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# COACHING KIDS

*All* TEAM SPORTS

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# COACHING KIDS

*All* TEAM SPORTS

2<sup>nd</sup> Editon

by  
Frank (Duke) Watts

**PW**  
PRICE WORLD  
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*Inspiration for this book comes primarily from the kids and parents who so graciously put up with my blunders as I learned to coach. My thanks must also include my own kids, Jenna, Robert and Bill, and my wife, Jane, who likewise suffered. May my grandchildren Zeb, Avery, Cassie, Abby, Gabby, and Jackson not suffer as much and perhaps even prosper from this work.*

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# FOREWORD

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What ever happened to playing ball in the front yard? Pick-up games at the park? When we were kids we'd come home from school, grab a snack, and head outside to play. Everyone in the neighborhood would gather in the street, choose sides, and start playing in our favorite sport, whichever one was in season.

We created games using the equipment we had. We played every position and called our own plays. Often times we'd play until mom called us for dinner by flashing the porch light a few hundred times.

Things are different now that technology has changed the world. Kids play video games instead of riding their bikes. They text and tweet instead of playing Nerf hoops in the garage. Man, we had some killer Nerf hoops tournaments back in the day.

Now we parents have to schedule everything. With schools cutting physical education and sports programs, club sports have become increasingly popular, thus increasing the need for volunteer coaches and parental involvement.

I know this because I've seen it from all angles. I've coached, directed, and administered basketball teams, camps, clinics, and tournaments for over 25 years. I've coached boys and girls, men and women. I've coached my two sons' teams (flag football, Pop Warner football, t-ball, basketball) since they were three years old.

I was fortunate enough to be the head coach of an NCAA Division I women's basketball program at Santa Clara University that played in the NCAA Tournament, which was broadcast on ESPN no less. I was head coach and president of operations of a men's minor league professional team, which basically meant that besides coaching I had to sweep the gym, sell the tickets, and call time-outs. Today I run my own company called NetScouts Basketball.

Between my time as an NCAA coach and today, I had the pleasure of working as the coach and director of a basketball club in London, England. In London, we had young men, women, and kids from over 20 different countries on our teams, along with the one thing that brought them all together – basketball

The differences in youth-sports culture were illuminating. It has always been very important for me as the coach to have some help coordinating all of the various responsibilities that go along with running one team, not to mention four. Parents in the UK aren't accustomed to driving kids to games, or even to attending the games for that matter. Snacks? Forget about it. Kids hop on those cool red buses or ride the subway to and from games by themselves. It's amazing that there are no "soccer moms" in London! I needed help, so I had to change all that – I had to get the parents involved.

By the time my family and I left London, my organization had changed. It now had great parental involvement, with record numbers of kids joining. The parents were really enjoying being a part of something as well. Also, after parental involvement improved, my job became a little less hectic, which allowed me to coach their kids and teach them the game.

If you're reading this, you're probably thinking about coaching your son or daughter's little league team. Or even better, you already decided to coach and you're wondering to yourself "what do I do now"?

Well, lucky for you Duke Watts came along and wrote this book. It will answer most, if not all, of your questions and give you the tools to be successful as a youth level coach.

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On my most recent basketball business trip to Europe, I saw two things that made me smile. The first was a pick-up game of basketball in a park in Madrid. These kids were playing three-on-two, using a soccer ball that didn't bounce very well, and loving every minute of it. The other inspiring thing I saw was a two-versus-two game of soccer at a bus stop. The kids were using an aluminum can as 'la pelota' (the ball). It made me think of our own ad-hoc games on the sandlot. Those were the days.

-Chris Denker, Managing Partner of NetScouts Basketball LLC, "The International Basketball Connection"<sup>TM</sup>



# INTRODUCTION

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Have you ever:

- Heard an angry coach hollering at his kids to “play ball” and wondered what that meant?
- Coached a kids team against the league organizer, who “just happened” to have more talented kids on his team?
- Heard a parent lament that “sports shouldn’t be so competitive”?
- Been asked by the Recreation District to sign a pledge to “stay out of the process”?
- Seen bottom performers forced off their team?
- Witnessed a parent hollering obscenities at a coach or official?
- Witnessed a coach who allowed his players to swear on the field?
- Seen the parents malign the coach
- Heard the coach malign the parents?
- Witnessed a coach who obviously didn’t want the parents to “interfere”?

These typical problems make it sound like we have some bad people involved in coaching. By my experience, it usually isn’t the people – it’s the process.

Much has been written about coaching kids. Most books are sport-specific, covering only one sport. They go into considerable depth on that sport. Certainly, if you’re going to coach any sport, you should find and read a book on that sport that is applicable to young kids.

Some other books are general, mostly feel-good stuff. They often focus on how to make the participants feel better, not necessarily perform better. This refers to sports with no winners or losers – as if there is some sport that exists in which there are no winners or losers! You will find little written, however, that relates directly to the basic challenge of coaching kids of young ages, regardless of the sport. You’ll find even less on organizing kids sports from the coach and league viewpoints.

I will draw heavily on my own experience playing sports, coaching, and watching many other coaches to make my points. Many, many discussions with other youth coaches have allowed me to develop some principles about team-sport coaching and organizing, whether it’s baseball, basketball, field hockey, football, flag football, ice hockey, lacrosse, rugby, soccer, softball, tee ball, track, volleyball or any other team sports I have not mentioned. I will also inject a little humor – as little as you will find anywhere!

This book will address coaching and organizing kindergarten through middle school, covering the coaching basics that are applicable to any team sport. Coaching high school kids is generally a different issue, for better or worse. Somewhere in the late middle-school years, the principles begin to change toward the exclusion of parents. This book, however, will not explore whether or not this should be the case. We will stick with the younger years because that is where my experience is.

This book is about coaching kids at a very impressionable stage of life – a stage when they will learn to love the sport or not, play it well or not, appreciate competition or not, become a fan or not, or

progress to the next level or not. Coaches must be aware of this and do everything in their power to help kids both appreciate the sport and progress as rapidly as possible. Some of what is found here may be worthwhile life lessons.

I will also look closely at the league organization and its duties. This is an often-ignored aspect of kids sports. I'm very dogmatic about what should or should not be done. Keep in mind that there are exceptions to all rules. Writing about the possible exceptions would make this work longer and dilute the message. Thus, only a little time will be spent writing about exceptions.

Also remember that my rules are based on mistakes I have made. They may not necessarily be the best approach. You may be wondering just what qualifies me, a mistake-making, ordinary coach to write about coaching kids.

Like many others, I played many summer and winter sports in the "sandlots." I played many different organized sports, earned a few high school letters, shared in the raising of three kids, coached several different team sports for 26 kid-seasons, taught skiing to disabled kids for five seasons, discussed coaching at some length with other coaches, and observed many paid and volunteer coaches at work. I have loved almost every minute of it. I also have been totally disorganized and watched other coaches in the same fix. I found my way out of the disorganization by trial and error. Hopefully you will not have to go through as much of this as I did.

As mentioned before, I know most of the team sports well, but I'm not qualified to tell you how to coach. This coach is only able to tell you how to avoid mistakes when coaching kids, because I have done just about as well as the worst. I have arguably made more mistakes than any other volunteer coach in modern history. You can certainly do better.

# CHAPTER

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# 1

## SPORTS, LOVE, AND LAMENT

**K**ids' sports represent what's best about America. Sports offer a chance for the player to get fit while having fun. Sports offer fun for participants and their families, establish a set of rules, reward those for most who participate the most, and usually provide consequences for those who break the rules.

Sports offer the excitement of competition as an individual and with a team. They offer an opportunity to excel. They offer an opportunity to belong. Team sports teach kids practical lessons in teamwork. Kids learn how to win and learn how to act after they win or lose. Also, they learn how to lead, follow, or get out of the way.

Sports offer a cleansing of the mind from school, work, or family pressures. There is typically a clear outcome with little fuzziness. There is a kinship found in sports that is lacking in many other endeavors. Many characteristics of sports are often and should always be prevalent in other life pursuits.

A good teacher of any team sport puts heavy emphasis on the mental aspects of the game. Wasn't it Yogi Berra who said, "Ninety percent of this game is half mental"? Even at young ages, the mental aspect of the game needs to be part of the training. It also needs to be part of the coach's preparation and execution.

Yes, sports have a dark side. Some college and professional athletes are the worst role models. Some end up in jail or dead. The news media folks have a fixation about reporting such events. They seldom put them in perspective, however. What percentage of our pro or college athletes do such things? Even in the pro ranks, where money can corrupt, the percentage is very small. But that isn't the impression you get from the news. Unfortunately, this is the image some parents have. You and I can't do much about the news media except complain. The same is true with umpires. But we can show kids a good role model and teach them what teamwork means.

As Terry Frei wrote in *Third Down and a War to Go*, "Done right, sports teach. Sports bond. Sports enrich. Sports are about lessons and unbreakable friendships that can last through one man's lifetime. And longer."

At dinner the other evening, a friend commented that the sandlots are empty. Where did the kids go? How often do you see kids playing in an empty lot, field, or greenbelt these days, with the kids themselves organizing the contest as they choose, playing a game without adults, and learning how to get along with their peers? Are all the kids at home watching TV?

When we were young, we often just chose sides and played without coaches, officials, or direct supervision. Did it hurt our self-esteem to be chosen last? Sure, but we got over it, and that taught us one of life's hard lessons: We are all good and bad at something, and finding our strengths and

weaknesses is part of life.

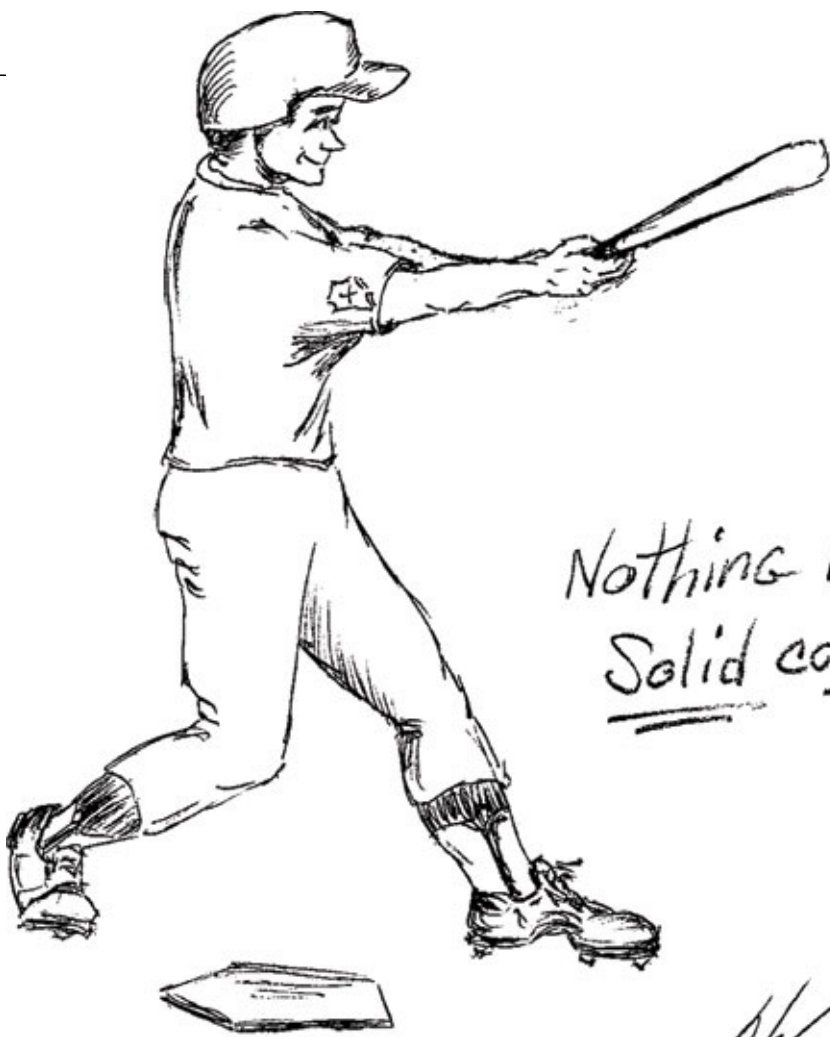
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On the local ball field, we seldom had enough players to make two baseball teams, so “piggymove-up” was the option of choice. In elementary school, a couple of teachers were usually on the playground, but they were just there to settle arguments. That is, if they could get to us before a fight broke out. Yes, we had fights on occasion. It didn’t seem to hurt us. It was good preparation for the boxing team. Probably those fights worked off some of the frustration that today might lead to some kid bringing a gun or knife to school.

We usually learned how to settle our problems without fighting. I especially remember the tackle football games in grade school. Yes, we had tackle football in grade school – without pads or helmets. Can you imagine that happening in a modern school? We spent hours and hours on a field, on the ice, and at the backyard hoop all with no supervision. We traded, negotiated, bartered, blackmailed, and threatened to take the ball or puck and go home. But we played, talked “smack,” and, most of all, had fun.

Our typical mode of operation was to have the two best players choose teams. The guy who chose first had to face uphill. The guy who chose last had to face downhill. Playing slightly downhill had an obvious advantage. Kids have a way of “leveling the playing field.”

Perhaps we should still let kids do their own thing like we once did. But today, most parent(s) are working, and no one is home to keep one eye on the sandlot. So, for better or worse, adults have organized sports, structured them, and turned them into a highly programmed activity. Now we need to figure out how to make kids sports the best possible experience for all involved.



Nothing like a  
Solid connection.

*Atkins*

## COMPETITION

**W**e were competitive. Most of us wanted to win no matter what the game. There was nothing wrong with competition. Today is no different in that regard. Boys are especially naturally competitive. Though, as girls' sports have emerged they have also become very competitive. But I digress.

Should youth sports be competitive? Yes. But do they need to be so adult-driven? At what age should kids be organized and coached by adults? Can we return to the sandlot? Maybe we can if one parent is home when the kids aren't in school and knows where the kids are at all times. Maybe we will as soon as outhouses make a comeback! So what should we do? The best scenario is to develop an association of volunteer parents to organize, coach, and assist the coach. Or, in a school or recreation district, we should take an approach that involves the parents in a meaningful fashion.

Can we combine the best of the sandlot with organized youth sports? Can or should a competitive sport culture be kept out of organized youth sports? Should there be a clear separation of competitive and noncompetitive leagues? Can we combine the best of the sandlot, organization, and competition? Should the noncompetitive league just not keep score? Will the kids, parents, and coaches on both sides feel like winners?

This book won't answer all these questions, but it will make you think about what is best for the kids and not what is best for the parents, the teachers, the city, the recreation district, the coaches, the administrators, or the school board. I emphasize again that this book is about doing what is best for the kids.

## PAID COACHES OR VOLUNTEER PARENTS'

**W**ho should coach kids? The short answer is: anyone who is interested in helping a kid learn how to play a sport and have fun at it. To be considered an effective coach by the kids and parents, however, is still another challenge.

Since the early days of sandlots, kid-coaching has been a challenge equal to finding a needle in a haystack. Because of this, some folks think professional coaches should be hired to coach kids. They say that kids sports should be left up to the recreation district (meaning government), to hire the coaches. Some people think they need someone with a recreation degree, a “real pro” who knows what he is doing. These people often think that parents should take a pledge to stay out of the process. This is the modern trend. Other folks think parents should organize and coach kid sports. I favor parents doing the organizing and coaching at young ages for reasons that will become apparent. You can decide for yourself.

The coach may be a parent, teacher, or recreation district professional. Whether done by paid or volunteer coaches, however, the parents must not be left out of the process. Parents often know the sport as well as anyone. They know kids better. They have a vested interest in both the process and the outcome. There is nothing taught in college that trumps parents’ knowledge of their kids.

Yes, sometimes parents are destructive. Sometimes they get carried away – too far away. This is often a problem with the process, not the parent.

On occasion, problem parents do need to be purged from the organization. When the government is in control, it’s very difficult to purge troublemakers. How can the government tell a taxpayer to take a hike? It can’t, and it doesn’t. Thus, the school or recreation district asks all parents to take a pledge to stay out of the process. Yes, the rare parent is a troublemaker. But parents come at no cost. No taxes are needed to pay parent coaches. For all these reasons, parental organizing and coaching of kids’ team sports is generally better than using professionals.

Paid coaches generally think they have to do it all alone. After all, isn’t that what they are paid for? Therefore, they exclude the parents. Sometimes, recreation districts adopt the paid coach approach. They typically ask parents to sign a pledge to “keep out of it.” This is exactly the wrong approach!

The paid coach will want a paid assistant, paid mileage, trips for training, seminars for improvement and other costly extras ad nauseam. Then the organization needs more money to throw at “the problems.” Often, these very problems are created by excluding parents.

Don’t believe the mantra that “parents are different now than in the past.” They “don’t want to be involved” or “don’t have time to be involved.” Parents are no different now than they ever were. The

kids are usually number one in their hearts and minds. They want to see their kids get the best teaching and training available. They want to see them succeed. They generally want to be involved in their kids' sports. They will find the time to be involved. In kids' sports, there are many ancillary jobs that don't take much time but will get the parents involved, as I will discuss later.

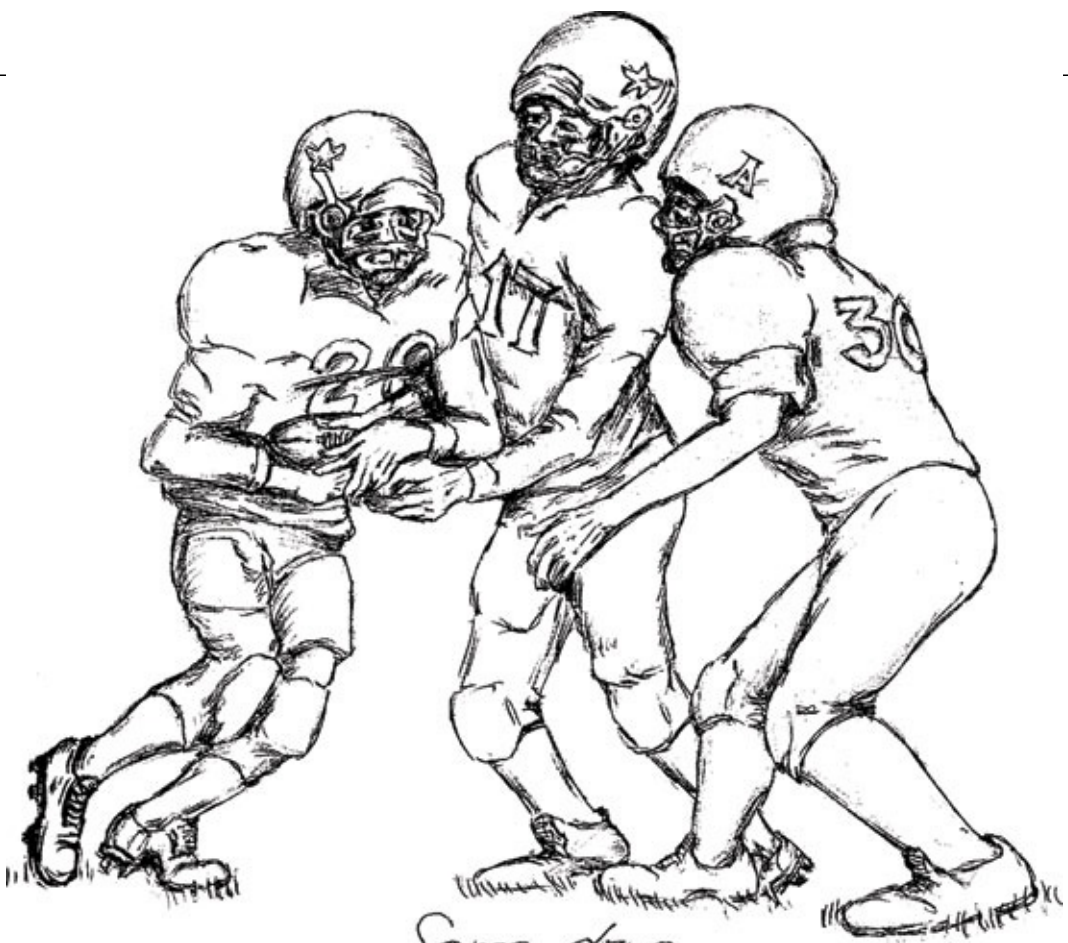
Who needs the government to coach kids' sports anyway? Probably those parents who want someone to baby-sit their kid. Should we pay taxes to make youth sports a baby-sitting service? The few parents who don't want to be involved should hire a baby sitter, not dump their kids on a coach. An association of parents, with parents coaching and helping, is the better choice.

Volunteer parents should be used to coach, officiate, organize, and administrate. Parents should coach the kids and organize the program while the government should furnish the field, rink, park, or court and pledge to stay out of the process. The parents lead, the kids follow, and the government gets out of the way.

Having said this, I recognize that paid coaches may be here to stay in some communities. Whether they work for a recreation districts or schools, paid coaches should still include the parents in the process. Paid coaches and their organizations should follow the rules I'm recommending.

Whether you are a volunteer or paid, realize that some days nothing works. That is how it will seem. That's the time to put the mind to work over the matter. If nothing seems to be working, it is probably for lack of positive planning, thinking, training, and practice – coach's responsibilities. Think over what went wrong and resolve to correct it by the next practice.





Some days—  
Nothing works!

A Venezia

## CAN YOU COACH KIDS?

**S**o you think you can coach kids. You know you can. After all, you have played the game – perhaps even excelled at the game. You know the rules. You have studied the fine points, watched the pros, and understand the strategy. All of this qualifies you to be a semi-failure when coaching kids. Lots of kid-coaches have those qualifications. Lots of us have been partial failures in our first season or two. For example, knowing your sport too well may cause you to make your teaching too complex for young kids.

I'm talking here about the formative years of elementary and middle school. When we are with young kids we need to keep it simple. Basics. More Basics. Add slight nuances depending upon the age.

In fact, if you're a real student of the sport and it's your hobby, then your chances of failure with young kids may be greater than the next coach's. You will probably lose them before your first practice is over, instead of somewhere around the third game as I did. Of course, younger kids need more simplification than older middle school players.

I'll use baseball as an example. At earlier ages, with someone on first and a ground ball hit to the infield, forget the double play. Keep it simple. Teach your players to make the throw to first and get the easy out. As they get older, teach them to cut down the lead runner. Then, at a later age, go for the double play. At exactly what age depends on the talent available.

Now don't burn this book and call the league to tell them to forget it. You can coach. You will do a much better job than I did. You will also probably learn more than the kids will. And it will likely be more rewarding for you than for the kids.

The coach's first priority must be to help young players enjoy the game. If they are having fun and practice moves fast, they will learn easily. If instructions or expectations are too complex, it will be difficult for both you and them to have fun.

I want you to have just enough doubt about your kid-coaching ability to finish this book. Maybe you can learn from this coach's 472 mistakes. I'm well-qualified to tell you how to make mistakes when coaching kids. Please do not panic. I will not cover all 472 mistakes. I can't even remember them all. I have, however, made some (or seen some made) over and over, and I remember those well. I will frequently slip into my coach's ego and tell you how to do it "right."

Experience is the best teacher, so don't expect to progress without mistakes. Just resolve to recognize them and correct them as soon as is practical, which will probably be in the next practice instead of in a game. This book may help you avoid some mistakes. More importantly, it will help you recognize and correct them promptly.

Let me ask again: Can you coach kids? Of course you can. What you choose to teach them, how much

you teach them, how much fun they have, how much they like the sport, how happy the parents are, and how much your team wins may all be different issues.

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## CLEAR AND SIMPLE – ASSUME NOTHING

**A**s an assistant coach for a kids' basketball team, I was telling the kids to rebound under both baskets – to fight harder for rebounds. One kid, listening intently, asked, “Coach, what’s a rebound?” He wasn’t the only kid who didn’t understand. Now ask yourself what will happen when the coach, not having defined and demonstrated a rebound, goes on to explain that defensive rebounds must be cleared to the outside for a fast break in transition? Instructions need to be simple, clear, and demonstrated, demonstrated, demonstrated, and then practiced, practiced, practiced.

When coaching tee ball, I spent a lot of practice time teaching the kids about batting, catching ground balls, and throwing to first. When the first game rolled around, one of my boys got wood on the ball – his first in a game. We hollered, “RUN, RUN, RUN”! He did run – directly to third base. I had neglected to cover base running. What do they say about how to spell assume?

As a hockey coach, I told my players to keep their sticks on the ice. This is for safety, and because that is where the puck is. Also, it’s the best position for reaction to most any situation. As we talked, one kid held his stick waist high. I looked at him and said, “Stick on the ice!” He looked around and did nothing. I pointed at him and said, more loudly, “Stick on the ice!” He finally dropped his stick on the ice. After an embarrassing moment, I showed all of them that the best position for almost all situations is to keep the blade of the stick on the ice, while keeping one’s knees bent and head up. Demonstrate to the kids, with an action, what you mean and what you want them to learn.

The worst example of this was a football coach I saw screaming to his kids during a game to “PLAY FOOTBALL!” The veins stood out on his neck. He screamed it many times. “PLAY FOOTBALL!” It was certainly simple enough but not very clear. They thought that’s what they were doing.

This is like hollering my dog’s name at my dog. “BLUE! BLUE! BLUE!” The dog glances at me and says to himself, “Yep, that’s my name. Do you want me to sit, stay, come, lie down, fetch, or what?”

When the coach hollers “play football,” what happens? The kids who were doing something right probably decide that they were doing it wrong. Those doing something wrong still don’t know it and will continue doing it wrong. The direction to “play football” doesn’t help any of them. If all the coach can think of is gross generalizations like “play football,” he or she should keep their mouth shut. Abraham Lincoln said, “Better to keep my mouth shut and be thought a fool, than to open it and remove all doubt.”

Maybe you have some time or schedule limitations and want a partner to co-coach. I co-coached a girls’ softball team and a boys’ coach-pitch baseball team (where a coach pitched underhand to his/herself own team). The other coach and I were very successful. This can work, but you have to put a little

extra attention into coordinating the job, and the co-coach should also be a parent of one of kids on the team.

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Co-coaching a boys baseball team, I remember telling the kids to put their glove on their knee when in the defensive-ready position. Jerry the co-coach had already told them not to put their glove on their knee but to have it ready by the knee. We had them fully confused! Before the pitch, we'd call to them to "be ready, guys." They would go through something that looked like a dance while glancing back and forth between us. We had both missed the point. While either method is OK, neither of us had explicitly demonstrated the important points: keep your feet apart, knees bent, glove on or near your knee, and watch the ball/ batter, not us.



We got together to agree on what “be ready” meant and had good success. We also worked with the kids to determine where the play was for every situation and kept it simple. Then, before each new batter, we would ask, “Where is your play?” Baseball moves “slowly” enough to allow you to do that providing you have covered each situation in practice.

Co-coaching does have definite advantages. If something goes wrong, you can always blame the other guy. If a kid isn’t called about a practice or a schedule change, you can always blame the other guy. Also, if you are coaching alone, the team tends to take on your personality. You may be surprised by what you see. You might not even like what you see. One year, by about the second game, I looked around and saw my kids constantly telling each other what they were doing wrong. They were great critics. Listening carefully, I heard my own words coming from their mouths. If I had a co-coach I would have blamed him or her.

In general, you should coach the team alone. Don’t share the responsibility and run the risk of confusing the kids and the parents. This doesn’t mean that you have to do it all alone. It doesn’t mean that you won’t have a couple of assistant coaches. It does mean that the buck stops with one person – the coach.

Remember the golden rule of coaching kids during a game: One encouragement is better than three critiques. Even in practice, the best method is to demonstrate or have a kid demonstrate the correct

way, rather than point out the one kid who is doing it wrong.

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As Gary Mack wrote in *Mind Gym*, “Many Little League parents don’t realize the damage they do to their child’s self-esteem with their negative comments. When you tell a Little Leaguer that he failed, you are telling him that he is a failure. Children internalize failure.” He was referring to parents, but the same goes for coaches. Fear, harsh critiques, and embarrassment can work when kids get older, but not at young ages.

Think about your coaches when you were growing up. What did they do that you liked, what was most fun, and what kept you thinking about the important aspects of the game?

Do read a book about coaching your sport. Try to find a book that is directed at kids. Failing that, find a book that is structured so that the basics are separated from the advanced techniques. Look for the basic drills and plays. Weave them into your plan.

Some books are structured from the basics up. Absorb the basics and understand the skills progression that is age-appropriate for your group.

Must the coach have played the sport? Preferably yes, but you don’t have to have played at the semi-pro level to coach kids. If the league needs coaches, go for it regardless of your experience. Coaches with no playing experience have been very successful. You may do a better job than someone with more credentials.

The parents and kids don’t expect a professional performance from the coach. Kids expect you to make it fun for them. Parents expect you to teach the kids some basics in keeping with their age and prior experience. If the kids are going to have fun, the most significant thing you can do is avoid boredom. You need to find ways to make practices move quickly, be intense, and be fun. And you must involve the parents. You must find a way to relate to them and have them relate to both kids and parents.

One of my son’s coaches purposely demonstrated the wrong way to do a task. He would laugh at himself, and the kids would laugh and go do it the right way. If they made a mistake on that task in practice he would say, “You did that as bad as I do!”

I used that general idea when teaching handicapped kids to ski. When they fell, I’d try to fall as quickly as possible, laughing all the way. They would look at me and laugh too. Then I’d tell them, “you aren’t falling, you aren’t learning.” I learned to ski backwards so the kids could follow me and still see what I was doing, and I learned to fall from that posture pretty well.

This is not to say that you shouldn’t have behavior rules and enforce them, especially regarding rules about the handling of sticks and bats. Have a few well-thought-out rules. For example, a coach must expect quiet when he or she is talking. Thus, my number one rule: “When it’s my turn to talk, it’s your turn to listen.” And if the kids aren’t looking at you, chances are good they aren’t listening.

**N**eed I even say that an unwritten rule prohibits smoking, drinking, or swearing with the kids around! Some folks think that swearing makes their message more intense. This could be true with some adults, but it certainly isn't true with kids. Kids will only focus on the words, not the message. Intensity doesn't come from swearing. It comes from your practice time. And the kids will reflect your behavior – good or bad. I will discuss more on intense practices later.

I recently attended a family member's soccer game. The kids on the opposition were swearing on the field – foul stuff. The swearing was directed at the opposition players. When the coach was called on it, he had an attitude that was indicative of a problem. He shrugged and raised his hands – palms up – several times, meaning, “What can I do?” He also said it out loud.

But the answer to his question is simple. This coach only needed to say that he would talk to his team to tell them that swearing is not tolerated. If you don't understand how simple this is, shrug and raise your hands palms up! If you just did that, close this book and don't coach.

When it comes to officials making perceived mistakes, let the officials know you disagree but don't make much of it at the time. If you do, you could be giving your kids an excuse for losing. They can quickly decide that if the coach thinks the officiating is biased, they might not have a chance to win.

Only a tiny fraction of games are so close that an official's calls will affect the result. If you are loud and overbearing about it, the official may look closer than ever to find your team's transgressions. That's just human nature. Bite your tongue! Take consistent bias or serious complaints to the association and the other complaints to the reading room.

When coaching these young kids, you are typically coaching your own kid(s), too. Coaching your own kids, especially boys, is difficult. Kids may not take coaching from Mom or Dad well. Also, we coaches may not be as patient with our own children as we are with others.

What should you do? Put them on a different team? That doubles the number of trips and hours involved. Yet I heard this seriously suggested on a radio show once. No, just sit down with your assistants and make a deal. No coach will tell his own kid what to do or not do or how to do it. Instead, each coach will privately ask one of the other coaches on the team to tell their kid what to do.

Your kid will listen much better to the other coach. In fact, after practice your kid is likely to tell you exactly what the other coach said, as if you didn't know. Just say, “Oh yeah, that sounds like a good idea to me!”

You and your assistants need to display the kind of behavior that will inspire the kids, not distract them.



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