

Coaching Philosophy

You're A Role Model

It doesn't matter if you're coaching tee ball or coaching at the college level, you're probably the most important role model that your players have during the season. Players are going to look to you not only for guidance and instruction, but they will be watching and listening to how you react to every situation. I'm a strong believer that a coach can be one of the most influential people in a young player's life. Many players and former players attribute a large portion of their success in life to the things they learned on the baseball field and from a few great coaches. We're not talking about fielding ground balls, or how to hit; we're talking about teamwork, perseverance, work ethic, having a positive attitude, to just name a few, skills that not only helped them on the baseball field, but helped them in life.

Often coaches think only of the present year; how am I going to develop the players to have a successful season. We'll get into a definition of "successful" in a bit, but the point here is often coaches don't realize the influence they have on their players. Coaches can help instill a love for the game that can last a lifetime. Good coaches can keep players interested in continuing to participate from year to year.

As a coach you have to decide how you want to be seen by your players and the parents of your players. What type of example do you want to provide? I hope everyone takes the responsibility of coaching very seriously. It takes a lot of hard work and effort to be a successful coach. The following paragraphs discuss some important issues that you should consider incorporating into your coaching philosophy.

Key Aspects of a Coaching Philosophy

Be Positive

Players need a patient, supportive coach that can teach and motivate in a positive way. Knowing how to be positive and having the ability to communicate with your players is more important to a successful season than knowing many aspects of the game.

Show Them You Care

Each player needs to know that you care for him as an individual and that you believe he is an important part of the team. Take time to talk to all players individually. Try to take interest in what is going on in their life outside of baseball.

Have Fun

Fun is essential for kids of all ages. Develop practices that let them do the things they enjoy. It's also important for you to have fun. Create an environment that is structured and varied enough for you to enjoy what your doing. If you're having fun, chances are your players will be having fun also.

Emphasize Improvement

Players want to improve and gain new skills. Make sure that you challenge all your players at an appropriate level to foster improvement. This may require that players focus on different skills than other players during practice.

Youth Coaching Advice

Don't make the mistake of emphasizing results instead of effort. I've seen and heard coaches who try to motivate players by offering rewards. This could be money or candy for getting a hit or getting on base. This focus on results puts additional pressure on the player to perform. This can be especially difficult for the less skilled player. A father once told me that his son's coach offered a candy bar for each hit during the season. His son started to get nervous the night before each game and it got worse as the season went on. The father talked to his son and found out that he felt like he was letting his team down because he hadn't got a hit and was the only kid on the team to not get a candy bar. He talked to the coach and they eliminated the reward. Without the pressure of trying to achieve results based reward, his son was able to relax and got a number of hits over the last few games.

Organization and Discipline

Kids quickly pick up on a coach that is unorganized and doesn't communicate his expectations. If you don't establish certain rules and don't follow up with an appropriate punishment if the rules are broken, you will quickly lose control of your team. I always have a rule about talking when I'm talking during practice. I expect when I'm

explaining something that the players will have their eyes on me and pay attention. If they interrupt or don't pay attention, I stop talking and we wait as a team for the individual to stop. If he does it again in the same practice he sits down and watches for awhile. I rarely have a player sitting on the side after the first couple of practices.

Players Learn By Doing

I love the quote in Mike Krzyzewski's book 'Leading with the Heart'. "When teaching, always remember this simple phrase: 'You hear, you forget. You see, you remember. You do, you understand.'" Often coaches try to teach players a skill by talking about it. The younger the player the less effective it will be. Give a quick explanation while you show them the skill you want them to perform. Then have them do it.

Attitude and Effort

Coaches that believe winning is everything have only one direction to take the team...down. Everyone wants to win, but when main goal is winning a really good season can be lost. If on the other hand you emphasize attitude and effort, a successful season can be had without a league championship. Winning games really will take care of itself if you prepare the team to play hard and always give their best effort.

Sportsmanship

The idea of sportsmanship seems to be lost on many youth players. The fact is, sportsmanship must be taught. If children watch professional sports then their idea of sportsmanship may be to trash talk, spike the ball in the opponents face, or to mimic some other visual statement that demonstrates their superiority. As a coach it's important that you teach the value of sportsmanship. I want my team to show joy when they make an exciting play, but not at the expense of the player on the opposing team. I want my players to always show the other team respect. Your leadership is the best way to get this across to your players. Interact with the players on the other team. Compliment them when they make a good play. Show your players that you appreciate the other team and the opportunity to play against them.

Dealing with Parents

Dealing with parents might be the most difficult part of being a coach. Research suggests that it's the single biggest reason that coaches quit. It's a common problem, but one that can be difficult to solve. In my experience as both a coach and a parent I have found some common mistakes that coaches make that can bring on the wrath of a parent along with some ways to deal with a parent that is causing you grief.

Communication - Parent Meeting

I believe that communication is the single biggest reason behind coach/parent problems. Many coaches don't take the time at the beginning of the season to hold a parent meeting and discuss with the parents how he/she is going to run the team. Hold a parent meeting right away. This will give you a chance to communicate your philosophy with your parents. The topics should include the importance of winning; how you are going to distribute playing time; how are you going to determine who plays where; what skills and values you are going to emphasize. Try to hit all the areas that are important. If for example you don't start a player if he is late or missed a practice, let the parents know that. It's important that they are aware of team rules and expectations. By holding this meeting right away, you have the opportunity to try and move players to a different team if you don't think it will work out. Let parents know that if they don't agree with how you are going to run the team, then this is the time to try and get the child moved.

Be Consistent

Stating your philosophy is one thing; implementing it consistently is another. Make sure you make rules for your team that you can follow up with. It is very frustrating for a parent to be told one thing and then see something else happen. I went through this myself last year with the team my son was on. We were told by the coach that all players would get a chance to play many different positions and playing time would be distributed equally. The coach said that the emphasis would be on building skill not winning. Well, after 3 losses to start the season, the coach abandoned his philosophy and had the best players play more and play the most important positions. He would simply rotate those players around those positions. You can imagine the grumbling in the stands as parents began to realize that their child was going to play outfield all year and hit near the bottom of the order. There were complaints and it ended up being a frustrating season for many parents and the coach.

The lesson here is to make sure you can live with the guidelines you set down. By sticking to what you told the parents at the beginning of the season, you will alleviate a number of parent problems.

Listen to Parent Concerns

I've seen many coaches with the "I'm the coach, don't question me" type of attitude. With some parents it can be difficult to not get irritated and show this type of attitude. Many parents won't say anything unless they are angry about something. When they finally do, they often are worked up and at that point can be difficult to deal with. I've found that when dealing with difficult parents, it's important that you listen to their concerns and take a real interest in what they are saying. Don't feel like you have to defend yourself right away. Sometimes listening to the concern and telling the parent that you will think about the situation and get back to them is enough to diffuse the situation. Just by doing that you validate the concern and show that you're open to suggestions. Parents want to feel like their input is taken seriously and that they have a say in what's happening with their child. You then can take the time to analyze the comments and see if there's any validity to the concerns. When you call the parent or talk to them at the next practice they will most likely be much calmer. It will also give you a chance to calm down. Parent complaints at the end of a game can be infuriating. Remember that you are a role model to the kids. If you can't handle the situation without getting upset, then it's best to tell the parent that you have to go and you will call them later.

If the parent is complaining and you don't like the attitude they have towards you, take them away from the crowd and the kids and let them know that you don't like the way they are talking to you. Let them know that you want to work out any concerns that they may have, but if they can't do so in a calm manner than maybe you should discuss it at another time.

Get Parents Involved

Getting parents involved can really help in avoiding potential parent problems. If you think that a parent is going to be a problem, try to get that parent involved in some way. If that parent only shows up to games, have him/her keep the score book, chart the hitters, or warm-up the next pitcher. If they feel like they are part of the team, they will often be less likely to complain. They also will have less time to focus on how their child is being "treated unfairly"

If the parent makes it to practices, have them help by working with some of the kids. They may soon find out that coaching is more difficult than it looks from the bleachers.

Document and Inform the League

If you think you're going to have a situation with a parent that you may not be able to resolve, document all the conversations that you have with that parent. What's their complaint; were they insulting or angry; what was your response. This way if you have to go to league administrators about the parent, you can accurately describe exactly what has gone on. This will help the administrators in not having to take sides over a he said, she said type of argument.