

Loudoun Soccer: Coaching Tips for High School Students

Thank you for volunteering to coach a Recreational team with Loudoun Soccer. As a high school student, you have a great opportunity to positively influence the lives of younger players in Loudoun County.

However, as a high school student, you'll also encounter some challenges along the way given your age. Some of these challenges will be more difficult than others, but all of them can be resolved by being organized and proactive, on and off the field.

Below are several tips to help you make coaching a positive experience for yourself, your team's parents, and most importantly for the players you're coaching.

"Age is Just a Number"

Your age can be a benefit – we'll discuss later on how you can best connect with the players you're coaching. But it'll be the first hurdle you'll need to overcome. Most parents on your team will be skeptical of you as the team's coach – they're likely expecting an experienced, parent coach, so they'll naturally be surprised that their child's coach is a high school student.

Alleviate their concerns by showcasing how responsible you are. This can be done in the following areas:

- Frequent, clear communication – send regular, weekly email reminders to your team about practices and games. Feel free to include what you're focusing on in training that week, but keep it short-and-sweet, and positive. Use email to communicate – text messages are for quick, last-minute updates.
- Manage your Calendar – make sure you have all practices and games on it, and check each week for any changes.
- Arrive early and depart late – make sure you're the first person at the field for practices and games so you can set up, and greet players. Stick around a few minutes after each team function – so you ensure all players leave with their parent or guardian, or work with an individual child on a particular skill for a few minutes.
- Be prepared (see below).

Everyone will make mistakes – but your margin for error is smaller because parents may be suspect of you as their child's coach. Stay on top of tasks to prove them wrong.

"Failing to Prepare is Preparing to Fail"

Success is often achieved through preparation. In coaching youth sports, this means having a clear plan for practices, and being organized on game day.

Loudoun Soccer offers an online coaching education resource center, which we encourage you (and all coaches) to review: <https://www.loudounsoccer.com/Default.aspx?tabid=2651924>.

Included is a practice session library (<https://www.loudounsoccer.com/Default.aspx?tabid=2651924#q6>) to make it easy for you to organize practices. You're welcome to plan your own sessions – just be sure to focus on a theme, and keep players moving and challenged.

We also have a series of articles on game day management, including how to organize a line-up and rotate players: <https://www.loudounsoccer.com/Default.aspx?tabid=2651924#q7> (look under Recommended Formations, Line-Ups, and Substitutions).

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Teach!

Coaching is about facilitating and teaching. If your practice session is organized (e.g. it has a theme, a progression of activities, it's fun and challenging, etc.) then you'll accomplish the facilitating portion.

The second part is teaching. This is trickier, because:

1. You need to take your knowledge, and explain it in words your players understand; and
2. Players learn differently – some will need to see it, others need to hear it, most need to perform it, and often times players will need to do two or three (show it, tell it, do it) to understand it.

Avoid lectures, over-coaching (commenting on everything), and having players sit for long periods of time. Deliver bite-size information, and keep the players moving and active.

A full series of teaching tips are available at

<https://www.loudounsoccer.com/Default.aspx?tabid=2651924#q7>.

Look the Part

Remember how parents will be skeptical of you as their child's coach? Looking the part will help address this.

Picture in your mind what a soccer coach looks like? He or she is likely wearing soccer clothes (track suit, or shorts and a polo), athletic shoes or cleats, holding a clipboard, perhaps has a whistle around their neck...

This doesn't mean you have to wear that specific outfit – just look the part. If any coach arrives at practice wearing jeans, they'll face a credibility question (just like if you're high school teacher shows up to school wearing pajamas). It's magnified with you as a high school student – so look the part.

Verbal communication (body language) is important. If you're sitting in a chair snacking on Cheez-Its during a game, or playing on your phone, it shows disinterest. If your body language is negative (arms crossed), your message may be lost. Be mindful of the vibes your physical appearance and actions send, as they can muddy your message.

Connect with Players, but Act the Part

You have a unique quality as a high school student coaching youth players – you are closer generationally to these children, which will help you better understand their world. You understand Fortnite and Minecraft, Flossing, and YouTube videos.

This means you'll be able to connect with them by speaking their language, and sharing some of their world. Use this to your advantage.

At the same time, you need to act as their coach. Be friendly, but not their friend. Your tone of your voice should be respectful but commanding. Avoid just being a cheerleader ("good job!") – provide specific instruction and feedback in a positive manner.

Put your phone away. Ignore texts and alerts and focus your full attention on the players and the team.

Act the part.

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Resolve Conflicts

As a coach, you'll inevitably have to resolve conflicts. This may be player-to-player (two players arguing in practice, or one child bullying another), or player-to-coach (a player refusing to listen to you), or parent-to-coach (a parent upset with how you addressed a situation).

Silence in these situations are filled with negativity, so be sure to address them.

When it's a player-related issue, help the child understand what and why they did was inappropriate – you might even ask the child questions to help them reach the answer (Why did you push Billy down? Is that appropriate? Why not? What do you need to say to Billy?). Depending on the severity of the issue, have them sit out for 5 minutes. A timeout along with an explanation of the inappropriateness of their action may be enough to stop future behavior. Be sure to inform the child's parents of what took place so they're in the loop, and can help reinforce positive behaviors.

Expect to have a parent-coach conflict. Parents are naturally protective of their children – they want to see them succeed, and they want them to avoid harm and failure. Some parent concerns will be more legitimate than others, but all need to be taken serious because they're serious to the parent.

It's also natural for you to respond defensively, or to become upset or angry, or to be intimidated in that moment.

Here are some helpful tips on addressing conflicts:

1. **24-48 Rule:** if a parent approaches you immediately after an incident (e.g. they're upset about their child's playing time and confront you at the end of the game), acknowledge them and their concern but ask them to wait 24 hours before addressing it. Those 24 hours allows everyone to "cool down" and think clearly. The issue should be addressed in the next 48 hours, so it can be dealt with in a timely fashion.

If the issue is smaller, or if the parent is not emotional (e.g. I noticed Johnny was picking on Billy today at training), you may still invoke the 24-48 rule as needed, or simply acknowledge the concern; sometimes the concern just needs to be recognized and placed on your radar to observe and address in the future.

2. **Listen first, speak second:** let the parent share all of their facts and perceptions before responding. Avoid becoming defensive, even if they're critical of you. Once you have their perspective, you'll be able to better identify the root issue at hand.
3. **Acknowledge their concern:** let them know that since this is important to them, it's important to you.
4. **Address their concern and reach a resolution:** if you mishandled a situation, it's OK to admit it, and pledge to prevent it from reoccurring. If you disagree with their perspective, share yours – what you saw, how you acted, why you did so. State these matter-of-factly – it shouldn't be an argument or a debate but a sharing of information with the goal of resolving a conflict together.
5. **Walk away if threatened:** if you ever feel threatened by a parent, do not engage, and simply walk away. Notify the club (dan.raben@loudounsoccer.com) immediately with the facts of the situation (name of the parent, what they said or did, why that may have occurred) so we can address it.

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Last but not Least – Enjoy It!

Coaching a team is a responsibility, but it's also fun. Your coaching will influence a group of children either positively or negatively. Embrace this responsibility by being organized, teaching, and setting a good example for your team (players and parents) to follow.

Enjoy the moments, too. This can be rewarding for the kids, but also for you, knowing you made a positive influence on these children and in your community.