

## COACHING PRINCIPLES

We are always writing articles about the great profession (avocation) of coaching. It has become a passion to contribute our views on coaching baseball.

Let's look at, and review, some of the things that will make you more productive and valuable coaches who have development of the kids foremost in mind.

- Understand and believe that what you are doing gives you the power to support the continuation of this great game. You can make a difference.
- Have a plan for each and every practice.
- Baseball is life- practice every day. If a day goes by and you didn't have a practice, you should feel guilty.
- NGI-Never give in. A coach must continue to teach, even when some of the players look like they aren't 'getting it.' Teach right up to the last out of the last game of the season.

A few years ago, very late in the season, I watched a Vero Beach Dodger game. The Dodgers had a losing record and many of the players were just 'playing out the string.' They knew their career in professional baseball was coming to an end. The best prospects had already gone up to AA ball.

That is a very tough time for a player and a coach. But it shows who the good coaches are. John Shoemaker was teaching in that game as if it were the first game of the World Series. "Shoe" still had his enthusiasm and was giving it his best effort. It would have been so easy to slack off in those dog days of August. (An update: John Shoemaker is now the skipper of the Dodgers AAA team in Las Vegas.)

- Stop watching baseball games on TV as a fan. Watch them as a coach and a student. Use these professional and college games as learning experiences. Try to imagine what you would do in game situations. Look at fielders' techniques and pitchers and hitters mechanics. Tape the games and watch them in slow motion and frame advance. Turn the sound off on the TV and try to identify the pitches. That is a good method and you will be surprised at how easy it is.
- Spend extra time, after practice, with those players who need it the most.
- Don't be influenced by what parents and other coaches say to you or about you. Believe in what you are doing and stay on the path. Believe me, if you are doing a good job you will not be popular. You will be respected, but not popular. If you try to please everybody you will wind up pleasing nobody.
- You must have control and you must use discipline.
- Be yourself. Coach within your own personality. Don't try to copy someone else. Use other methods from coaches that you admire but ultimately you have to be yourself.

- Have integrity. Keep teaching the important values even when they are not fashionable. Stand by what you say. If you penalize players for missing practice, penalize all of them, not just the weaker players.
- Don't set arbitrary rules to enforce them at your whim.
- Understand that you can make a difference in a young life. That is your reward. That is why you coach-not just to win.
- Have a goal of making your players just a little better than they were the day before. Develop the attitude that if they are not getting better, they are getting worse.
- Teach your players to respect the game. How they act on that field is a direct reflection of you, the coach. Have them hustle at all times, keep their shirttails in, wear baseball caps, maintain good behavior and listen to you. The way they practice is the way they will play in games.

If you coach your son try to honestly evaluate his talent and put him in the position where he will do the most good for your team. I have seen many a coach's son who never was and never would be a shortstop. Guess where he played.

- Take coaching seriously and give it your best effort. If you want your players to take you seriously, take the game seriously.
- Become a student of the game. Players can use the off-season to get better. Coaches can too.
- Teach your players appropriate behavior during games. Don't let them question umpires' calls or cheer against the other team. Teach them how to stay focused in the dugout. Give each player some responsibility. I feel that early in the season you will have to stay on top of this. Establish the way you want them to act and keep on them until you get the desired results.
- Demand respect from your players. You will find you'll have to earn it.
- Become a positive role model around your players. Don't smoke in front of them. They are going to emulate you. You have an obligation to set aside your personal peccadilloes for the time that you are a coach.
- 'Knowledge is power.'
- Put your ego in your back pocket. Be confident that you are operating with the proper motives.
- Don't belittle other teams and other umpires.
- It is important that you make your players understand the fact that the techniques you are teaching them may involve failure. If a player is having a measure of success and performing a certain skill incorrectly, he must understand that when you change him he will fail until the new skill becomes part of his 'muscle memory.'

For instance a pitcher may throw very hard and be successful. No one can hit him in Little League. However he may have poor mechanics that could hinder his development as a pitcher. It is your job to help him change those mechanics. The player will fail at first so you should be there to help him grasp that fact. ***How a player deals with that adversity determines his future.***

- Learn ways to keep your team focused in games. You want them to stay involved. That is part of the learning process. This is a very tough element of coaching. I saw an ad in a baseball magazine that drove that point home for me. Pictured were 3 high school players in the dugout. The balloon caption over the first player read “What color is athlete’s foot? The 2nd caption read “Gee, it hurts when I do this (He was bending his hand backward.)” The final balloon read “Look, girls.” The title of the ad read, “Coaching is Hard.” You get the point. Do you remember those dugout responsibilities we posted in a past Tip of the Week? Make sure you give each and every player something to do. Ask them questions to keep them involved in the game.
- Constantly move your infielders and outfielders around during the game. This keeps the defense alert as well as preparing them for different situations.
- Set a high standard. Don’t go down to another teams’ level if that team has poor coaching. Stay away from that ya ya stuff.

We believe a youth coach should take the approach that he is teaching all his players how to move up to the next level. That is what he should want for his players, to keep going up the ladder. If he coaches a junior league team the next step is high school. If he coaches high school the next step is college.

This is where integrity comes in- that player who is having success now but might have a bad mechanical hitting flaw. If you don’t help him change, he will not go on. You, the coach, are aware of the problem. It is your duty to help him. It is very easy to ignore it. He is doing so well now. We are winning with his little drawback. Ah, let the next coach worry about it. This takes some determination and strength of purpose on the part of the coach. He not only has to get the player to buy into what he is doing but he must convince the parents that he is right. It is definitely much easier and much more popular to just let it alone.

Coaching is not for everyone but it is a very rewarding and noble pursuit. If you decide to do it, it is more gratifying to do it right.

Thanks to Baseball Excellence.com Tip of the Week.