

Youth Sports Coaching: Not a Job, but a Calling!

by [John O'Sullivan](#) / Wednesday, 15 October 2014 / Published in [Coaching, Leadership](#)

So they call you Coach, huh? Have you ever stopped to consider what that means?

You have taken on one of the most beautiful, powerful, and influential positions a person can ever have. Some people may call it a job, and others a profession, but in reality, being a great coach is not that at all. It is so much more than that.

By becoming a coach, you have chosen to work with young athletes. You have chosen to guide them through the trials and tribulations of learning two beautiful games: sport and life. You are in a position to change their lives forever, not only by making them better athletes, but better people. You are a leader, you are a role model, you are a person who serves your athletes, and you are a person to whom they entrust their physical and emotional well-being.

Never take this responsibility lightly.

Coaching can be one of the most difficult jobs in the world. We work with young athletes in highly emotional and public situations. We keep score, and because of that our work is often judged week to week, even day to day, based upon the performance of a bunch of kids, how well they play, how much they play, and where they play.

Every time we coach, our words and actions can have a huge impact in the lives of our players, both positively and negatively. We are faced with moments of success and failure, and with calls from officials both good and bad. Our words and actions in these situations can stick with our players forever.

The thing is, **we don't get to choose which things stick, and which ones they forget, so in everything we say and do, we have to choose wisely.**

Coaching also means you will be dealing with parents. Many of them are wonderful, and will support you and be grateful that you have taken the time and energy to teach and mentor their child. Celebrate them, and be thankful they are on your team.



Others are not so wonderful. They have unrealistic expectations for their children and the team. They will be a friend to your face, and an enemy behind your back. They will make life miserable for their own child, and often for you and the rest of the team as well. Do your best to educate them and minimize their negativity, and empower

others to do the same. Most importantly, **be a trusted mentor for their child. Those kids need a positive role model more than most, and it's not their fault that mom or dad has lost the plot.**

The science of coaching and teaching has evolved tremendously in the last few decades. We now know that many coaching and teaching methods used when we were kids are not as effective as once thought. Fear and intimidation does not work as well as an environment of love and respect. Lines and lectures are a thing of the past. Rote repetition is effective only to a point. Just because you taught something does not mean your players learned it. Just because you went over it does not mean they retained it and can replicate it in a game. Far too many coaches are focused on running exercises in practice that are successful 90% of the time, when in reality messy practices that replicate game situations are far more powerful learning tools. Do you have these type of practices on your clipboard?

Every player we coach, we leave a lasting impact. There is no way around this; you will influence every player you come in contact with. What will your influence be? Will it be something positive and affirming that bolsters your athletes and serves them throughout life? Will it be a more fulfilling experience for you and your players, more enjoyable, and more successful?

Or will it be something that tears them down, that diminishes their self worth, that makes them fearful of failure, or ties their self-worth with sports success? We all mean well, but sometimes when we are pushing to win a game, or talking to our teams after a tough loss, we say and do things that we later regret. I know in the past I have, and I never considered for a moment that my harsh, personal and often over the top criticism of a kid might follow him or her off the field. But it did.

I believe that being a coach is so much more than running a bunch of practices and organizing kids for games. It is about connecting with your players as people first, and athletes second.



It is about being passionate, and loving the game you teach, so your players will play with passion and love.

It is about empathy, making every player feel important, and giving him or her a role on the team.

It is about integrity and consistency for kids during good times and bad.

It is about being a model of the behavior you expect from your athletes, both on and off field of battle.

It is about being a teacher, not only of the X's and O's of a sport, but about life, about optimism, about persistence, and about character.

No, coaching cannot simply be a job. It must be a vocation, a calling to a place that best suits your skills, your passion and your ability.

You can change lives with a single word, a single pat on the back, and a single conversation that says "I believe in you."

The world needs great coaches more than ever before. The world needs you!