

Defining the Word Coaching

Following is a summary of a lecture given by Bill Beswick to the NSCAA Academy coaching staff in connection with the NSCAA Convention in Baltimore in the year 2000.

Beswick is a mentor/adviser to soccer coaches in England, including Howard Wilkinson of the English FA, Steve McLaren of Manchester United and Steve Round of Derby County.

There are qualities necessary to take players to a new level.

Being the head coach of a team is a lonely job; it takes courage to be a coach. In fact, the majority of the final decisions relating to a team fall on the coach's shoulders. But when there is a dip in the team's performance, the coach may need someone to give ideas as to the why the team is in decline.

Nevertheless coaching itself is, for many, a search for self-fulfillment and that process is what keeps the profession, while sometimes frustrating, also exciting. Coaching highs provide wonderful moments that keep coaches' interest and involvement while they search for perfect practices and perfect games.

Beswick said he tries to work with coaches in terms of how they develop their philosophies as well as how they relate to their players. Coaches must begin with the end in mind; they must know what they want in the long run. They must keep the "big picture" in front of them; "don't lose it in the details."

There are several core issues with which coaches are concerned:

- Did we get the preparation right?
- Were the players in the right frame of mind?

The process.

- Do we pick the right players?
- The right substitutes?
- Are the players fit enough?
- Are we playing them in the right positions?
- Do we have the right shape as a team?
- Are our tactics right so that we can play well in that shape and get results?

- Do the half times help or hurt us? If the coach makes good suggestions and is right, then players start to believe and change themselves.

Beswick's definition of coaching: "**Coaching is taking players somewhere new.**" He asked his audience what came to mind as that definition was broken down. The word "coaching" evoked the following responses: enthusiastic, committed, want to improve, positive role model, good listener, presence, problem solver, solution-oriented, loyal, sense of humor, ethical, creative, knowledge-giving, respected, good character, inspirational, people skills, vision, mentor, imposing, influencing, honest, inspiring, preparing and teaching.

Beswick noted that all of the responses were positive. He said coaches need to be passionate - but controlled. He added **caring** to the list, noting that modern coaching is *about selling, not yelling*.

"Effective coaching" was another addition with the reminder that the ultimate objective of coaches is to achieve perfection. "Motivating" was added with the eventual goal of the coach to make players self-motivating. Good coaches are also "other-oriented" and build a sense of trust within the team. The exemplary coach also is disciplined, including self-disciplined.

The coach also uses a sense of humor to defuse matters. *Worry prolongs, humor eases* is something for coaches to keep in mind. Good coaches are usually good story-tellers. They come up with an appropriate tale related to the coaching issue at hand.

A coach must have a clear sense of purpose. The coach must create the plan and establish goals to achieve the desired end result. As part of the coaching process the coach must share "the why" of everything. The importance of practice needs to be constantly stressed to the players. "**Don't expect anything new at game time**" was a reminder to coaches.

Other Beswick thoughts:

- The players need to do the simple things well.
- Be organized, be compassionate and the results will occur.
- Mistakes are part of the process; it is not the falling down that is important, it is the getting up following mistakes that is important.

"Lifestyle commitment" was added by Beswick, who noted that "multi-cultural" is also important in modern coaching where a variety of personalities from different backgrounds make up team rosters. He also noted that humility is something that players of quality possess and players must understand and accept their roles within the team in order for it to be successful.

Finally, coaches should let the team's goals unfold as naturally as possible. The process of developing a learning environment was addressed. One mark of a successful coach is that he or she is able to creatively repeat lessons and not leave the players bored.

"Repetition without repeating" is part of the art of coaching. McLaren, when viewing videotape with the Manchester United team never mentions mistakes to players in the final or attacking third of the field. He doesn't want to discourage players from taking chances in that area of the field that places huge demands on individual creativity.

Mistakes exhibited in the middle third of the field may bring questions from him, but not necessarily critical questions. Mistakes made in the defending third of the field will bring criticism as they can be fatal to the team's chances for success. In using motivational videotape it is important to show everyone. Give everyone some attention.

Coaches need to learn to handle defeat - and victory. Dean Smith believed the coach should take care of the losses and give the wins to the players. All coaches share a consistent desire to win games but the evolution of the modern coach includes the following differences from yesterday's mentors:

- The traditional coach focuses on the task and communicates to the group, whereas the modern coach achieves the task with a more "play-centered" approach and a far higher level of both team and individual communication.
- The modern coach is interested in maximizing the potential in the player, he or she is player-centered. The traditional coach is task-centered and more interested in development of the collective unit.
- Formerly coaches might have been labeled as being "results-oriented" vs. the "excellence-dominated" coach of today.
- Today careful planning of a more long-term nature (Beswick termed it "the journey to excellence") is the rule against what has been termed "instinctive coaching." "Small details win big games."
- Coaches today believe they can influence soccer results more (64 percent of goals scored are via set pieces; three substitutes can affect results) vs. the player-dominated "let the boys sort it out" philosophy of the traditional coach.
- Yesterday's coaches were isolated and unto themselves; today's coaches have assistants to share the workload or mentors to lend perspective to their coaching.
- Coaching has evolved from **me** to **we**.
- Authoritarian approach of the more traditional coach has given way to a more democratic methodology.

- Today's coach is intent on listening carefully, then speaking. Selling rather than yelling.
- The coach is no longer seen as a trainer, but rather as a teacher.
- ***The traditional coach was often simply an ex-player; today's coach is qualified as a coach.***
- The traditional coach was seen as a hard worker; today's coach is seen as a smart worker - it isn't the hours you put in that matter, it is the quality of the time; work not longer, but smarter.