

7 ESSENTIAL STANDARDS FOR DEVELOPING A COACHING PHILOSOPHY

1. *How do you implement and establish visions, goals and standards for your sport program?*

At the beginning of each season, and periodically throughout the course of each season, all of our team coaches and directors will meet to discuss our goals and expectations for our individual teams as well as the overall program as a whole. In addition to this collaboration between coaches and directors within our own program, we are always working hard to educate ourselves by attending coaching clinics, sharing ideas and experiences with coaches from other organizations, pursuing new certifications and licenses and just playing and watching the game and learning from the game itself. After meeting with our coaches and directors, and putting a plan in place for the upcoming season, it is then each individual coach's responsibility to have a team meeting with players and parents at the start of their team training to discuss and implement our philosophy and make clear their team's goals and expectations for the season.

2. *Do you have a code of conduct and how do you go about enforcing the code? Who enforces the code-athletes or the coach? Does your code of conduct just pertain to the sport or does it go beyond?*

For our coaches and directors, we have a strict code of conduct that is enforced and expected to be respected at all times by all adults representing our program. For the athletes, we believe more in core values. Community, Culture, Passion, Inspiration and Education. These are our five pillars. Coaches are expected to model these values to their players, and we expect our players to hold each other accountable to live up to them. If they are repeatedly failing to do so, then it is the coach's responsibility to determine the necessary next action. We recognize that our players are still just kids, so the expectation is that they will make mistakes, but we expect them to RESPECT the game and all those associated with it. These core values are something we hope has an effect on our players off the field, just as much as on the field, for years to come.

3. *Why is it important to maintain good relationships with athletes? How do you work to develop relationships with the athletes' parents? Do you utilize social media with your team? Personally?*

I personally believe that it is important to maintain good relationships with your athletes for a number of reasons. For starters, if you demand or expect respect from someone, you MUST show them that same respect. Many times I hear coaches say that they don't need their players to like them, and I agree with this point to a certain extent. I agree that it is a coach's job to challenge and push their athletes to become better players and better individuals off of the field, and they are not there to be the player's friend. I also believe though that players will find more success in whatever it is that they're doing if they're actually looking forward to doing it. Any player who fears coming to practice, or dreads showing up to training, is not going to get the most out of that training. Especially with the younger generation of players, they need to feel as though their coach cares about them to be motivated to play for them. There is a distinct difference between being hard on a player and challenging them, and just downright being nasty to them. The very best coaches find a way to challenge their players and push them while still letting them know that they care about them. When this happens, it is easy for those players to not only respect that coach, but to like them and look forward to playing for them as well. As for parents, it is never easy balancing those relationships. It will always be difficult to have a team full of happy parents, but my philosophy is to just be open and honest with them and keep an open line of communication at all times. We have a club page on Instagram and Facebook that I personally monitor and we try to keep the kids involved by capturing moments or videos from games, players of the week, or even acknowledging individual or group accomplishments off of the field.

4. *Has the phrase "safe sports environment" changed during your career? What are some examples from your own coaching experience that have shaped your "safe coaching environment"? Does your school have any specific codes that student athletes must abide by?*

There has definitely been a huge push over the course of the last few years to expand each coach's knowledge of what a safe sports environment is. Some of the requirements in order to coach include a background screening, concussion, first aid, cpr, aed training, and a safesport online training program. Ten years ago when I first started coaching club soccer the requirements to get started were minimal.

5. *How do you prepare your practices? What intensity level do you plan to take? Is it different for the athletes and coaches? How do you keep all athletes involved? How is playtime decided?*

As far as preparation for practices goes, it varies based upon the team, time of year, upcoming competitions, etc. As for a single session, I like for my training sessions to always be progressive. For the younger, foundation age groups I follow the Play/Practice/Play format typically focusing on a single topic and always ending with some form of match play. With the

older age groups, we tend to do a lot more functional training of specific positions or the team as a whole. As for intensity, I believe that my intensity level will directly affect my players' intensity level. If I want them to work hard, I've got to push them and motivate them to do so. If it is a relaxed, maybe recovery session, my tone and intensity have to reflect that. I try to keep all of my players involved by designing activities that keep them engaged at all times. You will rarely EVER see any lines, laps, or long lectures at any of my sessions. Ball to player ratios are always kept low as well so that the players are all maximizing their touches on the soccer ball. As for playing time, I believe that everyone on the team deserves and gets a chance to play within every game. We are a pay to play sport. The kids want to play. With that said, how much time they play is earned by their attitude, effort and performance in practice and in matches.

6. When do you feel your practices are most effective? Splitting the team into work groups or training as a single unit-which style works best for you or when would you use one or the other?

It really depends on the team and/or the topic. Technical activities should always be smaller work groups to maximize each player's touches on the ball. If the goal of the session is a tactical component then training as a single unit makes most sense because it is important that all the players understand their individual responsibilities within the group.

7. How do you use self-reflection and life experiences to influence your players? How do you evaluate yourself for improvement?

I love talking to my players before or after a training session or match and relating things that have happened on or off of the field with them to an experience of mine from the past. I believe we as coaches are educators first, and what better way to teach than by reflecting back on our own past experiences and helping the players to "learn from the past". In addition to the knowledge the players may gain from sharing those experiences, I think it also helps them relate on a personal level and gain a different level of trust or respect for their coach. As for self-reflection or evaluation, we have certain self-reflection forms for our coaches. It can be difficult to get coaches to fill them out at times, but for me the best self-evaluation is watching my teams play, then going and watching some of the other teams within the local area play. I love to watch and listen to other coaches, research their sessions and compare and relate my style to theirs. I am my toughest critic and I am a firm believer in always expanding my knowledge of the game, any way that I can.