

Building the Perfect Coach:

An article from the Youth Soccer Insider

By Brandi Chastain

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I've had every kind of coach imaginable: great motivators who were not really good tacticians; decent tacticians who were not great leaders; coaches who were good at the game but had weak people skills; and even the quintessential parent-coach, who didn't really know the game but made it enjoyable for the players and their families.

I've had easy-going coaches - the kind who give you one look, and you know they are pleased. Then, I've had those who are intensely verbal and very dramatic.

The bottom line is that whatever the personal style, it's the coach's job to keep an eye on the big picture and to help players to see it as well. A good coach can help his players connect the experience of the sometimes monotonous and exhausting training sessions with the great feeling they have after executing those worked-on skills in a game.

In turn, each practice becomes a microcosm of the game. Santa Clara University coach Jerry Smith is one of those coaches who can connect the dots. He knew what he was driving for in that training session in the dark, that the scenario would likely occur in the game. Endlessly repeating different shots on goal would breed the skill and make it accessible, so I would be able to call on it when I needed it, without thinking.

A great coach, however, is much more than just a tactician. One coach in a generation can revolutionize the game through pure strategy and chalkboard Xs and Os. The last person to do that was Dutch legend Rinus Michels in the 1970s, who, with the help of his legendary star, Johan Cruyff, helped popularize the "total soccer" concept of fluid positions and attacking soccer.

Since then there have been small innovations here and there, but the true measure of a great coach is in his ability to motivate and teach his players. And you don't have to be a tactical genius to do that.

Personally, I love those coaches who emphasize the fundamental skills of the game and have the ability to encourage and inspire each player on their roster.

In my experience, the best coaches are insightful, inspiring, and compassionate. They deliver a message with clear, sometimes even eloquent language, a calm demeanor, and a sympathetic tone that inspires players to go out and attempt what they're teaching.

The skills of a coach and a teacher are pretty much the same, in fact: communicating ideas and concepts so that players or students can understand.

They don't just ask players to perform; they set an example, which inspires respect. A great coach can break down the components of the game and put them into simple terms. And when there are problems, good coaches help players to see them, and to find solutions.

Excerpted from "It's Not About the Bra: How to Play Hard, Play Fair, and Put the Fun Back into Competitive Sports"
<<http://link.socceramerica.com/go2.shtml?YNE7fDA2zK0VN006/e6d4ee7fa95eaa/8cb674c61ea5fe82/JRWHITE@WINSTEAD.COM>> By Brandi Chastain with Gloria Averbuch courtesy of HarperCollins.

Brandi Chastain made 192 appearances and scored 30 goals for the U.S. women's national team in 1988-2004. She won two Women's World Cups (1991 & 1999) and two Olympic gold medals (1996 & 2004).