

What Type of Coach Are You?

There are as many different coaching styles as there are coaches. I'd like to spend a few lines writing about a couple of coaching styles that I see a lot, and give you my opinion of which one I think is ultimately more effective for kids. The two styles are "**leader**" and "**dictator**." Which one are you?

The leader is the type of coach that the kids respond to because of trust and respect. This type of coach uses a sound knowledge of the game and skillful persuasion to help the players see the benefit of what they're trying to get across.

Conversely, the dictator is the type of coach that the kids respond to because of fear. This type of coach may very well have a sound knowledge of the game, but there is no persuasion.

I've seen both methods produce seemingly successful teams. Which one are you?

Here are some real-life examples of each type of coach that I've seen recently while doing some umpiring in my local league.

My partner was the plate umpire, and he was calling a very tight strike zone. Both pitchers weren't getting many close strikes called. The leader-coach called time, walked out to the mound and helped his pitcher see that he needed to adjust his pitching strategy a little. He wasn't getting the calls, so he needed to put the ball over the plate and let his defense work for him. The conversation went something like this...

Coach: "Hey Joey, you're not getting many calls are you?"

Joey: "Nope."

Coach: "I think you're going to have to catch a little more plate. If they hit it, they hit it. You'll have to trust your defense to back you up."

Joey: "Okay."

Coach: "You're doing great, keep it up!"

The pitcher made the adjustment, and the defense supported him (like they usually do).

In a different game on a different day, I came across the dictator. I'll never forget the words or the angry tone of the coach to his pitcher. The conversation went something like this:

Coach: "Joey, why'd you ignore my sign to throw over to second to hold that runner?"

Joey: "I don't know. He didn't have a big lead."

Coach: "I shouldn't have to explain myself, I've played the game enough to know why I want you to do something. You should just do it!"

I don't think this pitcher could have done anything right, no matter what he did!

In fact, the coach did know what he was doing. The runner needed to be held close. It was a close game! The problem was that the pitcher didn't know the "why" behind the "what," and this coach missed a huge teaching opportunity.

Even the best coach can't control the actions of all nine players on the field. However, in my humble opinion, a good coach will teach their players ***how*** to play, ***why*** to make certain throws, ***when*** to hold runners close, ***what*** plays to make in certain situations, etc. And then reinforce that understanding through timely teaching opportunities during the course of the season. Never pass on an opportunity to reinforce learning with real-game experience.

Which players do you think were having more fun?

Which coach are you?

Here's a coaching tip that'll keep your kids focused on making the play and hitting the pitch, no matter what team they're playing or what pitcher they're facing.

Play the Ball, Not the Other Team

Focus your players on playing the ball during your pre-game pep talk, and making the play they've made a thousand times in practice. If you focus on the other team, you can psyche your team out, and end up being counter-productive.

It doesn't matter who hits the ball, the fielder is going to make the play they routinely make in practice. It doesn't matter who pitches the ball, it's going to come through the strike zone and the batter is going to hit it just like they do in practice.

This method gives the kids the confidence they'll need to make the play, because they've done it a thousand times in practice.