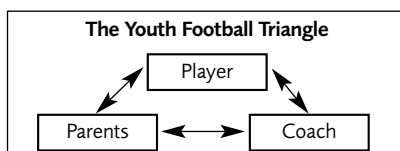


Fair Play for Young Players: Entering the Moral Maze

JOHN MCDERMOTT

"Fair Play is defined as much more than playing within the rules. It incorporates the concepts of friendships, respecting others and always playing within the right spirit. Fair play is defined as a way of thinking, not just a way of behaving."
European Code of Sports Ethics 1992

Society has seen the dwindling of youngsters playing impromptu games on the park and in the streets. Football for our young players is predominantly organised and is heavily reliant upon adult involvement.



The role and influence of the coach and parents

This youth football triangle illustrates the vital relationships that need to be developed between the three sets of people - the player, the parent and the coach.

The influence of the coach on young players cannot be overstated. It is therefore essential that coaches examine their own attitudes and beliefs. The most effective development of youngsters is by concentrating on performance goals as opposed to outcome goals. Emphasise the importance of striving to win, not winning itself. Keep winning in perspective and allow players to enjoy the experience. Dare to take risks in order to learn and encourage independent self-thinking players, not reliant on the (often diverse) touch-line instruction.

Recent studies have shown how easily young players are influenced and the adverse effects on fair play brought about by the 'win at all cost' attitudes on the player is fundamental in their development.

The relationship the coach develops with the parent and with the child, as well as the relationship directly between the parent and child is vitally important. Building effective lines of communication will avoid conflict and help establish greater respect and understanding. Ignore parents at your peril! At the very least, problems will result in the player receiving inconsistent messages from two very important people, causing confusion, uncertainty and unhappiness.

Problem Parents

The successful operation of a Youth Football Club is highly dependent on parents for finance, transport, administration, fundraising, etc. On the whole most parents are supportive and can appreciate the efforts of those involved. However, the following problem parents will probably be recognised:

1. The Delegators

The coach and the Club is used as the creche. The parents fail to get involved or support Club activities. The youngsters are dropped off and picked up later on and the parents have not shared any of the child's experiences.

2. The Jekyll & Hyde

The normally passive, mild-mannered parent, who when the whistle blows prowls up and down the touch-line, kicks every ball, abuses all and sundry (especially the officials) and at the end of the game is more exhausted than their embarrassed child.

3. The Expert

The parent who feels their child must be the star of tomorrow - often hoping for the football success they failed to achieve when young. The pressure placed on these players undermines their motivation and play becomes work.

Implementing Codes of Conduct
- Be **Pro-active**

As mentioned in the Youth Football Triangle, communication between parents, managers and players can help create a positive environment:

- Involve the players in establishing clear rules of behaviour - giving them ownership and responsibility.
- Consult with parents at a pre-season meeting and establish and record managers' guidelines and a code of conduct of parents and spectators. Any future problems in the season can be referred back to the agreed code.

• It is essential that the Code is used as a working document and implemented when necessary for the good of the parents, your Club and the future commitment of young players to football.

Remember:

- "Every now and then, some time, some place, you are going to have to plant your feet, stand firm and make a point about who you are and what you believe in."
Pat Riley, leading NBA (Basketball Coach)

Examples of Good Practice

Throughout the country, I have learned of numerous examples of good practice, devising, implementing and enforcing Codes of Conduct. The Football Association is extremely keen to learn of such good practice and to share it with members of The FA. Coaches Association.

I would be grateful if clubs could send in practical examples of their Codes of Conduct with evidence of how they have been accepted.

We will be publishing some of these in future editions of 'Insight' for the benefit of others. Please send to:
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John McDermott graduated from Liverpool University. He worked within the Community Scheme at Leeds United FC before establishing the Football in the Community Scheme at Watford FC prior to becoming Youth Development Officer.

John joined The Football Association two and a half years ago and worked as Regional Director for Football Development in the south of England. With the implementation of the 'Charter for Quality', there was the need for a National Football Development Officer and John was appointed to that position in January 1998.