

Coaching Principles – Creating a Team Bond

Are individuals more apt to act on their own or as a group? Tough question. But soccer is a sport that surely enables players to create as individuals, but who must successfully perform with teammates. The phrase that a team is more than a sum of its parts is perhaps more accurate and telling in our sport than any other.

One of the keys to success is clearly team building, creating a cohesive unit that enjoys working hard together. There certainly is no perfect way to accomplish this as every team is unique. But some guidelines may help. Here are six essential keys, we think, to creating a team bond.

Leaders

The captains are crucial in representing the team, but every player is a leader. Encourage the potential and positive contribution in each player. Emphasize to each player and to the group that leadership can come in many shapes and many forms. Every player counts and needs to be a leader in his own, even subtle, way

Starters and Non-Starters

The term “substitute” seems to have a negative connotation, so think of another term like reserves. Too many players consider themselves inferior and less important to the team’s success if they are not starting. This can lead to ill-will between players, frustration against the coach, and feeling of being left out for non-starters. Remind the players that a starting line-up is never in concrete and reinforce this by rotating starters especially as a reward for solid play, a positive attitude and hard work. Encourage players on the sidelines to stay mentally involved in the game and always be positive when you remove a player from the game. Constructive criticism can come later, after the game or in the next training session.

Training Sessions are Important

The players will improve very little if the practices are not well-organized, competitive, challenging, and fun. The training sessions need to be crisp and attendance should be required. Convince the players that practice is crucial to the team’s success. If players miss practices or don’t have a good attitude in practice, their playing time should be affected. Reward the players who train the most diligently with a starting position and the urgency for practices will quickly catch on.

Learning from Wins AND Losses

Many times, coaches have a hard time keeping the team consistent because they get too excited from wins and too distraught from losses. It's crucial to be a good example in learning from both wins and losses. Losses, like wins, have moments to celebrate, learn from and build on. You are never as good as your best win or as bad as your worst loss.

Off the Field

It's so important that you realize that you are managing people. They need to be treated as individuals. Try to connect with each player away from soccer topics such as knowing their families, learning about their hobbies, and following their academics. Plus get the team together for non-soccer fun such as meals, going to movies, and playing other sports. They will like each other better and be better teammates as a result.

Humor

Having a sense of humor and being able to sling it at the right moment is a gift we all have. Don't ever get too serious, soccer is just a game – true the world's biggest and most beautiful – but still just a game.