

The Role of the Coach

By
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We are first and foremost TEACHERS. As teachers, we are morally and ethically required to use positive reinforcement and effective teaching techniques. The field of play, the gymnasiums, and the ice rinks are our classrooms, and we must avoid techniques and strategies that cause undue stress, diminish a child's self-confidence, harm self-image, and create a negative impression of their sports experience.

To be effective, we must understand the nature and influence of youth sports as a cultural institution. We also must understand the connection between kids, coaches, parents, and society (schools, leagues, health care, and the media). Contamination of the youth sports experience happens when the often competing needs of these four groups clash.

As teachers, we must not only understand the role of sport in society, but it's original purpose. Sport has always been about competition. But, did you know that the word "competition" derives from the Latin word "competere" meaning "to strive together" NOT AGAINST each other? Healthy competition implies respect for self, one's competition, and all who take an interest in sport.

The chances that sports will be fun AND allow everyone to develop their skills to the maximum depends on, you, the coach more than anything else. When all of your athletes have a chance to develop their skills and confidence in each other, your team will have a reasonable chance to win.

Phil Jackson, the great coach of the Chicago Bulls and the Los Angeles Lakers has written one of the most significant books ever written about leadership and coaching. Throughout your study of coaching, you will learn more about what has made Phil Jackson so unique, and so successful. For now, here are just a few excerpts from his book entitled, "Sacred Hoops."

In Chapter 1, Jackson put his finger on two of the most important truths about any organization wanting to achieve anything great. 1) Everyone matters, and everyone must be in synch with everyone else. 2) Greatness comes when people trust each other and can put away their egos and hidden agendas to become a team.

Jackson turns teacher with these insights. There's an intellectual component to playing basketball. Strategy is important. But once you've done the mental work, there comes a point when you have to throw yourself into the action and put your heart on the line. That means not only being brave, but also being compassionate towards yourself, your teammates, and your opponents. He goes on to say, "More than anything else, what allowed the Chicago Bulls to sustain a high level of excellence was the players' compassion for each other

Jackson makes another incredible point about leadership. He says: "It is the job of the leader to be aware of the group member's process; it is the need of the group member to be received and paid attention to. Both get what they need, if the leader has the wisdom to serve and follow."¹

As a coach of modern athletes, old styles and techniques are no longer effective or even advisable. The expectations that kids and their parents have of a coach are much higher than even a few years ago. You must have knowledge of effective teaching techniques, basic child development, psychology, and communications. You must also be well-informed about liability and safety issues, injuries, substance abuse and proper conditioning.

In short, volunteering your time is no longer going to satisfy anyone, including yourself. Because sports are so important to the growth and development of children, and because the role of the coach is critical to that end, you must prepare yourself to accept this important role in our society. Your own personal enjoyment and satisfaction will also depend on it.

The quality of coaching is the one factor, that more than anything else, will determine whether participation in sport results in benefits or detriments to the youth athlete. Your primary objective as an effective coach/teacher is to maximize the benefits while minimizing the detriments.

Why do I want to coach? List as many reasons as you can.

ⁱ Jackson