

## Effective Coaching Techniques

### "Mastering coaching practices that maximize performance"

#### A GOOD COACH

- \* A good coach makes sure the players have fun while learning the game!
- \* A good coach places their emphasis on the player, not on winning!
- \* A good coach develops the child's self-worth.
- \* A good coach teaches good sportsmanship!

To players, having fun and being personally rewarded for having fun makes playing any game "really great"!!!

#### PRELIMINARY DEFINITIONS

- "Coach" refers to either a team coach or a sport parent.
- "Players" are either team members or an individual being coached by a sport's parent.
- "Skill", "action", "drill" or "mechanic" all refer to the skills that the player learns. The words are interchangeable.

#### TYPES OF REWARDS

- Kids play a sport for many years because they feel good about themselves and their performance. It helps when the team wins, but the reason for playing is found within the player.
- Coaches make their players "feel good" in two ways. **EXTRINSIC REWARDS** - tangible objects (trophies, ribbons, certificates, etc.) are used to motivated players to play well. Beware of a trap with extrinsic rewards.
- As the accomplishments get bigger and bigger, will the players expect the rewards to get bigger and bigger? When the "tangible rewards" don't measure up to the kid's perceived efforts, the drive to succeed may end. **INTRINSIC REWARDS** - players play purely for their own pleasure and satisfaction. Coaches use praise to make their players feel successful, feel competent and feel pride in their

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## SPORTS KNOWLEDGE

- Successful coaches have detailed sports knowledge. For coaches needing detailed playing mechanics, "How to Play Better Baseball ... Softball... Football ... or Basketball" fills the gaps nicely. For other sports, your local library is a great source of information.
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## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- These players strive to do better and better in the sport because they are doing something that is fun and they walk away feeling good about themselves. A "winning attitude" develops within these players. When a player with a "winning attitude" fails, the player drives themselves to practice their skills even more. Though hard practice, they feel more successful, more competent and better about themselves.

## HOW PLAYERS LEARN

- Players learn by developing unique sets of mental rules, a "motor program", for each activity. "Motor programs" enable kids to perform an action on demand. Stimulating and interesting drills develop "motor programs" faster than slow and boring activities. Matching drills to the player's ability sets the stage for positive reinforcement, success from the coach and increased self-worth for the player.

## STEPS IN LEARNING

- Step 1: Creating a "motor plan" through a mental preparation. The players consciously spend time developing their own mental process for successfully completing a skill.
- Step 2: Refining the action by practicing. In this "step", conscious thought diminishes each time the skill is successfully completed. The players refine and reinforce their "motor plan" each time the action is performed. Every time a player does the skill successfully, the child uses less conscious thought the next time they practice the skill.

- Step 3: Making the action automatic. After the action is properly completed many times, the mind performs the action with little, if any, conscious thought. When the action is performed poorly, the child knows what is wrong and what immediate adjustments to complete the skills properly the next time.
- Step 4: Further refining the skill. The coach builds upon "automatic action" to refine the skill even more. The coach adds more detail to the "automatic" skill the player just mastered and starts the learning process over with Step 1.

### TEACHING A SKILL

- Step 1: Introduce the skill. Explain how the mechanics fit into the kid's goals...
- Step 2: Demonstrate the mechanic. If possible, personally demonstrate the mechanics and the action's purpose. When this is not possible, point out the skill during a professional sporting event. Most skills are broken down to a particular body movement, so focus on the specific body parts involved in the movement....
- Step 3: Immediately practice the skill. Players stand up and perform the mechanic slowly, use equipment to make the practice more interesting. With some skills, players can practice an entire movement. For more complex skills, the players practice part of the whole motion eventually incorporating all the motions together. Remember to make this fun, to use positive reinforcement. Players are always doing "something" right!
- Step 4: As quickly as possible, positively correct mistakes. Make the feedback specific. Use phrases like "your stride gave you great direction on that throw", instead of "nice throw." Provide information on how to perform the mechanic properly. During games, to avoid embarrassing a player, correct the action in private.

### PLANNING A PRACTICE SESSION

- Step 1: Have an instructional goal for the practice session based upon the player's ability, having fun and challenging the player.
- Step 2: Teach an entire skill breaking the session's goal into simple movements. Break complex skills into separate parts and then combine into the more complex movement.
- Step 3: Review past skills in a fun way, complimenting the kid's actions whenever possible.
- Step 4: Add new instructional skills to the session in an interesting, fun way.

- Step 5: Practice the skills under game situations even when these situations are make up verbal situations. Use instructions like "It is the bottom of the ninth, the bases are loaded and there are two outs..."
- Step 6: Evaluate the session. Give the players your honest opinion of skills they are doing well.
- Step 7: Use this evaluation to plan future practice sessions.

### SETTING REALISTIC GOALS

- Coaches create situations for positive reinforcement by setting realistic goals for the player. Goal setting takes into account the player's limitations, the kid's current skill level and the kid's desire for playing the sport...
  - Self-Worth - As the player works toward their goals they receive rewards. Success in sports will come to mean personal success and self-worth, not a team goal. This greatly reduces anxiety while playing. The player plays for themselves and a team loss is not as devastating. The player knows they did their best for the team. Realistic goal setting motivates the players to learn the game's skills in a positive, enjoyable and fun way... Goals - the player's goals and the coach's goals must be exactly the same. The coach guides the player toward realistic goals, but avoids letting the player make all the decisions for themselves. For beginners, the goals start off being very broad, yet specific ("have fun learning to hit a baseball"). In time the goals become less broad and much more specific ("learning to stride on the ball of the foot when hitting a baseball"). For example, a pitcher learns the correct arm position during the wind-up. Now the coach refines the player's goal by asking the player to add the correct wrist position to their arm mechanics.
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### REWARD FREQUENTLY

- Give a reward as soon as the player performs the skill properly.
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## CLEAR COMMUNICATION

- Listening - Coaches are good listeners. Coaches let the kid finish what they are saying without interrupting. When the coach actively listens and offers constructive feedback, the kid feels involved reaching their goals that much quicker and having a more enjoyable time playing the sport. These are the players that will play the game well and for a longer length of time... Body Language - Coaches are extremely conscious of the non-verbal signals they send. Coaches learn to control their body motion during communication with the kid... Touching - Coaches realize that the amount and type of touching can either help or hinder communication. A pat on the back after a lucky play gives a kid the message that they can succeed in the sport without practice and through luck... Voice - Coaches are very conscious of how the tone of their voice as they say things. A comment meant sincerely, but spoken sarcastically destroys the positive intent of the communication.

## USING FEEDBACK

- Doing things right - Give some form of intrinsic reward immediately after the child performs a skill correctly. Sincerely compliment a child that attempts to perform new skills or new actions that have never been presented. Build an environment where the child is not afraid to try new things, not afraid of failure... Doing things incorrectly - when it is obvious to everyone that a child performed below their skill level, it is not necessary to say anything. The child knows what they did. In so doing, the coach's comments remain positive...
- Luck - Luck sometimes plays a role in the outcome during the game. Reward the child's action, their intentions or their effort, but do not reward an outcome. Players rewarded for luck too often begin blaming everyone else for their failures. Instead, they should be blaming themselves for not working hard enough on the skill to guarantee success each time they perform a skill.

## SHAPING BEHAVIOR

- Keep It Simple - Teach only one skill at a time. Break the skills into steps that are so small and simple that the kid can not help but perform the action correctly. The coach sets themselves up for giving positive reinforcement all the time. In the beginning, give the kid rewards as often as possible. As the kid's skills improve, give reinforcement less frequently. When the rewards are only given occasionally, move the child on to a new skill...

- **Complex Skills** - Complex skills require multiple mechanics combined into a single action. Teach one segment of the action at a time. Combine these actions into the desired skill. When combining skills, ease the reinforcement standards. Even though the players have mastered the individual skills, these skills may deteriorate as the kid learns to combine the two. In time, both the skills will return to their original performance levels...
  - **MISBEHAVIOR** - Punish only when absolutely necessary. Before giving any punishment, make sure the kid knows what was expected. Always give a warning before any misbehaviour is recognized. Be consistent with the punishments; punish the same way for the same situations for all players.
  - Avoid shouting at a kid in front of other players...
  - **Types of punishments** - Taking the kid away from the activity is highly recommended. Running laps and other forms of physical activity may cause the kid to associate physical training with punishment. Players need training to attain peak performance, so this association is disastrous. Players must not associate any training with punishment... Be guilt-free - When rules are broken, explanation to the player in an impersonal way the specific actions which brought the punishment on. Also, tell the kid what to expect if this misbehavior would occur again.
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### COACHING CHECKLIST

- \* Have fun.
- \* Place emphasis on the player, not winning.
- \* Reward actions, not outcomes.
- \* Fit skills to the player's ability.
- \* Give rewards-as often as possible.