

Diamond or Developer - The Forming of a Philosophy

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Philosophies!

One of those buzzwords that fly around for us to put our own soundbite against. Something we develop over time but still panic over when handed a Post It note at the start of a course or CPD event. Picture the scene. A guy in an FA jacket who I've respected for years gives me this little piece of yellow paper to write my philosophy on so he can stick it on the wall. What am I supposed to write? What does he want to hear? Why is this note so small? What does the coach next to me write? Why am I sweating? Does anybody else relate to this moment that happened to me during my coaching journey?

Just like when we're designing our sessions, we often fall into the trap of wanting something unique, something different. Too often we're trying to overthink and be the creator of a masterpiece that's never been tried (or tested). Philosophy is the same. If somebody has a good one, there should be no shame in copying it and tailoring to your own needs. My own Coaching (or life) philosophy would never fit on that little yellow note but the bottom line would.

Every Child Counts!

Now, that's not unique. Those words appear on many Twitter profiles but when I saw them put together, I realised nothing summed up how I feel about coaching local kids more than those three words. So I borrowed them for myself!

Clearly, what we see in the Grassroots Environment tells us that those words are not for everybody and I don't want to write yet another piece about the 'Win Now' Coaches or those that put perceived talent to the forefront. These guys, like me are doing what they feel is right. I just see it differently, that's all.

So, how did I get there? What helped me form such a philosophy? What motivated me to Coach in the first place? The same as hundreds of others perhaps? I had a child myself.

Briefly (as this is not about me) I was an awful player. Tiny as a kid and often found my name on the team-sheet at number 12, detached from the rest and dressed in a tracksuit. Playing time for me was limited until players gave up after getting thrashed and stopped turning up, meaning only us 'not good enough' were left. Constant losses and lectures afterwards (our Coach actually brought his medals to training to show us) meant Youth Football was a sad experience for me. My game never improved and playing petered out. I'm not looking for sympathy. That coach did me a massive favour. Years later, my son turned four years old and I decided that nobody was going to give him that experience. I got into coaching because of that guy. My boy wanted to play.

Now Hazza is in the image of his Dad as a child. A slow developer, always one growth spurt behind the rest. Popular with his mates but we all know that Alpha Male amongst kids is the fastest one, the strongest one or the 'best' footballer. That was never him. When I first got into coaching, my boy wasn't the best player, he was barely a player. He loved the game as much as any kid on that team. He loved to play. He loved to pull the kit on. My favourite photograph shows him playing in shorts that reach his ankles. He smiled all the way through each game but he was never going to affect the score-line in any way. He wasn't alone. We had a few 'Hazzas' in our early side and although lack of experience myself meant I made mistakes, the playing level of my own son, coupled with my own initial motivation, made a significant impact on where my philosophy lies today. He counted.

So, let me flip it. What if Hazza was Alpha Male in the classroom? What if he was the fastest and best balanced player, scoring six every match (we had one of those too. We were pretty good overall). Would my philosophy have remained the same? Much as I'd like to say I would have always championed every kid's right to play, I do fear that I may have taken a different path. There's every chance that I would have wanted every player in my team to be as good as Hazza, so he didn't have to carry the weight. There's every chance he would have joined a Development Centre and I could have signed all his mates and discarded the locals. We might have been a great father and son double act, taking on the league together with a 'Win Now' philosophy and able to blame everybody else when it didn't go well. I guess that just wasn't to be? A lucky escape? I'm glad he was small!

So why do I think that could ever have been the case? My motivation started to form my philosophy long before Hazza even started to play. I might have been OK but I guess we'll never be sure. We all know coaches we greatly admire or for whatever reason, perhaps have little time for. Maybe they win trophies. Perhaps they play every child equally. Doubtless there are many who do both or neither. Is there any correlation between the early ability of the Coach's child and the attitude/philosophy of that Coach? Is his Son or Daughter the Diamond or the Developer? Have they changed direction over the years as their own child got better or dragged back into the pack? Have you changed? Have I? Should Every Child Count?

My Son was the Developer and I love him all the more for it because he has helped me understand what's really important and become the Coach I set out to be. He's now coming up to 14. He's improved to somewhere above average, some way below brilliant and playing 'Coach's Son' which is the toughest position on any pitch. We've had ups and downs as we both learn our roles, doing our best for one another. More than anything, he helped me evolve and refine that philosophy, even though I nicked those three defining words!

EVERY CHILD COUNTS!

Thanks for reading.

Rich

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