

Coaching Culture – Positive Coaching

Mindset: Positive Coaching

The goal of the Southbury Youth Baseball League is to use the game of baseball to create a fun environment for the children of Southbury, while at the same time learning and developing skills to play baseball. This environment will develop not only athletic and social skills, but also each child's sense of self.

According to Dr. Darrell J. Burnett, when the UCLA Sports Laboratory surveyed children for the main reasons why they continue to participate in youth sports, the number one reason given was positive coach support. Research points to the benefits of getting kids to continue to participate in youth sports, noting that kids who stay in sports tend to stay in school, get better grades and have fewer behavioral problems.

It is key, coaches, to remember that success is not defined by a won-loss record, but in terms of how many kids decide to return to play again next year. And we need to remember that from a self-esteem perspective, 9-and-unders do need to win. It is crucial then that the league and its coaches create situations where each youngster has opportunities for success, at whole variety of levels, practice, games, situations, improvement, teaming etc.

Below is a checklist of characteristics of positive coaching:

- ✓ Praise kids just for participating.
- ✓ Look for positives and make a big deal out of them.
- ✓ Stay calm when kids/team make mistakes, instead help them learn from their mistakes.
- ✓ Have reasonable and realistic expectations.
- ✓ Treat kids/team with respect, avoiding put-downs, sarcasm, and ridicule.
- ✓ Remind kids/team not to get down on themselves.
- ✓ Remember not to take oneself too seriously during a game.
- ✓ Maintain a "Fun is #1" attitude, with lots of laughter and a sense of humor.
- ✓ Emphasize teamwork and help my kids think "we" instead of "me."
- ✓ Be a model of good sportsmanship

Positive Coaching Alliance – As a member of the Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA), SYB expects coaches to reinforce PCA/Positive Coaching concepts. These include:

- ✓ ELM: (E for Effort, L for Learning, M for bouncing back from Mistakes).
- ✓ Reinforce the team to:
 - put in a high level of effort to get better,
 - cultivate a "Teachable Spirit" to continue to learn and improve,
 - use a Mistake Ritual (e.g., "flushing mistakes") to quickly rebound from mistakes.
- ✓ Honoring the Game – encourage ROOTS — Respect for:
 - Rules
 - Opponents
 - Officials
 - Teammates
 - Self.
- ✓ As a coach, always remember to "Honor the Game" and use self-control to avoid losing composure when things may go wrong

Coaching Culture – Parents

Mindset: Parents

The most important thing for a coach when it comes to team parents is to communicate the ground rules for the season at first contact. This should be done in writing, and then reiterated in the first practice and a parents meeting. By doing so, the coach sets a firm tone as well as a behavioral baseline for the entire season. This baseline will serve the purpose of clearly defining expectations and objectives, and will serve as an important reference point to fall back on should players or parents prove troublesome as the season progresses.

Ground Rules:

- A. Basic coaching philosophy - *Instruction, discipline, fair playing time*
- B. Objectives for the season - *Develop skills and self-confidence, create a sense of team, have fun*
- C. Expected players' behavior - *Proper gear, focused and attentive, 100% effort*
- D. Expected parental participation and behavior - *Timely drop off/pick up, emotionally supportive, snacks, fundraising and league events*

Sportsmanship

The importance of sportsmanship cannot be overemphasized, to players, parents, and coaches alike. Good plays should be applauded, regardless of which team makes them. Cheering should be supportive – “C’mon, JB, you can do it!” rather than “This pitcher stinks, you can hit him.” Cheering should be even keeled – just as enthusiastic when losing as when winning. Umpires are not scapegoats. Teammates are not to be blamed. What happens on the field stays on the field – handshake lines are for handshakes and good words, not for rubbing a loss in or on occasion evening a score.

Trouble Spots

Occasionally coaches will have players on their team with behavioral, physical, or psychological challenges. As volunteers, few coaches are formally trained in handling these types of situations, and so should not hesitate to rely upon the child’s parents for guidance and support. If a coach has these types of challenges they may:

- ✓ Reinforce that this is a team sport, and as in all team activities, the good of the many outweighs the needs of the one.
- ✓ No single player should be allowed to adversely impact the sporting experience of the rest of the team.
- ✓ Should one player’s issues begin to detract from the overall experience for the team, the coach should quickly move to work with that player’s parents to find a solution where all parties benefit.
- ✓ If a coach has a parent(s) who are difficult to work with, and who may complain or even become belligerent, a helpful strategy to employ when facing a conflict with a parent is to wait at least 24 hours before discussing the issue. This will give both parties the opportunity to step back from the heat of the moment, and hopefully allow each to bring a more rational perspective to the discussion. When you do hold the discussion, don’t do it by email – the written word can often be misinterpreted, making an already volatile situation worse. And occasionally, the impersonality of the medium can lead to the communication of things that might not have been said otherwise. Discussions with upset parents are best done face-to-face.
- ✓ If needed, the League President should be alerted and help assist as well

Coaching Culture – Team

Mindset: Team

Besides creating a Positive Team Mindset, Coaches need to create a culture that breeds a TEAM concept throughout the season. Some Strategies may include:

1. **Be constructive.** Work hard, lead by example, be “positive constructive” in all criticism. Remind players if they have a personality problem with another player, talk to the coach. Doing nothing let things linger. If some part of a players game is not going as well as you want, don’t get down, help them – use individual instruction.
2. Remind the Team to “**Take care of yourself**” – Eat a decent breakfast before weekend games, healthy snacks or meals at all times, including between tournament games – concession stand hot dogs and hamburgers are for fans, officials opposition teams - not for you.
3. **Take Pride in the Team** - Remind the Team to be dressed to play. Check your glove and spikes 24 hours before game or practice (in case repairs/replacement is needed). Arrive for games in a complete uniform, wear smartly and with pride. Sloppy dress equals sloppy play. For practices, come with an extra long-sleeve or warm-up jacket, baseball or sweat pants (NO SHORTS!), and a cap, your cup and proper footwear.
4. Remind the team to **Use time wisely**. Show up early for the game or practice – if you can’t arrive early, make sure you begin your pre-game preparations at home. Practices and pre-game warm ups are structured for maximum value in the minimum amount of time, so be on time for those. “When we start as a team, we think like a team.”
5. **You play, we’ll coach.** Let coaches handle disputes and disagreements, players should focus on performance. Players are not to make calls/decisions during games. Equipment throwing, abuse of park facilities, or swearing will get you removed from the game. Insubordination will put you on the bench. Co-operation in practice is just as important.

Additional concepts that breed good team building includes these fundamental Concepts for a Coach include:

Note: Please reference Practice Guidelines –Teaching Key Baseball Specific Fundamentals

1. *Teach or Coach - Not Both*

Reason: If it’s practice time, teach; if it’s game time, focus on coaching.

Example: During the game you want your players to focus on the next out, next hit - so should you. You can’t teach a pitcher a new pitch on the mound in the seventh inning. No instruction during the game (or at the least very minimal) - instead, make mental notes for post-game or a special clinic during the next practice.

2. *Want it? Teach it.*

Reason: You can’t ask players to do something in the game that they’ve never tried in practice.

Example: If you expect a player to bunt, you better have taught him in practice. Same with basics like base running, over-the-shoulder fielding, and whatever else. No one wants to try something for the very first time in a pressure situation with an audience.

3. *A Little Praise, Please*

Reason: Every improvement, however small, deserves a compliment.

Example: One of the best things about coaching is seeing your players do better - individually and as a team. Let them know it - praise even minor accomplishments because they may only be minor to you, but major to them!

4. *Don't Say "Don't"*

Reason: Always affirm with a positive action.

Example: If you want a batter to keep his head on the ball, the instruction is not "don't look up", it's "Keeping looking at the T for a count of one thousand and one." The worst offense: coaches who say "whatever you do, don't strike out."

5. *Be Credible*

Reason: If a player doubts you, he'll doubt himself too.

Example: Coaches (and parents from the stands) who call out to the batter after a strike-out "don't worry you'll get him next time" actually foster non-confidence within the player. (There's no credibility, folks.) Sometimes, it's best to let a bad moment slide. Instead reinforce concepts that breed success.

6. *Give Them Legs*

Reason: As players mature, they must learn to self-correct.

Example: Better to have a batter be self-reliant, recognize what he's doing and be able to correct himself. The same is true with pitchers, fielders and base runners.

7. *Practice for Games*

Reason: Put your emphasis in practice on situations you actually face in games.

Example: Pitchers who throw knuckleballs practice but never in games, or infield pre-games with throws from first to third - those are two examples. You might as well practice triple plays.

8. *Practice with Intensity*

Reason: Players need to leave a practice pumped with desire to test what they've learned in a game.

Example: Plan every practice - on paper - against the clock. Keep things fresh and real to keep them focused. It's the only way to build a team with the desire to out-perform.

9. *One at a Time*

Reason: Players need to concentrate to learn - they can't correct five things at once.

Example: Decide the one thing that will most improve the situation - is it foot position or arm angle or focus? Then teach only that - say/do nothing else.

10. *Ten Swing Rule*

Reason: Repeat your one instruction until you and the player both seem ready to move on.

Example: If in your hitting instruction you talk about 'driving the nail to the inside of the ball' then say it, as the player does it for at least 10 pitches.

11. *Be Brave*

Reason: Young players like to challenge themselves. Coaches need to share that enthusiasm.

Example: Be willing to try new drills, switch player positions, call steals, and so on.

Note: These coaching tips are drawn from Richard Todd, <http://www.webball.com/work/approach.html>

Coaching your Own Children

Coaching your own children can be a very difficult thing to do. Often times a coach treats their own child more harshly than he does other players, the sporting equivalent of hurting the one you love. This behavior could be attributable to many causes: high expectations, difficulty in exchanging the mantle of parenthood for a coach's cap, off-field issues manifesting themselves on the field, or, most likely, excessive effort to avoid the appearance of favoritism. Regardless of root causes, every coach should be aware that the potential exists for a coach to treat their child different from the other players on the team. When you step on the field tell yourself you are there coach, not his parent. Then make sure you treat him the same as you do the rest of the team.

Coaching Culture – Safety

Mindset: Safety

A coach's first obligation is to ensure the safety of his players. He should endeavor to teach practices and behaviors that will protect his charges not just when they are together as a team, but when they engage in activities at home, in the neighborhood, or at school.

These practices and behaviors should include:

- ✓ Proper equipment, utilized properly
- ✓ Knowing what are safe playing conditions
- ✓ Having an appropriate regard for the safety of others
- ✓ Developing the proper skills and techniques to minimize risk of injury
- ✓ Proper treatment of injuries