

Five youth coaching sins

Posted on [January 29, 2013](#) by coachdeck

There are many mistakes – big and small – made by youth sports coaches everywhere. But here are five in particular that seem to be some of the most common traps we fall into.

1). **Degrading an opponent:** While common sense tells us that most youth coaches know enough not to outright demean a youngster on another team, unfortunately in the worst of circumstances, it does occur. However, what is much more prevalent is when an opposing coach thinks he is being sly or clever and denigrates a player on the other team under the guise of “coaching” his own kids. Examples are, “Get ready to rebound. He has hasn’t made a free-throw this half,” or “Just throw strikes, he hasn’t swung the bat yet.”

2). **Becoming angry with players and embarrassing them without coaching:** Sure, especially at the youth, recreational level, coaching should be mostly positive and encouraging. The younger the players, the more, “Good try!” and “Get them next time,”s there should be. But as players get older and more skilled, and as winning becomes more important, kids want a coach who will get the most out of them. Even if that means pointing out mistakes. However, the difference between a good coach and a poor one is this: A good coach will address a mistake a youngster made and combine it with something helpful; namely what he could or should have done differently so that he can have success in the same situation next time. A poor coach only gets angry, as if the kid intentionally did something to annoy him, and simply berates. Yelling things like, “What were you thinking?” or “Were you listening in practice?” or “We can’t have that!” certainly serve the intended purpose of making players feel bad, but does nothing to help them improve. In fact, statements such as those have the opposite effect by creating fear, nervousness and lack of confidence.

3). **Setting a poor example:** When I coached, if our team went to the pizza place after a game, I’d never drink anything alcoholic in front of them. I don’t smoke, but if I did, my players would never know. And a coach should never swear or make crude remarks in front of his players, even if they’re teenagers. These players look up to you and think of you on a level that may equal or even surpass their own parents. Why then let them see or hear you do something you wouldn’t want them to do?

4). **Giving up on a team:** The coaches I admire most are the ones still working and exhorting their players even in the face of obvious defeat. The soccer coach down 6-0 in the second half who is still up motivating his team to attack and defend. The basketball coach behind by twenty with two minutes left trying his best to cut into the deficit until the buzzer sounds. Or the baseball coach losing by eight runs who tries to make his team believe they can still come back and win. And a sin even greater than giving up on a game, is giving up on the season. When they’re older, the kids you are coaching will be confronted with plenty of adversity. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if they learned early in life to never surrender, regardless of the circumstances? You have the opportunity to teach that life lesson.

5). **Giving up on a player:** We’ve all had kids on our teams who didn’t have the athletic tools to become great. A selfish coach ignores them and focuses on the stars who can help him win. But don’t the players with lesser ability deserve just as much help and instruction as the stars? They need it more. And even a self-serving coach should know that every member of the team is like a link in a chain. Concentrating on only on the strongest links means sometime, in a critical moment, a weaker link is bound to fail and hurt everyone.

The secret to being a great coach is to prepare your players – for the next play, the next game – but also for the next season and for the years ahead. If you can instill in your team tenacity, sportsmanship and self-confidence you’ll have taught them to be winners – regardless of your record at the end of the year.