

Coaching Tips

Below are bite-size tips to help you as a Double-Goal Coach[®], whose first goal is winning, and whose second, more-important goal is teaching life lessons through sports.

Awarding Game Balls

On many youth teams it is common practice to hand out a game ball or other symbolic reward to the "player of the game." This award should not necessarily go to the most outstanding or dominant player in a game. Instead, consider using this honor to cultivate, reinforce and reward the behavior you want.

A team's coaches can meet privately right after a game while players to pack up equipment. Regardless of results on the scoreboard, coaches decide what behavior to reward with a game ball.

For example, after a baseball game, coaches may award a game ball to a player who learned from a practice session on shortening swings with two strikes. That player may have grounded out in the fourth inning of a blowout loss, but awarding the game ball publicly encourages that player and teammates to listen and learn in practice and put those lessons to work in games.

Try honor each player with a game ball at some point in the season, as long as you can attach some truthful specific praise to presenting the award.

Sometimes it's as simple as rewarding a player for an obvious scoreboard accomplishment, such as pitching a complete game shutout. But you'll find you put the most into your players and get the most out of them when you reward the less talented for their hard work and learning life lessons, which encourages them and their teammates to continue doing so.

Keep Coaching

PCA workshops often emphasize the "next play," training coaches and parents to help their athletes focus on the "next play," regardless of mistakes, disagreeable officiating, tough opponents or crowd noise. To illustrate this principle, our PCA Trainers often use this quotation from Stanford Women's Volleyball Coach John Dunning: "So many kids think they're great competitors because they growl the loudest or cuss the loudest. I define a competitor as the person who is most often ready to play and win the next play."

Ironically, sometimes coaches forget to apply the same principles to themselves. Facing tough times during a game, coaches also need a way to remind themselves to be ready for the next play.

Using Mistake Rituals with their players -- such as the "flush it" or "brush it off" techniques -- many Double-Goal Coaches cap off the ritual with the words "next play." Coaches looking for an equivalent trigger word or phrase to recover from their own mistakes can remind themselves to "keep coaching."

This simple alliterative imperative can instantly refocus you on the task at hand. Just as you would have your players get beyond their mistakes and any other obstacles, you owe it to them and to yourself to “keep coaching.”

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Get to Know Opposing Coaches Before the Game

A great way to ensure a positive environment for your youth or high school athletes is to get to know opposing coaches. It's easy to get caught up in pre-game preparation and to not make time to introduce yourself to opposing coaches, but this is a great opportunity lost.

By shaking hands and talking with opposing coaches, you are actively modeling Honoring the Game for your players and their parents, and it sets a strong, positive tone for the competition. Double-Goal Coaches know the importance of establishing a working relationship with their opposing coaches. Among the reasons:

To establish a basic understanding that you are both there for the players and that they come first. You might even mention that you are a Double-Goal Coach: "I'm looking forward to a great game with your team. Like you, I want to win, but I ascribe to the Positive Coaching Alliance's Double-Goal Coach model. We are going to do our best to play in a way that respects you and your team. Honoring the game is important to us."

To know coaches' names, so you can get their attention when necessary. It's much easier to talk with your opposing number when things go wrong if you've had friendly contact beforehand.

To humanize yourselves to each other (rather than the all-too-common demonization of opponents). If you have never met the opposing coach, likely in a travel team situation, go out of your way to introduce yourself, as soon as he or she seems to have a spare moment, away from players and parents. Make it a friendly introduction...not a chance to gain competitive advantage. To assure your opponent, you might even offer up a nugget of information about what you are trying to work on with your own team. "We're 3-1 this season, and every game has been close, so I'm trying to get our players to feel less pressure and enjoy the game no matter what the score."

In a house league, you have an even better opportunity to get onto the same page as opposing coaches. Perhaps you have attended the same Positive Coaching Alliance workshops or cross paths in your children's schools or the supermarket and therefore share common values and concerns.

Those may be grounds for a deeper discussion of coaching philosophy, which creates an even stronger foundation for the positive culture you are establishing in your league. At root, most people become coaches because they want to contribute to the health, well-being and growth of youth. Respectful, friendly pre-game conversations among coaches help ensure they adhere to those values.