



“Many times players can learn more of real value from losing than winning”

COACHING LEADERSHIP – LOSING AND LEARNING

A few years ago, we were having an incredibly good season winning almost every game. A parent came up to me concerned that we were winning too much. At first, I was taken aback a little because most of the time concerns to coaches come when the team is losing, not winning too much. But of course, this parent was making a good point. If their child consistently wins, how is he/she going to learn how to deal with losing, lose with dignity and respect and learn what to do to correct whatever was causing the loss.

In real life we all know that a great deal can be learned from failure perhaps more than from success. Losing is also a kind of a restraining device that keeps us from getting too big a head and taking the game and ourselves too seriously. Coaches should help turn losing into a motivator to try harder and to do the necessary to improve.

So, an important part of youth development is learning to deal with defeat, the emotions around it, learning not to point fingers, learning to stay positive and set improvement objectives, and just accepting losing as part of the game ... you can't win them all.

Of course, if a team is losing every game, it's not fun or helpful for the players to be in that negative environment.

Coaches can help a great deal in channeling positive energy to all the learning that can come from losing right across the spectrum. We can identify all the things that caused the loss all the way from the luck side where we just got bad bounces (sometimes you do) to the “you make your own luck side” where very specific physical and mental skills can be improved upon to improve results. The latter is the primary purpose of practices. We can also promote all the fun things that come out of playing on a team apart from winning and losing, from dressing room antics, to making new friends, to attending events and doing fun things as a team.

Any coach can make players feel good about themselves when they are winning. A coach that can lead players and the team to feel good about themselves when they lose and still maintain a strong desire and focus among the players to do the things that are necessary the next time to improve and win will maintain a strong relationship with the players and help them attain their goals much more than the “fair weather” coach who is happy when the team wins and visibly upset when we lose.

This doesn't mean coaches should have an “oh well we win some and lose some” attitude all the time and show the players we don't really share their disappointment in losing. We just need to find ways to turn the negative energy of losing into the positive energy of improving play.



One very good team-building event when winning or losing is watching a game film of one of your games. Ask a parent or someone else to videotape a game and then watch it as a team. Players love to see themselves and their teammates. Players and coaches can comment on the play, identify development objectives, and reinforce the positives. This is a great learning tool and it is fun.

It is very important after identifying team and individual development objectives to then immediately spend practice time concentrating on them and communicating the reasons you are doing that to the team before the practices.

Some players quickly go to making excuses and finger pointing when losing starts. Coaches should deflect and firmly discourage excuses and finger pointing whether it is at our players or at a favorite target, the referees. Negativism and scapegoating is quite destructive to a team and for players personally both on the giving and receiving end. Players, for their own personal development must learn to take responsibility for outcomes they produce by their play, individually and as a team, and stick together win or lose.

So what should coaches do when the losing streak is upon them?

**ENCOURAGE, TALK ABOUT AND SET POSITIVE ATTAINABLE OBJECTIVES
AND THEN PRACTICE THEM UNTIL THEY ARE ACCOMPLISHED**