



Coach's Manual - 2007

Introduction

To start with the most important thing, THANK YOU FOR VOLUNTEERING TO COACH! Simply, without your time and effort, the league could not function and the children would not be able to participate. This document is to help you and make your job easier. As a coach, your responsibility is to create an environment where the players can enjoy the best game in the world.

KEY STARTING POINTS:

1. This is a house league. What that means is that we want to achieve the maximum participation for ALL players. While winning is important in all sports, it is not our focus - our focus is to provide the best possible environment for our children to play soccer.
2. We must concentrate on what is POSSIBLE. Because this is a house league and because the goal is maximum participation, you will not be able to teach a new David Beckham the skills he needs to play international soccer! Without in any way compromising on quality, organization, or the integrity of the sport of soccer, our expectations must be realistic in order to be achieved.
3. Never forget YOU are the grown up! Obviously, how we carry ourselves and the examples we set are very important. But also, don't be afraid to rely on your own judgment. Some of our coaches do not have much experience with soccer, but we are all professional people, all parents, and all have plenty of knowledge, common sense and experience that we can apply to this situation.
4. The job of any coach is the same whether you are in Brazil, England, Italy or Nun's Island, or whether you are coaching in the World Cup or a house league: ORGANIZE YOUR TEAM so they can take the field, and so they know what to do and what's expected of them when they are there.

Preparation

Before you even get to the field, the organizing should begin. The point of this is to know what you want before you get there. Here are some important steps to follow:

1. If you don't know the game of soccer, try to familiarize yourself with it.

We have lots of different coaches with lots of different experience. If you are one of the less experienced coaches, try to become as familiar with the game as you can by watching it on TV and doing a little research.

2. Know the rules.

This is twofold. The FIFA rules that apply to all soccer are obviously crucial, but so is knowing the rules of our particular league.

3. Know the formation and positions you want your players to play.

This is THE most important thing in organizing your team. Do NOT underestimate how crucial this is. Furthermore, given the limited amount of time available to you it is what you should coach the players on most. Teams up to 11 years old will play 7 a-side, with a 2-1-2-1 formation (not as complicated as it sounds). There are two defenders, then one center midfielder in front of them, 2 wide midfielders (left and right) further forward (creating a V shape), and one central forward. For 11 year olds and up who play 11 a-side, all teams will play a 4-3-3 formation (like Chelsea and Barcelona) with four defenders, three midfielders (playing close together), and three attackers (one center forward, and two wide forwards).

These formations are in line with modern soccer tactics and all teams are expected to follow these guidelines. This will produce continuity throughout the program, making it easier for players to move from one age group to the other (the 2-1-2-1 formation in the younger age groups is the best preparation for playing the 4-3-3 in the older age groups). Considerable time will be given to this at the coaching clinics. The better you understand the system, the better you will be able to communicate it to your players.

4. Know your goals: **Bravery**

Effort

Sportsmanship

Some children will NOT be very good players. However, your job is to help them and this is one way of doing that. Concentrate on 'Bravery' as a collective and individual goal. This means not being afraid of the ball (lots of kids are), not being afraid to get hurt, not being afraid of the opposition (most kids are if the opposition players are bigger and/or better), not being afraid to tackle or block the ball, not being afraid to head the ball, not being afraid to try their hardest, and never being afraid of failing.

Soccer is a game that relies on the effort of the individuals for the team to succeed. It's crucial for players to never stop trying, always chase back to help the defense, always try their hardest, and make sure that at the end of each game they can say, 'Yes, I did my best'.

Sportsmanship is insisted upon by the league, and you should enforce it with your team. Focus on teaching the kids to: play hard but always fair, never show dissent to the referee, always respect the coach, always be positive towards their own teammates, never try to hurt an opponent, and no matter what, always shake hands PROPERLY after the game.

The bottom line is this: you might not be able to get your team to play like Brazil and you might not find the next Maradona. But if you can communicate the principles of bravery, effort, and sportsmanship to the children on your team, you will have done a great job and taught your players lessons they can carry with them in the future. THESE are the things you should concentrate on communicating, and the increase in confidence they get as a result is probably the most important aspect of participation in sport for children.

Before the Game

1. Make sure players are there at least 20 minutes before game time.
Don't be afraid to talk to parents concerning this. It will give you a little organizing time before the game, when you can do a warm up to get them moving and make sure your players take the field organized. It is also very important that players learn they must respect the rules set by a coach and the game itself.
2. Insist on full uniforms, cleats and shin guards.
This is a safety issue, but it is also important to teach that equipment and uniforms must be respected and that they are the responsibility of the PLAYER, not their parent.
3. Know the names of your players.
Make sure to have your list of names with the players' numbers with you at all times. Also, name tags can be used for the first few games. Bottom line: if you don't know the players names after the first few weeks it will KILL their confidence.
4. Choose an appropriate warm up activity.
This must be age appropriate, with as little standing still as possible for the players. It should also be something that the players can join in as they arrive. (The best thing is to have one coach doing the drill and the other dealing with the kids as they arrive). Warm up activities will be covered in the coaches' clinics. The warm up is to get them moving, NOT to train them. (The only exception to this might be team formation and positions, and set plays, e.g. corners.) Training is done on weekends by the Technical Director and is not your responsibility in the 10 minutes you have before the game! It's simply not possible for you in the time that you have.
5. Give a team talk.
Make sure they all listen. It's important to not be negative, but be strong enough to give them no alternative but to listen to you. Use all your parenting skills! Reiterate the goals of effort and bravery, compliment last week's performance, chose ONE

thing for them to try to do this week (e.g. pass!), go over the formation and line up, and send them on to the field confident, organized, happy, and determined!

During the Game

1. Be interested and enthusiastic.

Pay attention to the game, try to be aware of ALL your players, and always be engaged, positive, and animated.

2. Insist on positions.

From a technical perspective, this is the most important coaching you can do during the game. Considerable time will be given in the coaches' clinics to help with this. Also, don't just correct, but positively reinforce good positional play. For example, "Hey, Phillippe! Great positioning! You see how you won that ball because you moved to the right place?"

3. Give positive reinforcement for ALL examples of the stated goals.

For example, the ball is bouncing between your player and a bigger opposition player. You can see your player is hesitating. You shout, "Go, Theresa! Be brave, be brave!" and usually you'll see Theresa win the ball. Then, compliment the player and show them how being brave meant they didn't get hurt and won the ball for the team. "Way to go Theresa! Way to be brave!" Shout it out, then watch that player be brave all season.

4. Give positive reinforcement for all good play - not just scoring or saving.

It's easy to see a good save or a good shot, but be aware of a good tackle, a good sprint, good skill, or a nice pass. Make sure you point them out at the time and say how good it was. This is positive reinforcement and should be used constantly. Simply, it's a great way to get kids to do the same thing again.

5. Encourage passing.

This isn't easy, especially with younger teams. You might not be successful with it, but ALWAYS encourage and compliment passing, no matter what.

6. Keep substitutions organized.

This can be the hardest part of the coaching job. With everything else going on, it can get out of hand. Keep it organized and concentrate on it. Keep a list of players and check off every time they are substituted. Make sure each player going on knows what position they are going to and THEN make the substitution. Make players run on and off the field, so the game is delayed as little as possible. And don't forget - make it as fair as you can.

7. Don't criticize the referee or the other team (and don't let parents do this either).

This is absolutely crucial. Don't let your players do it, don't let your players' parents do it, and absolutely NEVER do it yourself (no matter how tempting). The policy must be one of zero tolerance.

After the Game

1. Insist on sportsmanship.

Make sure all players come together, shake hands PROPERLY with all the opposition players and the referee. Watch this carefully- you'd be surprised how quickly and easily these basics of sportsmanship can be ignored.

2. Give a team talk.

Point out all that was good. Refer back to our goals of effort and bravery. Bring out examples, especially from lesser players. This builds their confidence and reinforces that it is a team game. Also, touch on "can we do more next week?"

3. Tell parents about their child.

All parents love to hear that their child is doing well! Never be afraid to tell them and give them examples of courage and how hard they are trying. This also has the effect of kids who are usually late suddenly starting to turn up early!

4. Any problems, tell the coordinator.

You are a volunteer. Problems with players, parents, the opposition, the referee, ANYTHING YOU FEEL IS AN ISSUE, go and tell the coordinators. It is their responsibility to work these things out, not yours. Plus, they must be informed or the problem will reoccur without their knowledge.

Frequently asked questions, and hopefully helpful answers

Q: What should I try to do on Day 1?

A: Get your players on the field in formation and start reinforcing the ideas of trying hard and being brave. Don't expect too much! Also, identify your best players. Who is quick? Who has skill, who is strong, and who has the best kick? This will help you organize your team quickly. (However, ALWAYS be ready for players to get better and improve. There should be good players at the end of the season whom you didn't notice at the beginning!)

Q: Who should play in each position?

A: Try and identify a player with speed for the forward position. Find someone brave and strong who works hard to play the center of midfield (often the most important position on a soccer field). The player with the best kick could certainly play defense. These are suggestions! Be ready to move them around and see.

Q: What about goalie?

A: If you have someone who wants to do it, great. If not, set up a rotation with rewards, such as getting more playing time when they are not in goal.

Q: How do you deal with really bad players?

A: They might not be so bad. Focus on bravery, positioning, and their effort and you might be surprised.

Q: But what about the REALLY bad players? How do you get them on the field?

A: Make sure they play, but do NOT put them in defense where they might let in a goal. The basic rule is put good players in the center and bad players out wide. Forward can also be a good position to hide your worst player.

Q: What if there is a player who is much better than the others?

A: Let them play. Good players MUST be allowed to express their talents on the field, though they must also do their share of time on the bench. Also, concentrate on giving them responsibility on the field so they can contribute to the team overall. Teach your best players not to get frustrated with others but to encourage everyone on the team instead.

Q: What if we lose really badly?

A: The league tries to make the teams fair. However, losing can happen. Go back and focus on bravery, effort, and sportsmanship. Review and drill positions, and encourage them more! Find positives! If you do this, you won't lose badly for long.

Q: What can be done about bad referees?

A: Don't say anything out loud!!! Wait, and quietly talk to a coordinator.

Q: Misbehaving kids? Misbehaving parents? Misbehaving opposition?

A: Go see the coordinator. They're on your side.

Conclusion

Some of our coaches have a background with the game, and others not so much. However, the basic goals for everyone are the same - we are trying to provide ALL the children with as good an environment as possible to play soccer in. The best way of achieving this is to prepare, plan and then on the game day itself KEEP IT SIMPLE. No matter what your knowledge of soccer is, this is what you're aiming for - an organized team that knows where to be and what to do once they are there.

Good luck and have fun!