

The Top 6 Biggest Mistakes Youth Sports Coaches Make

by [Janis B. Meredith](#) | May 22, 2017

After 29 years of being a coach's wife and 22 years of being a sports mom, I've encountered hundreds of coaching styles. None of those styles comes anywhere close to being perfect. Every coach makes mistakes.

Mistakes are not desirable of course, but they will happen. As a coach, your job is not to beat yourself up over it, but to learn from it. Here are the top six mistakes I've seen youth sports coaches make:

Mistake 1: You Refuse to be a Student of the Game

Coaches, you might talk about the values of being coachable with your players. But what about you? Are you looking for ways to better your coaching skills? Are you a student of your game?

The best coaches I've known were those who always looked for ways to better themselves as a coach. They studied films, watched other teams play, went to clinics to learn from experts and asked other coaches for advice.

Even after three decades of coaching, my husband is still learning how he could improve. If you think you know it all when it comes to coaching your sport, then it just may be that you've already reached your peak as a coach and it's downhill from here.

Mistake 2: You Try to Make Everyone Happy

You cannot please everyone. If you try, you will not only stress yourself out, you will dilute your influence as a leader. People pleasers do not make strong coaches.

Instead of giving in to parenting demands so they will not be angry at you, focus on what's best for the team. If you don't have skin thick enough to do that, perhaps it's best to hand over the reigns to someone who can.

Mistake 3: You Focus More on Outcome Than Process

In youth sports, the primary objective is not winning—it's development and fun. Winning is definitely a goal, but it should not be pursued to the exclusion of everything else. Youth sports are a journey and a process that shapes young lives. Winning at all costs ignores that.

Mistake 4: You Put Athletes in a Box

You might be doing this in two ways. First, you label kids because of size, sibling performance, rumors or even because of what you think of their parents. Labels are

convenient and perhaps they make things easier for you as you plug kids into positions. But labels do not give every athlete a chance to grow and reach their potential. Let the athlete prove you wrong.

The second way you might be putting your players in a box is by forcing them to play only one position. This is understandable in college and the pros, but in youth sports, kids should be challenged to think outside the box and stretch themselves. Give them chances in practice to work on other positions. You never know what butterfly may emerge from the cocoon.

Mistake 5: You Don't Communicate Efficiently

Unfortunately, many coaches are notorious for their poor communication. Have you ever felt scattered and found yourself constantly forgetting to give pertinent information to parents? Or perhaps you don't feel the need to explain to your players why you do certain things, like pull them out of the game or take them out of the starting lineup.

If the true purpose of youth sports is for kids to grow and develop, then it's also important for coaches to communicate the why behind the what. Why a child isn't getting as much playing time as she wants. Why a player can't play the position he wants. Why you are running this offense or defense. When athletes and parents are well informed, it will go a long way on cutting down the season's conflicts.

Mistake 6: You Put Band-aids on Broken Bones

What happens when there's a conflict between two players? Do you bench them and move on or do you help them work through it? What happens when a player constantly shows up late for practice? Do you make him or her run laps and ignore that there may be something deeper going on?

Coaching is a demanding job and it's understandable why you may be tempted to liberally use band-aids.

However, a good coach may sometimes have to wear a therapist hat for a few minutes. Obviously, if there are deep emotional issues, the athlete may need to see a counselor. But as a coach, you should be striving to develop the whole child, not just improve her batting average or his throwing percentage. And that means that you may sometimes have to look beneath the surface for what's really going on in a situation.

Coach, never underestimate the positive impact you can have on a child's life. You may think you can only teach Xs and Os, but really, you can teach them *life*. If you've made any of these mistakes, face them and learn from them. In doing so, you are modeling yet another life lesson to your players: mistakes are made for learning, not repeating.