

# Approaching Game Day



## Coaching styles – Coach Centred vs Athlete Centred

Coaching styles refer to how coaches work with players and where they direct their focus. They cover areas such as how much responsibility for decision making the coach allows the players and how much the coach focuses on the athletes' goals. The coaching style that you use will depend on your philosophy, your understanding of how athletes learn, how you were coached yourself, and what your objectives are. There are a range of styles you could use; it is useful to think of these as working along a continuum.

At one end of the continuum is a coach-centred coach, and at the other end is an athlete-centred coach. A **coach-centred coach** is there to achieve their own objectives, which are often results-based. They use control, direct instructions and often a 'win at all costs' attitude to achieve this. At the other end is the **athlete-centred coach**, who places the needs of their athletes at the centre of the coaching environment. They are focused on player development and creating independent athletes.

## Match Day Coaching

It is important to view trainings and match days as part of one process rather than two separate events.

The work that is done in training should lead into and be reinforced on match day.

You should then reflect on what occurred during the match and build on it in the next training session.

To do this effectively you need to understand the role of development and winning within sport.

## Development versus winning

There are two ways to view the purpose of competition: either to develop athletes or to win games and championships.

Where you decide to focus will depend on your philosophy, your team or organisation's objectives, and the developmental needs of your athletes. You need to consider each of these together and come to a balanced approach to development and winning.

The age and skill level of your athletes will clearly influence where you direct your focus. With children's sport the focus should clearly be on development, with the desire to win taking a back seat. As players age and develop, striving to win can take on a greater focus. Player development, however, should still be the overriding goal.

## **Importance of maintaining an athlete-centred approach**

It is important to bring the athlete-centred approach to match days so that you remain consistent in how you coach.

Many coaches promote ownership and decision-making during trainings and then turn coach-centred on match days.

If you do this, your players will believe that you do not really trust them to make decisions during competition. This will make them less likely to engage in the process during training. Their confidence will suffer as they will feel that you do not have enough belief in their ability to allow them to take ownership over their own competitive performance.

Using an athlete-centred approach on match day ensures that the needs of your players are not overridden by the competitiveness of the day. You should view competition as an opportunity for your players to continue learning, creating a positive match day experience that focuses on development and growth. Opportunities should be provided for all players, not just the strongest or best performing. Taking this view, you will help your players to learn from what occurs during the match, not criticise them for making mistakes.

## **How do you maintain an athlete-centred approach on match day?**

Usually it will not be appropriate – or even possible – to ask players questions while they are in the middle of competing.

So how do you apply an athlete-centred approach to match day?

Here we will discuss four approaches: using a *theme* on match day, setting *goals*, using an *observation tool*, and using *effective communication strategies*.

### ***Match day theme***

If you take a long-term approach to player development, you will likely plan your training sessions around “themes” that your players need to work on. These themes should be appropriate for their age and stage of development. They could include the techniques, skills or principles of play for your sport. Examples might include passing, receiving, tackling, transitions or evasion, among others. A good way to link your trainings and match days is to use the same theme across both.

Providing a theme for match day encourages your players to focus on specific tasks rather than just the result. This means that your players are actively trying to use what they have learnt in the week’s training session, and that you are viewing and assessing your players’ performance in light of how they perform relating to the current theme. The goals that the team set, and the areas that you discuss with your players, will be related to this theme.

It is important that the theme is not a shortcut to winning, but rather an area that is important for your players to develop. This maintains the link with training and ensures that player development is the focus throughout the process.

A shortcut to winning is a strategy or technique that makes it easier for your team to get a result, without actually helping the players to develop. Examples could include using the

long ball to a high striker in hockey, passing to the tallest players in basketball, or walking the strongest hitters in softball.

### ***Goal setting***

Goal setting is an effective tool for player development. Teams should have a goal for the season and goals for each game that they play. Players should also have individual goals that they are working towards. For an athlete-centred approach you should tie your goals to your match day theme.

Match day goals should be based on using what your players have learnt during training. This will help your players to focus on using what they have learnt and allows you to judge if there has been an improvement in the area. They also provide a way to measure the success of the team that isn't dependent on the result; even if they lose the game, if they have made improvements in the areas, they have been working on then the game has been a success.

### ***Observation tool (see approaches on page 4)***

Effective coaches are able to view a match and focus on the important areas of their team's performance. Performance can't be judged by the score line alone; you also need to judge how well your players are developing in the areas which have been the focus of your training. Just watching a game, it can be easy to get caught up in the excitement of the competition. To be effective you must actively seek out information that will tell you how well your players are actually doing.

One way to focus your observation is to use an observation tool. This is simply something you use to record targeted information on how your players are performing. The areas that you use should be tied to the theme of the match day and the goals for the match. The tool directs your focus to the relevant areas in the match and provides a means for recording what you observe.

Collecting this information directs the coach's attention to the theme of the match, and also provides valuable information for identifying the team's progress towards their chosen goals.

### ***Communication***

Coaches influence their players on match day through their communication. Often, we see coaches barking instructions to players from the side-line, telling players what they need to do in order to win, and generally trying to control everything that occurs. While you may not have time to use detailed questions and group discussions on match day, there are still ways you can use an athlete-centred approach.

If you are using an observation tool, you shouldn't have time to be continually barking instructions to your athletes. Remember your theme and focus on this during your team talks, along with what your team can do to achieve their goals. You can ask players for their opinions, and get them to assess their own performance before offering your critique. The

communication that you use can help to maintain a positive environment and assist your players to learn. Focus your communication on the theme of the day rather than how you will win the match.

### Approaches to observing the game

Categorising the game in 'moments';



By looking at the game in '4 moments', we can categorise our observations and in turn our feedback in context.

**WB Structures:** What is our team doing when we have the ball?

**Transition to WoB structures:** What is our team doing after we've lost the ball?

**WoB Structures:** What is our team doing after a prolonged period without the ball?

**Transition to WB structures:** What is our team doing once we've won the ball back?

You may like to gather information objectively, in the form of statistics;

| Quarter/Half | How many times did we enter and get an outcome in the circle? | Successful Outcome | Unsuccessful Outcome | Total |
|--------------|---|--------------------|----------------------|-------|
| 1            | ✓XXX✓XX✓✓✓✓XX✓✓✓✓XXX✓✓✓                                       | 12                 | 10                   | 22    |
| 2            | ✓XXX✓XX✓✓✓XX✓✓X✓✓✓✓   | 11                 | 8                    | 19    |
| 3            | ✓XXXXX✓✓✓X✓✓✓✓XXX✓✓✓✓✓  | 13                 | 9                    | 22    |
| 4            | XXX✓XX✓✓✓✓✓✓✓✓XX✓✓✓   | 11                 | 7                    | 19    |