

10 Skills of Great Coaches – A Guide for Youth Sport Coaches

By Jack Perconte

A memorable quote from an unknown source goes like this, “A year or two from now your players will not remember anything you taught them. But forever, they will remember how you made them feel.” Besides players’ parents, a child’s sports coach is often the most influential person in their life. Unfortunately, the impact that many youth sport coaches have on kids is a negative one.

One of the most common gripes in youth sports is “The coach stinks.” When kids do not perform up to their parents or their own expectations, it is common for players and parents to blame the child’s coach. Often, parents have unrealistic expectations of their child’s coach and they forget that sport success is difficult to achieve. On the other hand, parents often have a legitimate gripe. Many youth coaches are not adequately prepared to coach youth sports. Often, youth coaches do not have the communication skills or the positive outlook that enhance kids self-esteem. Youth sport leagues often provide sport-specific-skills clinics to help coaches’ knowledge of the sport but they fail to help coaches with the things that are most important – how to deal with youth so that kids have the positive experiences they should have.

If youth sports organizations did a better job of developing their coaches’ communication and confidence-building skills towards youth, the coaching gripe would mostly disappear. Teaching youth game strategy and sports skills are necessary, but equally important is that adults learn to treat youth in a way that will have a positive impact on them forever. Sports organizations should teach their coaches the mindset that great coaches have. Following is a list of skills that great sport coaches possess.

Great sport coaches:

1. Commit to help every player on the team equally, not just their own child or the better players. 2. Have a good background in the sport or obtain sufficient knowledge of the sport to help players of that particular age level.
3. Are aware of the safety issues involved in the sport and always put the emotional and physical health of the players first.
4. Explain their coaching philosophy at the beginning of the season and remain true to the stated philosophy.
5. Have teams and individuals that are better players and people at the end of the season than at the beginning. This can be done by following these points which promote being a positive role model. Kids learn by observing adult’s behavior.
6. Encourage and teach the fundamentals and strategy of sport with understanding and patience. Recognize the difference between effort and results and the difference between physical and mental mistakes.
7. Remain enthusiastic about the sport and coaching, and display this enthusiasm to players in good times and bad.

8. Do not ridicule individuals or team with negative words or gestures.

9. Demonstrate sportsmanship, fairness and leadership at all times and teach those attributes to players through words and example.

10. Always keep the lines of communication open among players, coaches and parents.

Finally, parents of youth athletes should recommend to their league officials some form of "how-to work with kids training," for all coaches, to ensure a positive sport experience for all.

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