

Correcting some common coaching errors

By Graham Ramsey

From observing youth coaches, both in practical and clinic situations, I have found that these are some of the common errors coaches make. By knowing about them it will help you become a better coach. The common errors are:

- **POOR COACHING POSITION** – You can only coach what you see. If you stand in the middle of a practice, you can only see half of it. Like good players, good coaches position themselves to see as much as possible. This is why you situate yourself on the edge of a game or practice area. Always look at the “big picture” before telescoping in to coach. Put the “mini picture” right and return back to viewing the “big picture” again. Think of looking at a mosaic composed of 1000 tiles. You stand back to view the whole mosaic and then see one of the tiles is dirty. You then telescope in to clean that tile. Once done, stand back to look at the “big picture” again.
- **DRILL AND ROTE BASED** – Too many coaching situations are organizational masterpieces with players standing in line. The drill becomes more important than learning. The result is great “drillers” and rotten players. As often as you can, create games. Games and players go together. Soccer is an “open skill” sport, which means players have to be able to problem solve every few seconds. By reproducing game like activities, players learn to read the game pictures. The youngsters play in mini game environments like 4v4, the faster the “reads” and the more acute becomes their awareness. Children always invent games. They know how to connect fun and learning through games, they are experts.
- **-FAN COACHING-** Many inexperienced coaches are like fans in the stands and react to everything that moves. The continual chatter tends to become annoying to players trying to concentrate. It’s like “verbal wallpaper,” and any good advice is lost in the avalanche of words. Also, too much information only confuses youngsters. Keep your coaching points concise and specific. Keep it simple and to the point. Remember one dime’s worth of coaching in exchange for one dollar’s worth of practice. Coach knowledge, no information. Knowledge is about discipline, understanding and awareness. Its positive problem solving- stop the picture, correct it, and go. Spewing out information, on the other hand, is about undisciplined players and throw verbal Band-Aides on every error. There’s no picture to stop as the whole session becomes a blur of unrelated incidents. The focus is totally lost, and the practice loses its meaning and direction.
- **COACHING THE GAME AND NOT THE PLAYERS-** This partly ties into the “fan coaching” mentality. Making big statements such as “make space” and “don’t bunch” may be true observations, but a good coach will stop, correct and individualize the instruction to a specific player. Good coaches coach players. Like good doctors, they treat each individual to cure the problem. You never see a doctor walk into his waiting room and throw aspirins at everyone. They put individuals right as

they have different problems. Coaching is no different. You have to diagnose the problem and then put it right.

- COSMETIC COACHING- Filling in a session with activities that just fill in time and keep players happy may look good, but are they learning? Many sessions are cute, filled with candy ideas, but lacking substance and direction. There has to be a purpose and method to help youngsters improve.
- PROGRESS NOT RELATED TO THE PLAYERS- This is where a coach is too organized and becomes a slave to his/her preparation plans. Be sensitive to your players and their progress.
- NOT SEEING KEY PLAYING ERRORS- Failing to put the main failings right. Practice, study and experience will help solve this problem area.
- POOR ORGANIZATION- This is often due to a lack of thought and preparation prior to a session. For example
 - **Lack of continuity to the session.** Every session must have a beginning, middle, and an end, often a game.
 - **No targets.** This is particularly so for defenders winning possession. As in a real game, they have to score. It could be a goal or reaching a line.
 - **Everyone is on the same team.** A coach may have done a great session, then throw all that effort away all because players cannot recognize which team they are on, come the final game. Get pinnies or tank-tops.
 - **Poor starting service.** If the service is poor, the practice just dissolves. This is particularly so when coaching heading or volleying. Quality service is the beginning of successfully learning skills and team play.
 - **Be disciplined.** Work at getting no more than two or three key messages across. Think of television advertising and that rabbit selling the same message over and over again. Coaching is no different.

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