

## IV. Mistakes Young Coaches Make

### **Mistakes Young Coaches Make!**

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I thought the following article has plenty for the "older" coach as well!

**1. Over Coaching Under Teaching-** If I could describe in one sentence the most common error it would be *that young coaches "over coach (during games) and under teach (during practice)"*. Ideally a well coached team wouldn't need much if any feedback from a coach during a game. What I mean by that is they commonly get bogged down in complicated X's and O's and struggle when their teams do not respond with equally sophisticated performances. If I were to comment on many young coaches after observing them in games, there is a tendency to criticize players for performance errors which are a result of their failure to adequately teach and prepare them prior to the games. While this observation is probably somewhat of an overgeneralization as a whole it is the truth. Keep in mind I am a teacher first, a tactician second. Try to prepare your players for the games by providing them the tools they will need to execute team and individual skills in practice, then let them play in the games. Keep your corrections simple and focused without lengthy dissertations.

**2. Coersion Isn't the Best Assistant Coach-** *Another area that is a hot spot for young coaches is the idea you have to be coercive to be a good coach.* Thirty years ago a coercive coach was the predominant style. My coach once said "when I ask you to jump, you ask how high." That method doesn't work well in sports where kids are more sensitive and less thick skinned, and people in positions of authority have so badly misused their power and displayed undesirable traits and judgment that kids now question most authority. You will do better to be an educator with a firm hand, teaching them to understand why they should practice or perform a certain way, and then finding motivational tools to encourage them to strive for those performance goals. Forcing someone to do something may get you results, but you'll truly never be able to achieve what you might if every player you work with were convinced that rowing the boat with equal enthusiasm and intensity in the same direction.

**3. Players Want Discipline and Consistency - Not a Friend-** *Young coaches today often think that friendship is the fastest path to team success, and this couldn't be further from the truth. Players may give the appearance that they will perform better if you are their friend, but in reality you will eventually lose objectivity when making decisions and control of the team. What kids want is someone to respect and believe in, so "be friendly" when you can, but leave the friendships to the players.*

Be more concerned that your work habits, honest communication, fairness in dealing with discipline, and basketball knowledge will help you to keep their respect. Be friendly but firm in your discipline. Remember you are their leader, and not their teammate.

**4. Teach How to Do it Right Instead of Focusing on a Players Wrongs-** *In terms of teaching basketball skills I think one common mistake that young coaches fall into is that they focus too much on what a player is doing wrong than what they are doing right.* I don't mean you should ignore error in execution, far from it. What I mean is when you are correcting errors give them a compliment to open their minds to your next comments. Then give them simple facts about their error without huge emotional swings or derogatory comments. Remember that coaches to often try to correct three or four errors at one time, instead of focusing on one error which may be the primary contributing factor to all the other errors. For example, a player makes a hard penetration step to the basket, spins wildly out of control, and throws up pure garbage at the basket. The coach say, fix this with the penetration step, keep the ball tighter to your body, and get your eyes focused on the basket before you shoot. The primary source of the problem here is body balance. If the player keeps their head up and over their center of gravity at all times, their penetration step will be with balance, the spin under control, and the body capable of executing a normal shot off the dribble because the body is in balance. Fix the primary error and let the rest take care of itself.

**5. Too Much Detail, Instead of Clear Simple Explanations-** *In addition when you are correcting your players keep in mind the phrase "paralysis by analysis". Many players are so overwhelmed with coaching advice their performance becomes "mentally" frozen. Instead focus their attention then they makes errors of execution on "how to do it the right way."* Give them one or two pointers which remind them of proper execution. In scientific terms this is called a "frame of reference". Internally our brain works to correct it's balance, or walking gait, or other motoric skills through an internal frame of reference. If you provide that "external skill frame of reference" often a player can correct themselves. As a player gains experience (and the coach) players can recall these "correction points themselves" and require little coaching. That is your goal.

**6. Learn, Then Practice Good Teaching Fundamentals-** *Young coaches can sometimes lack full understanding of good teaching principles as well. I'm not necessarily talking basketball knowledge but rather teaching methodology. Things like not gathering players where they can all see and hear you when you attempt to communicate an important teaching detail, not getting their full*

attention before speaking, or not checking to see that they understand what you have taught. A simple method around the latter is to ask the player to explain back a principle you have just taught, you will find out quickly enough if a player was truly listening and understands the key point. You might be surprised to listen to players, who you believe you are teaching a physical intensity through a "hamburger rebound drill", tell you they are learning to dislike contact because you haven't taught them how to properly use their body for proper position and strength. Study books on how to teach sports skills and make notes where you can improve your teaching methods.

**7. Evaluate Every Practice and Every Game Win or Lose-** *Another error that young coaches make is not in fully evaluating their practices at the conclusion of practice.* It is common to spend hours breaking down game films, or studying opponents. However, one of the most important evaluation tools a coach has at their disposal is to thoroughly rate how a practice has gone. Did I spend too much time talking, or explaining not allowing them enough skill practice time? Are my players showing improvement in their defensive footwork? If not, is it because of poor technique, or lack of understanding? How well are we rebounding in practice? Are we making free throws in practice under pressure? Evaluating your practices daily helps you to adjust your season or month schedule during a week to be sensitive to performance decrements at certain points of the season. If your team is not executing some aspect of the game well on the weekends, it may be very possible you are missing something during the week in practices. Make notes after every practice even if you don't use them to change the next one. Keep a collection and following the season you'll be able to see hot points as well in terms of where your team did well and where it needs substantial work.

**8. Teaching in the Game Is Too Late-** *I spoke earlier as well about trying to overcome poor practice teaching by over coaching in games. It is too late by then, although you can sometimes make minor adjustments. The better you train your players in practice, the less you should have to coach in the games.* This lets you then concentrate more on the ebb and flow of games, without having to constantly remind players of every little detail which can sometimes distract them more during performance than simply playing through their mistakes.

**9. Demand Beyond What They Think They Can Deliver-** *I believe another common error is not to demand enough of your players.* I'm not talking about running your team like a prison. I'm talking about being too concerned about how they feel about a practice rather than challenging them so that they leave all of their effort on the court every day. Now it is true that later in the season you may want to gear

back your practices some as season fatigue sets in, but in general, young coaches should challenge their players as if each were going on to the next level of the game. Demanding enough can also be in terms of commitment, individual practice time, schoolwork, and ethical behaviour as well. One of my coaches once told me you can "flap your wings with turkey's and ever expect to fly with eagles." Maybe a bit of an overstatement but there is more than a bit of truth in it. Think of the people who most motivated you in life. Ask yourself if they were easy on you or challenged you to go beyond your capabilities.

**10. Look for Warning Signs-** *The last two things which I believe you see often with inexperienced coaches is their failure to anticipate warning signs of trouble ahead both in the areas of physical and mental fatigue.* I did just say you want to demand a lot of your players, but you also have to be smart enough to recognize when you have not allowed enough recovery time from a long tournament weekend, or a series of 6 or 7 games in a two week period of time. Those are schedules which more resemble the Pro's and even these physically mature players have difficulties at times bringing their "A" game on the second or third night of consecutive games. If you fail to recognise signs of fatigue, and do not allow adequate rest periods, the results will show up on the scoreboard, and on the athletic training table with injuries. Push your team but keep your hand on their physical and mental pulse, ready to give them some air if they need recovery time to produce their best performances.

