvious chance to do well (an open goal or an easy putt), it is often said that they lacked concentration, but the reality may be that they were trying too hard, tensed up, over-revved.

A nervous bunch of schoolboy soccer players were on the bus to play their hated rivals. The coach noticed the fear in the faces of his players. His message to them was simple: "You're going to play for an hour. There will be 22 of you on the field. Each of you will have the ball for no more than 2 minutes at most; maybe no more than 10 or 15 touches. Make them count."

It was as much what he didn't say, as what he did; if you're preparing your team for a great campaign, it's best to keep it short. It distracts them from the scale of the task ahead and gives them a sense of high urgency but low pressure.

Fantasy that is shut off too long from external reality risks degenerating into a self-deluding hell. Fun is a useful technique, not only to relax players in stressful times, allowing them to express themselves without excessive tension, but it also intimidates the opponent to see a team perform so well without apparent effort.

Fun has been seen as both a crucial form of release and of self-expression for the great players.

Is the youth soccer culture creating a fear-driven experience for the young players? Fear that they might not be good enough to stay in the team, fear that they are making mistakes, fear that interferes with their genuine enjoyment of playing. Are the pressures to make certain teams, to meet others' expectations to reach someone else's goals lessening the total experience of youth sports? What exactly is the purpose of youth sports and to what extent is this being realized? Does the early emphasis on competition drain the imagination, creativity, freedom and fun from the young athletes? Are young players playing so as not to make mistakes?

The previous excerpts were taken from the book A Cultured Left Foot by Musa Okwonga. It stimulated some serious thinking about what I am seeing today in youth soccer. My concern is that fun is being replaced by fear; fear of being left out, fear of making costly mistakes, fear that inhibits natural player and personal development. I recently read Why Johnny Hates Sports by Fred Engh and the combination of those experiences has triggered this reaction to express some thoughts. Some of what follows is taken from Why Johnny Hates Sports, and some is my own thoughts and opinions.

Youth Sports

Sports is the greatest tool we have in today's society to help children develop positive character traits and life values.

All children must have a safe, positive, and meaningful experience from sports.

Youth sports were intended for fun, relaxation, and recreation.

The primary goal is to make sure that the kids have a good learning experience, develop skills for whatever sport they're playing, and have a positive, fun experience.

I see three different concerns in the youth program:

1. Complacency — a place for everyone — a social-soccer situation.
2. Excessive influence and pressure on the player that leads to fear, burnout, and quitting.
3. The need to play in a relaxed environment where personal and athletic development is emphasized and winning comes later.

Complacency

I previously wrote an article titled "Playing vs. Competing" where the emphasis was placed on the entitlement issue of pay-to-play. The evolution of social-soccer is based upon the premise that if you pay, we'll find a place and a team for you. We will make you feel as though you are the best, creating a false sense of identity.

With the current soccer culture, it seems that everyone can find a comfortable place to play, and feel good about themselves. However, what might be lacking in some of these situations is the

drive to fight for a spot on a team. That same failure to fight for a spot on the team carries over into other areas of play as well.

Complacency and entitlement have replaced competition. The end result is that players struggle to achieve when the resistances increase. What do they have to draw from? Having come through a youth system that provides a team for every wanting player, it becomes: write a check; show up; and play me. When things don't go their way, they quickly and easily find another team to make it right. This lateral slide is what drains the competitiveness out of the player. Instead of staying and working harder, playing better, or playing the way the coach wants, it's just too easy to leave, usually on bad terms, and ply your trade elsewhere.

Confusing Play with Competition

Problems develop when we set goals for our kids without carefully taking into account the reality of a child's nature.

Play provides children with the chance to learn independence, develop self-esteem, explore their physical abilities, and have fun.

Play covers everything from amusement to exercise to diversion.

It's what we do for fun, enjoyment, relaxation, and stress-free pleasure.

Play vs. Competition

With organized sports, we have simply taken play, put it into an organized form and added factors like skill development and discipline.

We have now changed the nature of play into competition.

Competition is a contest in which the participants seek the same objective.

When competition dominates, then the original goals of play are eliminated for many.

Competition

Competition for children must first and foremost be enjoyable, challenging, and fun.

Children become more competitive as they grow and age. You can play while competing if you are also having fun.

Competition is a dual-edged sword. It can enhance play in some children and ruin it for others.

Competition instilled with values of fair play, sportsmanship, and ethics can build character that will last a lifetime.

Excessive influence and pressure on the player leads to fear, burnout, and quitting.

- Why Kids Quit

- Sports are no longer fun
- Needs not being met
- Made to feel miserable
- Too much pressure on winning
- Coach presents negative attitudes
- Coach was a poor teacher, played favorites
- Took too much time and wanted to do other things

Burnout

Growing weary of the enormous stress and demands placed on a person to perform at high levels

Point of saturation, a vicious revolving door of never-ending sport seasons

Children and parents fear taking any time off for fear of falling behind and/or being excluded from the team the following season

Choosing to play only one sport early on deprives the child of the chance to experiment with other sports, to learn and develop a variety of skills, and to work other muscle groups

When working under great pressure to perform, the conservatism of tactics will usually appear. When winning is the only option for survival in such a volatile environment, then questions of the beautiful game often go out the window. Managers become afraid to play flamboyant soccer for fear they may lose. Games played in that manner fall rather short of expectations.

Seventy percent of the 20 million children who participate in youth sports will quit by the age of 13 because of bad experiences and

damaged feelings of self-worth, frozen by the fear of making a mistake.

Too often promising young players fizzle under the strain of parents' expectations.

Problem areas when rushing young players too fast — Playing 11 a side on full-size fields too early

Children's legs are smaller and cover much less ground than an adult. The young children are exhausted trying to cover too much ground, and they are not strong enough to kick the ball over the distance either. Forcing children to play on big fields really becomes an exercise in futility.

Each time you add players and/or increase the size of the playing area, you automatically increase the variables involved—and in many cases exponentially! Thus, the mental capacity of the player is brought more into play and the cognitive ability is not even in place to handle most of what is needed. Failure and frustration results for many. It's not much fun!

The history of tactics is the history of two interlinked tensions:

Aesthetics vs. results (how it looks vs. the outcome) on the one side and

Technique vs. physique (ball skills vs. physical attributes) on the other.

When results drive the program, especially at an early age, the learning and developmental processes take a big hit. Creativity, imagination, risk-taking and personal expression are compromised

to play in a safe and effective way. The greatest players in the world of soccer today grew up playing in the streets, without adult coaching and supervision, and learned to play freely trying things without the consequence of making a mistake. Learning becomes greatly impeded when mistakes are not tolerated.

The need to play in a relaxed environment where personal and athletic development is emphasized and winning comes later.

Soccer has a deceptive, and therefore seductive, simplicity. That which initially seems easy, becomes more difficult the deeper you explore it. Perhaps the greatest beauty of soccer is the sheer randomness that lies beneath its apparently sedate surface.

An accomplished soccer player must, together with adequate technique and specific mental and physical qualities, possess soccer intelligence, insight into the game, and recognize the ever-changing situation. He must be able to choose very quickly the most efficient solution out of the many possible solutions. He must do this with a free mind, not bound by fear of choosing wrongly. The essence of soccer is to think and play, to be relaxed enough to handle the pressures of the moment, but not become too wrapped up "in the moment."

If we start with the premise that it takes 10-12 years to develop a soccer player…

The Learning Process does not have a fast forward button. It is a patient process over time that yields the best results. Children need to learn the game in stages and carry each stage of learning over

into the next stage. Age-appropriate learning experiences set the tone for player development

Children need to learn the game and understand it on their terms. It must be meaningful to them. They must have involvement, recognize what is going on and participate accordingly.

Some areas of concern

1. Young athletes under-train and over-compete.
2. Training in the early years is heavily focused on outcomes (winning) rather than processes (overall child development).
3. In general, young soccer players require a certain amount of uninterrupted play. This allows them to experience soccer first-hand. They should be allowed the opportunity to experiment, and with that, succeed and fail. We are very guilty of over-coaching.

If a player starts playing at age 6, by the age of 16 to 18, he should be developed into a well-rounded soccer player. Unfortunately, due to our current system, children are dropping out in large numbers around the age of 12 to 14. It seems that we are running them off. Why? Maybe it's no longer fun, and they have not gotten any better.

It is of utmost importance to deal with the whole person, not just the athlete. When people are respected and treated appropriately, cooperation is at its best. In order to best treat people, we need to know as much about them as possible, especially in a team setting. Who are the high achievers, and what motivates them? What is the "pecking order" within the team? Every person is unique and thus must be treated as an individual. Do your best to get to know what makes them tick—what motivates them and what their fears are. Using the personality information listed here, we see four distinct

personality types. Notice that the combination of high ambition coupled with a low fear of failure yields the best results. We must do our best to promote an environment that is challenging, fun and free of fear. Value the process, not the product. The process will last much longer than the end product. The work that goes into a project lasts within the person, it builds confidence and self-esteem.

Four personality types (A, B, C, D) with different strengths and performance anxiety:

- A has great ambition and high performance anxiety
- B has great ambition but is not afraid of failing
- C has little ambition but is afraid of making mistakes
- D has little ambition but is not bothered about failing

A is the type that is fine in ordinary league matches but fades when it really matters.

B is, not surprisingly, the type who makes the most of his resources. B dares to excel when it really matters. In order to create a B culture, we must stimulate ambition and reduce fear.

The most common personality type by far—some 80 %—is type A.

How does a manager handle the 80 % of type A personalities?

Beyond the player there is a person who likes to be considered, he likes to be treated properly, and if you can get this kind of relationship in the right way then they will give everything for you. If you treat people well, they will respond to what you're asking from them.

How do we put the fun back into sport (soccer)? Notice the excitement generated during recess, the free play owned by the young people; this is what we need to put back into our sessions. The best coach has always been the game itself. Set up small-sided games with certain objectives/conditions and then let them play. Look at the enthusiasm and energy generated by the game, let the play continue uninterrupted, and at the end allow the players to give feedback. Don't over-coach the session—make the necessary few points and leave it. End every training session with the players wanting to come back for the next one. It is our job as coaches to give the players the best opportunity to experience, enjoy, and improve themselves through playing. It's not boot camp — try to create a recess-like environment and see if the fun doesn't return.

About the Author

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Changing a Team Culture: Championships are Founded in Program-Wide Trust

Larry Lauer, PhD and Rob Smith

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Within every team and program, there is the opportunity for success and also for self-defeating breakdowns and total collapse.

Think about this statement for a moment. Is this true?

We should argue that it is. Any athletic program has the potential to be successful, even if you do not have much talent. At the same time, every program has a number of stakeholders with different interests. Student-athletes want to play, win, be on a team with their friends, represent their school, and be recognized for their efforts. Coaches want to develop young people, win, compete, build a program and so forth. Parents want their children to be successful, have fun, and of course win, too. Administrators want successful programs with few problems that shed a positive light on the school.

All Programs Have Their Powder Kegs

There are many similar interests across these stakeholder groups. However, their primary interests often create conflict. What's the primary interest of the coach? It is his or her team. What is the primary interest of the athlete or parent? You hope the team, but maybe it's their self-interest (playing time, points, or glory). Every program has powder kegs — people, situations, or decisions that can blow up in your face if not handled wisely.

Coaches frequently complain about the issues they have with others in the program. Student-athletes are not willing to work hard and seem entitled. You can't push them to the extent you need to develop their abilities and have an outstanding program. And, when things are not going well, they take home a message that deflects the blame from themselves to the coach. This creates drama, makes the kid feel important and gets the parents' attention. Often parents hear the negative message massaged by the athlete to place themselves in a positive light.

Coaches are concerned that administrators feel the pressure to succumb to the politics of parents who are trying to get the coach to do what they want in the program. Sometimes parents create rumors about coaches, attempt to make changes in programs by exerting political power, and second-guess coaches. The politics that surround teams makes it difficult to create team cohesion. So, how do we overcome this inherent conflict of interest and get back to building great teams?

Championship Teams Develop over Time and with Trust Building

During the 2008-2009 season, the Pittsburgh Penguins were struggling to make the playoffs. They fired the coach, Michel Therrien, and hired Dan Bylsma for their American Hockey League club. The Pens went on to defeat the Red Wings in the Stanley Cup Final in seven games, and compiled an astonishing record of 34-11-4 (including playoffs) after Bylsma's hire. This victory is the rare minority, however, because things do not usually work this way when the team changes the coach. Bylsma was the second coach in NHL history to be hired midseason and win the Cup.

Why do quick turnarounds not happen very often? Think about when a new coach comes to a program with a new philosophy and system, a new way of doing things, and with different expectations. For adolescents this is a lot of change to deal with especially when they don't have the life experiences and coping skills to always handle it well. We argue that high school programs should hire coaches for the long haul and then provide all the resources needed to build a program founded on trust amongst stakeholders. When you create a culture and tradition where trust exists and communication is transparent, great things are possible.

Program-wide trust is the foundation of championship teams. Programs must facilitate coach-athlete-parent-administrator trust and communication to succeed. Instead of coaches walking on egg shells afraid to make tough decisions because of parental reactions, offending players, and worrying if the administration will have their back, coaches must have the trust within the program to make tough decisions and have those around them follow. All program members must understand their role, accept it, and recognize how their current behavior/attitude adds to or takes away from the solution. When Coach Smith's team lost the 2008 high school girl's

varsity basketball state championship game, the winning coach remarked that a big part of the reason they won was because the parents were supportive and not creating drama and distractions.

Trust Is at the Core of Winning a State Championship

To illustrate how to develop program-wide trust let's review the case of the East Lansing girls basketball team that won a state championship in 2010.

Winning and coaching are very complex things that are the result of thousands of hours, decisions, communications, and the efforts of many people. You will find it very difficult and really useless to attribute a championship season to one key move or decision. However, we do believe that every season has tipping points that influence the course of the season greatly.

Rewind back to early March of 2010. For the fourth consecutive year, the East Lansing varsity girl's basketball team was considered a real championship contender. In previous years the team suffered heart-breaking losses, once in the championship game and once in the quarters to the team that would run away with the state championship. What was even more frustrating was the fact that the team was favored in each of these situations to win, and they even led in the 2009 state quarterfinal the whole game until the last minute. It was the coaching staff's opinion that the team failed not in being prepared but in staying composed under pressure. We also felt that this could be directly linked back to the lack of trust between stakeholders in the program. When some parents are overtly second-guessing the coaches, it is impossible for the athletes to buy in to what the coaches are communicating.

East Lansing was feeling the weight of the continued expectations as they headed into the 2010 state playoffs with only one loss and with few tight games during the conference schedule. In 2009, they were undefeated the whole season until they suffered defeat for the first and only time in the quarters. Would they experience another post-season trip that would end with disappointment? The question, although no one said it aloud, was on everyone's mind. Playing with this kind of burden showed as the girls played tight offensively and struggled to find their rhythm in the district playoffs. Fortunately, the girls battled to a regional championship. However, the team was not dominating like in previous years. How could they even be as good as last year's team that didn't win states?

It was clear that something wasn't quite right with the team. They weren't executing on offense and were resisting the coaches' strategy to slow down the game when they had the lead late. They did not trust that it was the right thing to do. Team chemistry was great off the court, but on the court the players still did not totally trust the coaches' decisions. At a team meeting we talked about trust and belief to get the girls to buy into slowing the game down; it wasn't stalling, but being smart and forcing the other team to foul. In response a senior raised one of the best questions we have ever had to answer. "How can we trust that we are going to win a state championship when we had great teams in the past and we didn't?" This question was at the core of the tense, burdened team. They were so consumed about the outcome that they could not trust the process. This was a tipping point.

But why should they not be consumed by the outcome, the state championship, which had been this team's mission for years? This was the time of the year that everyone had been waiting for. It was

their time to shine, but the pressure of the spotlight was putting the girls in a nervous, doubtful mindset. They had to believe in themselves and focus on the process. We probably did not get through this mindset in past years. What could we do differently? The answers we gave that day may or may not have made anyone feel better, but the message was to put faith and trust in the process. Trust in the hard work and preparation they had put in all of their lives. Trust in the coaches and that they knew what was best based on their expertise and diligent scouting. Trust that if you focus on "how to play" that the outcome would take care of itself. What other choice do you have? You can continue to choose to dwell on your concerns over winning and meeting everyone else's expectations, but this has not worked before so why go down the same path? Believe in yourselves, trust in your coaches and teammates, and put faith in knowing that by doing the right things on and off the court that you gave yourself a chance to win it all. If not, then you won't have a chance.

The girls went on to play outstanding basketball in the state semifinal and championship game. They played with a confidence and composure we had not seen in previous years. It seemed as if they played without the burden of expectations and fear. How did the mindset and feel in the locker room change? The key was when the senior captains took ownership of the process and sold it to the rest of the team. They decided to trust in the team, in the coaches and ignore the distractions. Winning a state championship happens when the players trust the coaching staff and the coaching staff trusts the players. Together we made it, and for everyone involved that should be the real reward.

How to Develop Program-Wide Trust

East Lansing is a great story about a team struggling with chemistry and trust within its program and then turning it around. In 2010, they experienced very few problems between stakeholders in the program. Importantly, parents were very supportive and backed the coaching staff, thus allowing the players to trust them. Let's not forget a few important things though. The team was very talented and led by three Division 1-bound players. Moreover, it was easy for players to buy into their roles because the pecking order was clearly defined based on talent and experience. The team certainly benefitted from these factors. At the same time, there were a number of key things implemented to create program-wide trust, which were essential to the championship season. These trust builders were implemented over a period of three years. Thus, success and trust did not happen overnight but grew over the seasons. So what steps should a coach take to help his/her team reach its full potential?

Enhance Staff Credibility

If you have a trust issue, then the coaches must enhance their perceived credibility. Players and parents must know that they are competent and their interests are genuine. They are not there just to set themselves up for the next job. They truly care about the student-athletes and want the best for them as people and athletes. Caring can be expressed in many ways from a pat on the back, listening to a player when she is down, giving a player a chance based on practice efforts, showing passion for teaching all players on the roster, and creating a connection between coaches and players. The East Lansing coaches also demonstrated their

credibility with an interest in continuing education. They went to coaching clinics, watched videos, and read books.

Set and Clarify Program Expectations

Everyone must understand their roles and the responsibilities that come with them. Coaches need to get on the same page with administration: what are the objectives we need to fulfill? It is also important for coaches to build trust with the parents, and educate them about appropriate conduct. This is also crucial since parents have the ability to reinforce or break down the level of trust fostered within a team or between the athletes and the coaching staff. Furthermore, coaches must establish clear lines of communication. Trust is destroyed when parents jump the chain of command and go to the principal or superintendent to voice complaints. Attempt to transparently handle all concerns at the coach-athlete or coach-parent-athlete level. To aid in the process of clarifying program expectations, the East Lansing coaching staff developed a "How We Operate" document that established codes of conduct for coaches, parents, and players that were reviewed in the orientation meeting.

Establish a Culture and a Mission

One of the best ways to motivate youth is to give them some power. Let them help the staff develop a mission for the season. Where do we want to go, and what do we need to do every day to get there? Things like doing well in the classroom, treating teammates with respect, etc., will be voiced as players talk about the daily things it takes to be a champion. You don't become a champion in a day; it takes months and even years of doing the right things and this includes off the court. This will facilitate the establishment of a

positive culture. In East Lansing's case, we established a high performance culture. Playing time is based on practice and game performance, not on who you are or the past. Not everyone will play all the time or get the number of shots they want, but you will play a valued role that contributes to the team's success. Team comes first in our decisions—"We before Me."

Finally, you have to be willing to be pushed hard, take some criticism (remember always more positives than negatives when communicating with youth), and accept that making mistakes may cause you to be removed from the game (but with dignity and effort to teach instead of punishing).

The coaches exhibited their belief in empowering the girls by allowing them to sometimes pick the drills in practice or even relying on them for which plays or defenses to run during games. The team also set their "10 goals for victory" and led their own warm-ups. Finally, the coaches reached out to the leadership on the team by setting up a Leadership Council. The team was represented by three upperclassmen who would talk to coach in a respectful manner about team issues. The coaches had to listen and attempt to not get defensive when they heard things they did not like. The coaching staff promised their girls they would listen to them, but they could not always do everything that was requested.

Continue to Clarify Roles and Establish Team Chemistry

In our situation, we had many new faces. In some ways this made it easier because the pecking order was pretty clear. However, it also made it difficult because the veterans had to make the new girls on the team feel like they belonged. Having team dinners, camps, and

meetings with team building activities helped to establish this chemistry. They created a family feeling; the girls wanted each other to be successful. This process is reinforced when the coaches clearly establish roles and helps players see how their role is valuable and contributes to everyone's success.

To show how everyone contributes, the coaching staff would ask players to write their name on a note card. Their teammates would then write down things that the person was doing to help the team be successful. They would also write down what they thought the person could improve upon. We have also done this exercise publically with players openly addressing teammates and the contributions they are making. Finally, to continue the process of trust-building, the coaches asked players during the season what the stakeholders (coaches, the player herself, teammates, and parents) could do to help the team be successful).

Foster Mental Toughness and Discipline

To be a champion requires mental and physical toughness. You have to be willing to do the training in order to be great. To challenge the girls to go to the next level, we had them think about their self-limiting beliefs and counter them. They had to overcome their personal demons as well as the team's demons; this battle continued into the playoffs. At the tipping point, the girls decided to trust in each other, in the coaches and in the process. If you don't believe deep down that you can make it, whether it be due to own personal doubts or those created by program stakeholders, than you will never reach your goal. That is why getting parent support is paramount to success. They cannot undermine the coaches. It only

creates a lack of belief and trust. In contrast, supportive parents can boost confidence and cement trust.

For our team we were able to create a motto that connected to a popular song. Our motto was "together we will make it." Fortunately the song "Together we made it" became a huge inspirational piece during the playoffs. It allowed us to refresh the message after a long, grueling season. We used this new motto during the playoffs, and it really brought the girls closer together and inspired them to push beyond their doubts and trust that they had what it took to win. If you can create a team motto that has a very meaningful message then you can bond a team and get them to go where they have not gone before.

Ultimately, trust can only occur if the team has done the necessary hard work. If you don't have the conditioning how can you trust that your team will last in a playoff tournament? Furthermore, you have to be willing to mentally prepare for the pressure by creating strategies that you have planned out and practiced for the big moments. In East Lansing's case, the girls were taught deep breathing, visualization, and positive thinking strategies that were integrated into routines that helped them plan for and overcome adversity.

Confidence can be a tricky thing for a teenager. Teenage girls tend to be hard on themselves and worried about what others think. The coaches implemented strategies to continually help the girls feel like they were improving. They created challenging practices that really pushed girls to go beyond their limits and be successful. The coaches also celebrated each girl's strengths, used video and press

clippings to highlight accomplishments, and sat with girls 1-on-1 to discuss areas to improve and encourage them to persist.

Always Communicate

The coaching staff prioritized the importance of transparent communication. We let the team and the program know why we are doing things. They may not always agree, but we gain their acceptance because they know where we are coming from. Furthermore, communication is not a one-way street. Coaches must listen and lead by example. They must ask for feedback and make players and parents feel they are approachable and want the input. Again, set the expectations early on how to do this appropriately. For example, we had the team list three things that the coaches could do to help them personally and/or the team. We then discussed them with each player. By doing this we showed an interest in every player and helped her meet her own needs.

As mentioned earlier, if you give the players some power then they will be more engaged in the process. They will take ownership for team functioning. This is especially true when it comes to your team leaders. You must openly communicate with them, listen to their advice, and really work with them to lead in effective ways. We gave them the MHSAA captain's booklet as a way to help them learn how to better lead.

In addition, within your coaching staff it is helpful to have coaches that play different roles. In our coaching staff, the head coach has to make the tough decisions that make people unhappy. Gary Greider, a very experienced and respected coach, serves as the guy the girls can talk to without any ramifications. They could say whatever

needed to be said to Coach Greider. The girls appreciated having this outlet. You cannot underestimate the importance of having coaches on your staff with different skills and roles. The head coach cannot be everything to everyone. Therefore, it is essential that the head coach empowers his or her coaching staff to communicate with players in the program and follow through on the principles of building trust.

Handle Conflict Quickly and Wisely

Again, every program has powder kegs. Commit to preventing crises and dealing with festering issues. Avoiding conflict only allows things to get worse behind the scenes, and it certainly breaks down program trust. Make it clear that players should feel comfortable coming to you with concerns. Then, when they do respectfully approach you with critical feedback, avoid becoming defensive or biting their head off/punishing them for communicating something you may not want to hear. If you reinforce open communication then your problem solving and trust can be strengthened. Educate your team on the best ways to approach the coach and also learn how each player handles feedback. Help them develop a thicker skin while facilitating respectful communication throughout the team.

Conclusion

Developing program-wide trust is a difficult thing and can be a long process. You should not expect turnarounds in the first or second month or possibly even the first or second season. Instead, be patient and work diligently to develop the foundation of trust. Communicate transparently with all stakeholders in your program. Create a structure and a culture that facilitates trust and minimizes

selfishness and politics. Be true to your philosophy; make it clear what your vision is and how everyone can play a role to get there, empower your athletes to take ownership of team functioning, and inspire them daily to follow through.

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Comfort is the Key to Coaching Young Athletes

Micharl Nyitray
2010 National USOC Developmental Coach of the Year

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When we think of coaching — especially great coaching — we probably think of coaches who possess great technical knowledge of his or her sport along with intense personalities and strong motivational charisma. While these descriptions probably describe the really effective coaches, they are, however, mostly coaches of adult athletes. What? Isn't coaching athletes essentially the same regardless of age? Nope, coaching adults is quite different from coaching kids, especially really young kids.

This article explores some of the subtle and not-so-subtle aspects of young athletes from a child psychology perspective. Much of what will be discussed will have an emphasis on the initial meeting and the new athlete/coach association. Being able to win over the comfort and confidence of a young athlete is not just about being

knowledgeable in your sport. It's also about understanding what young athletes want and being able to quickly show them you are there to help them improve their athletic abilities.

A Talented Young Athlete is Still a Child

When we see a young athlete with extraordinary talent, it's easy to forget that talent is wrapped inside the body and mind of a child. Kids think differently than grown ups, especially when they are younger. Their logic is pretty black and white. Abstract thinking and conceptualization — not to be confused with creative thinking or imagination — doesn't really start developing until the adolescent years. In short, kids lack the vocabulary, technical knowledge, and life experience to be able to effectively interpret abstract concepts.

Coaching explanations must be succinctly descriptive and presented with a vocabulary that's on the level of the athlete's intelligence and maturity, not age. Analogies are an effective method of explanation so long as they stay within a topic that the athlete already knows. For instance, nothing will be more frustrating to a bright young athlete than to be spoken to like "a little kid."

Talking over the head of a young kid is equally counterproductive. Just because a kid may have superstar talent doesn't automatically mean they have superstar intellect. Using lofty jargon or complex concepts with a youngster of average intelligence may not only be interpreted as demeaning, but it also tends to be downright boring. Either way, the coach will lose the interest of the young athlete for no other reason than the coach was trying to coach the talent, not the person. Just keep in mind the two cannot be separated.

Coach the Intelligence, Not the Age

To be most effective, a coach needs to understand his or her young athlete not only from an athletic perspective, but also the child's intelligence and athletic background. It's been my experience that finding out what other skills my clients have helps me relate to what they already know and with what I want to teach them. Learning about their grades in school and what subjects they like helps me get tuned in with their intellectual capability. But it's that athletic background that can uncover additional athletic potential. Leverage, timing, alignment, etc., are universal constants in sports. If the young athlete has a competitive athletic background or even just a lot of experience in another sport, analogizing concepts from that other sport will better illustrate what you're trying to convey to the young athlete. (By the way, this works great with grown-up athletes, too.)

The younger the child, the more results-oriented they will be. Give them something tangible other than lower/higher score in their respective sport. Skill drills with specific challenges that offer some type of validation or reward is an effective way to get a kid's focus off of results and onto technical training.

Height Represents Authority

When coaching young athletes, the coach is always taller; sometimes much taller. Kids have an instinctive recognition of authority for adults. The recognition of authority is amplified with regard to coaches. In many cases, the larger size of the adult coach creates a certain amount of intimidation. This intimidation will diminish over time, especially with athletic success. But some kids have trouble getting over this intimidating size difference.

Coaches need to be empathic to a young athlete's comfort or discomfort, even when it comes to something as basic as how tall we adults are. Without any conscious intent, an adult coach can be impairing the coaching experience by simply standing "over" the young athlete.

Fortunately, it doesn't take much to eliminate any height intimidation. All that's needed is to adjust your height lower so as to be more on a similar eye level with the child. This only needs to be done a couple of times for the young athlete to understand that there's nothing to be afraid of and no reason to feel intimidated. Once this comfort is gained, the coach can go back to standing normally because the young athlete will be looking at the coach, not at the big (intimidating) person telling them what to do.

From time to time, continue to find ways to lower/reduce your height by leaning against a table or other object that can bring you closer to eye level with the young athlete. It shows the child that you are sincere with your message, thus further gaining the child's trust and confidence. This is a perfect segue to the next topic.

Non-verbal Communication

With every gesture, every expression, we continuously send messages with our body language. These signals are the most basic form of communication. The most telling of our non-verbal communication comes from our facial expressions. Going as far back to the 1800s with Charles Darwin, there are some in science who believed much of our reaction to facial expressions is "hardwired." A great deal of what we think and feel originates from our subconscious as well as our instincts. We often don't realize how

our happiness, disappointment, etc., is manifested in the face. Happiness and approval are first recognized with the smile, but the eyes and eyebrows also confirm the positive expression. Conversely, tension in the jaw muscles, pursing the lips, and lowering the eyebrows are classic expressions of displeasure, or even anger. Kids are very attentive to these cues, as well.

This paragraph might seem a bit controversial, but I'm including it to illustrate how unusual circumstances can be. Coaches who have eyebrows that are turned down toward the nose can be unfairly labeled as mean and/or angry. The first "hardwired" impression interprets the down-turned eyebrows as an expression of anger and/or meanness. Some of you reading this article may find yourself reminded of when you met a coach—or other person—who had down-turned eyebrows and first thought that person wasn't going to be nice or was mean, only to discover they were actually a very pleasant person. This instinctive reaction is not only an incorrect assessment of the coach's personality, but it's actually an unfair one. The simplest way for a person with these kinds of eyebrows to overcome this is to raise his or her eyebrows upon meeting a child and speak with a friendly voice. Employing this simple strategy upon first acquaintance provides a "nice person" image, promoting a genuine perspective of the coach and his or her personality.

Becoming aware of how we present these subtle, non-verbal messages can go a long way toward improving a kid's coaching experience. Smiling, as opposed to frowning, is much more effective toward helping a young athlete become more comfortable and open to coaching.

The same goes for what we do with our hands. How we gesture with our hands and arms also says a lot about what we are thinking and feeling. The two classics with the arms are: hands on the hips and the arms crossed. Hands on the hips can suggest a message of frustration or impatience, especially if standing over the young athlete who is struggling to perform a new skill or improve an old one. The same goes for crossing the arms. Aside from "saying" don't approach me or get too close, crossing the arms can also project frustration and impatience. The more animated a coach is when he or she is "talking" with their hands and arms (within reason of course), the more engaged the coach appears to be in the coaching.

Empower Confidence by Making the Child's Opinion Count

The younger the child athlete, the more limited their cognitive skills and mental versatility will be. But that doesn't mean they don't have opinions or ideas. Coaching is a two-way experience. The coach, of course, is the source of knowledge, but listening to what the young athlete is thinking can actually enhance the coach's coaching. No one knows everything, and inspiration can come from the most unexpected sources … sometimes even the kids you're coaching.

Improving a young athlete's ability is not limited to just their physical technique. Developing their cognitive skills is the other part of improving a young athlete, which is far more than just compiling new information. Developing the inner athlete is a blend of acquiring and assimilating technical knowledge along with building the confidence for implementation. Aside from hearing a different perspective, allowing the young athlete to have a voice is simply good for the development of their self-esteem.

Personal Space

When we think of feeling safe, the first thing that comes to mind is danger, not comfort. Danger is pretty much self-explanatory. Comfort, in this case, refers to the amount of personal space (actual physical distance) between the child and the coach.

Each person defines his or her personal space uniquely where he or she feels comfortable. It's your obligation as a coach to recognize and respect a child's personal space. Get too close and the child will begin to feel uncomfortable, thus undermining the coaching message. Think about it — what adult feels comfortable with a "close talker?" Kids are even more sensitive to "being too close" because they have to rely more on their emotions and instincts, which is another way to describe their personal comfort, due to their lack of life experience.

Whenever possible, having a table and bench or other objects in between the coach and child will automatically help create space and comfort for a young athlete. As a bonus, the equipment can provide a platform to rest a video camera and/or printed material used during coaching. It's the coach's responsibility to recognize and respect the personal space of the coach/athlete association. Doing so will optimize the athlete's comfort and will, in turn, maximize the young athlete's coaching experience.

The Bottom Line

As the coach, you are the boss, and your athletes take their lead from you. Show that you are having fun and you will show your young athletes that you want to be there to help them improve. Finding out what makes the young athlete tick is the best way to

keep them interested in learning and interested in training. The more enjoyable you make the coaching experience, the more you will inspire your young athletes to want to continue to improve.

Six Elements of Mental Toughness

Christine M. Riorday

The business world just keeps getting more complex. Indeed, a recent study by IBM of 1,500 global chief executives (Capitalizing on Complexity) indicated that they felt the greatest issue facing them was the escalation of complexity.

Complexity and turbulence in the business environment may be here to stay, but they present opportunities as well as challenges for leaders. As a business school dean, I run a more than $80-million business in an increasingly competitive marketplace. With over 33,000 stakeholders, I know the pressure isn't going away, and so do other leaders in my organization. More likely, it will intensify. Still, I say, "Bring it on!"

Let me explain.

My son plays soccer in a competitive league. He practices three days a week and trains in specific skills with his coach. Also, he and I train together. Not only do we run sprints and engage in long bike rides to build speed, endurance and strength, we also work on the mental game associated with playing competitive sports.

Research and common sense tell us that top competitive athletes succeed because of their physical talents and their dedication to training. However, they also succeed because of their dexterity in dealing with the psychological pressure of a sport. In short, mental toughness and resilience are tremendously important for any athlete aiming to be the best in a sport.

As a result, many athletes engage in training their psychological readiness. At the root of mental training in sports is this question: Are you mentally tough enough to compete?

It is not simply a matter of my son's knowledge, ability and skill in soccer. It is also his psychological preparedness for the game, including skill in dealing with the stress of strong competition, recovering from mistakes and failure quickly, determining strategies to tackle tough situations, adjusting with each circumstance and game, collaborating with a team, celebrating successes but not becoming overconfident, and keeping positive before, during and after the game.

Using research and literature from sports psychology, such as James Loehr's The New Toughness Training for Sports, my son and I actively work each week on his mental game. When we do so, I recognize dramatic similarities to conversations that I have with business executives.

Many have shared with me that their companies have taken a brutal pounding for the last two years, and even those who have had some success are citing fatigue in this new complex game of business. But, just as with athletes, they don't rely only on knowledge, skills, ability, or past success to traverse difficult situations. They draw on an attitude, a toughness that allows them to push through hard

situations and face adversity with confidence. As businesses look to the future, their top people need to think about whether they have game-ready leaders who not only have technical skills in business but mental toughness as well.

There are at least six areas of mental toughness from sports psychology that apply equally well to business situations. As with athletes, business leaders need to ask, am I mentally tough enough to compete?

Flexibility

Game-ready leaders have the ability to absorb the unexpected and remain supple and non-defensive. They maintain humor even when the situation becomes tough. If something isn't going well or doesn't turn out as expected, they remain flexible in their approach and look for new ways to solve the problem. Just like a quarterback faced with a difficult play, a leader may have to decide quickly on a different way to get the ball down the field.

Also, leaders must continually be open to re-educating themselves, even in the basics, which they may have taken for granted for too long. They need to exercise caution in defensively falling back on ideas they know and are comfortable with rather than looking for new ways of doing business.

Responsiveness

Game-ready leaders are able to remain engaged, alive, and connected with a situation when under pressure. They are constantly identifying the opportunities, challenges, and threats in

the environment. They understand that they need to think differently about how their environment and business operate.

The problems we encounter now are messier and more complicated than ever before. They often can't be solved in the ways others were. Game-ready leaders look for new ways to think about these problems and, more importantly, look for fresh ways out of these problems. They have a sense of urgency about responding to the changing face of business.

Just as a coach may change strategies at halftime in response to the way a game is going based on the opponent's strengths and weaknesses, game-ready leaders in business must respond to changes in the environment and the players.

We must pay close attention to and understand global, national, regional, and local economic trends, market trends, consumer trends, industry trends, and competitor responses. Relying on old assumptions about how business operates and assuming that last year's trends still hold today is dangerous. Leaders make decisions and act based on up-to-the-minute and in-depth knowledge of what is really going on in business now.

Strength

Game-ready leaders are able to exert and resist great force when under pressure and to fight against insurmountable odds. They find the strength to dig deep and garner the resolve to keep going, even when in a seemingly losing game. They focus on giving their best and fighting hard until the end, with persistent intensity throughout the game.

The story of Team Hoyt, Dick and Rick, is an inspirational example of drawing on both inner and physical strength. Rick was born in 1962 to Dick and Judy Hoyt and was diagnosed as a spastic quadriplegic with cerebral palsy. His parents were advised to institutionalize him because "there was no chance of him recovering, and little hope for Rick to live a 'normal' life. This was just the beginning of Dick and Judy's quest for Rick's inclusion in community, sports, education, and one day, the workplace. In the spring of 1977, Rick told his father that he wanted to participate in a 5-mile benefit run for a lacrosse player who had been paralyzed in an accident. Far from being a long-distance runner, Dick agreed to push Rick in his wheelchair, and they finished all 5 miles, coming in next to last. That night, Rick told his father, 'Dad, when I'm running, it feels like I'm not handicapped.' At that moment, they formed Team Hoyt and have run many races together with now impressive times. The 2009 Boston Marathon was officially Team Hoyt's 1,000th race" (Team Hoyt website).

Just as athletes dig deep to find the physical and psychological strength to continue through adverse and tough situations, game-ready business leaders must exhibit the same strength. As James Loehr puts it, top athletes think, "While this is tough, I am a whole lot tougher." Game-ready business leaders bring the same intensity through the continuous pounding.

Courage and Ethics

Game-ready leaders do the right thing for the organization and the team. They suppress the temptation to cut corners or to undermine others so they come out on top. They have the courage to make the hard but right decisions for their organizations.

A famous story I share with my son as an example of courage and ethics in sports is that of tennis player Andy Roddick. In 2005, Roddick was the No. 1 seed at the Rome Masters. He was at match point and about to win. The umpire called his opponent for a double-fault serve. Walking to shake his opponent's hand, Roddick noticed a ball mark on the clay — in bounds. Roddick got the umpire's attention and pointed out that the ball had nicked the line but was in fact in bounds. The match continued. Roddick went on to lose the match, and his beyond-the-call-of-duty honesty made him famous as an upstanding person, an opponent who would do the right thing.

Game-ready leaders in business do the same. PepsiCo provides a great example of this. A disgruntled Coca-Cola employee and two other individuals attempted to sell proprietary information to Pepsi. Pepsi received a package containing a sample of a new Coke product and other information. Pepsi immediately informed Coke, which contacted the FBI. Game-ready business leaders ultimately win by making the right and courageous decisions.

Resiliency

Game-ready leaders rebound form disappointments, mistakes, and missed opportunities and get right back in the game. They have a hardiness for enduring the low points of a situation. They remain optimistic in the face of adversity and quickly change when necessary. They resolve to make things better and are experts at figuring out ways to do more with fewer resources. How about the resiliency of Detroit Tigers pitcher Armando Galarraga who was just one out away from pitching a perfect game when Jim Joyce, the first-base umpire, called a runner safe who was indeed out? Joyce had made an error. Galarraga was certainly deeply disappointed, but

he continued to pitch and get the next batter out. Afterward, Joyce admitted the error and apologized. Galarraga shrugged it off, saying, "Everyone makes mistakes."

Sportsmanship

Game-ready leaders exhibit sportsmanship. They don't let the opponent know when he or she has gotten them down. "Chin up," I say to my son. Clearly we all experience disappointment, attacks from others, an occasional blow to the stomach. However, the behavior exhibited by game-ready leaders after losing or being attacked by others or the situation sets the tone for the rest of an organization. Additionally, top athletes support their teammates and their roles. If teammates start competing with and attacking one another, it is definitely difficult to win.

Living in Denver, I follow the Denver Broncos. Kyle Orton has done an outstanding job of displaying sportsmanship while under public scrutiny. Brought to the Broncos in 2009, he has been the subject of constant press speculation about possibly being replaced. The drafting of Tim Tebow brought on another press outcry, that Kyle was out and Tim was in. Kyle handled it with grace and dignity. Putting his mind to the game and the team, he got on the field and simply practiced hard and welcomed his new teammate. In the face of internal competition, Kyle Orton exhibits the mentality of "Bring it on!"

We all need these same markers of toughness to succeed and lead in today's business environment. We cannot succeed on technical skill alone. Companies have tough questions and situations to address. Game-ready leaders go into today's business environment

with the best mental game and with the attitude of "Bring it on!" After all, who doesn't love the challenge and fun of a demanding, complex game?

About the Author

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Controlling Confidence

Be World Class
Simon Hartley

I have worked for a few years in the Premiership. I've often heard managers saying, "If we could just win a couple of games, we'd get our confidence back and then we'll start playing well." I've been fortunate to have worked in a wide variety of sports during the past 15 years, and one thing I've noticed is that confidence is the Holy Grail for most athletes. Most athletes recognize that when they are confident they play well. They think less and play a more natural, and normally effortless, game. How many center forwards have you seen who are fantastic when they're scoring but seem unable to kick the ball if they're not?

However, as those managers highlighted, confidence is often thought to be a "chicken and egg" thing. Unfortunately, this belief leads many struggling teams to start praying for a change of luck, or hope that they will get "a good bounce" or "a decision" from the referee. Hoping for a change of luck does not strike me as a very sound strategy!

As a sport psychologist, I teach people to take control of their confidence. In reality, most people's confidence is underpinned by

results. However, that's not a strong position to be in. If your confidence is reliant upon winning or losing, it is going to be pretty fragile. Winning or losing is something you cannot directly control. There are a huge number of factors that dictate the result of a soccer match. Although you have a certain degree of control, there are many things you have no direct control over. You can't control the referee. I've seen referees have an enormous influence on results. If you allow your confidence to be dictated by results, you leave it open to chance. Do you really want refereeing decisions to dictate your confidence?

What other factors underpin confidence? To be honest, there are potentially hundreds. The more common ones are "coaches feedback" or "other players feedback" or, for junior athletes in particular, "parents feedback". I worked with a Premiership and international soccer player a few years ago who was lacking confidence. We chatted about what influenced his confidence. The manager had the biggest influence, followed by other players, the crowd, his Dad and even the newspaper report. When we looked at it objectively, the chances are that the manager's feedback was not going to be completely reliable. The manager will be watching 20+ players on the field and not really focusing on him. If they win, the manager is likely to be happy with him. If they lose, he won't. That also goes for the other players, the crowd and the newspaper. As we chatted, it became apparent that the players' own views counted for very little. Ironically, of course, the player himself was in the best position to review his game and probably had the most accurate feedback. He'd seen and felt his performance from inside his own body.

This example shows that controlling confidence often starts with how we control feedback. Our soccer player started to control his confidence when he began to honestly and objectively evaluate his own performances. It sounds pretty simple and straightforward, but let's take a look at that in more detail. Firstly, he needs to be honest. If he has had a poor game, he needs to be honest about it. Equally, if he's played really well, he needs to be honest rather than modest. Secondly, he needs to be objective. This means that he can use his own evaluation and then integrate feedback from others. The aim is not to be arrogant and ignore the feedback of others. The aim is to use the benefit of both.

Finally, our player needs to evaluate. Most players don't evaluate, they judge. Normally the judgment is emotionally charged and contains little in the way of useful information. How many times have you come off of the field and described the performance as "good", "ok" or "****." None of those have any value. When I work with athletes I start by asking them to rate their performance on a scale of 0-10. It's never going to be a zero. There will always be something in it that was positive. Equally, it's very rare that a performance would be a "perfect" (flawless) 10. Whatever you score, there will always be two elements to your score. What did you do well (that stopped you from scoring 0)? What can you improve (that stopped you from scoring 10)? Knowing these two things will help you ensure that your next performance is better than this one.

But what happens if I scored a 2/10? Surely I'm not going to be confident going into the next game.

There is a very simple formula that you can use to create confidence. Build on what you can do! I have known athletes score

their performance as a 2/10. The only sensible solution is to take responsibility for the performance, identify what you need to work on and knuckle down! I have seen very successful athletes use their mistakes to increase their confidence (that's right, increase their confidence). Imagine two athletes, who both have disappointing performances. The first athlete feels upset and gets disheartened, so they try to forget the performance. They go back into training and do the same things they did before. The second athlete also feels upset but decides to go through the uncomfortable task of reviewing the performance in detail. They identify those things that went wrong and then work hard on them in training. A couple of weeks later, they can see tangible improvements in those areas of their game. The second athlete is not making the same mistakes now. Who do you think will go into their next competition feeling more confident?

You can use the same simple principles to control your own confidence. Start with what you're doing well and add to it. Practice the bits you're not as confident in until you know you can do them.

5 Top Tips to Help Control Your Confidence

- Be in control of the feedback.
- Be honest.
- Be objective.
- Evaluate — don't judge.
- Build on what you can do.

About the Author

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Mindsets: Developing Talent Using a Growth Mindset

Dr. Carol S. Dweck

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Coaches are often frustrated and puzzled. They look back over their careers and realize that some of their most talented athletes — athletes who seemed to have everything — never achieved success. Why? The answer is that these athletes didn't have everything — they didn't have the right mindset.

In my research, I have identified two mindsets that people can have about their talents and abilities. Those with a fixed mindset believe that their talents and abilities are set. They have a certain amount and that's that. In this mindset, athletes may become so concerned with being and looking talented that they never fulfill their potential.

People with a growth mindset, on the other hand, think of talents and abilities as things they can develop as potentials that come to fruition through effort, practice, and instruction. They don't believe that everyone has the same potential or that anyone can be Michael Phelps, but they understand that even Michael Phelps wouldn't be

Michael Phelps without years of passionate and dedicated practice. In the growth mindset, talent is something you build on and develop, not something you simply display to the world and try to coast to success on.

Almost every truly great athlete — Michael Jordan, Jackie Joyner-Kersee, Tiger Woods, Mia Hamm, Pete Sampras — has had a growth mindset. Not one of these athletes rested on their talent; they constantly stretched themselves, analyzed their performance, and addressed their weaknesses. In the 2008 Olympics, silver-medal swimmer Dara Torres (age 41) and gold-medal marathoner Constantina Tomescu-Dita (age 38) defied myths about age through their training and dedication.

Research has repeatedly shown that a growth mindset fosters a healthier attitude toward practice and learning, a hunger for feedback, a greater ability to deal with setbacks, and significantly better performance over time. How do the mindsets work and what can coaches do to promote a growth mindset? Before addressing these issues, let me first answer some other questions that I am often asked about the mindsets.

Questions about the Mindsets

Which mindset is correct? Although abilities are always a product of nature and nurture, a great deal of exciting work is emerging in support of the growth mindset. New work in psychology and neuroscience is demonstrating the tremendous plasticity of the brain and its capacity to change and even reorganize itself when people put serious work into developing a set of skills. Other groundbreaking work (for example, by Anders Ericsson) is showing

that in virtually every field — sports, science, or the arts —only one thing seems to distinguish the people we later call geniuses from their other talented peers. This one thing is called practice.

Are people's mindsets related to their level of ability in the area? No, at least not at first. People with all levels of ability can hold either mindset, but over time those with the growth mindset appear to gain the advantage and begin to outperform their peers with a fixed mindset.

Are mindsets fixed or can they be changed? Mindsets can be fairly stable, but they are beliefs, and beliefs can be changed. Later on, I will describe workshops that have altered people's mindsets and had a real effect on their motivation and performance.

How do the mindsets work? The two mindsets work by creating entire psychological worlds, and each world operates by different rules.

The Mindset Rules

Rule #1

- In a fixed mindset, the cardinal rule is: Look talented at all costs.
- In a growth mindset, the cardinal rule is: Learn, learn, learn!

In our work with adolescents and college students, those with a fixed mindset say, "The main thing I want when I do my school work is to show how good I am at it." When we give them a choice between a challenging task they can learn from and a task that will make them look smart, most of them choose to look smart. Because they

believe that their intelligence is fixed and they have only a certain amount, they have to look good at all times.

Those with a growth mindset, on the other hand, say "It's much more important for me to learn things in my classes than it is to get the best grades." They care about grades, just as athletes care about winning the game, but they care first and foremost about learning. As a group, these are the students who end up earning higher grades, even when they may not have had greater aptitude originally.

Our studies show that it is precisely because of their focus on learning that growth mindset students end up with a higher performance. They take charge of the learning process. For example, they study more deeply, manage their time better, and keep up their motivation. If they do poorly at first, they find out why and fix it.

We have found that mindsets play a key role in how students adjust when they are facing major transitions. Do they try to take advantage of all the resources and instruction available, or do they try to act as though they don't care or already know it all? In a study of students entering an elite university, we found that students with a fixed mindset preferred to hide their deficiencies, rather than take an opportunity to remedy them even when the deficiency put their future success at risk.

Rule #2

- In a fixed mindset, the second rule is: Don't work too hard or practice too much.

- In a growth mindset, the second rule is: Work with passion and dedication — effort is the key.

Those with a fixed mindset believe that if you have natural talent, you shouldn't need much effort. In fact, having to work hard casts doubt on your ability. I believe that this is why so many enormously talented athletes never fulfill their potential. They are often the ones who have coasted along, winning with little effort, while the other athletes were sweating, struggling, and practicing. The fixed mindset "naturals" never learn to work, so that when they later reach their limits, they cannot cope. From Michael Lewis' wonderful book, Moneyball, we all know the story of the super-talented Billy Beane, who was a colossal failure in the major leagues because he didn't think he should have to learn or try.

Those with a growth mindset know they have to work hard, and they enjoy it. They understand that effort is what ignites their ability and causes it to grow over time.

I get letters from former child prodigies in many fields. They were led to expect that because of their talent, success would automatically come their way. It didn't. In the world of Olympic sports, we do not do our young athletes a favor by allowing them to believe that great talent alone will transport them to the medal stand.

Recently we conducted a small study of college soccer players. We found that the more a player believed athletic ability was a result of effort and practice rather than just natural ability the better that player performed over the next season. What they believed about their coaches' values was even more important. The athletes who believe that their coaches prized effort and practice over natural ability were even more likely to have a superior season.

Rule #3

- In a fixed mindset, the third rule is: When faced with setbacks, run away or conceal your deficiencies.
- In a growth mindset, the third rule is: Embrace your mistakes and confront your deficiencies.

We have found over and over that a fixed mindset does not give people a good way to recover from setbacks. After a failure, fixed-mindset students say things like, "I'd spend less time on this subject from now on" or "I would try to cheat on the next test." They make excuses, they blame others, and they make themselves feel better by looking down on those who have done worse. They do everything but face the setback and learn from it.

It was so interesting to see in the last Olympics how many champions prevailed in events that were at some point not their strong suit. Chris Hoy, the Scottish gold medal cyclist, saw his specialty eliminated from the Olympics and had to reinvent himself. He did not sit and lament his fate or blame others — he got to work.

How Are Mindsets Communicated?

Mindsets can be taught by the way we praise. In many studies, we have gotten a very surprising result. Praising children's or adolescents' intelligence or talent puts them into a fixed mindset with all of its defensiveness and vulnerability. Instead of instilling confidence, it tells them that we can read their intelligence or talent from their performance and that this what we value them for. After praising their intelligence or talent, we found that students wanted a safe, easy task, not a challenging one that they could learn from. They didn't want to risk their "gifted" label. Then, after a series of

difficult problems, they lost their confidence and enjoyment, their performance plummeted, and almost 40 % of them later lied about their scores. What should we praise?

We found that praising students' effort or strategies (the process they engaged in, the way they did something) put students into a growth mindset, in which they sought and enjoyed challenges and remained highly motivated even after prolonged difficulty. Thus, coaches might do well to focus their athletes on the process of learning and improvement and to remove the emphasis from natural talent. A focus on learning and improvement tells athletes not only what they did to bring about their success but also what they can do to recover from setbacks. A focus on talent does not accomplish this.

We have also directly taught students the growth mindset. We have been developing a software program called Brainology in which students learn all about the brain and how to make it work better. Furthermore, they learn that every time they stretch themselves and learn something new, their brain forms new connections, and over time they increase their intellectual ability. Research has repeatedly shown that teaching students the growth mindset strongly enhances their motivation and achievement.

Coaches can identify their fixed mindset athletes by asking them to agree or disagree with statements like these: "You have a certain level of athletic ability, and you cannot really do much to change that;" "Your core athletic ability cannot really be changed;" and "You can learn new things, but you can't really change your basic athletic ability." They can also ask their athletes to complete this equation: Athletic ability is ____% natural talent and ____% effort/practice.

They can then work on fostering a growth mindset in their players who place an undue emphasis on fixed ability.

What about Coaches' Mindsets?

Of course, coaches themselves can have a fixed mindset. These coaches may convey to their teams that they value natural talent above all, they may spend little time with the athletes they deem less talented, and they may be intolerant of feedback from others (since they may see feedback as impugning their own ability). Research by Peter Heslin and his colleagues shows that business managers with a fixed mindset have qualities like this. However, after workshops that teach them a growth mindset, these same managers are more eager to help their employees develop and become more receptive to feedback from others.

A growth mindset coach is also more likely to foster teamwork and team spirit. When a coach has a fixed mindset, players will be eager to impress the coach with their talent and will vie to be the superstar in the coaches' eyes. However, if athletes know that their coach values passion, learning, and improvement, these are things that players can work together to produce.

Conclusion

At the level of the player, a growth mindset allows each individual to embrace learning, to welcome challenges, mistakes, and feedback, and to understand the role of effort in creating talent.

At the organizational level, a growth mindset is fostered when coaching staffs present athletic skills as acquirable, value passion,

effort, improvement (and teamwork), not simply natural talent, and present themselves as mentors and not just talent judges.

When coaching staffs have a fixed mindset, their job is simply to find the talent. When they have a growth mindset, their job is to inspire and promote the development of talent. It is in this mindset, I believe, that they will nurture a new generation full of Olympic athletes the likes of Michael Phelps and Nastia Liukin, athletes who love their sport and bring it to the highest level.

About the Author

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Mental Toughness for Coaches and Players

Juan Pablo Favero, M.S.

When Googling "mental toughness" on the Internet, many resources on the topic pop up. An array of books have been written, a plethora of articles can be found, and in the public speaking arena, many share information about this all-important area within the mental aspect of performance. However, most of these resources are directed to the athlete with very little attention given to the importance this plays for coaches as the leaders of a group.

With a combination of fifteen years as a coach and ten years of studying and applying sport psychology under my belt, I have had the opportunity to incorporate the principles I've learned in a unique way. Through many successes and failures, my players have shown me new and creative paths to my role as a leader. Therefore, my approach in this article will be to make the information as practical as possible, translating theory into usable tools.

Looking at the qualities that successful, mentally tough athletes possess, it is clear to see that these same qualities are just as

important for a coach who is going to lead his or her players to success. The seven qualities elite performers share are:

- A strong desire to succeed
- Positivity in the face of challenge and pressure
- Controlling the "controllables" mentality
- A high commitment/ balanced attitude approach
- A high level of belief in self and team
- A process orientation
- Positive communication and body language.

Having a strong desire to succeed is perhaps the most obvious of the characteristics, but as a leader it is of utmost importance to communicate clearly with your players that you know where you are going and how you are going to guide the team there. This helps build the type of credibility necessary to lead a team to success. Some of the practical ways to accomplish this are:

Cast a clear vision of the destination with your players as well as other important constituents including assistant coaches, support staff, parents, and authorities.

Guide your players in establishing a mission statement. This serves both as a guiding light and an accountability tool for yourself and the team. It also provides unity of purpose and therefore grows team cohesion.

Guide your team in establishing clear, specific, and high, yet attainable goals both in the short, medium and long-term. More importantly this needs to be coupled with an effective process by which these goals will be achieved (more on this later).

A SWOT Analysis
(Strengths/Weaknesses/Opportunities/Threats)

This tool, borrowed from the business world, can help your team tremendously. First, do it with your assistants on your team, and then let your team do this about themselves as well. Many successful coaches and leaders have discovered the secret of focusing on strengths, but I believe weaknesses that keep an athlete from their strengths must also be addressed. Knowing your opportunities and threats can also help you plan and make decisions about personnel, formation, and tactics.

Make your training sessions effective, challenging, and competitive. This will foster a better learning environment and will help boost the competitive nature within your athletes and team.

Invest in and develop leaders within your team. This will only increase the team's chances to achieve the desired success. This will also give the team more entrusted ownership and will simultaneously lower the negative attitude of entitlement.

Finally, be sure to reinforce the small steps along the way. Words of affirmation can go a long way in creating a positive environment and quickly lead to a momentum build-up, which is critically important in attaining goals. Be careful not to be lured into the "fake praise trap" as it initially seems to benefit your athletes, but it generally becomes counterproductive in the end.

Those who have a positive attitude generally have a higher rate of success than those who are pessimists. The quality that successful athletes and coaches share is that they can remain positive in the face of challenges and pressures. Anyone can stay positive when

things are going well, but mentally tough people endure the toughest challenges while still choosing to remain positive.

Here are some practical ways we can accomplish this difficult mentality:

Since competition is a continuous presentation of challenges and problems, the key to remaining positive is proper preparation. Having good preparation and a good process allows athletes to believe they can succeed even when things are not going their way. Good preparation also allows the athlete to have the freedom to be flexible like a bamboo under pressure, which can be bent but remains unbroken. Your job as the coach is to make sure your team is and believes they have been properly prepared.

Our reaction as coaches will serve as the example that our athletes will follow. While an initial negative reaction to a setback is not necessarily bad, the key is how quickly we can recover our Critical Response Time (CRT). If, for example, our team allows a goal, while we can be upset, we can't remain in that state of mind very long since we still have a job to do and an example to set. We must also be conscious of our communication in these times.

As coaches we must also understand the pressure to perform that players experience from themselves, family, and fans. Good coaches understand how to use pressure to boost performance by knowing when they need to relieve or increase its levels appropriately.

If the coach can create a challenging training session where the activities and the game itself demands more than the coach

him/herself, then this will help the athletes love the challenge of tough competition.

How the coach reacts to the result is critically important as well. How we deal both with losing and setbacks, as well as with winning and success, sets the stage for how our players will react.

The principle of placing our attention and efforts into controlling the "controllables" is not only a principle for success in athletics but in life as well. The amount of time, attention, and energy we have available is perhaps our most precious resource, so wasting it on things we can't do anything about makes no sense whatsoever. Tony DiCicco says that "confident players focus on what they can do and don't worry about what they can't," and I think this is very true for coaches as well. Here are some ways we can achieve this.

Focus and direct your and your players' attention and communication on those things they have influence over. Instead of talking about and wasting energy on things they don't influence, they should direct their energy into those things they can do something about. The words that come out of our mouths are a direct reflection of our thoughts, so if we can help our players change their communication direction, we can positively affect their thought process as well.

Some of the things we can encourage our players to focus on are preparation, communication, effort, attitude, concentration and performing consistently at their best level to name a few.

Coaches must be careful not to change their actions and outward demonstration of emotions drastically from game to game. Too many coaches allow their own anxieties, fears, and worries trickle

down to their players when they act or communicate differently, depending on the rival or the situation in a game (winning vs. losing or time left in the game). I believe coaches must become master actors and actresses, knowing how to hide their emotions when these can be detrimental to the team. Most players respond better to an even-keeled approach rather than one with drastic swings.

As coaches, our communication must also be directed toward those things that we can do something about. This serves as a magnet for the attention and energy of the players. We must shield our players from negative and uncontrollable factors by not magnifying these in public, while looking at possible solutions in private.

The most successful athletes and coaches have learned the secret of maintaining a healthy balance between their commitment to performing to highest standards of excellence and having other things in their lives to keep them centered. People who don't find this balance have the possibility of two negative outcomes: burnout and the trap of perfectionism. Instead, people with this balance have learned that sometimes less is more, and that taking appropriate breaks, both physically and mentally, can help them perform to a higher level. Here are some ideas to help attain a high commitment, yet balanced attitude.

We should demand more of ourselves than others demand of us, and we should teach our players to do the same. This actually can also help build self-confidence. One of the easiest ways to have this balance is to set up transitions in and out of the sport performance. Use the locker room as not only a "changing room" of equipment, but more importantly of mentality, from "regular person" to "performer" and back. Just like players can't let personal problems

affect their athletic performance, they must equally not allow their athletic performance to affect their personal life. As coaches, we must have the same approach.

We must guide our teams to have a mission for each day. Setting clear and specific objectives for each training session helps the athlete to know the expectation and can give them a sense of achievement after a good day's work. Athletes should also be encouraged to have personal objectives to achieve within each session that are aligned to the team's objectives.

The principle of "stopping and smelling the roses" when things go well is important as well. Sometimes an extra day of rest can accomplish more for a team than another training session. This could be true when things are not going well, too. A wisely chosen unexpected break can create some breathing room and recharge both you and the team physically and emotionally. The key here is to know your own team and figure out what might work best for that particular group at given point in time.

Having a high level of self and team belief is yet another characteristic shared by successful athletes and coaches alike. Since confidence is a choice and it must be present before success can be attained, this is a critically important element. Of course, once you have success, it builds confidence as well, but as coaches, we must give our athletes the tools from which they can gain their own high level of self-confidence.

Here are some ideas you can implement:

Maintaining this belief even when the player or the team is performing poorly is critically important. As a coach, you must

realize that your communication, and especially your non-verbals, send a very strong message.

Help teach your players to have a "present" mentality. The past is gone and therefore can't be changed. The future can only be affected by how they perform in the present. Coach K of Duke talks about a "next play" mentality, which helps his athletes in the same way.

Coaches and players must have a "never give up" attitude. "Belief is the mother of all reality" is true about life, and applies to athletic performance as well. A team wins or loses a game at the exact time that they believe they have won or lost a game, regardless of outside factors like opponents, time and score.

Here are ways you can help your players build their confidence: Teach them not to base it on what others say; focus on small victories or successes and reinforce them; set your players and team up for success; clearly define roles for your players; help your players find ways to add value to the team on and off the field; and encourage them to develop self-affirmation statements.

By experience or intuition, most successful people know the importance of setting high objectives and goals. This helps them achieve great things but perhaps more important still is to have a process orientation in place to achieve the team's goals.

The same principles used for good goal setting can be used to help your team go through a process-setting session. Doing both of these things with your team helps give them ownership of the process and create a positive, personal responsibility environment.

A good process can also make it easier for you to hold your players accountable to the objective standard that everyone agreed on when you came up with it. This, instead of your subjective standard, becomes easier for players to accept, and you can also ask them to evaluate how well they are carrying out the process.

Here is that if you set up a good process, you must be consistent and stick with it, even when things may not be going as you'd like. A good process should include flexibility as well, but too many changes in how you do things and in expectations can confuse and detract your team's performance.

Once the season ends and a new year begins, the process can be revisited. Having gained from past experience, improving or adding new methods, taking into account changes in personnel, or having new goals and objectives, all factor into this analysis, but this must always be done at the beginning of a project.

The last principle has already been introduced in several of the other characteristics but it is the first and easiest thing we can improve as coaches, and it is our positive communication and body language. Ninety percent of a message is transmitted by non-verbal (body language) and para-verbal (speech patterns) means, therefore non-verbal messages are 16 times more powerful than verbal ones. As a result, it is not just what we say with our words but what our bodies and our tones tell our players what is most important. This is also the most important tool we have as leaders, so invest in this very important area, and you will see immediate benefits for you and your team.

Here are some practical things you can do to improve:

Look professional and help your players look professional so they look like they mean business.

Maintain a positive body language even when your team is losing or playing poorly.

Some mental training techniques for players can be useful for you as a coach as well, such as releasing negative thoughts by using thought-stopping techniques and replacing them with positive thoughts. For example, if you think your team is going to lose, stop that thought and find reasons why you believe your team can win. Remember that the words out of your mouth will naturally follow the thoughts in your head.

Remember to gain control over your emotions and not the other way around. Relaxation techniques as simple as taking deep breaths can help you keep the level head necessary to make important decisions under pressure.

Have someone film you as you coach and look at it objectively. You'll be amazed at what you find, and it will give you a glimpse of what your players see.

Finally, here is some practical advice that will help the quality of your verbal communication as well:

Be honest but genuinely positive in your words.

Switch from "self-centered" to "team-centered" pronouns: We instead of I; us instead of me; our instead of my; and ours instead of mine.

Change negative words with weak connotations for "power words": Trust instead of hope; will instead of might; and for sure instead of maybe.

State things in the positive rather than in the negative. "We can't lose this game" sends the wrong message and actually predisposes the team to think about negative consequences and perhaps highlights the fear of failure. Instead, change it to "Let's play to win with confidence and determination" sends a completely different message. Note that the second message also includes and reinforces a process orientation vs. the outcome-only orientation of the first statement.

Stay away from using "but" as it negates everything you stated before it.

Beware of yelling.

Watch conversations with assistant coaches, especially by the benches.

Make it a rule not to talk about players with other players. If it is negative, it will get back to that player and will be detrimental, but even if it is positive, be careful as it may make the player feel you have unfairly compared them or that you are playing favorites. Talk with people about them and not about anyone else.

Be vulnerable and admit when you are wrong or make mistakes. This gives you more credibility and the influence necessary to be a leader.

Being a mentally tough coach and leader is something we can all become with some effort and desire. You may already possess some or all of these characteristics, but they can always be enhanced and improved, so make it your priority to do so and you and your team will see an immediate positive impact.

Wanted: Players Who Can Solve Problems in the Game -

A Look at Why the Majority of American Players Cannot Deal with Adversity in the Game
Lang Wedemeyer
South Dakota State Head Women's Coach, NSCAA National Staff Instructor

A few summers ago, I was working with our oldest age group (1988/1989 at the time) at the Region II Olympic Development Regional Camp for girls held in DeKalb, IL. During the camp, we played our top group of players against the younger Regional Team of Midwest players born in 1990. The coach of the '90s players had them play a low-pressure type of defense in our scrimmage. It was near impossible for the players on the '88/'89 team to figure how to break it down. They continued to fail over and over through the first 45 minutes. The girls did a better job in the second half, but only after the coaching staff helped show them how to solve some of the problems they were facing.

That night, after the scrimmage, the staff sat around discussing (more accurately, lamenting) the fact that this group of players, who

are either attending or would be attending some of the best Division I schools in the Midwest and across the country, could not solve these very real game-oriented problems. It gave rise to a very simple, yet effective, training session and intra-squad scrimmage for the next day that would put these players into an environment where they would have to solve problems for themselves.

The coaching staff divided up the group of 54 players into 3 groups of 18. The three groups rotated to each of the three staff coaches/stations, where the players were placed into slightly different environments for solving problems. Group A was divided into two teams with one team playing a player down. So the two teams played 9v8 for approximately 10 minutes with no coaching. At the end of that 10 minutes, the coach then brought the two teams over and asked them to evaluate how effective they were at either taking advantage of being a player up or how they chose to deal with being a player down. The coach led the discussion, but the answers to solving some of the problems were discussed as a group by both teams. Some of the discussion points centered around these elements:

- Whether to apply high pressure vs. low pressure.
- Where to draw the restraining line.
- How, when, and where to counter attack.
- How to penetrate a packed defense and stay balanced.

This discussion took no more than 5 minutes and then the two teams' situations (up or down a player) were reversed and they were given another 10 minutes with little cueing from the coaches to see if they could solve these problems a little more effectively.

Group B was divided into two teams with one playing high pressure and one playing low pressure. This group followed the same pattern of 10 minutes of non-coached play followed by 5 minutes of discussion and another 10 minutes of play. The players' discussion points revolved around things such as:

- Where, how and when to distribute the ball out of the back.
- Breaking down a high-pressure defense.
- Breaking down a compacted defense.
- How to recognize where the space to attack was and utilizing it, along with some of the elements that make both high and low pressure defending successful.

Group C followed the same pattern of 10 minutes of non-coached play, 5 minutes of discussion, followed by another 10 minutes of play. The theme for this station was up or down a goal. One team was given a 1-goal lead with 10 minutes to play in the game. That team was asked to do whatever they could to maintain that lead while the opposing team was told to do whatever they could to get the equalizer. The teams would play out the full 10 minutes regardless of number of goals scored. During the 5 minute "half-time," I used leading questions to get the players to think about how and why they were or were not successful and how and what they could do to change that in the next 10-minute game. The two teams would then switch roles with the other team being up a goal. During that second 10-minute game, there was a little cueing (making suggestions without disrupting the flow of the play). At the end of the second 10 minutes, we analyzed the differences and reviewed how effective the two teams were.

It was a tremendous session for two very different reasons: 1) the feedback that the players gave was amazing, mainly in regard to the fact that they had never been put into these types of situations on their teams (or very rarely); and 2) they really enjoyed having the freedom and responsibility to solve problems on their own. What started to transpire was that the leaders in each group began to take control in directing their teams into ways of being successful. Certain individuals took charge in organizing their teammates, giving instruction, and solving problems.

We, as a regional staff, then took this idea and went another step further for that evening's session. We designated four captains and had them come to a meeting with the coaches. Each captain selected players off the full roster for her team. It was extremely interesting to see the dynamics of this draft. These captains were not necessarily chosen because they were the best players or the best leaders, but we took into account the number of years that they had been a part of regional camp. Not only were the coaches able to see which of these four captains had taken the time to get to know more of the people in the group, but who were the ones paying attention to the better players and the players that would be most beneficial to their teams whether that was by position, personality, strengths, combinations, etc. Some of the interesting things to note were that no one chose a goal keeper until about the 6th or 7th round. Two captains chose their closest friends first while two chose the best players (in their opinions) first. Three of the four captains got into the idea of the draft very quickly meaning that they were scouting the list of the players (listed by position) and planning their next moves.

At the beginning of the evening session, each captain called in her team, issued a warm-up, decided on what formation to play, and how they were to run their subs. They played a round robin with the top two teams tying and going to penalty kicks. Again, the captain had to decide which 5 to take the kicks. There was no coaching from the staff during these games. The teams were told that the champions would receive prizes, so there was "something" on the line. They received old Region II ODP shirts that were worn with a lot of pride through the rest of camp.

All four captains did a good job, but the best of the four in her organization (she had her starting line-up planned out before hand), her formation (based on the players' strengths that she had drafted), and the management of the game enabled her team to win out in the end.

The experiment, so to speak, of giving the game back to the players was at first very frustrating, especially when seeing them struggle with what seemed like elementary ideas on dealing with problems of the game. It soon became very liberating for the players and the coaching staff. Those feelings then progressed to real joy in seeing the players taking the game into their own hands, solving problems, and being successful. I think that the Region II ODP camp has been and continues to be a great learning environment for players of different levels and ages. In all the years of working the camp, I don't think there has ever been a single day of sessions that has made such a lasting impact on the players. As coaches, we are always lamenting the fact that there is too much emphasis on winning, playing too many games, and coach-driven trainings and competitions. Although, the activities that the staff implemented that day still had the presence of "finding a way to win," it was not in a

coach-driven environment. It was a player-driven environment — an atmosphere that allowed for many different problems to be given and where the players could sort through those problems to produce more developed game-savvy individuals and teams.

A few weeks later, I was asked by the NSCAA to do a couple of sessions for the Colorado High School Coaches Association. I took the idea of creating problems for the players and tweaked it a bit so that they would have to think about and determine how their style of play would change based on the issue at hand. I used two teams of 8 and, similar to the ODP camp, manipulated the game. I did a variety of things with that Colorado group that included:

- One team up/down a goal.
- One team up/down a player.
- One team playing low/high pressure.

I also incorporated some other style of play themes like giving one team the instruction that its emphasis was to maximize the width of the field and push most of its attack in those areas when possible. I was then talking to the spectating coaches on the sidelines about what to watch for:

- What formation did the team come up with?
- Were they able to keep those players on the flanks wide?
- How did they create space for the flank players?
- Did they put their best players wide or keep them in the middle where they usually play, etc.?

The other team was given a style-of-play issue of attacking using a target forward. Again, the same issues arose in how they adapted to this game element. This idea can be expounded upon for pretty

much anything from restraining lines to what part of the field does the team want to win the ball to what is the most successful way of attacking.

The bottom line is this, as hard as it is to relinquish control over our players and to not give them advice on every move, every kick, every decision that they make during a training session or game, in the long run these players will not only become better soccer players, but they will enjoy the game more, and I know it will increase the coach's enjoyment as well. There may be no greater way of teaching than to put players into situations, create an environment for what problems need to be solved, and guide them toward the answers without directing their every thought. In this way, coaches will evolve from mechanists to artists, and the players will develop into more instinctual problem solvers.

The Importance of Coaching Credibility

Sean McCann, PhD
USOC Sport Science and Technology

"Be more concerned with your character than your reputation, because your character is what you really are, while your reputation is merely what others think you are."

— John Wooden

While searching for new ideas on coaching and leadership, I recently read an article by Nilsen and Hernez-Broome, titled "Integrity in Leadership." It was a valuable reminder of the importance of credibility and integrity for any leader or coach.

Based on research by David Campbell of the Center of Creative Leadership, the article reported that the primary quality separating the most effective and least effective leaders was credibility, defined as "being believable and worthy of trust." Examples of credible leadership included being consistent in making decisions (even when this resulted in a short-term problem) and "walking the talk." The results of this study of business leaders were so dramatic that the

authors concluded that once a leader's behavior caused the loss of credibility, "it is probably gone for good."

This article reminded me of the times I have seen elite coaches lose credibility with their athletes. Talented coaches who lose credibility with their athletes and National Governing Body (NGB) can never retrieve this key ingredient of coaching leadership success. The two most common examples I have seen in elite coaching are: 1) giving up on athletes; and 2) disappearing in bad times, reappearing in good times (fair-weather coaching).

Giving Up on Athletes

Coaching at the elite level requires tremendous energy and sacrifices, often without significant rewards. When a coach's team or individual athletes perform poorly, it is easy for a coach to question whether the sacrifices and energy required to coach are worth the commitment. This is especially true when family or other non-coaching responsibilities also are important to the coach.

Poor performance on the field can be so discouraging that a coach's outlook can change for the worse — thinking, language and behavior can change dramatically. These changes are usually visible to other people in the coach's environment and can become poisonous.

One Olympic coach told me that her athletes would never be internationally competitive due to disadvantages the sport faces in the US. Months later at the Olympic Games, an athlete in the sport said, "It's amazing, but it is so hard to 'get up' for the Games, because nobody on the team thinks we can do anything here. Even our coach gave up on us after our last trip. She doesn't even try to

motivate us anymore. Why should I care? Half of my teammates are here just to go to the parties."

When a coach gives up on athletes, they know it, and credibility and the chance to lead toward success is gone.

Fair-Weather Coaching

Fair weather coaching is the act of disappearing when results are bad and paying attention to athletes only when things are going well. Like giving up on the athletes, coaches under tremendous pressure and stress may find it difficult not to fall into this behavior pattern. Because of time pressures, coaches often must focus their energies on the athletes with the best chances to succeed. This is simply the nature of high-pressure sport. Athletes don't always like this aspect of elite sport, but they usually understand it. On the other hand, coaches who carry this behavior to extremes may lose credibility and the ability to lead athletes.

For example, one athlete described her feelings toward her coach after winning an international competition:

"It is pathetic. When I was performing horribly, he told me I was lazy and didn't even know what I was working on. Now that I win, he is jumping in front of reporters to tell them that it was his program that 'turned things around.' It was really his assistant who worked with me when I was struggling, and we both know it. He is the same way with injured athletes, never calling them and ignoring them unless they are ready to compete. It makes you feel like a piece of meat, and it makes you want to think only about yourself."

Giving up on athletes and extreme fair-weather coaching are coaching behaviors in and of themselves — athletes learn that "coach doesn't care about me." Conversely, coaches who lose credibility become quite lonely when things are going poorly. The two-way street of goodwill and patience that can benefit a coach with struggling performers is absent when a coach loses credibility with athletes, other coaches and administrators. A coach who loses credibility loses the chance to lead, which may lead to a loss of his/her job.

Building and Maintaining Coaching Credibility

Losing credibility is devastating. What can coaches do to build and maintain it? The opening quote by Coach Wooden suggests a good starting point, character, but reputation is also important. As research has indicated, when it comes to leadership roles, perception (and reputation) can become reality. Many coaches in danger of losing credibility are unaware of it because they don't realize how they are perceived by others.

Tips for Coaches Who Want to Maintain Credibility

- Get feedback. Do you have a feedback mechanism to get an accurate reading of how others perceive you? If not, this should be a starting point. Coaches who get over the initial fear and discomfort of soliciting feedback from coaching peers and athletes find it to be extremely useful. If you are lucky, your sport organization has a system in place, but if it doesn't, you should start one.
- Increase consistency. "Walking the talk" is easy to say but often difficult to accomplish. One common mistake is to make a rule

that is applied strictly for some athletes and less so for a star athlete. This is a classic example of the kind of inconsistency that leads to a loss of credibility. Taking an occasional short-term loss of long-term credibility is rarely a mistake. On the other hand, I have frequently advised coaches not to establish rules or expectations that they are unable to enforce. If you know that you can't be consistent in your behavior, don't pretend or you will lose credibility with your athletes.

- Know your strengths and weaknesses. Loss of credibility may be related to a blind spot within yourself. Coaches who understand their own motivation, personality and preferences can build an environment that helps maintain credibility. For example, a coach who thrives on constant change and new challenges might not want to preach the gospel of consistency unless they have other people in the environment (such as a strong assistant coach) who will maintain a consistent approach.

Credibility is the key to strong leadership, and the loss of credibility is a major factor when coaches lose the ability to lead. If leading others is one of your goals as a coach, consider your credibility and determine what you need to do to build and maintain it.

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Dealing with the Prima Donna Athlete

Greg Winkler

I have played, coached, and observed countless athletic contests over the course of my lifetime. Many of the games I have coached in and observed have been at the youth and high school level. I have witnessed players behaving with poor sportsmanship, bad attitudes, or what I would call the "me" mentality. With that behavioral performance comes the reaction of the coach and what the coach does to handle the player behavior.

Being that I am a high school soccer coach, how the youth coach handles that behavior will have an impact on future teams that player will move on to. If the coach did not deal with the behavior effectively, I will have a much more difficult time with that player as a teenager.

The environment they play in creates these young "prima donnas." Many times this young athlete is physically more mature than his/her classmates and is able to run faster, jump higher, throw harder — you name it, they are better at it. The players' peers will give the athlete anything they want as long as they are on that player's team.

When I ask young kids about the behavior and its inappropriateness, the kids always know that the behavior is wrong or frowned upon, but they will allow it because the player is good. The young athlete's peers will hold the gifted player to a different standard than themselves.

Then the gifted athlete moves onto competitive youth programs where they continue to excel. Many of the coaches at these youth levels are parents, young adults, or students looking to gain coaching experience. Many of these coaches are not trained and are often more concerned with game results instead of player development both physically and emotionally.

Go watch a youth basketball game where you do not know any of the kids playing. It will not take long for you to pick out the better players. Then watch the better players and see how many mistakes they make and how the coach handles the mistakes. Many coaches may yell at the player for the mistakes and watch them continue to make it over and over. Then watch how they treat other players who are not as good. Many times you will see the other player removed from the court immediately for the same mistakes.

As the player gets older and moves into their middle school years, they may start to even get more verbal, talking back to the coach or the officials because they are able to get away with it.

If they get a good coach who is concerned about player development and not as concerned about the win/loss record, the problem may be dealt with and corrected. If the coach is concerned with the result, many times they will allow negative behavior because without that player in the line-up the chance for the victory is diminished.

At the high school level, if this player has gone unchecked, they become a real problem in the program. Their behaviors are part of them now and their peers accept it because of the talent they have. Parents also have watched this player grow up, and they have tolerated the behavior as well because of the success that comes along with the player's talents.

If I have to deal with the behavior at the varsity level, I then face resistance not only from the player but from his teammates and the parents as well.

How can you, as a coach, deal with this kind of player behavior? The first step is to identify the behavior and bring it to the athlete's attention. Take the time to teach the athletes how to behave or control themselves to prevent the behavior. Make sure the athlete understands there will be a consequence if the behavior continues.

Let me tell you about one of my former players. This player was extremely competitive, very self-motivated, and what I would consider a perfectionist. He was a 4.0 student in high school, went on to play four years of college soccer and is currently in med school.

He had difficulty dealing with referees and anything that he considered to be a "bad call." He would often throw his arms in the air and question the referee every time a call was made that he disagreed with. In the first three games, he had already picked up 3 yellow cards. I pulled him aside and told him that anytime I saw the behavior, I would take him off the field.

This was a behavior that he had done since he was 10 years old, and he was allowed to carry on that way for every coach he played

for. So what I was asking him to do was going to be very difficult for him. During the next four games, every time I saw the behavior starting I would take him off the field. He would sit for a period of time and go back in. He did not like coming off so he had to make a decision — if he wanted to play soccer, he had to get his emotions under control.

The fifth game after our discussion he started to go off, and I sent a substitute to the line to take him off. He became very upset and went berserk on the field. He was given a red card, and his teammates had to play short the remainder of the game.

I did not talk to him right away; his team was very disappointed in him as well as his own disappointment in himself. After a while we talked about the incident. The referee thought the player was yelling at him, but really he was very upset with me because I kept subbing him out of games. After our discussion about his self-control, I made a new agreement with him. I told him I would loosen the reins I had on him if he would start worrying about his game and what he could control. He did not pick up another card that season or the next two that he played for me, and he ended up becoming an all-state player as a senior.

Every coach recognizes poor behavior, but they do not feel it is that bad and they allow players to keep playing when they should be taken out of the game and the problem addressed.

My high school team recently played in our regional championship game. The team we were playing had a very talented midfielder who was known for his poor attitude, his questioning of official calls, and constant chatter. I had spoken to the coach of that team a few weeks prior to our contest, and he spoke to me about this player

and the problems he had with his behavior and mouth all season. I believed he was taking steps to keep his most talented player in line.

In our regional game, his star player was on the referee immediately, picking up a yellow card early in the first half. The player was sent off and his coach returned him to the field almost immediately as it was a tight match and there was a lot on the line. There were many more times in the first half that the player could've been sent off, however the official did not want to send this player to the bench again knowing it would be a double yellow and the end for him. My team was down 1-0 with 5 minutes to play in the match. There was a foul 30 yards from the goal and this "prima donna" player argued the call and then kicked the ball away. The referee issued the 2nd yellow and he was sent off the field. We scored on the free kick and eventually advanced to the sectional round on penalty kicks. This player was sure to have been one of the kickers in penalties.

It was a perfect example of how this player, because he was allowed to get away with this behavior all season, affected the chances of his team advancing. I am sure the coach thought he had to play this player in order to win but in the end the behavior cost his team the game.

What more might this have cost his team? How many young players observed this young man's behavior all through the season without penalty? How many more seasons will there be in this coach's future where he has to deal with this behavior?

These are the questions to ask yourself when you have an issue that you may be thinking of letting slide. Think about what is best for your program in the long run and do the right thing. As the coach, you are the adult; you set the standard for your program.

About the Author

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Practice Like a Girl, Compete Like a Boy

Training the Total Athlete
Kathleen J. DeBoer

I'd rather coach women in practice settings any day, but if we are talking about coaching in competition, I'd prefer coaching men." I have heard this statement or a variation of it from many coaches who have worked with both female and male teams in a wide variety of sports. This pattern in preferences for different genders in different situations, while not universal, is certainly common enough that it cannot be attributed to isolated coaching idiosyncrasies.

When I question those making the statements, the responses are again very similar. The preference for females in practice settings stems from the observations by these coaches that the female athletes listen better, and they are more interested in learning technique and in knowing specifically what their roles are in different situations. Since most coaches find the details of technique and strategy fascinating, the attention of their athletes to these areas is naturally affirming.

The stated preference for males in competitive situations is that male athletes can block out extraneous concerns and "just play," that they take initiative in making things happen, and that the goal of winning is never questioned and always shared, if not always accomplished. For coaches, who are universally competitive people, these responses in contests are viewed as natural and normal, and any other response is perplexing, if not utterly incomprehensible.

So what causes these differences? Do our athletes come to the gym with the predisposed characteristics to battle or to bond already hard wired into them? Or, are we training them to respond differently to practice and competition? I believe the answer is a combination of both factors.

One way to unpack the issue of predisposition is to look at how athletes choose to behave when they are not being lead or coached. A friend of mine has taught eighth graders how to play volleyball in co-ed physical education classes for over twenty-five years. He describes these patterns of behavior when the students enter the gym. The first boy who comes into the gym grabs a volleyball off the rack and either shoots baskets with it or tosses it up and hits it against the wall. The first girl who enters the gym sits down on a bleacher to wait for her friends. The next boy who enters the gym generally engages with the first boy. They start playing short court over the volleyball net or engage in a game of one-on-one at the basketball goal. The second girl who enters the gym may get a ball off the rack and sit down next to the first girl or she may sit down in a different place on the bleachers. As more boys enter the gym, the games they are playing either expand or multiply. After a number of girls are in the gym, they will get in a circle and pass and set the ball around the circle, laughing and talking as they exchange the ball.

This differentiation is not universal, meaning there are girls who will display the characteristics typical for boys and boys who sit rather than engage, but they are the rare exceptions. The teacher reported to me that this pattern of gendered behavior has not changed for the twenty-five years he has been teaching volleyball to his classes. When choosing unsupervised interaction, the males choose competitive play, and the females choose cooperative play.

What happens when athletes are being coached? The 1990 Olympic Sports Festival was held in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The eight men's and women's volleyball teams trained at Carmichael Gymnasium and an auxiliary facility. Bill Neville, a veteran coach with broad experience working with both males and females at both the elite and beginning levels, was the head of the volleyball delegation. In that role, he spent considerable time observing the practices of the various coaching staffs.

He made the following generalization about the training. First, the women's teams, regardless of the gender of the coaching staff, spent a lot more time on technique and positioning drills than the men's team; the men's teams spent a lot more time in competitive, game-like drills than the women's teams.

I tucked the comment away for further reflection and observation because I was curious as to whether this tendency was peculiar to volleyball or held true across various team sports. When I returned to my college administrative post, I watched a variety of teams in practices in order to evaluate Neville's hypothesis. The pattern he had observed in the volleyball practices held true for our basketball teams, our baseball/softball teams, and our soccer teams. Like the volleyball team practices, the women's teams spent more time

drilling on positioning and repetitive technique-oriented sequences; the men's teams spent more time in head-to-head, competitive, results-oriented sequences.

Since most of those coaching at the collegiate level had spent all of their time coaching either men or women, the coaches were unaware that this difference in training methods was so prevalent. At our institution only men coached the men's teams but both men and women were in head and assistant positions with the women's teams. As with the Olympic Sports Festival, only the gender of the athletes had an impact on the nature of the practice activities, not the gender of the coach.

When I asked our coaches to reflect on the difference, the most common speculation was that the female athletes did not have the same physical skills in terms of movement, jumping ability and power as the male athletes and, therefore good technique was more critical to their success in playing the game.

Shortly after these conversations I went to watch a friend coach his son's six-year-old basketball team. When we entered the gym the boys were engaged in a variety of activities, some were competing with each other by shooting long shots from outside the three-point line, others were playing H-O-R-S-E, still others were trying to dribble without having another child steal the ball.

The coach started the organized part of the practice with a few dribbling drills. The boys engaged in these exercises so lackadaisically that the coach stopped the drill and scolded them harshly, pointing out that dribbling was an essential skill to playing the game and they should pay attention to their method.

Next he introduced a shooting drill. My friend began by explaining to his charges how to hold the ball in their hands, where to position it in relation to their bodies and how their hands should look on follow through. During this explanation the boys fiddled and nudged each other, rarely looking at the coach. As soon as he gave them the go-ahead to practice this technique, they ran to the baskets and immediately started playing a game to see who could make the most baskets in the shortest period of time.

Shortly thereafter, about fifteen minutes into the sixty-minute workout, the coach divided the boys into teams for competitive drills, scrimmaging first in three-on-two fast break situations and progressing to five-on-five drills. These six-year-olds had no skills or movement abilities whatsoever, yet they spent most of their practice time in competitive, game-like progressions.

My next opportunity for observation was at the Women's Volleyball World Championships in Sao Paolo, Brazil, when I accompanied our national team as an advisor. Our practice times frequently overlapped with those of the other women's teams. During the course of the two weeks I watched the silver medalist Brazilian team and several of the Asian teams in training sessions.

These were the best women's volleyball teams in the world, full of elite athletes with 15-20 years of high-level training and competition. They were, for the most part, above average jumpers with great body control and movement skills. Their practices, however, were amazingly technique oriented. They worked for long periods of time on footwork drills for blocking and transitioning from defense to offense. They spent considerable time on serving and passing drills. Only occasionally, for a few minutes at the end of a training session,

did I observe anything that resembled a scrimmage or competitive exchange.

These back-to-back observations of a beginning boy's team engaged mostly in game-like activity and elite level women's teams engaged mainly in technique training made me question the rationalizing lore I had been given by my peers as to the reasons for the gender differences in training regiments.

The truth is that we as coaches are training our teams based on their strengths because they are more cooperative and easier to deal with when engaged in activities in which they are comfortable. By our methods we reinforce what they already do well by teaching females cooperative play and teaching males competitive play.

What we must realize, however, is that by focusing on technique, positioning and tactics we short-change our female athletes. We don't regularly subject them to the uncomfortable stresses of competition. In the same vein, by our focus on battle, rivalry and proving one's self in training males, we leave them under-prepared also. They don't get exposed to the difficult discipline needed to learn stress-proof technique or the repetition necessary to refine integrated tactics.

To make a female team more competitive, we must practice competing. We must accept that the "me versus you" nature of a contest can be difficult for those who choose cooperative play when left to their own devices. For females, then, competitiveness must be taught and rehearsed. On the other hand, the male worldview grounded in proving one's self in opposition to others does not lend itself to the restraint of repetitive drilling. For males, then, the

discipline to train, to learn proper technique must be taught and rehearsed.

Each of you at this point can cite examples of elite athletes in your sport who are exceptions to these stereotypes, athletes who are both rigidly disciplined and insanely competitive. Yet I venture that you could make a much longer list of those who didn't quite make it because they were accomplished in only one half of the equation.

The unanswered question for coaches is how much competing do you put into your training if you are coaching women, or how much drilling do you demand if you are coaching men? It's a tricky question. Each coach must evaluate the capacity for anxiety-producing activity among his or her athletes.

My observation is that the younger the athletes, the lower their tolerance for unpleasant experiences. Their primary motivation for engaging in the sport is to "have fun." More mature athletes realize that periods of stress in training are part of the process in pursuing athletic excellence.

I've also seen that, in most cases, a major shift from current practice does not work. Radical shifts make athletes edgy and confused about the goals of training. They quickly lose the sense of enjoyment they get from participation.

The coaches of female teams who have the most success with teaching competitiveness are verbal and straightforward about what they are doing and why. Instead of assuming their athletes know how to compete, they make the practice of competition a regular, disciplined, and evaluated part of a workout. They also verbally deconstruct the inevitable conflicts that result from forcing their

athletes into the uncomfortable situation of battling against each other. They accept the strife as part of the learning process. Finally and importantly, they are attuned to the level of anxiety on their team so they can quickly revert to calming, process-oriented drills when necessary.

Those who failed at teaching competitiveness plunged their teams into a "mano-a-mano" struggle without explanation or debriefing. The resultant fretfulness and disruption of team chemistry is generally disastrous to relationships among the players themselves and with the coach. The feminine ability to put emotions into words and the penchant to problem solve verbally results in authentic communication between coach and athletes, and among the athletes themselves is a prerequisite for success in training a female team to compete.

Basketball's Rick Pitino is the coach I have observed who had the most success with training males in repetitive, technique-specific, non-competitive sequences. He did this by separating his technical training from his team training. His morning sessions were individual — one or two athletes at a time, short — 20 minutes, and frequent — four times per week. The focus was completely on technique — shooting the three, crossover dribble, stutter step and accelerate, head/ball fake and shoot, free throws, etc. The athlete was corrected each time he performed a technique incorrectly regardless of the result of his efforts.

I observed a session one day in which a player missed 90 % of his shots. The coach running the drill stood where he could only see the player's form, not whether he made the basket or not. His

comments were directed at the prescribed shooting form, which was correct most of the time. The coach said nothing about the misses.

The sessions were also at game speed and very efficient. The athlete was breathing hard, yet aerobically, most of the time and, depending on his position, took between 250 and 400 shots per session.

The main reason for the success of this training regimen is the individual nature of the sessions. The athlete was working only to satisfy the coach and the soul focus of the coach was the technical accuracy of a particular movement. The absence of rivalry and very clear feedback patterns allowed for concentration on method rather than outcome. Unlike the successful female practices, there was no conversation and no explanation.

The mundanity of the individual training was numbing, even to me as a casual and occasional observer. But the effectiveness is also clear. Pitino's players are known at the professional level for their excellent fundamentals and healthy self-confidence in their abilities. Their technical efficiency has also been said to mask physical limitations, allowing them a couple of years or a season as a professional that they might not otherwise have had.

Training complete athletes will not happen automatically. It takes purposeful attention by the coach to concentrate on the part of successful competing that is difficult for them. Females must be taught, through frequent repetition, how to benefit from and be comfortable with head-to-head competition. Males must be taught, through daily rehearsal, how to benefit from and be comfortable with repetitive sequences focused on technique and tactics.

Without knowledge of each gender's predispositions, coaches easily gravitate toward a training regimen that reinforces that gender's strengths. The results are frustrated coaches and semi-prepared athletes. Just as we take responsibility for all other aspects of training, coaches must be accountable for teaching their athletes either the competitive fire (female) or the technical discipline (male) that is essential for athletic success.

About the Author

Kathleen DeBoer is the author of the book *Gender and Competition: How Men and Women Approach Work and Play Differently* and is currently serving as the Executive Director of the American Volleyball Coaches Association.

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E-Goals = Excellence

Erica Carlson, M.A.

So, the question is, "Why does goal setting seem so easy, but is so hard to do well?" Goal setting is one of the most effective skills an athlete can learn to use to develop excellent performance. It's important to remember that developing focus of the mind while under pressure is a highly developed skill. E-goals (Effective, Every day, and Evaluative) are a great tool for developing this skill.

The proven benefits of goal setting

- Goals improve performance
- Goals improve the quality of practices
- Goals help clarify expectations
- Goals help relieve boredom by making training more challenging
- Goals increase intrinsic motivation to achieve
- Goals increase pride, satisfaction, and self confidence

It is interesting to note that Olympic level athletes value goals primarily for improving their performance. Collegiate athletes value goals to improve chances of winning, and youth athletes value goals for increased enjoyment in activities.

E-goals are your ticket to Excellence. In order for goals to create Excellent execution, your goals must meet three criteria. Goals need to be:

1. Effective — goals need to be challenging, realistic, and have a plan. Effective goals include strategies of "how to" achieve the goal.
2. Every day — goals need to be set every day in every training session, every practice, every game. This process requires commitment, courage, and takes 1-3 minutes per day with a big pay-off.
3. Evaluative — you must record and revisit your goals every day to check your progress and reset your goals for the next session or game. Evaluation will keep you focused, motivated, and ready to work on the most important part of the game.

There are four different types of goals you need to know.

- Long-Term Goals — Goals that you focus on for the upcoming two months to one year. These goals are usually, but not always, more outcome-oriented (see below).
- Short-Term Goals — Goals for the next 2 to 6 weeks. These goals are usually, but not always, performance oriented.
- Outcome Goals — are commonly set by teams and groups and focus more on results. An example of an outcome goal would be to win State Cup or to earn a scholarship.
- Performance Goals — Goals focus on improving your personal or team performance, all the "little things" like connecting passes, work rate, or number of shots on goal in a training session or game.

E-goals use a combination of long-term, short-term, outcome and performance goals. Effective goals create motivation and confidence for athletes. Athletes need to feel as though they can reach a goal with hard work and skill development. Research has also shown that most athletes preferred moderately challenging goals over difficult or very difficult goals. If goals are set too unrealistically high, failure is likely. Setting goals too easy will not allow your team to progress, overcome challenges, and increase confidence. The rule is to make goals challenging but realistic.

How to set goals with your team or individual players

Step 1: Set a long-term goal — This is usually a goal that you want your team and individual players to accomplish within the next six months to a year. This may be an outcome or performance goal. An example of a long-term outcome goal is to make it to regionals or win the league.

Step 2: Set 1-3 short-term goals with strategies — These goals are often more performance oriented, but still relate back to the long-term goal. An example of a performance goal is to "apply pressure and press." This is a great performance goal. Now, to become truly effective, there must be a strategy for the goal. These strategies should be the "how to" of the performance goal. The coach must decide what three things you need to do to make that happen.

Goal	Strategy
Apply pressure and press	Use offside tactic and space

Goal	Strategy
	Compacting defense both length and width
	Team shape

Step 3: Set 1-3 Every day goals — The goals are created every day for the practice field, training sessions, game, and tournaments. These goals, like all the others, need to be written down. Every day goals need to be based on your teams' long-term and short-term goals. These goals will increase focus during practice and allow the team to monitor progress during practice and competitive experiences. It is a great tool for helping players to take responsibility for performance in practice because they are able to monitor their performance based on goals.

Your E-Goals

Long-Term Goal	
Goal	Strategy

Short-Term Goal	
Goal 1.	Strategy (the "how to") 1. 2. 3.

Short-Term Goal	
Goal 2.	Strategy 1. 2. 3.
Goal 3.	Strategy 1. 2. 3.

Every Day Goals	
Date:	
Today's Goal 1. 2. 3.	Accomplished Yes/No

At this point you have effective, every day goals that are sending the team on a path toward excellent performance. By completing these worksheets, the players have increased the chances of accomplishing their goals, therefore improving their performance and confidence. However, the most important step comes next.

Step 4: Evaluate — As the player decides on effective every day goals, it's important for each player to write them all down. Writing the goals down requires a commitment that goes beyond just thinking about the goals. Many athletes start out a practice or game with "thoughts" on what they want to accomplish during the game.

However, these "thoughts" often do not have strategies and do not have a high level of commitment because there is no form of accountability. Without a method of accountability, it is difficult to evaluate goals. This is the biggest reason goal setting fails athletes. The coaches and players do not evaluate the completed goals. For athletes to stay motivated and coaches to keep team needs prioritized for practice, it is vital that both are clear about how they are progressing and what the athlete is achieving in terms of their goal(s). When a practice session or game is over, whether a win or loss, goals met or not, the goals will still be written and waiting for the player to evaluate. The player must come back to their goals and strategies to evaluate the outcome(s). Once the player has evaluated the goals, new goals must be set for the next game or practice. This process should happen with both team goals and individual goals. It is recommended that the coach have each of the players keep a notebook filled with their "Every day Goal" sheets to enable athletes to write, evaluate (accomplished?) and reset goals. The players can keep this notebook with their soccer gear at all times. Regular check-ins with coaches, team captains, team members, assistant coaches, sport psychology consultants, and their own written goals are effective ways to continue the goal setting process over the course of the season.

Goal setting is imperative for teams and players to perform consistently and with confidence. Goal setting, when properly executed, like a great play, is a one-way ticket to build confidence and improve performance and, therefore, outcomes (e.g., winning or feeling great). Goals are specific pieces of performances that require adjustment and continual progression. With proper implementation of E-goals, goal setting can send the team on the way to their biggest dreams possible, one step at a time.

Why We Don't Set Team Goals
Ed Dudley

Not every coach uses goal setting as a means to motivate the team. Ed Dudley, head coach of Marian High School girls and the Gladiator Soccer Club explains why goals don't work!

If you asked 100 coaches if they set team or individual goals for the season, 99 of them would say they do. My philosophy on this is the polar opposite. I've never set team or individual goals with any of my club, high school or college teams. And, if winning games and championships is a criterion for success, the Marian High School girls' team won 6 consecutive State Championships between 1998 and 2003. The University of Nebraska at Omaha college team has advanced to the NCAA Division II final eight, five years in a row and won the National Championship in 2005!

When you set goals, you set limitations on your team's possibilities of reaching their potential. In addition, players get tired of hearing the same old, recycled, rah-rah stuff over and over!

Another potential problem with setting goals is that it deals with a future event or outcome. And since the future is not a tangible thing, and in reality does not exist, why add more clutter to the players' minds? The only thing that really matters is right now, this very moment. When the coach does convey this "let's just go play" mentality to the team, it is very liberating. Your practices will

improve, game time performance will improve and mental performance will improve!

Coaches, spend too much time living in the past and worrying about the future. Slow down a little and "smell the roses." In other words, enjoy right now, this very moment.

Practice in the now, coach in the now, and most importantly let your players play in the now. When your team plays in the moment, it frees them (and the coach) of worrying about the potential outcome. Try it — you won't be disappointed!

You Were Hired to Win Now or Win Consistently

April Heinrichs

You just landed your "dream job," now it's time to set your vision and philosophy in motion. Before you get started, it is important to understand the philosophy of those who hired you. Assess how their vision of the program matches up to your vision. Hopefully, you're on the same page, or you have some internal persuasion issues to take on along with the coaching task at hand. Major considerations are: Does your employer want you to win now or win consistently? Do you have a one-year contract or five-year guaranteed contract?

In the US, we have four primary models for developing winning programs:

1. Win, despite the odds (requires great talent pool).
2. Throw money at the sport.
3. Youth movement (select a younger pool and give them the player/team development opportunities).
4. Build a "pipeline" from the top down or the grassroots up.

Leaders Begin with the End in Mind

As the coach, you are the leader of your program. If you can focus on building a vertically integrated program, it becomes a matter of re-loading and not re-building to sustain the level of competitive excellence you desire. In order to do that, you must create a realistic and durable cycle for player development, team development, coach development, and probably support staff development at the international level. You start with where you want to be at the end of the year or the end of a five-year cycle and build backwards.

The first step is developing and communicating your goals, objectives and plan.

- What do you want the athletes to be able to achieve by the end of your goal?
- How can you help coaches implement the requisite technical, tactical and psychological skills necessary for international success?
- What if a player or coach leaves the program? Have you identified another to fill the role so the program doesn't sustain a setback?
- Does he/she have the ability to step in immediately and positively impact the team?
- Do you like your team's or program's culture?

  - If yes, how do you sustain it over time and as your program expands?
  - If you don't like the culture, what is your plan to change the culture?
  - Does your administration buy into the plan? If not, identify challenges and opportunities to advocate for your plan.

Engage politically, even though you just want to coach your team. Knowledge is power!

Identifying and Developing Talent Now with a Vision for the Future

Player development is not an exact science in which we can predict "when" a player will be able to compete at the international level. Players need time and opportunities at the national team level to become confident at the training level and then prove himself/herself in the international arena.

One of the greatest challenges in identifying and developing players is the size of your country. What level of confidence do you have in your selection system — have you found all the best players and/or athletes? Building a "seamless" scouting network is going to facilitate success as quickly and securely as training the athletes once you have them in camp.

Another challenge is the varying degrees of the athletes' physical and emotional maturity. It is important to realize that early maturation in sport is not a good indicator of later sport success. Labeling a young soccer player "the next Mia Hamm" is not only an overstatement, but it does the young player a disservice in labeling her before she is ready to take the responsibility of America's soccer's success on her shoulders, like Mia Hamm once did.

Another factor influencing the cycle of development and identification of athletes is one where the coach or coaches watch a competition, identify the athlete(s), select them for the next level. The athlete then receives training and games experience, is evaluated by the coach or coaches, selected again and moved to the appropriate

level of competition. After your players perform in training, they must prove they can thrive in the "competitive cauldron."

More and more we must put national team players on national team fields with national team coaches at the international level. Does your National Governing Body have the resources to give your players/teams the right amount of international games? If not, how can you supplement this much-needed "games" environment?

For the female athlete, playing against boys is great for their athletic development and should be pursued. The coach must have a deep understanding of the value and its limitations. Playing against boys often elevates the competitiveness of a training or scrimmage environment, which can be beneficial, but it also limits your player's ability to demonstrate and refine her "personality" when the boys are physically quicker, faster and stronger, yet not tactically superior. Over time, if too many games with boys are scheduled, the female athlete can potentially lose motivation, confidence and desire to experiment. The key here is to find quality environments, not over schedule games against boys.

When is it right to create a "youth movement" in your selection process? If you do not have the players to compete now, if you believe the future is brighter, if you lack quality playing environments for the best players in your country, and if your players are performing now but a big turnover is expected soon, then now is the time to plan for your successes down the road.

A critical factor for success at the National Team level or at any level, is the belief you're on the right track, confidence you've sought outside input for your plan, persistence to overcome the many challenges, and the unwavering and unflappable spirit you embody

despite the outside pressures — and there will be pressures. It is the ability for you to "stay the course" when the external pressures increase.

While coaching the US Women's National Team for five years, we rarely entered a tournament with the focus to win. Our goals weren't simply to win; rather, our goals were to provide the team with the opportunity to develop, develop younger players and recovering players, look for good chemistry in groups on the field, test players in escalating pressurized situations, allow them the opportunity to experiment and to emphasize winning, but never did we train, play or compete with a "win at all cost" attitude.

If you do this, you will surely make decisions that hinder individual and team development rates, team cohesion, "what if" planning and your own vision of winning when it matters. It goes without saying — we played to win, but never at the expense of a player's opportunity to develop or at the team's opportunity to grow within a tournament. Anyone can tear down a building, but your job is to build it and quite often from the ground up.

Have a one, two or five-year plan. Be flexible within it to adjust based on factors that evolve over time, stick to your plan (don't be thrown off course because you lost a game or tournament), know the experience you bring to the job puts you in the unique position to know what it's going to take to succeed, and most importantly don't let outside forces, naysayers, media, administrators or the long list of those who never attend training influence your confidence, decisions and vision!

Priorities for the US Women's National Team

- Periodization
- Training methods and mentality
- Technical and tactical development
- Teaching psychological skills training
- Creating a competitive and challenging environment for elite athletes
- Providing consistent and immediate feedback on an individual basis
- Integrate performance enhancement expertise – the "margin of victory"
- Staying the course with a "growing vs. winning" philosophy

Priorities for the Youth National Teams

- National Team players on National Team fields with National Team coaches
- Creating a competitive and challenging environment for elite athletes
- Training methods and mentality
- Self-coaching
- Physical preparedness
- Objective and periodic physical testing
- Sustained year-round programming
- Teaching psychological skill training
- Guaranteed international games year
- Training camps per year
- Integrate performance enhancement expertise – the "margin of victory"

Keys to Our Success

- The talent pool
- The "massive" infrastructure
- Decision-making
- Resources/financials
- Organizational skills
- Vertical integration
- From our Under 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 21, and Senior Women's National Teams
- Communication with the "sphere of influence"
- Consistent application of the principles from our Youth to the Senior Team

The structure for "sustained competitive excellence" in Women's Soccer is a highly evolved system of identification, evaluation, development and creating highly competitive environments for all the athletes starting at age 13. The concepts are adaptable to any sport. Depending on the level of athlete you are coaching, you may not have the number of steps in the pyramid, but the concepts can be developed to provide you with a program that can methodically develop players, coaches and administrators that all influence performance and assist in your goals of winning consistently.

About the Author

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Great Players Don't All Think Alike

Peter Broadley, M.Ed.
Director of Soccer Operations, EXACT Sports,
NSCAA Academy Staff, NC USYSA ODP Staff

The best coaches understand the player's mind. The following is a new analysis of elite soccer players' attitudes at the forward and midfield position.

"The aim of every soccer player and the coaches guiding them should be to develop a healthy lifestyle and well-shaped mental and emotional attitudes that allow the player to maximize physical and technical potential."

— Bill Beswick, Sport Psychologist and England National Team Psychologist

What Bill Beswick is saying in his book, Focused for Soccer, is that players' mental and emotional attitudes are of paramount importance for achieving on-the-field success. In order to develop the best development plan for athletes, coaches need to understand their own players' attitudes. Certainly, we can see with our eyes which players have poor physical technique and develop a training

regimen for them based on that. However, what about what occurs inside the players' heads? Coaches frequently ignore this component of athlete success, which is a serious mistake.

In January of 2007, a 200-question psychometric diagnostic (the EXACT Sports Competitive Athlete Psychological Inventory) was administered to players invited to the USL and MLS combines. The objective of the diagnostic was to identify the key psychological ingredients for success at the elite collegiate level and to report back on these findings to the soccer community at large. While much of what the diagnostic uncovered is already conventional wisdom in the soccer community, what is intriguing is that this is the first time that we've really dived into players' minds to understand what the key ingredients for success are. This article quantifies the attitudes and behaviors of players with easily understood metrics that are useful for soccer coaches.

An Important Note for Coaches: It should be clear that each player is an individual who has a unique set of skills, behaviors, and perspectives. These findings can only serve as loose guideposts for coaches in considering what some of their players' strengths and weaknesses could be. Additionally, the weaknesses addressed herein are really opportunities for coaches to improve the on-the-field and off-the-field performance of their players. The attributes measured by these tests are flexible — as a coach, you can impact how players score on each of these metrics. Nothing is set in stone, but it is certain that a coach's guidance plays a strong part in shaping a player's future.

There are Quantifiable Differences between Elite Forwards and Midfielders

It is particularly exciting to see that these results are the nation's best male college players. The test was administered to those players who have excelled at their positions. The following three points were uncovered:

- As expected, forwards are more free-spirited than their peers on the field. They are exceptionally competitive but less "coachable."
- Coaches will be surprised to see that midfielders were much less competitive than the forwards; however, they showed strong adaptability to social norms, which is indicative of a strong value system.
- All athletes who took the diagnostic scored very high on their training attitudes. In fact, on absolute terms, virtually all athletes measured with this behavioral diagnostic scored very high on every metric. This is not surprising given that the diagnostic was completed by some of the nation's best players.

The remainder of this article will discuss position-specific attributes of forwards and midfielders, highlighting each position's three strongest and three weakest scores.

Coaching Forwards: Make Time for Feedback that Promotes Leadership and Run Exercises that Reward Persistence

Key Strengths	Key Development Opportunities
Competitive	Coachability
Achievement Motivation and Confidence	Acceptance of Responsibility

Key Strengths	Key Development Opportunities
Leadership	Persistence to Goals
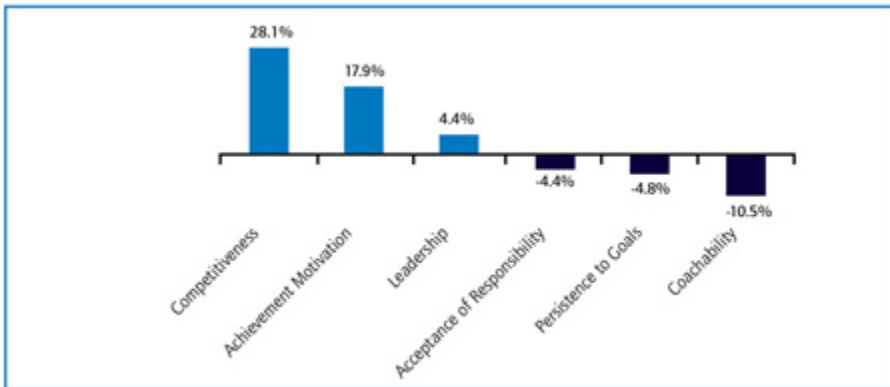
Figure 1: Comparative Scores of Forwards

It can be difficult it to identify, recruit, and develop forwards. They must excel both on and off of the field. Relative to other players, forwards are strong in competitiveness, self-confidence, and leadership attributes. This probably comes as little surprise. So what are the developmental opportunities for forwards? As illustrated in Figure 2, it is clear that forwards scored relatively low on their coachability. What is also surprising is that forwards scored lower on persistence to goals even though they are highly competitive and motivated. These findings present a clear case that coaches should, in fact, pay even more attention to developing forwards to be successful and play a stronger coaching role, regardless of the how challenging they are to coach. Sticking to the task and persistence are critical for a forward to be a successful goal scorer.

So how can a coach manage players who do not want to be coached? Here are some tips that may be helpful.

1. Coaches need to give their forwards some additional attention at every practice session, maybe with a brief discussion about their last game, or the opposition in the next game, or how they may need to adjust their thinking to break down the defense. You can help to focus their attention on acceptance of responsibility as a team leader and sticking to their goals for the season with just a few minutes with them before, during or after each practice. Continuing to make runs even though they may not always receive the ball is critical to their ultimate success in scoring goals.

2. Building consistency in practice every day with repetition exercises like turning and shooting or working through patterns with their striking partner(s) in and around the penalty area may help them to be more persistent with scoring chances and not give up too easily on opportunities to score. Diagram 1, below, provides an example of a pattern exercise for two forwards. This type of training allows for much needed interaction with the coach and his/her key players who most certainly will be expected to produce the goals that will win the next game.

Diagram #1 description: The exercise is 2 versus 2 with the forwards attacking one goal. Target players are positioned in counter attack goals and are rotated in to the exercise. You could match your starting forwards up against your starting center backs to make the exercise more challenging, or have all of your forwards and attacking midfielders involved, taking turns to defend. The coach releases a ball to a server who starts the exercise after a goal is scored by either team or when the ball goes out of play.
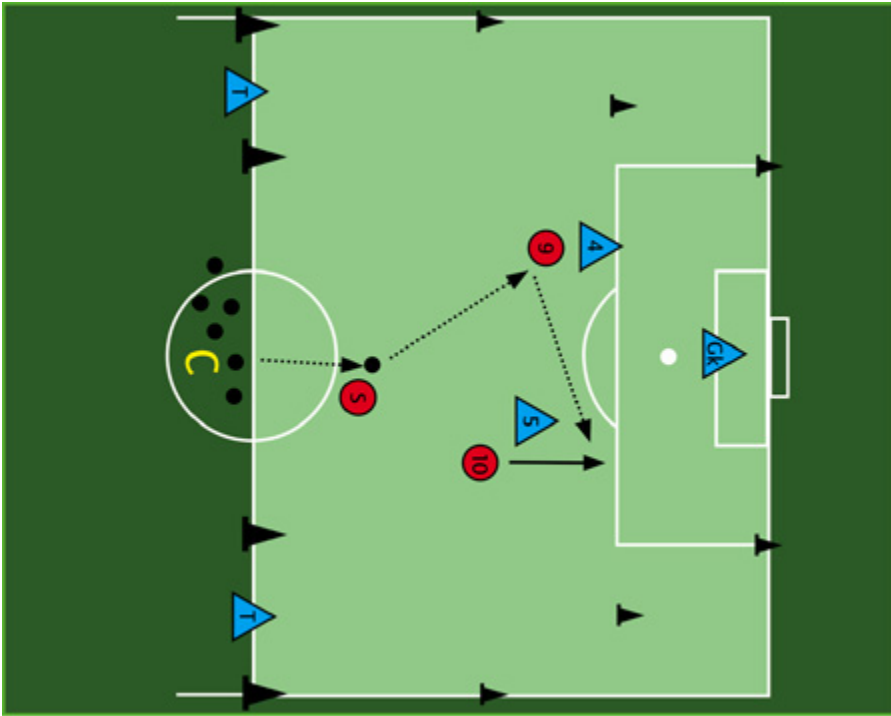
Diagram #1: Pattern Exercise for 2 Forwards

Coaching Midfielders: Run Training Exercises that Are Very Goal-Oriented

Key Strengths	Key Development Opportunities
Normative Values	Competitiveness
Achievement Motivation	Self-confidence
Acceptance of Responsibility	Persistence to Goals
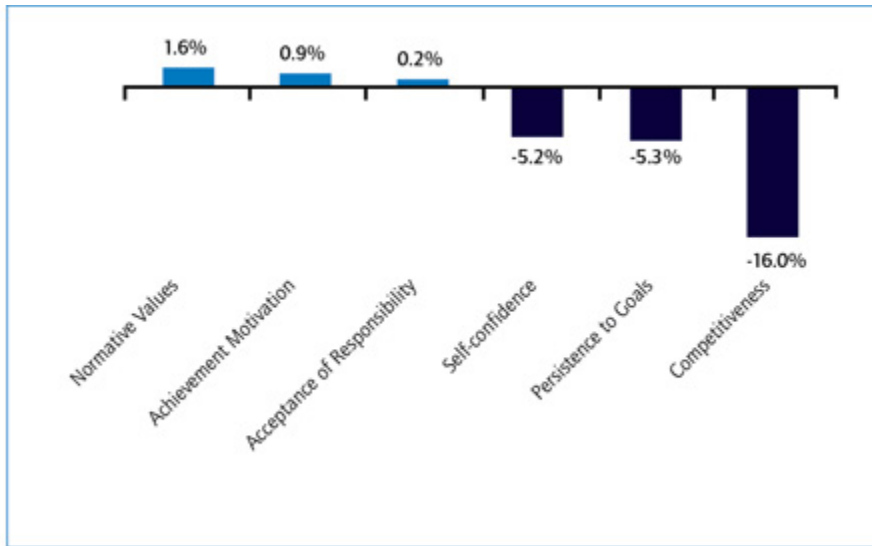
Figure 2: Comparative Scores of Midfielders

These results suggest that aspiring midfielders do not believe that being competitive is as important for their position as it is for other positions, such as for forwards. How can this be so when many of us would argue that the midfield is where many of the major battles take place for supremacy over the opponents? As coaches we are very aware of the specific roles that may be attached to midfielders, however do we take this into account in our training or simply lump them all together with possession drills? If we are asking a particular style of player to fulfill a defensive midfield role, do we train them in that role in a competitive practice environment that allows for opportunities to be a ball winner and destroy the opponents attacking momentum through the middle? Very often these midfielders find themselves playing keep away in a 40x40 yard square with no direction and no goal to defend and only possession in mind. Midfielders are prone to receiving mixed messages about what is expected of them in practice and in games: should they be the playmaker, winger, or the enforcer?

It is the coach's responsibility to build a competitive and confident team. Confidence, for instance, can be created by providing your players with positive feedback both "in the moment" and on a regular basis. Feedback should be given based on how hard the player worked to achieve their objective, regardless of whether or not they were successful. Many coaches make the mistake of providing positive feedback only if a certain outcome was achieved, such as a goal scored or a win. But to build self-confidence coaches must provide feedback on the process of achieving that goal. There are also very precise training exercises that can be created to slowly build the confidence in players so that they are ready to take on more challenges and reach their goals. Diagrams 2 and 3 show two examples for how these attributes may be improved in practice.

When playing a possession game for midfielders there should always be a goal in mind for both teams. A specific number of passes or playing to a target player or into an end zone are some examples. Players must be aware that you have confidence in their ability to perform when they are called on to play and many times this confidence must be developed and solidified in competitive practices that give them a chance to succeed. Diagram #2, below, provides an example of a game for midfielders.

Diagram #2 description: In this exercise, players must connect at least 3 passes before playing to the target player to score. The first team to score 10 goals wins. Players rotate in, starters and reserves are mixed and the game can incorporate the forwards. The coach can serve a ball in after a goal is scored in a variety of ways that encourages players to fight for possession.
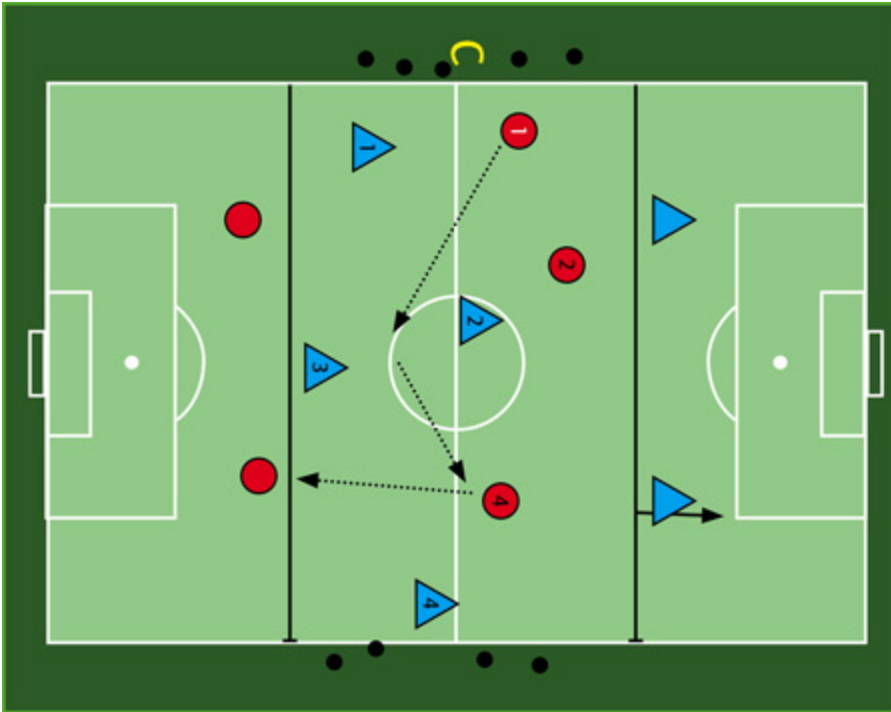
Diagram #2: Midfielder Practice to Develop Competitiveness

In the modern game, it is extremely difficult for one player to completely dominate the midfield, even on the international level. Players may find it hard to stick to their goals if they feel that they are alone in their endeavor during a game. Working together toward a common goal is very important for the midfield unit, as dominance over the opponents is often marked by who controls the midfield space on the field. However this is not enough as it must be dominance with a view to penetration to goal if they are to win the game. Diagram #3, below, provides an example of a game that helps build confidence with domination in the midfield third.

Diagram #3 description: Play starts in the midfield third and uses the whole field. 4 versus 4 + 2 neutral players; possession should be maintained for at least 4 passes, and on the 4th pass 3 players may break out of the midfield zone toward their opponent's goal. One

defender and a goalkeeper are waiting to defend their goal against the 3 attacking players. Progressions may be 2 touches, increased number of passes before attacking the goal or adding another defender. If the shot on goal is saved, the GK may deliver the ball directly to his team in the midfield third or use his back defender to assist. The attacking players must retreat into the midfield third. If the shot misses the goal then the coach restarts the exercise from the center line.
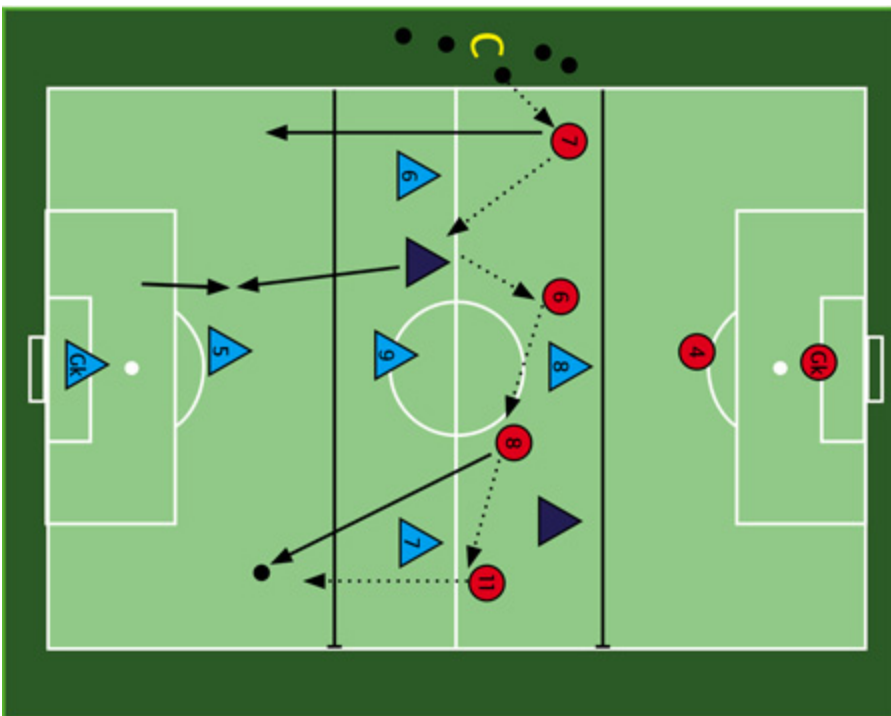
Diagram #3: Midfield Game to Foster Team Play and Build Confidence

Relative to the other positions, midfielders need to be challenged to compete for the midfield space on the field and taught to dominate opponents for as long as possible during a game, just as we expect a forward to dominate the opposition defense to create scoring chances. Competitiveness can be encouraged over time with coaches guiding players through practices focused on making

decisions that enable midfielders to keep the upper hand and fulfill their role for the duration of the game. All the while coaches should provide positive feedback for aggressive play.

Conclusion

Coaches who have more and better information have a chance to be better coaches. This article serves as a useful guide to coaches in providing a glimpse into the mindset of elite college soccer players. It is important to share the results with the soccer community in order to identify position-specific training tips and ideas that will improve the players' developmental opportunities. These results and suggested ideas can serve as starting points for coaches to begin reflecting on the very specific needs of their players in each position. It is important to understand the behaviors and attitudes of the players on your team. By better understanding the individual characteristics, coaches can develop the best training programs specific to their players and their team.

It's All in the Eyes! The Psychology of Success and Failure for Penalty Takers

Greg Wood and Dr. Mark Wilson

As we begin another year of top flight soccer, it is inevitable that penalty kicks will play a major factor in the outcome of some of the most important matches in world soccer. In fact, the frequency of this set piece has shown a steady increase in the last few major international tournaments (Armatas, Giannakos, & Hatzimanouil, 2007). Despite the expected advantage to the kicker, a surprisingly high percentage of penalty kicks are missed in games of this magnitude. For example, three recent European Champions League finals were decided by penalty shootouts (2001, 2003, and 2005), with a relatively high percentage of kicks being missed (14 out of 31 shots, or 45 %).

Due to the magnitude of such performance failure, sport psychologists have tried to explore what variables contribute to suboptimal performance in this task. In a recent study, Jordet, Hartman, Visscher, C, & Lemmink (2007) explored the effect of stress, fatigue, skill level and luck on the outcome of penalty kicks

and found that only stress could significantly account for performance failure. While this may not be surprising—anxiety's negative influence on performance is well known—the precise mechanisms behind such effects on penalty kicking performance are still unclear. How does anxiety disrupt performance? At the University of Exeter, UK, we have been exploring the eye-behaviors and attentional control of penalty takers shooting under low and high anxious conditions using eye-tracking technology. We hoped that anxiety's effect on the eye behaviors of penalty takers might shed some light on this important question.

Shooting Strategies

One of the first studies on penalty kicks to make suggestions about the eye behaviors of shooters was carried out by Kuhn (1988). In this study, a sample of 66 penalty kicks from European soccer was assessed via video analysis to explore what players were looking at prior to kicking. The author proposed two kicking strategies: keeper-dependent and keeper-independent. The keeper-dependent strategy sees the kicker focus on the goalkeeper prior to shooting in an attempt to monitor the keeper's anticipatory movements and then shooting to the opposite direction. The keeper-independent strategy sees the kicker ignore the movements of the goalkeeper and instead look where they intend to aim. As these strategies were defined using video observations, no actual eye-behavior data was collected and as such, the kicking strategies identified remain an approximation at best.

In a series of studies (see Wood & Wilson, in press) we attempted to firstly explore how effective penalty takers are at utilizing a keeper-dependent strategy. For this, 14 male, experienced university

soccer players wore eye-tracking equipment while looking at the center of the goal but attempting to hit areas just inside the posts of a 5-a-side soccer goal. Results suggested that participants hit significantly closer to the center of the goal when they looked centrally while trying to hit optimal areas inside of each post, compared to when they looked at the optimal areas and tried to shoot to these. In essence, when the eyes were constrained, centrally shots became more centralized.

In a follow-up study, penalty takers took a series of shots with a goalkeeper present to explore if the kicking strategies outlined by Kuhn were actually utilized by penalty takers. We also explored how effective each strategy was in generating successful shots (e.g., those farthest from the goalkeeper). As Kuhn suggested, the keeper-dependent strategy was the most frequently used strategy. However, we uncovered a previously undocumented strategy that we went on to label the opposite-independent strategy. This strategy sees kickers look to one direction and shoot to the other in an obvious attempt to deceive the goalkeeper. The results of this second study again illustrated that a centrally focused gaze strategy (keeper-dependent) brought about shots that hit closer to the goalkeeper, making them more likely to be saved. Furthermore, worse performing kickers were more reliant on the keeper-dependent strategy and better performers used the keeper-independent strategy, looking where they intended to hit.

Why It's Important to Look Where You're Shooting

Intuitively, it seems obvious that in most aiming-based sports you need to look where you intend to shoot. For example, it would be quite absurd to expect an archer to hit the bull's-eye while not

focusing on the target or a basketball player to take free throws while looking into the crowd. Yet for some reason soccer players seem to adopt a suboptimal strategy when attempting to hit accurate shots.

In aiming, the eyes play a crucial role in providing information that is required in the planning and production of accurate responses (e.g., force and direction). It could be argued that due to the size of the target area in soccer, the level of accuracy is not as critical as archery or basketball. This is especially the case if the goalkeeper dives early, leaving most of the goal as an unprotected scoring area. However, adopting such an approach undoubtedly relinquishes some control over the situation from the kicker to the goalkeeper. For example, what if the keeper doesn't dive and remains stationary? What if they guess the way you intend to shoot at the last minute?

In a recent high-profile example from the English FA cup semi-final, Dimitar Berbatov hit a feeble shot directly at the keeper in the penalty shootout and explained his miss as follows: "I was looking for the goalkeeper and in the last moment he took the angle I was going for, so he saved it" (Berbatov, 2009). From a psychological viewpoint, relinquishing control in this manner is seen as counterproductive. In fact, those kickers that feel they are not in control of the outcome of penalty kicks are found to be significantly more susceptible to performance failure (Jordet, Elferink-Gemse, Lemmink, & Visscher 2006).

The truth is, in penalty kicks the kicker has the most control over the outcome. If a shot is struck at a sufficient pace and hit accurately just inside of either post then a goalkeeper will have insufficient time in order to react and save it. Furthermore, research examining the

visual search strategies of keepers in penalty shots suggests that they use information sources from the lower body (legs and hips) to predict shot direction, not where the kicker is looking (e.g., Savelsbergh, Williams, van der Kamp, & Ward, 2002). So utilizing a "target-focused" strategy should not give any clues to the keeper regarding shot location. Research here and elsewhere consistently shows that the optimal strategy for kickers to adopt is a target focused one, independent of the goalkeeper. Utilizing this attentional strategy provides the necessary information to guide an accurate shot.

Anxiety-Induced Attentional Disruptions

In study 1, when participants were asked to hit each corner of the goal, every single participant aligned their eyes with where they intended to hit. It was only in study 2, when a goalkeeper was introduced that other attentional strategies (keeper-dependent or opposite-independent) were employed. Therefore, it seems that the mere presence of a goalkeeper disrupted the optimal attentional outlook of soccer players taking penalty kicks. Why?

When we are anxious it is widely accepted that we show an attentional bias to threatening stimuli in the environment. In a penalty kick scenario, the goalkeeper is the primary threatening source in the environment. His actions heighten the level of uncertainty with regard to the outcome and threaten the potential success of the kicker. In a further study (see Wilson, Wood & Vine, 2009), we tested this hypothesis by asking soccer players to take kicks under low and high anxious conditions and monitored how they attended to the goalkeeper. We were especially interested in how anxiety-induced changes in their eye movements affected their

shooting accuracy. Results showed that when anxious, soccer players showed a predisposition to look at the goalkeeper earlier and for longer periods of time. Furthermore, and consistent with previous studies, such centralized disruptions in eye movements also resulted in shots being hit closer to the goalkeeper. Put simply, where the eyes look, shots tended to follow!

Implications for Goalkeepers

In a follow-up study, we explored the implications of these findings from a goalkeeper's perspective. Research from mainstream cognitive psychology would suggest that anxious individuals are more distractible, especially to threatening stimuli. Therefore, an actively distracting goalkeeper may be more likely to draw the attention of an anxious penalty taker. There is again some anecdotal evidence from professional soccer that may support this. Former Liverpool F.C goalkeeper, Bruce Grobbelaar, rationalized his distracting behavior in an infamous shootout as follows: "The biggest memory I have is the 1984 European Cup final against Roma and my 'spaghetti legs' routine during the penalty shoot-out that won us the trophy. People said I was being disrespectful to their players, but I was just testing their concentration under pressure. I guess they failed that test" (Jackson, 2005).

We asked 18 university soccer players to take penalty kicks under high and low-anxiety conditions with a stationary and distracting goalkeeper (waving his arms) to compare the effect on attentional control and performance. We found that when anxious, participants looked at the distracting goalkeeper earlier and for longer periods of time. Yet again these disruptions in gaze behavior made shots more likely to hit centralized locations and also increased the likelihood

that participants would fail to score the kick (saved or missed shot). From this it seems that distracting techniques of this kind may have real benefits from a goalkeeper's perspective.

Implications for Penalty Takers and Coaches

So what can players and coaches do about this? Well firstly, a penalty kicking strategy that is fundamentally linked to the actions of the goalkeeper should be discouraged. This strategy relinquishes control of the situation and is likely to increase the anxiety of the kicker. This strategy is only effective if the keeper dives early, whereas if he remains stationary or dives late, an inaccurate centralized shot is probable.

Instead, coaches should encourage penalty takers to practice penalty-kicking routines that encompass a target-focused strategy, providing the performer with the optimal target information to generate an accurate shot. Training that focuses on guiding the performer to targets or optimal goal locations should serve to strengthen eye-shot coordination and also will allow the eyes to provide the brain with the necessary visual information for accurate shooting. It is likely that such training will not only enable the taker to utilize the best shooting strategy but will empower the kicker to claim more control over the situation, making disruptions in gaze behavior and choking under pressure less likely.

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Mind Games

Patrick Maskall

The following article was originally published in Champions Magazine.

Bill Shankly once famously told a player, "The problem with you, son, is that your brains are all in your head!"

The cliché that football is a physical game is almost as old as football itself But, according to Watt Nichol, a man who is billed in America as "the guru of personal reinvention," the cliché is completely wrong. "Football is about 20 percent physical and 80 percent mental. But most of the training that players do is physical. They need to work out more in the mental gymnasium."

Before you dismiss this amiable and slightly eccentric former Scottish MP and folk musician as the motivational equivalent of a carnival hypnotist, take a look at his client list: national football teams; Premiership clubs; top players; Formula One driver David Coulthard; an ex-boy band member gone solo who has enjoyed phenomenal success; and a certain American golfer at the very top of his sport. He's helped them all. "I have never had to advertise," Watt says. "It's always just been by word of mouth."

So how has he helped footballers? Nichol has to be reasonably discreet, but when challenged, says immodestly: "In football terms I'm called the difference maker." Here, he answers a few questions about the mental aspect of football.

What Attracts You to Football so Much Now?

Golfers and tennis players are much more aware of the inner game. Footballers don't play the inner game. It's seen as an external game. But when they gain that awareness, you can almost see the lights come on.

Where do you start?

Most of what I deal with is getting players to understand that if they don't have their personal lives in order, they won't be in a fit state to perform as a footballer.

In what Respect?

A player's relationships with his partner, his friends, and children ... these relationships aren't really valued in football, yet they enable players to be able to bond or not. With a team, it's about creating common purpose. That's next to impossible if the individuals don't come in with a clear mind. In martial arts, when you get to the door of the gym, you stay there until you feel you've cleared your mind. If you can't, you don't come in. I don't think that would go down too well with most football coaches, but the principle is essential. It allows for a much greater capacity for understanding and concentration and you can start to build what I call critical mass.

Explain what you Mean by "Critical Mass."

The critical mass of a football team is where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. It's easy to improve a team if you work on group dynamics rather than just looking at highly skilled individuals. If you create a team of prima donnas, you face problems.

But if you have eleven men with critical mass — no egos, but total belief in the theory that "together we're stronger" — that's when the magic happens. I'd like to see clubs buy players not only for their skills, reputation or ability, but because of their capacity to fit within the group dynamics of the dressing room. I'd say it's even more important than pure ability.

You can achieve a lot if you gel a team together, even if they're not as individually talented as a glamour team. In a word, it's persistence. You cannot beat a persistent critical mass. If you can send on eleven people with a common purpose, with an imbedded persistence, backed up by their own personal support system — if it's meaningful to their partner, children, parents — that's awesome.

But How Might that Support System Help?

I've been working with a young Premiership player who has made a handful of first-team appearances this season (2006-07) but who got injured after breaking through and was shattered. I know he's besotted with his baby daughter. So I asked him, "Every time you think it's too hard, just think of your little girl — if she had problems learning to walk, how long would you persevere before you quit?" He said he'd never quit. I used that to help him. We've trained him to think of his daughter at times when he's feeling pressure. I've done a lot of work with Edwin van der Sar. Edwin doesn't need motivating. But to get that extra percentage, I asked him to look out of the window on the way to the field and to look at all the men taking their

sons to the game. When he does that now, I've got him thinking, "Those men are taking their boys to see me, so I must not let these fathers down. Not just in my ability as a goalkeeper, but in how I conduct myself, how I prepare, how I work." And he has responded so well. Edwin is so aware of how he walks into a stadium, how he warms up, how he acknowledges the crowd.

You Worked with Wayne Rooney while at Everton.

Wayne was a very interesting player to work with. I always ask players this: "Do you want to be a winner, a champion, a hero or a legend?" All players need to at least be winners — they'll do whatever it takes to win. Champions will campaign to get there over time. A legend is someone who works toward a set of values over an extended period of time in such a way that he becomes unforgettable. A hero is an individual and always will be. Wayne is the most outstanding example of a hero I've ever worked with in any walk of life. You can tell by how he positively and immediately responds to the crowd. I had little or nothing to do with the way he turned out. But I did recognize the hero within him, which is vital. He's an individual, and you have to recognize that within the dynamics of a team. If you have a hero in your midst, use him as a hero. If you try to use him as part of the group dynamic, he'll break it because whenever he hears the roar of the crowd he'll break rank.

What makes Rooney an individual "hero?"

It's to do with something called hemispheric dominance. The right side of the brain and the left side of the brain have different functions. People who are right hemispherically dominant will use their memory. As a nation, we tend to be left hemispherically

dominant, our educational system is based on retention of information.

But people like poets and artists tend to be right hemispherically dominant because they have to be creative. They go down avenues that nobody has gone down before. Coaches usually don't like right hemispherically dominant people because they're the types of players who do all the fancy stuff, and coaches want players to do specific things. But when you talk about a player like Wayne who can win a game by himself, it's because he is right hemispherically dominant. He's emotionally charged.

So where does someone like David Beckham fit into the winner-champion-legend-hero model?

David is a legend. He's subconsciously working toward that every day. He's a hard worker, and he'd take the long-term view — it's not just a question of living today. Each win is a step toward becoming a champion. Now he's been a champion while he's working on becoming a legend — he wants to become unforgettable.

How does the speed of the game affect a player's mental attitude?

We all follow the same thought process, but for a footballer during a game, that process happens in a millisecond. Number one is perception — you look and listen. The next stage is analysis, the analysis that leads to a poor decision and inappropriate action. For a footballer, 95 percent of a thought process is about quality perception. You'd be amazed at how inadequately some top players see reality. They see what they want to see, what they've been told should be happening, rather than what is happening.

The biggest mistake with perception is putting the emphasis on the most recent piece of information. For example, is the ball or a member of the opposition coming toward me? At that point the player must have the mental agility to see the bigger picture. If the process was slowed down of course we want them to perceive what they can immediately see and hear. But that's just new information. But the most powerful thought at this stage is, "I've prepared for this, and I have the speed, power, agility and skill to overcome this. I have dealt with this situation 25,000 times and there are 35 ways to deal with it."

The difference between Zidane and a third division player can be minimal. They could have similar physical skills, but Zidane chooses to do the right thing at the right time.

That's what makes him the player he is. It may not look like a thought process is going on, that it's instinctive, but every movement of the body is instructed by the brain and if we can train those processes, players will become better.

How would the "difference maker" make a difference with these greats?

Ronaldo: "I'd get Ronaldo to visualize what it'll be like when he stops playing. He won't be remembered as a legend like Pele. I would make him uncomfortable with how he'll be remembered, and I'd hope I could lift him."

Vieira: "If you break Vieira's cool, his talent is flawed. If he sees that weakness, he immediately becomes a better player."

Multi-skilled — Knowing the Brain

Anthony Hudson

I worked with an under 10 team recently and in our first session, I pulled a kid to one side who was playing right back. I noticed the whole time he was in the game he never left his little "self-made area," which only allowed him to move 3 or 4 yards in any direction, regardless of where the ball was and what was happening in the game.

"Andrew, what do we want to do when we get the ball?"

"Um, pass, combine?"

"Yeah, pass, combine, but what else do we want to do?"

"Um … score a goal!"

"Yes, score a goal. So, when you get the ball, wouldn't you like to go and score?"

"Yes, but I'm not allowed to go up there!"

I was completely shocked, and ever since then I haven't stopped thinking about it. Somewhere along the line this kid has learned that

firstly he is a defender, and secondly, as a defender he is not allowed to go forward. What a crying shame! And how many more kids have these restrictions put on them, and how are they able to enjoy and express themselves under such conditions?

As coaches we have a huge amount of influence over the players we work with, whether young or old. And to aid us, we have so many resources for learning at our disposal!

Is it just enough to learn and practice the technical and tactical side of the game? No question it's extremely important, but what if we can't communicate effectively what we want? Can we read our players? Is what we are seeing and hearing really what's going on? Do we know how to truly listen to them? What good is all this technical and tactical knowledge if we can't best help our players?

The Multi-skilled Coach

Just as cross training is invaluable to any particular sport that someone participates in, the same type of cross training is true with coaching. As coaches we must constantly seek to become much more multi-skilled. Working and learning in such areas as psychology, physiology, nutrition, human development, learning languages, fitness, self-development, mentoring, and counseling are all subjects that can aid us into becoming a more effective influence over the players we work with. All these factors that influence our coaching environment are so interesting and enjoyable to experience — the many joys of being a coach.

The Brain and How People Learn

We know today that people learn in many different ways. Some are more visual than others, others learn best by hearing, some by feeling and doing. For example, one player may be able to do exactly what you're asking him to do the first time you ask, but another may need to see it performed a few times first before giving it a go.

The brain is absolutely amazing, and in a learning, coaching environment, hugely underestimated! We can access so much insight about the brain and in particular how players learn. Study of the conscious and subconscious mind can go a long way in aiding us to becoming more effective as coaches. Dr. Emile Donchin (University of Illinois) says "that 99 % of all learning is non-conscious. Your students are learning without knowing it." So this means that what we do, how we speak, what we say, how we dress, our body language, our facial expressions, the environment, the posters we put on the wall, the affirmations, the diagrams all affect the learning of the players we work with without them even being aware of it.

So when I'm making a coaching point or giving a team talk to my players, I may think that what I'm saying sounds effective and constructive, but there are players that may not even be listening to my words. Instead, there're focused on my body language or the expression on my face, reacting to the tone of my voice or noticing the other players, their expressions and what they're thinking. Their subconscious mind is feeding off and taking in all that I am doing.

So are we aware of all the factors that can influence our players to achieve a better state of learning? Are we aware of the factors that can aid us into better "teaching?" And are we doing enough to

affect these variables and to try and accommodate all the different learning styles of our players?

As a child, people told me to keep practicing and practicing. And I did. But a Saturday afternoon visit to a live game, with thousands of screaming fans, the emotion, the passion and the professional players, did something to me that no amount of words from anybody about practicing could do. I would leave the stadium with an unbelievable enthusiasm, and I couldn't wait to get out there to play and practice. So, for me, a situation where I'm emotionally involved, when I can hear and feel the crowd. The "smell" of a game day is a much more powerful stimulus than someone telling me, "if you want to be a professional and play in front of thousands of fans, in big stadiums, then you need to go and practice!"

The stronger effect of the two has impacted all of the senses — visual, auditory, smell, feelings, imagination, and on and on.

Now, we don't all have the opportunity to affect all these learning senses so strongly, but if we can gain a better understanding of our players and how to really reach them, we will find creative ways to gain the desired positive effect!

Negativity/Confidence

It's very interesting to watch players and see how they behave both on and off the field. Confidence can make a player and just as easy the lack of it can tear one down. Is what we are saying to our players really helping them?

I remember a time from my youth that can be a lesson for a coach. When I was young, my coach kept telling me that I used to make

bad runs. He kept on and on, telling, pointing, pointing and telling. I used to hear him on the side say, "he makes some terrible runs." Well, not only did this affect me in a negative way (both psychologically and physically), but it was totally inaccurate. I knew exactly where I should be going, I knew how to create space for myself, I knew where I needed to go to put myself in a good position to receive the ball — I knew all this. The problem was, at certain times and in certain areas, I didn't want the ball. I didn't want it anywhere near me. Confidence and specific training — these were the areas that needed attention — not my understanding of the game. And the way to find that out is through awareness, a little curiosity and by communicating.

When asked his views on the qualities of a top coach, Portuguese legend Eusebio said: "It is someone who is able to talk to the players and get the maximum out of them. The ability to communicate is essential!"

In learning about the brain, there's a certain stem, or the "reptilian brain" that dominates our behavior under stress.

"Under threats, anxiety, negative stress and induced learner helplessness, the brain operates differently. There is increased blood flow and electrical activity in the brain stem and cerebellum area and decreased activity in the mid-brain and neo-cortex. That means the brain has 'minimized.' You get more predictable, rote, knee jerk reaction behaviors when the brain senses any threat" (Brain Based Learning, Eric Jenson).

Consider the characteristics in the last sentence — are these not the exact type of characteristics you least want your players to have when playing a game?

For soccer players, this type of reaction can lead to restricted breathing, tensed muscles, impaired judgment and decision making, which always result in a negative outcome, e.g., losing the ball or "messing up." And these negative outcomes are more often than not labeled by the coach as "poor technique," or "they're just not good enough." So we know now, there's a little more than meets the eye, and we have to dig a bit deeper.

"Young players need freedom of expression to develop as creative players…. they should be encouraged to try skills without fear or failure." — Arsene Wenger

For better or worse, what we do know is that we have a very strong influence over the state of our players. Therefore, it's our responsibility to become more aware of all the different factors that play a part in bettering every player we work with.

As coaches we may want to ask ourselves:

- Do we engage enough curiosity in our players?
- Are we engaging them emotionally?
- How effective is our feedback? Do we give enough feedback? If so, when and to whom?
- Are we allowing our players to set goals for themselves?
- What kind of language are we using?
- Are we providing hope every time we are in contact with them?
- Do we reinforce positive beliefs and affirmations?

It is truly amazing — how fortunate we are, to be able to learn and help others become better and to reach their dreams!

Creating Optimal Training Conditions and Learning from the Neuroscience of Leadership

Rick Underwood

Recently I was participating in a coaching education training session. As we discussed the various curricula for teaching coaches how to be better coaches of youth, several important emphases were stressed. We need to:

- Help unlock the game within each child
- Make training fun
- Be positive
- Use guided discovery to help coaches and players learn from playing
- Be supportive and optimistic with our players and coaches
- Be flexible and communicate effectively

Most of our coaching philosophy is based on trial and error, or modeled learning from previous coaches, teachers, trainers, or parents. Moreover, we draw from development psychology principles that help us understand the cognitive development, moral

development (decision making), and physical development to help us provide the best education and training possible.

During the last two decades, scientists have gained a new, far more accurate view of human nature and behavior change because of the integration of psychology (the study of the human mind and human behavior) and neuroscience (the study of the anatomy and physiology of the brain). Imaging technologies such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and positron emission tomography (PET), along with brain wave analysis technologies such as quantitative electroencephalography (QEEG) have revealed up to this point unseen neural connections in the living brain. Advanced computer analysis of these connections has helped researchers develop an increasing body of theoretical literature linking the brain (the physical organ) with the mind (the human consciousness that thinks, feels, acts and perceives).

Implications of this new research are particularly relevant for soccer coaches and those who train soccer coaches.

While coaching continues to be an art, an understanding of the recent breakthroughs in cognitive science can help us develop the best in coaching craft.

Youth Brain Development

Brain imaging has shown how a child's brain, particularly the frontal lobes, does not fully develop until around twenty-two years of age. A small part of the brain called the amygdale develops very early and serves as a conductor of stress management. The amygdale sends direct messages to the frontal lobes based on previous experiences and/or expectations. If the child has had a lot of negative

experiences, such as parents or others yelling at them, the messages will quickly be sent to the still-developing right part of the temporal lobe that automatically sets off the fight or flight reaction. The resulting chemical/hormone releases, such as cortisol steroids kicks off a chain reaction that includes increased heart rate and narrowing of blood vessels, which makes relaxation and listening very difficult. Hence a child learning the game under such circumstances often appears as if he is a deer looking into headlights. If on the other hand, a child hears messages related to positive experiences or expectations, the messages will quickly be sent to the not-yet fully developed left side of the temporal lobe and relaxation and focus results. The following discussion of how the change and/or the acceptance of new information occurs in the brain furthers our understanding.

Implications for Coaching from Neuroscience Findings

Several key findings have explained why accepting new information is hard. According to David Rock and Jeffrey Schwartz in an article titled "The Neuroscience of Leadership," working memory (the brain's holding area), where perceptions and ideas can first be compared to other information, is frequently engaged when people encounter something new. When a young player observes a new skill demonstrated or a coach tells a young player something new, the player immediately compares previous experiences with this new information. This kind of memory activates the prefrontal cortex, an energy-intensive part of the brain.

Rock and Schwartz further explain that the basal ganglia are invoked by routine, familiar activity, like dribbling and having fun, things that the young player has done many times. This part of the brain is

located near the core and is where neural circuits of long-standing habit are formed and held. It requires much less energy to function than working memory does. This is in part because it seamlessly links simple behaviors from brain modules that have already been shaped by extensive training and experience.

Without conscious thought, the basal ganglia functions extremely well in any routine activity. On the contrary, the working memory fatigues quickly and can hold a limited amount of information. The implication is that any activity practiced or heard repetitively gets pushed down into the basal ganglia. Thus a habit is formed. Consequently, this frees up the processing resources of the still-forming youth prefrontal cortex.

After a few months of practicing, a new technique like dribbling, passing, or shooting, kids can typically do these techniques without thinking about it.

The second brain research finding that helps understand how youth learn and/or adapt to change relates to basic brain functioning. The human brain quickly evolves a particularly strong capacity to detect what neuroscientists call errors. That is the perceived differences between what one expects to happen and what is actually happening. So if a coach tells the players he or she wants them to have fun playing and then yells at them when they do something "wrong" or says that they are going to have a fun practice and then proceeds to do really boring activities, the brain emits strong signals that use a lot of energy or dramatic bursts of light.

These error signals are generated by a part of the brain called the orbital frontal cortex. It is closely connected to the brain's fear circuitry, which resides in a structure called the amygdale as

discussed earlier. When the amygdale and the undeveloped orbital prefrontal region are activated, they draw metabolic energy away from the prefrontal region. Especially in the still-developing prefrontal lobe of a young person, error detection signals can push kids to become emotional and act more impulsively. This explains why kids react the way they do if one of the above mentioned scenarios occurs.

Rock and Schwartz integrated learning from neuroscience and contemporary physics to drill these insights deeper. They point out that neurons communicate with each other through a type of electrochemical signaling that is driven by the movement of ions such as sodium, potassium, and calcium and so on making the brain a quantum environment. In other words, the observer effect of quantum physics has demonstrated that an atom-sized entity changes when observed. When any system is observed in a sufficiently rapid, repetitive fashion, the rate at which that system changes is reduced. In quantum physics, as in learning to play or coach soccer, a watched pot never boils.

These connections have been applied to what happens when one pays close attention to a mental experience. Simply stated, the mental act of focusing attention stabilizes the associated brain circuits. Concentrating attention on mental experience, whether a thought, an insight, a picture in your mind's eye, maintains the brain's association with a specific experience. Over time, paying enough attention to any specific brain connection keeps the relevant circuitry open and dynamically alive. This process leads to physical changes in the brain's structure.

Power of Focus

This power of focus reshapes patterns of the brain. Players who train under a coach in a fun, challenging, positive environment function differently than players who burn out or quit playing because of contradictions in what they have been exposed to and reality.

Cognitive scientists are finding that people's mental maps, their theories, expectations, and attitudes, play a more central role in human perception than was previously understood. The placebo effect is an example of how this works. Tell a person they are receiving a pain-reducing pill even though it is a sugar pill and studies show as high as 28 % experience pain relief. The mental expectation of pain relief causes the person to focus his or her attention on the experience of pain relief. The result is the brain's pain-relief circuits are activated, causing a decrease in the sensation of pain. People experience what they expect to experience.

The fact that a person's expectations, whether conscious or unconscious, are buried deep in the brain centers and can play such a large role in perception has significant implications. Two young players training under the same coach who have radically different mental maps of what soccer means can have two different reactions. One player who has been yelled at lot by parents or coaches will respond in one way. Another player who has had a positive, challenging, optimistic experience with parents and coaches will respond totally differently.

Help Unlock the Game within Each Child: Insight

How then does this brain learning facilitate better coaching? The impact of mental maps suggests that one way to start is by

cultivating moments of insight. This in turn requires some kind of event or experience that allows young players to provoke them to change their attitudes and expectations.

Based on MRI and EEG technologies studying moments of insight, bursts of high-frequency gamma waves in the brain appear just prior to moments of insight. This oscillation is conducive to creating links across many parts of the brain. Further findings confirmed these connections have the potential to enhance mental resources and overcome the brain's resistance to learn or change. But to achieve this result, given the brain's limited working memory, you need to make a deliberate effort to hardwire an insight by paying it repeated attention.

For these insights to be useful, they need to be generated from within. A player who discovers a new way of making a turn on the ball or how to bend a pass, or that being relaxed creates better decision making is more apt to retain the learning. The use of guided discovery/questioning with players is essential to enhancing their insight and learning. Several neuroscience findings affirm this method: 1) kids will experience the adrenaline-like rush of insight only if they go through the process of making connections themselves. The moment of insight is well known to be a positive and energizing experience; and 2) genes, experiences, and varying patterns of attention influence neural networks. Human brains are both similar and unique. Therefore, it is much more effective and efficient to help others come to their own insights. In order to do that, kids must develop the ability to self-observe. Most profound insights occur when kids play on the streets or in pick-up games when they develop technique into skill.

Attention density is the amount of attention paid to a particular mental or physical experience over a specific time. With enough attention density, individual thoughts and acts of the mind can become an intrinsic part of an individual's identity. This self-directed neuroplasticity is who one is, how one perceives the world, and how one's brain works. This explains why a kid or coach can participate in a training event and get excited about some new ways of thinking or playing only to realize later that he or she can't remember what the new way of thinking or playing or teaching was. Further research is needed to understand exactly how much attention is required to facilitate long-term change. However, it has been found that follow-up coaching with players or coaches who have discovered new ways of thinking, playing and coaching increase performance by at least 28 %. Thus it is extremely important to provide many positive repetitions in a game environment.

One researcher discovered that when clinically depressed patients focused their attention on things that were proven to increase happiness/fun and that these patients had people to encourage them to pay attention to these fun-inducing activities, their moods improved significantly. What powerful implications this has for players who enjoy the game.

Example

On the soccer field, a coach would day after day paint a broad picture of the team playing with enthusiasm, having fun, risking new techniques, and being highly successful. The coach's goal would be for his players to picture the new behaviors in their own minds and in the process develop energizing new mental maps that have the potential to become hardwired circuitry. The coach would then get

his or her team to focus their attention on their own insights, by facilitating discussions and activities that involve being like the coach has described. There are some great new web-based platforms designed to provide immediate feedback to players. Then every time the team gathers for training the coach should provide gentle reminders so the new maps become the dominant pathways along which information, ideas, and energy flow. The coach also needs to catch the players when they get sidetracked by yelling parents, etc., and bring them back.

Conclusion

In summary, coaches can focus on creating new behaviors through a solution-focused or guided discovery questioning approach that facilitates self-insight rather than just telling the players what to do. Clearly all of the emphases in our coaching education programs are confirmed and fleshed out by neuroscience research on leadership.

The Psychology of the "Bench Player" —

Managing Non-Starters Toward a Positive Playing Experience
Eric Steeg

This article is focused on coaches and players who play on competitive/tryout orientated teams from youth to professional levels.

Soccer players who invest countless hours in order to improve conditioning and technical foot skills and sacrifice their winter and summer vacations for the soccer pitch expect to contribute to the team's efforts on game day. When hard work fails to be "rewarded" with playing time, an athlete can quickly become frustrated and unmotivated. Most coaches can vividly recall those "rotten apple" players that spoil and undermine positive team chemistry and success. Unfortunately, most players place a tremendous importance on game time using the number of minutes they play on game day to define their personal value and contribution to the team. It can be difficult as a coach to correct this misperception.

Coaches avoid playing time discussions for a variety of reasons. Some strategically avoid addressing this topic because they want to create a competitive and an uneasy climate where all players are "on the bubble." In this instance, coaches believe that uncertainty in starting status and playing time motivates players to stay sharp and focused. However, this technique may only work for the first month of the season until the players know the majority of the roster will be most likely set. Just as many coaches also ignore the playing time topic because they do not know how to best handle discussing this issue with athletes. Needless to say, by not talking about playing time openly, a coach may be unwittingly conveying the message that the players who don't play as much are not as important.

The reality is that players participate in sports with aspirations and expectations of playing. Often they believe playing in games is the only way to contribute to the team, have fun, and see themselves as a meaningful part of the larger group. With players placing such a heavy importance on playing time, athletes and teams would be best served having a coach who addresses issues of playing time. In an effort to avoid the frustration and retaliation that often develops in players who give much of themselves but aren't given any playing time in return, coaches can address the issue of playing time in a number of ways.

1. *Schedule individual meetings for the beginning of the season.* These meetings provide a valuable opportunity to discuss playing time expectations, clarify goals and roles, and show players that you value their hard work and time. An effective technique to use during these meetings is to ask players what their strengths are and how they can best contribute to the team. It is vital that you are honest and clear with players when discussing roles and

areas that need improvement. When players know what a coach expects of them from the beginning of the season, they have the choice to accept it or move on. If a player is a non-starter, impress upon him/her what strengths they bring to the team and that their value to the team cannot and should not be measured in how many minutes they play come game day.

2. *Articulate clear team policies to the group.* Early in the season, it is important to communicate to both players and parents the proper avenues to discuss questions of playing time. For example, mandating that playing time issues are not to be discussed directly after a game and should be conducted directly with the coach during a 1-on-1 meeting can be helpful in avoiding damaging situations.

While the above strategies are best employed at the beginning of the season, how can coaches deal with playing time frustration as they arise during the highs and lows of a competitive season? The following strategies can be implemented by a coaching staff to avoid conflict, promote team unity, and enhance participation satisfaction in players who may not see much playing time.

1. *Spend equal time with role players.* Spend as much time speaking with and addressing non-starters as you do with starters. Remind the team of the value of the "bench player" by congratulating them on practice accomplishments, positive attitudes, and strong work ethics. Have the coaching staff monitor and provide feedback to players who are on the bubble and motivated to take their game to the next level.

2. *Help role players experience competition.* Often one of the most significant aspects non-starters miss is the simple thrill of competition. By developing competitive practices that include

inter-squad scrimmages, non-starters and starters alike will be engaged in fun and healthy competition that will produce a motivating practice climate while further developing team camaraderie. In addition, it is vital as a coach to communicate clearly to non-starters what they need to do to improve. By helping players set clear and realistic short and long-term goals, non-starters' energy/effort will be focused on specific areas of improvements and an internal competitive spirit will be ignited. To be most beneficial, coaches need to provide frequent detailed feedback while an athlete is progressing toward these goals and, if done well, competitiveness, motivation, role acceptance, and participation satisfaction will increase in non-starters.

There certainly isn't a magic formula to deal with the many issues that may develop throughout a season regarding playing time. By addressing playing time, coaches can defuse non-starters' frustrations, raise enjoyment in participation, and establish a clear and honest line of communication that is appreciated by players and parents alike. Should you have any specific issues that you would like to discuss, feel free to contact Eric at the email address included below.

About the Author

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Coaching for Life: The Value of Teaching Life Skills Principles

Jason Pendleton

This past fall my high school boys' team finished with a disappointing 6-11-1 record. On the bus ride home after the game I began, along with my assistants, reviewing the season and identifying the deficiencies that resulted in our team underachieving. The questions we considered included: Did we play the right system? Did we play people in the right spot? Had we trained them properly to perform the tasks asked of them? In addition to focusing on our field performance, we reflected on the players' consistency in living up to our life skills principles and came to the conclusion that we had some breakdowns in that area that had as much of an impact on our season as our tactics.

Two days later our players checked in their equipment and filled out a questionnaire on the season. They anonymously rated different aspects of the team's performance and were asked specifically "what can be done to make this program better?" More than half of the evaluations mentioned concepts related to life skills such as "better attitude," "more commitment," and "less selfishness." In the wake of what was a disappointing season, I was faced with the

realization that our players also believed our poor record was partly related to a breakdown in life skills principles.

As a high school American history and American government teacher, I have emphasized life skills principles, such as promptness, work ethic, and respect, throughout my career. A strong foundation of those skills will help students achieve success in life as much as any content material they may learn in my class. This belief has guided my coaching career as well. While I hope to some day coach a championship team or two, I have come to realize much to my own disappointment that most coaches will never win a state championship or even a league championship. Despite this, all of us coach boys and girls who will one day be men and women, and potentially fathers and mothers with jobs and responsibilities. While some players will develop these life skills principles at home via their parents, many will not. The coaching environment we create can help instill in our players the important principles that will help them be better players and better people. Consequently, it is important for coaches to develop a set of life skills principles to guide them in their interactions with players and in the creation and implementation of team policies. The head coach bears the responsibility to develop this important, but often ignored, component of coaching.

At Free State High School, I have identified the principles that I want our players to learn and carry forward into adulthood. Our goal at Free State High School is to create an environment that will help develop hardworking, committed, respectful and responsible people. These simple ideals guide us on a daily basis through our interactions with our players. Below are the principles we emphasize with examples of how we attempt to teach each of them.

Work Ethic: We subscribe to the motto that "lack of effort has caused more failure than lack of ability" and refuse to accept anything less than players' maximum physical effort. Practices are tough, and we attempt to push them physically past the point that they believe they are capable of reaching. Failure to give absolute effort will result in immediate removal from games and a reduction in playing time. It is our belief that the one aspect that individuals can always control in a game environment is how hard they play regardless of the opponent. It is the coach's job to push players in training to help them find their physical limits and improve their mental toughness.

Commitment: Our objective is to teach players that they are part of a group and that the group's success depends on each individual committing to the overall goals of the team. Selflessness and a willingness to sacrifice for the group is emphasized, and we highlight those players who are willing to move from their preferred position to assume a different role to benefit the team. Additionally, it is mandatory that every player is on time for everything we do each day. We believe tardiness reflects a belief by players that their time is more important than the teams'. That concept is typically rooted out early on when players enter our program as a result of consistent consequences. To further emphasize the team concept, we require our players to wear specific practice uniforms each day as a team. Failure to be on time or wear the appropriate uniform (matching shirts [tucked in], matching shorts, and matching socks) results in specific consequences that progress for repeat offenders.

Respect: We want players who respect themselves, teammates, coaches, referees, and the game. We take our interaction with each other seriously and monitor the behavior of our players when they

are representing our program and school. Trash talking or laughing at weaker opposing teams are not accepted. Players are never to address the referees (captain exception) or the other team's coach during a game, and all of our players are to shake hands with the other team's coaches and players as well as the referees after every game regardless of the outcome. Reinforcing these concepts involves us being proactive in addressing these types of issues. Constant reminders and positive feedback for handling tough situations correctly has proved to be effective in teaching our players this principle.

Responsibility: We run a "no excuse" program. We expect our players to live up to the expectations we have established without exception. Players have the responsibility to be at every practice, bring the proper equipment, and bring the ball that we check out to them properly inflated. Failure to be responsible results in specific actions such as extra conditioning, and the consequences can progress to more stringent consequences for those who chronically violate the structure we have set up. Instilling responsibility in players has proven to be one of the most difficult challenges we face. From my experience as a teacher and coach, some parents will offer a variety of excuses for their kids and end up enabling and reinforcing behavior that is irresponsible.

The same challenges that coaches face in teaching players to play zonal defense (or other concepts) properly and consistently are present in the effort to teach life skills principles. One defensive session is not enough for players to pick up the nuances of pressure, cover, balance and repeated training is necessary with constant reminders and corrections to get players to the point of proficiency. Teaching life skills requires consistency and an absolute

adherence to the concepts that we have determined are important. Every player must be dealt with in a similar fashion whether they are a top-flight goal scorer or the last player off the bench. Fairness in the application results in more players supporting the life skills principles. Our actions are guided by a belief that "principles only mean something if you are willing to stand up for them when it's inconvenient." You must be willing to follow through with established consequences even if it means your best players will have to miss games and your team is likely to lose.

While we have a disdain for losing, we think the life skills principles we are teaching are of greater long-term importance to our team and players than winning a specific game. It is our experience, however that over the last eight at FSHS our emphasis on life skills principles has likely resulted in our team often winning games against more talented teams because of our players' discipline. Creating a "no excuse" environment that requires individuals to consistently meet our expectations in all areas often results in those same players exhibiting those principles on the field. Thus, the emphasis on life skills principles not only affects their lives off the field but also has a significant positive impact on the quality of our performance on the field.

Looking back on our 2006 fall campaign, our record was disappointing partly because we had a few players make selfish choices that undermined the team. A key player was removed from the team because he violated a behavior contract. That action resulted in us replacing him with a freshman who was not ready for the level of competition. Another starter, and arguably our best player, missed half of the season for a violation of the code of conduct. Additionally, two other players who had garnered post-

season recognition the year before showed up for the preseason completely out of shape and proved to be ineffective for the first half of the season.

For our staff, the main question we faced was why did these individual players' negative actions surface this year? We concluded that while we returned many talented players from a team that went 13-5-1 the year before, we had lost key seniors who had provided important leadership. The leadership void had an impact on us in the summer months leading to our preseason because, unlike previous years when other Free State teams had worked out and played regularly together, the 2006 squad did not have full team participation. Inconsistent participation in the summer resulted in a breakdown in the team concept and directly affected the fitness of those players who did not participate. As a coaching staff, we also took our previous years' successes for granted and assumed our returning players would automatically do what others before them had modeled. We rested on our laurels and paid a heavy price in terms of results.

To help our deficiencies in these areas, we have decided to do two things. First, we are going to identify our captains in the spring and assign them specific off-season responsibilities relative to team building. Second, we are going to create a more structured training environment this summer. Instead of allowing our players to regulate themselves like we have in previous years, the coaching staff will instead monitor established times for weights, conditioning, and training and will also train our team to participate in the annual Sunflower State games. Hopefully these actions will result in our team meeting its potential.

Our record was poor by our standards, but we believe our players learned a great deal about the importance of team commitment and how individual poor decisions can adversely affect the group. The end-of-the-year evaluations showed that our players had been paying attention to the life skills principles we are attempting to teach and that they recognized how failure in those areas led to failure for the team. As a coaching staff we learned that we have to consistently evaluate our actions to ensure that we are creating the proper environment for our players to become hardworking, committed, respectful and responsible people. Accountability to the team in the off-season and a willingness to sacrifice for the group are both things we will continue to strive to improve.

For coaches who plan on teaching life skills principles, it is important to understand that initially many players (and maybe parents) will not like the structure set up to teach life skills. However, as Bill Beswick pointed out at the NSCAA convention, "it is not what players want, but what they need" that should guide us.

Away Disadvantage: Five Steps for Coping

Richard Pollard

The inaugural season of the Football League, the first such league in the world, was in 1888-89. Just over 67 % of points won were gained by the teams playing at home, 33 % by the away teams. Thus, the phenomenon of home field advantage was born, something that remains to this day deeply ingrained in the culture of football the world over. Although home field advantage is currently lower in English league soccer than it has ever been (currently around 60 %), it remains a factor that coaches must consider when preparing a team for a game. The location of the game can influence the behavior of both teams, both by giving an advantage to the home team while at the same time disadvantaging the visitors. The combination of these effects is what we call "home field advantage." It is my view that there is relatively little that the home team can do to increase their advantage, although Barcelona will probably disagree after the recent alleged doctoring of the field at Stamford Bridge! In contrast, there do seem to be a number of ways in which the visiting team can minimize its disadvantage. This will be the focus of this article.

First, we should look at a few more facts about home field advantage and its possible causes. Crowd support is what first comes to mind when home field advantage is considered, and it is undoubtedly a factor, although the way in which it operates is not as obvious as it might seem. Why, for example, has it always been slightly lower in the Premier League (and formerly the First Division) than in the other divisions of the Football League where crowds are smaller? Why does it exist at all in non-league football, even in leagues with attendance averaging fewer than 100 spectators? Why is it non-existent in the quarter-final round of the F.A. Cup when crowd support is especially great? Internationally, why is it highest in Albania, Bosnia and Bolivia, countries not noted for the size of their crowds?

There is some evidence that it is the referees, more so than the players, who are influenced by the crowd to give an advantage to the home team. Because a single decision, such as awarding a penalty or issuing a red card, can have a decisive impact on the result of a game, referee bias, even though subconscious, remains an important and plausible factor to take into account. The effects of travel, especially within a single country, have been difficult to establish as having an adverse effect on the away team. Home field advantage is certainly lower in local derbies, but beyond that it does not seem to depend on distance traveled, at least not within England. In contrast, familiarity with local conditions does seem to have an influence, but one that the away team can take steps to minimize. The visiting team will lack familiarity not only with the field of play itself but also the facilities and conditions in and around the stadium. All these things have the potential to adversely affect performance. Other possible causes, such as special playing tactics used by the away team, the concept of territoriality, and other

unidentified psychological effects are still being investigated. Ultimately, it should be remembered that what goes on in the minds of players, coaches and match officials will influence actions on the field and eventually determine the result of the game. Against this background, what steps can a team take in order to reduce the away field disadvantage?

Tip 1 — Do Your Homework on the Away Venue

Fields differ in size, texture, alignment in relation to the sun and prevailing wind, as well as the physical relationship with the crowd. These factors should be researched in advance and communicated to the players. Video recordings of games at the away venue should be obtained, preferably ones with the home team losing. Information about the stadium, changing rooms, and the surrounding areas will ensure a smooth pre-game build up. The aim should be to increase the confidence of the players and to avoid unforeseen surprises or problems with the away venue.

Tip 2 — Establish an Away Game Routine

Fifty percent of a team's games are away from home and a set routine should be put into place. Each away trip should start at the same meeting place, using the same coach, or other method of transport, with the same driver and the same traveling team officials. Anything that can be done to standardize the immediate pre-match routine should be

encouraged, including trying to make the atmosphere in the away changing room as much like home and as comparable to other away games as possible. The aim should be to make each away experience as similar to the last one as possible.

Tip 3 — Sharpen Concentration to Lessen the Effect of an Away Crowd

There is no way to reduce the noise of the crowd at an away game, nor the abusive chants and personal comments that might accompany it. A poorly trained team will be distracted and their performance adversely affected. The away team should therefore be trained to intensify its discipline, concentration and self-control, and to ignore all provocation, especially during the early stages of an away game. The aim here should be for single-minded on-field discipline and focus.

Tip 4 — Don't Antagonize the Referee

Even the best referee will find it difficult not to be subconsciously swayed by the noise of a home crowd, especially with a marginal decision that has to be made in a spilt second. Since games are determined by goals and goals are rare events in football, a single decision, such as the awarding of a penalty, can have an enormous influence on the result. It is therefore very important for away players to avoid any action that might lead to unnecessary confrontation with

the referee, and if possible to steer clear of risky challenges in dangerous places, although this is much easier said than done. The aim is to avoid being intimidated by the crowd into rash behavior, leading to excessive censure from the referee.

Tip 5 — Don't Adopt Special Away Tactics

In 1981, the Football League started awarding three points for a win. One of the reasons was to encourage more open play since teams were thought to be adopting more cautious and defensive tactics when playing away from home. The overall effect of this change is unclear, but it is likely that changing tactics specifically for away matches has always been counterproductive. A more defensive approach will immediately hand both the territorial and psychological initiative to the home team, magnifying rather than lessening the perceived disadvantage of playing away. The aim should be to discourage tactics, or any other action for that matter, that appears to reinforce belief in the existence of home advantage.

Conclusion

Home field advantage is a real and quantifiable factor that clearly influences results in soccer. In order to minimize its effect, there are definite actions that the away team can take, and which can be incorporated into the build-up to a game, as well as during the game

itself. Players, just like everyone else, are aware of the existence of home advantage, a fact which itself probably contributes to its continued existence. Home field advantage has become a self-perpetuating phenomenon. However, if players can be convinced that the perceived disadvantages of playing away from home have been largely neutralized in their preparation for a game, then their team will have gone a long way toward breaking the vicious circle.

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This article was extracted from Insight Live, the online coaching resource providing discussion forums, voting, plus access to valuable coaching content including, audio interviews, coaching vacancies, industry updates, sports science articles and of course Insight Journal and its archive stretching back some thirty years!

The Importance of Psychological Profiling and Mental Skills Training to Maximize Player and Coach Potential

Tony Falkner and Steve Nickson

Throughout soccer, there are few practices in place to address a player's mental development.

Practices are in place for physical and technical development, but we believe there is a place for mental skills to aid a young player's path toward a professional career.

Between us, we have not come across any coach in football who does not believe the mind and being mentally tough are not important; in fact, they all think this is very, very important.

As a result, we have taken every opportunity available to us during the past three years to meet some of the leading experts in the field of mental development, including Carol Dweck, the Professor of Psychology Stanford University and Yehuda Shinar, who developed

"The Winning Model" adopted by Sir Clive Woodward during England's successful 2003 Rugby World Cup campaign.

Through increasing our own understanding of the subject, our main focus has been to address the need of selected players in the Blackburn academy to possess the mental capacity to deal with setbacks in their football career and for our coaches to be aware of the specific mental traits a player needs to develop.

What we now have in place is a profile model where we focus on four specific areas a coach can proactively influence, areas, which are key for any aspiring footballer to succeed mentally.

These areas comprise of:

- Constructive Evaluation
- Mental Toughness
- Mindset
- Language and Behavior

The aim of developing this model has been to enable us to be far more objective in our assessment of a player.

In the past where our industry has been much more subjective, making comments based on intuition and gut feelings, we now have objective analysis and statistics, which will support what we are saying. We can then monitor, assess and show how we are moving a player along a continuum.

You will not only see that theoretically, but you will see that in his behaviors, which will then become habit, which has a positive effect on performance.

The ultimate goal is to develop a "growth mindset" culture within the Blackburn Academy, in contrast to a "fixed mindset" often found in talented young players.

Players with a fixed mindset almost exclusively rely on their natural talent to deal with setbacks in their career. They believe that this talent on its own will help them through the setbacks they face.

But as these players have been born with talent, they have very little experience of facing obstacles or challenges, resulting in them often viewing them as a threat. Then when things get tough, they quit very easily and avoid hard work.

Players who adopt a growth mindset recognize that their abilities are going to develop over time and view their own personal development as a path of opportunity and success, motivating themselves to do better. Vitally, when they come across a problem, they see it as a challenge to develop themselves further.

To identify the character traits in each player, we profile every player who comes into the academy, scoring them based on various criteria based upon the areas already highlighted: constructive evaluation, mental toughness, mindset, language and behavior.

Then having evaluated their scores, we can identify areas where each player is mentally weak and use a range of skills training to develop their psychological traits.

Players who score low on various aspects of mental toughness when profiled show a lack of emotional control, both on and off the pitch. This can lead to detrimental effects on their development and

performance. Hence this could lead to a blame culture within the individual.

Indeed, we want the key motivation of all of our players to be to attain, obtain and achieve, rather than avoid, steer clear and exclude others.

That said, by no means are we saying that individuals have not succeeded from adopting a fixed mindset. However, if they had possessed a growth mindset, there is a greater possibility that they could have maximized their potential and sustained their time at the top of their profession for possibly longer.

So what can a coach do to address specific areas where a player is mentally weak?

One of the key things in the model is that we are not only talking about player development, but we are also talking about coach development.

If the coach has a deeper understanding of where the player is in their mental development then it increases the possibilities for the coach getting best out of that particular player and team.

Through understanding how a player perceives his view of the world, a coach can cleverly gain information from the individual.

The language portrayed by the coach to the player can help them fulfill their ability, and this comes with understanding how to get the best out of every player, whether they are proactive and use their own initiative in wanting to improve, or reactive to the guidance of the coach.

Coaches can use specific approaches of encouragement through using the player's language, whether it is getting a player into the gym, facing up to areas of their games they must improve and so on.

They can focus the mindset of the player to what they can achieve in their career and help them face up to an indifferent performance through honest constructive self-evaluation.

Then by using one of the various techniques called mental imagery as an example, the coach can help the player predict potential future situations and work out ways how to deal with the negative situations they may encounter.

However they must not become over-reliant on the guidance of the coach, and the coach must make sure the player, with guidance, eventually becomes self-reliant.

In the time we have had this model in place at the academy, we have already seen a marked improvement in the behavior of a number of players by addressing areas where a player has been mentally weak.

Individuals who had the specific traits of a fixed mindset are now more self-aware of their own thoughts, feelings and behaviors.

Crucially, they have more focus on what is needed to improve, understanding how their mindset can impede their own performance and development.

And while the model is having a positive effect on the mental development of selected academy youngsters, we too are looking to

improve our model as we continue to develop our own knowledge of mental skills techniques.

We would like to think we are of a growth mindset ourselves, so purely by that nature we want to learn develop and get better all the time.

So if there is an area of the model that evolves, which for sure it will because both people and environment around us evolve, then we will pick up various trends that we can adapt and use if need be.

And over time through our expert contacts, we will pick up new techniques that will help us even more as we strive to ensure all our youngsters fulfill their potential.

Successful Coaching: Gaining and Maintaining Credibility

Gregory A. Dale, PhD, Duke University

"If you want to build an atmosphere in which everybody pulls together to win, then you, as a leader have to recognize that it all starts with you. It starts with your attitude, your commitment, your caring, your passion for excellence, your dedication to winning. It starts with the example you set. It starts with the way you treat and relate to your athletes."

— Pat Williams, Senior Executive Vice President, Orlando Magic

Have you ever wondered why some coaches achieve so much success with their athletes and teams — winning and gaining everyone's respect along the way — while others continually fall short or struggle to get their teams or athletes to perform at a consistently high level? If you are like most coaches, you have probably asked yourself questions such as the following:

- How do some coaches consistently get the most out of their athletes while others have athletes who chronically underachieve?

- How do some coaches gain their athletes' confidence, trust, and respect while others have athletes who never buy into them, and what they are trying to accomplish?
- How do some coaches inspire their athletes to compete with confidence, aggressiveness, and mental toughness while others have athletes who routinely crumble and choke under pressure?
- How do some coaches get athletes to willingly "run through walls" for them while others have athletes with little commitment, no work ethic, and bad attitudes?
- How do some coaches inspire a sense of loyalty and pride in their athletes while others have athletes who want to quit, or worse yet, instigate a revolt and try to get their coaches fired?

In my work as a sport psychology consultant, I have come to the realization that the most successful coaches are those who not only win most of the time but also are able to develop meaningful relationships with the athletes they coach. In other words, their athletes respect them and willingly "put it on the line" for them when asked.

Following are seven characteristics that successful coaches and their athletes have identified as being essential for a coach to have credibility with their athletes and ultimate success. As you read these characteristics, I hope you will honestly examine the way you coach. Ask yourself if there are any areas that need attention.

Remember, you continually ask your athletes to work on aspects of their games that are lacking. It seems to only make sense that you would do the same for yourself if you want to improve.

Character

These coaches:

- Do what they say they are going to do. They don't tell athletes one thing and then do another.
- Are honest with athletes regarding their role on the team. They don't promise things they can't deliver.
- Follow the rules as they are written and don't look for ways around those rules to have a better chance to win.

Consistency

These coaches:

- Are consistent in the way they administer punishment. They don't show favoritism toward better athletes.
- They don't have a "doghouse." Disagreements are dealt with and everyone moves on in a productive manner.
- Are consistent in their mood and the way they approach their athletes on a daily basis. They don't take things out on their athletes.
- Create an environment where their athletes know what to expect from them. There are no petty mind games.

Communicator

These coaches:

- Make sure their positive/instructive comments outweigh the negative comments.
- Are proactive. They seek out athletes and check in with them vs. waiting for problems to arise.
- Truly have an active, open door.
- Clearly communicate with athletes and staff about roles, expectations and standards. They make no assumptions.
- Focus on really listening to players.
- Seek input from team leaders on key decisions. Athletes feel like they can come and talk to them.

Caring

These coaches:

- Act as servants. Athletes feel like the coach would do anything for them regardless of their talent.
- Take a genuine interest in the athletes' lives away from the sport.
- Treat athletes as more than just a group of individuals who can help the coach move up the career ladder.
- Forge long-term relationships with their athletes. There is a sense of loyalty for life.

Competency

These coaches:

- Know their sport inside and out but are also human enough to admit when they are wrong.
- Keep up to date with the latest advances.
- Always learning and willing to look for new ideas.
- Their athletes improve from the time they entered their program to when they finished, no matter how good they were when they started.

Committed

These coaches:

- Have a clear vision for the program and are able to communicate that vision to athletes.
- Are passionate/invested. They are committed to putting in the time to be good. They come early and stay late.
- They aren't afraid to list their secrets of success because they know no one will outwork them.
- Have a competitive vibe. They are highly competitive individuals.

Confidence Builder

These coaches:

- Are inspiring. They sell athletes on themselves. They create and maintain hope and optimism. They also plant seeds of greatness.
- Know that athletes want to feel appreciated, valued, competent, and important. Great coaches make athletes feel good about themselves.
- Realize that confidence is fragile, and they are willing to praise athletes in public and criticize in private (never publicly embarrassing them). They catch people doing things right.
- Are appreciative. They share credit with staff, especially acknowledging the "little" people.
- They have the mindset that the athletes are the ones who really win games, not the coach.

Gaining and maintaining respect and credibility with your athletes is vital to ultimate success. Great coaches are great because they see the importance of credibility and respect. They know how fragile they are and work hard to maintain them. Where are you in your journey to becoming one of the great coaches?

In conclusion, I would like you to consider how you want to be remembered by the athletes you coach. Every athlete who competes for you will remember his or her experience with you and your coaching for something. When you think about it, your coaching career is relatively short in the whole scheme of life. Whether you are involved for a few years or dedicate much of your life to coaching, the time you have available to impact people is relatively short. Essentially, your career is the "dash" between your first and last day of coaching (e.g., 1995-2035). "It's an inch." It is very short. Therefore, it is imperative that you invest your time wisely and

determine what you will do with the "dash" you have been given. How are you going to coach during those years? What legacy would you like to leave behind after you are gone? What would you want the important people in your life to say about you when celebrating your career at your retirement banquet? The following is a poem that seems very appropriate when thinking about your legacy.

Poem: How You Live Your Dash

I heard of a man who stood to speak at the retirement banquet of a coaching friend.

He referred to the dates of the coach's career from the beginning ... to the end.

He noted the first and last day of the coach's time and spoke the dates with tears.

But he said what mattered most of all was the dash between those years.

For that dash represents all the time that he spent coaching on earth.

And now only those who loved and played for him know what that little line is worth.

For it matters not how much we win; the trophies... the records... the cash, what

matters most is how we live and love and how we spend our dash.

So think about this long and hard ... are there things you'd like to change?

For you never know how much time is left that can still be rearranged.

If we could just slow down enough to consider what's true and real and always

try to understand the way our athletes feel.

And be less quick to anger and show appreciation more and love the people in our

lives like we've never loved before.

If we treat our athletes with respect and more often wear a smile, remembering that

this special dash might only last awhile.

So, when your coaching career comes to an end with your life's actions to rehash ...

would you be proud of the things your athletes say about how you spent your dash?

Adapted for coaches by Jeff Janssen and Greg Dale from "The Dash," a poem by Linda Ellis of Linda's Lyrics http://www.lindaslyrics.com

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The Performance Sweet Spot

Rick Aberman, PhD in Psychology
John Anderson, Head Baseball Coach at the University of Minnesota

The following is a summary of a presentation at the 2007 NSCAA Convention in Indianapolis.

To sustain an optimal level of performance requires conscious effort and continued self-awareness. Taking into account talent and technology, the difference between effectiveness and superior performance is often quite small. To perform under pressure and at a very high level, several critical competencies are necessary.

These competencies include moral competencies, emotional competencies, and creative competencies. Together acting in harmony, we call it the "performance sweet spot."

Moral intelligence has to do with acting consistently within your principles, values and beliefs. The Institute for Global Ethics in Bangor, ME, has conducted research from a variety of cultures worldwide to identify some universal principles. They identified respect, responsibility, honesty, fairness, and compassion as standards for ethical and responsible behavior. If one of these

principles is violated, the credibility of the leader will be questioned and a relationship bond is weakened.

What do these principles looks like in action? Being respectful of others and of one's self. Being responsible for individual actions and behaviors as a member of a community. Being honest in the things we do, including honesty in our relationships. Being fair when we deal with others. Finally being compassionate when it comes to the limitations and the misfortunes of others. With moral intelligence, think of it as having the courage to make the right decision even though it may not serve you personally.

The second component of the performance sweet spot involves emotional intelligence. We define emotional intelligence as "the ability to stay focused on a goal in the face of competing emotions." It is the capacity to create alignment between your goals, actions/behaviors, and values.

As human beings we have the ability to experience a variety of emotions often at the same time. When you think of sports or performance, it is possible that we may feel excited and fearful simultaneously. We can be happy with our success yet sad our career may be over. We can experience both excitement and fear when we attempt to hit a game-winning shot. Emotional intelligence is about staying focused on the goal and executing even though we are feeling a variety of often-competing emotions

Almost everything we do in sports is about emotional intelligence. Skill and technical expertise are important, but most of the research (see Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence www.eiconsortium.org) demonstrates that emotional intelligence is most important when it comes to sustained optimal performance.

There are plenty of people who are smart and talented but do not do well or reach their potential. If you imagine two individuals with equal talent, why does one achieve their potential and the other does not?

The Head Butt

Take for example the emotional competency that looks at impulse control. In the 2006 World Cup, soccer headlines in the newspaper read: "Zidane sent off in extra time for head butt." The reference is to soccer star Zinedine Zidane, a captain for the French national team who head-butted Italy defender Marco Materazzi during the 110th minute of the final game.

Zidane clearly became overwhelmed by a strong emotional reaction. Everyone can understand the emotions of anger and frustration during intense competition. The decisions one makes concerning the expression of those emotions is important and in this case problematic. The game was tied 1-1 at the time Zidane was sent off, and France went on to lose to Italy 5-3 in a shootout. One can only wonder if things would have turned out differently for France if their star player had been on the field.

Unfortunately, Zidane's actions not only affected his eligibility to play the rest of the game but also hurt his team's chances for victory and disappointed French fans as they cheered for their country in hopes of a World Cup title. Furthermore, Zidane will probably now be remembered as much for losing his temper as his athletic achievements.

Continuing to list other well-known athletes or performers, leaders or coaches who lack important components of emotional intelligence would take up too much space. But it is interesting to think of this

when you are evaluating individual talent and individual and/or team performance.

Emotional intelligence is also about making the right decision when presented with ethical challenges. Competing in the world of sport where the stakes seem to be getting higher and higher has created a significant gap between managing our emotions and making the right decision. Again, with more pressure to perform and to reach our goals quickly, sustained optimal performance requires developing your emotional intelligence and making the right decisions. It is never too late. Unlike our IQ, it is possible to improve your EI. We can always learn to manage our emotions or become more empathic.

Creative intelligence is the final piece of the performance sweet spot. Creative intelligence is the ability to see things from a different perspective. We all have the tendency to perceive data in the same way over and over again. Because of this we are often limited in our ability to solve problems creatively. How we go about solving problems is often more problematic than the problem itself.

When confronted with repeating problems, expanding beyond our normal set is critical. This first requires self-awareness, the ability to notice that we are stuck. The next step is to challenge yourself to take a different view of your situation. Again, working smarter not harder. The eventual relief of not pounding your head against the wall will create other possibilities. This "letting go" is what artists often refer to as "surrendering to the creative experience."

Often this process happens naturally as people describe "hitting rock bottom." Another view suggests, "if it hurts bad enough, change will occur." While sometimes this happens on its own, often the cost is

too great, e.g., physical health, personal relationships, and career, etc. Practicing creative competence is something you can be more conscious of. You can improve your creative intelligence through self-awareness and surrendering to the creative experience.

Why Bother?

For a variety of reasons, the things we may have learned in our families 25 years ago are no longer being taught. Our society has now become dependent on our institutions to teach the basic skills of motivation and how to play nice with others, both of which are emotional competencies. Today we look to our leaders outside the home, our teachers, coaches, leaders, and corporations to be our guides. As a coach, you may not have signed up for that in the beginning, but once having been at it for a while I'm sure you will experience the added responsibilities.

Our advice is not to ignore it but to embrace it. See it as an opportunity to move beyond where you are now. We strongly suggest that you invest more energy teaching the critical EI skills than the teaching of technical skills.

In today's world emotional intelligence has become a critical differentiator when it comes to sustained optimal performance. We are committed to teaching these skills just like you may teach a proper follow through. We continue to see the benefits of our work whether it is in sports and/or performance in business. With practice and commitment, you can improve your ability to consistently reach the performance sweet spot.

About the Authors

This article is based on the book, *Why Good-Coaches Quit: How to Deal With the Other Stuff*, written by *John Anderson*, head baseball coach at the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities, and *Rick Aberman*, Ph.D. in psychology and former staff psychologist the University of Wisconsin, Madison, Department of Athletics.

Coaching Generation Y and Millennial Players

Dr. Rick Underwood

At many of the NSCAA conventions, the largest crowd of coaches has packed in to hear Bill Beswick tell his wonderful stories and discuss psychological strategies for building a winning team. In fact, over the past few years, some of the best-attended sessions at the convention have been addressing the psychological aspects of the game. Most coaches come to the game having been an outstanding player and possessing great technical knowledge of the game, but some struggle with leadership skills in the areas of team building and psychological management of players. This is especially true when coaching players from a younger generation. Recently, a very successful high school girls' coach, framed the challenge, "these girls seem more selfish than any team I have coached over the last twenty years." My response was, "are they selfish, suffering from entitlement issues or are they just different?" This article will briefly discuss: 1) the unique challenges of coaching younger Generation Y and Millennial players; 2) leadership skills needed for coaching this group of players; and 3) some practical suggestions for creating a winning environment.

Unique Challenges of Coaching Younger Generation Y and Millennial Players

While it is dangerous to stereotype any group, research has confirmed there are similar traits each generation has in common. Generalizations are helpful as a way to begin understanding someone else. They give us insights, awareness and empathy that can lead to new coaching approaches. There is not room here for a full discussion of the different traits between Veterans (Radio Babies) born between 1930 and 1945, Baby Boomers born between 1946 and 1964, Generation X born between 1965 and 1976, Generation Y born between 1977 and 1990, and Millennials born after 1991. So this article will focus on the similar traits between Generation Y and Millennials (ages 30 and under) because they are the youth, high school and college players of today.

A generation is a group of people who are programmed at about the same time. During any given generation, the media bombards children with compelling messages. Educational systems, parenting patterns and other unique circumstances in life all shape and mold the children of that era. Each generation has its own mood or tone that pervades the developing perspectives of the kids. Certainly, there are many other diverse issues that affect the development of attitudes, values and behaviors such as race, socioeconomic status, ethnic background, family configuration, regional differences, etc. But research has shown that similarities pervade even into the soccer lives.

Here are some generalizations about the younger Generation Y and Millennial players.

1. Compelling messages that affect these players.

- Be smart—you are special.
- Leave no one behind.
- Connect with each other 24/7.
- Achieve now.
- Serve your community

2. Parenting styles that influenced these players.

- Parent advocacy
- Put children first
- Soccer moms
- Supervision

3. Resulting values, attitudes and expectations on these players.

- Positive team environment
- Future-oriented teams
- Collaboration
- Challenges
- Fun
- Flexibility

All of this translates into a generation of players with a different work ethic than any other generation. Raised by parents who valued the importance of self-esteem, they tend be very confident. Optimistic about the future, they expect their coaches to create a challenging, collaborative, creative, and fun training and playing environment. Goal and achievement oriented, these players expect immediate feedback on how they are doing.

They are used to being organized into teams and making sure no one is left behind. Therefore, they want teams where everyone is

treated fairly. They expect their coaches to be positive and respectful. They are open to learn new skills and knowledge but need to be encouraged. Coach turn offs for this generation of players are cynicism, sarcasm, unfairness, and condescension.

Leadership Skills Needed to Coach Generation Y Players

If you are a Generation Y coach, you are probably very effective. If however, you are from one of the other groups, doing what comes naturally may not work with these players. When was the last time you thought, "these kids are spoiled and don't know how to work hard," or "these players are self-centered and don't know how to work as a team," or "I wish these kids would grow up and separate from their parents?" Obviously, coaches influenced by other generational values and attitudes may struggle to lead these Generation Y players. In fact, it is common for Veteran, Baby Boomer, and Generation X coaches to clash at times with players over training, recruiting, motivating, communicating, and retaining.

So what is the older coach to do? Some coaches move into administrative positions or get out of athletics completely. Other coaches choose to work with players who will adapt to their style. There are three basic levels of response to working with these young players.

1. Acknowledge it, and let it go. In other words, when you realize there are generational values and attitude differences you can acknowledge it and let go of your frustration. If you can't change your situation, then change your attitude toward it. "This player is a younger player, and I am a Baby Boomer coach; we are acting

typical for our generation." Obviously, this strategy isn't going to work over the long haul.

2. Change your behavior. You change something you do, like what you say or how you say it. Daniel Goleman's book on emotional intelligence came out several years ago and had some success. There has been a resurgence of interest in this research and its implication for leadership especially with these younger players. Emotional intelligence refers to the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well within ourselves and in our relationships. In his latest book, Primal Leadership, Goleman differentiates between resonant and dissonant leadership. Dissonant leadership sways players feelings negatively, undermining the emotional system that helps players be their best. Under this leadership style, players feel dispirited, unmotivated, burned out, and discouraged or they leave. Resonant leadership on the other hand influences the emotions of the players positively, connecting authentically with players, helping the players to be their best and builds passion for the team goals. This is not a soft approach. But rather, increasing your coaching EQ allows you to connect and create positive relationships with your players that will more likely lead to outstanding results. The EQ skills that work best with Generation Y players are emotional self-awareness (recognize how your and their feelings influence performance), assertiveness (deal with difficult issues directly and welcome feedback), empathy, social responsibility (the want to develop players and give praise generously), interpersonal relationships, flexibility, and optimism. Studies have shown a positive correlation between coaches who

possess these leadership skills with results in their win/loss records.

3. Use an understanding of the generational differences to talk and listen. Out of this dialogue you can reach some new understandings about how to work together. Bill Beswick, in Focused for Soccer, summarizes the challenge of the modern coach who, "must develop the philosophy and skill to change the culture of their teams, to gain access to the power of positive attitudes, and to influence change from negative to positive, hope to belief and fear to confidence."

Some Practical Suggestions for Creating a Winning Environment for the Younger Generation Players

1. Read everything you can about the Generation Y and Millennial players. Challenge your own assumptions about what motivates this generation of players. A high school girl's coach asked players to answer questions about events, places, music, and people who had influenced them. The coach used these answers to have a discussion with the players about resulting values and attitudes. This process not only helped the coach build relationships with the players but also provided some valuable insight about what motivated these players.

2. Look at your emotional EQ and decide if you want to improve in the areas discussed above. A motivated Baby Boomer coach actually took the ECI (a 360 EQ evaluation) and had a cross section of his players to take the instrument, which provided surprising information about the gaps in how he saw his strengths and weaknesses and how the players view them. As a result, the coach discovered how de-motivating his sarcastic

comments were and how his players really needed immediate feedback (communication) on how they were doing.

3. Don't fight parental involvement; embrace it. Find creative ways to involve them. A coach who was struggling with "negative attitudes" with players realized some of the parents were constantly voicing their negative opinions about what the coach was and wasn't doing with the team. The coach called a meeting of the parents and invited the parents to be a part of the solution. The coach clarified her goals and values. She then listened to concerns of the parents and adapted a communication process through which concerns could be addressed. The coach then worked with the parents to schedule a series of parent-only social gathers for team/parent building. Out of this process a number of parents stepped up and volunteered for supportive jobs. The team chemistry gradually improved, leading to much greater success on the field.

4. Communicate, communicate, communicate. Share information with players and ask for a lot of feedback. Listen and adapt. When possible, decisions are made by consensus. A college coach provided a weekly email newsletter for parents and players to share pertinent information. Through this medium, questions, concerns and suggestions were invited. Parents who had been feeling out of control of their player's lives were able to relax and the energy was transferred to players. When themes emerged that seemed important the coach would proactively address them with the team asking for their input and when possible reaching a consensus about what to do. This same coach instituted a team council representing each class who would meet weekly and discuss issues and provide suggestions and feedback to the coaching staff.

5. Involve your players in creating the vision, team values and goals for the team. A high school coach took the team on a preseason retreat where they discussed their hopes and dreams for the season. Through a variety of team building activities the players crafted specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and tangible goals for the season. Each individual player's goal was included in the team goals, distributed and discussed often throughout the season.

6. Use a web-based feedback system to weekly evaluate progress toward team goals. Be sure this process is confidential and allows for immediate feedback with suggestions for improvement. You may want to use a blog. The same coach described above contracted with a peak performance coach to create a web-based feedback system. The team's values and goals were stated in behavioral terms and put into questionnaires on the web site. The team picked three categories: motivation, focus, and positive. Each week the players would go on the web site and confidentially evaluate the team's progress on each of the behavioral categories. For example, we had focused warm-ups before games, and we pushed each other in conditioning. The players could log on any time and see how the entire team was rating each behavioral category and the comments. After three or four weeks, the team and coach could evaluate their strengths and weaknesses and discuss possible behavioral solutions to address the weaknesses. The process kept the players focused on the process goals and values as well the end result goals.

7. Create a challenging training environment. Balance positive and constructive feedback. Be open to suggestions from players for improvement. Older coaches should always be upgrading soccer skills through continuing coaching education thus ensuring variety

and challenging training. At the end of the season, a high school coach had the team's seniors meet and design and conduct a couple of training sessions focusing on what they thought mattered most to the team. The players responded extremely well. Another high school coach invited several of his returning seniors to participate with him in a state NSCAA coaching course and then used them throughout the year as training assistants.

8. Reward and reinforce good practice and play. Celebrate successes.

9. Always be fair and respectful and deal with problems in a proactive, straightforward manner. A tendency for some coaches is to ignore problems between players. A successful college coach is great at noticing issues brewing. She, in consultation with a peak performance coach, has developed a workable conflict resolution process. A reduction in drama and increased resonance has been the result of using this process.

10. Make a connection with every player at every practice. Many coaches have assistants to touch base with every player during a training session and game to make sure personal and soccer related issues are being processed. Some coaches institute a weekly session with each player to discuss anything but soccer.

11. Use a sense of humor often. Do fun things with the team, such as a community service project. Rafting trips, challenge courses, team trips, soccer clinics and camps are a few of the ways coaches and teams have done team building and community service.

12. Stress that soccer is a learning ground for future life. Coaches need to debrief what was learned from both wins and losses. Help players apply these connections to everyday life.

Conclusion

By taking an honest look at the values that have influenced your players and your coaching philosophy, you can break the unproductive self-fulfilling prophecy that often leads to team dissonance and disappointing results. Find creative means for closing the generation gaps and empower your young players to realize their potential.

Watching Soccer to Elevate Game Awareness

Roni Mansur

It's a Sunday afternoon and the Central Square bar in Cambridge, Massachusetts, is packed to the rafters. There is about an hour before the game is scheduled to begin but outside there is already a line about 40 people long waiting to get in. Amazingly, these fans aren't here to watch the New England Patriots, Red Sox or Celtics—they are all here for the finals of the European Championship between Germany and Spain.

Can it be true? Have Americans finally started watching soccer now? What impact will this have on soccer in this country?

Not so fast. A few days ago, this same bar was barely half full for the semi-finals of the same tournament. And during the group stages, it would be a treat if there were more than five people watching a game. I would know as I had the luxury of taking three weeks off from work to watch all the games.

We are seemingly heading in the right direction, albeit slowly.

Of the thirteen players in the U12 girls travel team I coach, only four actually watched the finals. Two of them watched a few other games, but most of the other girls were not interested even though I had provided them with a TV schedule ahead of time and tried to entice them by offering a prize of a brand new soccer ball for the player who filled out a tournament bracket and had the most correct results.

I imagine this scenario is similar for most youth soccer teams around the country. Of the thirty-one top level games showcased at the European Championships, only about 10 to 20 percent of our youth players watched a maximum of maybe 3 or 4 games. This leads to the inevitable question:

"Do our young soccer players watch enough soccer to elevate us to the next level as a soccer-playing nation?"

The American Soccer Player

Most of our young soccer players are suburban youth who start playing soccer as early as the age of four or five. Most typically play on their local in-town or travel teams. The better players move on and play for clubs, high schools and colleges. Our top youth players play a lot of soccer, often as much as six times a week in very structured settings comprised of practice sessions or games. However, our youth players spend little, if any, time watching top level soccer. This development path leads to certain generic strengths and weaknesses in our player development as a whole.

In general, the strengths of the American soccer player are that he or she is athletic, technically sound, and has a terrific work ethic and team mentality. Brian McBride is a symbol of the quintessential

American player and his bloodied image during the 2006 world cup is the image that most outsiders have of the typical American player—tough, strong and willing to play their heart out for the team.

On the flip side, however, two criticisms that are often leveled at most American players are that they lack creativity and tactical or game awareness. These development opportunities can be traced back to two root causes. The first root cause is the absence of "street soccer" in the US. Recently, there have been discussions at various levels of the US youth soccer setup about how promoting and incorporating the "street soccer" concept into our youth coaching philosophy can help address some of these deficiencies.

The other root cause is that most American soccer players and coaches do not watch enough soccer. This article argues that this issue puts American players and coaches at a disadvantage compared to their counterparts around the world in terms of understanding the subtleties of the game and gaining the tactical and creative edge needed to develop players with the same level of soccer savvy as those from the top soccer playing nations.

Why Is Watching Soccer Important?

Coaches only have a limited time to teach the game to their players, ranging from 2 to 3 hours a week of practice for a youth travel team to a maximum of 10 hours a week for top youth players. Soccer players take their game to the next level by practicing on their own by playing soccer with their friends outside of their club or team environment and by watching the game.

Top players of any sport spend a lot of time during their formative years following a team or other top players in their respective sport.

LeBron James and Kobe Bryant grew up watching Michael Jordan, who in turn watched Larry Bird, Magic Johnson and Dominique Wilkins. Tom Brady grew up idolizing Joe Montana. Steven Gerrard, the current Liverpool captain, was an avid Liverpool fan who grew up following his team and watched them play at Anfield whenever he could. He watched not only Liverpool stars like Dalglish, Rush and Barnes, but also players from rival clubs like Bryan Robson from their arch rivals Manchester United. He watched old videos of the all time greats like Maradona, Pele and Cryuff and classic games like the 1986 World Cup final between Argentina and West Germany. All these experiences helped mold Gerrard into the world class player that he is today.

First and foremost, watching soccer regularly and especially having an idol or following a team serves to inspire a young athlete to work harder in order to become better. This leads to more touches on the ball, whether in the backyard or with friends on a side street. In addition, these young players try to mimic, and eventually improve, the skills and techniques of their idols. Who better to demonstrate these skills and techniques than the best players in the world? There are few coaches who can demonstrate these skills and techniques as well as the top players. For example, Cristiano Ronaldo has taken Figo's step-overs and cuts to a new level by executing them at a phenomenal speed and adding other subtle touches to beat defenders almost at will.

Watching their idol play also helps young players understand the mental side of the game. They can learn how to concentrate and keep focus throughout the course of a game and how to keep one's cool after being brought down by a bad tackle, or maintaining focus after making a mistake. Unfortunately, some of the leading soccer

players don't control their emotions well or contrive to cheat and deceive by diving. These actions serve as a bad example for the next generation of players, but that is a topic for another discussion.

Finally, by watching the game, young soccer players can start processing and internalizing the subtleties of the game, such as how to break an offside trap with a through ball from midfield to a forward making a late penetrating run behind the defense. They can learn tactical nuances and build game awareness by learning how to play in different scenarios, like when they are up 1-0 on a wet pitch or down 2-1 with 15 minutes left to play, without having to depend on their coach for instructions or guidance during a game.

The key point here is that we must develop soccer players who can think critically about the game. As coaches, many of us can run practice sessions focused on specific tactics and game situations. But unless we have players who can think critically and independently about the game in the midst of a game, these sessions won't be effective in terms of solidifying the tactical understanding and building game awareness in our young soccer players.

As a nation, we play most of our soccer with our feet and our hearts, but not with our brains. We need to develop soccer players who start engaging their soccer brains more. Watching more soccer can help fill this missing ingredient in the makeup of our soccer players.

Current State and Gap Analysis

In the past 10 years, great strides have been made in US soccer. The men's national team has gained respectability around the world and is a strong second tier team—we don't quite have the same

level of consistency and talent as the top European or South American countries, but the US is capable of upsetting a top team on its best day. The women's national team is still one of the top teams, although it seems that other nations like Germany, Brazil, China and North Korea have now caught up.

However, most of our youth players don't watch soccer frequently and don't follow a team as compared to other soccer playing nations. Chart (a) illustrates our "current state" and the "gap" with the other top men's teams around the world.

The bottom axis (x-axis) depicts how much soccer is watched by the youth players in a particular country, ranging from players who are not interested in watching soccer (level 1) to avid fans (level 5). Table 1 describes each of these "levels" in the soccer-watching spectrum. The "soccer-watching level" of each nation was determined by the writer's experience and judgment.

Level 1	Does not watch soccer
Level 2	Watches 3-4 live games a year annually (local semi-pro or amateur team/college/high school) Does not regularly watch soccer on TV
Level 3	Watches 3-4 level games a year annually (local semi-pro or amateur team/college/high school) Regularly watches games on TV
Level 4	Follows a top professional team and watches their games on TV and tries to go to the stadium when possible Regularly watches games on TV
Level 5	Follows a top professional team and watches their games on TV and tries to go to the stadium when possible Follows multiple leagues and international games

Table 1: Soccer-watching Spectrum

The left side axis (y-axis) depicts the overall soccer playing ability of the nations selected. Each of these nations was placed into one of three tiers (top, second and third) based on FIFA rankings.

There are two key takeaways here. The first is that players in most countries around the world watch more soccer than our players, regardless of their nation's playing ability. The second takeaway is that most players in all the top tier nations such as Brazil, England and Germany watch a lot of soccer. The implication of this second point is huge. As a nation, we have a solid structure in place to foster the development of soccer. However, until we address and overcome this issue of getting our players to watch more soccer (and move up the chart as indicated by the dashed arrow), we will likely not produce enough top class players to compete consistently with the top tier countries.

Chart (a): Current State and Gap Analysis

What Are the Challenges to Getting Players to Watch Top Level Soccer in America?

While soccer has grown in leaps and bounds in America recently, it is still not considered a mainstream sport here. There are at least

four other major team sports to compete with—American football, basketball, baseball and ice hockey—in addition to other sports like lacrosse, track and field, tennis, field hockey and swimming. Furthermore, we are competing with computer games, television, Internet, and other interests like music and theater, not to mention a packed scholastic schedule for our youth's attention and time.

Finally, there is a sentiment still prevalent among most Americans that soccer is too slow and boring to watch — there aren't enough goals. Even most of our college level soccer players aren't interested in watching more than the highlights or goals.

How Can We Get Our Youth Players to Watch More Top Level Soccer in this Environment?

There are two conditions that exist which can be leveraged to achieve our goal. The first condition is that the first boom generation of soccer players (i.e., those who played high school and college soccer in the mid to late '80s) have children who are of soccer playing age now. This provides a great opportunity to use these parents to promote soccer in their local communities and encourage kids to watch soccer.

The second condition is that there is technology now that allows targeted "marketing" of ideas and products to specific groups of people. These technologies, in the form of text messaging, Internet and social networking websites (e.g., Facebook) can be effective viral marketing tools to reach out to youth soccer players.

There are four sets of stakeholders who can work together to leverage these conditions and help achieve this collective goal. The role of each of these stakeholders is outlined in Table 2.

Coach	The role of the coach is to consistently and continuously inspire and motivate his or her players to watch and follow top level soccer. This requires that coaches themselves follow the sport closely. Steps that coaches can take to inspire and motivate their players include: Demonstrating enthusiasm about the game and talking to players about results from big matches over the weekend, demonstrating specific skills that the top players used, or talking about how certain teams played Organizing team outings to watch live national team, professional or college games at local venues Organizing team outings to watch important soccer games at local establishments (e.g., World Cup, European Championships, Liverpool vs. Manchester United, Boca Juniors vs. River Plate) Sending links from relevant websites where players can learn skills from top players (e.g., the UEFA website has a terrific player and coach development section that uses top players and coaches as instructors) Providing other incentives as appropriate to build their interest in the game
Parents	Many parents themselves are soccer fans who watch soccer. These parents are often from countries with a rich soccer culture or those who also played the game in their youth. These parents can play a positive role by watching games with their children. These players can in turn encourage their teammates to watch games with them.
Administrators	Administrators and Marketing Executives for our national associations (US Soccer, NSCAA, AYSO), professional leagues (MLS and WPS) and professional clubs should continue to focus on and broaden their grassroots marketing. In addition to mainstream marketing, creative and innovative new marketing techniques to reach youth soccer players and encourage them to watch more soccer should be tested and adopted. In addition, steps should be taken to improve the presentation of professional soccer games here. It is widely acknowledged that the English Premier League does an exceptional job presenting the game, and recently the Australian A-League has followed their lead. All the games are played on proper soccer fields, with no other line markings and the level of commentary and analysis is top notch. It is often difficult to distinguish the one-hour A-League highlights show from the Premier League highlights show. Administrators for youth soccer clubs can also do their part by providing information on top level games (on TV and local venues) through the club website or email notifications to coaches and parents. In addition, clubs can set up and promote a DVD library or organize "game nights" when the club shows a famous soccer game on the big screen, opening the screening to all club players and coaches.
Media	There are now two full-time soccer channels in the US—Fox Soccer Channel and GolTV. In addition, soccer matches are also shown via ESPN, ABC, Spanish networks, satellite, and the Internet. The media can try to continue increasing the level of interest in soccer by covering important games and providing a high level of commentary and analysis during the games.

Table 2: Role of Stakeholders to Encourage Youth Players to Watch Top Level Soccer

Looking to the Future

At the youth level, the level of interest and popularity of the game continues to grow, translating into marked growth in the number of youth soccer clubs, training camps and tournaments. The overall

level of coaching has improved through the efforts of US Soccer, NSCAA and AYSO. The youth structure is being continuously refined, and the recent development of the academy league is a step in the right direction.

As we move forward with all these initiatives, we should also try to increase the number of our players who watch the game on a regular basis. This will help us develop players who have that "edge" and instinctive "feel" for the game. It will allow us to develop players who read the game better and, as a result, make better decisions as individual players and as a team. It will take more of our soccer players to the next level.

About the Author

Roni Mansur is a nationally licensed coach in the US and has been coaching soccer at the youth level since 1999. A former collegiate player at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia, he is the Coaching Director at Cambridge Youth Soccer, an organization with more than 800 players and 70 coaches, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and coaches a U12 girls travel team. In addition, he is a Manager in the Strategy and Operations practice at Deloitte Consulting LLP.

The Coach's Role in Developing Champions

Kristen Dieffenbach, M.S., Daniel Gould, PhD, & Aaron Moffett, M.S., University of North Carolina Greensboro

"We cannot map people's lives in advance but much can be done to make desirable outcomes more likely. Acquiring high abilities is one such outcome. We can and should act to make it happen more often."

— M.I.A. Howe (1999)

It has long been recognized that to achieve success, Olympians not only need to possess excellent technical skills and physical fitness but also strong psychological skills. In fact, in the last issue of Olympic Coach, we reported the results of our most recent research that examined the psychological characteristics of some of the most successful US Olympic champions.

Mental toughness, ability to focus, confidence, goal setting, sport intelligence, positive or adaptive perfectionism, willingness to be coached and high optimism were some of the important

psychological factors found among top Olympic performers. Beyond knowing what it takes psychologically to be great, we wanted to know what influence coaches and other individuals, significant in athletes' lives, had on the development of key mental skills and characteristics. This article reports the results of research related to the role coaches played in the psychological development of Olympic champions.

In our study, some of our most successful US Olympic champions, representing nine different sports, participated in confidential interviews. Additionally, each athlete identified one coach and one family member familiar with their career to be interviewed. The 10 Olympians participated in an average of 2.4 Olympic Games each (range one to four Games). All had won at least one Olympic gold medal, with most winning multiple medals and numerous world championships. The 10 athletes won a total of 32 Olympic medals (28 gold, three silver, one bronze). Four athletes participated in the Olympic Winter Games while the remaining six were summer Games participants. Six male and four female athletes were interviewed.

Interviews with Olympians' coaches and family members were conducted to add additional depth and perspective to the study. All coaches and family members were asked to identify athletes' important skills and characteristics that facilitated their success at various career stages, as well as institutions and individuals assisting development during each stage. Coaches and family members also were asked what coaches emphasized or did that influenced athletes' development during different phases of their careers.

Athletes were asked to determine career stages using Bloom's (1985) description of career phases as a guide. According to Bloom, elite athlete development is broken into:

- the early years, when the individual develops a love of sport, participates for fun, is free to explore and receives encouragement,
- the middle or precision years, when with the help of a master coach, the athlete works on long-term skill development, and
- the elite years, marked by many hours of practice and the honing of technical skill and expertise into personal excellence.

Of the 10 coaches interviewed (one per athlete), nine were male and one was female. Seven coaches worked with the athlete during the athlete's elite career, one during both the elite and middle phase, one in the middle phase, and one during the early years.

Coach Roles and Areas of Influence

Coaches played an important role in the lives of these Olympians, particularly during the middle and elite phases of their careers. In discussing the role coaches played, athletes described their coaches as "like a surrogate parent, had a good bond, provided an adult-to-adult relationship and was a good friend." Overall, six main areas of coach influence were emphasized by these Olympic champions.

Quality Coach-Athlete Relationship

Throughout all interviews, the importance of a good coach-athlete relationship was stressed, particularly during the middle and elite career phases. A good relationship was characterized by mutual trust, confidence in each other's abilities, good communication

(especially good listening skills) and a sense of collaboration or working together. A coach's display of interest and respect for the athlete beyond his/her athletic identity was also important. Additionally, many participants indicated that a good fit between coach and athlete personality, need and style made the relationship work.

A main aspect of a good coach-athlete relationship was the coach's ability to understand each athlete as an individual and to individualize his/her coaching style to suit that athlete's needs. One coach stated, "I found my role [was] to give her an environment and understand her well enough to give her what she needed to excel." Another said, "You have to look at athletes as individuals; you have to recognize their strengths and weaknesses."

In coaching, the importance of individualization was demonstrated by two athletes discussing how their coaches helped them deal with frustration after disappointing performances. One athlete indicated that her coach left her alone until she approached him; the other indicated that his coach spoke to him immediately. Though the coaches approached similar situations differently, both athletes indicated that their coach's response was right for them. Unfortunately, preliminary studies in this area indicate that many coaches lack skill in recognizing needs and moods of individual athletes, indicating that this is an important area for coach improvement.

Knowledgeable, Competent Coaching Style and Characteristics

Important components of coaching style include a balance between strictness and kindness, personal dedication, passion for the sport and coaching, discipline, enthusiasm, organization, and displaying a professional coaching style with parents and athletes. Having and demonstrating knowledge of the sport, training aspects, and an understanding of competition, especially elite levels of competition, were also noted as significant characteristics of coaches.

Many of the Olympians considered coach credibility an important influencing factor; specifically, they thought having a coach who had achieved an elite status by competing at national, world, or Olympic levels was an important aspect of his/her credibility. Several athletes indicated that having a former elite competitor take an interest in them played an important role in enhancing confidence in their own abilities and increased their motivation.

Multiple Coach Goals for Athletes

All sources interviewed indicated that coaches had definite goals for the athletes they coached. The three goal focus categories included fun, development and winning. Fun-based goals emphasized having fun and creating an enjoyable training environment. Development goals included focus on tactics, skill and technique development. Winning goals focused on performance outcomes.

Coaches' goals for athletes were an area where definitive differences were seen between early-year coaches and those who coached during the middle and later years. During the early years of athletes' careers, coaches centered mainly on fun and development goals. Mid-career coaches balanced performance and non-performance objectives, such as fun and development as well as

winning. During elite years, winning was more often emphasized, but even during the elite years when winning was of utmost importance, athletes and coaches indicated that it was important to have fun.

Coach-created, Individualized, Motivational Climate

In creating a motivational climate for athletes, coaches used many motivational techniques, one of which was exposing athletes to elite achievers. This allowed athletes to see these elite athletes as regular people and to recognize that the same status was possible for them. One athlete who was exposed to the Olympic trials and the participating athletes by her coach said, "He made me realize that normal, everyday people can go to the Olympics."

Other coaches created a motivational climate by pushing the athlete, providing a positive environment with opportunities and appropriate challenges. Another coach indicated that he was most effectively able to motivate athletes when he "challenged them in a fun way and let them rise to the challenge." It is important to note that the motivational techniques coaches used were successful because they were individualized to meet the needs of each particular athlete. The importance of remaining flexible and trying new ideas with different athletes was expressed by an elite level coach, "Something may work for one person, but it doesn't really work for another."

Coach Support

While pushing athletes to excel, coaches simultaneously provided athletes with unconditional support that did not pressure them. Coaches demonstrated support by backing athletes' decisions and goals, showing pride in their athletes, being present at practice, expressing concern about athletes' well-being after a loss, bragging

about their athlete's accomplishments and "being there emotionally" for their athletes.

Coach Teaching

One of the most important things coaches did for athlete development was to teach, directly and indirectly, the various skills and characteristics that the athletes thought were important to their achievement of elite accomplishments. Coaches emphasized high expectations and standards that athletes were expected to achieve and helped athletes realize that the expectations and standards were attainable. The expectations and standards emphasized by coaches encompassed important aspects beyond athletic achievement, such as schoolwork, personal responsibility and good citizenship. They also emphasized and expected hard work and self-discipline in training. Athletes indicated that through emphasizing high expectations and standards, coaches taught skills such as training hard and focusing on performance improvements. Athletes received positive and constructive feedback and criticism from their coaches on how to correct mistakes and improve skills. Coaches were also credited with teaching athletes how to keep success and disappointments in perspective and how to balance other aspects of life such as academic and career goals with striving for personal accomplishment. Finally, coaches directly mentored athletes' development and indirectly modeled the positive skills and characteristics athletes need for success. Through their own hard work, passion, dedication and positive outlook, coaches demonstrated these skills. While mentoring athletes, they directly taught skills such as goal setting, imagery and time management skills.

Implications for Coaching

The identified coaching roles and areas of influence that impacted the development of this sample of US Olympic champions provides us with a number of important points for consideration in coaching developing young athletes.

- Influential early-year coaches didn't damage athletes by pushing too hard or placing emphasis on outcome, but rather they laid a strong foundation based on enjoyment of the sport and skill development.
- Development of the necessary psychological skills and characteristics took place over time and several different coaches often nurtured the development phases of an athlete's career. This emphasizes the importance of national governing bodies developing coaching systems in which multiple coaches understand their role in athletes' total career plans, and coaches coordinate efforts to work with athletes at different career phases.
- The most effective coaching strategies differed across situations, career phases and from one athlete to another. Strategies based on individual needs and goals were the most successful.
- A good fit between coaches and the athletes' personalities, needs and styles are necessary if the coaching methods and lessons taught are to be accepted by the athlete.

Table 1 contains a checklist for coaching success that is based on the findings from this study. Review the checklist and rate how well you fill each role. Then look at the areas where improvement is needed, and chart a course to make it happen!

	Athlete A	Athlete B	Athlete C
There is a mutual sense of trust between my athlete and me.			
I have confidence in my athlete's abilities, and I let him/her know this.			
My athlete has confidence in my abilities as a coach.			
There is good communication between my athlete and me.			
I take an interest in my athlete beyond his or her athletic performances.			
There is a good fit between my athlete's and my personality, style, and needs.			
I have a balance between being strict and kind with my athlete.			
I have a passion for my sport and coaching this athlete.			
I use a professional style with my athlete and his or her parents.			
I demonstrate my sports knowledge in my coaching.			
I strive to keep my sports knowledge up to date.			
I have different goals for each individual based on individual strengths and weaknesses.			
I have fun-based goals for this athlete.			
I have developmental-based goals for this athlete.			
I have competitive outcome goals for this athlete.			
I tailor the goals I have for each athlete depending on the stage of his/her career.			
I expose my athlete to high levels of competition and training.			
I provide a positive training and learning environment for my athlete.			
I provide appropriate challenges for my athlete's skill level and abilities.			
I individualize my approach with this athlete.			
I provide this athlete with unconditional support.			
I am present at practice (both physically and mentally).			
I let my athlete know I am proud of him/her, not just his/her accomplishments.			
I support the decisions and goals of this athlete.			
I have high but reasonable expectations for this athlete.			
I am a good role model for healthy skills and characteristics.			
I provide positive and constructive feedback and criticism.			
I help my athlete find balance between his/her sport and life.			
I emphasize high standards in and out of athletics with the athlete.			

Table 1: Checklist for Championship Coaching

Directions: Think of how you interact with your athletes. Be honest, think of your relationship with each athlete and what they would say, not what you want to hear. Then, rate how well you achieve each of the following characteristics for each athlete. After you have rated yourself in each area, review your scores and work on developing strategies to enhance your lowest marks.

Conclusions

This report provides a brief overview of important roles and areas of influence that coaches were found to have on the development of an elite group of US Olympic champions. It is important to remember that not every coach interviewed was necessarily credited with doing every aspect mentioned, nor were all of the roles and areas of influence necessarily addressed during all phases of each athlete's development. Rather, coaches who had the greatest impact on the lives of these athletes took the time to individualize their coaching style and practices to meet the specific needs and goals of each athlete. As one athlete said, "I think the coaches I had at different times were good for me." Ultimately, coaches should use their roles and potential areas of influence as a guideline in tailoring their individual coaching style to help athletes achieve the strong psychological skills and characteristics necessary to become Olympic champions.

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A Three-Step Formula for Competition Readiness: From Preparation to Execution

Sean McCann, USOC Sport Psychologist — Strength and Power

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When an athlete prepares well, has the talent, but simply doesn't execute it is frustrating and often puzzling to figure out what went wrong. At the Olympics, it is relatively rare to see a total performance collapse. When athletes underperform at the Games, the most common phenomenon is a series of small, atypical mistakes and changes in performance. Added together, these changes and mistakes derail the performance just enough to create a below-average performance. Over the years, in my work as a sport psychologist, I have tried to determine what factors are present when athletes underperform and what it is that allows some athletes to perform at their best, time after time. After eight Olympics, I have observed a few consistent factors that result in strong performances.

Key to Strong Performances — Being in "Execution Mode"

"When you're out there in the big league pressure cooker, a pitcher's attitude — his utter confidence that he has an advantage of will and luck and guts over the hitter — is almost as important as his stuff."

— Bill Veeck

Athletes do not have to be "in the zone" or have a "peak experience" to perform well under pressure. However, there are some basic characteristics of an athlete's mindset when things go well. I call it "execution mode," a state of mind in which an athlete has simple thoughts, a very clear idea of what she needs to do, and complete confidence that executing this clear idea will mean success.

Simplicity and clarity of thought. For best performances, athletes are operating with a stripped-down, uncluttered mind. Technique has been reduced to shorthand. Strategy is a simple idea. The internal mind is quiet, but the senses are open and aware. Thoughts are almost completely in the present.

Certainty regarding focus. During best performances, there is no confusion or uncertainty about where the mind should be. Athletes are sure they are on the proper performance path, which makes it easier to keep proper performance focus. Certainty and the absence of doubt reduce self-consciousness.

Confidence in approach. Athletes who perform well are completely confident that what they are doing is correct. With this confidence, they can fully commit to the simple, clear ideas above. They know exactly what they are trying to execute, and they trust, become

defensive, and increase the ability to stay relaxed, athletic, and aggressive.

Virtually every athlete in every sport I have talked to about these issues agrees that these three factors are present in great and good performances. Most consistently strong performers will agree with these ideas but they often say that they hadn't really thought about these factors or given them a name. For most successful athletes, they discovered how to get into that state of mind through trial and error. I believe coaches can help a much larger number of athletes get into execution mode by setting it as an explicit goal for competition and explaining that there are three steps on the path to execution mode.

Execution Mode — The End Stage of Competition Preparation

While developing an effective competition plan is an ongoing task for elite coaches and athletes, this column will be limited to the short-term process that takes place within the time frame of a competition. What steps does a well-prepared and talented athlete take from the arrival at a competition to the point of successful execution?

It should be helpful for your athletes to break down the path to execution mode into three separate and essential steps. These are the three steps that all successful athletes must learn to incorporate into their competition preparation process.

Let's take the example of a national team that arrives at an international competition site two or three days before competing. There are lots of tasks to accomplish to be ready to compete. It is important to note that athletes cannot be and should not be in

execution mode during that entire time. There is a time and a place for questions, analysis, critique, expectations, complex thinking, distractions and coaching during this time period, but as athletes move closer to competition, an athlete's mindset must change. The following list of changes, gives a sense of the differences between an athlete's mind upon arrival at a competition and the moment that competition starts.

Step One — Building a Foundation
Arriving at a big competition, there is much to do, much to think about, and much information to gather. This is the point where the last years, months, and days of preparation in general must be integrated with the specific issues of this competition. As coach, you must be sure your athletes are aware of location specifics, that they are prepared for anything unique in this environment, that their equipment is in order, that their technique is solid, that they understand all the logistics of this competition, and that they believe they can do well here. If your athletes have questions, distractions, concerns, or doubts, you want them to surface and get addressed here and now, rather than later.

Remember, athletes will not be able to move to the next step, unless their foundation is solid. You may not like that your athletes have basic concerns about their technique or equipment two days before the World Championships, but if you don't let athletes express and work through those concerns now, be ready for these issues to surface under stress right as the competition begins.

As a coach, it may be helpful to recognize that you are going through a parallel process. You arrive at a new venue, figure out the best route to the venue from your hotel, determine where and when

the coaches meeting is, work through logistics, wonder about your athlete's state of mind and body, wonder if you have prepared them properly, look for any special opportunities or challenges this specific venue creates, develop a mental map of your environment, set up your coaching tools, have more discussions, think through any other details, manage any personal distractions, and only then, can you move on to the specifics of getting each athlete ready to compete. You need a solid foundation to coach effectively, and your athletes need a solid foundation before they can move on as well. Together, you must be convinced you are ready for step two.

Step Two — Identifying Specific Performance Keys
Step two is the easiest step to overlook or skip. Step two is the conscious narrowing and transformation of thinking from the general to the specific. Step two moves from broad strategy to specific tactics. Here an athlete moves from basic technique to the application of technique for this specific competition. Step two requires decision making, calculation of risk, and a search for the most essential performance keys. This step is the point where an athlete may have to admit their limits or get out of their comfort zone but still find a way to get the best result possible. An 800-meter runner may be more "comfortable" running from the front but determines that this is a poor strategy given the tendencies of his competitors in this race. A wrestler may "prefer" an attacking high-risk/high-gain strategy but decides that against this opponent a better result is likely to come from a calculated "counter-move" style

Sometimes the calculation and decision making of step two is an open discussion between athlete and coach. For example, a ski racer may worry that a line is too risky and aggressive but acknowledges that holding back here will not produce a podium

result. In this case, the ski racer and coach may have to work hard together to see the best strategy and help the athlete believe she can execute it.

As a coach, you will know your athlete is ready for the final step when they can answer the question, "What are the two or three things you must do to perform well?" To answer these questions well, they must consider their own abilities, the specific competition challenges, and begin the process of commitment. Commitment always means letting go of options and making a choice. As a coach, you must help your athletes see that there is only one best choice for success. From this choice flows a few specific performance keys that will become the blueprint for thinking in execution mode.

Step Three — Move into Execution Mode
If you have ever coached a supremely confident athlete on a performance roll, you have seen an athlete who has figured out how to flip the switch and get into execution mode. While it is easy to see that this athlete exudes confidence and certainty, and knows how to keep thoughts simple and clear, it is harder to see that this is a product of work rather than a personality trait. The work allows an athlete to trust and helps the athlete manage worry.

Worry is a kind of multi-tasking, which always interferes with high performance. An athlete who worries is usually stuck on step one or two.

No athlete will be able to consistently get into execution mode without having done the work in steps one and two. As a coach, you can help by developing a system that walks your athletes through this process. In a recent Olympic Coach column, I wrote about the

value of pre-competition routines. One way to think about effective routines is that they are a mechanism to take an athlete into execution mode. Routines reduce the multi-tasking of worry, keep thoughts simple and clear, and help an athlete feel confident.

As a coach, perhaps the most helpful thing you can do to get your athlete into execution mode is to name it and emphasize that this way of thinking and behaving is a specific goal for competition. Some athletes may never have thought about it, and most athletes have not thought about it as a multi-stage process. The figure below may help explain that there is a time and place for all kinds of thinking at a competition but that an athlete should be moving toward a specific kind of thinking when the clock starts or the whistle blows. Some coaches who see this figure quickly realize that this model also describes the process of coaching. Are you a coach who can get into your execution mode?

Communication and Performance — A Vital Link

Jennifer Griffin

Communication. We've all experienced situations when communication was less than ideal. How often have you said or heard "there was a lack of communication" or "it was because of a misunderstanding" when things did not go as desired? In a crisis, we are quick to note the source of the problem. But do we notice our communication on a daily basis? What is our awareness of what we say, how we say it, and how the staff and players around us on a consistent basis receive it? Are we prepared to take a look at this area of our coaching as a means of improving performance?

We process the world as it is happening through our senses. Our conscious and unconscious mind is continuously taking in all the details of our surroundings. Then we run those details through our own personal filters inside of our heads, personal filters that affect how we perceive things, and therefore, what meaning we put to things. Our past experiences influence our filtering and processing system in combination with the way our mind works. There are two constantly running questions behind all of our behavior, with the first

question "what does this mean" followed by, "what should I do or how should I respond?"

Understanding how people process their experiences lays the foundation for creating better results, more efficiency and the atmosphere or culture that you want. Because we know that people are constantly creating meaning, or "maps," in their heads, we can manage the process by starting from the end. Do you ask yourself what it is that you really want before you speak, design a training session, or interact with your staff and players? If you do not have absolute clarity about your outcome(s), then the results you get will be inconsistent, unpredictable, or subject to merely chance. How will you know that your training session is or was effective? What do you want to learn from your player meetings? Do your assistants have clear roles and responsibilities that are consistently discussed before training sessions or in the office? Measuring performance has to start with comparing current reality to desired outcomes. Knowing your outcome prior to taking action is essential to planning your training sessions, having player meetings, delegating tasks, giving feedback, and the many tasks that are required for being a coach. Notice when and where you have clearly defined outcomes or not as clearly defined outcomes and compare the results.

The culture of any organization is built upon what is consistently said and done by all members, particularly driven by the top member or "head coach." Where the head coach is concerned, players and staff will be constantly asking themselves, "what does this mean," and "what should I do," in response to everything coming from him or her.

We largely communicate with our body language and tone of voice, in addition to the words we speak. Tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures and body language are said to make up an estimated 70 % of our communication. The words we choose also have an important effect upon players and staff and what meaning they put to what is happening around them.

As you strive to improve your coaching results, your challenge might be to get to know yourself better in the realm of how you communicate and how it is received. Think back and notice how you routinely speak or don't speak to people around you. Typically what do you sound like, what gestures or facial expressions do you make? What have you consistently conveyed to staff and players about your ideology, your measuring stick, the meanings you put to the events around you? What tone of voice is prevalent? Are there moments when you say nothing at all in response to a situation?

It is crucial to understand that silence can be a massive form of communication. Because in the silence, the "not saying anything," you give all those around you open season on creating the meaning for you. When a coach does not communicate something, everyone fills in the blanks from within their own filtering and processing system.

For example, when a rule is broken and the coach does not speak to the team about it, what meanings could players put to both the violation and the ensuing silence? They may think the coach has favorites or a special player who does not have to respect the rules. They may think the coach is not paying attention or is inconsistent or not fair — rules don't really matter anyway or at least only some rules. The coach does not respect us enough to include us in the

discussion … or many other variations of what the silence means. Unless your desired outcome is to have multiple meanings put to a situation, it is absolutely vital to communicate what it is you want your players to understand the situation means to you, and therefore to the team. A favorite phrase can be "We cannot not communicate!"

Language, or the individual words we choose, is another tool to consider in our quest for excellent performance. Words bring about responses in the form of images, emotions and feelings. Words can enhance focus or break concentration. Words make the same task seem impossible, challenging, rewarding or commonplace. Think about how these words can create different meaning to players.

Bad as compared to not as good as.

Correct as compared to perfect.

Hard as compared to challenge.

Opportunity as compared to failure.

Losing as compared to learning.

Aggressive as compared to active.

Get the ball off your foot as compared to find a pass.

If you did a quick inventory of the words that your coaching staff regularly uses with players, you will find places where the consistency and quality of the meaning players put to your directions can be enhanced by word choice alone. Do coaches use the same words for the same meaning? So does stuck in mean the same as

goal side? When one coach says push up, does another coach use attack? Are you using words that will give you the optimal response? Can you substitute words that inspire, motivate, energize? Try having one member of staff, or an observer, note the word choices made in your training session and then reflect on yourselves regarding language. When you are planning training sessions with your staff, be sure that everyone is using the same words to identify instructions or concepts.

Another consideration in word choice is our tendency to use vague phrases, also known as hints or tips, as opposed to direct and clear instruction. "Find someone in the box," "get wide," and "be creative" are all heard regularly from coaches. These words, without supporting demonstrations, explanations and specific instruction in training environments, offer a player unlimited options to determine "what this means, and what I should do." What exactly do you mean when you say "be creative?" What is your outcome when you say it? And how will you know that the players understand what you mean? And how will players know that they know what you mean?

Being aware of how players are interpreting the world will help you improve the performance of your team. Taken on an individual basis, for example, you may have a player that you have told repeatedly what you want or how you want them to do something on the field. Frustration and disappointment often appear when your coaching and his behavior do not align. We often then "blame the payer" for not being talented or coachable.

Take a step back and find out what the player is seeing and thinking. When the world is happening at game pace, the player is running the constant analysis of "what does this mean and what should I

do?" It can be that the player is not recognizing the time and space, and not able to make the decision you desire. His mind is processing through his filters and past experiences and thus producing a different behavior than what you want. He is doing the best he can with the resources at his disposal. His mind is seeking the best option it can find. With the best of intentions, the player's mind is not putting the same meaning to the moment that you are.

Help the player see that the answer to "what this means" is what you are directing—it means x, and therefore you should do y. Chunk it down (or up), use different words, paint a different picture, understand more by asking the player to walk you through his thoughts and decisions. Players can be overwhelmed by past experiences or fear. You will improve performance by interrupting the old pattern and replacing it with a new one.

Sustained successful performance will come out of a positive, learning, growing organization. You will put your own meaning to those words, particularly the words "successful," "positive," "learning" and "growing." You will have an idea and vision of how those words are incorporated into your culture and how the members of your organization perceive that culture. What is your outcome in terms of team culture? The best way to know more precisely where your team or club is currently positioned in these areas is to get their feedback. Asking questions can reveal where your players and staff are with relation to many characteristics of a learning organization. If you were to survey all the staff and players in your organization, the responses would provide useful feedback for where the organization is in this moment. The feedback can give you direct and useful insight into how communication is being perceived within your program. What kinds of responses would you

desire, in comparison to what you actually might receive, in response to these questions?

- Does each member of this organization feel honored and respected?
- Do players in this organization believe that the coaches focus on them individually, in order to affect individual growth and improvement?
- Do players believe that coaches are capable of helping them become better individual players?
- Do players believe that the coach is effective at creating collective team improvement?
- Do we fear failure?
- Does the atmosphere in this organization allow learning, including mistakes, to be accepted and addressed as part of the development process?
- Are we allowed to excel without alienation?
- Is open and honest communication encouraged and demonstrated?
- Are people in this organization rewarded for offering ideas different to the leader or tradition?
- Does this organization have a method for consistently giving and receiving feedback?
- How would you describe communication in this organization during difficult, stressful or challenging situations?
- Is there clarity and consistency between coaches and players about roles and responsibilities?
- Is the language used consistent from coach to coach? Are the words utilized creating the highest level of performance?
- When performance is not as good as we want, does the staff place blame or responsibility on the players, the coaching, the

referees, or other? Where and how does responsibility for performance get "assigned" within this organization?

These questions begin to explore the many facets of a team or club organization in terms of what people say and do, and how it is understood within the system. Knowing how your message is perceived is the first step toward making your communication result in the best possible impact on staff and players.

Our daily responsibilities demand our focus on so many tasks. Those demands can distract us from noticing details about the language we use and the quality of our communication. Frequently we assume that people will "know what we mean" when we say something. That leaves a vital aspect of communication to luck or chance because the meaning of our communication is in how the receiver responds to it. Very often we measure how the receiver responds to our communication by their performance, or wins and losses. Consider communication to be a vital component to achieving excellence in performance within your team. Most exceptional leaders are characterized as also being excellent communicators.

On Mental Toughness and Peak Performance

Bob Andrian

Among interscholastic and intercollegiate sports coaches, an often heard, perhaps even default lamentation when their teams are struggling to compete successfully is that they lack mental toughness. Even Boston Celtics coach, Doc Rivers, called his team "soft" after a number of mediocre performances early one season. But what do coaches really mean when they say that players are not tough enough mentally? And do the players themselves truly understand what the concept of mental toughness entails? Is it possible to teach such toughness to today's Generation Y student-athletes, many of whom are accustomed to a tweeting, text driven, Facebook updated, SportsCenter-highlighted, instant communication and gratification, entitled world?

Military metaphors permeate athletic competition. Invariably in their inspirational pre-game talks, coaches will characterize the upcoming game as a battle to be won. "It's going to be a war out there. We have the weapons to get it done. Whose warriors are going to be left standing? We've got to "out tough" the enemy." And so on. In many sports, physicality is absolutely essential. But toughness in the

desired physical sense cannot occur unless athletes are mentally tough. Retaliating against an opponent in front of the referee, for example, is a sign of mental (and emotional) weakness.

The concept of mental toughness is complex and challenging to teach. And yet, it forms the bedrock of a healthy team culture. Let's consider some of its interrelated, component parts.

Grit: the combination of passion and persistence that demonstrates an individual athlete's and team's tenacious and indefatigable determination to reach their goals.

Will or Resolve: the unswerving commitment each individual athlete makes to do whatever it takes to make the team the best it can be. The mentally tough individual and team understand that it is not about the "need" to win but about the "will" to win. Furthermore, this "will" is sustainable whatever the moment in an athletic contest. Thus, individuals and teams are capable of "sealing the deal" by closing out competitions resolutely. Consider the following poem from ancient China:

THE NEED TO WIN

From The Way of Zhuang Zi

When an archer is shooting for nothing

He has all his skill.

If he shoots for a brass buckle

He is already nervous.

If he shoots for a prize of gold

He goes blind.

Or sees two targets —

He is out of his mind!

His skill has not changed. But the prize

Divides him. He cares.

He thinks more of winning.

Than of shooting—

And the need to win

Drains him of power.

- **Ambition:** the ability to channel personal desire into larger team goals. Athletes need to focus on what they can help build instead of what they can get from being on a team.
- **Resilience:** the capacity to have the courage to risk failure, the willingness to learn from mistakes, and the confidence to confront adversity and use it as motivation to grow and develop as an individual and a team.
- **Equanimity:** the composure, poise, and mental calmness athletes and teams exhibit under pressure in order to be successful. A byproduct of equanimity is "equilibrium." The individual athlete and the team avoid the "highs" and "lows." Victories are not celebrated nor are defeats mourned. Perspective is key. Thus, it's important to thank the bus driver

and the people who brought the food, the trainers, etc. The barometer for success rests not with the best or worst games/practices but with the consistency of performance (execution at a high level) under pressure over the course of an entire season.

- **Intensity:** the state of extreme concentration that equanimity permits. The intense athlete is not "tense" but instead "relaxed."

- **Self-discipline:** as an "athlete learner," the acquired knowledge and understanding, accompanied by the qualities of self-control and self-restraint of what to do and how and when to do it, contribute to the team's self-discipline and performance. Improved self-discipline means improved self-confidence and is crucial to achieving trust within the team.

- **Accountability:** the ability to "look in the mirror" when things do not go well in a team's performance, and the ability to "look out the window" and credit others when things do go well in a team's performance. This approach begins in practice. John Wooden used to insist that whenever a player scored a basket, he acknowledge the teammate who passed him the ball. Good teammates are constantly "catching each other doing things right" in positive practices. Athletes need to hold themselves (and each other) accountable for what they alone can control in their performance. They need to set controllable goals and well-focused strategies to achieve those goals.

- **Acceptance of Role:** the capacity, to paraphrase ESPN's Jay Bilas, for players who compete with each other for starting roles within the team BOTH to fully support their teammates who have "outcompeted" them for a spot, AND to relentlessly push and challenge those same teammates on a daily basis in practice. In

addition, such acceptance means that all players have faith in each other to step up and perform when called upon.

- **"Awake-ness" or Focus:** the importance of being "in the present moment" and letting go of each moment, good or bad, to move on to the next moment. Life indeed is ephemeral, and it is easy to miss out on a moment to get better by clinging to what happened in the past or what could happen in the future. Distractions (from without and within) abound, and the mind wanders amidst the "clutter." However, when you practice as if it were your last moment, then you will be free of everything. The most mentally tough athletes are fully "awake;" that is, they have no division between the self and the experience (striking a ball on goal, shooting a free throw, serving a tennis ball, navigating a slalom gate, knowing where to move when the team presses, etc.) at each moment that experience takes place. Total concentration breeds confidence.

- **Selflessness:** the humility and trust (in coaches and teammates) that allows an athlete to abandon his or her ego and "surrender" to the team in order for both individual player and team to become better. Selfless teammates are more "awake" and focused and consequently more self-disciplined, self-confident and self-motivated. They understand that wearing the uniform and playing the game is a privilege not a right. As such they learn to love the game and respect its beauty and integrity.

- **Trust:** the willingness to embrace the belief that you're not alone, that the team believes in you and you believe in them, that teammates "have each others' backs," that you can really imagine a positive answer to the question, what could you do if you believed you could not fail because the collective

responsibility of how the entire team performs will not allow you to fail alone (or succeed).

- **Pursuit of Excellence:** the understanding, as Jim Collins argues in his seminal work, Good to Great, that "good is the enemy of great." Mentally tough student athletes (as well as all performers) recognize the "curse of competence." How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Practice, practice, practice … with mental toughness.

- Even after achieving the pinnacle of success in his profession by winning three Super Bowls, New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady used to say that he approached every practice as if he were trying out for the team. To put it another way, if you know you have to walk 100 miles, then you should reckon that 90 miles is halfway. The virtue of practice lies in the opportunity for individual development and team building (especially trust building) and the creation of a team culture that "leaves no doubt" about a team's identity, and a selfless, relentless commitment to pursuing greatness. After all, "only the mediocre are always at their best."

- Given these factors, what might we observe from mentally tough soccer players?

Here a few examples:

- The player who, after missing a penalty kick during regulation, buries a penalty kick in a tournament final, sudden death shoot out to win the championship for the team
- The midfielder or outside back who makes an errant pass or gets caught in possession in the opponent's end of the field and who then proceeds to make a 60-yard recovery run to chase down an opponent on the counter attack

- The player who, instead of electing to shoot the ball from a poor angle in the box, looks up and slots the ball across the six-yard box to an onrushing teammate who scores the goal
- The forward who works tirelessly off the ball to create space for teammates, and who does not complain when not receiving the ball after all the hard work
- The players, once in the starting "11," now on the bench, who nevertheless remain steadfast supporters of those who are on the field
- The same players who, rather than complain about playing time behind the coaches' backs, continue to compete by pushing those ahead of them during practice
- The defender who treats a 1v1 duel with the opponent's star goal scorer with the same competitiveness, tenacity and savvy as two wrestlers on the mat
- The players who avoid the pitfall of becoming "YBC" ("Yeah, but Coach") players. Consider this conversation, for example, after the opponent got behind the defense to score a goal: Coach to center back: "You've got to read the player with the ball and drop sooner." Center back to coach: "Yeah, but Coach, where was our goalkeeper?
- The player who consistently arrives first to and leaves last from practices to work on free kicks or corner kicks or other aspects of technical development
- The forward who understands that team defending begins with the first layer of pressure, and who knows when, where, and how to apply that pressure based on the team's defensive tactics
- The senior, star player who, with the team trailing by a goal with 10 minutes to play, does not succumb to trying to do too much

on his own while worrying about the chance of the team being eliminated from the tournament, thus ending his career

- The player who consistently plays the next moment, avoiding the distraction of a poor or missed call from the referee and does not feel the need to whine or retaliate
- The goal scorer, who after tallying the winner against an archrival, shows respect for the opponent by neither taunting nor drawing attention to himself
- The goalkeeper who recovers from allowing a "soft" goal by making a crucial save on the very next opportunity she has to "come up big"
- The fullback who "sends a message" by delivering a crunching (legal) tackle to the forward who seemed initially to be having his way against the team
- The player who, while others watch, seizes the potential for a rebound from the opposing goalkeeper off a strong shot from a teammate, and who scores a "garbage" but great goal
- The captain who realizes the lack of intensity and focus in practice and who, without the coach's direction, brings the team together to take stock and insist upon change
- The senior player who, holding himself accountable for his effort and performance during a practice (or game), has the courage to hold his teammates accountable, thereby cultivating a sense of trust within the team
- The central midfielder who, upon receiving the ball, rather than being content with the "safe" square or back pass is always focused on looking forward first for a potential connecting pass in front of the defense or an even more devastating pass behind the defense

- The players in their back third who resist the temptation to foul opponents while facing the touchline — committing reckless fouls creates unnecessary, dangerous set plays for the opponent
- Those players, especially midfielders, who are relentless in their efforts to win the "50-50" balls
- The forwards who possess the will and the courage to sacrifice their bodies — think diving headers and sliding bodies — to get on the ends of crosses
- Those 3rd attackers, who, rather than gravitate to where the ball is, think ahead about where the ball might very well be
- The player who, though having a "bad" day at practice, seeks to pick himself up both by picking others up who might be struggling and by applauding the efforts of others
- The players who take care of themselves off the field to consistently put the team in the best position to play hard, play together and play well. To wit: getting enough sleep, eating the right foods, observing training rules, and adhering rigorously to rehab in cases of injury
- Those players who understand that success in next year's soccer season begins right after this season ends with a commitment to goal setting for improvement during the off season (getting stronger, etc.)

Cultivating and sustaining a culture of mental toughness has always been a challenge for coaches of competitive sports, now even more so in working with the "Millennials," student-athletes born in the 1990s. An ESPN "Outside the Lines" program highlighted today's "trophy generation," where everyone at the youth level gets a trophy and is prevented from failing and learning the lessons of losing. Moreover, so-called "helicopter parents" hover over their children beginning with youth sports and extending into college. In essence,

as one coach put it, "The path has been prepared for the child rather than preparing the child for the path." Along the way, many of the qualities of mental toughness remain underdeveloped. For some athletes, a sense of entitlement emerges as well as a need to know instantly why coaches do everything they do.

As the preeminent soccer manager of the last generation, Sir Alex Ferguson once noted, "We don't train to win championships. We train like champions and the championships seem to follow."

Today's successful coaches are able, not without considerable challenge, to cultivate various aspects of mental toughness in their players. These coaches model mental toughness every day in the way they display their craft during practices and games. They are, as Hall of Fame football coach R.C. Slocum states, "demanding but not demeaning." They attend scrupulously to detail, hold athletes accountable, discipline them, and offer effective feedback so that the players will gradually learn to demand more of themselves and each other, hold themselves (and their teammates) accountable, persist in getting the "little things" right, develop trust, become more self-disciplined and self-confident, and be able to self-prompt and self-assess their performances in practices and games. Providing effective feedback looks forward and involves athlete engagement. The coach might ask the player, for example, "Given what you (and/or we) were trying to accomplish, what might you do differently to make it happen next time?" Cultivating confidence among players necessitates modeling constructive versus destructive criticism. Instead of saying, "You guys can't finish anything today; I've never seen such a talented team miss so many shots," a frustrated coach might offer, "Our goal was to create more scoring opportunities by focusing on getting more guys into the box, and we are doing just

that, so keep it up. It's only a matter of time before we break through."

The great coaches design practices that mirror game-like situations so that players can have the best chance to transfer what they have learned to the game. Their practices are simplistic, competitive and often harder than games. And why not harder? After all, which team will possess more players who, when real fatigue sets in, can dig deeper and "get the job done?" Finally and not insignificantly, as psychologists, the best coaches recognize that each player brings a different "story" to the team, and therefore the coach learns to get to know all of the players and what makes each tick. Coaches learn what "buttons to push" to make each player and thus the team mentally tougher as the season progresses to ensure peak performance. And a mentally tougher team leaves no doubt in its mind, the mind of its opponent, and all those who have the pleasure of watching.

About the Author

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A Coach's Role: Managing the Motivation Process of the Team

Dr. Rick Underwood, duPont Manual High School Girls' Soccer Coach

Introduction

Watch any team at any level play several games and you will see ups and downs in performance. The same athletes playing under the same coach performing at similar levels of competition produce different outcomes from game to game. Obviously, there are many explanations for this frustrating phenomena, including things like lack of focus, diminished intensity, selfish play, mental or physical fatigue and so on. Certainly all of these dynamics can play a part in the performance of a team. In my fifty years of playing and coaching, I would suggest that the key issue for a lack of performance is motivation.

All coaches will tell you that one of their biggest challenges is how to motivate players to play consistently at their peak performance. The biggest problem with this challenge is that a coach cannot motivate a player. Now, that doesn't mean a coach cannot encourage, inspire, and influence a player's performance. But in the long run the player has to learn to motivate himself or herself. On the other hand, a

coach can do a lot of things that de-motivate players. However, the good news is that we can learn to manage the motivation process. This article will offer some suggestions about ways coaches can effectively manage the motivation process and avoid de-motivating slips.

Three Kinds of Motivation

There are basically three kinds of motivation: fear; incentive; and internal or attitudinal. Fear and incentive motivation are externally administered and generally have short-term effects. Anyone who has ever coached has used both of these kinds of motivation with some good outcomes. Threatening players with extra running and exercise is a classic technique that has its place in our coaching toolbox. However, too much of it can begin to de-motivate modern-day players. Incentives such as a day-off practice as a reward for outstanding performance and special recognition also need to be a part of our toolbox. But again, incentives can turn into a part of what is expected and lose their motivational value.

When a coach can help a player develop internal or attitudinal motivation, it has a long-term effect, and it becomes a very vital tool in the player's toolbox of success strategies. Granted, there are many factors that have already impacted a player's abilities to be self-motivated. Some of those factors are natural personality, physical attributes and negative experiences the player has had. We also know that the thing that motivates one player may not motivate another and that what motivates a player one day may not motivate the player the next day. Consequently, it is imperative that we help our athletes discover the keys to their own, individual motivation process.

Need Identification

If we cut all the theory away and dig down underneath to what motivates every person, we will discover it is the desire to meet a need. Think about it, if you are hungry or thirsty, you get something to eat or drink. If you feel unsafe in your home, you buy a lock for the door. If you are lonely, you seek companionship. If you want to feel good about yourself, you go back to school or get a better job. If you want to be fulfilled, you write an article or book. I am obviously using Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of human needs understanding to illustrate how our needs motivate us.

This same process can be applied to the players on your team. I recently asked my female high school varsity players to identify needs that motivate them to play soccer using this hierarchy of needs. Here are some of the answers to each level.

- Basic needs: adequate equipment; practice space; hydration; good conditioning; transportation; and uniforms
- Safety or Security needs: coach; good practice surface; training equipment; rules; referees; team leaders; team cooperation; development of technical skill
- Belonging needs: make the team; teamwork/bonding; supportive coaches; fun practices; friendships; good team chemistry; a voice — to have one's opinion valued; doing things together off the field
- Ego or Esteem needs: Earn captain or leadership position; starter or role player; championships; special recognition = team awards; productive practices so team improves; family and friends coming to games; goals/assists/shut outs; having an experienced coach who knows how to take your team to the next level

- Self-actualization needs: set high goals for self and team; special training opportunities; chance for college scholarship; take risk in games to stretch skills and tactics; achieve goals for self and team; develop peak performance mental skills

Once a coach has facilitated the needs identification with each player, there are at least three steps to enable him or her to implement a self-motivation process.

Goal Objects

Goal objects are practical ways the needs get met. For each of the needs that a player seeks to meet in his or her competition, there must be a goal object that satisfies those needs. When goal objects cannot be consistently integrated into practice and game situations, the player becomes de-motivated. For example, a player needs adequate equipment or a safe practice area, and if neither of those needs is met, motivation is stifled. Or a player needs to have fun playing the game, and if the coach constantly harps on playing harder and does not provide the player an opportunity to have fun while training, motivation may falter.

Goal Setting

To ensure that each player focuses on two or three needs that motivate them, goals should be established. In order to be effective, these goals must be specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and tangible. It is also helpful to have the player write the goals as if they have already been achieved. Rather than a vague goal like "I will be more motivated as a player," a smart goal might be something like the following: "It is the end of the preseason, I am noticing that I have stayed focused and motivated. I have consistently asked my

coach how I can improve, and I have worked hard to make those improvements. Whenever I have become fatigued and tempted to take shortcuts, I have reminded myself that if I am going to get better, I must maintain a can-do attitude. Whenever I have made a mistake in practice, rather than thinking negative thoughts, I have worked hard to make my next touch perfect. My coach and teammates have commented on how positive my attitude has been. I am feeling very confident that I can be a leader on my team."

Goal Accomplishment

Most players and coaches set goals during the preseason. It is common, however, for those goals to be forgotten as the season unfolds. Or at the least, the goals are not revisited on a regular basis. It is especially important to teach players ways they can overcome negative thoughts and feelings that come up during the season. Sometimes the goals need to be revised to be more realistic depending on what happens during the process of achieving them.

- When a player is not reaching their goal, the following guided discovery process can help.
- Ask the player to read their goal out loud
- Ask the player to rate their satisfaction with their goal accomplishment on a scale from 0 to 10 with 10 being complete satisfaction
- If the rating is 9 or 10, celebrate the success
- If the rating is below that, ask what they think will happen instead
- Ask them if they can think of a specific situation that makes them think they will not complete this goal
- Ask them to tell you about the experience — where were you located? What specifically was happening? Who were the

important participants in this experience? Describe what happened briefly. Then ask them to rate this described experience from 1 to 10 in terms of satisfaction

- Ask the player what the most troublesome part of the experience was and what would need to be different in the experience just described to make it more acceptable or satisfying
- Ask the player to describe what would happen differently if magically what they said would make it better were to actually happen
- Ask them how this would make the experience different
- Have them rate the changed experience
- If the rating has moved up toward satisfaction, then encourage them to take that different feeling back onto the field

Often this guided discovery process will enable the player to overcome the negative feelings that get in the way of them accomplishing this goal. Obviously, there are often many negative past experiences that create obstacles for players, so this process may need to be repeated. It is even better if we can teach the player to use a similar process in clearing out the negative feelings about accomplishing their goals. Teach a player how to set and work on their goals, and the goals will begin to work on them.

Conclusion

Rather than coaches assuming we know what motivates each of our players, it is much better to have them identify and verbalize their needs. We are then better able to create goal objects and enable our players to find goal objects that will move them toward success.

Fear of Failure in the Context of Competitive Sport

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Introduction

In my years of consulting with competitive tennis players, I have encountered a host of varied mental difficulties. But through it all, a certain general pattern has emerged. Though not always the case, the vast majority of mental difficulties can be traced back to the fear of failure. The sequence is roughly as follows: fear of failure emanates from the enormous discrepancy between the practical and psychological consequences of winning versus losing and the inherent uncertainty of outcome in any closely contested athletic contest. Winning is highly rewarding, and losing is extremely painful. The rub comes from the fact that regardless of how hard the athlete tries to win or how well he trains, prepares, concentrates, and

attempts to controls his emotions, he may still fail in execution. This, of course, is what makes sport so compelling to the spectators.

Stress, Anxiety, and Escapism

The common consequence is high-intensity, unpleasant stress, particularly in individual sports that take place over long periods of time. It is stress that the rare and successful athlete handles well and the more common and less successful handles poorly. With the latter, his subconscious effort to relieve stress during competition produces a variety of escape responses that are counterproductive to his stated goal of winning the contest. Among these are anger, acceptance of defeat and reduced drive to win, loss of focus and concentration, and an assortment of other defensive rationalizations and excuses. All of these are instinctive, subconscious techniques that function to reduce the stress of competition and mask the fear of failure.

The structure of the situation, where one outcome is very pleasant and the other is very painful; yet the participant, try as he might, cannot control it and is tailor-made for stress, anxiety, and escapism. By way of analogy, I have seen a similar paradigm in a psychology experiment. Dogs were strapped into an apparatus where, when shown an illuminated circle on a screen, they could press a bar and receive a reward of food. Of course they soon learned to press the bar to get the food. Then they were shown an illuminated ellipse on the screen.

If they pressed the bar in this case, they were given a painful electric shock. They soon learned not to press it when the ellipse appeared. So far, so good.

But now came the tricky part. The experimenters began to change the shape of the ellipse to make it look more like a circle. The time finally arrived when the dog could not tell the difference between the circle and the ellipse, making the task of discrimination impossible.

Yet the dog continued to try to figure it out and press the bar, sometimes getting the food and sometimes the shock. As a result, the dog became increasingly agitated and disturbed, entering a state of what the experimenters termed "experimental neurosis." It yelped and squirmed to avoid being put into the harness. Of course it had only to stop pressing the bar regardless of what it saw on the screen to avoid the shocks, but the dog kept trying to solve an impossible problem. So it got randomly rewarded and punished while attempting to control an outcome that was uncontrollable. As a result, the dogs become very nervous and tried to escape from this stressful and unpleasant situation, much as athletes often do in an analogous situation.

The usual means of escape from the stress, uncertainty, and uncontrollability of competition is to become angry, make excuses, focus on and complain about "problems" rather than work to solve them, or simply give up. Of course it is not a conscious decision, nor is it a productive one if one's objective is to win, but it is a quite normal one. As we have seen with the dogs, even an animal will become stressed and try to escape an uncontrollable situation when the alternative outcomes are randomly pleasant or extremely painful. It is the exceedingly rare (or abnormal) individual who can remain rational, unemotional, and practical in an important athletic contest when, despite his or her most fervent efforts, things are going wrong and the prospects of failure begin to loom large. The vast majority cannot.

Since they are not able to simply pack up their bags and run off the field, their alternative is to mentally check out by becoming angry, focusing on "problems," or giving up; all of which are forms of escapism in that they temporarily insulate the players from the impending pain of defeat and its concurrent fear of failure.

This is why coaches pull their hair out trying to convince athletes to remain focused, rational, and motivated under the day-to-day stress of practice or during competition. Standing unemotionally on the sidelines, it is obvious that the alternative is counter-productive. And after the emotions have dissipated and over a cold Gatorade in the clubhouse, even the athlete will agree that losing his head was not a good idea. But what leaves coaches perplexed is that after discussing the situation and agreeing on the obvious benefits of remaining cool and motivated on the field, the athlete will go back out and do the same thing again!

Coaching Tools

The reason, of course, is that logic and emotion are like oil and water. They don't mix, or at least they don't mix quickly. The coach and athlete (or psychologist and athlete) are usually in agreement when they are both in the logic mode, but the situation on the field or court is different. It is emotionally driven, and in the throes of strong emotion, logic is usually the first casualty. Depending on the sport and situation, the coach may have the option of using fear and coercion to overpower the athlete's counterproductive defense mechanisms. With a coach like Bobby Knight, for example, the athletes were more afraid of him than anything else.

Logic is a second tool that coaches and psychologists can use to bring about changes.

Here one tries to convince the athlete to use his conscious logic system to overpower emotional propensities to behave counterproductively. The appeal is basically to the athlete's desire to win and his understanding (obvious as it may seem) that getting angry, frustrated, dejected, or making excuses will simply reduce his chances for victory. The use of force and fear are simpler and easier to apply. Effective appeals to logic are more complex. They require subtlety—even artistic talent—on the part of the practitioner since the athlete is not receiving information that is actually new. He already knows that counterproductive emotions increase his odds of failure. He is just not sufficiently motivated to do anything about it.

Since sports psychologists and coaches in certain sports (tennis is one of them) cannot generally use force and/or fear, they must work to convince the athlete. This requires, on their parts, exceptional verbal talent, people skills, and patience because they will have to come at the problem repeatedly from different logical angles over a longer period of time than seems reasonable. They must be mentally agile enough to use the athlete's desire to win in various ways that will make an impact—possess enough "feel" to somehow get into the athlete's head—without simply repeating themselves and becoming boring. It is a tightrope.

The same simple problem recurs and the same simple solution needs to be reapplied. The trick is to induce the athlete to rethink the problem from some novel angle and come away with the usual and only proper conclusion—that he or she must control the errant emotions.

The information itself is not rocket science. The athlete is well aware that losing his head often gets him beaten. The problem is getting him to do something about it. This is ultimately a matter of convincing the athlete to decide, at a deep level, to stay practical and on track toward his goal and forego tempting but counterproductive emotional escape responses. This is a difficult process because the athlete's urges to escape from stress, uncertainty, and frustration are natural and powerful and, most importantly, don't ever go away.

Suppressing them requires constant conscious vigilance. They lurk —a permanent fixture below the edge of consciousness—ready to pounce. If, for any reason, the athlete mentally tires and loses discipline, out will pop the defenses. It is a never-ending battle and usually requires repeated doses of motivational input, until the athlete finally gets it.

Overcoming the Urge to Escape

Coaches wonder why players, who seem to "get it" for periods of time, so frequently relapse and revert to old counterproductive emotional habits. They do so because as much as they claim to understand, they don't really get it. And by "getting it," I mean that they haven't committed deeply enough to overpowering their escapist proclivities. They think that they have, but they haven't. They are really cured only when the light bulb goes off in their head, and they once and for all decide that they are not going to do those irrational things anymore that make them lose.

How do I know the problem is motivation rather than information (besides the fact that the information is so obvious that the athlete

would have to be in a coma to miss it)? Consider the following thought experiment. What if I were to go out on court or field with a gun and tell the athlete that if he becomes angry, makes excuses, or stops trying, I will instantly run over and shoot him in the head? In this case, he will be dead—a negative consequence that most people find to be extremely motivating. And as long as I am standing there brandishing my gun, I would bet a lot of money that he won't let his counterproductive emotions take over.

Here the penalty far outweighs the positive reinforcement provided by escapist actions. This tells me that the player simply does not want to change badly enough. When he does, he will change—and change immediately.

Since the stress of outcome uncontrollability is always there, the urge to escape will always be there. The athlete may control himself for a while, but the underlying problem will never be solved. Like an alcoholic on the wagon, the athlete must remain constantly vigilant against backsliding. If he mentally weakens, out will come the irrationality again.

The Magic Feather

Often the anxieties associated with the athlete's inability to control outcome ultimately affect the psychologist/athlete or the coach/athlete relationship. When an athlete begins working with a new psychologist or coach, his performance usually improves rather dramatically.

This is because the athlete feels that the psychologist/coach is going to give him new tools that will make him win. The athlete is, at this stage, a believer. His faith in the new psychologist/coach reduces

the anxieties associated with outcome uncertainty, and this belief in itself makes him play better and win more.

It is analogous to the story of Dumbo and the magic feather. In this movie, a mouse gives Dumbo a feather and tells him it is magic and that whenever he holds it in his trunk, he will be able to fly. So Dumbo flaps his huge ears and, believing in the magical powers of the feather, does in fact fly. While flying, Dumbo drops the feather, starts to fall, and the mouse (who is perched in his hat) tells him that the feather never had magical powers at all and that Dumbo was able to fly all along. And so Dumbo, of course, flies without the feather. In sport, the psychologist/coach may initially serve as the athlete's magic feather. The difference is that when the athlete finds out that the psychologist/coach has no magic and that the old uncertainty-of-outcome issues remain, he often does not continue flying on his own. Instead, many conclude that the psychologist/coach is inadequate and look elsewhere for help – wanting to join another team, work under another coach, or dispense with the sports psychologist.

I call this aspect of the process "athlete resistance." It is very common and occurs sometime after the initial novelty (or honeymoon phase) wears thin. Here the athlete discovers that the basic problem of uncontrollable performance (and its related unpleasant anxiety) remains. Now the athlete begins to notice that many of the psychologist's or coach's swords have a familiar ring, and they begin to lose their effectiveness. Despite having had some initial success by following instructions, the athlete has ended up with many of the same unresolved problems. Uncertainties, stresses, and urges to escape still pop up. In the beginning, the players seldom realize at a deep level that in overpowering

counterproductive emotions, they have to do all the work themselves and that the function of the psychologist/coach is merely to convince them to do this. Yes, the player may have improved somewhat, but the cure is rarely complete with the initial assault. Maybe, they think, this level of improvement is all that they can hope for. Most unhelpful is this growing doubt about the value of the psychologist/coach's words. Once the athlete cuts himself loose from strict emotional control, he will have uneven performances, suffering numerous relapses where he lets the emotions run loose.

This phase of the process is akin to an overweight person who goes on a strict diet and is initially successful at losing weight. But he has had to exert fierce and constant effort to deny himself the pleasures of the table. Going against one's natural instinct to eat tasty, pleasurable foods is difficult. It is, in a sense, liberating. Eventually, the discipline slips and the dieter starts to indulge—just a little bit, at first—but the dam has been breached, and it is not long before the lost weight returns. Now it becomes doubly difficult to get back on the diet again since much of the initial motivation has dissipated. Memories of the difficult, prolonged self-denial remain and few people are in a hurry for another dose of unpleasantness, especially since it has apparently come to naught.

Like the dieter, after the initial rush and early improvement, the athlete will often suffer relapses and vague doubts about the process. He may not have the stomach to climb back on the wagon again. He may also think he knows all there is to know and that talking further about it with the psychologist or coach will be futile. He may, at this point, even avoid talking with anyone. An analogy would be like your mother telling you to do your studies; if you

haven't done them, the words themselves can become irritating and something to be avoided.

Conclusion

The good news is that the message usually gets through eventually, not as quickly as the psychologist/coach might like, but eventually. The athlete finally tires of getting his head beaten in, and the words of the psychologist/coach take on new and deeper meaning. Part of the process involves the athlete simply becoming a more mature human being and developing a more accurate grasp of reality. At this stage, he begins to realize that there is no magic and that the only person who can save him is himself. How long this "maturation" process takes is determined by the degree of insecurity of the athlete and the talents of the psychologist/coach, but in my experience it is between one and three years.

Managing Adversity

Dr. Jay Martin

It is a good thing that I read Keith McFarland's new book, Bounce. In fact, I lectured the team about the book four or five times during the course of the season.

Keith McFarland describes his book as explaining the art of turning tough times into triumph. It is a book about bouncing back from adversity. Coaches talk about adversity all the time. Learning how to deal with adversity is one of the most important benefits derived from participation in sport — at least that's what coaches say.

Soccer coaches talk about adversity a lot — the score, the environment, the officiating, the opponent, etc. Because soccer has such an element of luck involved in the outcome of games, teams and players face some kind of adversity in almost every game. The team that handles adversity best will usually win the game or the championship — at least that's what coaches say.

But do coaches teach their players how to handle adversity, or do they just talk about it?

McFarland uses the "storytelling format" so ubiquitous in the self-help book market today. He uses the story of a fictional Boston

based company—CRX and division manager Mike Maloney as a backdrop to present his six key principles for bouncing back. Maloney is about to lose his biggest customer and most important employee. He goes to the gym for a late-night workout and runs into Joe, a former Army Ranger.

Mike pushes weights and vents to Joe. After listening for a while, Joe says, "Sounds like your company is ready to Bounce!" Joe begins a tutorial in lessons from the battlefield. "It is precisely when all seems lost," says Joe, "that the opportunity exists to rethink the situation and make real progress."

The Ohio Wesleyan University soccer team flew into San Antonio on Dec. 1, 2011, excited to have earned a berth in the Division III Final Four. After landing and picking up three vans, the team headed to their downtown hotel. It was 2:30pm on a beautiful sunny day in San Antonio. The team stopped at an upscale mall to eat lunch at Panera. After thirty minutes, the team returned to the vans to find that two of the three had been broken into and a lot of personal property and soccer gear was gone!

McFarland proposes six key principles that a coach/leader/manager can follow in difficult times. Joe suggests that under pressure, people experience two kinds of anxiety: one that hurts performance and one that helps it. It is the job of the leader to make sure that from adversity, the group finds a way to help performance! Here are the six principles.

Embrace the Bounce The author informs us that another word for bounce is resilience. Evidence suggests that it isn't resistance to the stress of difficult times that makes people and organizations resilient but rather adaptability in the face of stress. How do they handle

stress? Stress happens, deal with it. The leader cannot prevent an event that negatively impacts a team or organization, but it is the leader's job to minimize the damage and turn tragedy into success.

The first thing I did was to ask every player to make an inventory of what they were missing. I asked them to make a list. That immediately focused attention on getting "some work done" and prevented the players from sitting around and feeling sorry for themselves and escalating a bad situation into total disaster. We told the players that the robbery happened. We can't go back. Accept the fact that some stuff is missing. Let's identify what it is, and let's move to resolution.

Manage Anxiety A leader's responsibility is to absorb and contain anxiety when the levels of anxiety get too high. The great leader can turn anxiety into a positive force. The leader must understand that the members of the group fear what might happen to them as a result of the incident. Manage anxiety by removing or reducing the impact of future problems if possible.

Although distraught about losing personal effects, the players were really upset about losing the academic work that was on their computers. Fifteen laptops were taken with assignments, projects, and papers that would be due the next week—the last week of classes. The anxiety at this point was extremely high, and the players had a dazed look in their eyes. I felt we had to eliminate this anxiety. I immediately called the university President (a nice perk of a small college) and the Dean of Students. Both affirmed that they would work with the players and the faculty the following week to give the players the necessary time and support to make up the work. This put the players at ease. We told them that the academic

situation is fixed so don't worry about it now! We will deal with it when we get back.

Manage the Mental Factors The coach must ask, "In times of pressure, how can I help the team keep things in perspective and to perform at their very best?" McFarland suggests that in times of crisis the leader must emphasize a "we control" versus a "they control" mentality. And the leader must not reveal any hidden emotion that would be perceived by the group as negative.

The coaching staff remained very calm and business-like. We wanted to try to reduce the emotional level of the players. We immediately reemphasized that the robbery took place and was over. What we did from this point on was entirely up to each and every individual on the team. We could allow this situation to destroy us and destroy any chance at winning the national championship OR we can use it as a motivation. The choice was 100 % up to each and every player. We told the team, "I am sorry this happened and understand the problems associated with this event. But what you lost was all material things that you can replace at some point. You can never get this weekend back. You owe it to yourself to prepare to give 100 percent!"

Manage the Money McFarland says that money matters. When it comes to surviving and thriving in difficult times, money can play three roles in the bounce process: money can serve as a signal; a shock absorber; and also as a strategic compass heading.

Fifteen players had their wallets taken. They had no money, and it was only Wednesday. We asked the players to call home. Using the remaining phones, each player talked to a parent. In one form or another the parents assured their son that help was on the way. The

coaching staff called the athletics director and had him increase the limit on the University credit card. The players who had no money were given loans to get them through the weekend. The coaching staff managed to reduce the anxiety of losing a computer and losing money within one hour of the theft. Yes, the players lost personal items, but now they had what was needed to regain focus on the mission.

Manage the Mission The reason we were in San Antonio was to compete for the national championship. That was our mission, and it stood on the apex of our self-created "goal triangle."

We thought we had a "special team" this year. We lost only two games all year. We came from behind numerous times including scoring 3 goals in the last 20 minutes against Ohio Northern to win 3-2 in the third round of the NCAA Championships. The team was focused on the mission. This incident might change the focus from winning the championship to worrying about personal loss. It was important to regain the focus and get the team thinking about the mission. We changed plans. We left the scene of the crime quickly and checked into the hotel. We immediately left the hotel for a training session. At the training session, we reiterated that this weekend would never be replaced. Let's get down to business. The coaching staff also changed the plan for the training session. We decided to engage in activities that we knew would be fun for the team and raise spirits. By all accounts we had one of the best training sessions of the year. The cloud of gloom was lifted. After a team meal at an Italian restaurant, the mission was once again in plain sight.

Manage the Morale McFarland says that morale is defined as "firmness in the face of danger, fatigue and difficulties." He says that people want strong and decisive leaders but also leaders who listen. People want leaders who see things as they are (realistic), but also leaders who can keep one eye on the prize. The truly great leaders can do both at once. This is a unique blend of cheerleading and keeping focus on the mission. A measured, honest and confident response to a crisis is usually the most effective.

The coaching staff made sure that we talked to every player on the team during dinner. We made sure that the players most affected had access to clothes, toiletries and anything else they needed to get through the night. Other team members stepped up to help their teammates. The players started making jokes about the theft and what each player lost. By the end of the meal, the players were smiling and laughing. The "togetherness" that was a trademark of the season was back!

A coach cannot take full responsibility for team morale. Team morale is the job of everybody associated with the team; but a coach can create an environment around the team that is positive — an environment around the team that is conducive to high morale, and an environment around the team where unproductive anxiety can be changed to productive anxiety. As the weekend wore on, we could sense that the theft was becoming a galvanizing force within the team. The players were completely focused on the task at hand. The players managed to make a highly negative event a positive force.

We won the NCAA DIII Championship.

Fun and Games: Are Parents Getting their Money's Worth?

Sam Snow, Technical Director — US Youth Soccer

Is it possible for youth players to have FUN at a training session playing games? Can the parents feel like they are getting their money's worth from such a coaching approach? Will players develop their talents if FUN is the centerpiece of each training session?

A fun environment during training sessions helps to open a player's mind. The misconception some coaches have is that if a team training session has fun at its center then nothing productive is being done, that the mood of the session is laissez-faire. This may be true of the coach who has lost control and succumbs to the plea to "scrimmage." Of course the players make this request when the training session is dull and too work-like. Unfortunately, very few coaches try to correct it. The majority of coaches take the easy way out by simply organizing eleven-a-side games. This is in no one's interest. The majority of the children will be uninvolved for long periods, their contact with the ball will be minimal and they become bored. All players, no matter what age they may be, want to have fun playing soccer. For children, this is doubly true. Players learn

more when they are having fun and are engrossed with the challenges of a proper training session. A training session can be organized and purposeful and still be fun.

Misbehavior is indicative of a training session riddled with drills. Drills are a death knell for a coach during a team session. Drills have players in lines waiting for their turn to kick the ball one time and then go to the back of the line. Naturally the players get bored with this approach to coaching. They then divert their attention to non-soccer matters or they get into pushing and shoving matches to butt up in the line in order to have another chance at touching the ball. Additionally drills do not require the players to make decisions. Player decisions turn into tactics as the players age. Thinking is a critical part of becoming a good soccer player, players who anticipate the action not merely react to it! Using drills stifles development, lends to player drop-out and dulls player creativity. Finally there is little transference from drills in practice to a self-reliant player in a match.

Activities instead should be done at a training session. An activity involves all of the players in action and thinking. An activity may have many soccer balls involved not just one with players standing and waiting for a turn to kick it. Here are the questions a coach should ask to determine if the exercise you have planned is a drill or an activity.

1. Are the activities fun?
2. Are the activities organized?
3. Are the players involved in the activities?
4. Are creativity and decision making being used?
5. Are the spaces used appropriate?

6. Is the coach's feedback appropriate?
7. Are there implications for the game?

Using activities that are "game-like" at training sessions helps to develop skillful, physically fit, tactically aware and passionate players. First, a coach needs to know the difference between practice and a training session. Practice is something players should be encouraged to do on their own time. This can be a player alone or with one or two friends. Practice is rote repetition, e.g., the player kicking the ball against a wall. There is value in practice. Players do need repetition to learn a technique. However, when the team is together, the approach must be to have a training session. A training session is dynamic, involves correct feedback from the coach and activities. A good coach during a training session avoids the three Ls.

The three Ls are

- Lines
- Laps
- Lectures

A good training session involves decision making by individual players and groups of players. Coaches can use a variety of "game-like" activities to create a challenging environment during training where learning, excitement and imagination are present.

What we should teach players is how to think flexibly, to be mindful of all the different possibilities of every situation and not close themselves off from information that could help them. Being mindful by using imagination and creativity to learn what works best for you

is what makes the difference between an average player and a champion. When players see that there's more than one technical or tactical solution to each situation, they become mindful.

But many coaches and players operate mindlessly, pursuing routines (drills) rather than looking for new details around them. It's important for players to be in control of their game and the way to be in control is to be in the active process of mastering some aspect of soccer. It's in the mastering that mindfulness comes to the player. If players and coaches realize that much of the burnout they experience is the result of mindless over rhythmization (drills), turnover goes down by a third. Soccer development can simply be a matter of setting and solving problems. Clearly the coach who can set problems and also guide a player toward appropriate solutions has an advantage. But any coach with imagination can set problems and guide players toward possible answers.

Younger players learn to play the game by playing small-sided games with fewer and simpler rules. Try to conclude each training session with small-sided games. This could be anything from 3 versus 3 to 8 versus 8. Small-sided games should take place during the last ten to twenty minutes of training, depending upon the age group.

The training session should progress from simple to complex activities.

- Warm-up (1st activity)
- 2nd activity—alone & in small groups
- 3rd activity—group activity in cooperation
- 4th activity—group activity in competition
- 5th activity—4 v 4 games with conditions

- Cool-down (6th activity)

Simple principles, professional organization, appropriate incentives, and unlimited encouragement — any coach worth the name can hardly fail.

"What we have to learn to do, we learn by doing."

—Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics II.i.

"Just Play!"

The Positive Psychological and Physiological Benefits of Playing Small-Sided Soccer
Steve Welham

I had a running commentary in my head when I was playing. It wasn't really my own voice. It was the voice of Pierre Cangioni, a television anchor from the 1970s. Every time I heard his voice, I would run toward the TV as close as I could get for as long as I could. It wasn't that his words were so important, but the tone, the accent, the atmosphere was everything" (Gordon, D., & Parreno, P., 2008). Manfred Schellscheidt (US National Youth Team Coach & Seton Hall University Head Coach) once said, "You develop a love affair with the ball when you are young. In the beginning, it starts with you and the ball … that is step one."

I guess for me, I developed a love for the game that stemmed from my childhood but was cemented in high school when, 18 years ago, a coaching philosophy and style of play was slowly being ingrained by one very important individual, Rob Myslik. "We still need to find a way to play quicker and understand what we are doing with the ball before we receive it," were some of the things he used to say on the field. The constant connection between you and the game, and high

level of focus and intensity are key factors for the development of a soccer IQ. A true instinct for the game can be developed with small-sided soccer, and this is one area that Myslik would focus on daily. "Robbie knew that learning to play soccer was like a hundred steps, with step one being you and the ball and step 100 being 11v11. It's important that kids spend time on all the steps (1v1, 2v1, etc.). You can skip steps on a given day and play in a bigger game before you are ready but only if you keep coming back and spending time on the steps along the way. It was in all of this that Robbie's small-sided games came to life and taught so many kids from NJ to Montana how to play," Bob Bradley (US National Team Head Coach) said about his former collegiate player.

Looking for the "connection" between the player and the game and how small-sided soccer brings about a positive environment for both learning (the psychological) and competing (the physiological) is what this article is all about. The author decided to ask some of the game's foremost experts in this area as well as two of the leading sport psychologists in the game and highly regarded college and youth coaches to find out their thoughts. What are the benefits of playing small-sided soccer? Jim Barlow (US Youth National Team Coach & Princeton University Head Coach) stated, "It is competitive and you have a responsibility … you are under the microscope. How are you going to help your teammates? Everyone needs to do their part because you are involved directly and every play can lead to a goal. This is because the goals are close together. There are a ton of benefits … it is competitive and challenging … it teaches players how to be connected with their teammates. As coaches we have a tendency to skip the development, and players go without developing a real instinct for the game." On the philosophical side, Schellscheidt added, "The key element is that small-sided is the

building block of the big game. At first it starts with one person and a ball. Next it goes to 1v1 or "you against me" then it goes to 2v1," which is what Manny describes as a huge step. Why? "You must learn how to play together. With every person added it becomes more complicated and more and more possible dimensions can be opened up. When you get 5-6 players on the same page, you can see the game become the teacher, and you can win a lot of games."

Two of the top sport psychologists in the game of soccer, Bill Beswick (formerly of Manchester United & England) and Dr. Leonard Zaichkowsky (2006 World Cup Consultant to Spain, Consultant to Real Madrid & Chelsea FC), were kind enough to add detailed insight to the advantages of small-sided play. So what are the psychological benefits of playing small-sided soccer? Zaichkowsky stated, "It is hard to train quick, accurate decision making on a big field. … A smaller field equates to quicker decisions." Beswick stated how small-sided benefits players by adding, "The players are more involved than normal and have to display a very focused mindset (competitiveness, self-belief, focus, decision making, and recovery from mistakes)." Beswick also went onto say that, "because of the smaller numbers involved, coaches, parents, and teachers can more easily see each player's mindset qualities and pick out potential problems early."

Can small-sided play benefit all ages and levels? "Yes," stated Zaichkowsky. Interestingly enough, Zaichkowsky drew from an ice hockey example. "Thirty years ago in Canada we started breaking the ice rink into thirds. Some people thought we were crazy, but this allowed the players the opportunity to play fast and hard in a tighter area, which promotes quicker decisions … the young kids loved it." Beswick stated, "Definitely, because 11v11 is simply a succession of

small-sided situations linked together as a team progresses up the pitch. Soccer is about solving problems in tight spaces with limited time—that's what small-sided games teach."

So exactly what aspects of the game will improve by playing small-sided games? Neil Roberts (Head Coach of Boston University) explains, "Your team's ability to possess the ball and your team's ability to play out of tight pressure will increase." Roberts also went on to add that "your players' abilities to receive the ball and make quick, confident decisions under pressure will also become more apparent." Beswick feels we should use small-sided games to "accelerate progress and grow technique by repetition, to involve players by gaining more touches and making more decisions. Specifically, small-sided will teach control, concentration and composure under pressure."

Although there are many advantages of playing small-sided, what then, if any, are the weaknesses? "There are no disadvantages unless you do not take into account balance" exhorts Zaichkowsky. "It has to do with leadership [coaching]. It is important to teach why we are doing this, to understand the purpose of it. There are few disadvantages if the coach is able to include proper balance and tactical cues." Beswick supports this as he states, "small-sided games lack benefit unless the coach understands the balance with 11v11 play." "The challenge of coaching small-sided is to emphasize and manipulate what you try to get out of it. How big? How small? How many touches? How many neutral players?" "A possible weakness is the lack of feel for the big game (11v11), but you can still do ok if you set it up in a balanced way. Importantly, you must state what we are trying to accomplish," says Barlow.

If small-sided games have so many benefits and relatively few weaknesses, if any, then how much do small-sided games relate to real match situations? Both Zaichkowsky and Beswick responded similarly. "It mimics it exactly," Zaichkowsky states. "When you advance to the big field it feels like everything is in slow motion." Beswick added a gem by saying, "if you take a still shot from any game film, you have a small-sided game." Kazbek Tambi (US Youth Girls National Team Coach & Seton Hall University Women's Head Coach) supports this. "It directly relates. High-level big matches are the equivalent of a lot of small-sided games together. All you have to do is watch Brazil and how they work their way up the field in tight spaces." Sue Ryan (ODP Region I Director—Girls and Stony Brook University Women's Head Coach) says "that there can be a disconnect in certain players (gender can play a role in this) as certain players are not students of the game. Some players don't watch and play enough soccer so their development may not be as great if they don't have the concept. It is important that there is a technical proficiency and an understanding of what is to be accomplished, and then the game can become the teacher."

So how do small-sided games impact the player physically and mentally? Roberts says "speed of play and the pressure you are under to adapt to the current situation." "Constant involvement means that physical demands are high plus less recovery time." "The psychological demands are great because the player is always in the game." Specifically, Tambi goes on to say that "agility, stamina, and the importance of short sprints all play a role." You cannot stop moving, and you have to be very active." Barlow added, "small-sided is also great for learning about play off the ball as well as spacing and learning the instincts that go with the game."

The physiological demands of small-sided play also show that 3v3 games on field sizes of 15x20, 20x25, and 25x30 have shown to produce heart rates similar to those found in 11v11 competitive matches (Owen, A., Twist., C., & Ford, P., 2004). A recent study that investigated the physiological and technical effects in small-sided play in regard to field dimensions yielded these important findings:

- Adding players to a small-sided game generally caused a decrease in mean heart rates and a decrease in mean peak heart rates.
- Adding players to a small-sided game generally caused the total number of technical actions to increase but generally decreased the total number of technical actions per player.
- Adding players to a small-sided game caused a decrease in the total number of technical actions performed by target players located around the periphery of the pitch.
- Enlarging the pitch size used for small-sided games by 10 meters generally caused mean heart rates to increase and mean peak heart rates to increase.
- Enlarging the pitch size used for the small-sided game by 10 meters had no effect on technical actions the players performed, although this finding may have been confounded by the change in number of players.
- In comparison to 11v11, the 3v3 game generally facilitated similar mean heart rates and the 1v1 and 2v2 games generally facilitated similar mean peak heart rates.
- In comparison to 11v11, the 1v1 and 2v2 games generally facilitated higher mean heart rates, whereas the 4v4 and 5v5 generally facilitated lower heart rates.

- Players passed the ball more than they did any other technical action in the small-sided games (Owen, et al., 2004).

A separate study that investigated heart rate responses in small-sided games with elite players suggests that the game area, the number of players, game instructions, the number and duration of the series, the total duration of the session, and the presence of goalkeepers directly influence the activity of the players and the physiological impact. It also stated that the player's activity in the 5v5 session was significantly greater than in the 11v11 session. The study revealed that the players had much more contact and touches on the ball than in the 11v11. It also revealed that as the numbers in the small-sided decreased, the intensity increased (Dellal, A., Charmari, K., Pintus, A., Girard, O., Cotte, T., & Keller, D., 2008).

So by now we understand that small-sided play can increase fitness levels, technical and mental proficiency, but what else can it promote? To how much more can a player get exposed in a 5v5 situation vs. an 11v11 situation? Schellscheidt stated, "5v5 is a number we can get to and can have people on the same page and not get too confused … sometimes beyond that we lose it. The big game (11v11) needs to be in harmony. It is important to have your next play lined up and have your answers long before you get the ball … you should be the one in the driver's seat in your own space." Importantly, "you can't hide," adds Tambi. "If you are not active, everyone will know. Every player is exposed at every moment. It forces you to learn on the spot much quicker and teaches the importance of not letting your teammates down. Likewise, the team that has the ball with no support on the ball is going to struggle. It exposes everyone at all times both defensively and in attack."

Does small-sided competition raise the level of intensity during training? Beswick stated, "Yes, because players are exposed and more easily judged by their peer group and their coaches — so players must make a greater effort." At the professional level, Dr. Zaichkowsky said, "Yes, players can go flat out, they can also go in bursts, which is a simulation of a real game."

Along with intensity comes the importance of speed of play. Let's look a little closer at what this means. If we break down the importance of speed of play, you will come up with four types of speed. All four clearly come out during small-sided play.

1. Technical Speed — quickness with the ball or the ability to manipulate the ball at speed and maintain control.
2. Tactical Speed — processing information from the game and quickly choosing an appropriate response to the situation.
3. Pure Speed — the ability to overcome the distance between two points in the shortest amount of time.
4. Mental Speed — ability of the player to be aware of all factors, conditions and options inside and outside the game (Linenberger, D., 2009).

With the speed of play and intensity in tight technical areas associated with small-sided play, is there a higher risk of injury? There is "no evidence of it," Zaichokowsky explains. Ryan comments, "No, you can go hard in a small area like 3v3 and not as many balls are played in the air. However, there could be more contact so there is a trade-off." Beswick states that "there will be more engagement in the high involvement of these games and occasionally there is a price to pay for realistic practice."

What would you tell a young coach to look out for in small-sided games? Ryan states that "making sure that coaches do not misunderstand a training session vs. a playing session." "The coach needs to give instruction (feedback) during stoppages (water breaks and natural stoppages) for players to see and understand the puzzle pieces. A training session with no interruption may not be the best usage of time for a college team as your economy of time needs to be a bit better; but for a U12 team it can be very positive." Specifically, Roberts emphasizes "technical development." "Focus and understanding of what to do with the ball and to look for football intelligence and a soccer IQ," explains Zaichkowsky. "Technical capability (1st touch), physical effort and stamina, mental qualities—competitiveness, aggression, persistence plus control, focus and decision making and especially a player's reaction to mistakes" were all listed by Beswick.

How does small-sided play increase participation & enjoyment in the game? Beswick commented by saying, "much more involvement (touches on the ball) can increase enjoyment of a session and the feeling that learning/progress is being accelerated." Zaichkowsky stated, "Regarding youth play and if you have a big group (team), remember that lots of touches on the ball equates to lots of happiness."

Now we have discussed some of the crucial aspects of small-sided play, so let's take a look at some tried and true small-sided games adapted from Insight (FA Coaches' Journal). Some of the objectives here are on improving passing, movement on and off the ball, combination play, transition, tactical and technical cues (decision making under pressure), finishing, rhythm & tempo of the game, and 1v1 situations.

Practice 1: 3 v 2 plus 4 target players

- 4 target players (T) (one touch)
- 3 v 2 in restricted area (free touches)
- Combining under pressure
- Free passing

Practice 2: 6 v 3 (3 teams of 3)

One team defends, therefore 6v3. The six players keep possession, one touch. If the ball is given away or kicked out of the area, the team responsible then defends.

Key Factors

1. The 6 players passing/support
2. The 3 players defend together
3. Group dynamics

Practice 3: 5 v 5 on four goals

- With goalkeepers — score with feet or head
- Without goalkeepers — only score from crosses with headers

(Adapted from Hunter, M., 2000.)

Small-sided soccer surely has cemented its place in the modern game and will continue to play a large role in an individual's development as well as team advancement. At its best, small-sided play can promote a very attractive and free flowing style. It is up to the coach to implement a purpose and how to use the small-sided concept. Although the game is the teacher, it remains up to the

coach to eventually uncover the key faults and diagnose a plan to bring about a positive change.

Much has been said about whether the game of soccer is an art form or a form of science; science has its place, but you have to feel that the game is more of an art form and at sometimes even a measure of expression than anything else. Roy Keane said it best when he spoke of Ryan Giggs' goal in the 1999 FA Cup semi-final against Arsenal. "Ryan Giggs' goal was amazing. In your very best performances you often find that extra bit of inspiration when you forget tactics, the game plan, even forget what you're playing for and just play. The way you did when you were a kid on the streets when there was nothing at stake except, in some vague way, personal vindication. When you reach that level of deep, deep concentration it's amazingly liberating. You summon up all you've ever learned about the game from somewhere deep inside and just play" (Keane, R., 2003).

Dedication

The author would like to dedicate this article to the late Robert Myslik — coach, teacher, mentor, and friend. I wouldn't have realized so much without you; you were and still are an inspiration to so many of us. Thank you, Rob!

Rob played collegiately at Princeton University and was on the Union Lancers club team that captured the U19 US Youth National Championship in 1987. Rob was also an inspirational high school English teacher and soccer coach in both New Jersey and Montana.

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Editor's Note

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What or Who Motivates Our Players to "Play or Not to Play"

That Is the Question
Neil Hull, Director Players Academy Soccer Skills State Technical Director—NSCAA

As we all know the game is built around individuals creating a team. In a full-sided game, a coach is dealing with twenty-two, but the numbers required to play a "game" can be as low as two — one vs. one. Whenever players get together a team environment can be created and this often is the bonding agent between winning and losing. The emphasis of the team can add a virtual player or two; their names might be motivation and passion. Our question though: what makes this individual want to play in the first place? Where does their motivation come from — the game, the ball, friendship, the end product? The answers to these questions could be endless because we are dealing with the psychology of the individual player.

In an organized game, the coach should have a role in the motivation of the player. At all times one must remember that players are passionate for the game because they just want to play. Everything else to them is just an external factor, in my opinion. To

remove the will to play from a player is surgical suicide. It is the coach's duty to create or facilitate the environment so the game can be successful. By doing this correctly, the game then becomes the player's teacher. As we know from our coaching experiences in soccer, players learn more from doing than from lecturing.

As mentioned in the National Soccer Coaches Association of America's curriculum at the director of coaching level and also the State diploma, directors of clubs should be there reinforcing the importance of the game to coaches and should not take away the opportunity for players to play and develop at any level, from a scrimmage, to an organized game. Obviously we have to deal with players overtraining and being able to prioritize, not wearing themselves out by scrimmaging with friends on a match day or conducting similar activities prior to important games. This comes down to the coach's scheduling, communication and organizational skills and the player's discipline. As mentioned in the NSCAA State Diploma, in certain areas of America the game is denied grassroots growth because of the restrictions in being able to play soccer. Reasons may include, but are not limited to: lack of public fields; travel distance to playing locations; restrictions placed on players by other institutions; or transport/ parent involvement. On an organized level in the USA, there are probably more options than most developed countries, but these can also have controlling factors and environments. At the end of the day when the opportunity arises for players we should give the game back and just let them play! This is when they become creative and learn from siblings, friends, strangers and the game. For a coach or parent to take the opportunity away from a team or individual when it is available (the ability to just play), removes the evolution and development of the

player, the team and the game. This is when the score does not matter! A player who plays is the winner!

Sometimes there can be more to a game than just the game. When players are young, grandparents, other relatives or mentors might travel a distance just to watch their offspring. The score does not matter to the spectators, only the moments of joy and pride expressed by the player. This is the game at grassroots, but as we advance in the game and enter the higher levels of club and high school, external factors can affect the game — incorrect numbers of officials, weather, team availability, injuries, and tactics. All these can affect the legitimate outcome of a game. In some of these situations, the rules say you can cancel and reschedule; so cancel it. However, do not send the players home. You've got the field, the time, the resources, so have a scrimmage: 11v11 or M, split the timing into thirds rather than halves so the players can enjoy themselves. At this level who knows the external factors? Maybe high school coaches have come to watch their players at club level or visa versa. Parents might be collecting video for college resumes. One team might have traveled a considerable distance to play; what are they going to do? Just turn around and not play because a referee did not turn up? Have a scrimmage; the official game will be rescheduled anyway: just let the players play and have their own winning moments.

One of largest feedback points from players to coaches is about playing time. Taking away the opportunity for a player to play when it is there, in the local park, league or high school setting, is possibly a control issue by the coach understanding what is best for him but not his team. There might well be strong reasons why he does not want to play the team in formation, but at least give the players the

option to have a 4v4, 8v8 or I M I run-out. Obviously there are exceptions in this argument, but at the local league level a game is the game.

Any coach worth his or her salt knows that all training sessions should finish with a game so he can assess his product and watch the players play. Each game, whether on the training ground or match day, is his diagnostic examination, where each player is cognitively graded in both effort and ability.

To produce a "red" card to players and deny the opportunity of a game or scrimmage could take away the ability for a player to love and advance in her sport. Creating the loss of passion and motivation divorces her from her roots and the reason she most enjoys the sport of soccer. Just remember: players play to play the game!

Controlling the "Controllables"

Juan Pablo

Every sport has specific demands that must be mastered in order to successfully play and excel as an athlete.

Physical, technical, tactical, and psychological attributes serve as building blocks for success. As soccer coaches, we know that physical qualities like strength, speed and agility are critical. Technical skills, such as passing, receiving and heading, are important abilities that must be mastered. Tactical intelligence includes vision, awareness and decision-making on and off the ball. Other sports have similarly important elements in each of these areas. Some of the key mental skills in all sports are focus, optimism and self-confidence and all these skills can be developed and strengthened.

One of the mental toughness principles I teach the athletes I work with is controlling the "controllables." Our athletes have limited physical and emotional energy, so wasting time and energy on things you have no control over and can't do anything about not only can empty your energy tank but also leads to frustration and decreased performance. Examples of things you cannot control are the weather, field conditions, the crowd and the referee to name a few.

As coaches, we also can apply these principles not to run on empty all the time.

Instead, help your athletes make the conscious effort to focus on the things you can do something about and have control over. Here is the Top Ten list I have encouraged our Aztecs to focus on controlling.

Attitude Everything starts and ends with attitude, and if you get it right, everything else will fall in line with it. A positive, winning attitude helps you succeed and impacts those around you. One of my favorite quotes on attitude is by Tony DiCicco, World Cup champion coach in 1999. "Attitude is a choice that can color any situation, and it is contagious. You must act as the player you want to become. Confident players focus on what they can do and don't worry about what they can't."

Effort How hard you work is up to you and no one else. If you give up that control, you are giving away one of the main things that sets you apart from the rest. Your effort must also be smart and reflected in your work rate in practice and games. Anson Dorrance, who has won 21 National Championships, puts it this way: "Winning is not something built in a day; it is constructed year-round. As always, it comes down to progressive, consistent effort, with a view toward a long-range goal."

Focus I define focus as relaxed concentration; it becomes especially important in games where outside distractions can keep you from performing at your best. Your focus must be on the here and now, on each play one at a time. NBA coach Phil Jackson shares that "the key is seeing and doing. If you're focusing on anything other

than reading the court and doing what needs to be done, the moment will pass you by."

Fitness The work you put into your physical conditioning will directly affect your ability to play while making a positive impact on your team. Michelle Akers, two-time World Cup champion, gives the following advice: "Be committed to the one thing you can control—your fitness. Be smart and be aware that your decisions and actions on and off the field affect the team."

Preparation Bobby Knight says it all: "The will to win is overrated in athletics, because everyone wants to win. It's the will to prepare to win that makes the difference." A side benefit of proper preparation is that it also helps you feel more confident.

Rest and Nutrition Your performance is directly impacted by your food and hydration choices as well as the amount of rest and sleep you get. Some research on your part will help you make better choices in this area.

Coachability This has to do with your ability to receive, accept, and apply the coaching points from your coach. The smartest players not only learn from the coach but also from their teammates.

Emotions You must act your way into feeling and not feeling a certain way before you act. Dean Smith, former UNC basketball coach, states: "You can act yourself into a new way of thinking more easily than you can think yourself into a new way of acting."

Communication Positive, assertive, and clear communication is not only something you can control but also will give you and your team an edge. Megan Jurado, an NSCAA All-American for us at San

Diego State this year shared that, "The sports psychology exercises really help our communication and how we work together: I think it has brought us together as a team."

Body Language While this is a part of communication, it is actually the first and easiest thing you can change. If you walk out with confident body language and remain that way under pressure, it will send a clear and powerful message to your teammates, your coach and your opponents.

I encourage you to try it. Start with your attitude and pick one other quality to work on with your players at a time. You and your team will start to think more effectively and steadily perform at a higher level.

The Power of Positive Youth Coaching

Travis Bonfigli

Introduction

During this past youth soccer season in Anne Arundel County, Maryland, my girls' U8 team trained on a field alongside a boys' U10 team. About 15 minutes into the first practice session, the coach of the boys' U10 team was yelling and screaming at his players making the following comments: "You aren't trying hard enough!" and "That was terrible! Do it again!" or "Are you kidding me? That isn't how you pass a soccer ball!" As a coach, I was disappointed, and as a parent I was heartbroken at what was being said to a group of youth soccer players.

As the season progressed, on every Monday and Friday, it was the same atmosphere with the addition of wind sprints for punishment to discourage poor play. By the time the last practice of the season rolled around, the criticism had reached a fever pitch and you could see the head of every player hanging down, weathered by the storm of negative feedback, sarcasm, and punishment. Is this the environment where kids are having fun, learning to be creative and developing a love for the game of soccer?

As coaches we have a duty to ensure that all of our players, irrespective of playing ability or age, enjoy youth sports participation in a safe, constructive and fun environment. Unfortunately, the proverbial trees of negativity, winning at all costs, and punishment for mistakes often obstruct a coach's view of the forest. The way in which we communicate with our players and what we say has a lasting impact both on and off the field.

Goal

The goal of this article (no pun intended!) is to recommend an alternative approach that you, as a coach or parent, can try to incorporate into your practice sessions and throughout the entire season. This approach, based on positive feedback and communication, can be used to inspire your youth players to be creative, have fun, and enjoy learning the beautiful game of soccer. So, what should you try to say to your players and how should you try to say it?

"You're the kind of person who…"

Jim Thompson, founder of the Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA), in his seminal book on youth coaching, The Double-Goal Coach, talks about an amazing phrase that I have used many times with incredibly positive results: "You're the kind of person who…" is how it starts. What a great way to build the confidence of a youth athlete by saying, "You're the kind of person who always works as hard as they can during practice," or "You're the kind of person who can accomplish great things with all your hard work, effort, and determination." There is also a common theme in the two preceding statements that you might have picked up on regarding

determination, effort, and hard work. While it might not seem obvious, the mention of effort, hard work and determination in praise has a much different impact and effect on children than when we praise their ability using phrases like: "You are a genius," or "You are a natural soccer star."

Praising Effort vs. Praising Ability

In a series of studies on how children learn and respond to our feedback, Carol Dweck and her colleagues at Stanford University found that feedback focused on effort, hard work and determination had a significant and positive impact on a child's desire to open their mind to new learning experiences. Dweck, in her powerful book Mindset, defines this type of attitude as the growth mindset. Children who aren't afraid to make mistakes and who focus on effort, hard work and determination grow their ability and desire to learn significantly faster than those youngsters who fear failure or who do not want to look like they are not the "natural" or the "genius." Here are some great ways to incorporate the growth mindset into your season by using phrases like: "Your passing has really improved as a result of all your hard work at practice," or "All your hard work and determination at juggling the soccer ball really shows."

And vs. But

Have you ever had your manager or boss give you feedback in the following fashion: "You did what I asked, but…" By the time the sentence is finished you are more likely to only remember the deflating conclusion to what seemed, at the start anyway, to be a positive message. By changing the word "but" to "and" you can significantly change the impact of your statement. I love to give

players feedback by saying things like, "You did an amazing job getting to goal, and if you focus on locking out your ankle, your next shot will have a great chance of going in." Or for a player who has just lost possession of the ball you could try: "You did a great job winning the ball, and if you shield it from the defender, you are sure to keep possession next time." The simple substitution of one conjunction for another completely transforms the message to a positive and forward-focused theme.

Try vs. Do

It wasn't until I had the distinct pleasure and opportunity of meeting Jeff Tipping, the former Director of Education and Coaching Development for the National Soccer Coaches Association of America (NSCAA), that I realized there was a difference between asking a youth player to "try" something as opposed to telling them to "do" something. While it may seem subtle, using the word "do" implies that if the player can't "do" what you are asking of them they have failed. Contrast this with using the word "try". You can "try" something as many times as you like and then "try" some more, without the fear of failure—you just keep trying (there is that effort, hard work and determination again!). Take a look at the following two statements: "Do the move we worked on last practice," and "Try the move we worked on last practice." With the former, a player who struggles or who can't "do" the move is left with a feeling of failure, as they might be unable to complete the task. With the latter, a player is more likely to feel free to experiment, be creative, and use effort to accomplish their goal. Still not convinced that what we say to our young athletes, and how we say it, can make a difference?

Nature vs. Nurture

In 1985, Benjamin Bloom and his colleagues published the groundbreaking work, Developing Talent in Young People. Bloom and his team set out to discover what made elite athletes, mathematicians, sculptors, and musicians different from their less successful counterparts. Was it simply a genetic gift or was there something else involved that could explain the difference? Bloom and company, at the conclusion of their study, discovered a common and consistent theme among the elite individuals: an environment that championed the growth mindset. The parents of the elite individuals consistently used language that stressed limitless possibilities, hard work, perseverance, and a message that you can achieve anything you put your mind to in life. Bloom also found that the parents of the elite individuals set the example and practiced what they preached when it came to working hard and always giving your all.

Conclusion

You might be asking yourself whether, by simply saying the right thing at the right time, you can guarantee that all your players will be the next Mia Hamm, Michael Jordan or Lionel Messi? Probably not; however, you will be creating an incredibly powerful and positive environment in which your young athletes will be encouraged to thrive and learn. More importantly, you will be arming them with the mindset to help them be successful both on and off the sports field. I will leave you with one final thought: Try to incorporate these approaches into your season, and with your hard work and effort, you can set an incredibly important example for your players that will foster their development, success and love for whichever sport they pursue.

About the Author

Travis Bonfigli has been coaching youth sports for over 20 years and holds the NSCAA Advanced National, National, Advanced Regional, Regional, State, Director of Coaching, and Youth National Diplomas, as well as the USSF C, D, E, F, and Y Licenses, The Football Association of England's International Coaching License, and just recently completed the Coerver Youth Coaching Diploma course. You can reach Travis at travispbonfigli@gmail.com.

Effective On-Field Communication: An Element of Success

Elizabeth M. Mullin

"Talk to each other out there!"

"Let them know if they have a defender coming!"

"Open your mouth!"

As a coach, how many times do you find yourself exasperated, trying to fill the communication void on the field? Effective communication is essential to cohesion, team dynamics, and relationships between teammates (Yukelson, 2006). Good communication can impact the motivation, expectations, emotional dispositions, and the behaviors of participants (Yukelson, 2006). One type of communication often neglected by coaches, but deserves emphasis, is the discussion between on-field participants. Like any other skill in soccer, effective on-field communication is a skill. It must be learned and can be practiced. If communication styles are not discussed or worked on in practice situations, they will not be utilized on game day, hindering the team's ability to perform at optimal levels.

What Is Effective Communication?

Communication is a dynamic process in which the members of the "conversation" are each participating in a give-and-take process. In practice situations, you can blow a whistle and stop a drill in order to instruct on certain situations, but coaches and players are not afforded that time during fast-paced dynamic movement of competition. Consequently, effective communication among players must consist of short phrases that relay the pertinent information. For example, "Man on!" is a common phrase used to let a dribbler know when a defender is closing in on the play. "Cross the ball!" means that a teammate is open across the field. Simple phrases, like the examples noted above, are commonly understood by soccer players. Still, sometimes coaches quickly become aggravated when lack of communication causes a turnover or forces a defender out of position. Communication skills are seemingly simple to understand but hard to implement without practice. And without them, you may find your team struggling to remain in control of the ball.

How Can I Improve My Team's Communication Skills?

Here are three simple approaches that could improve a team's ability to use quick, effective language on the field. First, develop an agreed-upon language, universally understood by all of your players. Second, implement the use of that language as an important objective in your drills. Finally, appointing a "general" to relay one coherent message to your team can be an effective approach so that all 11 players can be on the same page.

Develop an On-Field Language

As mentioned above, on-field communication is a skill. Your players might be chatty off the field, but in the speed of game situations are unable to draw on their verbal abilities. The first step to gaining the "talking tools" required is to create a language that your team can understand and remember. A common phrase like "Cover me" yelled by a sweeper to a defensive back might seem self-explanatory, in that the sweeper wants the defender to drop back while s/he goes after a dribbler. Without practice using this type of short communication, the defensive back might struggle to react immediately, leaving a wide enough opening for an attacking opponent. Developing an on-field language is as simple as a quick discussion among players that frequently interact with each other. Encourage your players to find phrases that work for them and can be easily recognized during the speed of the game.

Make "Talking" a Practice Objective

Once a common language is developed, drills should be designed to integrate the language into daily practice. For example, a five-on-two drill should require all four off-ball players to be communicating with the passer regarding their locations. The defenders should be communicating who will guard the ball handler and who should drop back waiting for the next pass in order to be successful. Reinforcement, both positive and negative, is critical to maintaining the use of language. Coaches should praise the successful use of communication. Lack of talk may result in the change of position from offense to defense, push-ups and crunches, or even sprints.

Removing language in a drill is also an effective method to demonstrate the importance of talking in a game situation. For example, an even-field game of keep-away where use of language is

an automatic turnover will quickly illustrate to your players just how useful game talk can be when trying to alert players about where to pass or if a defender is approaching. Note when players resort to other forms of communication, such as clapping or waving, to get an idea across. After a five to ten-minute game of silence, reinstate the use of language and notice the immediate increase in substantive verbal communication.

Appoint a "General"

Some messages can be relayed by any member of the team as the situation requires. In other cases, one coherent message is required to organize the team. An appointed "general" might be an effective way to put the entire team on the same page. Having a single player relay your message regarding an attack formation, defensive switches, or holes in the opponent's defense will allow everyone to obtain the information clearly and efficiently. Central defenders or midfielders tend to be highly skilled players with leadership skills. Sometimes these players are captains who understand that verbal leadership is a part of their charge. Appointing a general does not require any special announcement or declaration. It can be as simple reminding a prospective general to talk in certain situations. On a drill toward goal where the central midfielder begins the drill, remind that player to keep talking and play an integral part in organizing the drill. Telling the player to be and act like a general will eventually sink in and that player will step up to the role.

Typically, players are receptive listeners to people whom they respect (Yukelson, 2006), such as elected captains or other highly skilled players. For example, a sweeper is typically positioned in proximity to the midfield line while the offense strings together an

attack. The positioning of the sweeper allows for an excellent view of the field, thus providing an opportunity for the sweeper to vocally guide players to locations where they could be most beneficial in the attack. Williams, Davids, Burwitz, and Williams (1994) found that experienced players in the central part of the field have the cognitive abilities to read the field and make an accurate assessment of where passes should be made during an offensive strike. With that in mind, an appointed "general" can communicate to a weak-side midfielder to make a cut or encourage the dribbler to look for a certain pass.

In sum, there are many types of communication that occur in sport, whether on the field or off, between coach and player, or player and player. While every coach will tell you that on-field "talk" is essential to success, that success cannot be attained without vigilant practice. With a designated language and a commitment to learn, practice, and use that language during game situations, teams will have a better opportunity to be successful.

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Getting Players "Match Ready"

Dr. Mark Boyea

How many times have you heard an athlete or coach say something along the lines of, "We need to be ready to play today," or "I just wasn't ready to play today?" Without question, the issue of being ready to play, or what we call "match ready," is always a major concern for players and coaches alike. Let's take a look at what it means to be match ready, then identify strategies that athletes can use to help themselves become mentally prepared to play. Then we will take a look at some ways coaches can help their players become match ready.

The Three As

Being can be thought of as achieving total concentration of body, mind and emotion. At this point, athletes must be able to keep all of their attention on skills and strategies they must execute in order to produce top level performance. There must be no distractions, no mental wandering. Being match ready, then, is about producing the first of what we will call the three As—maximum attention.

In order to achieve the level of attention necessary to play well, we must account for the other two As. These are anxiety and arousal.

Anxiety can be thought of in everyday terms as nervousness. This nervousness can come from things we are aware of, such as the strength of an opponent, or it can have its source in things we can't put our finger on. Regardless, anxiety is very real and can result in physical discomfort, tension and the inability to keep our thoughts from racing. As you can imagine, these things would make maximum attention difficult to achieve.

Arousal can be understood in practical terms as the extent to which an athlete is psyched up, fired up, or energetic. While it's certainly important for players and teams to have the energy to perform, what exactly is the relationship between how psyched up an athlete is and how well he or she performs? The short answer is that arousal helps performance to a point and then starts to hurt it.

In general, a moderate level of arousal is best for top performance. However, there is one important factor that must be considered in order to make an accurate assessment of the arousal level an athlete needs in order to be match ready: what kind of sports are we talking about? Sports or positions that consist of high levels of physical exertion over short periods of time (weightlifting, sprinting) require the greatest level of arousal. Ones that consist of lower levels of exertion over long periods of time (golf, baseball) require the lowest degree of arousal. Again, the majority of sports are best performed at a moderate level of arousal. Therefore, players and coaches are probably wise to avoid being "sky-high" for matches. Some signs of this kind of over-arousal in athletes are hyperactivity, decreased reaction time, inability to concentrate, and when well-learned skills fail.

What, then, can players and coaches do to account for arousal and anxiety levels that influence attention? Here are a few techniques and suggestions:

Develop a Pre-match Routine

Establish a pre-match schedule and maintain it. Get the same amount of sleep the night before a game, get up at the same time, put your uniform on or coaching gear in the same way, listen to music, go off by yourself for a few minutes, etc. Experiment until you find a routine. The important point is that you find a routine that meets your needs. The content of your routine is less important than it be comfortable and consistent. Routines are helpful because they help coaches and athletes control their environment to some extent. Distracting thoughts or emotions have a tougher time doing their damage if everyone involved knows they have a schedule to meet as part of a plan to maximize both individual and collective performance.

Make a "Mental Movie"

Players need to go off alone some place an hour or so before the start of a match. There they can close their eyes and try to create a mental movie of themselves performing in the match. They should envision the weather conditions, the spectators and the opponent. Also they should visualize executing runs, passes, tackles and shots to perfection. They should hear the sounds associated with each of these movements, and forecast themselves communicating the right things at the right times to teammates. They should "feel" what it's like to play to their highest standard of performance. Mental movies

help athletes force their attention onto playing the match and also tend to bring arousal levels up or down as needed.

Clear Your Head

As discussed earlier, anxiety (nervousness) often results in our being bombarded by a great many thoughts that move rapidly through our minds. Unfortunately, the large majority of these thoughts have nothing to do with performing necessary skills. Therefore, before athletes can begin to pay attention to only the skills and strategies they have to perform, it may be necessary to have them clear their heads completely. Have them sit or lay down somewhere quiet and simply practice breathing slowly and deeply, in and out. Concentrate on nothing but breathing in and out. What you will find is that in a short time their thoughts will have either greatly slowed down or totally disappeared. When they have reached this point their anxiety will also have mostly or completely disappeared.

Use Video

Have the team view a video of them playing their best. This will again help everyone put all their thoughts and energies on performing necessary skills and strategies. Additionally, video can serve as an important reminder that the team can play at a top level. Reinforcing self-confidence is certainly a great way to control anxiety. If you don't have a suitable video, the next best thing is to use a video of a team that plays at a consistently high level.

Have a Back-up Plan

One of the risks you run in using a given mental preparation routine is the possibility that circumstances may prevent you from executing

it. What happens when you, as a coach, feel the need to call an unscheduled meeting when the routine calls for viewing a mental movie? What happens if the video doesn't work or play? The key is to develop as many match-ready tools as you can so that you can always have something to fall back on. For the athletes, it means clearing their mind during that meeting (this will also help them concentrate better on what the coach has to say). Make a mental movie if the real thing becomes impossible.

Take a Consistent, Planned Approach to Developing Match-ready Skills

The use of the word skills here is intentional. Mental skills are no different than physical ones in that they can be acquired and improved through regular, organized practice. Have the athletes work on one or more of these techniques daily. Just as you work on physical skills and strategies during practice in order to perfect them for competition, you should also work on mental preparation skills prior to practice in order to perfect them for match use. Remember: use it or lose it!

Limit Pre-match Instruction

The more you give players to think about prior to competition, the greater risk you run of increasing their anxiety levels. Keep instructions simple and confined to only that small number of things that are essential to performing well against that particular opponent.

Consider Individual Differences

As you are no doubt aware, every player is different. Encourage your athletes to use those mental preparation techniques that meet

their comfort level. A player who has difficulty imagining things will have a tough time making a mental movie. He or she might have better success using head clearing or watching a video. Highly creative players might find clearing their minds harder than mental moviemaking. Also of great importance in relation to the issue of individual player differences is that coaches must avoid confusing emotion with being match ready. This is a common coaching error. Just because a player is psyched, it does not mean that he or she is ready to play. In fact, the opposite is often true. Remember our discussion of arousal levels and performance — the athlete who is hyperactive may very well be over-aroused, while quiet, calm players may be at peak readiness. Emotion and readiness are not the same thing.

Don't Force It

Forcing your athletes to try to use mental preparation techniques will probably make them resist doing so, or more likely to use them half-heartedly. Present them as simply another skill they can incorporate into their training to be a complete soccer player. Discuss the various techniques with your athletes and then help each one discover which ones work best and are most comfortable.

It is unfortunate how many athletes work hard each day in practice at improving their passing, shooting or tackling but when match time comes they can't get that hard work to result in top performance. Usually this is because they have not acquired another critical skill—that of being able to properly prepare themselves for the match. By developing a pre-match routine and a set or mental preparation techniques, players can master the three As: controlling anxiety;

achieving the optimal level of arousal; and keeping one's attention focused on executing skills and strategies.

About the Author

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Coaching Children to Embrace a "Love of the Game"

Maureen R. Weiss, PhD, University of Virginia

Coaches occupy multiple roles in children's lives as sport participants. Coaches must be excellent instructors so that youth learn and improve skills, increase knowledge of strategies and tactics, and achieve their goals. Coaches can also inspire children to maintain motivation for participating in sport and, in so doing, allow them opportunities to accrue such benefits as positive self-esteem, enjoyable experiences, long-lasting friendships, and a positive attitude toward the value of lifetime physical activity. In short, coaches can ensure that youth want to continue their sport involvement — that is, participate for intrinsic reasons — rather than participate for primarily external reasons, such as feeling obligated to others to continue. How can coaches maximize their positive impact on youths' motivation in sport?

Ingredients of Children's Motivation in Sport

Children participate in sport for multiple reasons, the most prominent among them being developing physical competence (learning and improving skills), attaining social acceptance and approval (be with and make friends, interactions with parents and coaches), and enjoying one's experiences (having fun, doing something interesting). Coaches can maintain and promote greater motivation by engaging in behaviors and structuring practices to meet these motivational needs. The three main reasons children participate in sport means that coaches should be mindful of enhancing players' perceptions of competence, ensuring positive social influence, and keeping practices and games fun and enjoyable. These three ingredients of motivation — perceived competence, social support, and enjoyment — are necessary for sustaining children's "love of the game."

We depict all the ingredients of motivation in the diagram shown in Figure 1. This visual shows that coaches, parents, and peers (teammates, close friends) directly influence children's perceived competence or beliefs about their ability in sport. Perceptions of competence, in turn, influence feelings of enjoyment and motivation in the form of intrinsic/extrinsic reasons, effort exerted, and persistence following mistakes. If we hone in on coaches as the source of social influence, we can identify specific coaching behaviors and principles that will maximize the probability that perceived competence, enjoyment, and motivation will thrive.

Provide Optimal Challenges

Coaches can satisfy athletes' need for developing and demonstrating physical competence by carefully matching the difficulty of skills or activities with the child's capabilities. I like to

think of optimal challenges as ones that match the activity to the child, and not the child to the activity. In short, optimal challenges are those that are at the cutting edge of a child's potential. Goals that are too easy are boring and simplistic; goals that are too difficult are likely to invoke anxiety and fear of failure. Coaches can ensure optimal challenges by setting hard but realistic goals for all participants, outlining developmental skill progressions that allow children to systematically achieve goals, and modifying facilities, equipment, or activities to optimize task difficulty relative to the child's skill level.

Maximize Social Support

Acceptance and approval by adults and peers strongly influence children's perceptions of competence, enjoyment, and motivation. Coaches can make an impact on these elements in several ways.

First, they can provide frequent and contingent informational feedback on how to improve skills. The term contingent means specific to or directly related to level of performance. For example, a baseball coach might praise a player for executing correct technique in hitting a ball to the opposite field, and then follow-up with information on how to get out of the batters box and up the line to first base more quickly.

In response to a skill error, focusing on information for improving on the next attempt, rather than punishing the error, is a contingent and effective means of motivating players to sustain their effort. The literature clearly shows that frequent, contingent instruction by the coach to enhance sport skills and strategies sends a message to

players that they have the ability to improve, and this is a motivating factor.

A second means of coaches providing social support is through contingency and quality of praise and criticism. Contingent praise might be our baseball coach reinforcing a player for making the correct decision in response to a fielder's choice, while contingent criticism might be constructively questioning a player for committing a mental error on a play he/she has mastered many times before.

This latter behavior should suggest to the athlete that the coach believes he/she has the ability to do better. This brings us to the term quality of praise and criticism. Quality refers to the appropriateness of the feedback. Is it too much or too little? For what level of performance or task difficulty is it given? The general rule to ensure quality or appropriate feedback is: (a) don't give excessive praise; (b) don't give praise for mediocre performance; and (c) don't give praise for success at easy tasks that everybody can do.

Make Sure Sport Experiences Are Fun

Fun does not have to solely mean pizza or McDonald's after the game. Enjoyment can be part of the fabric of practices and competitions. Children and adolescents experience fun when there are opportunities for high levels of action, personal involvement in the action, and affirming friendships.

Activities during practice could be structured to maximize action by eliminating waiting in line, ensuring sufficient equipment, and keeping things moving with short but intense and varied activities. Children also enjoy having some input in their experiences. Although coaches

certainly make up the practice plan and orchestrate the pace and content of activities, children can be part of the decision-making process, such as choosing warm-up drills or an activity at the end of practice. Providing some opportunity for autonomy translates to greater fun and enjoyment.

Create a Mastery Motivational Climate

The motivational climate refers to how the learning environment is structured, what behaviors are valued, and how individuals are evaluated. A mastery motivational climate is one in which success and valued behaviors are defined in self-referenced terms such as learning, effort, and improvement, and mistakes are viewed as part of the learning process.

By contrast, a performance motivational climate is one that emphasizes norm-referenced definitions of success such as comparison to teammates' performances and game outcome. The sport environment is one that contains some mixture of both mastery and performance climates.

The key is for coaches to recognize, praise, and emphasize athletes' personal improvements because such actions are under athletes' control and thus more motivating than emphasizing peer comparisons. The acronym TARGET identifies elements of a mastery motivational climate and also reinforces some of our earlier coaching concepts. TARGET includes:

- Task (optimal challenges vs. standardized goals),
- Authority (player choice vs. coach-directed only),
- Recognition (reinforcing effort and improvement, not only outcome),

- Grouping (cooperative teamwork vs. competitive orientation),
- Evaluation (assessing improvement vs. normative criteria), and
- Time (adequate time for learning and improvement).

Help Children Help Themselves

Coaches can also motivate athletes by teaching them self-regulated learning strategies, which allow children to depend on themselves, not only adults, to monitor and evaluate their skill improvement and performance. Self-regulated learning consists of self-observation, self-judgment, and self-reinforcement. These processes refer to monitoring one's behaviors to assess progression toward skills, comparing one's current performance with desired goals, and reacting positively or negatively concerning progress toward goal achievement.

Strategies such as goal setting, reframing negative to positive self-talk, and encouraging adoption of effort attributions for performance setbacks allow children a constructive means of evaluating their progress and readjusting their sights, maintaining a positive mental attitude rather than getting down on themselves, and seeking out alternative strategies as a means of problem solving rather than ascribing skill errors to factors outside of their control.

Take-Home Messages

Coaching to embrace a "love of the game" means understanding that multiple reasons underlie children's participation patterns. The major reasons children play sports is to develop and demonstrate physical competence, experience positive social interactions with adults and peers, and have fun and enjoyable times. These three

reasons form the ingredients of intrinsic motivation — one that is synonymous with an inherent desire to continue involvement.

To maximize motivation, coaches can positively affect children's sport experiences by providing optimal challenges, maximizing social support, ensuring enjoyable activities, creating a mastery motivational climate, and helping children help themselves. Each of these principles can be easily customized with sport-specific examples, and applied during practices and competitive events to maintain, sustain, and enhance children's "love of the game."

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USOC Sport Psychology's "Top Ten" Guiding Principles for Mental Training

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Mental training can't replace physical training and talent.

We haven't seen any Olympic athlete who succeeded without doing the physical and technical work, even though we have worked with some of the most mentally talented athletes in the world. The reality is that even an exceptionally talented athlete who has not prepared well physically loses confidence and is vulnerable in competition. The best and easiest confidence is that which comes from the knowledge that you are as prepared, or more prepared, than your competitors, and that you are physically capable of a winning performance.

Physical training and physical ability aren't enough to succeed consistently

On the other hand, we have worked with a number of athletes whose coaches called them "the most talented athlete on the team,"

yet these athletes never achieved international success. These physically gifted athletes were not able to manage the mental demands of the sport. Some athletes can't handle the focus and discipline of training, where others can't handle the pressure and stress of competition. If you are lacking in either of these areas, you may succeed at times, but you will not succeed consistently.

A strong mind may not win you an Olympic medal, but a weak mind will lose you one.

It is very difficult to predict that a mentally strong athlete will win an Olympic medal, due to all the factors that play into winning a medal. There are so many variables — training, health, finances, coaching to name a few — to properly account for that success for any athlete is never certain. On the other hand, one of the easiest predictions to make is who will fail under Olympic pressure. Athletes with an obviously weak mental game virtually never win at the biggest competitions.

Coaches frequently don't know what their athletes are thinking.

While all great coaches pay close attention to the behavior of their athletes on the field of play, very few coaches have a similarly detailed knowledge of what their athletes are thinking or should be thinking. Few coaches know enough about the specific mental "demons" all athletes have, so they are often unable to intervene when they need to at competition. We have come to the conclusion that like politics or religion, it is an area many coaches are afraid to ask about. While some coaches know that "psychological factors" were the cause of an athlete failing in competition, many of these coaches are not aware of the athlete's mental state before they compete.

Thoughts impact behavior. Consistency of thinking = consistency of behavior.

It is a simple but powerful idea that all sport behavior starts with a thought. While much of coaching focuses on making sport behavior more consistent and controllable, much less of coaching focuses on making thinking more consistent and controllable. Because of this, many coaches are surprised by not only the difference between their athletes' practice behavior and competition behavior but that the reason for that difference is due to how their athletes are thinking. One goal of sport psychology is to understand and control the thinking process, therefore understanding and controlling behavior.

Coaches often have a different view of changing technical mistakes vs. mental mistakes.

As sport psychologists, we are optimistic about the ability to work on mental mistakes. Thus we are often surprised when coaches are willing to write off an athlete as a "choker" when they repeat mental mistakes in competition. These are often the same coaches who will literally work for years with an athlete on a repeated technical mistake. To a coach who says, "I don't think they'll ever do it," we ask, "How many times have you specifically worked on changing the mental mistakes? What drills have you tried? How do you give the athlete feedback on his mental mistake? Does the athlete know exactly how she should think? Have you had this discussion?"

Coaches must be involved in the mental training process.

Historically, in sport psychology, we have heard coaches say after a strong period of training before the season, "Well, now it is all mental. Now it is up to the sport psychologist!" While it is nice to feel

important to a team's success, we have learned from hard experience that it is all wrong for coaches to "outsource" mental training and sport psychology to a sport psychology consultant. We have learned that many elite coaches feel out of their comfort zone when dealing with mental training issues, and fear asking probing questions about how an athlete thinks and feels. We have also learned to push coaches to go past their fears and get used to coaching the mental, as well as the physical, athlete.

If coaches don't become the prime provider of sport psychology for their teams, all kinds of teaching opportunities and chances for excellence will be missed. At worst, coaches who are unaware of their athletes' mental skill building will coach in ways that oppose or undermine the mental skills acquired. The bottom line is that coaches must be involved in mental training for it to be successful.

Sometimes it is ok to force athletes to take the time to do mental training.

The USOC's Sport Psychology Department's philosophy on this topic has evolved over the past ten years. In the past, we were unwilling to say that all teams should do some form of mental training. We had been fairly passive, waiting for coaches to approach us with requests for service. Unfortunately, many of those requests came from coaches who had seen their athlete melt down in the biggest competition of their life. Obviously, it is too late at that point!

Surprisingly, many coaches seem willing to accept an athlete's reassurance, "My mental game is just fine." Why, when you wouldn't ask the athlete to determine if his technique is "just fine," do you let the athlete avoid working on their mental game for years until a crisis forces them to admit they need work? At the USOC, we are

now quite comfortable pushing athletes into doing the mental training work, even if they don't always see the value at first.

Like any other skill, mental skills need to be measured in order to maximize performance of those skills.

"What gets measured, gets done." This old expression from business writer Peter Lynch is useful for coaching as well. Just as ski coaches time training runs, or basketball coaches calculate free throw shooting percentages, application of mental skills can be measured. Moreover, they must be measured if they are to change. Once you think of mental skills as behaviors to be measured, you can begin to use your own coaching creativity to teach, modify, and increase the use of, mental skills.

Coaches need to think about their own mental skills.

Most coaches can readily see that the same skills they are teaching their athletes are also useful for their own work in coaching. With the amount of pressure coaches face, for example, the ability to manage emotions, control arousal, game plan, and simulate pressure are all useful for coaches.

This is an excerpt from the Coaches Guide—Mental Training Manual, USOC Sport Psychology staff. This manual is available from the USOC for $24.95, call 719.866.4517 for more information.

Developing Leadership in Players

Hector R. Morales-Negron, Itay Basevitch, and David W. Eccles

Everyone involved in athletics in the United States talks about how leadership is developed through athletics participation, but do coaches develop leadership? If so, how? The following was first published on the FA Learning website.

Coaches and managers need players who can contribute to the team with more than just great technical skill. Coaches want players who can support the team goals and objectives by becoming leaders. Coaches want these leaders to motivate and provide direction and instruction to other players on the team both in and out of play. But leadership identification and development in football are not simple challenges and are often ongoing because players move, rotate and retire. In this article, we discuss types of leaders, functions of leaders (i.e., what they do), and various leadership qualities you can look for in your players before outlining a range of activities for developing player leadership.

Types of Leaders

Before focusing on developing leaders, it is useful to have some understanding of the different types of leaders and leadership styles. A distinction is often made between assigned and unofficial leaders. Assigned leaders are assigned to the leadership position by others and include coaches, managers, team captains and other administrators. These individuals have been placed in a leadership position due to their experience, education and training, or demonstrated capability. Unofficial leaders include those players that the rest of the team look toward at critical times for guidance and direction. These leaders are not appointed but have emerged owing to their chemistry or "cohesion" with the remaining players on the team and their behavior on the field. Therefore, as you scan your players in the search for potential leaders, start by looking at your unassigned leaders. These unassigned leaders are already part of the leadership of your team and organization because they have won half of the leadership fight, earning the trust of those to be led. Regardless of their appointed or unassigned status, what we expect from these leaders remains constant and is discussed as follows.

Leadership Functions

So, what does leadership really mean? If you research or ask this question, you will get a multitude of definitions. However, one method for arriving at a definition for leadership is by evaluating what people expect from leaders. Common answers to this query include wanting a leader to tell us what we should be trying to achieve and how to achieve it, and to remind us that we can do it. From this approach then, leaders provide purpose, direction, and motivation for their team members. Understanding these functions is important when attempting to identify potential leaders in your team.

Purpose First, in football, leaders provide purpose by giving players a reason to do things. For example, an emerging leader might be heard to say to other players during a game that the team needs to better defend the right wing to avoid getting beaten.

Direction Second, players want direction; leaders provide direction by figuring out how to get the work done right with the players, time and other resources they have available. For example, following the right wing defense example, the emerging player might be heard directing players into positions and suggesting to them tactics that will enable the right wing to be defended.

Motivation Effective leaders understand that people are driven when they have both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is motivation provided by feelings "that come from within"—for example, wanting to feel that one has a purpose in life, to feel competent and the desire for challenge. Extrinsic motivation is motivation provided by feelings about things "that come from without," often from rewards such as prize money. Leaders motivate their players by highlighting both intrinsic and extrinsic motives. For example, they might give a speech to players reminding them that not only will they will feel a personal reward by meeting the challenge of rising above the stress of a cup final and playing their best (intrinsic reward) but also knowing that a great performance could lead to a win, which would lead to the chance of becoming the league champions and standing on the podium (extrinsic reward).

Leadership Qualities

Certain qualities have been found to be common in successful leaders, and these are described in this section. Coaches should

look for these qualities in their players when attempting to identify potential future leaders and should help instill these qualities in their current leaders.

Commitment Players will never follow a leader who they believe is not truly committed to the players' and the team's success. In one way, this is a trust issue. Players are not going to take risks and apply extra efforts to improve current performance on the basis of the leader's recommendations if they do not trust that the leader is committed to the team more or at least as much as they are. The level of a player's commitment can often be identified by the player being willing to undertake acts that put the team first; that is, acts that negatively affect him or her personally but are of benefit to the team such as sitting it out on the bench rather than playing when feeling under the weather.

Communication Leaders cannot be effective if they lack communicational skills. Leaders need to be able to communicate clearly and should also provide players with opportunities to speak out if they do not understand something that has been communicated to them. One method of testing the communication skills of emerging leaders is to ask them on several occasions to relay various messages, such as those relating to practice and tactics, to the remainder of the team and then, once this has been undertaken, to speak to various team members to assess the extent to which they understood the messages relayed. In addition, take time out, and try to foresee opportunities to observe your emerging leaders as they communicate with the players and, based on your observation, provide feedback to them on where they might be falling short in communicating well.

Initiative Initiative is the tendency to act to better oneself (and in this case the team) without being told. For example, a player that comes to you to present possibilities for a more challenging practice session that he or she thinks will help the team is showing initiative. You can create situations that present possibilities for your players to show initiative. For example, ask your players to think about how the team's performance might be improved by the next match. Observe which players take the initiative by coming back to you with good ideas.

Listening If you want to lead, you have to listen. Leaders are easily accepted and embraced by players when each player feels that their concerns are being heard and their input is being considered — in other words, they matter to the team. It does not mean that the leader has to agree with an individual player's opinion, just that they consider and reflect on this opinion. Aspirant leaders should understand that good ideas can develop from the "ground" up. Starting out with the attitude that each player on the field might have something smart to contribute and is capable of making a clear contribution to the overall success of the team will predispose leaders to being better listeners. This quality in a player would be indicated by their active attempts to seek the opinions of typically less vocal and/or less listened-to members of the team.

Positive attitude Effective leaders must be able to find the positive aspects of an adverse situation. Players are always going to be affected when they make an error or miss an opportunity (they kick wide despite having an open goal), they lose concentration when marking their man, which results in conceding a goal, or they react late to a penalty kick. Rather than criticize these mistakes, effective leaders treat the mistake as a learning opportunity by providing

constructive advice on how to do something different to avoid the problem in the future. You can encourage your leaders to be positive following player mistakes by using the "sandwich" approach to providing constructive feedback, which has two positive statements filled with constructive criticism. For example, following a mistake, first begin by praising the team in some way, such as for their effort, and follow this with constructive criticism. Critical sentences should begin with "Here is what I believe we should do to stop this problem happening..." Finally, end with an encouraging statement, "If we do these things, I am sure that we will really be ready to give 'so-and-so' a run for their money next Saturday."

Responsibility Leaders must be prepared to assume responsibility for their decisions and their actions. This starts with personal responsibility, which can be indicated by the nature of the leader's attributions about his or her own performance. If a match does not go as planned, does the individual only find other players responsible for the problems when the individual was also responsible? Do they take full responsibility only when things go right? You can ask yourselves these questions as you evaluate your players for leadership potential.

Teachability Effective leaders do not exhibit a "know it all" attitude but instead are willing to learn and actively seek out learning opportunities. The best way to identify teachability among players is by observing their actions and behaviors after they make mistakes and after they receive criticism. Do they use the information well and make adjustments to their practice and the way they play or do they react negatively? Individuals with teachability make adjustments quickly, and actively look for advice and guidance from others in order to improve their and the team's performance.

Vision A leader without a vision for the future is no more than a "fire fighter" who leads only so that current situations are resolved to bring peace to the environment or to maintain the status quo. They do not look to longer-term goals because it might require that the status quo is changed as opposed to maintained, which is a much harder task. However, effective leaders have a longer-term vision and are able to articulate that vision to their teammates. This quality is often indicated by an individual being prepared to propose changes that are unpopular in the short term (because they may create extra work for the team) but potentially lead to a performance gain in the long term.

Leadership Development Activities

In this section, we describe various activities that allow coaches to take an active role in developing leaders in their teams by providing them with opportunities to make decisions about important team-related issues.

Off-the-pitch planning and strategizing Ask potential leaders to plan and strategize about various issues, such as individual practice sessions, a weekly training schedule, or on-the-pitch play.

On-the-spot decisions Place your potential leaders on the spot by asking them to make decisions about important issues under time pressure. For example, you could ask a potential leader, without prior warning, which player he or she thinks should be the substitute for an injured player on the pitch.

Take the day off You or another individual in a supervisory position can "take the day off" and let your potential leaders embrace the opportunity to exhibit their capabilities for an entire day. Days off can

provide good opportunities for potential leaders to gain practice at leading for a relatively long period of time.

Small group problem solving Use hypothetical as well as actual situations to develop leadership by creating small groups in an off-the-pitch setting. Appoint a different leader for each group you create. This will provide you with opportunities to see how each leader interacts with the remaining players and how they react to the leader. The problems for discussion can vary; you can ask the team to resolve tactical game strategies, discuss practice regimens, or discuss what they feel are the barriers to current performance improvement.

Summary

In this article, we have discussed types and functions of leaders and described various qualities that coaches might look for when attempting to identify potential future leaders and should help instill in their current leaders. We have also outlined a range of activities for developing leadership. We hope that by considering the concepts and trying the activities outlined here, coaches and managers will be able to identify and develop players into leaders who can contribute to the team with more than just great technical skills.

Further Reading

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