

The Coach's Role

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The Role of the Coach

After this course, you will become coaches, and regardless of your past, as coaches, you will bear a responsibility. It's likely that you'll be coaching youth teams, young children, and you will be a significant figure to them. They will look up to you and see you as a role model. Moreover, you have the duty to educate them both as soccer players and as sports enthusiasts.

You will need to explain or teach them how one should behave when they win, how one should act when they lose, how one should conduct themselves during training, how one should handle injustice, and the everyday etiquettes (for instance, greeting upon arrival and departure from the session).

We will initially focus on the role of the coach as an educator of individuals and later as a soccer educator. We believe that soccer education is crucial; it's not enough just to teach them to be good athletes. We also need to impart soccer knowledge, as they chose this sport over handball, hockey, basketball, athletics, or tennis.

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Coaching with Values

Key values include:

Prioritizing effort over results.

Valuing effort more than talent.

Respecting teammates, the opposing team, the referee, and spectators.

It's crucial to lead by example in this regard. Typically, children might not be the best listeners, but they excel at imitation.

Teach, and first understand, that at this age, learning is more important than the outcome. One could argue if this holds true throughout life, but that's a deeper discussion. What's evident is that during the early years, learning takes precedence over results.

We must distinguish between results and learning. We'll delve into how to do this later.

As we'll see, we'll address different aspects of the game each week. Thus, competition is just another facet of education and learning.

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Coaching with Habits

As coaches, we should instill or teach habits common in many sports, especially team

sports, and even some non-team sports. These habits can also be applied to other areas of athletes' lives.

We refer to these habits as:

Punctuality: As coaches, we should always be the first to arrive for training sessions and matches. This sets the standard for our players and establishes a positive work dynamic, optimizing training time.

During Training: Merely arriving on time isn't enough. Arrive early to set up the necessary equipment for the session (balls, bibs, cones, etc.).

During Matches: Even if we have assistance (assistant coach, delegate, etc.), as the head coach, we should have all the required match equipment ready: warm-up balls, bibs, player cards, match attire, first aid kit, water bottles, etc.

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Personal Appearance

Dress appropriately for the task at hand. If we're coaching, we should wear training attire. Ideally, if it's not too cold, wear football boots and avoid caps unless it's very sunny; avoid headphones and sunglasses.

Always wear the club-provided uniform during training and matches. If not provided, choose a consistent uniform.

When coaching, be 100% present. Give the same level of commitment and attention we expect from our players.

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Time Management: Both in training sessions and matches, we should aim to arrive 5 minutes early, if possible, to start preparing the field (we'll delve deeper into this the next day). But we also need to account for breaks during training, finishing on time, and the same goes for matches: arriving on time to find the changing room, get changed, warm up, and then be ready for the match.

Time management, in the beginning, will be trickier than as we gain more experience.

Until we have that experience, we'll encounter situations like not being able to complete all the exercises we had planned, taking longer than expected to set up cones for an exercise, or realizing that everything's set up, players are in place, cones are ready, but the balls are still in the bag.

This time management skill is learned by doing, like most things in life. During the initial training sessions, you'll find yourself constantly checking the time, but gradually it will become second nature.

All coaches make mistakes, and often one can lose track of time.

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Personal Relationships

We need to effectively manage personal relationships with others.

Listening is one of the most important values in a leader, and this is what we should do in our role as coaches.

If we want to receive proper attention and respect from others (players, opponents, referees, coaches, delegates, etc.), we must demand the same from ourselves, bearing in mind that we represent the image of the team we coach.

We must show genuine appreciation and never criticize. If we apply this with our players, opponents, referees, club staff, etc., we can influence them more easily.

This will help us achieve our goals.

Remember that our main goal is to educate our players in a way that knowledge lasts over time.

As coaches, we must treat our players with care and respect.

We need to ensure that players show respect for referees and their decisions. They are a part of the game, and like players, they can make mistakes.

We must set an example to improve the world of football by creating an atmosphere of respect towards referees.

It's crucial for the health of the sport to respect and even admire referees. Without them, none of this would be possible.

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Football Coach

Lastly, we are football teachers. We need to educate in the sport and explain, teach, show, and make them think about the best ways and alternatives to play this sport.

Often, this part is taken to the extreme; that is, some focus solely on the values we've explained before and forget that children invest between three and six hours a week in this activity, considering training sessions, traveling to and from training, and the weekend match or tournament. Therefore, it's essential they learn football; otherwise, they would have chosen another sport, as we've mentioned. Others fall on the opposite extreme and focus on being football teachers. Their goal is performance; they want to win, often at any cost. An example would be positioning your best player, who is much taller than the rest, in an offside position in countries where offside isn't played, in seven-a-side or five-a-side football, to pass them balls and score goals. This is an extreme example to illustrate a coach focused solely on performance.

How much do each of the players learn in this case?

What we're looking for is precisely what we've been explaining so far: someone who embodies all the previous values, understands that we must educate in values, habits, and football. We'll explore how we can learn football.

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Watch Wenger's Video and Comment:

What's your opinion on his words?

What responsibility do we have as coaches?

Does the data Wenger provides influence the way we should train? Does it influence our goals?

How We Learn

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To learn football, we need to create the necessary conditions for learning to be possible.

Let's use an example: you don't learn to cook Italian food by reading Italian cookbooks, nor do you learn to love Italian cuisine by cooking parts of Italian dishes; meaning, you only chop the onion or just boil the pasta.

You also don't truly learn something if you don't make mistakes, if there's no friction, if I tell you exactly what to do and you don't internalize it and don't know why you're doing it, there's no learning. Without mistakes, learning is challenging.

Another clear example is school. We hardly remember anything we learned in sixth or ninth grade. We only remember to pass the exam.

The difference between education and learning is that education is something we do to get a paper, a diploma.

In education, we ask: Is this on the exam?

When we learn, we don't realize we're learning. There's no exam.

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If we tell players what they should do, they will behave as we want; meaning, they learn to do things we want, but they don't understand why and in other situations, because football is extremely complex, they won't know what decision to make because we haven't taught them to think, to make decisions; we've taught them to follow our instructions or orders.

All this is to say that there are two approaches to education, two teaching styles:

The reproduction teaching style, known as the traditional style. As you can imagine, it's a teaching style where the coach gives orders without worrying if the player understands the reason behind them.

One of the positive aspects of this style is that results come faster.

If we tell the player what to do, the player will execute the order, and we'll likely see results.

The problem is that we are the ones giving the order. What will happen when we're not there? Will the player know what to do?

There's a chance they might, but they'll probably focus on following instructions rather than thinking of possible solutions.

The production teaching style, also known as cognitive or discovery styles. From the name, we understand it's different. With this style, the goal is for learning to be more lasting and more meaningful; meaning, the player understands the why.

How do we achieve this? By forcing them to make decisions to different problems we present. In football, we call these problems "exercises." The moment we force them to make decisions, they will make mistakes, and these mistakes are an opportunity to learn.

It's crucial to use mistakes as a step towards learning. We shouldn't punish mistakes at young ages, but we should talk about them.

Another important aspect we'll discuss later is the difference between technical errors and decision-making errors.

The tool we use in this type of teaching is questions.

For example, if we're playing a possession game and a player makes a bad pass because they give it to the opposing player. What we should do during a break, or if we want to do it at the moment, is ask: "What happened? Why did you lose the ball?" Then the player will think and give us an answer. We can always guide them; then we'll ask: "How could we have avoided this? What could you have done?"

In this way, the player will think and, with our help guiding them, will understand that they probably didn't observe the surroundings before passing or made another mistake.

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Future Coaches:

As future coaches, you're likely to start coaching teams of young players.

If this is the case, you should try to use a productive style with questions most of the time to ensure they fully grasp all concepts and situations.

When you coach or if you coach teams of players over 17 years old, where results are

generally more important, the style will be more reproductive. However, asking questions and helping them understand the "why" of things is also important.

In conclusion, it's impossible to be entirely purist and always use questions or never use them; we will always mix the two styles.

It's important to consider which style to use more depending on the team we're coaching.

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Guided Discovery

We will use questions and try to guide players to find solutions, forcing them to think and be attentive. When the player verbalizes the answer, they believe it more, and we should gradually get used to using questions instead of orders.

If a player learns with a productive style, they learn to make decisions, understand the game, and will know how to make decisions on the football field. This knowledge will even serve them in other team sports like handball, basketball, etc.

They will learn to occupy spaces, understand what happens when a player moves, generate spaces, and understand the objective of the game. In other words, we're helping the player have a global vision of the game and understand that their decisions affect the team's results.

It's common to find coaches using the reproductive style (even if they don't know what it's called), especially during matches.

Here things get complicated; we must be patient. We can't engage in an ego battle against the other coach and start giving directions and orders to our players.

It's logical that a team of any age under 15 trained by a coach who gives orders will play better or, at least, have a better chance of winning.

The coach is making decisions for them and helping them from the outside to see solutions to different problems they may encounter on the field.

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Meaningful Learning

Ensuring our players, especially the young ones, achieve or acquire meaningful, lasting learning is a common goal for all coaches.

To apply productive styles, as we know, we should ask players questions.

These questions aim to help players find solutions to different situations, tasks, or problems presented.

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Prepare Questions:

Preparing these questions before training is vital; obviously, we must be flexible and adapt to the answers we receive.

The more experience we have, the better we'll do. But this shouldn't be a reason not to try.

In future lessons of this course, we will study the different technical and tactical actions of football.

Each action has guidelines or details.

It's easier to pose questions when you know the objective of the training or the specific exercise. We'll work on this later.

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Typical Questions:

Below, we list some "typical" questions that we can ask; you can use, vary, and adapt them to your team.

It's common or necessary to ask more than one question many times, as they might not understand the objective of it, or they need a more specific question or a question that includes an example.

The "trick", as with almost everything in life, is to practice. The more questions we prepare at home, the more questions we ask, and the more answers we receive, the better questions we'll ask, and the more comfortable we'll feel.

Typical questions

- Are you occupying the best possible space?
- Are you helping your teammates in the position you're in?
- How can you be more useful?
- Can you see the entire field from this position? How could you solve this, even partially? How could you improve it?
- Are you creating a passing line?
- What makes the defender's action more difficult? And less?
- What could happen if you drive the ball?
- How could you prevent the ball from being taken from you?

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Benefits of Asking Questions:

With questions, we achieve:

- Generating concerns in players
- Generating curiosity to learn
- Increasing attention
- Focusing players on what we're working on
- Internalizing learning
- Raising awareness about the performance of the players

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Session Design:

Our sessions should be designed so that solutions to problems, challenges, or proposed challenges must be found.

Exercises or tasks like matches, conversations, or waves (we'll see details when we talk about Methodology) are ideal, as they favor or facilitate players making decisions. These are what we call open tasks.

As a counter-example, we would have tasks like passing wheels or tasks where we work on automatisms. In these tasks, the player doesn't make decisions, as it's the coach who decides what to do, and the player executes and repeats (these tasks fit into a reproductive teaching style).

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Open vs. Closed Tasks:

In the video link below, we can see the difference between open and closed tasks.

Ask the class what they think they're working on in each of the exercises.

In both cases, we're working on short passing as the central axis.

It's obvious that the group working on conservation works on many more things than passing, but focusing only on passing, we clearly see that the pass changes every moment depending on my teammate, the opponent, proximity, body position of these, and mine.

The pass in this scenario is much more "real", and we find that we practice passing many times without being isolated but within a football context (opponent, ball, objective).

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Feedback and Questions:

Without going into the type of feedback given in each of the video cases, it's quite obvious that the number of questions we can ask is much greater in the case of the open exercise or task.

Exercise:

Write 10 possible questions you could ask players during the break of the open exercise from the previous video.

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Important Attitudes for Continuous Improvement:

There are some very important attitudes for the continuous improvement of the player.

Some of these attitudes are intrinsic, meaning they are attitudes that the player must have, while others are extrinsic, meaning they are attitudes of the coach towards the player, that is, ours towards the player.

The intrinsic attitudes are discipline, responsibility, and attitude.

As coaches, we must help players have better discipline, responsibility, and attitude.

Discipline: Much has been written about discipline. The more discipline we have, the freer we are. Discipline is doing what we have to do, whether we feel like it or not; if today we don't feel like training, we'll train without the desire, but we'll train.

This is very difficult, especially for young children. A good idea is to ask at the beginning of training who doesn't feel like training and then have a good training session and ask the same at the end and show them that even training without the desire, their mood is much better after training.

If players apply this discipline in other aspects of their life, it will be very important.

If you have the discipline to attend the entire course, you'll have the reward of having the title and perhaps coaching a big club in the city.

We must help players with discipline in aspects like listening when we speak, arriving on time, picking up the balls when they need to be picked up, and all these details.

It's also distinctly important for discipline to listen when the coach speaks, to come immediately when called, not to play with balls between exercises, etc.

If players fail in any of these aspects, we can use consequences. These consequences work much better if the players decide on them.

An example would be, for instance, arriving late to training, the late player has to run a lap around the field, do 10 squats, 10 push-ups, or whatever consequence we've decided on.

10-MINUTE BREAK (Coffee, tea, relax)