

## **Communication Strategies for Soccer**

*"Well done is better than well said." --- Ben Franklin*

Soccer coaches spend most of their time transferring knowledge to, and receiving feedback from their athletes. This knowledge is designed to improving skilled soccer performance, and includes technical and tactical information, organizational details, and strategical principles. Therefore, the coaches' success and the success of their athletes will depend in part on the effectiveness of their communication skills. The following strategies will assist the coach with his/her communication of technical information, and with promoting a climate for effective performance:

### **Preparation Phase**

Before the coach can attempt to improve the skill levels of the players she/he must first perform a diagnosis of both the skill and the player. The diagnosis of the coach should answer the following questions:

- What qualities are needed in the performance?
- What are the attributes of the performer?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the performer?

Next, the coach must establish a structure for effective learning, and finally, she/he should develop criteria for measuring successful performance.

The following check list is recommended for assisting coaches prepare for a practice session:

- What is the ideal performance?
- What is the required performance?

- What are the improvement goals for this session?
- How can these goals be achieved?
- How can objective coaching points be made?
- What is the order or priority of coaching points?
- How can a suitable learning environment be created?

### **Demonstration Phase**

The purpose of the demonstration by the coach is to allow the player the opportunity to formulate a "motor plan" which will form the foundation for subsequent performances. The goal is to get the player to produce a rough approximation of the skill initially, and to subsequently refine this initial performance to the desired level. Therefore, before performing the actual demonstration of the skill the coach should consider the following issues:

- The suitability of the demonstration: Demonstrations must match the player's skill level and developmental phase.
- The speed of the movements: Demonstrations should be performed at normal speeds.
- Method for introducing the skill: A brief description of the skill should always precede the demonstration.
- The main focus of the demonstration.
- The number of times the demonstration should be performed: The coach should perform several successful demonstrations with the players instructed to perform as soon as they think they know what to do.
- Points to emphasize: The coach should focus on proper techniques and not on mistakes.

### **Skill Execution Phase**

During the execution phase the coach will assist the player to make positive use of his/her efforts. The coach should assist the player to improve her/his performance by:

- Providing constant feedback concerning the performance.
- Giving precise knowledge of results.
- Directing the attention of the player to the important parts of the feedback.
- Providing instruction.

### **Communication of Organizational Details**

The emphasis during a soccer training session is to maximize the quality of performance while maintaining a high level of activity. Therefore, the coach should spend minimal time on organizational details such as moving players into groups and communicating procedural details. The following coaching guidelines are recommended in order to maintain a high level of activity during training:

- Determine what groupings of players are required, when they are required, and a plan to get them quickly into position and exercising.
- Plan for a smooth flow of activity during the training session in order to improve productivity.
- Use methods which ensure that the players spend maximum time working and minimum time watching the coach and other players perform and/or listening to instructions.
- Progress from simple to complex activities

## **Communication in Promoting an Effective Climate for Performance**

### Effective Team Communication Strategies

At the beginning of the season the coach should provide the team with information which will help them assess her/him as a person. The coach should also clearly indicate her/his expectations concerning work ethic, fitness, skill, tactics, attitude, and commitment.

During the season the coach should use personal conversations, game film and statistics to improve game performance. She/he should avoid angry flare-ups immediately after a loss. Coaches who are unable to restrain their angry feelings should hold a team meeting immediately after the game, not to punish the team but to assist the coaches release some of their tensions in a straight and honest fashion.

Finally, the coach should keep her/his instructions simple and audible during games. Before the game and during the half time break the coach's instructions should concentrate on only two or three important points.

### Technique for improving communication between athletes and coaches

The basic ingredients of successful communication between coaches and players are mutual respect and trust. The following strategy is recommended for improving communication between players and coaches:

- Let the player know that she/he has the right to express her/his ideas and that her/his opinion counts.
- Praise achievement and effort not personalities.
- Statements of understanding should always precede criticism.
- Avoid negative and sarcastic coaching.
- Avoid use of the expression "I told you so"