

Team Management and Game Coaching

1) Introduction

- One of the most important things we do as coaches (but not the only one) is to coach games. What sort of game coaches do we want to develop into?
- **Ego-driven coach:** Coaches based on her/his emotional reactions. The coach's pride is the only thing at stake for her/him. Players are just a means to her/his ego-gratification. Gets angry with players or praises them accordingly to moods and final scores, not player's performance. Players fear her/him.
- **Bureaucratic coach:** Mostly preoccupied with managing the details of substitutions, playing time, diagrams on a pad, and other things happening on the side. So concerned with managing the comings and goings of players that he/she has little time to observe the game and coach the players.
- **Active coach:** Connected emotionally with the players (bonds, suffers and rejoices with them), good game manager, but keeps her/his focus on **reading the game, and on instructing the players** in a positive way during the course of the game. Has high expectations and helps his players meet them. Players respect her/him.

2) Rate Yourself (1 = area of relative weakness; 2 = adequate but improvable; 3 = major strength)

- What kind of coach am I – ego-driven, bureaucratic, or active?
- Do I prepare my players effectively to meet the demands of the game (practices)?
- Do I prepare myself before the game?
- Do I prepare my team effectively before game start?
- Do I bond emotionally with my players, so they trust and rely on me?
- Am I a good game manager?
- Do I read the game well?
- Do I intervene effectively during the game so as to get the best performance possible?
- Do I help my players deal with the outcome in a positive way, so as to promote their development?
- Do I try to develop myself as a coach?

3) Preliminary Questions

The **active coach** comes to the game prepared, gets his players ready to perform at their best, bonds with them, maintains good discipline and high morale, and manages the team well during the game. In addition, she/he **reads the game well** and intervenes appropriately during the course of the game to get the best possible performance out of the team. The message here is that **what you do or don't do before, during, and after the game has a major impact on your players' performance.**

The active coach maximizes her/his positive impact on the team's performance.

Knowing that your actions determine your team's performance, here are the key questions:

- What can you do to **prepare yourself** before the game?
- What can you do to **get your team ready** for the game?
- What can you do to **intervene positively during the game**?
- When should you intervene, how, and what should be the content of your intervention?

When and how should you address individual players or the group?

4) Preparing yourself before the game

- Equipment, necessary paperwork, weather-appropriate coaching outfit
- Game report and other league requirements
- Game plan sheet, technical and tactical focus of the week, objectives of the game
- Know your players' strengths and weaknesses
- Know who will be missing
- Know your opponents

5) Preparing your team

- **Proper game day procedures** (Teach them before the first game, and expect them to follow it on their own):
 - Emphasize that your players are expected to know these procedures and take responsibility for following them on their own
 - Each player should be responsible for bringing the required game day equipment (see the details on separate section).
 - Check in with coach upon arrival (specify the time – such as 30 minutes before game time)
 - As each player comes in, she/he should go directly to the bench and place her/his equipment neatly on a line next to or behind the bench.
 - Warm-up (you should have a designated warm-up procedure and they should follow it)
 - Check in with coach for pre-game talk
 - Teach them what the referees expect: coaching box and bench, coin toss, substitutions, after-game hand-shake, how to handle bad calls, etc.
 - Check in for half-time talk
 - Check in for after-game summation
- **Check in:**
 - Use it to establish a bond with each player, to calm him or her, and to set the tone and focus for the game.
 - Be fun and positive, and acknowledge each player individually.
 - Take care of any discipline issues right away (gentle discipline builds morale).
- **Warm-up and stretch:** before your first game you should teach them a warm-up routine (you can make minor adjustments in focus throughout the season). Your players should know it and take responsibility for following them. See the section on game day warm-ups for more details.
- **Player cards and equipment check:** when the referees call, have your team line up with no time delays for any reason. Have your player cards ready.
- **Pre-game talk (make sure you have everyone's attention, and be very brief):**
 - Assign positions (including subs), captains, 1st and 2nd half goalies.
 - Reminder of system of play and positional responsibilities on attack and defense (be brief).
 - Address team shape on attack and defense.
 - Address technical focus of the week.
 - Address tactical focus of the week.
 - Simple motivational phrase for the day: mental focus.
- **Coin Toss:** make the captains responsible for this job, instruct them on the procedure.

6) Bonding:

In the course of each practice or game you should do the following:

- Keep in mind that coaches have enormous significance in the life of their players, both in their soccer careers and as persons.
- Keep in mind that coaching is extremely complex, and to be effective coaches must be aware of the psychology of the coach-player bond.
- Be efficient and knowledgeable, but also keep good team morale and nurture your players.
- Nurturing and keeping morale are about recognizing your players' emotional needs and harnessing their emotions in a positive way to get the most development.
- Show genuine concern for each individual player:
 - Recognize each player's existence, importance, and contribution. If you don't, the experience that player will have on the team will be one of anonymity and alienation.

- Greet each player individually, making eye contact and smiling.
- Ask each player a personal question to show genuine interest in them as people, whenever possible.
- Use each player's name several times for praise and to give instructions. A player who does not get a compliment or a correction will feel that you don't care about his/her contribution to the team.
- Set the tone:
 - Keep it fun and light, using appropriate humor whenever possible.
 - Maintain discipline firmly and gently.
 - Promote morale. Morale is defined as behavior that springs from high expectations. The coach must demand the highest performance players are capable of (the expectations must be high but realistic). Players want to be proud of their efforts and of their team, even if it's "just a game".
 - Failure and mistakes can turn high expectations into a source of anxiety and fear for each player. This is where the coach-player bond is most important. It is not enough to set high expectations for your players. You must help them meet it, while giving them time to develop and room to make mistakes. The coach must be sympathetic and patient when players fail, giving them encouragement and hope, showing emotional support. The players will develop emotional trust for the coach.
 - Also, the coach must earn the professional trust of the players by helping them overcome their mistakes and deficiencies. This makes the players trust their own abilities, and trust the coach's abilities. A coach who cannot help the players fix their mistakes will not have that trust. Don't let a player go home without experiencing success: use the appropriate method of correction and make sure the player gets it right at least once before leaving.
- Make corrections using the appropriate method: compliment-correction-compliment.

7) Game Management

- **Establish an appropriate system of play. Take into account the following factors:**
 - Players win games, not systems. This doesn't mean the system doesn't matter. It means that you should choose a system that will maximize your players' abilities.
 - Field size and aspect ratio.
 - Number of players allowed on the field.
 - Objectives for the game (nature and importance of the game).
 - Player development objectives.
 - The level of development of your team as a group.
 - The level of development of your players individually.
 - Your opponent's strengths, weaknesses, and team shape.
 - When should you change the system mid-game?
 - When should you change the system mid-season?
- **Assigning positions:**
 - Maximize your strengths and minimize your weaknesses – you must know your players.
 - Match the characteristics required of each position with the characteristics of your players.
 - Requirements of the game for each position (see details).
 - Individual player's aptitudes.
 - Player development objectives (short and long term).
 - Take into account which players are available or missing.
 - Be sensitive by your players' wishes, but not ruled by it.

- **Manage Substitutions:**
 - Know the league procedures and teach your players.
 - Take into account the following factors:
 - Requirements of the game (the four components).
 - Players' aptitudes.
 - Players' fitness level.
 - Objectives of the game (nature and importance of the game).
 - Fair playing time.
 - Opponent.
- **Half-Time:**
 - Make hydration your priority. This will give them time to settle emotionally and get ready to focus mentally. Don't allow contact with parents (they will lose their focus).
 - Have all players check in for coaching talk.
 - Make your talk brief and clear.
 - Give them an overall evaluation of the team's performance – brief and to the point.
 - Give them two key points for defense, and two for offense.
 - Keep it positive. Do point out the main problems, but challenge them to solve it rather than placing blame. Give them the solution, and give them the confidence to implement it.
 - Deal in a similar manner with individual players, as needed.
- **Handling injuries:**
 - Give the injured player immediate attention.
 - If possible, give care on the sidelines, allowing the game to continue.
 - Serious injuries:
 - Don't treat or move the player in case of any serious injury.
 - Don't allow the player to return to the game.
 - Always have the folder with the Authority to Treat form, insurance information, and emergency contact numbers handy.
 - Have a cell phone available, or be near a telephone.
 - Have a second adult present in case someone needs to take a player to the hospital.
 - Minor injuries:
 - Carry a first-aid kit for minor injuries.
 - Observe and evaluate the player carefully before returning her/him to the game.
- **Game Report:**
 - Assign a parent to fill out the part of the game report that deals with numbers, like shots, saves, goals, etc. This will free you up to coach during the game.
 - After the game you can fill out the evaluative part of the game report.
 - Email me the game report right after the game.

8) Reading the Game and Coaching Intervention: Preliminary Discussion

- What factors affect a team's performance during a game?
 - _____ (fill in the blank) → performance
 - In the line above, how many things could you fill the blank with?
 - How many of those things are within the current coaches' power to affect the team's performance?
 - ***The main factor that determines a team's performance is the quality of the training sessions you run.*** But the topic here is game coaching, so we will leave that aside for now.
 - Active coaches affect their team's play during the course of the game to bring out the best possible performance, given realistic expectations. The best way to fill in that blank is to implement the game coaching cycle:

- Observation → Analysis → Intervention → **Performance** → (repeat)
- Can a coach's skill in reading the game and intervening make the difference between winning and losing? Most definitely, but not always. More importantly, it always makes a difference for the quality of the performance, and therefore for the team's development. Since development is success, *the success of your team always depends on you.*
- To be an effective game coach you must **read the game** (observation and analysis) and **intervene** in a timely and effective way. That means you must:
 - Recognize exactly what **breakdowns** are occurring,
 - **Analyze** which of the *four components* of the game are involved in that breakdown,
 - **Intervene** with the correct solution,
 - In an **emotionally sensitive** way,
 - At the appropriate **coachable opportunity**,
 - Using the appropriate **method of intervention**.
- **When do the “coachable opportunities” occur during a game?**

When to Intervene	Who to Address	Method of Address	Content
Warm-up	Individual players	Slogans during exercises	Technical Tactical Mental
	Small groups	Individual talk	
Pre-game talk	Whole group	Brief comments to group	See section on pre-game talk
	Individuals	Individual talk	
1st half	Field players	Praise and recognition Slogans Intervention “sandwich”: Praise → Correction → Praise	Technical Tactical Mental
	Players on the sidelines	Positional instructions Individual talk	
Half-time	Whole group	Brief comments	Overall evaluation 2 Key points for attack 2 Key points for defense
	Individuals	Individual address Intervention “sandwich”: Praise → Correction → Praise	
2nd half	Field players	Praise and recognition Slogans Intervention “sandwich”: Praise → Correction → Praise	Technical Tactical Mental
	Players on the sidelines	Positional instructions Individual talk	
Post-game summary	Whole group	Brief comments	Mental: Big perspective Give compliments and recognition Point out the positives!
	Individuals	Brief overall evaluation Praise	

9) Reading the Game and Coaching Intervention: Nuts and Bolts

▪ Breakdowns

➤ What is a breakdown? How can you tell when there has been one during the game?

- A breakdown happens whenever your opponents gain an avoidable advantage in attack, defense, or transition.
- The breakdown may be forced or unforced.
- Forced breakdowns show that your team needs to develop relative to your opponent.
- Unforced breakdowns show major weaknesses on your team.
- The breakdown may be a result of individual or group action or inaction.
- The three moments of soccer: defense, offense, and transition (offense to defense, defense to offense). A breakdown is any deviation from what would count as the perfect execution of each of these moments against actual opposition. That means that in order to recognize a breakdown the coach must have a clear idea of what the correct execution would look like under each specific circumstance in the game.
- Therefore we can say there are four sorts of functions that can break down: attacking functions, defending functions, offensive transition functions, defensive transition functions.
- As a corollary the coach needs to have a clear idea of what the perfect execution of each of these functions (attack, defense, defensive transition, offensive transition) should look like in each specific situation of the game. If you don't know this, you cannot determine whether a breakdown has occurred, and what needs to be done to fix it.
- Fixing a breakdown always requires knowing what should have happened instead.

➤ What kinds of advantages can your opponents gain?

- Control of the ball: denying/keeping possession.
- Control of spaces: denying/gaining penetration.
- Control of the rhythm and style of play.
- Positional advantages (1 vs 1 match-ups).
- Converting these advantages into goals.

➤ Where is the breakdown located in the Pyramid of Player Development?

- This will be important in determining the contents of your next training sessions
- See Coerver's Pyramid of Player Development
- Ball Mastery → Receiving and Passing → Moves (1v1) → Speed → Finishing → Group Attack

➤ What are the causes or sources of breakdowns?

- You must look at the four components of soccer for the sources of breakdowns.
- In the context of a game none of the components appear in isolation. "The four components" are just an abstraction. In the context of a game there are only "functions" and "applications" of the components.
- A function is the role of a component in achieving a particular objective.
- All four components of the game are always involved in every function.
- The four components of soccer:

Component	Definition	Elements
Physical	Psychosomatic (body and mind) skills independent of the ball	
Technical	Skills with the ball	
Tactical	Decisions made by each player and by groups of players	
Psychological	Mental factors that affect a player's performance	

▪ **Game reading skills:**

➤ **How can you tell which component is the source of a breakdown?**

- Anything a player does on the field always involves the four components together. For instance, let's say the player wants to make a pass. "Passing" is the function we want to analyze. It is a function in that it serves a strategic purpose in the game. It could be intended to get out of pressure, to penetrate, to set up a shot on goal, etc. If the pass fails, how can I tell whether the breakdown was physical, technical, tactical, or psychological? What is the "mark" of identification of each component? In addition, sometimes one component impacts on another. It may seem that a bad pass was simply a technical breakdown, when in fact it was physical or psychological (perhaps due to fatigue). How can we determine which component is the real factor in a breakdown that appears to be something else?
- These are the sorts of issues involved in reading the game.
- Experience is the best guide, but study and application on your part will speed up the acquisition of this skill.

Moments	Tactical Principles	Applications Of the Principles	Functions	Elements of the Components of Soccer			
				Physical	Technical	Tactical	Psychological
Defensive	Immediate Chase (Pressing, Restraint and Control) Pressure Cover Balance Compactness Concentration Recovering Possession Set Plays Goalkeeping	Restricting Time Restricting Movement Controlling Space Restricting Options Regaining Possession	Chasing Sprinting Recovering Pressuring Jockeying Charging Tackling Covering Balancing Starting position Marking Tracking Clearing Jumping Heading Volleying Challenging - 50/50 "Vision" Tech./Tact. Speed				
Attacking	Possession Support Width Depth Mobility Penetration Improvisation Finishing Set Plays Goalkeeping	Maintaining Possession Creating Space Creating Time Creating Options Creating Shooting Opportunities	Receiving Dribbling Turning Shielding Faking Passing Crossing Shooting Heading Volleying Starting position Supporting Combination Plays Penetrating Running "Vision" Tech./Tact. Speed				
Defensive Transition	Change team shape from attacking to defending	Speed of transition: outperform your opponent	Starting Position Immediate Pressure Delay Recovery Organization				
Offensive Transition	Change team shape from defending to attacking	Speed of transition: outperform your opponent	Starting Position Consolidating Possession Creating Time Immediate Support Counterattacking				

➤ **Where is the breakdown located in the temporal chain of the game?**

- Certain skills are more fundamental than others, not only in the sense that they are the basis upon which the others are built, but more basic in the temporal flow of the game because they are called for first. For example, the moment a ball is passed to me in a game, certain skills (drawing on all four components) are called for by the situation in a temporal chain or sequence: first touch, then turning and shielding, then dribbling out of pressure, then looking for options, then passing or shooting, etc. There is always a temporal order of skills called for by a given situation, whether you are on or off the ball, whether you are attacking or defending.
- Where is the breakdown happening in that temporal chain?
- This question is important because it is no use in fixing a breakdown that happens at the end of the temporal chain before fixing a more frequent problem at the beginning of the chain.
- In choosing which breakdowns to address during a game, it is always most effective to fix the problem that will have the highest impact on the team's performance.
- In most cases, fixing the most basic frequent problems, those that happen frequently and are closest to the beginning of the temporal chain, will have the highest impact.
- When addressing your team as a group, focus on the most frequent breakdowns experienced by lots of players, at the earliest point in the temporal chain.
- Frequent breakdowns experienced by one or few individuals should be addressed discretely with that individual.
- Breakdowns involving more advanced skills, or skills that come later in the temporal chain (which means those players will have mastered the more basic skills) should be addressed individually with those advanced players, otherwise they will not develop.