

A Guide to Coaching Mini Soccer and Youth Football

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Answers to questions that a "new" mini soccer or youth football coach may be afraid to ask - honest opinions and advice based on my personal experience over the last 15 years. Particular focus on player development and wellbeing from day one of your coaching career.

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1. Introduction

I am passionate about Football and have been involved as a player, manager and coach for the last forty years. During that time, I have worked with many different coaches and managers all with different ideas and opinions on how to get the best out of their players. An underlying theme has always been how to win and this has often been the priority. However, when I decided to write this post, I chose to look at football coaching from a different perspective - with the health, wellbeing and enjoyment of the child as the main focus.

As a newcomer there are three key aspects to focus on as a Coach:

- 1) How you conduct yourself and the example you set for your team.
- 2) The wellbeing, enjoyment and development of your players.
- 3) The atmosphere surrounding your team and its supporters. Get these right and everything else will fall into place.

Football is our National game and continues to attract large numbers to the sport each year. Last year alone in the Surrey Youth League 12000 players were registered to approximately 800 teams with 1600 managers and assistants taking up key roles. As children reach the age of four or five many parents seek some form of structured involvement and outside of school this usually takes the form of Mini- Soccer.

Get these right and everything else will fall into place.

My earliest personal experience of Mini-Soccer dates back to 2002 when my two boys were aged seven and four. Sheltering from the wind and rain at our local Football club on a Saturday morning, surrounded by a throng of excitable children waiting for their coaching session to start. The number of coaches was always limited and I confess that part of me had been itching to get involved, but like most parents I had lacked the confidence to volunteer. I decided to take the plunge and from that day forward didn't look back.

Coaching Youth Football has been a memorable experience, filled with uplifting highs and occasional lows - it has been genuinely life changing. When I reflect on my coaching career, it occurred to me that

no-one had acted as my mentor or explained to me what to expect, to a certain extent I had to learn from my mistakes.

There is an assumption that if you have played football to a relatively high standard or have a keen interest in the game that you can automatically be a successful coach. This is not necessarily true. You may argue that there are already many coaching manuals and courses for football at all ages, however you will notice that the vast majority focus solely on the playing side of the game. Skills training, drills, formations, the list is endless. The key area that is often overlooked is how to actually coach, nurture (often hidden) talent and develop young footballers?

A fellow coach and close friend of mine provided me with his opinion as to what is involved and I think he identifies a wider important issue:

“The most important thing when coaching Youth Football to ensure development is to remember that you are not simply coaching football, you are trying to develop all round good people - good people make great footballers.”

Coaching Youth Football has many facets to consider, far more than the score at full time or final league tables. Coaching a group of talented youngsters can be easy, but becoming a talented coach is potentially a lot more difficult.

We live in a results driven world and also an environment that demands instant gratification and success. I would strongly argue that developing a six-year-old over time, teaching them to take responsibility and learn life skills is far more rewarding than any trophy or medal. I do however want to make it clear that I fully understand children like to win and that life can be competitive from an early age. My point is this, structured development and ultimately enjoyment has to be the priority and the result will look after itself. If you get the basics correct, success will follow in whatever way you deem it measurable.

2. Equipment

A key component of Youth Football coaching is ensuring that you have the correct kit and equipment available at all times. This may sound obvious, however the assumption that a few balls and cones will suffice is sadly not the case. An organised and well equipped coach will produce competent and valuable training sessions, as well as being fully prepared on a match day.

Balls

It is vitally important to have a decent supply of balls, I suggest a minimum of one ball per player for training sessions and one between two for match day warm-ups. You will “get what you pay for” and I would certainly recommend paying a little extra for quality. A word of warning though - they can go missing at an alarming rate! I suggest lesser quality all weather balls for training and two or three decent match balls (Nike or Mitre). As a tip, mark the balls with a waterproof “sharpie” pen with your club name and age group. It is also advisable to designate someone responsible for collecting them on a match day after the warm up. Invest in a quality pump and ensure that all the balls are fully inflated before both training sessions and games. Another suggestion is to purchase different coloured balls as they can be easier to identify. Make sure that they are the correct size for the age group that you are working with.

Cones and Poles

As part of your basic equipment you should have a selection of cones, ideally different colours and sizes. They can be used for pitch marking and drill set up. Again look for quality so that they last. A decent

number will be required to help in setting up the pitch for training sessions. Poles can also be used as goalposts, if training on grass when goals are not available.

Bibs

Often overlooked, these simple items will be invaluable to you as a coaching tool. I recommend you purchase a full set of bibs depending on your squad number. Two sets are ideal, one for training and a second set in case of kit clashes on match day. Keep them in good order and keep them clean! Numbered bibs whilst difficult to find can be very useful in the event of a kit clash, especially for a senior game when the referee will need to identify players.

First Aid Kit and Water Bottles

Both of these are essential for the health and wellbeing of your players. From the outset invest in a quality basic First Aid kit (follow FA or League guidelines) and ensure that it meets the required standards. The kit should contain all the basic items (gloves, blanket etc.) however you should take care when administering any treatment and liaise with a qualified First Aider.

Water should always be available both at training sessions and on match-days. Purchase a couple of drink bottle holders and the necessary bottles. Look for quality and keep them clean and in good order - again they tend to grow legs and disappear if not looked after.

Kit and Training Kit

Kit is another key component and can have a massive effect on team morale and ultimately performance. It is important to manage both players and parents/guardians expectations concerning kit as this can be an emotive subject (speaking from experience!)

If your Club ethos is to provide a full set of kit to your players, including numbered shirt, shorts and socks then you must deliver. Do not be tempted to try and mix and match or “make do” - see this as a vital part of your planning.

Young footballers absolutely adore getting new kit and it can adversely affect the team dynamic when problems arise. Children often identify with a favourite number and whilst not easy it is an idea to sort this out as early as possible and then stick to your decision. Seniority and length of service at the Club should entitle players to first choice, the others will have to compromise!

Choose a quality reputable manufacturer and aim for a supplier not likely to discontinue lines or suddenly hike prices. If you can get a parent to act as your “kit manager” this can be really helpful - one less job for you to think about! The operation of a “Club Shop” can help and make it easy for parents to order replacement items.

Miscellaneous other key items

- It is always advisable to have a spare set of shin pads, goalie gloves and a cap in your kit bag on a match day.
- A spare pair of boots can also sometimes save the day, choose an average size for your team!
- Personally, I have always had a whistle, watch and flags just in case emergency referee procedures are invoked! A mum or dad may end up refereeing a game and better to be prepared for any eventuality.
- Make sure you always have your player registration cards, your relevant competition rulebook and details of a trusted contact (with experience) to refer to, plus contact details for any appointed officials.

- A 'second' kit will be required in the event of a clash. I suggest you keep this so that shirts do not go missing!

3. Training

The hard work will be done on the training field, however it should also be where you teach, nurture and enjoy the company of your young footballers.

Firstly, you need to ensure that you give careful consideration to the day, time and venue for your sessions. If it transpires that due to poor planning on your part some of your key players either struggle to attend or cannot make it at all due to other commitments, then problems can arise. Aim to have a strong committed contingent regularly at your sessions, as this will set the tone and your squad will begin to gel.

The venue needs to be suitable and accessible, with an appropriate surface (ideally all weather) and importantly the session time should be age appropriate. You may decide to coach your players, or employ the services of an external coach. If you take this course of action the individual needs to be qualified, vetted (CRB/DBS checks) and fully aware of your aims and ethos. If you decide to coach your players, then a responsibility falls upon your shoulders. You need to project a professional image, be on time and be fully prepared for every session, with detailed plans whenever possible. Always be the first to arrive and the last to leave.

Session content should be age and ability appropriate. Every single session has to be enjoyable and the environment needs to be inclusive. Young footballers are constantly learning, soaking up information like a sponge. It is imperative that players look forward to training and want to attend. The key to success is to make certain that everyone is involved and has a positive experience. Training should never be seen as a chore or something to be avoided. Young footballers often like to participate in other sports and this should always be encouraged. Skills and techniques can often be learnt that can often be useful in their footballing development.

There are many resources that you can refer to for session content, drills etc. Do not forget it is children you are working with and why they are there - probably simply because they love playing football!

Do not over complicate sessions, your aim should be to ensure that everyone has a ball, a smile on their face and feels valued, whilst still making progress. Your players will develop at a different pace; patience is really important. During your sessions, never use sarcasm or negative feedback, this is completely counter productive. A child is unlikely to understand sarcasm in everyday life, so why use it in a coaching environment?

It is as important to be fully prepared and focused before a training session as for a match-day. Consistency is of paramount importance and over the course of a season a solid team training ethic will develop. The foundations of a strong team are built on the training ground. Keep it fresh and update your session content regularly - review what works well and more importantly what your players enjoy. Enjoyment equals engagement and as such your players will progress and develop. In summary here is a quote from a coaching colleague of mine:

“From the first minute to the last of a training session your players must be completely focused to develop their full potential. Training is where the hard graft is done.”

4. Key Roles

The Manager

Football management can be hugely rewarding as well as immensely frustrating, put bluntly the buck stops with you and you are in charge! Before you agree to taking on the role it is important that you appreciate the level of commitment required and whether you are able to give the required time and effort?

Once you have decided to take the role, I strongly recommend that you contact your parents/guardians at the earliest possible opportunity and set your stall out as to how you intend to manage the side and your expectations of them and their children. Speaking from experience, the role can be lonely, nerve wracking and confusing. It can also be fun, enjoyable, rewarding and extremely satisfying. Aim to involve an assistant who is like minded and ideally a close friend. You will want to bounce ideas off of each other, support each other when the going gets tough and ultimately have the same outlook on coaching and what you are trying to achieve. On a match day it is so important to have someone to share the responsibility as well as (hopefully) the enjoyment.

A simple reminder is to focus on the three A's, your Ability, your Appearance and your Attitude. Work on each of these throughout your managerial career and aim to constantly improve.

Working alongside parents and guardians, grandparents or whoever accompanies your players in their formative years is one of the most important aspects of successful development. It is essential to engage with everyone, make them feel part of the bigger picture and fully involved. Clearly state and explain your ethos and at the earliest possible opportunity ensure everyone understands how you intend to manage the side. It is sometimes better to identify issues at an early stage and address them, especially with parents who do not agree with your management style or goals for the development of their child. Occasionally, you may be left with no option other than to part company but this can sometimes be best for all concerned.

The Coach

A certain level of experience and understanding of the role is needed to be a competent Coach in Youth Football. There are many courses and qualifications that you can work towards achieving and remember you have to start somewhere! Don't be put off, focus on your sessions and overall outlook being age and ability appropriate in content and style. You will need to work hard and fully commit to the role. Gaining a deep and meaningful understanding of what makes players "tick", especially as young players develop is key. From as young as fifteen participation in Youth Football starts to decline. Players begin to drift away, often due to outside influences and it is therefore crucial to know your players and retain their enthusiasm and love for the game.

A coaching colleague gave me the following insight in to how they approach coaching:

“Adapt your style and always remember depending on what is happening in your players home or school life, their time playing football may be more important than you think.”

“Realise that all players are not the same, some need an arm around their shoulder and as they get older some need more encouragement. They are all individuals and should be treated as such.”

Some of the players that I have had the pleasure to coach had little parental support as they got older and very often they had nobody to rely on. In that type of situation, the significance of your support and guidance should never be underestimated.

You need to appreciate that if a player has to look after themselves, get to training as well as travel to match day venues, this can be a huge ask and can affect their demeanour, performance and enjoyment of

the game. Be aware that for every child with supportive parents and a safety net to pick them up when they fall, there is another player who has to fend for themselves.

Sometimes, football is an opportunity for young people to feel involved, part of a larger entity, gaining confidence and belief. Camaraderie is a powerful thing; it can really help youngsters with their development.

In summary, here are a couple of final quotes from colleagues:

“Keep it fun, keep it engaging and keep them praised. This will keep them coming back and your players will learn without realising!”

“If you are willing to put in the work then the rewards can be massive”.

General Helpers

Having a solid and supportive group of parents/guardians is another goal to aim for. You will have difficult times as a manager and being able to rely on those closest to your players can be invaluable. On a match-day, simple tasks such as helping with the goals, keeping an eye on the balls or water bottles or even swapping registration cards with the opposition are all jobs that you can always appreciate help with. Travel arrangements to away fixtures can be problematic, especially as your players get older. A core of parents or guardians willing to help with lifts can often save the day.

A Treasurer, or assistant with the administration for your team (subs money, registration fees etc.) is another key role that can take a lot of pressure off of you, making more time for the coaching of your players. If they can also assist in fund raising for your side within the overall Club set up this can also be really helpful and can benefit all concerned - funds may be short and any extra money can always be put to good use!

5. Officials and Respect

The importance of quality, qualified referees in Youth Football cannot be underestimated. Referees can be hard to find and certainly in the early years it can be a thankless task for a less than willing volunteer. The simple fact of the matter is that without a referee a meaningful game cannot take place. During the early part of your coaching career it is advisable to try and align yourself with a Mini Soccer referee who is keen, competent and reliable. This can make a huge difference to your match day experience and the enjoyment of all concerned. I also recommend that you consider taking a basic course yourself, as you never know when you may be called into action!

As your career progresses and your players move towards nine and eventually eleven a side, referees and assistants become an integral part of the game. It is important to realise that referees are volunteers and are often involved because of their love of the game. Many young referees also become involved to earn some additional money whilst studying. Be aware of the appropriate match fees and if it is your responsibility have the money available to pay your referee once the game has finished. Match fees will vary depending on the age group, league and competition. It is advisable to refer to the appropriate guidelines and to confirm with the official to avoid any confusion.

You are likely to have been provided with a League Handbook at the start of the season and I strongly recommend that you familiarise yourself with the basic rules for your age group, for example what to do in the event of a kit clash or how long extra time is for cup games? Keep a copy with you on match day to help deal with any disputes or discrepancies. In particular procedures can change for cup competitions

under different League or County jurisdictions.

From an early age teach your players to respect the referee and his or her decisions. As a Coach you must lead by example, your manner and in particular your attitude towards the referee will be mirrored by your team. It is completely unacceptable to blame a result or poor performance on a referee; this sets a poor example to your players. You will be amazed at the number of professional coaches who blame referees for their teams' shortcomings in post match interviews.

Referees are human; they will make mistakes occasionally during games, as will both you and your players. It is never acceptable under any circumstances to use foul or abusive language, sarcasm or general derogatory remarks towards officials. You will find that a referee treated with respect will reciprocate.

As players develop the offside rule will become a factor and you will need linesmen to assist the referee. Invariably this will be a parent, usually reluctantly persuaded to undertake the role. Understand that this is a difficult job and that they are also likely to make the odd mistake, however they will do their best and the support they provide to referees is invaluable.

Some Youth Leagues are trialling the use of Pitch Marshals to act as a liaison between the referee, coaches, managers and supporters. Initial indications are that they have been a success, helping to promote a positive experience for all. Helping to prevent issues before they arise is far better than having to deal with the consequences after the event. You are the focal point for your team. Try to forge a close relationship with parents and guardians and identify any potential problems. Set clear boundaries as to what is deemed acceptable behaviour and confront anyone who steps out of line. Parental influence from the touchline is massive and has a huge impact on how players perform, far greater than their coach or team mates observations.

6. Health and Fitness

One of the main challenges in society today as a whole is getting youngsters to participate in any form of regular structured exercise and many studies suggest that football can be an excellent way to channel their enthusiasm. If children can keep fit and healthy as they grow this can help to minimise health issues, such as Obesity, Heart disease and Type 2 Diabetes. According to a Government study over the period 2010 to 2015, 28% of all children between the ages of two and fifteen were obese and the figure is rising. Physical activity levels amongst five to fifteen year olds are falling and this needs to be addressed.

Any activity should be encouraged and the more different sports that your players can take part in the better. Many young footballers will benefit from taking part in other sports such as Netball, Volleyball, Rugby or Cricket for example. The core features of teamwork, discipline and general fitness are present in all team sports, as is a structured approach to training and the need to allocate your training time effectively.

As players reach puberty, fitness levels can start to fall and the effects of a poor diet and different lifestyle choices can become evident. It is important to explain to your players that the key to developing fitness is regular and sustained activity. It is important for you to promote a healthy diet, advise them to try and limit their intake of sugary drinks and junk food and remind them of the importance of hydration. However, young footballers (especially teenagers) do not want to be lectured on their diet and their sleep patterns, it is far better to discuss issues with them and let them self evaluate. If they are serious about being the best that they can be, they will alter their habits and peer pressure will lead to the squad following a few individuals who take the lead.

Guidance can be provided as to the best types of food to eat pre-match or even before a training session and it may also be an opportunity for you to educate yourself to ensure your advice is correct.

Promote an all round healthy lifestyle to keep fitness levels maintained. Swimming, running and gym work are all recommended and it will become abundantly clear to you those that take their fitness seriously. Flexibility is important and both Yoga and Pilates can help with this, improving core strength and balance. Your players need to know their bodies and be aware of potential weaknesses. It is really important to have clear two-way correspondence to address any injuries or general health issues as early as possible. As a coach, it is important for you to understand the difference between a slight knock and a serious injury that needs treatment.

If possible, as your players get older, work with a qualified physiotherapist who can not only identify and diagnose problems, but can also give detailed advice for both treatment and recuperation.

Unfortunately, there is the temptation for players to start smoking, again usually due to peer pressure. Don't simply lecture your players on the evils of tobacco, instead talk to them about the side effects of smoking and how it can affect their fitness levels and ultimately their performance.

Alcohol is another potential issue not to be overlooked as young players become teenagers. Inevitably as your players get older and their social lives change, some may experiment with alcohol. It is important to be frank and honest with your players.

Realistically, you are unlikely to be able to stop your players from drinking completely, even though you may feel a huge responsibility to do so.

You are far better discussing the issue, ideally as a group with your players and making it quite clear what you deem to be acceptable. Peer pressure will have a huge effect. If you know your players as individuals, you will be able to identify issues at an early stage and address them. During this key stage in your players development, they will need to decide how important football is to them as opposed to a busy social life!

If you have any concerns at all in respect of your players health or well being, then consult an expert at the earliest possible opportunity.

7. Player Progression and Development

“It is far easier to coach a group of already talented individuals, than it is to develop players and be recognised as a talented coach”.

The natural progression for your players after “Mini Soccer” is a switch to eleven a side on a full size pitch. Depending on the length of time that you have been working with your players you should have an idea as to which position most prefer and are comfortable playing. It is important not to “pigeon hole” players at an early age. Remain flexible, open to change and experimentation. Try players in different roles and formations and give everyone equal opportunities. One of the most satisfying aspects of coaching Youth Football is working with a player who thrives on playing several different positions.

You are likely to have identified a goalkeeper by this stage and this is a key position. You may have one or two players who want to spend some time in goal and if this is the case then feel free to rotate goalkeeping duties. You owe it to all of your players to give them a fair chance to develop and often you will be pleasantly surprised at their ability to adapt to different roles.

Over time you will gradually begin to settle on specific roles for most players and as they get older and familiarise themselves with the responsibilities required their strengths and weaknesses can be identified.

During this development stage “player profiling” can be introduced and you can regularly review your players performances. Begin to move towards a more regimented training and match day routine. Gradually, you can start to explain some of the realities of football and how these reflect everyday life. Time keeping, discipline and commitment are all key areas that your players need to develop.

Spend time with your players, understand them as people first and footballers second. Consider their home life, academic progress, family and friends and lifestyle choices; all of which can affect their performance in both a positive or negative way. Show empathy when issues arise in respect of academic commitments and ensure that the relative importance of both football and studying is acknowledged.

Now is the time to promote and implement your own high standards both in respect of training sessions and match days. Set clear guidelines and expectations in respect of arrival times, kit and general conduct and make sure that your players adhere to these standards at all times.

A difficult subject that you will need to address is “squad rotation” and there will never be an ideal solution to this, someone will always be disappointed. I took the decision that as players get older (personally I did this from under sixteen onwards) it is appropriate to explain your thinking and ask the whole squad to accept your ethos. It is advisable to limit the number of players in your squad to a number that you can comfortably manage. Explain that places are being played for, everyone will have an opportunity to impress at training but weekly rotation may not always be possible. I would caveat this approach when dealing with younger players, when it is not only fair but essential to make sure that everyone is given game time and substitutes are regularly rotated.

As players develop, post match debriefs become important. It is advisable to reflect on a performance before any discussion takes place, without knee jerk reactions or over dramatisation of events. Remember it is a game of Youth Football and wait until you have assessed the performance rationally before you speak to your players. It is sometimes better to do this at your next training session after a game, rather than immediately at the final whistle. What went particularly well and what could be improved upon are always two good places to start.

Aim to keep a level head and try to accept victory and defeat with the same pragmatic outlook. Never single out individuals or use negative feedback, it is totally unacceptable and counter productive.

It is important to explain to young players that they will be constantly learning throughout their playing careers. Ask your players to rate their own performance post-match, or after a training session. What could they have done better? What aspects of their game can they focus on over the coming sessions? Diaries of progress made are helpful and can prove extremely useful as are achievement logs. Always focus on the positives.

Another sometimes contentious issue can be the appointment of a Captain for your team. During the early years it is advisable to rotate the captaincy and one suggestion is to link the decision to the man of the match from the previous week?

Eventually as your team progresses, you may want to appoint a permanent Captain and ask them to shoulder some additional responsibility. You need to choose carefully, looking for a player who will lead by example. They may not be the loudest or even the most technically gifted, they will however have leadership qualities. They need to set standards for your team, be disciplined, keep a cool head and earn the respect of their team mates. You may want to consider making your goalkeeper your Vice Captain, as he or she is likely to be on the pitch should your Captain be injured or absent.

8. Psychology

One of the key components in coaching Youth Football is to instil mental toughness in your players. In particular, the ability to fight and challenge themselves to improve, especially during what can be seen as tough times. Mental toughness can be improved just like physical fitness, it simply needs to be worked on and developed.

Confidence in young players is vital and as their Coach it is imperative that you develop this. Teach your players that successful athletes are those that constantly drive to learn, grow and improve. It is important to explain that it takes courage to pursue risks, however the pursuit of risks can in turn build confidence.

Make certain that your players understand that loss is not the same as failure. Explain that they should have no regrets at all if after a game they have given their all and simply been beaten by a better team on the day.

As your players get older and progress as footballers explain to them that they have to take individual responsibility for their performance and ultimately their success or otherwise. They will have the support of you and their team-mates but they need to perform to the best of their ability.

You need to make it perfectly clear that it is unacceptable to give any less than one hundred percent every time they attend training or represent their Club on a match-day. Football is a team game and players owe it to their team-mates to give their all. At the end of a game or training session your players need to be able to look at themselves in the mirror and say without question they have given everything - if that is the case then no more can be asked regardless of the result.

Developing a player's mental strength can be difficult, but ultimately incredibly rewarding as a Coach. You will need to commit to spend time with your players, really understanding them as individuals and nurturing the mental side of their game. With focus, attention to detail and effort on your part significant progress can be made. As your ability in this area improves you will begin to appreciate changes in your player's behaviour. There are many areas that you can nurture such as visualisation and various focus techniques.

Sports psychology is a rapidly expanding part of the game. It can require a large investment of both time and effort before results are seen. Constantly strive to develop, take on new ideas and methods and take pleasure in seeing young players improve the mental side of their game. Ask your players to self evaluate - how are they improving? What aspect of their game are they currently working on? The player needs to ultimately be in control of his or her destiny.

Teach your players to play "in the moment" as this is the only time that they can influence. The missed chance or misplaced pass has gone, what might happen in the second half is unknown, they can only influence now. Sports psychologists often refer to "controllable goals". Ask your players to focus on the aspects of their performance that they have control and influence over. Ask them to focus on the process - not the outcome as football is about consistency not perfection.

Your aim and ultimately that of your players should be that when they are in your company they learn something or improve and leave the session with a sense of achievement. If they are smiling all the better.

9. Conclusion

Before you embark on a coaching career it is worth considering the following; when your time with a

group of players eventually ends (which will happen at some point in the future) what would you like your legacy to be. How would you like your players to remember you? I once read a very powerful statement - "The most important way to evaluate a life is to create something that outlasts it". Players will move on, some will continue to play football, a few may be fortunate enough to play at a higher level and some may never kick a ball again. The only certainty is that as they mature and move into higher education, university or ultimately the workplace they will remember the time that they have spent with you.

The leadership and guidance that you provide will have a huge influence on how your players develop into young adults. Sports coaches can be the adults that they most closely identify with and often look up to.

If you coach a group of young players from the age of six or seven and mentor them until they are seventeen or eighteen you are likely to spend in excess of one thousand hours in their company. Therefore, you are bound to influence both their behaviour and their outlook outside of football.

I referred to the three A's of Ability, Appearance and Attitude and reiterate their importance. Remember, children in your care for a period of time will begin to mirror your demeanour and character.

A calm, confident and pragmatic manager will eventually lead a team with a similar outlook. Conversely, an obnoxious, highly strung manager with poor people skills and little empathy will struggle to bring his players together in a cohesive unit.

Coaching Youth Football is not an opportunity for you to brag that "you" are top of the league, or how easily "you" won at the weekend - it is not about you! Your focus and aim has to be to ensure that your players are developing, enjoying themselves and improving. Any personal achievement or satisfaction as a coach should be exactly that - personal. Reflect with pride on your achievements, but aim to greet victory and defeat in the same way. Satisfaction from seeing happy and engaged children should be sufficient reward.

To end I would like to share with you the feedback I received from a parent as my time coaching his son came to an end:

"Teamwork is key to all aspects of life and competition is important to galvanize people and achieve targets. My overriding memory however was the camaraderie that was achieved with the boys and their mums and dads. The team, with you as their "leader" created a fun and focused group who supported and wanted the best for each other. In terms of development the team learnt to test and stretch each other with your leadership and support. They also learned how to handle themselves, we were regularly the best behaved team with referees and officials, but we were not a push over. The team developed a sense of right and wrong and to respect authority - but were always strong and fought for each other. On a separate personal note, you are aware that my son was home taught and out of school as he developed as a footballer. He had a few friends and was a nice young boy - but this team and you as their manager allowed him to have a group of friends and an objective that were integral to him growing up in his most important teenage years. He needed this team and we could not have asked for more support from it. He formed his strongest friendships within this team and he respected and wanted to do the best for you and his team-mates."

The content within this post is based on my personal experience and observations having been involved in Youth Football for the last twelve years. I am mindful that "how to" coaching manuals are subjective; you may agree with some of my suggestions and challenge others. The aim of this post is to get you to

think, encourage you to have an opinion and ensure that you constantly strive to improve. I wish you every success in your Coaching career.

If you wish to discuss any of the issues raised or would like further guidance, feel free to add a comment at the end of this post.

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