

South Brunswick Soccer Club *Guidelines for Travel Coaches*



Introduction

The role of parent coach in any sport is an incredibly important position. At any given time, you are the most significant person in the soccer life of every player on your team, and their future participation in and love of the game are in your hands. While trainers should have the expertise to teach and improve players, it is usually the execution of those skills in the game situation, the game experience across the season as a whole, and the competitive environment that players will remember more, and what will decide for them whether they want to try-out to play travel soccer the next year. Working closely with a trainer will help each player produce their skill-set from the practice field to game-day, but this document is designed to help you make the decisions that are yours. By providing a framework within which coaches at the club can work, we are also identifying expectations that the club has, as to how the coach of each team can best help develop the players in their charge.

By working within that framework, it relieves you of some of that pressure. Having a club policy on some of that more important issues that you will face also provides a frame of reference and support should your decisions be questioned. While not explicitly mandating that each of the points below must be implemented in every game, these are strong recommendations, and do represent the club's position on how a SBSC travel coach should coach a team. These should also reflect the expectations of parents and players as to how their team will be coached. So, if something goes wrong in one game (as it will) and things don't go the way identified in here, learn from it and try to redress it in the next game.

At the end of the guidelines are three articles I have referenced. The first is written by a parent, and his perception of the positive image of a coach. While you have all been parents as well as coaches, it is a good reference point and reminder of how our actions are perceived.

Secondly, a reminder of the personal qualities that good coaches at the travel level possess. There may or may not be new things in there, but again, it's a good reminder of what we can all aspire to.

Finally, is 86 ways to say "very good". While a very simple message, most players will react well to "that was very good – now let's try to make it better", and as you try to be positive from the sideline and on the practice field, it can help keep you current.

Game Time

At the small sided level (U8 through U10), every player should play at least half a game. At the full-sided level (U11 and up), each player should play at least a third of a game.

Rationale: Game time is usually the most controversial issues coaches face. The SBSC travel program is neither a recreation program or necessarily premier. Therefore, our players should have some interest and skills in the game, without necessarily being world-beaters. Having taken a player on the roster, we have a responsibility to them to allow them to play. Recognizing that every roster will have a strongest through weakest order, there will be a point at which what is best for the team may conflict with what is best for an individual player. The third consideration is what is best for the program, and in sustaining a club which can support travel players, and feed a town High School program, and what is best for the program is the compromise that guarantees everyone the chance to play – but does not hurt them team and does reward the better players.

The change from small to large sided recognizes two things:

Firstly, that as teams become large sided and players have been playing longer, the opportunity does exist for teams to move up and down in flights, and the club does encourage teams to strive to play at the highest level possible. Secondly, we understand that as players move toward High School age, better play will be rewarded. SBSC does have an outstanding fall and spring in-town program for less able players who are not necessarily at the level to have a lot of travel game time, but to whom soccer is important.

Playing Different Positions

At the small-sided level, players must play in different positions in every game (ie. – defense / midfield / forward, not just right and center defense). At the full-sided level, players should have the opportunity to play in different positions for a meaningful amount of time through the season.

Goalkeepers are a special case. A dedicated GK should be allowed to specialize in that position if they want to, but one who wants to play on the field also should also be allowed to do so at the small-sided level. At the full-sided level, the team selection committee will aim to give every team a dedicated GK, so a player who wishes to play both in goal and on the field may be placed on a lower level team than a less able GK who wants to play that position only.

Rationale: There is a common misconception among soccer parents that there is a hierarchy of position, where the best players play forward, the ‘okay’ players are in midfield, and what is left gets put on defense. This is wrong, as each position has it’s own valid skill-set. Soccer is unlike most other sports in that while certain principles apply to offense and defense, every player should have the confidence to execute (at their own level) a rounded set of skills, and have some ability to play any position. This is not specifically in relation to the High School argument (what if there is a better player in the one position that my son / daughter plays) but is a part of giving every player a holistic soccer experience.

In addition, an understanding *in all players* of how to think reactively (defensively) and proactively (offense) will benefit both the individual and the team, and at the small-sided level particularly, players should be encouraged to think of themselves as ‘soccer players’, rather than left defenders, right midfielders etc. Only by teaching and helping all players to understand all parts of the game (which the club curriculum does) and giving them the opportunity to play in all phases of the game (which you can do) can they become all-round players and truly understand the whole game.

Communication with players

As obvious as it may seem, very few pre-high school players respond particularly well in the long term to a hard verbally destructive coaching style – this is particularly true with girls teams (most players at most levels). However, most young players will respond in the short term to fear, which may well be what they feel when a coach shouts at them. Please don’t mistake this immediate reaction for improvement or development in the player. The goal of the program is to develop not only an understanding of and improvement in the game, but also a love of the game. If the players of today are the coaches and parents of tomorrow, then we are doing a good job.

Pre-Game

Going into a game, players need to be focused on two primary phases of the game – what to do when we have the ball, and what to do when the other team has the ball (following on from that may come what to do at the moment that possession changes sides). Professional players at the highest level will be given two or three key points to take on to the field, which is worth remembering if your team talk has more than that. Training and changes / improvements to a players performance will not occur immediately before a game – they are things for training, so focus on re-establishing existing knowledge / thoughts with your players, not introducing new ones. Giving players new ideas immediately before they play will confuse them. Always!

During the Game

Games are when players put into practice the things they have learned in practice. The best learning environment for that is with silent coaches, but it is true that games are not purely learning environments, but also competitive environments. However, with this in mind, think carefully about what you achieve with your in-game instruction – your goal should be to help players perform. If you are constantly telling them what to do, you are actually making them dependent on you, so try new ways of communicating that information.

Some suggestions are on the next page:

- Instead of “mark your player”, how about “where do you need to be”?
- Instead of “why did you play such a bad pass”, how about “what could you have done better”?
- Instead of “you’re doing badly”, how about “I think you can do even better than that”?
- Instead of “that was terrible” how about saying nothing at all? We all know when we make a mistake. Effective coaching is helping players past their mistakes, not helping them relive them.

Finally, recognize the difference between shouting at players, and shouting to them – and communicate that to your team parents. Sometimes you will shout a positive instruction or encouragement across the field, and will necessarily shout loudly in doing so. That is totally different – and more destructive – than raising your voice even slightly to criticize a player.

Remember that however important the game, however heated the moment, and however bad the mistake, there never anything positive that comes from berating / screaming at / heavily criticizing a young soccer player. It does not make them tough or help them ‘suck it up’, it is just an easy way out for a coach who lacks the knowledge to say anything constructive, or the control to say nothing at all. Therefore, there is no excuse for it, and if do you lose your cool and cross that line, then cross back and apologize as soon as you can, but be aware that those fences can take time to mend.

Half-time

Whatever the half-time score, the chances are that you will be seeking to improve the performance of the players in the second half, which involves getting a reaction of some sort to what you say. Try and be clear about what you are going to say before you start talking – many of the best coaches in the world make a few notes during the game to make sure they don’t miss anything. Remember a few things:

1. Only identify the biggest one or two things that need correcting – if you run through 10 things, players will not remember them all, and may forget the most important ones.
2. Also emphasize the things that the team did well. Your talk should be a positive experience, which should include an emphasis on the good things in the game.
3. Think carefully before you criticize effort – directly or indirectly (we just need to work harder etc.). If the players are always not trying as hard as they can, or if they could always work harder, you should look very carefully at how you are motivating them.

Post-Game

The biggest mistake that coaches make is to criticize players immediately after games. There is a time for constructive criticism, but that is never after games. Tell players what they have done wrong when they have a chance to put it right – typically immediately before a training session, or as part of a pre-game talk. All soccer experiences – playing or training – should finish on a positive, so find something good to say before you send the players home. If you can find nothing to say – say nothing. Criticizing a player (or the whole team) and then sending them away will have the effect of leaving them on a low until they have a chance to put it right. Players are tired after a game in any case, and I think hard if you are talking for more than a minute about anything other than how well the team has played or how hard they have tried.

Communication with Parents

Soccer is a subjective game, where everyone will have different opinions – often on the same game or player. As a coach, it is your decision that matters in relation to who starts, subs, plays where etc. which is a big responsibility. While recognizing that you can't keep everyone happy (and nor should that be a goal), you can communicate clearly and effectively with everyone, so they can gain an understanding of what you are trying to achieve with the team.

Pre-Season: Introduce yourself, introduce your trainer, and introduce your goals for the season. Identify at this stage your expectations for the players and parents (attendance at practice and games, tournaments you expect to play in). Most importantly, lay down some guidelines to your parents on how you want to communicate with them – ie. never straight after a game when emotions are high. Make clear before the season starts that you don't mind discussing an individual player with their parents, but never straight after a game. Identify the morning / afternoon / evening after a game (whenever works for you). Remind everyone why the team is running, and what the players should be getting out of travel soccer– which is a constructive and positive experience.

During the season: Recognizing that this is not what you do for a living, try to over – rather than under- communicate. If you can even put out some brief thoughts weekly or monthly, it helps to have the rest of the team on the same page, and people never complain about being told too much. When and if difficulties do occur, it also helps to already have open channels of communication to build upon – rather than having to have dialogue with someone you really don't know at all.

Finally – do stick to your policy of not discussing game issues immediately after games. Time to collect your thoughts - and to let all parties calm down – is always a good thing.

Post-season: Although the hardest part is over, some feedback will do the world of good in terms of giving the players something to take away. Having a preset formula, such as one strength and one area for improvement, also avoids having one player who has 8 areas for improvement, and another with nothing but strengths. However good or bad a player is; there is always something positive, and something to develop.

Communication with your trainer

The quality of the coach / trainer relationship is key to the effectiveness of the learning experience for your players. Recognize that on the one hand, the trainer is an employee of the club, but at the same time, they are also the “expert”, who you should seek to learn from whenever possible.

Pre-season: Regardless of whether you run a pre-season camp or not, do try to meet with your trainer and have the trainer work with the team in advance of the season start. This will enable you both to discuss areas for the team to improve, and for the team to get the most out of each session, rather than have ‘getting to know you’ sessions after the season has started. Ask for a scheme of work (what they intend to do through the year) – you should expect every session to be carefully planned and not delivered of the cuff when they arrive.

During the season: Find out whether the trainer can get to games or not, and if not, try and talk with him / her after games, and / or copy them on your feedback. Involving the trainer as much as possible with the team will enable them to be as specific as possible in how they focus their sessions, and will help them feel involved. Every session that is delivered should have a session plan, and you can ask to see it every week. The ideas and drills that are run are things you can use in your own practice sessions with the team, and you can ask questions of the trainer that will expand your own knowledge base. Remember – we are paying for their time, so get your money’s worth.

Post-season: Hopefully the season has gone well in terms of player development, if not, it is unlikely that you will wish to continue the dialogue, but it is well worth sitting down with the trainer and discussing what has gone well badly, and ideas on how to move forward. The thoughts and input from him may well contribute to your player feedback, although your thoughts and his may well differ, and ultimately your thoughts are what you should write.

Article One - ***Good Coaching***

By Lori Reynolds

"What is a good coach?"

"Why is HE a good coach?"

"What makes him different from other coaches?"

I've been asked these questions—or ones similar—many times over my years of being a soccer mom. My son has had the same coach for almost four years, and no matter what organization the team plays with, I make sure we stay with the same coach. Why? That's easy. He possesses qualities that I feel are essential and necessary for being a positive influence and good coach, such as:

PATIENCE—This is probably the most important characteristic. Let's face it—12 active boys together require a lot of attention. A good coach is one who doesn't expect angels on the soccer field.

TOLERANCE—This quality goes hand-in-hand with patience. Kids are going to be rowdy, or moody or lazy. Tolerance takes the different mind-sets and turns the focus to the tasks "afoot".

ACCEPTANCE—Our children are so very different. Each one has varied potential and skill levels. A good coach is one who recognizes each child as an individual and he/she encourages that child to perform at his/her very best level. Perfection is not required!

MOTIVATION—Soccer can be viewed as kids kicking a ball across the field, or it can be viewed as an opportunity for growth. The true test lies in sparking a child's interest to learn and grow and keeping that spark alive each season.

RESPECT—I've seen many games in which the coaches, and sometimes parents, of the other teams berate and belittle their children for making "mistakes". Sometimes they even go as far as criticizing opposing team members. Good grief! We're playing U-10 soccer! This isn't the World Cup. 'Coach' has never singled out a child for making a mistake and he does not allow parents or the other team members to do so either. At the beginning of every season 'Coach' reminds us parents that we're all in this sport to learn and have a good time.

SPORTSMANSHIP—Perhaps this should have been on top of the list, but being toward the end does not lessen the importance. My definition of sportsmanship is to teach kids to work together as a team in order to achieve a common goal. It also means teaching kids to respect other players as well as each other. Insults are not tolerated. Mistakes are team mistakes, and they are used as teaching tools for the next game.

ABILITY TO TEACH—Sounds simple, right? It's not. How many times has a parent signed up a child for a sport, only to have a well-intentioned father decide to coach? He may or may not know the sport. He may or may not relate well to his players. There is a huge difference between the team whose members do what is yelled at them, and the team whose members actually understand what to do and why. A good coach teaches his players basic fundamentals, explains concepts and enables his/her players to think logically when making a play. One of our practice mantras is "You've got a man X and a man X. The ball comes to you. What do you do"? The kids are able to use logic and make the best choices based on situations.

LOVE OF KIDS: They have the energy to make every practice and every game a new experience for coaches and parents alike. Without their vision and energy, sports would be dull and unappreciated. They offer a day-to-day challenge for coaches, which is contagious and which is motivation for everyone involved in athletics at all levels.

LOVE OF THE GAME: Coaches must love their sport, and, more importantly, must show their players enthusiasm for every aspect of the game. This would include techniques and tactics. The love of the game must also show to the players the love for fair-play, respect for the opponents, officials, and spectators, and positive reinforcement for team mates. Only a good coach who loves the game can provide the correct aspects involved in the winning and losing of competition.

One of the reasons we parents encourage our kids to play sports is to hopefully broaden their horizons and to give them additional skills they wouldn't get otherwise. While having a winning season is great, I consider it a bonus and not the main purpose. Playing sports should be a positive experience, and it should be one that children look forward to each and every season.

Article Two - **Communication**

From – www.thecoachingcorner.com

In your role as a soccer coach, you need to communicate effectively with a lot of different people: your players, parents, grandparents, officials, other coaches, association directors, etc...

All of them have different agendas and need communicating with in different ways.

The Players

Communication with your players goes far beyond simply giving them instruction. If you took a communications class in high school or college you will remember that more than 50% of communication is non-verbal. Facial expressions and tone of voice also convey a great deal of the communication. Leave the sarcasm at home! Players may place a great deal of importance on anything you may say or do, possibly more than what their parents' may say or do. Also, although it can be tough with 12 jabbering kids, try to listen to each one, allowing each one to talk in turn.

A few pointers:

1. Talk to the players' on their level, both physically and emotionally. This may mean getting down on one knee and looking into their eyes as you communicate. Use simple, direct statements that will be less likely to be misinterpreted.
2. Don't wear sunglasses on the practice or game field. Players need to make eye contact with you to fully understand the communication.
3. Be positive, honest and sincere with your players. When trying to correct a particular skill problem, it can be advantageous to make the mistake yourself, and then point out your own shortcomings. Players will respect a coach that is honest. Be positive: constant 'nagging' will only 'turn off' your players'.
4. Tell them what you want to tell them, tell them again, and then tell them once more. Try to reword your communication each time. This will give you a much better chance of getting the communication across with ALL the players.
5. Be loud enough that all players can hear you, but don't scream at them. Clearly understood voice communication will get their attention and your respect. TIP: In one-on-one communication, a whisper may serve the purpose and be much more effective than a normal or loud voice.
6. Avoid inconsistent or confusing body language. I.e. don't turn your back on a player talking to you, expecting praise, attention or instruction... Shaking your head while telling the player "nice try"...

The Parents

After your initial parents meeting you may or may not have a great deal of contact with the players' parents. If a parent should contact you during the season, you should...

1. Listen
2. Listen
3. Listen

They may be concerned about their child's skill development. I.e. "Johnny makes a lot of goals, but my kid...". Just be positive about their child's development unless you too have a concern that their may be a medical or physical condition that needs attention.

They may think you're a lousy coach, or you just haven't developed a relationship with their child. If they're wrong, try to rectify the miss-communication, but not at the expense of the team. It could just be the parents or child's problem, and you probably can't "fix it".

Finally, if you need to talk to a parent, do it after a practice or game where you can speak to them without children being present. Sometimes a phone call or e-mail will work just as well.

The Officials

Maybe it works for Alex Ferguson, but it won't work for you. Yelling at or disagreeing with the coaches will solve little during a game. What it will do is show your players that you are disrespectful of the officials, and they will tend to do the same. If there was clearly a bad decision, bring it up after the game with the official or later at a specially called meeting.

Article Three – 86 ways to say “Very Good”
From the Michigan Soccer Association

<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Good for you!2. That's really nice3. Superb4. That's the best ever5. You did that very well6. That's great!7. You've got it made8. Way to go!9. Terrific10. That's the way to do it!11. That's not bad!12. That's quite an improvement13. Couldn't have done it better myself14. Good thinking15. Marvelous16. You really are going to town17. You're doing fine18. Keep up the good work19. You're really improving20. That's it!21. You're on the right track now!22. That's better23. Now you've got it figured out24. You haven't missed a thing25. Outstanding!26. Fantastic!27. That's coming along nicely28. You outdid yourself today29. I know you can do it30. You're doing a good job31. Good work32. That's the right way to do it33. You figured that out fast34. That's better35. I think you've got it now36. Right on!37. I'm proud of the way you worked today38. Well, look at you go!39. Tremendous!40. That's the best you've ever done!41. You certainly did well today42. That's RIGHT!43. Perfect	<ol style="list-style-type: none">44. You must have been practicing!45. Nice going46. Great!47. You've got your brain in gear today48. Keep working on it...You're getting better49. Now you've got the hang of it50. You remembered!51. WOW!52. That kind of work makes me very happy.53. Wonderful!54. You're really working hard today55. You're getting better every day56. That's what I call a fine job!57. You're learning fast58. I knew you could do it!59. You make it look easy60. I'm very proud of you61. That's a good boy/girl62. One more time an you'll have it63. That's very much better64. Fine!65. Super!66. That's good67. You did lot of work today68. Good job69. Keep it up!70. You really make this fun71. You've got that down pat72. Good remembering73. Congratulations74. Nothing can stop you now75. Exactly right!76. You are doing much better today77. Nice going78. Keep on trying79. Excellent!80. You are really learning a lot81. Sensational!82. You've jut about got it!83. You're doing beautifully84. I've never seen anyone do it better85. You've just mastered that!86. You are very good at that
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