

The Perils Of Over-Coaching

by Dave Simeone, NTSSA Director of Coaching, National Staff Coach, U.S. Soccer

Many sports today are coach-oriented rather than player-oriented, leading to the potential for over-coaching.

Basketball, baseball and American football—referred to as “set up” sports—all demand and allow a high degree of involvement by the coach during games. Between pitches (baseball) or plays (American football) the time and opportunity exist for diagrams to be drawn or the coach to reposition an outfielder.

But soccer is different. In soccer, the involvement of the coach is secondary to the performance of the players. Soccer is fairly uninterrupted. Players must be allowed to make decisions on their own and learn to receive and process information to solve problems during the game.

Soccer coaches must do most of their game preparation work during the week. By game time on the weekend, it is up to the participants to act, make decisions and play!

Answer these questions honestly to determine if you are over-coaching. If you answer “yes,” you are over-coaching.

- Do you find that your voice is strained following a game?
- Is the information that you give your players during half time emotional but non-specific? Does it help them solve problems?
- Do you use catch phrases such as “suck it up, boys” or “no pain, no gain” in attempting to motivate youngsters?
- Do you find that you are sweating and running just as much during the game as the players?
- Are your pre game, half time or post-game speeches similar to the president’s State of the Union address?
- When addressing the players, do you ramble and cause confusion among the players as to the point you are trying to make?
- Are your remarks and instructions made during the game and to players repetitive

and redundant? Is this information general, non-specific jargon and cheer-leading, and is it altering the players’ performance?

- Are you reluctant to allow players to make their own decisions during a game?
 - Are you constantly barraging players with instructions during the game?
 - Do you coach in absolutes such as “always” or “never”?
 - Do you choreograph and arrange players into strict positions with instructions such as “never go out of your zone” or “defenders should never cross midfield”?
 - Have you instructed players to refrain from passing the ball to certain teammates because their present level of ability is, from your adult perspective, inadequate?
 - Do you spend an excessive amount of practice time on throw-ins, kick-offs, corner kicks or penalty kicks?
 - Are you utilizing methods of training that do not allow players to acquire and improve technical skills, tactical decision-making, physical stamina and confidence (i.e., dribbling through cones, standing in lines awaiting a turn)?
 - Are you attempting to improve the team’s level of fitness by minimizing the time the players have contact with the ball? Do you view the game as a contest based only on fitness that leads to a preoccupation with running?
 - Are you openly emotional or upset when addressing the players to the point that they stare at you, and think, “What is he/she so disturbed about?”
 - Do you have difficulty accepting a realistic approach to winning and losing? Do you believe that winning is synonymous with player development?
 - Are you consistently aggravated and apprehensive about coaching?
- If you answer “no” to the following questions, you may be over-coaching.

- Do your practices produce nearly the same degree of movement as a soccer game?
- Do you enjoy and have fun coaching youngsters?
- Do the players seem to enjoy playing because of your input and involvement as coach?

The games and practices youngsters take part in should be viewed as vehicles for learning. The same is true of their practices. The acquisition of playing ability is a long-term process that begins at the age of five or six. It is unrealistic to expect youngsters 11 years old or younger to have an adult perspective on the game.

Young players are a product of their experiences. They learn more from their experiences (games, activities, the environment) than they do from the coach. The role of the coach is to organize and set up games and activities that allow the players to learn and enjoy the sport.

The majority of over-coaching occurs with youngsters five to eleven years old. It occurs, in part, because the average parent/coach brings little practical soccer experience with them and is learning about coaching. As youth coaches are exposed to coaching education through their state associations, they assume their role with greater effectiveness.

Parents should consider a coach’s demeanor and approach to games. Is their child learning to play soccer, or is the coach preoccupied with drills that only permit playing “at” soccer? Will the coach make decisions for the players rather than let the players make their own decisions? Or will the coach allow youngsters to play the game for themselves?

Remember, play is a key word in player development. ●

