



Asset-Building Ideas for Coaches

Coaches teach young people not only the rules and strategy of games but important lessons about life as well. You can help young people develop confidence and self-esteem, help them learn to resolve conflicts peacefully, teach them ways to take care of their health and well-being, and help them develop skills for communicating with others. Here are a few ways coaches can be asset builders:

- ▶ **Learn the names of all the players on your team** and call them by name. Make a point to talk at least once with each player each time you practice or play.
- ▶ **Create and maintain a positive atmosphere.** Two top reasons young people participate in sports are to have fun and to spend time with their friends.¹ Winning is not one of their top reasons.
- ▶ **Focus on helping players get better, not be the best.** It will reduce players' fear of failure and give them permission to try new things and stretch their skills (asset #16: high expectations).
- ▶ **Know that highly competitive sports can often cause a great deal of stress for young people.** The intense pressure that goes along with trying to be the best can sometimes lead to unhealthy outcomes such as substance abuse and/or eating disorders. Be careful not to push young people too hard and learn about the warning signs of possible problems.
- ▶ **Care about your athletes' lives outside of the sport** and show them that they are valuable people as well as team members.
- ▶ **Adapt your teaching style and language to the players' age level.** Young children do not always know sport terms. Use words and concepts they understand. On the other hand, older youth may be more successful when they understand the big picture of what they are trying to accomplish as well as the specific skills or strategies needed.
- ▶ **Set goals both for individuals and for the team.** Include young people in setting these goals.
- ▶ **Catch kids doing things right.** Be quick to praise a player's efforts. The best feedback is immediate and positive.
- ▶ **Use the sandwich method of correcting a player's mistake.** First praise, then constructively criticize, then praise again.
- ▶ **Always preserve players' dignity.** Sarcasm does not work well with young people. They may not always remember what you say, but they always remember how you said it.
- ▶ **Insist that all team members treat one another with respect.** Then model, monitor, and encourage respect. Have a zero-tolerance policy for teasing that hurts someone's feelings.
- ▶ **Be specific about a code of conduct and expectations** for athletes, parents, spectators, and team personnel.
- ▶ **Encourage athletes to do well in school** and to be motivated to achieve.
- ▶ **Respect other activities and priorities in**

¹ "Factors Underlying Enjoyment of Youth Sports: Sport and Age Group Comparisons" by Leonard W. Wankel and Philip S.J. Kreisel. *Journal of Sport Psychology*, March 1985, 51-63.



athletes' lives. Avoid conflicts with their other commitments and respect their need for time with their families.

- **Find ways each child can participate,** even if he or she is not particularly skilled in the sport.
- **Listen to and encourage your athletes' dreams, concerns, and desires—**sports-related or otherwise.
- **Develop leadership skills in young athletes** by giving them opportunities to lead practice drills and develop a team code of conduct.
- **Take time at the end of practice to have the group offer positive comments**

about each player's performance that day. Make sure no one is left out.

- **Split up cliques on the team** by mixing up groups for drills or scrimmages.
- **Plan a community service project for the team.** It teaches players to give something back to the community.
- **If you have an end-of-season gathering, take time to say a few positive things about each player.** Avoid Most Valuable Player awards and other "rankings." Focus on the relationships, the improvement of the team, and the unique contributions of each player.