

PLAY SAFE!

THE NFL YOUTH FOOTBALL HEALTH AND SAFETY SERIES

SERIES EDITOR
BARRY GOLDBERG, M.D.

IN CONJUNCTION WITH
THE INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY
OF YOUTH SPORTS
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY



COMMUNICATION AND AWARENESS



B O O K **2** T W O

COMMUNICATION AND AWARENESS

BOOK **2** TWO

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SERIES EDITOR: BARRY GOLDBERG, M.D.

SERIES CONSULTANTS: ELLIOTT HERSHMAN, M.D.; ELLIOT PELLMAN, M.D.

NFL PROJECT EDITOR: JIM NATAL

GRAPHIC DESIGN: MORRISSEY GAGE

COVER PHOTO BY AL MESSERSCHMIDT



National Football League
280 Park Avenue
New York, New York 10017
(212) 450-2000

Internet: www.NFL.com / AOL Keyword: NFL.com
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American College of Sports Medicine
401 West Michigan
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American Red Cross

American Red Cross
8111 Gatehouse Road
Falls Church, Virginia 22042



National Athletic Trainers Association (NATA)
2592 Stemmons Freeway
Dallas, Texas 75247



The Institute for the Study of Youth Sports
Michigan State University
East Lansing, Michigan 4882



NFL Players Association
2021 L Street N.W., Suite 600
Washington, D.C. 20036

FROM THE SERIES EDITOR

Football is America's passion, so it is not surprising that football is the number-one high school participatory sport among boys. And increasingly, girls are enjoying the game.

For youth, high school, and college players, it is a game loved for its challenge and competition. Parents watch their children play, and coaches help teach the game. But no matter the level of involvement, all agree that football must be played safely.

The NFL and the NFL Players Association have developed this Youth Football Health and Safety series to promote the awareness of health issues related to sports participation and to maximize the safety of young athletes. *Play Safe!* is a series of four books containing relevant and practical articles, along with instructional posters distributed to school programs and youth football organizations. It is designed to help parents and coaches maximize the benefits of football for young competitors while minimizing the risks.

Four subject areas are discussed in this series:

First Aid

Communication and Awareness

Strength and Conditioning

Health Concerns For Young Athletes

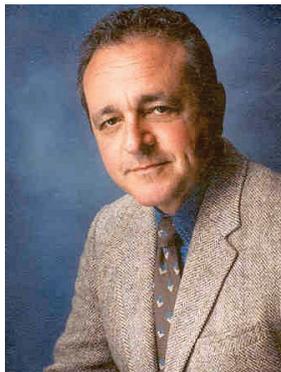
Respectively, the information for this series is provided by highly respected experts from:

- The American Red Cross,
- The Institute for the Study of Youth Sports at Michigan State University
- The National Athletic Trainers Association, and
- The American College of Sports Medicine.

In developing this program, the National Football League and NFL Players Association are proud to have enlisted the expertise of these four leading organizations in the field of health and medicine. For the first time, these nationally renowned organizations have pooled their knowledge and informational resources to create an aggressive and exciting series to help educate young football players, coaches, and parents on the subjects of health and safety in football. The information will allow coaches and parents to advise players how to *Play Safe!* as well as optimize their enjoyment and performance.

Topics include important areas such as: immediate recognition of injury and response to emergencies, psychological management, instructional techniques, training and conditioning techniques, and pregame meal preparation and proper nutrition.

All of us involved with this worthwhile project appreciate the enthusiastic support and love of the game expressed by its fans. We are committed to working with our partners to ensure that young football players continue to *Play Safe!*



**BARRY GOLDBERG, M.D.,
SERIES EDITOR**

Dr. Barry Goldberg is the Director of Sports Medicine, Yale University Health Service, and Clinical Professor of Pediatrics, Yale University School of Medicine.

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FROM MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

PERSONAL AND SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF COACHING YOUTH FOOTBALL

These essays address the personal and social skills that should be possessed or acquired by people coaching young athletes. Parents, administrators, and children expect youth sports to enhance the athletes' social, mental, and physical development. Scientific evidence supports the widely held belief that youth sports, if properly conducted, are an excellent arena for teaching the life skills that are essential to healthy, productive citizenship. However, a significant gap exists among the suggested knowledge, skills, and values needed by coaches and the incorporation of these competencies into lessons on America's playing fields.

The articles fall into five categories. The first group, *The Football Program*, describes the type of program most likely to attract and retain young players.

The second, *The Growing and Maturing Athlete*, explains how young athletes of the same age may differ in size, maturity, experience, and ability. The articles explain how to spot these differences and what steps coaches need to take to incorporate developmentally appropriate experiences into daily practices.

Effective Instructional Techniques addresses organizing practices and teaching for maximum

effectiveness. These essays reflect the experience and knowledge of individuals who have coached at the youth and scholastic levels for much of their professional careers.

The fourth section, *Essential Qualities and Competencies of Coaches*, calls on practical experience and scientific information that is relatively new in its application to youth sports. Knowledge of such topics as positive coaching, motivation, team unity, resolving conflicts, and sexual harassment are essential ingredients for coaching success.

Finally, *Roles and Responsibilities of Parents* addresses the special challenges coaches face as they negotiate the interaction between parents/guardians and the child's sports experience. Changing family structures complicate this relationship. Of concern are the special considerations arising in one-parent homes, families with divided residences, and situations in which both parents work outside the home.

Together, these articles alert the coach to the many dimensions of coaching not commonly discussed in manuals. The supplemental materials—listed at the conclusion of each essay—suggest resources for coaches who wish to learn more about specific topics.



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THE FOOTBALL PROGRAM

CHARACTERISTICS OF A SUCCESSFUL YOUTH FOOTBALL PROGRAM

SEAN P. CUMMING, PH.D.

SUCCESSFUL YOUTH FOOTBALL PROGRAMS ARE BASED ON TIME-HONORED ORGANIZATIONAL PRINCIPLES. THE FOLLOWING SEVEN INGREDIENTS ARE ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS OF SUCH PROGRAMS.



WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW

- YOUR COACHING PHILOSOPHY NEEDS TO EMPHASIZE THE INTERESTS OF THE PLAYERS OVER WINNING.
- CREATE A SOUND PROGRAM TO ENSURE THE WELFARE OF YOUR ATHLETES.
- AN INFORMED COACH PROVIDES THE MOST QUALIFIED ADULT LEADERSHIP.
- TEACHING BASED UPON DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRESSION IS A COACH'S PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY.
- CONSISTENCY AND STABILITY RESULT FROM METICULOUS ORGANIZATION.
- THE ROLES OF PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY AS SUPPORTERS HAVE TO BE DEFINED.
- THE PROGRAM NEEDS TO BE CONDUCTED IN AN ENVIRONMENT THAT PROMOTES SAFETY AND FAIR PLAY.

PERSONAL EQUIPMENT CHECKS ARE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF EACH PLAYER. ANY FAULTY EQUIPMENT MUST BE REPORTED TO THE COACH.

SELECT DRILLS THAT INVOLVE 3-5 PLAYERS AT A TIME. PLAYERS LEARN LITTLE BY WAITING IN LINES.

Success in youth football is determined by more than won-lost records. Principles such as organization, the health and safety of athletes, and coaching philosophy have equal or greater importance. Seven key components of successful youth football programs are:

① YOUTH-CENTERED COACHING PHILOSOPHY

A successful youth football program places the interests of the players ahead of winning. Structure your program to maximize the benefits and minimize the risks of participating in football.

② INFRASTRUCTURE BASED ON THE ATHLETES’ WELFARE

Staff, players, and parents need to know what behavior is—and is not—appropriate. Establish a policy regarding the health, safety, and development of your players. This policy statement addresses such issues as the conduct of players and coaches, rules that the team needs to obey, and requirements to protect the health and safety of the athletes. These policies need to be available to all coaches, administrators, and parents.

③ QUALIFIED ADULT LEADERSHIP

A competent coach is a well-informed coach. Take every opportunity to educate yourself. Encourage your staff to do the same. A knowledgeable coach understands conditioning, nutrition, psychology, growth, and first aid—plus the rules, techniques, and strategies of football. Sources of information include coaching clinics, books, the Internet, and other coaches.

④ SELECT DRILLS AND STRATEGIES THAT ARE APPROPRIATE

Teach the fundamental skills of football with enthusiasm. Players need to master the fundamentals of football before they attempt more complex skills or strategies. Keep offensive and defensive schemes simple. Players learn more quickly when they are presented with strategies and drills that match their developmental levels.

WHEN SELECTING DRILLS, ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

- Is the drill too physically demanding?
- Is the drill or scheme too complex for the players to understand?
- Does the drill maximize time on task?
- Is the drill unnecessarily risky for players?

⑤ ORGANIZE TO PROMOTE CONSISTENCY AND STABILITY

A team that fails to prepare is a team preparing to fail. Staff and players need to prepare for practices and competitions. Coaches can anticipate and pre-

pare for problems both on and off the field. Among the most common problems are injuries to players, broken or lost equipment, inclement weather conditions, and cancelled games or practices.

⑥ DEFINE ROLES FOR PARENTS AND COMMUNITY SUPPORTERS

Make the program part of the community. Hold a preseason meeting for parents. Share with them the program’s philosophy. Encourage parents and community members to become involved. Parents and community members help in a variety of ways.

THEY CAN:

- Become assistant coaches
- Assume administrative roles such as team secretary or treasurer
- Wash team uniforms
- Hold fund-raising campaigns
- Host team socials
- Provide financial assistance for travel, equipment, or other necessities
- Practice and encourage good sportsmanship

⑦ CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT THAT PROMOTES SAFETY AND FAIR PLAY

On-field administration affects the health and safety of players. Each program is responsible for providing well-maintained facilities, adequate equipment, and appropriate medical care for participants (when necessary). Be sure to check the field and equipment before every practice and game. Delegate responsibilities for these tasks to staff and volunteers. This on-field safety team looks out for hazards, including:

- Dangerous objects on the field of play—broken glass, stones, animal droppings, or metal shards
- Potholes, metal gratings, benches, and the like
- Loose padding on goal posts
- Faulty or ill-fitting equipment (e.g. helmets, shoulder pads)
- They also promote sportsmanship and fair play by establishing a code of conduct for players, staff, and parents

MORE READING

GO ONLINE AT WWW.NFLHS.COM/HEALTH

Youth Football: A Complete Handbook. J. Cvengros, Cooper Publishing Group.

Coaching Football Successfully. B. Reade, Human Kinetics Publishers.

PACE, Program for Athletic Coaches Education Handbook. V. Seefeldt, M.A. Clark, E.W. Brown, Cooper Publishing Group.

Football Coaching Strategies. G. Teaff, Human Kinetics Publishers.

FUN—THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT IN YOUTH FOOTBALL

KEVIN A. STEFANEK, M.A., M.S. AND MARTHA E. EWING, PH.D.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND WHY YOUNG ATHLETES START PLAYING, CONTINUE PLAYING, AND STOP PLAYING SPORTS. BY KNOWING WHAT MOTIVATES ATHLETES, COACHES CAN PROVIDE PLAYERS WITH THE EXPERIENCES THEY ARE LOOKING FOR, AND AVOID EXPERIENCES THAT PROMPT ATHLETES TO STOP PLAYING.

WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW



- **MOST YOUTH AND SCHOLASTIC ATHLETES START PLAYING FOOTBALL BECAUSE THEY WANT TO HAVE FUN. THEY CONTINUE PLAYING BECAUSE THEY ARE HAVING FUN. THEY STOP PLAYING FOOTBALL BECAUSE THEY ARE NOT HAVING FUN.**
- **FUN IS NOT SIMPLY LETTING ATHLETES DO WHATEVER THEY WANT. FUN INVOLVES IMPROVING SKILLS, LEARNING NEW SKILLS, BEING WITH FRIENDS, AND COMPETING IN A SAFE AND ENCOURAGING ENVIRONMENT.**
- **IF YOU ASK THEM, YOUNG ATHLETES WILL TELL YOU WHY THEY ARE PLAYING FOOTBALL. TAKE THE TIME TO GET TO KNOW THE PLAYERS.**

THE FIVE MOST FREQUENT RESPONSES YOUNG ATHLETES GIVE AS REASONS FOR PARTICIPATING IN OR DROPPING OUT OF FOOTBALL FALL UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE COACH. FOR THAT REASON, COACHES CAN MEASURE THEIR SUCCESS AT THE END OF EACH SEASON BASED ON:

- **THE PERCENTAGE OF ATHLETES WHO IMPROVE THEIR PHYSICAL, PSYCHOLOGICAL, AND SOCIAL SKILLS.**
- **THE PERCENTAGE OF CURRENT PLAYERS WHO WILL EAGERLY JOIN A FOOTBALL TEAM NEXT SEASON.**

Coaches have ideas about the experiences players want in football. Players have their ideas, too. When these two sets of ideas agree, satisfaction results. When coaches offer what players do not want, there is dissatisfaction all around. To put the athletes first and to provide what players want, coaches need to know and address the reasons for participation in sports. The top five reasons for playing, stated by young athletes are: “fun,” “doing something I’m good at,” “to improve my skills,” “the excitement of competition,” and “staying in shape.”

Notice that winning is not mentioned, although it does show up as number 8 on the top 10 reasons why boys play sports. Thus, coaches who emphasize winning as the reason for playing football are doing so inappropriately. Most athletes have fun when they win, but it cannot be the main emphasis of a youth sport program. But this list is just a beginning. Ask your athletes why they want to play football.

The previous list helps coaches understand what to provide for their players. The following list—the reasons why young athletes drop out of football—tells

coaches what to avoid. The top five reasons why young athletes drop out of football are “not learning new skills,” “not having fun,” “not feeling a part of the team,” “not exciting,” and “not getting enough exercise.”

When coaches provide what young athletes seek, the reasons for dropping out become moot.

■ **TO KEEP YOUTHS INVOLVED IN FOOTBALL: EMPHASIZE LEARNING NEW SKILLS AND IMPROVING EXISTING ONES**

Doing the same drill repeatedly is not an effective way to improve skills. Be creative with drills and skill building. Talk to other coaches and read books so that you are able to teach fundamental football skills using different techniques and drills.

■ **HAVE FUN**

If you are having fun, chances are the team is too. Laugh with the players and allow them to laugh with each other and you. Coaches can teach players that making mistakes is one of the best ways of learning. Laugh at your own mistakes and encourage the players to do the same. Create a positive environment where your players want to improve and succeed, rather than a negative environment where the players are afraid to fail.

■ **MAINTAIN A SAFE ENVIRONMENT**

Do not allow athletes to become involved in careless actions, tricks, pranks, hazing, or practical jokes. These often lead to physical and psychological injuries, and injured players are more likely to stop playing football.

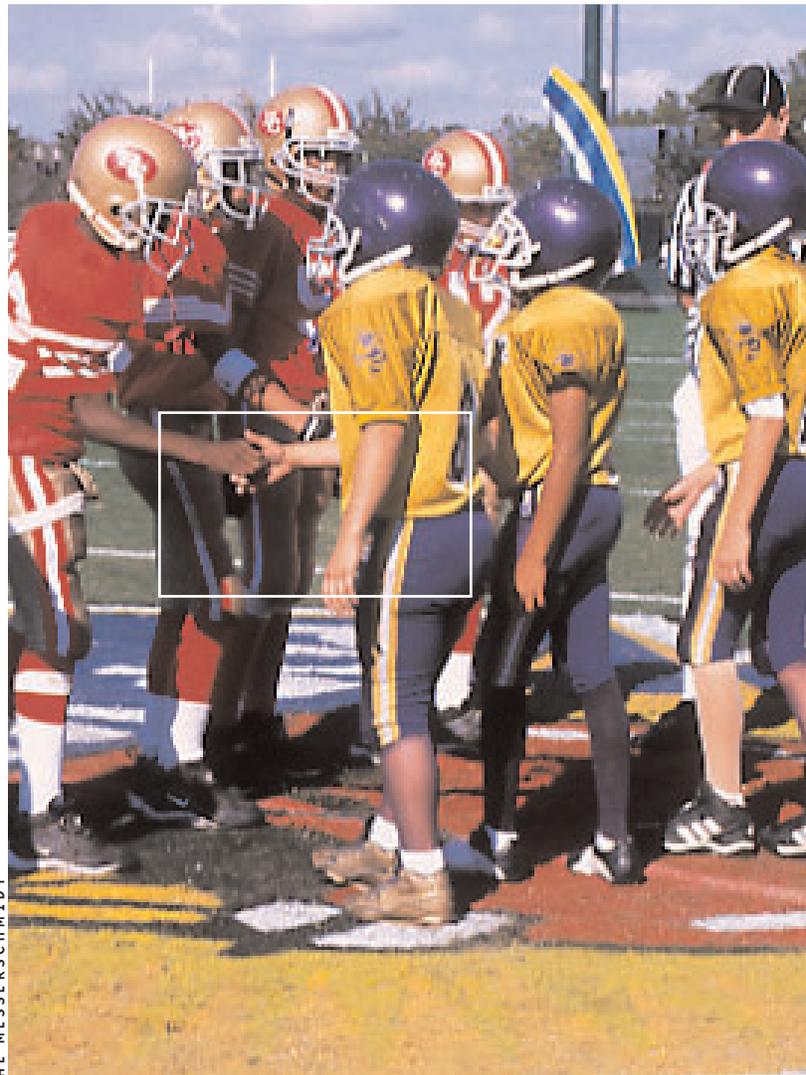
■ **CHALLENGE THE ATHLETES WITH PHYSICAL EXERCISES IN CREATIVE WAYS**

Rather than sprints up and down the field, set up teams for relays. Guide the players as they make up specific relay legs. For example, one leg might be running forward, the next running backward, and then the bear crawl. Play tag or ultimate Frisbee rather than running laps to warm-up. The result is the same—the athletes condition anaerobically and aerobically, but the process is more enjoyable.

■ **GIVE PLAYERS A SENSE OF BELONGING TO THE TEAM**

Treat everyone fairly and equally. Create a low-stress, team environment. Make sure that all players know the team goals. Help the players see how everyone’s role helps achieve team goals. Provide positive feedback—praise and encouragement—to players when they do their part to help the team realize goals.

When coaches put players first—by providing the joy, opportunity, education, excitement, and physical workout that players are looking for—the athletes are more likely to have positive experiences and return to play again next season.



MORE READING

GO ONLINE AT WWW.NFLHS.COM/HEALTH

“Children’s Psychological Development Through Sport.” R.S. Weinberg and D. Gould in *Foundations of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, Human Kinetics Publishing.

“Youth Sport Participation: Is It Simply a Matter of FUN?” L.M. Petlichkoff in *Pediatric Exercise Science*, 1992, volume 4,

THE REAL MEANING OF WINNING

ANTHONY MORENO, M.S. AND VERN SEEFELDT, PH.D.

REAL WINNING HAPPENS WHEN ATHLETES AND COACHES KNOW THEY HAVE DONE THEIR BEST TO ACHIEVE INDIVIDUAL AND TEAM GOALS.



WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW

- **WINNING OCCURS WHEN EACH PLAYER GIVES MAXIMUM EFFORT FOR HIMSELF AND THE TEAM.**
- **STRIVING TO WIN AND THE PURSUIT OF VICTORY—AND NOT THE FINAL SCORE—ARE TO BE THE ULTIMATE GOALS IN YOUTH FOOTBALL.**
- **ATHLETES WHO IMPROVE THEIR SKILLS AND LEARN NEW ONES ARE WINNERS.**
- **WINNING, FOR MOST ATHLETES, INVOLVES A BALANCE BETWEEN FOOTBALL, SCHOOL, FAMILY LIFE, OTHER RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES, AND RELIGION.**
- **WIN-AT-ALL-COSTS IS AN ATTITUDE THAT UNDERMINES THE TRUE MEANING OF WINNING.**
- **THE TERMS WIN AND WINNING USUALLY DESCRIBE THE FINAL SCORE—THE OUTCOME OF A GAME. COACHES NEED TO CONVINCE ATHLETES TO GIVE THEIR BEST EFFORT EVEN WHEN THE SCORE IS NOT IN THEIR FAVOR.**
- **IF YOUTH AND SCHOLASTIC ATHLETES ARE TO ENJOY PLAYING FOOTBALL, WINNING HAS TO INCLUDE EFFORT AS AN IMPORTANT INGREDIENT. EFFORT AND IMPROVEMENT NEED TO BE REWARDED.**

“THE MOST INTERESTING THING ABOUT THIS SPORT, AT LEAST TO ME, IS THE ACTIVITY OF PREPARATION—AND ASPECT OF PREPARATION FOR THE GAMES. THE THRILL ISN’T IN THE WINNING, IT’S IN THE DOING.”

CHUCK NOLL

“IN ORDER TO HAVE A WINNER, THE TEAM NEEDS A FEELING OF UNITY; EVERY PLAYER HAS TO PUT THE TEAM AHEAD OF PERSONAL GLORY.”

PAUL (BEAR) BRYANT

COACHES MAKE ATHLETES FEEL LIKE WINNERS WHEN THEY:

- Praise athletes who listen and respond to instruction
- Praise improvements in skill development
- Praise players who persevere, who do not give up despite mistakes or losses
- Acknowledge athletes who understand and correctly apply a new strategy in a game situation
- Commend players for assisting others in learning or improving skills
- Applaud athletes who suppress their stardom for the welfare of the team
- Approve of sportsmanship-like acts and call such acts to the attention of the team
- Compliment athletes who take responsibility for their actions, especially when their actions may have consequences for the team
- Recognize athletes who demonstrate emotional control in difficult situations

Both coach and team lose when players drop out. Successful football coaches know that when players drop out, the program loses its influence over them. The physical, social, and psychological benefits of football are no longer available to dropouts. On the other hand, everyone wins when players enjoy the game and return the next season.

CHANGE A LOSING ENVIRONMENT INTO A WINNING ONE

POSITIVE COACHING INCLUDES:

Coaches may have to change their teaching styles (e.g. eliminate abrupt, aggressive coaching styles). They need to develop styles more compatible with the personalities and temperaments of the athletes. Positive coaching should be the norm.

- Using players as peer coaches may be less intimidating to less skillful, inexperienced players

- Getting team members to be concerned about their teammates leads to greater cohesion on the football field
- Encouraging athletes to do their best in practices and games
- Encouraging players to set personal goals. Reward them for achieving their goals. This helps athletes develop a positive attitude.
- Recognizing effort. Praise athletes who put out extra effort.

Winning youth or scholastic football programs have certain characteristics: Players willingly attend practices; they improve their physical, social, and psychological skills; and the athletes involved strive to do their best in practices and games. In situations where everyone strives for a common cause, winning is a daily occurrence rather than the outcome of a weekly contest.



MORE READING

GO ONLINE AT WWW.NFLHS.COM/HEALTH

Sportwise: An Essential Guide for Young Athletes, Parents and Coaches. L.J. Micheli, Houghton Mifflin.
Raising a Healthy Athlete. D.G. Avella and T.F. DiGeronim, British American Publishing Company.
Straight Talk About Children and Sport. Canadian Coaching Association.

JENNIFER J. WALDRON, M.ED. INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF YOUTH SPORTS, MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

SPORTS DO NOT AUTOMATICALLY DEVELOP CHARACTER IN ATHLETES. COACHES PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN DEVELOPING GOOD CONDUCT IN ATHLETES.



WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW

- **THE KEY TO BEING A GOOD SPORT IS TO BE RESPECTFUL OF SELF AND OTHERS.**
- **COACHES CAN TEACH GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP BY BEING A POSITIVE ROLE MODEL AND BY CREATING A CODE OF CONDUCT THAT ALL ATHLETES MUST FOLLOW.**
- **EXAMPLES OF GOOD CONDUCT INCLUDE:**
 - **SHAKING HANDS WITH OPPONENTS AFTER A GAME**
 - **HELPING AN OPPONENT UP AFTER A PLAY**
 - **SHOWING CONCERN FOR INJURED OPPONENTS**
 - **ACCEPTING ALL DECISIONS OF THE REFEREES**
 - **ENCOURAGING LESS SKILLED TEAMMATES**
 - **CONGRATULATING AN EXCELLENT EFFORT BY OPPONENTS**
- **EXAMPLES OF POOR CONDUCT INCLUDE:**
 - **TRASH TALKING** ■ **CAUSING INJURY TO AN OPPONENT ON PURPOSE**
 - **CHEATING** ■ **BLAMING LOSSES ON OTHERS**
 - **RUNNING UP THE SCORE AGAINST OPPONENTS**
 - **MAKING FUN OF A TEAMMATE’S EFFORT, SKILL, RACE, ETHNICITY, OR SIZE**

AS LEGENDARY NOTRE DAME COACH KNUTE ROCKNE ONCE SAID, “ONE MAN PRACTICING GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP IS FAR BETTER THAN 50 OTHERS PREACHING IT.” IF YOU CANNOT CONTROL YOUR BEHAVIOR, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT YOUR ATHLETES WILL BE ABLE TO CONTROL THEIRS.

Sportsmanship is an important issue facing all people involved in athletics. Episodes of coaches, parents, and athletes behaving poorly at sporting events, including football, are frequently reported in newspapers and on television. Good sportsmanship occurs when athletes show respect for opponents, teammates, coaches, and officials. In other words, treat others as you would like to be treated.

As with football skills, athletes need to be taught positive behavior. Coaches have a responsibility to teach good sport conduct to their athletes. There are many ways coaches can teach sportsmanship to players, but the most important way is to exhibit good conduct. Young players look to their coaches as role models. Coaches who show respect to officials and opposing coaches before, during, and after games can expect their players to do the same.

During practices and games, it is imperative that coaches remain under control while interacting with players, assistant coaches, officials, and opposing coaches. Parents observing the good sportsmanship and attitude of their children's coach soon will understand the responsibility they have to engage in good conduct as spectators.

Coaches should actively teach sportsmanship to their athletes. Bring examples of the good or poor behavior of professional or college football players to practice. Discuss the behavior of these athletes with your team.

Set up rules of sportsmanship at the beginning of the season. These rules must apply to all athletes on your team in all situations. Reward athletes on your team who behave as good sports. Punish athletes who behave as poor sports. If you let poor conduct happen on your team, you are teaching your athletes that poor conduct is acceptable.

The following approach was successful for a youth football coach who wanted to make sure his players were good sports and respected each player on the team and the coaches. At the end of each practice, each player and coach had to shake hands with all the other players and coaches. This way, no

SAMPLE PARENT GOOD CONDUCT PLEDGE*

I (WE) WILL NOT ALLOW OURSELVES OR OUR FAMILIES TO ENGAGE IN POOR SPORTSMANSHIP.

I (WE) WILL ENCOURAGE ALL ATHLETES TO PUT FORTH EFFORT AND TO DO THEIR BEST AT ALL TIMES.

I (WE) WILL APPRECIATE ALL ACTS OF SPORTSMANSHIP, WHETHER FROM OUR TEAM OR OUR OPPONENT.

I (WE) WILL CONGRATULATE ALL GREAT PLAYS, WHETHER BY OUR TEAM OR OUR OPPONENT.

*ADAPTED FROM THE MICHIGAN HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

one left practice with hard feelings and appreciation was shown for everyone's hard work and effort.

IN SUMMARY, TRY ALWAYS TO:

- Stress the importance of sportsmanship and cooperation at meetings with parents
- Teach athletes to be responsible for their behavior
- Teach athletes to be considerate of their teammates and their opponents when they win and lose
- Emphasize respecting opponents and officials whether winning or losing
- Make sure your athletes know and follow the rules of football

MORE READING

GO ONLINE AT WWW.NFLHS.COM/HEALTH

Michigan High School Athletic Association: Sportsmanship: <http://www.mhsaa.com/services/smship.html>.

Institute for International Sport: National Sportsmanship Day: <http://www.international sport.com/nsd/nsd.cfm>.

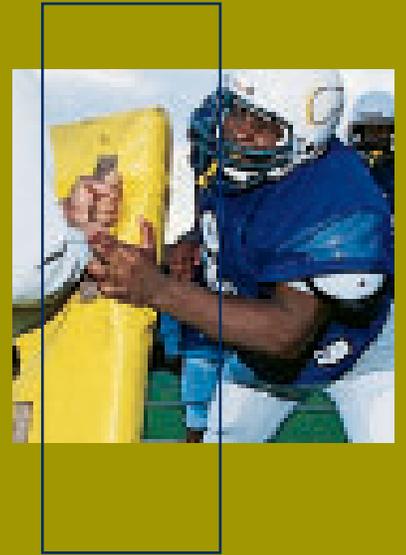
Character Counts: <http://www.character counts.org>.

Coaching for Character: Reclaiming the Principles of Sportsmanship, C. Clifford and R.M. Feezell, Human Kinetics Publishers.



PLAY SAFE!

THE NFL YOUTH FOOTBALL HEALTH AND SAFETY SERIES



THE GROWING, MATURING ATHLETE

BUILDING SELF-CONFIDENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM

JENNIFER J. WALDRON, M.ED. AND MARTHA E. EWING, PH.D.

“THE BEAUTY OF THE GAME OF FOOTBALL IS THAT SO OFTEN YOU ARE CALLED UPON TO DO SOMETHING BEYOND YOUR CAPABILITIES—AND YOU DO IT.”

DUB JONES



WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW

- COACHES HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO HELP ATHLETES MAINTAIN OR INCREASE THEIR SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-CONFIDENCE.
- COACHES CAN INCREASE THE SELF-CONFIDENCE OF ATHLETES BY CREATING SUCCESSFUL PERFORMANCES, GIVING VERBAL ENCOURAGEMENT, BY BEING A GOOD ROLE MODEL, AND ALLOWING ATHLETES TO HAVE FUN IN FOOTBALL.

COACHING STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING SELF-CONFIDENCE

SUCCESSFUL PERFORMANCES

- FOCUS PRACTICES ON DEVELOPING SKILLS
- PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ATHLETES TO MEASURE THEIR PROGRESS BY SETTING ATTAINABLE GOALS
- STRESS PERSONAL IMPROVEMENT
- SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS FOR EACH ATHLETE TO EXPERIENCE SUCCESS

VERBAL ENCOURAGEMENT

- GIVE TECHNICAL FEEDBACK
- AFFIRM YOUR BELIEF IN THE ATHLETE'S ABILITY
- SUPPORT AND ENCOURAGE YOUR ATHLETES
- USE POSITIVE STATEMENTS SUCH AS “I KNOW YOU CAN DO IT!”
- SAY SOMETHING KIND TO EACH PLAYER BEFORE THEY LEAVE PRACTICE OR THE GAME (POSITION OR ASSISTANT COACHES CAN HELP WITH THIS TASK)

ROLE MODELING

- SHOW ATHLETES A CONFIDENT TEAMMATE OR ELITE ATHLETE WHOM THEY CAN EMULATE
- DEMONSTRATE CONFIDENCE AND A POSITIVE ATTITUDE
- SHOW A CONFIDENT ROLE MODEL WHO TRIES HARD AND MAXIMIZES HIS ABILITY

POSITIVE EMOTIONS

- ALLOW ATHLETES TO HAVE FUN PLAYING FOOTBALL
- DECREASE ATHLETES' WORRIES WHILE PLAYING FOOTBALL

People judge themselves as having good or bad qualities. These opinions create a person's sense of self-worth or self-esteem. Having good self-esteem means having an attitude of "I am capable and I can do this." Through verbal and nonverbal messages and support, parents shape their child's self-esteem. Coaches have a responsibility to help athletes maintain or improve their self-esteem.

COACHES CAN HELP INCREASE SELF-ESTEEM BY:

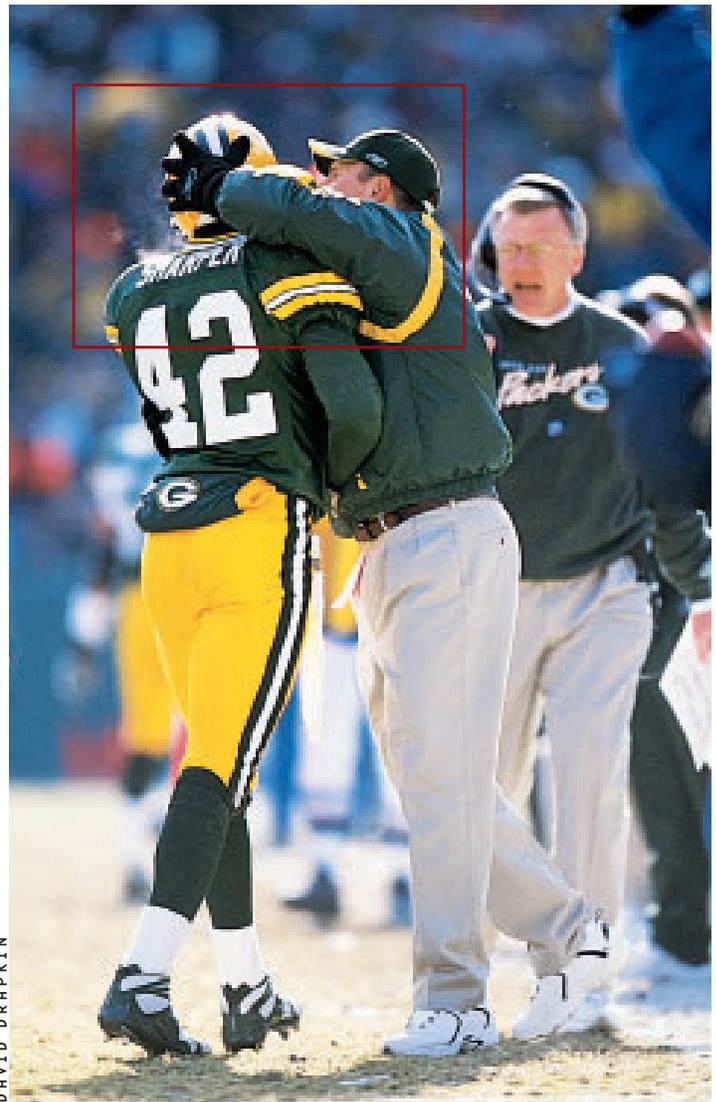
- Giving athletes opportunities to succeed
- Helping athletes view themselves as important and successful members of the team
- Showing athletes that you think positively about them as people
- Helping athletes understand that football is about using their abilities to be the best person they possibly can

Self-confidence is an ingredient of self-esteem. Self-confidence is the belief that "I can perform this task." Athletes who experience success in football will feel more confident and be motivated to continue to play. Athletes who experience failure will feel less confident and may be less motivated.

ALONG WITH THE STRATEGIES ON THE PRECEDING PAGE, COACHES CAN HELP BUILD ATHLETES' CONFIDENCE BY DOING THE FOLLOWING:

- Greet each athlete as they arrive. This shows you are happy they are at practice
- Make each athlete feel good about being at practice and competitions
- Encourage effort without always focusing on the outcome. This allows athletes to feel successful in football regardless of their ability.
- Give athletes responsibilities. For example, let a different athlete lead stretching drills each practice.
- Invite questions. Make sure athletes know they can ask questions if they do not understand your instruction.
- Praise athletes for special things that they do. This gives them support and shows your belief in them as individuals.

Let all athletes know that their value as people



does not depend on wins or losses. Remember, football is only one part of an athlete's life.

After a game, review what went right and what areas need improvement. Seek information from the athletes on how they judged their performance. Explain to the team plans to continue to work for improvement. Allow all athletes to participate at times with the first team.

Keeping or increasing an athlete's confidence is an important skill in coaching. When athletes feel confident, they will be motivated to practice and continue playing football.

MORE READING

GO ONLINE AT WWW.NFLHS.COM/HEALTH

It's Just a Game! Youth, Sports, & Self-Esteem: A Guide for Parents. D.J. Burnell, Funagain Press.

"Enhancing Children's Sport Experiences." T.D. Orlick and L. Zitzelsberger in *Children and Youth in Sport:*

A Biopsychosocial Perspective, WCB McGraw-Hill.

"Self-Confidence." R.S. Weinberg and D. Gould in *Foundations of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, Human Kinetics Publishers.

MENTAL ELEMENTS OF YOUTH FOOTBALL

PEGGY S. McCANN, M.S. AND MARTHA E. EWING, Ph.D.

THE MENTAL ELEMENTS OF YOUTH FOOTBALL INCLUDE THE PLAYERS' ABILITY TO PAY ATTENTION, PROCESS INFORMATION, AND MAKE DECISIONS. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOUTH FOOTBALL COACHES UNDERSTAND THAT YOUNG ATHLETES CANNOT PROCESS INFORMATION AS READILY AS ADULTS.



WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW

- **YOUNG ATHLETES PROCESS INFORMATION MORE SLOWLY THAN ADULTS. LIMIT YOUR COMMENTS TO ONE BIT OF INFORMATION AT A TIME.**
- **IF YOU SEE THE NEED TO MAKE SEVERAL CORRECTIONS AT THE SAME TIME, CHOOSE THE MOST IMPORTANT ITEM. LEAVE THE REST FOR ANOTHER TIME.**
- **DEMONSTRATIONS ARE MORE EFFECTIVE THAN WORDS IN TEACHING A NEW SKILL.**
- **THE MOST EFFECTIVE PRACTICES IMITATE GAME SITUATIONS. ANTICIPATE SITUATIONS YOUR ATHLETES WILL FACE. BUILD THEM INTO YOUR PRACTICES.**

Many things on the football field compete for young athletes' attention. Distractions include teammates, opponents, officials, parents, coaches, and the location of the football.

HERE ARE SOME WAYS TO HELP YOUNG ATHLETES PAY ATTENTION:

■ **SET UP GAME-LIKE SITUATIONS IN PRACTICE.**

Make the practice setting more real. This helps athletes choose the important cues and ignore the distractions.

■ **HELP ATHLETES DEVELOP CUE WORDS.**

Teach them reminder phrases. For example, have linemen say, "focus on the count." By doing this, their attention will be directed at the relevant cue—the snap count.

■ **PRACTICE EYE CONTROL WITH YOUR ATHLETES.**

Work with athletes on what to look at in different situations. Do they focus on the ball, the opponent in front of them, or the movements of the defensive backs?

INFORMATION PROCESSING

Young football players process information much slower than adults. Overloading young athletes with too much information confuses them.

■ **USE SIMPLE AND DIRECT LANGUAGE WHEN WORKING WITH ATHLETES:**

Provide only the specific information you want your athletes to know. Keep it simple. Use simple language that young players will understand.

Focus on one piece of information at a time. To correct skills during a tackling drill, focus instruction on one error at a time. Make sure your instructions include information the player can use to correct the error.

■ **BE SURE THE ATHLETES UNDERSTAND YOUR INSTRUCTIONS**

Have players repeat your instructions. Ask them to show you what they are to do as well.

■ **BREAK DOWN THE SKILL YOU ARE TEACHING**

If you want to teach tackling, first work on the correct movements. Progress to tackling a dummy; follow by tackling a player.

■ **DECREASE TALKING AND INCREASE DEMONSTRATIONS.** Young athletes learn best by seeing the skill first. Include plenty of demonstrations in your practices. To teach running backs how to cut, show them the correct movements. Demonstrate the skill yourself or use a player who has mastered the move.

■ **KEEP OFFENSIVE AND DEFENSIVE SCHEMES SIMPLE**

Stress fundamentals and execution. If you provide too much information to players, they will be overwhelmed. Young athletes often react instinctively, so too much information overloads them. Younger players will understand the fundamentals much better when things are kept simple. Later, you can refine skills.

DECISION MAKING

Young players make decisions at a much slower rate than adults. This is particularly true for players who are just learning the game of football. Their lack of experience and the added stress of playing a new sport affect their ability to make decisions.

TO HELP YOUR FOOTBALL PLAYERS LEARN TO MAKE DECISIONS:

- Adapt your practices and games. When young athletes are presented with too many choices,



MICKEY PELEGER

they become overwhelmed. Set up practices and drills with four or five-person teams to limit the choices. This is especially important for very young players.

- Simplify choices. For example, avoid complex blocking schemes with several options. This gives your athletes fewer things to think about.
- Set up a comfortable environment. Accept that making the wrong decision is part of the learning process.

Young athletes are different from older athletes in their abilities to pay attention, to process information, and to make decisions. By understanding these differences, you will be a more effective coach.

MORE READING

GO ONLINE AT WWW.NFLHS.COM/HEALTH

"Communicating With Your Players." M. Ewing and D.L. Feltz in Youth Football: A Complete Handbook, Cooper Publishing Group.

Straight Talk About Children and Sport: Advice for Parents, Coaches, and Teachers. J. LeBlanc and L. Dickson, Coaching Association of Canada.

Coach's Guide to Sport Psychology. R. Martens, Human Kinetics Publishers.

Coaching Football Successfully. B. Reade, Human Kinetics Publishers.

ASSISTING ATHLETES WITH TIME MANAGEMENT

MARTHA E. EWING, PH.D.

ATHLETES FACE MANY DEMANDS UPON THEIR TIME. IF THEY DO NOT LEARN TO MANAGE THEIR TIME EFFECTIVELY, ATHLETES WILL EXPERIENCE STRESS AND POTENTIAL BURNOUT.



WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW

- TIME MANAGEMENT IS A SKILL THAT HAS TO BE TAUGHT.
- FAILING TO MANAGE TIME EFFECTIVELY RESULTS IN STRESS AND FAILURE TO COMPLETE TASKS.

Football players need to be taught to balance the demands on their time. Practices and games compete with school assignments, leisure time, and family activities. Young players need to be allowed to enjoy life. Without knowing how to manage time, athletes often experience failure in the classroom or feel as if they are being excluded from social activities.

BALANCING TIME DEMANDS

Time management is a strategy. It helps us balance activities we HAVE to do with those that we would LIKE to do.

Young athletes need time for certain activities.

THESE INCLUDE:

- Get an appropriate amount of sleep
- Attend 6 to 8 hours of school per day
- Do homework and study for exams
- Do chores and participate in family activities

IN ADDITION, YOUTH WANT TO:

- Earn money for social activities
- Play sports
- Hang out with friends
- Watch TV or play video games
- Volunteer in religious organizations and/or community organizations
- Participate in other extracurricular activities

REDUCING TIME PRESSURE

As with anyone else, when there are too many things to do and not enough time to do everything, athletes feel pressure. Teaching them time management skills reduces this pressure.

Athletes feel pressured because they do not use time wisely.

CONTRIBUTING FACTORS OFTEN ARE:

- Procrastination
- Poor judgment about the time needed to complete tasks
- An inability to say NO
- Doing multiple tasks and not focusing on one task at a time
- Failing to establish priorities



ROSS LEWIS

ATHLETES MUST LEARN TO:

- IDENTIFY TASKS TO BE ACCOMPLISHED IN A GIVEN TIME.
- PRIORITIZE TASKS.
- ALLOCATE A REASONABLE AMOUNT OF TIME TO EACH TASK.
- PLAN THEIR WORK AND WORK THEIR PLAN.

TEACHING EFFECTIVE USE OF TIME

Coaches face the same time management challenges as athletes. Therefore, coaches are in a good position to teach time management skills.

THE FOLLOWING STEPS HELP ATHLETES LEARN TO USE THEIR TIME MORE EFFECTIVELY:

- Determine what is valued (school, family, religion classes, sports). Give these activities priority.
- Identify tasks to be accomplished in a given time. (For example, in addition to going to classes, athletes may need to attend a family birthday party, go to church, make pre-Prom dinner reservations, and/or start writing a paper for English class.)
- Prioritize tasks. If an English paper is due Friday, it may be listed “number one.” This means the athlete starts it on Monday with the first available time.
- Allocate a reasonable amount of time to tasks. Add 15 percent to anticipated time for interruptions or unplanned delays.
- Use a calendar or daily plan sheet. Identify time during the week to work on tasks.
- In other words, plan your work and work your plan!

Coaches have to be aware of the demands on athletes’ time. Coaches can work with athletes to complete tasks. For example, time between school and practice can become required study periods. Coaches occasionally may need to shorten or even cancel practice. Athletes then can use the time to complete school assignments or engage in family activities. If coaches think work and family are important in their own lives, they have to respect these elements of athletes’ lives.



COACHING THE EARLY- AND LATE-MATURING ATHLETE

REBECCA BATTISTA, M.S. AND VERN SEEFELDT, PH.D

PLAYERS DIFFER GREATLY IN PHYSICAL SIZE, PLAYING EXPERIENCE, AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT. SUCCESSFUL COACHES DETECT THESE DIFFERENCES AND ADJUST THEIR TEACHING STYLES AND CHALLENGES TO THE ATHLETES.

WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW



- OBSERVE THE DEVELOPMENTAL DIFFERENCES THAT SEPARATE THE EARLY- AND LATE-MATURING ATHLETES ON THE TEAM.
- BECOME FAMILIAR WITH PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS ASSOCIATED WITH EARLY AND DELAYED MATURATION.
- PUT ATHLETES IN POSITIONS AND SITUATIONS IN WHICH THEIR DEVELOPMENT WILL LET THEM SUCCEED.
- EXPLAIN TO ATHLETES AND PARENTS HOW DEVELOPMENTAL DIFFERENCES MAY KEEP LATE-MATURING PLAYERS FROM MAKING MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO TEAM GOALS.
- RECOGNIZE THE OBSTACLES THAT KEEP LATE-MATURING ATHLETES FROM PERFORMING PHYSICAL TASKS.
- PROVIDE SPECIAL ENCOURAGEMENT AND INSTRUCTION TO THE LATE-MATURING ATHLETE.
- DISCUSS EACH ATHLETES' FUTURE POTENTIAL WITH THEM AND THEIR PARENTS AS PHYSIOLOGICAL CHANGES OCCUR.

A YOUTH FOOTBALL COACH REJECTED NATHAN NIXON*, A LARGE AND SLIGHTLY OVERWEIGHT BOY GROWING UP IN RURAL TENNESSEE, AT AGES 10 AND 11. NATHAN WAS TOLD HE WAS "TOO SLOW AND CLUMSY" TO PLAY FOOTBALL. HOWEVER, HIS FATHER SAID, "NATHAN, THE COACH IS WRONG! I'LL WORK WITH YOU ON YOUR FOOTBALL SKILLS, AND THEN WE'LL SHOW THE COACH THAT HE WAS WRONG." NATHAN NIXON WENT ON TO PLAY HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL, AND RECEIVED A FOOTBALL SCHOLARSHIP AT THE UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE. AFTER GRADUATION, NATHAN PLAYED PROFESSIONAL BASEBALL FOR 13 YEARS. NATHAN SAID, "AFTER BEING REJECTED BY MY YOUTH FOOTBALL COACH, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN EASY FOR ME TO GIVE UP TRYING TO PLAY FOOTBALL, BUT MY FATHER WAS MY SUPPORT SYSTEM. WITHOUT HIM, I WOULDN'T HAVE MADE IT. I WONDER HOW MANY YOUNG PLAYERS QUIT SPORTS BECAUSE COACHES MAKE BAD DECISIONS OR BECAUSE THEY HAVE NO ONE TO COUNTERACT THE DECISIONS OF NEGATIVE COACHES."

*THE STORY IS TRUE, BUT THE ATHLETE'S NAME HAS BEEN CHANGED.

Youth and scholastic football programs usually group players by age or grade in school. When eligibility depends upon age, the oldest and most mature athletes dominate. When several ages or grades are combined, the developmental difference among players is even greater. The late-maturing athlete may end up feeling unsuccessful or out of place. These players then are at greater risk of dropping out. However, coaches and teammates can provide the support and encouragement that will keep them playing football.

Coaches need to be aware of mismatches. Mismatches can occur in: physical size, strength, endurance, aggressiveness, speed, coordination, the ability to learn, power, experience, and the amount

of improvement that occurs during a season. When mismatches occur, less mature players may feel psychologically and physically intimidated.

Tables 1 and 2 show the differences in height and weight that occur in a normal range of development for boys and girls. The fiftieth percentile means that half the youth are taller and heavier; the other half, shorter and lighter. These numbers also can be thought of as averages. The fifth percentile indicates that only four percent of the boys and girls are shorter and lighter. The ninety-fifth percentile shows that just four percent of the boys and girls are taller

CONTINUED ON PAGE 24

TABLE 1: STANDING HEIGHT (IN INCHES) OF BOYS AND GIRLS AT SELECTED AGE PERCENTILES

BOYS PERCENTILE					GIRLS PERCENTILE			
AGE	5TH	50TH	95TH	DIFF	5TH	50TH	95TH	DIFF
10	50.3	54.1	58.3	8.0	50.2	54.4	58.9	8.7
11	52.2	56.4	61.0	8.8	52.6	57.0	61.5	8.9
12	54.2	58.9	63.9	9.7	55.0	59.6	64.1	9.1
13	56.3	61.6	66.9	10.6	57.2	61.9	66.2	9.0
14	58.6	64.2	69.6	11.0	58.5	63.1	67.4	8.9
15	61.1	66.5	71.6	10.5	59.3	63.7	68.0	8.7
16	63.4	68.3	73.0	9.6	59.7	63.9	68.2	8.5
17	64.9	69.4	73.7	8.8	60.1	64.2	68.3	8.2
18	65.2	69.6	73.9	8.7	60.5	64.4	68.3	7.8

TABLE 2: WEIGHT (IN POUNDS) OF BOYS AND GIRLS AT SELECTED AGES PERCENTILES

BOYS PERCENTILE					GIRLS PERCENTILE			
AGE	5TH	50TH	95TH	DIFF	5TH	50TH	95TH	DIFF
10	53.6	69.3	99.8	46.2	53.7	71.8	104.0	5.3
11	59.1	77.8	113.5	54.4	60.1	81.5	119.0	28.9
12	65.8	87.7	128.1	62.3	67.3	91.6	134.1	66.8
13	74.2	99.1	143.3	69.1	75.3	101.6	148.4	73.1
14	84.3	111.9	159.0	74.7	83.2	110.8	161.1	77.9
15	95.0	125.0	174.4	79.4	90.4	118.3	171.5	81.1
16	105.2	136.9	188.8	83.6	95.7	123.2	178.6	82.9
17	113.5	146.2	201.3	87.8	98.6	125.0	181.8	83.2
18	119.0	151.9	211.1	92.1	99.8	124.8	181.8	82.0

SOURCE: NSHS GROWTH CENTER FOR CHILDREN, BIRTH-18 YEARS, UNITED STATES-NATIONAL CENTER FOR HEALTH STATISTICS, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE

and heavier. The “Diff” column reveals the difference between the fifth and ninety-fifth percentiles.

HEIGHT AND WEIGHT

Table 1 shows that the greatest difference in height occurs from ages 13 through 15 for boys. According to Table 2, the difference in weight between the lightest and heaviest boys increases each year from age 10 through age 18. The biggest difference between the average heights of boys and girls occur between ages 16 and 18. However, on average, boys become taller than girls by age 14. In weight, boys and girls are similar until puberty. (Puberty occurs on average at 13 in girls and 15 in boys.)

In puberty, the accumulated muscle mass of boys and increases in body fat of girls create an average difference of seven pounds in favor of boys. The weight difference between boys and girls increases throughout the rest of the growing years. By age 18, the average body mass of boys is 42 percent muscle. Girls typically have 34-36% muscle mass. When boys and girls compete against each other, their ability to produce strength and power may be quite different. This remains true even when the players’ weights are comparable. Coaches of co-ed teams must take this into consideration.

BODY SHAPE AND COMPOSITION

In puberty, boys increase muscle tissue, accelerate growth in the trunk and shoulders, and slow growth in the arms and legs.

SIGNS OF PUBERTY IN BOYS INCLUDE:

- Greater width of shoulders in relation to hips
- The childhood appearance of being all arms and legs with a shape in which the trunk and legs contribute nearly equally to height
- Muscle accumulation in the arms, shoulders, chest, thighs, and legs.

IN GIRLS, PUBERTY RESULTS IN AN APPEARANCE OF...

- Wider hips in relation to shoulders
- Development of secondary sexual characteristics
- Increased muscle and fat accumulation in the legs, buttocks, abdomen, and trunk.

Late-maturing individuals usually have linear bodies. They have an abundance of skeletal tissue compared to muscle and fat. Such youths also are likely to be hesitant in body-contact drills. Not having muscle and fat to protect the skeleton and nervous systems may inflict greater pain on the late maturer during physical contact. Coaches must ensure that protective equipment fits properly. This

guarantees coverage for sensitive areas such as shins, thighs, ribs, and shoulders in all players.

CHANGES IN STRENGTH, POWER, AND SPEED

Accumulating muscle mass during puberty directly affects an athlete’s ability to generate power and speed of movement. Conditioning programs can improve the capacity of both early- and late-maturing individuals. However, individuals with the greatest muscle mass—early maturers—have the advantage. Coaches must be careful to create matchups involving players of equal ability. Not only are injuries more likely when mismatches occur, but late-maturing athletes end up being overwhelmed in drills involving strength and speed. This can demoralize late maturers and may cause them to drop out of football.

CHANGES IN COORDINATION, AGILITY, AND RATES OF LEARNING

Constantly changing body proportions—especially in the arms, hands, legs, and feet—cause lapses in coordination. Rapidly growing athletes may appear clumsy compared to others who have already gone through their growth spurt. Thus, certain drills and plays will challenge late-maturing athletes. For example, situations requiring body control when dodging or rapidly changing directions will be particularly difficult for them. This apparent inability to execute drills and plays may lead coaches—mistakenly—to conclude that late-maturing athletes are slow to grasp complex strategies and maneuvers. Coaches should recognize how difficult it is for some athletes to coordinate a rapidly growing body, and coaches should respond with patience. They need to support athletes who try—yet fail—to keep up with earlier-maturing teammates.

THE ROLE OF EXPERIENCE

Performing a drill seemingly without thinking about it results from repetition. Athletes correctly perform a drill so often that it becomes embedded in their memory. Embedded memories allow athletes to make quick decisions in rapid succession. The early-maturing athlete likely has many more experiences of correct actions to draw upon. The late-maturing player is still trying to learn the basic patterns. Thus, the late-maturing athlete may appear frustrated and confused when having to react quickly to a changing environment.

Practices must imitate game situations to give ath-

letes the necessary experience. Late-maturing players may need more exposures to identical situations before they can correctly make quick decisions in game situations.

MISMATCHES

Youth programs often combine two ages or grades in school. Scholastic football teams may have an age span of four to five years on the same team. In such cases, the differences between early and late maturers are exaggerated. When girls play football with boys the differences become even greater after puberty. For safety's sake, coaches have to adjust practices and control game situations. The goal is to reduce or eliminate the possibility of mismatches between players.

Nevertheless, mismatches are the essence of much of football. A lineman blocks a defensive back. A linebacker tackles a running back. There will be differences in size. The coach's responsibility is simple: Place athletes in situations where they will be safe. Play them where they have a chance to succeed.

Coaches have options for helping players become successful. Most important, coaches must anticipate and meet the needs of early- and late-maturing athletes.

COACHES DO THIS WHEN THEY:

- Know each athlete's capabilities. Set measurable and attainable goals to increase self-esteem.
- Recognize and provide additional praise to players who have difficulty as they develop their skills.
- Challenge skilled, early-maturing athletes. Expect them to be teachers, role models, and counselors for other players.
- Make safety a daily priority. Expect larger, more mature athletes to set the tone. Charge them with eliminating teasing, intimidation, and hazing. Stress that less mature, less talented players are to be respected.
- Ask the more mature, highly skilled players to involve less-skilled players in team activities on and off the field.

WAYS TO ACCOMMODATE LATE-MATURING ATHLETES

Successful coaches adjust their programs to the needs of everyone who wishes to play football.

Today's poorly skilled, underdeveloped athletes may become the skilled players of tomorrow. However, this will occur only if they receive guidance, instruction, and protection.

Successful programs provide these essential components to all their athletes.

HERE ARE SOME IDEAS FOR ACCOMMODATING LATE-MATURING PLAYERS:

- Play a second quarter in which only those players who did not start the game may play
- Play a fifth quarter reserved for those who had limited playing time during the game
- Play a fifth quarter for those who did not play in the regulation four quarters

In any of these schemes, no player may play in more than four quarters on a particular game day.



BILL STOVER

MORE READING

GO ONLINE AT WWW.NFLHS.COM/HEALTH

Advances in Pediatric Sports Sciences, O Bar-Or, Human Kinetics Books. Growth, Maturation and Physical Activity.

R.M. Malina and C. Bouchard, Human Kinetics Books.

"NCHS Growth Curves for Children, Birth—18 Years." National Center for Health Statistics, Vital and Health Statistics, U.S. Government Printing Office. Also available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/about/major/nhanes/growthcharts/charts.htm#Set 2>.

HELPING ATHLETES COPE WITH COMPETITIVE STRESS

JENNIFER J. WALDRON, M.ED. AND MARTHA E. EWING, PH.D.

ALL ATHLETES EXPERIENCE PRESSURE AND STRESS SOMETIME DURING THEIR CAREERS. THE CHALLENGE IS LEARNING HOW TO COPE WITH IT.



WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW

- STRESS CAUSED BY FOOTBALL OCCURS ON AND OFF THE FIELD.
- THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT REASONS FOOTBALL PLAYERS EXPERIENCE STRESS.
- PLAYERS WHO ARE SUFFERING FROM STRESS MAY EXPERIENCE CHANGES TO THEIR BODIES, NEGATIVE THOUGHTS, OR CHANGES IN THEIR BEHAVIOR.
- SETTING UP EFFECTIVE PRACTICES AND PROPERLY MOTIVATING PLAYERS IS ONE WAY COACHES CAN HELP ATHLETES COPE WITH STRESS.

NEGATIVE SELF-TALK:

“YOU IDIOT, HOW COULD YOU MISS THAT EASY TACKLE!”

“THAT WAS A TERRIBLE PASS!”

POSITIVE SELF-TALK:

“EVERYONE MAKES MISTAKES. RELAX AND FOCUS ON THE NEXT PLAY.”

“SLOW DOWN, FOCUS ON YOUR TIMING AND RHYTHM.”

Stress occurs when the challenges of football outweigh an athlete’s skill to perform the football task or when the athlete is expected to perform exceptionally and play an important role in winning the game. For example, players may experience stress if they are scared about making a mistake during practice or games. Stress may happen before, during, or after a football game.

ATHLETES MAY EXPERIENCE STRESS IN FOOTBALL FOR THE FOLLOWING REASONS:

- Worry about being good enough
- Parents’, coaches’, and teammates’ comments
- Fear of making a mistake
- Not improving or not improving as quickly as someone else

- Time demands of school, sport, and a social life
- Pressure to win a game
- Expectations of self and others

Parents are often sources of stress if their expectations are too great or if they critique the athlete after each game. Parents are most helpful when positive coaching is accompanied by positive parenting.

Athletes may experience stress in different ways.

SOME ATHLETES MAY EXPERIENCE THE FOLLOWING:

- Tight muscles
- Shallow breathing
- Butterflies in the stomach
- Increased heart rate

PLAYERS MAY EXPERIENCE NEGATIVE THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS, SUCH AS:

- Loss of confidence
- Negative thoughts (I can't do this)
- Worry about poor performance

ATHLETES MAY UNDERGO CHANGES IN THEIR BEHAVIOR, INCLUDING:

- Not sleeping the night before a game
- Pacing
- Not wanting to practice or play football
- Changes in friends

There are different ways coaches can help players deal with stress and perhaps prevent stressful situations from developing. Players may experience stress if they have poor football skills or if their skills are not improving fast enough. Coaches need to organize effective practices and effectively teach football skills. Coaches should understand, recognize, and discuss stress with their athletes. They should provide an environment where players feel comfortable talking to a coach concerning their feelings. The coach also must provide an environment where making a mistake or losing is considered part of the game.

Sometimes the athletic environment may be a source of stress for the players. You can help players overcome these pressures by properly motivating athletes. You should never punish an athlete for making a mistake, unless it results from a lack of effort. When players are punished for mistakes, they will fear failure. If this happens, they may not put forth their best effort in practice and games. Instead, help athletes learn from mistakes. Athletes should always receive encouragement and positive reinforcement from coaches, from their teammates, and from their parents.

Coaches can teach players coping strategies so the athlete can deal with stressful situations. If the stress causes changes to an athlete's body, they need to learn how to relax through proper breathing. Proper breathing means filling your lungs completely, holding for a few seconds, and slowly exhaling. This tech-

nique is best used when there is a break in the action.

Athletes also need to control their self-talk. One way to do this is to have cue words athletes can use to focus their attention. For example, a punt returner might use the words "be a monster" to remind himself to be aggressive on the return. You can also teach athletes how to stop their negative thoughts. There are three steps to thought stoppage.

- 1 Identify negative thoughts and the situations in which they occur
- 2 Interrupt the negative thought by yelling 'stop' in your head
- 3 Replace the negative thought with a positive one

These three steps also are helpful for coaches who become upset with athletes who continue to make the same mistake or with referees who make bad calls.



MORE READING

GO ONLINE AT WWW.NFLHS.COM/HEALTH

"Helping Athletes Cope with Stress: A Vital Aspect of Motivation." M.E. Ewing, J.J. Waldron, and L.A. Gano-Overway in V. Seefeldt & M.A. Clark (editors), PACE: Program for Athletic Coaches' Education. Cooper Publishing Group.

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HELPING ATHLETES DEAL WITH INJURIES

DAWN K. LEWIS, M.S. AND JOHN W. POWELL, PH.D. DEPARTMENT OF KINESIOLOGY, MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

ATHLETES EXPERIENCE A VARIETY OF EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL RESPONSES WHEN AN INJURY OCCURS. COACHES CAN PLAY A SUBSTANTIAL ROLE IN HELPING ATHLETES DEAL WITH INJURY AND IN FACILITATING THE RECOVERY PROCESS.



WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW

- **BEING CERTIFIED IN FIRST AID AND CPR PROVIDES COACHES WITH KNOWLEDGE OF VARIOUS INJURIES AND HOW TO DEAL WITH THEM.**
- **INJURED ATHLETES MAY BLAME THEMSELVES FOR THE INJURY. REASSURE ATHLETES THAT THE INJURY IS NOT THEIR FAULT AND THAT THEY DID NOTHING WRONG.**
- **KEEP THE INJURED ATHLETES INVOLVED WITH THE TEAM.**
- **DON'T TRY TO GET AN INJURED PLAYER TO RETURN TO PRACTICE TOO SOON. WHEN THEY DO RETURN, SET REALISTIC SHORT- AND LONG-TERM GOALS FOR THEM.**

Coaches provide vital support and encouragement to injured athletes. They keep athletes connected to the team by fostering positive emotions and offering encouragement. Coaches' interactions with injured athletes provide them a sense of not being alone during a difficult time. Coaches need to be readily available to assist athletes in handling the challenges of recovery and returning to practice.

WHEN INJURIES OCCUR

The first chance for coaches to help an athlete deal with an injury comes on the field when it occurs. Athletes respond to verbal and nonverbal messages transmitted when coaches assist hurt players.

COACHES HELP ATHLETES DEAL WITH ACUTE INJURY WHEN THEY:

- Calm themselves before assisting the athlete
- Use a calm, quiet voice to talk with the athlete

- Repeat short, instructions (*calm down, relax, stay still*). These prepare the player for treatment.
 - Reassure the athlete by being there
 - Follow up with a phone call or visit to the athlete
- Coaches' opinions and approval are critical to athletes. Injured players often fear disappointing the coach and worry about letting the team down. So, reassure athletes that the injury is not their fault and that they did nothing wrong. Then tell them you look forward to their return to practice.
- Some coaching behaviors interfere with the athlete's ability to cope with injury and hinder the player's chances of returning to healthy sport participation. **FOR EXAMPLE:**
- Don't expect athletes to tough it out. They need support from the coach and others during rehabilitation and the return to practice.

- Don't send the message that injured athletes are worthless
- Don't try to get the player to return before the injury has adequately healed

AS ATHLETES REHABILITATE

Unfortunately, some coaches pay little attention to injured athletes. Coaches may feel awkward around injured athletes or not know what to say or do. Coaches also may know little about the athlete and so appear concerned only about whether—or when—the athlete can play. To help athletes cope, there are many ways coaches can show they care.

Try to know the athlete as a person. Make it a point to know one additional interest the athlete has outside of the sport.

Recognize and support the athlete's rehabilitation progress. This is done by asking athletes to demonstrate a rehab exercise or congratulating players when they regain sport skills, walk without the use of crutches, or have a cast removed.

Acknowledge the athlete's return to practice. Call the team together to cheer or announce the athlete's return to play at the start of practice.

Athletes who cannot practice commonly feel left out or like an outsider. Involve injured athletes so they retain a sense of self-worth and importance to the team:

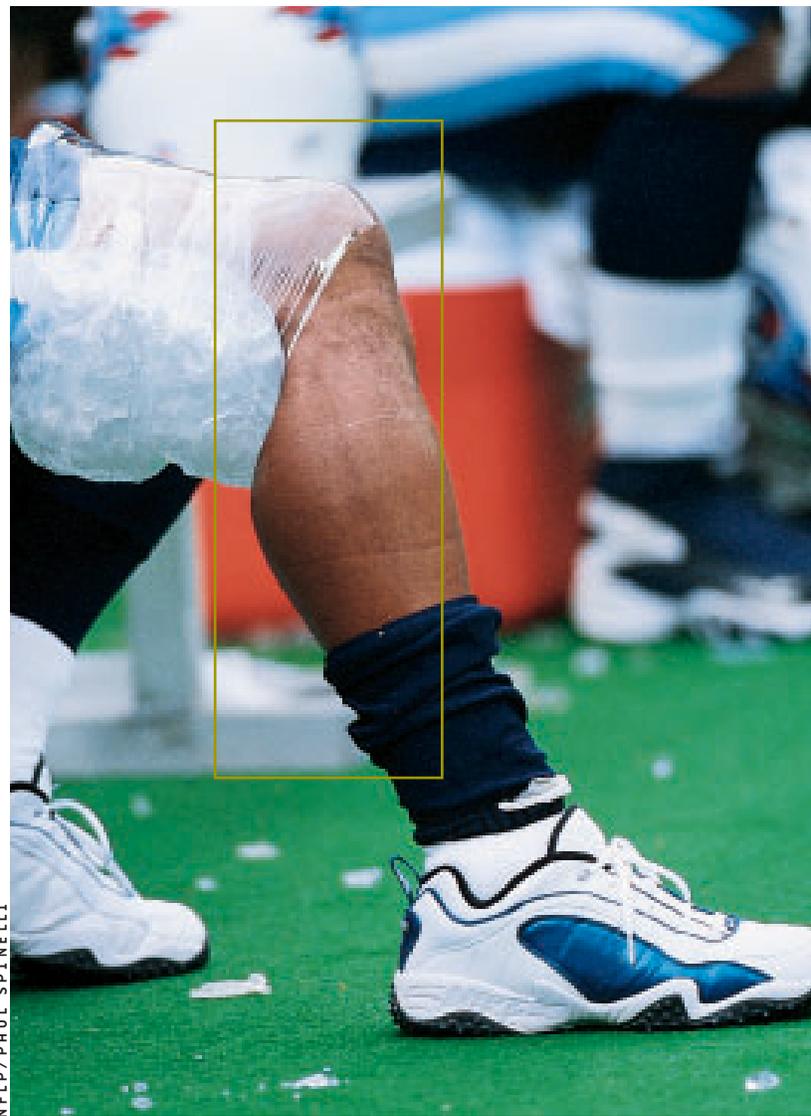
- Expect injured athletes to attend practice and participate in activities whenever possible
- Encourage parents to continue bringing athletes to practice
- Allow injured athletes to referee scrimmages or keep statistics during games
- Plan alternative activities for injured players

Use time wisely! Suggest activities that expand the injured athlete's skills, knowledge, and understanding of football during a time of reduced physical involvement. Encourage injured players to practice mental imagery of individual skills or team strategies.

In addition, ask injured athletes for feedback on practice and games.

WHEN ATHLETES RETURN TO COMPETITION

Set short- and long-term goals for athletes returning to practice. These goals have to be realistic and measurable, allowing athletes to see their progress. Goals ought to encourage skill redevelopment. Communicate these goals to the athletes and their parents.



NFLP/PAUL SPINELLI

MORE READING

GO ONLINE AT WWW.NFLHS.COM/HEALTH

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THE ATHLETE AT RISK OF DROPPING OUT

VERN SEEFELDT, PH.D. AND MIKE CLARK, PH.D.

ATHLETES PARTICIPATE IN SPORTS AND DROP OUT OF SPORTS FOR MANY REASONS. NOT ALL DROPOUTS REFLECT NEGATIVELY ON THE COACH OR THE FOOTBALL PROGRAM. COACHES CAN POSITIVELY IMPACT THE DROPOUT RATE.



WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW

- SOME ATHLETES ENTER THE FOOTBALL PROGRAM AT HIGH RISK OF DROPPING OUT.
- A CERTAIN NUMBER OF DROPOUTS ARE LIKELY, NO MATTER WHAT THE COACH DOES TO PREVENT THEM.
- PLAYERS WHO DROP OUT HAVE COMMON CHARACTERISTICS. THESE INCLUDE DELAYED MATURITY, SMALL SIZE FOR AGE, AND BEING FORCED TO PLAY BY PARENTS.
- SUCCESSFUL COACHES HAVE LOW DROPOUT RATES. THEY MODIFY THEIR COACHING STYLES TO MEET THE NEEDS OF A VARIETY OF ATHLETES.

YOUNG ATHLETES WERE ASKED WHY THEY DROPPED OUT OF SPORTS PROGRAMS. FIVE OF THE TOP TEN REASONS WERE CRITICAL OF THE COACH AND THE WAY IN WHICH THE PROGRAMS WERE CONDUCTED.

THE TEN MOST COMMON REASONS INCLUDE:

- 1 "NO LONGER INTERESTED."
- 2 "NOT HAVING FUN."
- 3 "THE SPORT TAKES TOO MUCH TIME."
- 4 "THE COACH PLAYED FAVORITES."
- 5 "THE COACH WAS A POOR TEACHER."
- 6 "I WAS TIRED OF THE SPORT."
- 7 "THERE WAS TOO MUCH EMPHASIS ON WINNING."
- 8 "I WANTED TO TRY OTHER ACTIVITIES."
- 9 "I NEEDED MORE TIME FOR SCHOOL WORK."
- 10 "THERE WAS TOO MUCH PRESSURE."

Coaches have the responsibility for determining who stays in and who leaves the football program.

COACHES KEEP PLAYERS IN THE PROGRAM BY:

- Getting to know players
- Learning the characteristics of potential dropouts
- Working to overcome barriers to participation

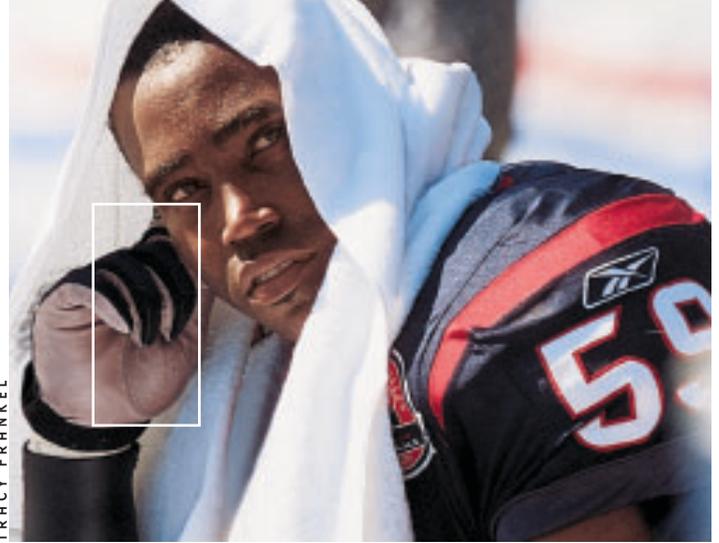
Athletes who join sports programs and later drop out are a concern to coaches and program sponsors. Dropouts often are the athletes who could benefit most from playing, and high attrition reflects negatively on adults conducting the program. Most important, athletes who drop out of football at an early age may never play again. Negative experiences in one sport may carry over to other activities. This may contribute to an inactive lifestyle.

Many potential players attend the first team meeting and early practices. Coaches who want to keep a large percentage of these players need to become acquainted with their athletes. Getting to know each athlete helps coaches identify those requiring additional attention.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AN ATHLETE AT RISK OF DROPPING OUT OF FOOTBALL ARE:

- The decision to play football was not voluntary. (e.g. parents forced the athlete to play.)
- The player has no friends on the team
- The first meeting also was the athlete's first exposure to organized football
- The person is small, late maturing, and inexperienced at football
- The athlete is shy, timid, and suspicious around other players
- The player differs from teammates in race, ethnicity, physical size, or socioeconomic status
- The person is sensitive to criticism, especially when other athletes are present
- The athlete has had previous injuries, which may make the player too cautious and keep him from showing his full potential

Acknowledgement, praise, and rewards need to be directed at vulnerable athletes. After identifying athletes at great risk of dropping out, coaches have to step in immediately. Athletes deciding whether to stay in the program form their opinions on a daily



basis. Actions by coaches or players that may lead to dropping out must be eliminated. Typical examples include teasing, mismatches in contact drills, and criticism in front of other players.

ACTS THAT SOLIDIFY TEAM MEMBERSHIP INCLUDE:

- Praise for improving individual skills
- Social acceptance by teammates
- Reaching personal goals.

When players drop out of football, it does not necessarily reflect negatively on the program. Instead, it may reflect a preference for another sport or less active pursuits. However, athletes leaving the program no longer benefit from it. In other words, football programs have positive educational effects on players. But athletes need to remain in the program to receive these benefits.

The coach's leadership style (including manners, attitude, and reaction to daily events) also influences players' decisions to stay or drop out. However, other circumstances cause players to consider dropping out. Finances may inhibit full participation; there may not be enough money to buy equipment for everyone. Coaches need to find assistance for these players. (Booster groups or other support organizations can help in these cases.) Lack of transportation may keep some athletes from participating. They may not be able to get to practices or games outside their neighborhood. Coaches and boosters can work together to solve this problem as well. Coaches who know their athletes will identify these problems and arrange solutions.

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DEALING WITH SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY

KEVIN A. STEFANEK, M.A., M.S. AND MARTHA E. EWING, PH.D.

COACHES NEED TO LEARN THE SIGNS OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY. YOUTH AND SCHOLASTIC COACHES ARE OBLIGATED TO MAINTAIN A CHEMICAL-FREE ENVIRONMENT.



WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW

- COMMONLY ABUSED SUBSTANCES INCLUDE ALCOHOL, TOBACCO, MARIJUANA, ECSTASY, AMPHETAMINES, COCAINE, ANABOLIC STEROIDS, CAFFEINE, AND DIURETICS.
- SUBSTANCE ABUSERS CHARACTERISTICALLY DENY THE PROBLEM. PEOPLE AROUND THEM OFTEN DENY THE PROBLEM AS WELL. DENIAL MAKES THE PROBLEM WORSE. IMMEDIATE ACTION IS CRITICAL FOR EVERYONE'S HEALTH.
- CONFRONTING A SUBSTANCE ABUSER REQUIRES PROFESSIONAL HELP FROM A COUNSELOR, THERAPIST, OR PSYCHOLOGIST. COACHES NEED TO KNOW THEIR LIMITATIONS WHEN COUNSELING ATHLETES.

CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY: THE REPEATED, ABUSIVE, AND UNCONTROLLABLE CONSUMPTION OF A CHEMICAL(S). DEPENDENCY CAUSES PROBLEMS IN AN INDIVIDUAL'S EMOTIONAL, MENTAL, SOCIAL, SPIRITUAL, ACADEMIC, AND ATHLETIC LIFE. CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY IS AN ILLNESS TO BE PROFESSIONALLY DIAGNOSED AND TREATED.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE: THE CONSUMPTION OF A CHEMICAL(S) THAT CAUSES THE INDIVIDUAL TO ENGAGE IN DANGEROUS AND RISKY BEHAVIOR. THE BEHAVIOR IS POTENTIALLY HARMFUL TO THE INDIVIDUAL OR TO OTHERS AND MAY LEAD TO CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY. DRINKING ALCOHOL IN ORDER TO GET DRUNK AT POSTGAME PARTIES IS AN EXAMPLE OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE.

Substance use/abuse is a major problem among America's youth. Athletes feel unique pressures that may lead them to use or abuse substances.

SOME ATHLETES SAY THEY ARE DEPENDENT OR ABUSE SUBSTANCES TO:

- Alter mood
- Escape reality
- Relieve stress (blow off steam)
- Feel better or feel nothing
- Increase energy

- Improve muscle mass, strength, and power
- Reduce pain
- Decrease recovery time

Combating substance abuse or chemical dependency means detecting when athletes are involved with harmful substances.

SIGNS OF ABUSE OR DEPENDENCY INCLUDE:

- Abrupt changes in attendance at practice or school
- Decreased performance quality

- Less effort in athletics or school
- Declines in—or inconsistent attention to—physical appearance
- Arguing or fighting with coaches or teammates
- Changes in attitude
- Severe mood swings
- Decreased muscular coordination
- Loss of memory
- Sudden weight loss or gain
- Withdrawal or isolation from usual peer group
- Developing new, questionable friends
- Smell of alcohol or marijuana

Coaches need to avoid diagnosing a problem without sufficient information. If several of the signs are noticed more than once, or if a sign is unmistakable (for instance, if the player is obviously intoxicated), confronting the athlete is in order. If there is any doubt, consult an appropriate professional such as a school counselor, social worker, psychologist, or physician.

Chemical dependency and substance abuse are not supposed to be a part of coaching. Unfortunately, they are. Most coaches, however, are not trained in substance abuse counseling, so they have limited ability to deal with chemical dependent athletes. Coaches need to understand why they may not want to become involved with a chemical dependent athlete.

OTHER ISSUES INCLUDE:

- Unless properly trained, coaches cannot accurately diagnose chemical dependency.
- Coaches may think that the situation is none of their business or that the athlete will grow out of abusive behavior. Therefore, they do not confront the athlete(s).
- The desire to win may stop coaches from confronting an athlete when substance abuse is suspected or known.
- Coaches may think that substance abuse could never happen on their team.

Players and parents have the right to expect a safe athletic environment. Coaches are responsible for providing that environment.

STRATEGIES FOR MAINTAINING A CHEMICAL-FREE ATHLETIC ENVIRONMENT INCLUDE:

- Refusing to engage in negative enabling behavior.
- Knowing the athletes and letting them know that drug use and abuse is unacceptable.
- Confront athletes when substance use/abuse or chemical dependency is suspected or known.

Negative enabling behavior occurs when coaches choose to not take action when substance abuse is suspected. Or coaches may decide to protect athletes from the consequences of their actions (for example, being benched, suspended, or removed from the team). Negative enabling behavior unintentionally tells athletes that substance abuse is acceptable.

When coaches suspect substance abuse, their responsibility is to confront the athlete.

SIX STEPS FOR CONFRONTATION ARE:

- Get to the point
- Summarize behaviors that lead to the suspicion that the athlete is abusing some substance
- Base the confrontation on accurate information and observable behaviors
- Avoid bringing up inappropriate or irrelevant past issues
- Avoid threatening and aggressive tones. These put the athlete on the defensive. Let the athlete know that you are there to help.
- Intervene by insisting the athlete seek professional help.

To promote a chemical-free athletic environment, coaches have to be knowledgeable about substance abuse and how it affects their athletes. Coaches should educate themselves and be aware of what chemicals/drugs are used in the area. They also should strive to maintain open communication with athletes, resolve conflicts immediately, and maintain a low-stress, high-fun environment on the team.

MORE READING

GO ONLINE AT WWW.NFLHS.COM/HEALTH

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PLAY SAFE!

THE NFL YOUTH FOOTBALL HEALTH AND SAFETY SERIES



EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNIQUES

HOW TO ORGANIZE EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

RAY ALLEN, PH.D. ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

THOROUGH PRACTICE PLANNING IS ESSENTIAL FOR SAFE PARTICIPATION, ADEQUATE SKILL IMPROVEMENT, AND SUFFICIENT PHYSICAL CONDITIONING.

WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW



- A SEASON PLAN DESCRIBES HOW THE COACH INTENDS TO HELP ATHLETES ACHIEVE THEIR GOALS.
- PRACTICES MUST PROVIDE EACH ATHLETE WITH A NUMBER OF TRIALS AT THE APPROPRIATE LEVEL OF DIFFICULTY IF THE TEAM IS EXPECTED TO IMPROVE.
- COACHES MUST USE ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES TO GIVE ATHLETES MEANINGFUL FEEDBACK.
- COACHES MUST MONITOR AND ASSESS PROGRESS AS WELL AS IMPROVE PRACTICE PLANS AND COACHING TECHNIQUE.

SETTING OBJECTIVES

A FITNESS OBJECTIVE FOR RUNNING BACKS MAY BE TO RUN 10 30-YARD SPRINTS WITHOUT LOSING MORE THAN 0.2 SECONDS ON THEIR TIME.

A STRENGTH OBJECTIVE FOR LINEMEN MAY BE TO EXECUTE AT LEAST 25 CONTROLLED PUSHUPS.

A SKILL OBJECTIVE FOR QUARTERBACKS MAY BE TO USE GOOD THROWING FORM AND COMPLETE AT LEAST 75 PERCENT OF THEIR PASS ATTEMPTS WHEN THROWING TO RECEIVERS WITHOUT DEFENDERS. AN OBJECTIVE FOR A DEFENSIVE LINEMAN MAY BE TO RESPOND CORRECTLY EACH TIME A TRAP BLOCK IS EXECUTED AGAINST HIM.

A SPORT-RELATED KNOWLEDGE OBJECTIVE WOULD BE FOR QUARTERBACKS TO SELECT THE CORRECT RECEIVER TO THROW TO ON PASS PLAYS AT LEAST 75 PERCENT OF THE TIME. AN EXAMPLE FOR AN OFFENSIVE LINEMAN MAY BE TO BLOCK THE CORRECT PLAYER AT LEAST 90 PERCENT OF THE TIME.

A PERSONAL/SOCIAL-SKILLS OBJECTIVE MIGHT BE TO TREAT EACH PLAYER ON THE TEAM WITH RESPECT AT ALL PRACTICES AND GAMES.

Nothing influences a team's success more than efficient, effective practices. Effective practices begin with constructing a season plan. This guides the planning of individual practices. Once effective practices are planned and implemented, coaches must monitor progress. This allows subsequent practices to be tailored to the team's specific needs.

CREATING A SEASON PLAN

Planning begins by identifying what athletes have to do and how well they have to do it.

COACHES MUST DEFINE SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES IN EACH OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

- Fitness levels—levels of muscular strength, endurance, agility, and flexibility
- Sport skills—skills necessary to play specific positions
- Sport-related knowledge—how to execute plays and implement strategies
- Personal/social skills—how athletes interact, including teamwork and cooperation

Coaches use these objectives for season planning. They decide which objectives to address and how much time to give them in each practice over the course of the season. A season plan is important because injuries occur and contests are lost when athletes progress too slowly or peak too soon.

CREATING INDIVIDUAL PRACTICE PLANS

Individual practice plans provide the structure for safe, effective, and continuous progress.

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES INCLUDE ALL OF THE FOLLOWING:

- ① Practice objectives—defined intended outcomes
- ② Warm-up—gradually increasing activity levels in preparation for intense portions of the practice

- ③ Advanced organizer—time for sharing the practice objective and why it is important
- ④ Explanation and demonstration—clear communication of what to do and how to do it correctly
- ⑤ Practice progression—process of practicing skills individually, then in small groups, then applying in a team setting
- ⑥ Cool down—moderate, light activity that allows the body to recover gradually
- ⑦ Review—reiteration of practice objectives and assessment of the day's progress

USING TIME EFFECTIVELY

The more time players spend practicing skills, the better their chances of being successful.

COACHES CAN MAXIMIZE PRACTICE TIME BY:

- Walking through plays and working on specific skills
- Organizing drills so lines are short
- Moving from one drill to the next quickly
- Keeping comments short and to the point

MONITOR PROGRESS AND ASSESS OUTCOMES

Coaches must fit individual practice plans to the team's specific needs. The following procedures help the coach make practice decisions by comparing practice plans to players' performances.

- List the practices' objectives with the necessary level of performance on a team roster
- Assess each team member's performance on each of his objectives by recording a "Y" or "N" behind his or her name and under the objective
- Calculate the percentage of athletes that met each practice objective
- Decide which objectives need the most attention in the next practice and allocate practice time accordingly

MORE READING

GO ONLINE AT WWW.NFLHS.COM/HEALTH

"Planning the Season." R. Allen in *PACE: Program for Athletic Coaches' Education*, Cooper Publishing Group.

"Planning Effective Instruction." R. Allen in *PACE: Program for Athletic Coaches' Education*, Cooper Publishing Group.

J. Cvengros, *Youth Football: A Complete Handbook*. Cooper Publishing Group.

B. Reade, *Coaching Football Successfully*, Human Kinetics Publishers.

EFFECTIVE AND APPROPRIATE TEACHING TECHNIQUES

RAY ALLEN, PH.D ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

HOW MUCH ATHLETES LEARN IS DIRECTLY RELATED TO THE WAY COACHES MANAGE THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT.



WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW

- **ESTABLISH AN ORDERLY ENVIRONMENT**
- **COMMUNICATE INTENDED OUTCOMES CLEARLY**
- **HELP ATHLETES CONNECT PRACTICE TO PERFORMANCE**
- **EXPLAIN FIRST, THEN DEMONSTRATE, THEN PRACTICE**
- **COMMUNICATE APPROPRIATE LEARNING EXPECTATIONS**
- **MONITOR PROGRESS AND PROVIDE FEEDBACK**

A team's success depends on how athletes perform. Therefore, coaches should conduct practice sessions that maximize learning. Research indicates that certain principles, when followed, maximize learning. Coaches are responsible for becoming familiar with these principles and applying them as they implement practices.

ESTABLISH AN ORDERLY ENVIRONMENT

Athletes learn more in safe, orderly, and business-like practices. Anxious, fearful, or confused players find it difficult to focus on the learning objective.

COACHES FACILITATE LEARNING BY:

- Following the same routines in each practice
- Interacting with athletes in a calm, caring manner
- Adhering to clear reasonable rules
- Effective coaches also attach rewards to desired accomplishments rather than general behavior

COMMUNICATE INTENDED OUTCOMES CLEARLY

Athletes progress faster when they understand what is expected of them.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION REQUIRES THE COACH TO:

- Get the athletes' full attention
- Share the objective in as few words as possible

- Communicate the desired level of performance in measurable terms
- Check to make sure the athletes understand what they have been told

HELP ATHLETES CONNECT PRACTICE TO PERFORMANCE

Young athletes with limited experience can have difficulty transferring individual skills into game situations. They often fail to see how the skill they are practicing fits in actual games, or they fail to recognize when to apply the skill as situations occur.

COACHES CAN HELP ATHLETES MAKE THOSE CONNECTIONS IF THEY:

- Explain and demonstrate how they and their teammates will benefit by executing the skill correctly
- Explain and demonstrate how they and their teammates will be disadvantaged if the skills are executed inappropriately
- Practice the skills individually, then provide repeated practice trials of a single situation where the skills are applied so the athlete can see how correct execution contributes to individual and team success.

EXAMPLE: COMMUNICATING INTENDED OUTCOMES TO OFFENSIVE LINEMEN

“EVERYONE TAKE A KNEE AND TAKE YOUR HELMETS OFF.”

(GET ATHLETE’S FULL ATTENTION.)

“TODAY OUR PRIMARY FOCUS WILL BE OUR ZONE RUN BLOCK SCHEME.”

(SHARE THE OBJECTIVE IN FEW WORDS.)

“OUR GOAL WILL BE TO EXECUTE THE RIGHT FIRST STEP AND CONTACT A DEFENDER ON OUR SECOND STEP EACH TIME THE BALL IS SNAPPED DURING OUR TEAM SESSION.”

(MEASURABLE LEVEL OF PERFORMANCE.)

“NOW, REPEAT OUR GOAL BACK TO ME.”

(MAKE SURE THE ATHLETES UNDERSTAND.)

EXAMPLE: CONNECTING PRACTICE TO PERFORMANCE

A coach teaches linebackers to check for counter plays when backfield action goes away from them.

HE KNOWS HIS PLAYERS WILL PERFORM THE ACTION BETTER IN GAME SITUATIONS IF HE:

- 1 Explains, then shows, how the linebacker’s willingness to check for the counter allows the rest of the defenders to pursue the ball aggressively. It also positions the linebacker to make a big tackle when the action comes his way.
- 2 Explains, then shows, how the linebacker’s failure to check for the counter can create a big play opportunity for the offensive team.
- 3 Practices the read in individual and group drills, then conducts a team session in which the offense runs a large number of run plays, half of which are counter plays.

EXPLAIN, THEN DEMONSTRATE, THEN PRACTICE

Athletes differ in the way they process information.

COACHES MAXIMIZE LEARNING RATES IF THEY:

- 1 Explain what they want athletes to know and do first. Explain the key points that make the skill correct in terms of appearance and how it feels.
- 2 Demonstrate exactly how they want athletes to execute the skill after (not while) they explain it; demonstrate it at various angles. Make sure to demonstrate only key learning points rather than the entire skill, so athletes know what to focus on.
- 3 Check for understanding. Make sure athletes can tell you what you want them to do and can demonstrate the skill correctly.

COMMUNICATE APPROPRIATE EXPECTATIONS

Effective coaches create environments where athletes expect to make steady improvement. When practice objectives are too easy or too difficult, athletes lose motivation.

THEREFORE, COACHES MUST:

- Accurately assess each athlete’s performance level
- Set practice objectives that players can attain with concerted effort
- Communicate a commitment to help each athlete achieve the stated objective

MONITOR PROGRESS AND PROVIDE FEEDBACK

Athletes make greater gains when coaches observe practice trials and provide instructional feedback.

COACHES CAN POSITIVELY INFLUENCE

BEHAVIOR, ACHIEVEMENT, AND ATTITUDE IF THEY:

- Focus feedback specifically on what was explained and demonstrated
- Focus feedback on one key element until the athlete attains an appropriate level of performance
- Make sure athletes engage in practice repetitions immediately after receiving feedback
- Offer praise contingent upon performance
- Provide constructive criticism

COACHES MAXIMIZE THE USE OF TIME IF THEY:

- Subdivide groups to reduce the length of lines and amount of waiting
- Have sufficient equipment to minimize waiting
- Make transitions between drills as quickly as possible
- Keep verbal instructions and feedback as short as possible

MORE READING

GO ONLINE AT WWW.NFLHS.COM/HEALTH

“Planning Effective Instruction.” R. Allen in *PACE: Program for Athletic Coaches’ Education*, Cooper Publishing Group.
J. Cvengros, *Youth Football: A Complete Handbook*. Cooper Publishing Group.
B. Reade, *Coaching Football Successfully*. Human Kinetics Publishers.

EFFECTIVE GOAL SETTING

SEAN P. CUMMING, PH.D.

A GOAL-SETTING PROGRAM CAN HELP PROVIDE PLAYERS WITH THE DIRECTION AND SUPPORT THEY NEED TO SUCCEED.



WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW

- GOAL SETTING CAN BE USED TO DIRECT THE EFFORTS OF PLAYERS
- IT IS BETTER TO SET PERFORMANCE GOALS THAN OUTCOME GOALS
- TO ACHIEVE A GOAL, YOU NEED TO DEVELOP A STRATEGY
- EVALUATE GOALS ON A REGULAR BASIS
- INDIVIDUAL GOALS ARE PREFERRED OVER TEAM GOALS
- PLAYERS WITH GOALS...
 - PERFORM BETTER
 - WORK HARDER
 - STAY MORE FOCUSED
 - FEEL MORE CONFIDENT

EXAMPLES OF GOALS

SKILL-BASED GOALS

- COMPLETE 7 OUT OF 10 PASSES (QUARTERBACK)
- RUN CORRECT ROUTE THREE OF FOUR TIMES (RECEIVERS)
- EXECUTE THREE OF FOUR PLAYS CORRECTLY (ALL)
- MAKE THREE OF EVERY FOUR TACKLES (DEFENSIVE PLAYERS)

FITNESS GOALS

- RUN 40-YARD DASH IN LESS THAN SEVEN SECONDS
- COMPLETE 30 SIT-UPS IN ONE MINUTE

BEHAVIORAL GOALS

- NO ARGUING WITH OFFICIALS
- NO PENALTIES FOR MISCONDUCT
- ARRIVE AT LEAST 10 MINUTES BEFORE THE BEGINNING OF PRACTICE

TEAM GOALS

- HOLD OPPONENT TO FEWER THAN 100 RUSHING YARDS
- AVERAGE 4 YARDS PER CARRY ON THE GROUND
- NO QUARTERBACK SACKS ALLOWED DURING THE GAME

“SETTING A GOAL IS NOT THE MAIN THING. IT IS DECIDING HOW YOU WILL GO ABOUT ACHIEVING IT AND STAYING WITH THE PLAN.”

TOM LANDRY, FORMER COWBOYS COACH

Every young football player’s goal is to be successful. Simply having a goal, however, does not guarantee success. The coach’s responsibility is to teach players how to set effective goals.

NEGOTIATE GOALS WITH PLAYERS

Often coaches impose goals upon players rather than discussing goals. When a player and coach jointly arrive at a goal, the player will be more committed to the goal. A player who owns a goal is more likely to achieve that goal.

STATE GOALS IN POSITIVE TERMS

Positive goals help players attend to what is important. Negative goals (e.g. “Don’t throw any interceptions”) create problems. They divert player’s attention from what he needs to do to succeed—in this case completing the pass. Positive goals (“Complete more than half of my passes”) focus the player on what needs to be done for success.

SET CHALLENGING YET REALISTIC GOALS

When setting goals, make it possible for every player to experience success. If a goal is too difficult, players quickly lose interest. They become frustrated or make less effort. Know the players well enough to set challenging—yet achievable—goals.

EMPHASIZE PERFORMANCE GOALS OVER OUTCOME GOALS

Players need some degree of control over their goals. Outcome goals (winning) are less reliable than individual performance goals. Because outcome goals are dependent on the ability and play of opposing teams, it is better to set goals that emphasize personal improvement and effort.

SET SHORT-TERM AND LONG-TERM GOALS

Help athletes realize their long-term goals by setting short-term or weekly goals. Short-term goals are more specific and provide immediate feedback. Short-term goals also help athletes stay motivated throughout the season. They focus on daily or weekly improvements.

HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF SHORT-TERM, PRACTICE GOALS THAT CAN HELP YOUR TEAM ACHIEVE ITS LONG-TERM GOALS:

- For long snappers, complete 90 percent of snaps to the kicker against pressure.
- For quarterbacks, complete 9 of 10 passes in drills where individuals simply run routes.
- For linemen, get the correct shoulder on the correct opponent 90 percent of the time.
- For linebackers, make the correct first step on 7 of 10 plays.

DEVELOP A STRATEGY FOR ACHIEVING GOALS

Coaches are responsible for devising strategies that help their players achieve their goals.

STRATEGIES TO HELP PLAYERS ACHIEVE BEHAVIORAL GOALS INCLUDE:

- Give positive feedback for good behavior in tense situations
- Establish and communicate clear guidelines and rules regarding appropriate and inappropriate behavior
- Deduct playing time from those players who violate team rules regarding behavior

STRATEGIES TO HELP PLAYERS ACHIEVE SKILL AND FITNESS GOALS INCLUDE:

- Select drills, games, and activities that emphasize techniques, agility, speed, power, and endurance
- Select drills and activities that address current areas of weakness (e.g. rushing, passing, conditioning)
- Encourage players to practice or train in their free time

SET INDIVIDUAL GOALS TO EMPHASIZE TEAM GOALS

Goal setting focuses on individual improvement. Individual goals focus on improving skills and techniques. Players have more control over such goals. Therefore, they are more likely to achieve them. Team improvement results from individual improve-

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JIM TURNER

ment. Team goals can include something as general as winning. But learning how to win competitively and graciously as well as how to maintain your dignity in a losing effort can be team goals, too.

SET SPECIFIC, MEASURABLE GOALS

Specific, measurable goals help players focus on what needs improvement: A player looking to improve his speed might say, "I want to reduce my 40-yard dash time by at least one second" or "I will run wind sprints for ten minutes at the end of every practice." Vague, nonspecific goals (e.g. "I want to play better") provide little direction on how an athlete can improve.

EVALUATE AND ADAPT GOALS

By frequently evaluating and adapting performance goals, coaches can ensure long-term player development. Once a player achieves a goal, raise the bar to provide a greater challenge. For example, if a player is successful in making two out of every four tackles, encourage them to set the goal of making three out of every four tackles. If a goal is too difficult and the player is frustrated, modify the goal to make it easier.

STRESS GOAL COMMITMENT

Help players commit to their goals. Encourage players to record goals in a training diary, post them on a team notice board, or share them with their teammates or parents.

SET PRACTICE GOALS

Practice goals help players direct their efforts during practice. This helps connect practice and competition goals. Practice goals have to be more challenging than competition goals, as players have more control over practice performances.

GOOD EXAMPLES OF GOALS THAT CAN BE USED IN PRACTICE INCLUDE:

- Arrive 10 minutes before practice dressed to play
- Break a sweat during warm-ups or conditioning drills
- Listen attentively when the coach is providing instruction
- Execute drills correctly on at least three out of four occasions

MORE READING

GO ONLINE AT WWW.NFLHS.COM/HEALTH

"Goal Setting." R. Weinberg and D. Gould, in *Foundations of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, Human Kinetics Publishers.
"Self Confidence and Goal Setting Skills." R. Martens in *Coaches Guide to Sport Psychology*, Human Kinetics Publishers.
"Goal setting" by L Gano-Overway, M. Ewing and J. Waldron in *PACE: Program for Athletic Coaches' Education*, Cooper Publishing Group.

REWARDS AND INCENTIVES

SEAN P. CUMMING, PH.D. INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF YOUTH SPORTS, DEBORAH L. FELTZ, PH.D.
DEPARTMENT OF KINESIOLOGY, MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

TO USE REWARDS AND INCENTIVES EFFECTIVELY, IT IS IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND HOW THEY INFLUENCE MOTIVATION AND BEHAVIOR.



WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW

- **REWARDS CAN POSITIVELY OR NEGATIVELY INFLUENCE MOTIVATION IN YOUTH FOOTBALL.**
- **THE MOST EFFECTIVE REWARD IS THE VERBAL RECOGNITION OF A JOB WELL DONE.**
- **BE CAUTIOUS WHEN USING MATERIAL REWARDS.**
- **REWARD THE EFFORT IT TAKES TO WIN DO NOT REWARD WINNING ALONE.**

Coaches need to foster the enjoyment of playing football. Athletes who enjoy playing perform better, are more confident, and are less likely to drop out. The rewards coaches give to players affect their levels of enjoyment. If players feel that rewards convey positive information about their ability or self-worth, they will enjoy football more. But if players feel that rewards are used to control their behavior, they will enjoy the game less.

USE FREE REWARDS

The most powerful rewards a coach can provide are free. Players appreciate knowing they've done their job well. Use rewards frequently to recognize each player's contribution to the team, personal improvement, or achievement of a personal goal.

EXAMPLES OF FREE REWARDS ARE:

- A pat on the back
- Verbal encouragement
- A friendly nod
- More scrimmage time

- Allowing players to choose a drill to do

BE CAUTIOUS WITH MATERIAL REWARDS

Material rewards—food or money—may either increase or decrease enjoyment. Coaches need to use material rewards to convey positive information about competence or self-worth. A good example is giving an annual trophy for the most improved player on the team.

Material rewards can be effective for encouraging players in activities that they may feel are risky or not fun (e.g. tackling drills or conditioning). Material rewards are effective only in the short-term. Once players feel comfortable doing the activity, material rewards should be replaced with simple verbal encouragement.

However coaches ought not use material rewards to control the players' behavior. Players lose interest if they feel that they are being controlled.

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AL MESSERSCHMIDT

BE LIBERAL WITH REWARDS

Take every opportunity to reward your players—particularly when athletes are in the early stages of learning skills. Coaches who provide frequent verbal encouragement receive more respect from their players, are better liked, and are more likely to have players return the following year.

REWARD PLAYERS IMMEDIATELY

When players execute a skill correctly, reward them as soon as possible. This helps players remember what it was that they did correctly or how a certain skill felt when they executed it properly. Say your wide receiver makes a crucial third-down catch. As you pat him on the back tell him how well he ran his route.

BE SINCERE WHEN GIVING REWARDS

Be honest and sincere when rewarding players. A reward is more effective when the player feels that it was earned. It will mean little to your players if you tell them they played well if, in fact, they played poorly.

COMBINE REWARDS WITH INSTRUCTION

Encourage learning by combining rewards with instruction. When rewarding a player for playing well, tell him why you are pleased with them.

REWARD EFFORT AND CORRECT TECHNIQUE

Players need to be rewarded for doing what it takes to win—effort, learning, competitiveness, and teamwork—and not just for winning itself. Players can control their own effort and performances but not the outcome of a game. Even in losing, it is possible to reward players for doing well. For example your team lost their second game of the season, but on this occasion they did not fumble the ball or give up any sacks. Reward them for the improvements that they have made.

REWARD TEAMWORK

The outcome of every play is the result of teamwork and not just individual efforts. It is important to reward individuals when they play well. It is equally important to recognize contributions in a team context.

MORE READING

GO ONLINE AT WWW.NFLHS.COM/HEALTH

"Feedback, Reinforcement, and Intrinsic Motivation." R. Weinberg and D. Gould, in *Foundations of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, Human Kinetics Publishers.

"The Effects of Rewards for Athletes." D. Feltz in *PACE: Program for Athletic Coaches Education*, Cooper Publishing Group.

"Principles of Reinforcement." R. Martens in *Successful Coaching*, Human Kinetics Publishers.

EFFECTIVE AND APPROPRIATE DISCIPLINE TECHNIQUES

DEBORAH L. FELTZ, PH.D.

MANY PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH DISCIPLINE CAN BE AVOIDED IF COACHES HAVE A WELL-DEVELOPED PLAN FOR CONTROLLING MISBEHAVIOR. A SOUND DISCIPLINE PLAN INVOLVES IDENTIFYING THE RULES OF BEHAVIOR.



WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW

- THREATS, SCREAMING, AND LECTURES ONLY PREVENT MISBEHAVIOR IN THE SHORT TERM. THEY ARE BEST USED WHEN A BEHAVIOR NEEDS TO BE STOPPED IMMEDIATELY. ROUTINELY USING SUCH FORMS OF DISCIPLINE CREATES A NEGATIVE ATMOSPHERE.
- YOUTH FOOTBALL PLAYERS WANT CLEARLY DEFINED RULES FOR ACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR.
- COACHES NEED A SYSTEMATIC PLAN FOR MAINTAINING DISCIPLINE, BEFORE THE SEASON GETS UNDERWAY, THAT IDENTIFIES THE RULES OF BEHAVIOR AND THE CONSEQUENCES FOR BREAKING THE RULES.
- RULES HAVE TO BE ENFORCED CONSISTENTLY.

USE MEANINGFUL AND EFFECTIVE REWARDS AND PENALTIES

REWARDS

STARTING AFTER BEING A BACKUP
PLAYING A DESIRED POSITION
LEADING AN EXERCISE OR ACTIVITY
RECEIVING PRAISE FROM THE COACH

PENALTIES

BEING TAKEN OUT OF A GAME
NOT BEING ALLOWED TO START
SITTING OUT FOR PART OF PRACTICE
ELIMINATING CHOICE OF A DRILL

Coaches often react to their athletes' misbehavior by yelling, lecturing, or making threats. These techniques are used because the coach does not know what else to do to regain control. Coaches don't have to yell and lecture to keep control if they develop a sound discipline plan before the season gets underway.

GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING A SOUND DISCIPLINE PLAN

① DEFINE TEAM RULES

Develop a list of desirable and undesirable behaviors

② FROM THE LIST OF BEHAVIORS, DEVELOP TEAM RULES

Rules need to be stated in clear and specific terms. For example, a rule regarding attending to instructions could be: "Players have to pay full attention to the coach's instructions. This means eyes on the coach, no talking, and no moving around."

③ INCLUDE PLAYERS IN FORMULATING RULES

Players want clearly defined rules for their behavior.

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SAMPLE LISTS

DESIRABLE CONDUCT

ARRIVING ON TIME FOR PRACTICES/GAMES

BRINGING ALL GEAR TO PRACTICES/GAMES

ATTENDING TO INSTRUCTIONS

GIVING FULL ATTENTION TO DRILLS

OFFERING POSITIVE ENCOURAGEMENT TO TEAMMATES

TREATING OPPONENTS WITH RESPECT

NOTIFYING THE COACH WHEN HAVING TO MISS PRACTICES/GAMES

UNDESIRABLE CONDUCT

BEING LATE TO PRACTICES/GAMES

FAILING TO BRING GEAR OR UNIFORM TO PRACTICES/GAMES

TALKING WHILE INSTRUCTIONS ARE BEING GIVEN

GOOFING OFF DURING DRILLS

MAKING NEGATIVE COMMENTS TO TEAMMATES

FIGHTING WITH OPPONENTS OR TRASH TALKING

FAILING TO NOTIFY THE COACH OF ABSENCES

Players need to be involved in establishing those rules. Research indicates that players are more willing to live by rules that they helped make. A coach might begin a discussion of discipline by saying, "Football can't be played without rules. Our team needs some rules, too. I have a set of rules that I think are important. But we all have to follow them, so they have to be your rules, too. What do you think are important team rules for us?"

ENFORCING RULES

Rewards and penalties help coaches enforce rules. Players are rewarded when they follow the rules and penalized when they break the rules.

Determine rewards and penalties for each rule. Players' input is necessary for this because they will receive the rewards or penalties. The best approach is to use rewards that are important to players coupled with withdrawal of rewards for inappropriate behavior. Ineffective penalties include showing anger, embarrassing the player, or shouting at the player.

Clearly state the condition for the reward or penalty. Players need to know exactly what they have to do to earn a reward and avoid a penalty.

CONSISTENTLY ENFORCE RULES

It is important to follow through, consistently and impartially, with your enforcement of the rules. Nothing destroys a discipline plan more quickly than its inconsistent application. Rules have to apply to all players equally and in all situations equally.

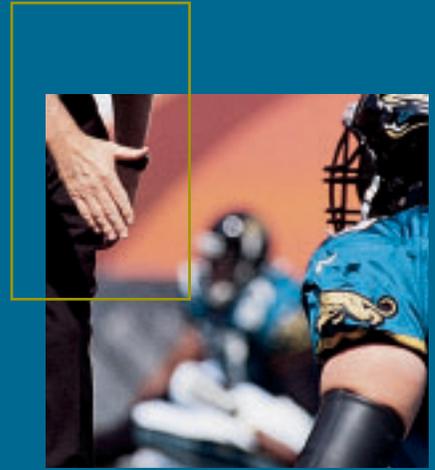
For example, if your team is in an important game and your star player breaks a rule that requires that he not be allowed to start, the rule still has to be enforced.

Threats, lectures, and yelling may prevent misbehavior in the short term. However, their effects do not promote learning. They also reduce the coach's long-term effectiveness. A more positive approach to handling discipline problems is to prevent them.

MORE READING

GO ONLINE AT WWW.NFLHS.COM/HEALTH

Maintaining Discipline. D.L. Feltz in *PACE: Program for Athletic Coaches' Education*, Cooper Publishing Group.



ESSENTIAL QUALITIES AND COMPETENCIES OF COACHES

QUALITIES OF A SUCCESSFUL COACH

MICHAEL A. CLARK, PH.D.

EVERY COACH WANTS TO BE SUCCESSFUL, BUT SUCCESS GOES BEYOND WINNING.



WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW

COACHES ARE SUCCESSFUL WHEN THEY:

- COACH FOR THE RIGHT REASONS
- UNDERSTAND PLAYERS AND TEACH SKILLS PROPERLY
- KEEP PLAYERS SAFE
- COMMUNICATE POSITIVELY WITH PLAYERS AND THEIR PARENTS
- LEARN THE GAME

Football can be a safe, enjoyable part of growing up. Coaches are successful when players develop a love of the game. Your actions influence how they and their parents will feel about football.

COACH FOR THE RIGHT REASON

Most athletes and their coaches will never make big money from football. Fun, learning, and watching the athletes' personal growth are your rewards.

UNDERSTAND YOUR POSITION

You affect your athletes; they watch and copy you. Players notice how you behave and how you talk. They see if you control your emotions and how you treat officials. They know if you have a sense of humor and whether you treat players fairly. You are the center of attention. Your actions, attitudes, and

words are powerful. Be a positive role model. Athletes take your comments seriously; these affect their self-esteem.

KNOW THE AGE GROUP AND HOW YOUNG ATHLETES DEVELOP

Understand the athletes—physically, socially, and emotionally. Learn their capabilities and maturity levels. Plan the season and set your goals using this information.

Most football programs classify players by age or grades in school. But children grow and develop at various rates. Some may not learn football skills as fast as others. Later, they may be the most coordinated and easiest to teach. The smart coach works equally with every athlete and uses the best developmental approach.

"I'M A PEOPLE COACH. PEOPLE PLAY THE GAME, NOT Xs AND Os."

FORMER NFL HEAD COACH LEEMAN BENNETT

LEARN FIRST AID AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL PROCEDURES

The National Standards for Athletic Coaches recommend first aid and CPR certification *for all coaches*. Contact your American Red Cross chapter for information about sport safety programs.

UNDERSTAND TRAINING AND CONDITIONING

Football demands specific training and conditioning. Age-appropriate techniques can be found in this series of books and other references. Learn how to prepare your players for practices and games.

KEEP FOOTBALL SAFE AND ATHLETES HEALTHY

Choosing and teaching appropriate skills—properly and in the right sequence—are important. So is understanding that injuries occur at every level of play. Some can be prevented; some cannot.

SUCCESSFUL COACHES MAINTAIN A SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR ATHLETES:

- Inspect the playing field and equipment
- Watch the weather
- Prepare an emergency plan
- Require the reporting and treatment of all injuries
- Teach fundamentals, progress to more complicated skills
- Teach the strategy of football

COACHING IS TEACHING

You became a teacher when you agreed to coach.

THE QUALITIES OF GOOD TEACHERS ALSO MAKE GOOD FOOTBALL COACHES:

- Plan the season, and make daily practice plans
- Get to know your players; learn their characteristics
- Create a positive learning environment
- Communicate with your players
- Learn how to motivate players to do their best
- Be positive and supportive

These qualities will affect your ultimate success more than the latest strategies or the newest equipment.

“COACHING IS TEACHING. SOME COACHES TRY TO MAKE WHAT THEY DO SOUND MYSTERIOUS AND COMPLICATED WHEN IT’S NOT... TO BE A GOOD COACH, YOU HAVE TO BE A GOOD TEACHER.”

**FORMER NFL HEAD COACH
JOHN MADDEN**

ORGANIZE EFFECTIVELY

A football team is an organization; the coach is the leader. Plan activities, keep records, evaluate personnel, and outline future goals. Decide what you need to do better next season and begin implementing changes to meet new goals.

COMMUNICATE WITH PARENTS

Have a preseason meeting with parents and athletes. Discuss team rules. Go over the schedule. Collect phone numbers. Get emergency information. Outline when and how parents can contact you with questions. Parents are an important part of the program—make them feel included.

KNOW YOUR FOOTBALL

You became a coach because you believe young people deserve the chance to play football. You know the game and how to play it. But this isn't enough. As long as you coach, keep learning. Develop the habit of reading coaching materials, attending clinics, and talking with coaches who have a reputation for excellence.

MORE READING

GO ONLINE AT WWW.NFLHS.COM/HEALTH

Youth Football: A Complete Handbook. J. Cvengros, Cooper Publishing Group.

SportsWise: An Essential Guide for Young Athletes, Parents, and Coaches. L.J. Micheli, Houghton Mifflin.

Handbook for Youth Sports Coaches. V. Seefeldt, American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance.

www.brianmac.demon.co.uk/coaching.htm

DEVELOPING A COACHING PHILOSOPHY

SEAN P. CUMMING, PH.D.

A SOUND AND CAREFULLY CONSIDERED COACHING PHILOSOPHY IS THE BACKBONE OF EVERY SUCCESSFUL FOOTBALL PROGRAM. TAKE THE TIME TO DEVELOP A PHILOSOPHY OF COACHING THAT REFLECTS PRINCIPLES OF CHILD/YOUTH DEVELOPMENT.



WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW

- SELF-AWARENESS IS KEY TO DEVELOPING A COACHING PHILOSOPHY.
- SHARE YOUR PHILOSOPHY WITH YOUR STAFF, PLAYERS, AND THEIR PARENTS.
- YOUR COACHING PHILOSOPHY NEEDS TO BE YOUTH CENTERED.
- PRACTICE WHAT YOU PREACH.

Values and goals are the building blocks of a coaching philosophy. The NFL and National Football Foundation support and endorse the following values and encourage their addition to any coaching philosophy.

- Youth football is for the benefit of the participants. Every coaching decision has to be made with the interest of the athlete first, and the interest in winning second.
- Focus on what it takes to win and not just winning. Attend to the skills and fitness of players and encourage them to give their utmost effort. True winners are those who always play as well and as hard as they can.
- Football is a game. Make sure it is fun for players. Fun results when players have the opportunity to learn skills and apply themselves in a safe and well-organized environment. Keep workouts interesting and varied.
- Teach safety every day. A healthy athlete learns skills and enjoys the game. An injured player misses out on the benefits of football.
- Help players become good citizens and good athletes. Success in football and life requires effort, commitment, cooperation, fair play, and a respect for others. Take the opportunity to pass on these values to your players.
- Don't play favorites. Try to give every player the opportunity to play. Encourage your athletes to try out at a variety of different positions. You will add depth to your program and your players will learn the value of teamwork. Give them the chance to experience a variety of challenges.

COACHING STYLE

Young football players come to the first practice highly motivated and eager to please. A wise coach works to maintain this enthusiasm. This is done by keeping instructions short and allowing players to

“WINNING ISN'T EVERYTHING, BUT STRIVING TO WIN IS.”

FORMER NFL HEAD COACH VINCE LOMBARDI

see and do rather than sit and listen.

Demonstrations have proven more effective than verbal descriptions. Long drills are unproductive. Limit instruction to 10 minutes, then switch to another drill or conditioning activity. Planning a series of 10-minute sessions with 1 or 2 minutes of verbal instruction keeps everyone active and involved.

Avoid shouting at individual players. Instead, approach the athlete and quietly explain how to correct the mistake. Young players have fragile self-concepts. They respond better to one-on-one teaching. Singling them out in front of the group causes problems. They become defensive and fail to concentrate on your instructions.

DEVELOPING YOUR PHILOSOPHY

The key to a sound coaching philosophy is self-awareness. Bob Reade, a four-time national champion at Augustana College, provides the following advice for developing your philosophy and improving your self-awareness:

- **GET TO KNOW YOURSELF.** What kind of person are you? What are your reasons for coaching youth football? A coach who knows his or her values and priorities is a coach who is able to make consistent and well-informed decisions. Appropriate reasons for coaching youth football include teaching valuable life skills and promoting good health.
- **BE YOURSELF.** Many coaches like to copy the coaching styles or strategies of their heroes. Although you can learn a lot from former NFL head coaches such as Jimmy Johnson, Bill Walsh, or Bill Parcells, don't be misled into believing that what worked for them will work for you. Recognize the differences between

professional and youth football and adopt a coaching style that places the interests of players before the interests of winning.

- **SHARE YOUR PHILOSOPHY.** Encourage players, parents, and fellow coaches to consider and accept your coaching philosophy and the values you endorse. This will provide your program with stability and unity.
- **BE A ROLE MODEL OF YOUR PHILOSOPHY** Coach in a manner that is consistent with your beliefs and treat everybody that you work with on an equal and fair basis.

SHARING YOUR COACHING PHILOSOPHY

It's a good idea to hold a meeting for parents and players before your first practice and go over your philosophy with them. Prepare a written statement that identifies the values and goals of your program. Include your thoughts on:

- Attending practice
- Assigning positions
- Determining starters
- Playing time
- Player conduct
- Parent behavior
- Discipline procedures

TEST YOUR COACHING PHILOSOPHY

Stating your coaching philosophy in words may not require much effort, but putting your philosophy to the test will be much more difficult. The pressure to win leads many coaches to sacrifice their values for a win. Such decisions bring short-term success and are, in the long term, counter-productive. Winning seasons come and go, but your reputation as a coach and a role model for young athletes will last a lifetime.

"FOOTBALL IS A SHOW ME GAME, NOT A PREACH TO ME GAME."

FORMER NFL HEAD COACH CHUCK KNOX

MORE READING

GO ONLINE AT WWW.NFLHS.COM/HEALTH

Youth Football: A Complete Handbook. J. Cvengros, Cooper Publishing Group.

Coaching Football Successfully. B. Reade, from Human Kinetics Publishers.

PACE, Program for Athletic Coaches Education Handbook. V. Seefeldt, M.A. Clark and E.W. Brown, Cooper Publishing Group.

"Coaching Philosophy and Objectives" by D. Nehlen in *Football Coaching Strategies*, Human Kinetics Publishers.

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

JENNIFER WALDRON M.ED. AND MARTHA E. EWING, PH.D.

EFFECTIVE AND APPROPRIATE COMMUNICATION IS IMPORTANT FOR COACHES TO SUCCEED AS LEADERS, TEACHERS, AND MOTIVATORS.



WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW

- **NONVERBAL MESSAGES ARE A POWERFUL TOOL IN COMMUNICATION.**
- **SENDING MESSAGES CONSISTS OF GETTING THE ATTENTION OF YOUR LISTENER, USING SIMPLE LANGUAGE, CHECKING FOR UNDERSTANDING, AND BEING CONSISTENT.**
- **GOOD LISTENERS SHOULD GIVE THE SPEAKER THEIR ATTENTION, REMEMBER WHAT IS HEARD, AND SHOW INTEREST IN THE SPEAKER.**

Coaches have to communicate with athletes, parents, other coaches, and game officials. All communication consists of sending and receiving verbal and nonverbal messages. Coaches send messages when they instruct, motivate, encourage, discipline, and evaluate. Coaches receive messages or listen when their athletes ask questions, want more information, or want to talk about problems.

NONVERBAL MESSAGES

More than half the messages coaches send are nonverbal. At times, coaches may not even be aware that they are sending nonverbal messages.

NONVERBAL MESSAGES ARE A POWERFUL COMMUNICATION TOOL AND INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- Posture—how we hold our bodies or how we walk
- Facial expressions—eye contact, smiling, frowning
- Gestures—throwing arms in the air, crossing arms, pointing
- Vocal qualities—yelling, talking quietly

- Touching—High five, pat on the back

Here's an example of dealing effectively with a nonverbal message. A running back has taken a hard tackle. You ask him if he needs to sit out a couple of plays. He says no, but his face clearly shows he is in pain. You remove him from the game because you are aware of his nonverbal message.

SENDING MESSAGES

Coaches constantly send messages to athletes, including feedback and organizational information.

HOW TO SEND CLEAR, EFFECTIVE MESSAGES:

- ① Get and keep the listener's attention
 - Make eye contact
 - Avoid distractions
- ② Use simple and direct language
 - Do not overload your players with too much information
 - Keep instructions to a minimum and messages short and direct
 - Use words players understand and language that is appropriate for the age of the athletes

- ③ Check for understanding
 - Ask players to restate points
 - Ask players if they have questions

BE CONSISTENT

Make sure your actions match your words: Verbal and nonverbal messages that conflict cause confusion. For example, you tell a player they did a good job, but your shoulders are slumped and you sigh. The athlete will not believe your verbal message. Another example occurs when you tell players not to question officials' calls but then constantly argue about calls. These mixed messages create disorder.

GET AND KEEP THE ATTENTION OF YOUR LISTENER

Say you are trying to instruct the offensive line. As you are speaking, you notice the players are paying little attention to you. Instead, they are watching the receivers run patterns. To be more effective in sending your messages, you should eliminate distractions by having the players face a different direction. This way your offensive line is forced to pay attention to you.

LISTENING

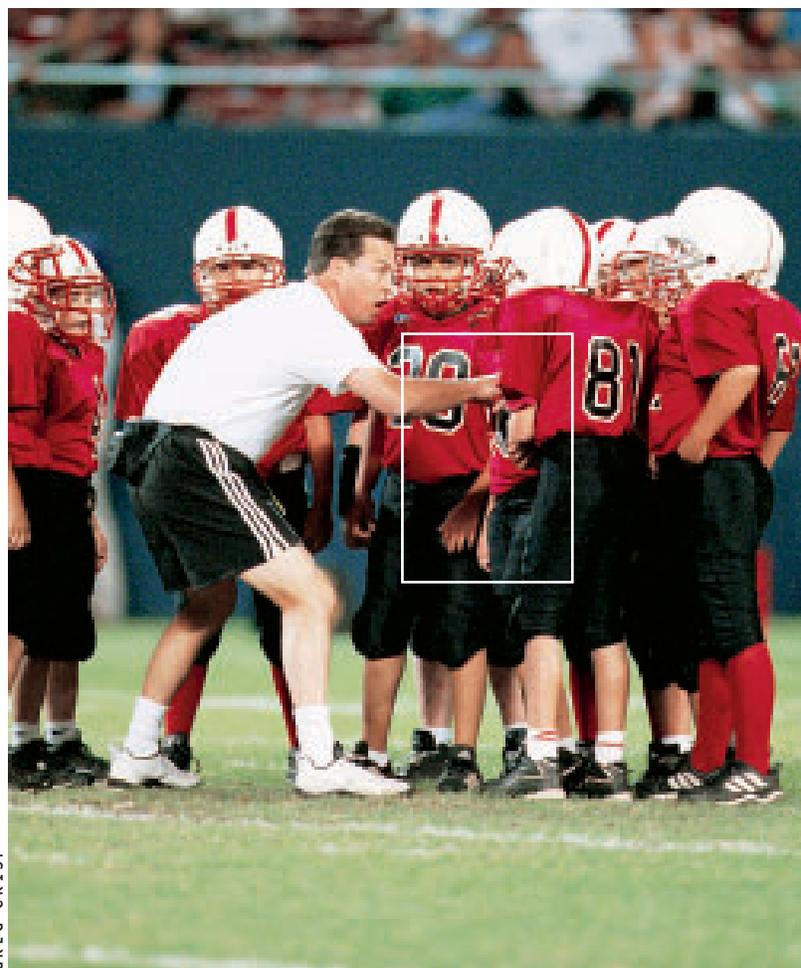
Listening is the other half of communication. Listening is not automatic. It is a skill that must be developed and practiced. The following steps outline how to become a good listener.

- ① Give the speaker your attention
 - Make eye contact
 - Stop distracting activities like making practice plans or reading
- ② Listen in a positive and objective manner
 - Respond in verbal and nonverbal ways
 - Hear the speaker's message, not just the words
- ③ Remember what you heard
 - Restate what you heard
 - Repeat the message in your head
 - Associate the message with a meaningful event

- ④ Express interest in the speaker
 - Show understanding
 - Acknowledge that you are listening
 - Ask the speaker if the message heard is correct.

BLOCKS TO EFFECTIVE LISTENING INCLUDE:

- Asking too many questions
- Giving advice before the speaker finishes
- Being judgmental about the speaker's opinions
- Agreeing or disagreeing before hearing the complete message



GREG CRISP

MORE READING

GO ONLINE AT WWW.NFLHS.COM/HEALTH

"Communicating Effectively." D.P. Yukelson in *Applied Sport Psychology: Personal Growth to Peak Performance*, Mayfield Publishing Company.

"Effective Communication." J. Waldron, M. Ewing and L. Gano-Overway in *PACE: Program for Athletic Coaches' Education*, Cooper Publishing Group.

"Communication." by J.R. Weinberg and D. Gould in *Foundations of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, Human Kinetics Publishers.

MOTIVATING YOUTH FOOTBALL PLAYERS

PEGGY S. MCCANN, M.S. AND MARTHA E. EWING, PH.D.

THE KEY ELEMENTS OF MOTIVATION: UNDERSTANDING THAT SUCCESS IS MORE THAN WINNING; PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEADERSHIP; TEACHING SKILLS; ENCOURAGING FRIENDSHIPS, AND GIVING ALL ATHLETES THE OPPORTUNITY TO PLAY.

WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW

- 
- **THE WORD MOTIVATE IS AN EXTENSION OF THE WORD MOTIVE.**
 - **SUCCESSFUL MOTIVATORS BLEND THE ATHLETES' MOTIVES WITH THE COACHES' MOTIVES TO CREATE COMPATIBLE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES.**
 - **SUCCESSFUL MOTIVATION BEGINS WITH UNDERSTANDING WHAT ATHLETES WANT FROM THEIR FOOTBALL EXPERIENCE.**

GET TO KNOW THE ATHLETES

Fun is the most important reason given by young athletes for playing sports. Winning is much less important to them. Football coaches need to understand why they play football. In other words, coaches need to know the athletes.

WAYS TO GET TO KNOW PLAYERS INCLUDE:

- **ASK PLAYERS WHY THEY WANT TO PLAY.** Have them write down their reasons or simply ask them. Do this at the first practice.
- **LEARN ATHLETES' NAMES.** Make an effort to learn every player's name during the first practice.
- **GREET EACH PLAYER EVERY DAY BY NAME.** This shows concern about players as individuals.
- **ASK PLAYERS FOR THEIR INPUT.** This gives athletes a sense of control. It also shows interest in what they have to say. Coaches will find that players have good insights.

BUILDING MOTIVATION

Young athletes play football for many reasons. Some players simply like being with their friends and learning the game; others enjoy the competition and the physical activity. Coaches need to maintain and build players' motivation.

TO INCREASE ATHLETES' MOTIVATION:

- Provide opportunities for each player to be a leader and have responsibilities. Have athletes take turns leading warm-ups or stretching.
- Help athletes learn by first teaching them the fundamental football skills. Encourage goal setting that is relevant to learning and improving skills. Start with simple goals and progress to more complex ones.
- Encourage players to make new friends.
- Build relationships on the team. Encourage outside activities such as pizza parties.
- Help athletes understand success is more than winning. Point out what the players do well even if the outcome is not winning. Say things such as, "Our offense did a great job of running the ball today" or "Our defense made some solid tackles!" Such statements indicate that executing the skills of football can be as important as winning the game.
- **INVOLVE EVERY PLAYER IN EVERY GAME!** The weakest or smallest player today may be the strongest and best player when he matures. Keep players' interest while they learn basic skills, and let them have fun playing the game.

BUILDING TEAM UNITY, HARMONY, AND COHESIVENESS

KEVIN A. STEFANEK, M.A., M.S. AND MARTHA E. EWING, PH.D.

TEAM UNITY RESULTS WHEN COACHES AND ATHLETES SHARE COMMON GOALS AND WORK FOR A COMMON CAUSE.



WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW

- **A UNIFIED TEAM SHARES GOALS, AND THOSE GOALS ARE A PRIORITY FOR ALL TEAM MEMBERS.**
- **TEAM UNITY OCCURS WHEN INDIVIDUALS ON A TEAM PUT THE TEAM'S NEEDS ABOVE THEIR DESIRES AND ARE WILLING TO MAKE SACRIFICES FOR THE TEAM.**
- **A COHESIVE TEAM IS LIKE A FAMILY; IT'S A PLACE TO GET SUPPORT.**
- **BE PATIENT—TEAM BUILDING TAKES TIME.**

Football is a team game. Success takes coordinated effort by a unified team. To create unified, cohesive teams, coaches have to recognize the characteristics of team cohesion. On such teams, players:

- Are satisfied with the team and their experience
- Have a team identity and pride in being on the team
- Conform to team standards
- Support and respect each other
- Stay on the team
- Understand their role and the roles of teammates
- Communicate openly and honestly to resolve conflicts
- Share goals and are committed to those goals
- Recognize team leaders
- Cooperate with one another
- Take personal responsibility for their actions. They blame no one, own up to their mistakes, and work to correct mistakes.

BUILDING TEAM COHESION

HERE ARE SOME DAY-TO-DAY KEYS:

- **COMMUNICATE OPENLY AND HONESTLY WITH PLAYERS.** Learn to listen actively.

Practice the skill with players. Active listening tells people that you are focused on them and what they are saying. Active listening means you maintain appropriate eye contact, use attentive body language (Face each other. Uncross arms and/or legs. Resist fidgeting with your hands or other objects.), and occasionally repeat in your own words your impression of what the other person says. Ask questions to clear up confusion or increase understanding. Avoid putting people on the defensive by grilling or accusing them. ("Why" questions often bring defensive reactions.)

- **LET ALL PLAYERS KNOW THEY PLAY A ROLE THAT CONTRIBUTES TO TEAM SUCCESS.**
- **FOSTER HEALTHY COMPETITION AMONG UNITS.** For example, linemen need to feel pride in their roles, but so do defensive backs. However, avoid setting up cliques. Coaches unwittingly do this by treating some players differently from others (e.g. starters versus non-starters).
- **HAVE REGULAR TEAM MEETINGS.** Meetings

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allow communication of positive issues and aid in conflict resolution.

- **KNOW THE TEAM CLIMATE.** Coaches need to be in touch with their teams. Team leaders can be a valuable information source.
- **KNOW EACH TEAM MEMBER.** Get to know players individually; let them get to know you.

TEAM-BUILDING ACTIVITIES

During a team meeting, get players to agree on goals, priorities, identity, and culture—with guidance from coaches. Start the season by asking what goals the team wants to accomplish and what it takes to reach these goals. Athletes are more committed to goals they set, rather than goals that are set for them. Have the team make some rules—based on the goals they set. Help team members connect daily behavior with their season goals. When athletes make the rules, they are more likely to follow the rules. Players sometimes make stricter rules than those the coach would set. Wait until the team makes its rules; then fill in the gaps with your rules. Use group activities that require teamwork and

cooperation. These can be physical (for example, a tug of war between offense and defense) or mental (such as asking the team to solve a problem that requires a coordinated effort).

When coaches know what gets in the way of team unity, they know what to avoid. Barriers to unity include:

- Personality clashes and power struggles
- Unclear, confusing, or conflicting team roles or team goals
- Poor communication among athletes and coaches.
- Favoritism of coaches for particular players or groups—especially stars or family members.

Be aware, too, that conflict can build team unity and cohesion and eventually can lead to harmonious interactions on the team. So a cohesive team may have occasional and temporary conflict. The coach who is building a unified team will make the best of any conflict and emerge with a stronger team.

MORE READING

GO ONLINE AT WWW.NFLHS.COM/HEALTH

"Group Cohesion." R.S. Weinberg and D. Gould in *Foundations of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, Human Kinetics Publishing.
"Maximize Efforts Through Teamwork." T. Orlick in *Embracing Your Potential*, Human Kinetics Publishing.
"Special Issue: Team Building." *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, March 1997.

RESOLVING CONFLICTS

KEVIN A. STEFANEK, M.A., M.S. AND MARTHA E. EWING, PH.D.

COACHES MUST IDENTIFY SOURCES OF CONFLICT AND INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR, RESOLVE CONFLICTS WITH AND AMONG PLAYERS, AND BE ABLE TO RESPOND WHEN CONFLICTS OCCUR.

WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW



- **THE SOURCES OF CONFLICT ON A TEAM ARE USUALLY MISCOMMUNICATION AND/OR MISINTERPRETATION.**
- **DEFINING INAPPROPRIATE AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR MAY BE DIFFICULT BECAUSE THIS BEHAVIOR CAN BE PHYSICAL AND/OR PSYCHOLOGICAL.**
- **RESOLVING CONFLICTS REQUIRES IMMEDIATE AND OPEN COMMUNICATION.**
- **IF VIOLENCE DOES ERUPT, IMMEDIATE ACTION IS NECESSARY TO KEEP THE SITUATION FROM GETTING OUT OF HAND.**

Conflict is often viewed as a harmful, negative experience. People tend to avoid it. Avoiding conflict, is destructive behavior. Conflict, when properly resolved, can help build team unity. In this way, a potentially negative issue can be turned into a positive experience for all involved.

MISCOMMUNICATION OR MISUNDERSTANDING OFTEN LEAD TO CONFLICT.

TO STOP CONFLICT BEFORE IT STARTS, COACHES NEED TO:

- Clearly communicate all expectations to players
- Treat all players equally—coaches who show favoritism toward certain players will cause resentment
- Resolve conflict among the adults—among the coaches and parents, and with opposing coaches. If the team's coaches are not peacefully resolving their conflicts, the players have little chance of doing so.

Coaches may initiate conflict without knowing it.

With miscommunication, coaches send a message different from what they think they are sending. Misunderstanding, on the other hand, means the athletes hear a different message than what is being sent by the coach.

COACHES NEED TO IDENTIFY, AND PLAYERS HAVE TO KNOW, THE INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR THAT IS LIKELY TO OCCUR.

Coaches need to be alert to warning signs of impending conflict or violent behavior. These include griping, complaining, trash talking, and emotional outbursts by players. Physical acts to watch out for are tackles or hits when players are out of bounds, head-hunting, and pushing and shoving after the whistle.

This list is not complete. Each coach needs to determine what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior. These then need to be clearly communicated to the team.

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OPEN COMMUNICATION AND IMMEDIATE ACTION HELP RESOLVE CONFLICTS. If conflict arises, steps to take include:

- 1 Immediately talk with players involved. If the conflict cannot be resolved immediately, the players and coaches need to meet as soon as realistically possible.
- 2 The players need to state their side of the conflict while the coach listens impartially.

- 3 After all players have spoken, coaches need to verbally summarize the situation to make sure everyone understands the full story. Unity, or team cohesion, usually increases when conflicts are resolved in a constructive way. By using this conflict-resolution process, team members learn that they can trust each other and that their team is strong enough to withstand the challenge of conflict.

CREATING SOLUTIONS

When a problem is understood, it can be solved.

COACHES CAN AID IN FINDING SOLUTIONS:

- If the players cannot create their own solution, the coach has to act as an impartial judge.
- Either way, the solution has to be stated as specific behavior that the players will—or will not—do.
- If the conflict is between coach and player, deal with the player(s) in private.

DEALING WITH ANGER

Players ought to be encouraged to express their anger with words rather than acting out.

Coaches have to show self-control when dealing with anger. Players will follow the coaches' actions more often than the coaches' words.

Anger is the likely culprit in instances of aggressive behavior. Players need to know the difference between expressing and acting out anger. Expressing anger involves using words to describe feelings. Acting out anger involves an action—either doing something (yelling, hitting) or not doing something (avoiding responsibility).

Coaches need to act swiftly to stop inappropriate behavior before it escalates out of control. Players should be separated until their emotions are under control. Then, as soon as possible, the player(s) need to meet with the coach to come to some solution according to the recommended conflict-resolution steps.

Communication is crucial to nonaggressive solutions to conflicts.



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MORE READING

GO ONLINE AT WWW.NFLHS.COM/HEALTH

"Aggression in Sport." R.S. Weinberg and D. Gould in *Foundations of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, Human Kinetics Publishing.
"Leadership and Team-Building." R. Vernacchia, R. McGuire, and D. Cook in *Coaching Mental Excellence*, Warde Publishers, Inc.
"The Skills of Confrontation." A.E. Ivey in *Intentional Interviewing and Counseling*, Brooks/Cole Publishing Co.

DEALING WITH OVERLY AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR

MARTHA E. EWING, PH.D.

COACHES MUST TEACH PLAYERS THE APPROPRIATE USE OF AGGRESSION AND DISCOURAGE INAPPROPRIATE AGGRESSION.

WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW



- **ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOR AND INSTRUMENTAL AGGRESSION ARE APPROPRIATE PARTS OF FOOTBALL.**
- **THE MEDIA AND THE ACTIONS OF COACHES AND PARENTS CAN ENCOURAGE ATHLETES TO BE OVERLY AGGRESSIVE.**
- **COACHES HAVE TO TEACH AND REWARD APPROPRIATE RESPONSES TO ANGER AND DEMONSTRATE APPROPRIATE ACTIONS WHEN THEY ARE ANGRY.**
- **FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO OVERLY AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR INCLUDE: HEAT; FRUSTRATION; AGGRESSION DISPLAYED BY COACHES, PARENTS, AND SPECTATORS; AND AN OVER-EMPHASIS ON DEMONSTRATING MASCULINITY.**
- **TEACHING APPROPRIATE AGGRESSIVENESS CONTRIBUTES TO THE PARTICIPANTS' ENJOYMENT OF THE GAME.**

Aggression in football straddles the line between the need to block and tackle and violence. Aggression is an issue because of the high potential for injury. Three forms of aggression relate to the behavior of athletes and spectators. They are defined by the elements associated with the behavior:

ASSERTIVE BEHAVIOR

- No intent to harm an opponent. Legitimate use of force. An unusual expenditure of effort and energy.

INSTRUMENTAL AGGRESSION

- Harm is intended, but the goal is winning. No anger on the part of the aggressor.

HOSTILE AGGRESSION

- Intent to harm another player. The goal is to harm that person. The aggressor is angry.
- Assertive behavior and instrumental aggression include legal blocks and appropriate tackles.

Spearing and crackback blocks represent inappropriate, hostile aggression that could harm both opponent and aggressor.

PHYSICAL FACTORS PROMOTING AGGRESSION

Heat and noise levels increase aggression. Loud noise from spectators and coaches also increase aggression. The effects of such conditions are amplified when teams already are intense rivals.

PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS PROMOTING AGGRESSION

Young players learn by observing. If a young athlete identifies with a player who displays unacceptable behavior, the young athlete may imitate those actions, especially if the role model's behavior goes unpunished.

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Rewards for aggressive acts—playing time or a sticker on the helmet—promote aggression. So do nicknames such as Enforcer, Assassin, or Dr. Hurt.

Frustrated athletes often resort to aggression. They see it as making up for poor play or for losing.

SOCIOLOGICAL FACTORS PROMOTING AGGRESSION

Media images promote aggression. Emphasizing violent hits and replaying them glorifies the action while failing to show the consequences of overly aggressive play.

Praising players for playing with injuries promotes a positive view of aggression and an acceptance of the consequences.

Telling youth that they are not performing up to the standards of a man or making derogatory, feminine references causes athletes to view violent hits as acceptable behavior.

Parents often accept aggressive behavior from their sons as long as they did not start the action. Such acceptance supports fighting or vicious hits as responses to someone else's aggression.

TECHNIQUES FOR CONTROLLING AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOR INCLUDE:

- Modeling appropriate behavior
- Monitoring coaching behavior to find what is taught or rewarded
- Teaching emotion management
- Reducing hostility between teams
- Teaching appropriate behavior and rewarding acts of self-control

Football players see coaches as role models. Therefore, coaches have to teach the appropriate use of aggression and discourage inappropriate aggression.

Administrators are responsible for monitoring coaching behavior. Coaches who either teach or fail to discourage inappropriate aggression should be disciplined or dismissed.

It is important to prepare young athletes for those moments in sport when they become angry. Coaches can help players recognize angry responses and teach them to count to 10 or walk away from



confrontations. Such strategies prevent injuries while saving 15-yard penalties for unnecessary roughness. Preparing for these types of situations in practice is an effective tool.

COACHES AND PARENTS HELP REDUCE HOSTILE AGGRESSION WHEN THEY:

- Talk about the enjoyment of competing against rivals
- Eliminate words and signs reflecting hatred of the opponent
- Encourage positive social interaction between teams before and after games
- Praise athletes who show restraint in emotionally charged situations
- Teach respect for the opponent and the game

Athletes behave the way adults expect them to behave. Parents and coaches need to work together to reduce hostile aggression. Parents and coaches need to discuss with athletes the violent acts seen in professional sports. When athletes fail to control their aggression, coaches need to remove them from the game. Football is more enjoyable when athletes focus on competition and playing the game, rather than on finding ways to hurt opponents.

MORE READING

GO ONLINE AT WWW.NFLHS.COM/HEALTH

Michigan High School Athletic Association sportsmanship kit: www.mhsaa.com/services/kit.pdf

"Aggression and Violence in Sport," AD LeUnes and JR Nation in *Sport Psychology: An Introduction*, Nelson-Hall, Inc.

<http://mentalhelp.net/psyhelp/chap7/chap7o.htm>

HARASSMENT AND THE ABUSE OF POWER

VERN SEEFELDT, PH.D. PROFESSOR AND DIRECTOR EMERITUS, THE INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF YOUTH SPORTS, MSU

THERE ARE VARIOUS DEGREES OF HARASSMENT AND ABUSE. THESE OCCUR AS PHYSICAL, SEXUAL, NEGLECTFUL, OR EMOTIONALLY ABUSIVE BEHAVIORS. COACHES NEED TO RECOGNIZE THE POTENTIAL FOR SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND THE EXISTENCE OF AN ABUSIVE ENVIRONMENT. THE IMBALANCE OF POWER BETWEEN COACH AND PLAYER FAVORS THE COACH. THEREFORE, THE COACH HAS THE RESPONSIBILITY TO RECOGNIZE ABUSE AND ELIMINATE OR AVOID ANY REAL OR IMAGINED INSTANCES OF IT.

WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW



- TEAMMATES ARE THE MOST FREQUENT PERPETRATORS OF HARASSMENT.
- COACHES, SPECTATORS, OFFICIALS, AND PARENTS ALL HAVE BEEN CITED FOR VERBAL AND PHYSICAL HARASSMENT OF ATHLETES.
- COACHES NEED A COMPLETE AND ACCURATE JOB DESCRIPTION. THIS DEFINES THEIR AUTHORITY AND OBLIGATIONS. FULFILLING A JOB DESCRIPTION PROVIDES PROTECTION AGAINST CLAIMS OF HARASSMENT.
- DUAL RELATIONSHIPS CAN LEAD TO TROUBLE. A COACH IS A CONCERNED ADULT—A TEACHER AND A MENTOR—RATHER THAN A FRIEND, COUNSELOR, OR MEDICAL ADVISOR. ASSIST THE NEEDY ATHLETE IN FINDING PROFESSIONAL HELP WHEN THE ATHLETE COULD BENEFIT FROM SPECIFIC, INDIVIDUALIZED ASSISTANCE.
- COACHES BECOME LIABLE WHEN THEY SEE HARASSMENT OR ABUSE BUT ARE INDIFFERENT TO IT.

The official role of coach does not fit with other social or emotional roles. Successful coaches recognize the power they have over their athletes. They also know and understand the special authority that goes with being a coach. Successful coaches appreciate the responsibilities that accompany their chosen role.

Conflicts of interest arise from the multiple roles coaches fill in the athletic environment. Prudent coaches realize how athletes, parents, and administrators may interpret their behavior.

FOR EXAMPLE:

- Coaches who are *friends* with athletes may find it difficult to be fair and objective. Decisions about starting positions, playing time, discipline, and correcting errors may be affected.
- Coaches may not be qualified to act as counselors. Coaches typically are not in a professional position to meet athletes' emotional needs.
- Some coaches demand complete loyalty. They

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require strict conformity to training and conditioning programs. Coaches who require extreme commitment may persuade athletes to overtrain or to play when injured. When dedication undermines health, the relationship is abusive.

- Coaches may develop romantic or sexual relationships with athletes. This creates a hostile team environment. Such relationships are unethical and illegal.

By avoiding potentially compromising situations, coaches protect the coach-athlete relationship. They also foster strong emotional ties that are important to a healthy athletic experience.

Coaches can do much to avoid claims of sexual

harassment or abuse of power because they directly control the athletic environment.

COACHES CAN:

- Learn and obey the sponsoring agency's or school's policy on sexual harassment.
- Deal with discipline problems within pre-established standards. If discipline policies do not exist, coaches need to ask the organization to create such policies.
- Avoid sexually explicit comments, graphics, gestures, or expressions. Verbal or physical acts of a sexual nature are to be avoided. This is especially true of actions that cause discomfort to or humiliate any athlete.
- Refrain from sexually degrading language, jokes, or gestures. Innuendo or obscene sounds are to be avoided. Such expressions have no place in the athletic environment.
- Avoid unwelcome or inappropriate touching, patting, or pinching.
- Communicate to athletes and parents a code of conduct. Such a code describes what is expected of all athletes and coaches.
- Insist that athletes and coaches do not use words or actions that bully, intimidate, or embarrass others.

League administrators can prevent abusive behavior by coaches with background checks. These checks ensure that coaches do not have a previous record of inappropriate or abusive behavior. States vary in providing for screening and background checks. Therefore, administrators need to determine their state's provisions before initiating such actions.

Youth and scholastic football offer unique opportunities. Among these is the chance to build healthy relationships between coaches and athletes. Coaches can do much to create such a nurturing environment. But first they have to understand the boundaries of personal involvement with their athletes. Successful coaches use their authority to foster physical and emotional growth in their young players.

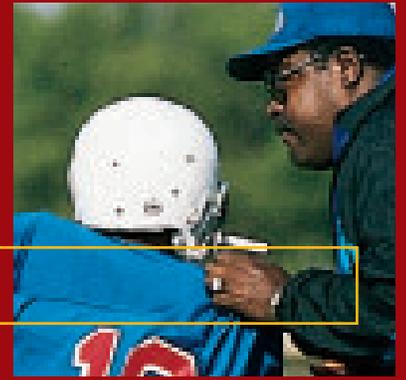
MORE READING

GO ONLINE AT WWW.NFLHS.COM/HEALTH

"Sexual Harassment and Abuse of Power." J. Brylinsky in PACE: Program for Athletic Coaches' Education, Cooper Publishing Group. Sexual Harassment in Athletic Settings. National Association for Sport and Physical Education.

Prevention of Sexual Harassment in Athletic Settings: An Educational Resource Kit for Athletic Administrators. Women's Sports Foundation.

<http://ed-web3.educ.msu.edu/ysi/Spotlights.htm>. See Fall, 1998.



ROLES AND

RESPONSIBILITIES

OF PARENTS

THE PARENT AS COACH

MICHAEL A. CLARK, PH.D.

COACHES OFTEN END UP WITH THEIR OWN CHILDREN ON THEIR TEAM. BE SURE TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THE ROLES OF PARENT AND COACH.



WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW

- THE COACH NEEDS TO FOCUS ON THE TEAM.
- DRESS AND ACT THE PART OF COACH AT PRACTICES AND GAMES.
- VERBAL AND NONVERBAL CLUES INDICATE TO PLAYERS YOUR ROLE AS COACH.
- THE DUAL ROLES OF PARENT AND COACH PUT STRESS ON RELATIONSHIPS WITH PEOPLE.
- AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE, SEPARATE THE ROLE OF PARENT FROM THAT OF COACH.
- DEFINE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN THE ROLES OF PARENT AND COACH.

Being a parent/coach can be challenging. It puts stress on relationships and people. Before you put yourself in this position, think through some of the critical issues and plan how to minimize conflicts.

SOME SIMILARITIES, A BIG DIFFERENCE

When taking on the dual role of parent/coach, the simplest way to be successful is found in the formula, "Treat all athletes as you would want your child to be treated." This means your primary concern is the health and well being of all players. Deal fairly with players and teach all players the fundamentals of the game.

As coach, your primary concern is the team—not individual players and certainly not your child. Make decisions on the basis of what's best for the team. This includes lineups, plays called, defensive strategies—practically everything about the game.

WHEN ARE YOU COACH?

Communicate to everyone—including your child—

that you're coach. The simplest way is by how you dress. When you head out for practice or a game, look the part. Put on a team cap, shirt, or jacket; wear a whistle; carry a clipboard. Do something that shows you're coach. When you're not dressed this way, don't coach! Talk about football, but don't discuss your team or game plans or players. Let your child—and the others—see you enjoying the game without being coach. There are other ways to communicate when you're coach. Some are verbal, others—nonverbal.

IN EVERY SITUATION:

- Get to know the players as individuals. Talk with each one daily. Ask each player for input. Respect their ideas.
- Be consistent in your treatment of players. Don't single your child out for either excessive praise or criticism.
- Show concern for all players. Check on all injuries.

- Emphasize the importance of TEAM: “We succeed when we work hard and play together.”
- Avoid family nicknames when talking with your child.

AT PRACTICE:

- Rotate groups for drills so that your child is not always with you
- Refrain from asking your child to lead warm-ups or demonstrate skills unless everyone has a turn out front
- Correct all mistakes positively and promptly
- Expect everyone to practice hard
- Celebrate each individual’s successes
- Avoid putting excess pressure on your child

DURING GAMES:

- Make players earn starting assignments and playing time by working hard in practice
- Have players play the position (or positions) that fit them best

BOUNDARIES BETWEEN PARENT AND COACH

Even though you may be tempted—especially where discipline is concerned—avoid discussing other players and their actions with your child. Listen to complaints, concerns, and observations. But don’t put your child in the role of informer, and don’t ask your child for details. Finally, if someone starts discussing other players with you, make sure your child is not present. Respect the TEAM and your child’s ties with teammates.

TAKE TIME TO BE PARENT

Away from the field, treat your child as you would if they played for someone else.

FOR EXAMPLE, ASK HIM:

- “How did practice go?”
- “What did you learn?”
- “Did you give it your best today?”
- “Did you have fun?”

Being both parent and coach can create problems. Of course, you want your child to succeed, but the team has to come first.



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MORE READING

GO ONLINE AT WWW.NFLHS.COM/HEALTH

Way To Go, Coach, RE Smith and FL Smoll, Warde Publishers, Inc.

“Social Interactions in Coaching Your Child’s Team, Parts 1 and 2,” E Brown in *Spotlight on Youth Sports—Winter and Spring 1998*, accessed at: <http://ed-web3.educ.msu.edu/ysi/Spotlights.htm>

Parenting Your Superstar, RJ Rotella and LK Bunker, Leisure Press.

YOUTH AND SCHOLASTIC FOOTBALL PARENTS

MICHAEL A. CLARK, PH.D. INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF YOUTH SPORTS, MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

PARENTS OF FOOTBALL PLAYERS DEPEND ON THE COACH FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THEIR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES.



WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW

- **WHAT ATHLETES REALLY WANT TO GET FROM PLAYING FOOTBALL**
- **THE ANSWERS TO PARENTS' QUESTIONS**
- **HOW PARENTS CAN HELP PLAYERS GET READY FOR PRACTICES AND GAMES**
- **CREATE A SYSTEM FOR REPORTING ALL INJURIES TO THE COACH**
- **HOW PARENTS CAN CONNECT WITH THE TEAM TO BECOME A POSITIVE PART OF THE PROGRAM**

Coaches can help the parents of players become positive influences for their children and the team. First of all, parents need to learn about the sport, the coaches, and the program.

HAVE ANSWERS FOR QUESTIONS SUCH AS:

- What are the benefits and risks of playing football at each level?
- How does the program recruit coaches?
- How are coaches prepared for their job?
- What do program administrators and coaches do to ensure the players' safety at practices and games?
- What special rules does the program follow?
- What time and financial commitments have to be made?
- What equipment is needed?
- What equipment do parents provide?
- What happens at practice?

For help with the answers, talk to program sponsors and other coaches, read books, and access Websites.

HOW COACHES CAN HELP EXPLAIN TO PARENTS WHAT IS EXPECTED OF THEM:

- Get athletes to practices and games on time
- See that they have all necessary equipment
- Report even minor injuries

Parents and the coach have responsibilities whenever an injury requires medical attention. Parents need to see that the injury receives proper care. Both coach and parents work together to help the athlete rehabilitate injuries and get back into game shape. The coach should not allow the athlete to play until fully recovered. If an injury requires the athlete to visit a physician or other medical professional, written medical clearance should be provided before the coach allows the player to participate.

Parents can reduce everyone's stress level by helping players keep things in perspective. Attending games, cheering for the team, and being good sports also are important. Once the game is

over, parents have to focus on the player's effort—not the score.

IN ADDITION, PARENTS HELP BY:

- Talking with their children about what goes on at practice
- Going over team rules with their children
- Supporting the coach when discipline becomes necessary
- Knowing when and how to talk with the coach
- NOT asking for special treatment of their children
- Allowing the coach to make coaching decisions about such things as positions, starters, playing time, and strategies
- Expecting players to take responsibility for their

actions. (“I was out of position to make the tackle.” Not, “Coach had us in the wrong defense.”)

- Supporting the program by keeping statistics, working the chain gang, selling concessions, or organizing team functions
- Developing realistic expectations for children.
- Providing the same positive motivation expected from the coach
- Avoiding the temptation to critique their young player's every move

Most important, parents need to let go. Parents have to allow the player to play and the coach to coach—on their own terms.



MORE READING

GO ONLINE AT WWW.NFLHS.COM/HEALTH

SportsMom: <http://www.sportsmom.com/>

The Parent's Playbook: Developing a Gameplan for Maximizing Your Child's Athletic Experience! C.E. Stankovich and T.M. Kays, Champion Athletic Consulting.

SportParent, American Sport Education Program, Human-Kinetics.

Center for Sports Parenting: <http://www.sportparenting.org/csp/index.cfm>

DEALING WITH PARENTS

SEAN CUMMING, PH.D. AND MARTHA E. EWING, PH.D.

TAKING THE TIME TO ESTABLISH GOOD WORKING RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS CAN HELP MAKE YOUR PROGRAM A SUCCESS AND YOUR JOB AS A COACH MUCH EASIER. APPROPRIATE EXPECTATIONS FROM PARENTS WILL FACILITATE THE DEVELOPMENT OF A GOOD WORKING RELATIONSHIP.



WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW

- **CONDUCTING A PARENTS' ORIENTATION MEETING HELPS COMMUNICATE WITH PARENTS.**
- **PARENTS EXPECT YOU TO BE KNOWLEDGEABLE AND INTERESTED IN THE WELFARE OF THEIR CHILDREN. DEMONSTRATE YOUR CONCERN.**
- **DEFINING A TIME AND PLACE FOR COMMUNICATING WITH PARENTS IS ESSENTIAL.**
- **A BOOSTER GROUP PROVIDES IMPORTANT SUPPORT FOR YOUR PROGRAM.**
- **INFORM PARENTS REGARDING APPROPRIATE AND INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR.**

The coach's—and parent's—first consideration has to be whether the athlete is ready to play. Young athletes who choose to play football usually become happy, enthusiastic team members. They develop a love for the game. Those who are forced to join a team resent practices and can't wait for the season to end. They have short careers and often end up hating football.

Learn why each athlete wants to play football. Help parents realize that coercion or force negatively affects players.

WHAT PARENTS EXPECT OF YOU

Parents care about the welfare of their child. They want children to enjoy playing football, learn new skills, be active, and learn valuable life lessons. Parents expect you to be knowledgeable about football, sensitive to their children's needs, and expect you to give their child equal playing time.

CONDUCT AN ORIENTATION MEETING FOR PARENTS

Communication and cooperation are keys to developing successful parent relationships. Consider holding a parent orientation meeting to recruit volunteers and explain your coaching philosophy.

DISCUSS SUCH THINGS AS:

- The role of parents
- Your season goals
- Team and league rules
- The amount of playing time each athlete can expect
- Practice and game schedules with expected attendance
- Your philosophy of discipline
- Your need for parental support
- When and how to talk with the coach
- NOT asking for special treatment of a player

THE EXPECTED ROLE OF PARENTS

Parents need clear guidelines about their place in your program. Their primary role is providing emotional support for their athletes.

OTHER PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES INCLUDE:

- Providing a positive, supportive atmosphere at home
- Informing the coach of pre-existing medical conditions that may place the child at risk
- Helping the child understand the lessons sports can teach

Some parents, though, have unrealistic ideas about their athlete's capabilities.

SUCH PARENTS:

- Live vicariously through their child
- Spoil the child
- Pressure the child with expectations that are out of reach, such as always winning
- Fail to listen to the child's concerns about sports and life
- See the child's athletic experience as an investment in the future and shame the athlete who wants to do other things
- Unfairly criticize the coach

Coaches should understand and encourage realistic parental expectations.

PARENTS WITH REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS:

- Listen to their children's views about playing sports
- Provide unconditional love during both successes and failures
- Help children understand that the definition of a good performance is giving one's best effort
- Encourage the players to be self-reliant and to accept responsibility for their decisions and actions
- Encourage nonsport interests
- Allow their children to set their standards of excellence
- Provide encouragement and hopeful optimism when needed by the athlete
- Emphasize enjoyment above all!

DEFINE A TIME AND PLACE TO COMMUNICATE WITH PARENTS

Explain to parents that just before and after games are not good times to talk. If an emotional parent does come around, politely ask the person to wait until he or she has cooled down. Meeting with parents away from practices and games eliminates distractions and diffuses confrontations. If someone confronts you during a game or practice, ask the person to call you at a more suitable time.

DEALING WITH CRITICISM

Parents can be critics. They may tell you what style of offense to run, what plays to call, or who to start at which position. Don't be defensive. Such suggestions often are given in good faith. Take advantage of their enthusiasm. Encourage critics to become volunteer coaches. If they accept, you have recruited a new coach and strengthened your program. If they do not, it is unlikely that you'll hear from them again.

CONFLICTS WITH PARENTS

Conflicts with parents usually result from a lack of communication, miscommunication, or a misunderstanding. Coaches should establish clear lines of communication with parents and encourage parents to discuss issues or concerns with the coach.

ENCOURAGE PARENTS TO ACT APPROPRIATELY

Parents have to control their emotions. Encourage parents to cheer their players while showing respect for the opponents and officials. Parents need to refrain from coaching their children from the sidelines. They cannot make derogatory comments to coaches, players, officials or other parents. The coach should establish, beforehand, the consequences that a disruptive parent should expect.

Your relationship with your players' parents affects the success of your program both on and off the field. Include parents in your program, and encourage them to support their children.

MORE READING

GO ONLINE AT WWW.NFLHS.COM/HEALTH

"Children's Psychological Development Through Sports." R. Weinberg and D. Gould in Foundations of Sport and Exercise Psychology. Human Kinetics Publishers.

"A Parent Orientation Program." R. Martens in Successful Coaching. Human Kinetics Publishers.

"Communicating Your Approach." in B. Reade Coaching Football Successfully, Human Kinetics Publishers.

DEALING WITH ONE-PARENT FAMILIES

MICHAEL A. CLARK, PH.D.

ATHLETES FROM SINGLE-PARENT OR STEPFAMILIES CAN PRESENT SPECIAL CHALLENGES. COACHES CAN BEST MEET THESE CHALLENGES BY KNOWING THEIR ATHLETES AND ENSURING GOOD COMMUNICATION.

WHAT COACHES SHOULD KNOW



- **THE EFFECTS OF NONTRADITIONAL FAMILIES UPON YOUTH VARY; GET TO KNOW YOUR ATHLETE.**
- **SINGLE MOTHERS MAY WANT CHILDREN TO PLAY FOOTBALL FOR EXPOSURE TO MALE ROLE MODELS.**
- **ATHLETES MAY EXHIBIT BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS AS A RESULT OF THEIR FAMILY SITUATION.**
- **ATHLETES FROM NONTRADITIONAL FAMILIES MAY NEED ADDITIONAL ATTENTION TO DEVELOP THEIR SELF-ESTEEM.**
- **LEARN WHICH PARENT IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ATHLETE.**
- **GOOD COMMUNICATION IS CRITICAL.**

The American family's changing structure influences many areas of society—sports included. More than half the players on a football team may live in families affected by divorce.

The effects of divorce vary. Some youth suffer real consequences, while others take things in stride. Some adults deal successfully with the situation. Others do not. It's impossible to predict how divorce will influence a particular family or child. But some responses are obvious and unmistakable. These require the coach's attention.

KNOW EACH ATHLETE

Youth from single-parent and stepfamilies are not all alike. The coach's first responsibility is to get to know each athlete. This includes learning something about the family situation.

A UNIQUE REASON FOR PLAYING

Children from nontraditional families play sports for the same reasons as other athletes. However, single mothers may encourage younger children to play football so they can associate with male role models.

These mothers don't necessarily love football, and their children may sign up for reasons other than a desire to play. Coaches need to recognize this situation. It influences the athlete's motivation and the parent's expectations for the athlete and coach. It also puts the athlete at higher risk of dropping out of the program.

PROBLEM BEHAVIOR

Youth affected by divorce or living in single-parent families may display problem behavior.

SUCH CONDUCT INCLUDES:

- Becoming aggressive
- Becoming shy and withdrawn
- Acting childish for their age

This conduct places the athlete at risk of dropping out of football. It also makes it difficult to integrate the player into the team and limits chances for success.

DEVELOPING SELF-ESTEEM

Coaches often react to problem behaviors as though they are a discipline issue. When discipline doesn't improve things, frustration sets in. This makes things worse.

Instead, coaches confronted with problem behavior need to refocus on building team unity and making football enjoyable. Building self-esteem is crucial. Youth from nontraditional families often respond positively to efforts to build self-esteem. When they do, problem behavior decreases.

CHILDREN OF DIVORCE

Parental responsibilities are affected by divorce and can be complicated. The coach must learn who is responsible for the athlete. At the very least, the coach needs to know:

- Which parent to call if an injury occurs
- Who can—and cannot—have contact with the athlete
- Which parent can transport the athlete

COMMUNICATION

Coaches have to use their best communication skills when dealing with nontraditional families.

USEFUL STRATEGIES INCLUDE:

- Putting all communication in writing
- Providing extra copies of schedules and messages
- Inviting parents, guardians, and even grandparents to parent meetings
- Collecting contact information in writing
- Calling BOTH parents when problems arise
- Talking informally with all parents whenever possible



Miscommunication and misunderstandings cause conflicts. Anything coaches can do to communicate with parents and athletes benefits everyone.

Players from nontraditional families can present the coach with challenges. Good communication is critical. Equally important is the coach's commitment to understanding the player's situation and creating situations in which the athlete can have fun and build self-esteem.

MORE READING

GO ONLINE AT WWW.NFLHS.COM/HEALTH

Living in a Stepfamily Without Getting Stepped On. K. Leman, Thomas Nelson.

"Parental Divorce and Children's Well-being: A Focus on Resilience." R.E. Emery and R. Forehand in *Stress, Risk, and Resilience in Children and Adolescents: Processes, Mechanisms, and Interventions.*

"Effects of Divorce on Parents and Children." E.M. Hetherington, M Cox and R Cox in *Nontraditional Families: Parenting and Child Development.*

