

Over-Coaching: Resist the Urge!

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Most of the sports that are currently predominant in our culture involve the coach as an active participant. Although the coach is along the touchline, in the coaching box or on the bench the opportunity for being overly involved with the players constantly exists. These opportunities are aside from the usual timeouts or substitutions. These typical stoppages in play already contribute to many sports being coach oriented rather than player oriented. Combine the standard loud encouragement (i.e.- screaming & yelling) with animated cheerleading and you have an excess of over-coaching.

Soccer is different than most sports. **The involvement of the coach is secondary to those participating in the game: the players.** While coach oriented activities (basketball, baseball, American football) demand, and allow for, a high degree of involvement by the coach during competitive games, soccer is different. It would be more appropriate to contend that soccer coaches do their work and prepare their teams during the week. By the time it comes to the game on Saturday morning it is up to the participants to act, make decisions, and play! **It is essential that the youth soccer coach understand their role.** If continuous over-involvement during the game is not the best way to assist the players then the coach has a responsibility to alter their behavior and learn to take a different tact. Sports such as baseball and American football are what we would refer to as "set up" sports. Between pitches (baseball) or plays (American football) time and opportunity exists for diagrams to be drawn or the coach to reposition an outfielder. Soccer does not allow for similar stoppages since play is continuous and fairly uninterrupted. Players must be allowed, and ultimately able, to think and make decisions on their own. They must learn to solve problems during the game. This self-sufficient type of thinking necessitates that players learn from the game and utilize any and all information that they receive and process towards finding solutions to the problems they encounter.

The games that youngsters play on Saturday mornings in their local leagues and associations should be viewed as a vehicle for learning. The same is true concerning their one, or two, days a week in training.

The acquisition of playing ability is a long-term process that begins at the ages of 5 or 6. It is unrealistic to expect youngsters at 10 or 11 years of age, and younger, to have an adult perspective on the game. Because of their maturity level youngsters are learning about the broadest parameters of play. They are at a stage where development is the priority since the acquisition of skill, elementary decision-making and an appreciation and passion for soccer are founded. Young players learn, and are a product of their experiences. They learn more from their experiences (games, activities, the environment) than they do from the coach. The role of the coach is to then organize and set up games and activities that the players enjoy and learn from.

Unfortunately, the majority of over-coaching occurs with youngsters who are between the ages of 5 to 11. It occurs, in part, because of the "profile" of the average parent/coach. These parent/coaches bring little practical soccer experience with them. At the same time they are learning about soccer they are learning about coaching. The availability of coaching education throughout state associations, combined with the information that is presented in the courses, simplifies coaching. Once youth coaches are exposed to this information they can assume their role with greater effectiveness.

While coaches are somewhat responsible to educate the parents of their players, parents, in turn, should evaluate the effectiveness of the coach: is my child learning to play soccer or is the coach preoccupied with drills that only permit the players to play at soccer? Parents should evaluate the demeanor and approach the coach takes towards games: is the coach willing to allow youngsters to play the game for themselves or is he/she absorbed with their active, but unnecessary, participation? Is the coach most concerned with making decisions for the players rather than accepting that the players must make decisions on their own?

Overall, there should be uniform agreement and understanding between the parents, coaches and league or association administrators on this matter. This shared responsibility helps ensure that play remains a leisure activity with a long-term interest of player development. **REMEMBER.....Play is a key word in player development!**