

Youth Coaches Clinic - Governors Academy – 2/8/10
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The Coach:

Challenging, fair, friendly, invested.
Influential – be a great mentor.
Help them to improve.
When in doubt, make it fun.

The Game:

So many decisions – fast, fun, physical, team oriented.

Initial comments:

Coaching 9 year olds presents different challenges than coaching 14 year olds. Expectations must be different. I think it is important for young players to learn and play all positions, even goalie. For the younger guys, you can rotate D to mid, mid to attack, and sub in 3 to D (3-3-3). Line ‘em up on the sideline and sub them that way. Consider having an “anchor” kid at each spot – match weaker players with stronger players. At times, play you’re “A” team, but don’t let the “B” team flail in the wind. Defense wins games – make sure you have good athletes there. Defense is easier to coach and you will see results sooner with a good defensive plan (even a real simple one, like designating a “slider” at the U-11 level). Offense takes skill and time. The hardest thing for young players to do is to realize that they can be useful on offense without having the ball. Put in a simple midfield “sweep” play where you try to get the ball to a strong righty and clear out underneath so he can sweep to right. As that takes shape, have a low crease man “pop” on the dodge. Look to feed the crease. A simple “triangle” offense works too. If you reinforce the fundamentals at a young age – scoop, circle away, pass, catch, cradle, shoot, defend – and you teach your kids offensive spacing and good defensive concepts you will have success. You can spend hours trying to teach a settled 6 v 6 offense but realize that you’d be better off working on transition/uneven situations. We spend an awful lot of time doing “unsettled” drills, as those situations occur a lot. Early in the season, make sure you have a basic clear – even if that means telling a middie to go get the ball from the goalie - . Sometimes our clear here at GA is “give the ball to the fastest kid.” You have to be able to get the ball out of your end. Use the space behind the goal (x) on offense. It forces the defense to look back there and frees up shooters in front of the goal. If they move a bit while their defenders “ballwatch”, you can get easy shots near the goal if an attackman can pass. Older boys should be able to understand and implement more advanced concepts. Defensive communication, “draw and dump”, moving without the ball, and moving the ball are concepts they should understand. As boys get older, you can demand more of them, and they will respond.

Practice Planning:

Think about what you want to accomplish in practice i.e. work on ground balls, work on team offense, work on clearing – then write out a practice plan to meet those goals. I start each practice with a lap and a quick stretch. We usually do stickwork after that – line drills, triangles, or full field passing. Then we might do a drill that reinforces an individual skill – shooting, 1 on 1 D, dodging. Then we take a break. Then we might do a team oriented drill – team O, or team D. We always do something fun like the #'s drill, or 2 on 1 ground balls. I think relay races are great – divide them up into a few lines of 4 or 5 each. Do relay races – cradle left – cradle right – etc. We rarely practice for more than 90 minutes. For U-13 kids, I think an hour and 15 minutes is plenty – practices should be fun, not grueling. You want the guys to like coming to practice. Make sure you use drills as much as possible that engage lots of them – that's one reason I like the numbers drill. If you have 2 coaches – divide and conquer. You can each run a drill and switch them. Keep mental notes of what works well and what doesn't. Try to avoid situations where kids are standing around a lot or waiting in line. Action is best – don't spend a lot of time talking. They will tune you out pretty quickly. If you need to talk for a few minutes – best to do that at the end of practice.

As a coach of a sport where young boys carry sticks and wear helmets, you have to always look out for the boys who whack each other in line etc. While initially it might seem naïve, nip it in the bud as it is a predecessor to bullying and you want your practice field to be a safe place where everyone gets along – that will help the team. You may not realize it but young boys can become extremely nervous about trying to compete athletically. Make sure you seek out the less confident boys and reassure them. Create an atmosphere where effort, not ability, is rewarded. Demand an atmosphere where your players respect each other, their opponents, and the referees. No swearing, no sarcasm, nothing negative at all. If you belittle your opponent, or the ref, or a player, you are teaching that to the boys. The refs do the best they can. We can't play the game without them.

Team Defense:

Man to man. Pick up a man.
Contract on D, expand on O
Protect the middle – the area where the goalie worries (demo)
Don't chase all over
Talk talk talk
Concept of "help"
Slide + Fill
Dictate terms

Individual (One on One) Defense:

"Feets don't fail me now"

Hands

Lower center of gravity

Stickwork (checks)

Body position - so important

Hard work – mental and physical

Channel opponent to certain spots

Team Offense:

Expand

Balance the field - 1-3-2, 2-3-1, 1-4-1, open set etc.

Clear space for the ballcarrier

V Cut to get the ball

Sticks on the outside – away from pressure

Cut + replace

A team of passers

Create a play or 2 (“motion” vs. “set play”)

Work for a good shot – work together

Offense is difficult

Individual Offense:

Catch, throw, cradle, see

Fundamentals are the key

Stick protection

Change direction – 2 ways (most under-practiced but important skill in any game)

Shooting – overhand, opposite side of cage – high to low

Develop off hand – but crawl before walk

Be a passer first – it’s contagious

Transition – O to D

Get back! Don’t get beaten down the field – mids especially (think basketball or hockey)

Ride – Attack – get the ball back!

Pick up a man – point w/stick – talk

“Inside out” – (contract)

Stop the ball – force outside – down wing

Transition – D to O

Ball travels faster than running – pass – get open (“steps” drill)

For really young kids – emphasize getting to right spots and passing to an “area”

Push ball to goal but if D gets set up, to attack wing, then to X (safe)

Attack can look for cutters – otherwise, settle!

Clear – expand – use space

Goalie is first player on O

Young Boys:

I know a young boy with these characteristics: He loves to run around outside. He can be extremely enthusiastic. Sometimes he knocks things over in our house. He loves to eat. He sulks sometimes. He responds well to discipline – responds best to positive reinforcement. I know he wants to please me. He is not perfect by any means but I love him. This boy is my dog Simba. Boys are like puppies. With attention and discipline, they can be trained – in fact they really *want* to be trained. Without attention and discipline, they develop bad habits, they can become too aggressive, they can get lazy and surly. Training a dog is like training a team – you take a few steps forward, and one back. It requires patience and love, but it is well worth the effort. Reward them for effort as much as for results. Stick with it. Make it your hobby. Learn about it. It's fun.

Resources/Support

I've learned a lot from mentors like Renzie Lamb, the retired Williams coach who gave me my first lacrosse stick when I was about 8. I still call him for advice. Talking to fellow coaches about coaching is really helpful and important. "Coaching" and "Lacrosse" are 2 different things. Work at becoming a good coach, a good teacher, and *teach* the subject of lacrosse. I am a fan of the Positive Coaching Alliance www.positivecoach.org their website has plenty of good stuff. I like to read. There are plenty of good books, DVD's and articles about coaching. Championship Productions has a whole series of DVD's that are excellent. US Lacrosse is also a great resource. While there is more and more available to read about lacrosse, there is 1000x that much about basketball, a very similar sport. I love reading stuff by Pete Carrill the brilliant old Princeton coach. Dean Smith has some good books out too. John Wooden has a good coaching website too. Learning more about coaching makes watching any sport more fun.