

Five things new coaches need to know

Are you stepping up to the plate (pun intended) this season and finally volunteering to be a youth sports coach? Well first off, congratulations. And secondly, thank you! Without parent-coaches most sports leagues wouldn't exist. Plenty of *SportsSignup* team members coach their children and we can tell you that you're in for a wild ride! It's going to be a lot of work, but it's also a ton of fun. Here are five things we think all new sports coaches should know:

1. Have a game plan for your practices.

While you don't need to have every single minute planned out, it does help to have a gameplan for each practice BEFORE you show up. What skills are you focusing on during that practice? What drills are you going to be running? How many drill stations will you have going at once (pro tip, it helps keeps the kids moving!)? Especially when you are working with really young players, having a plan for your practices helps keep things moving and minimizes the downtime, which in turn keep their attention and focus!

Keep in mind that sometimes something will happen that blows your practice plan out of the water, so being flexible is just as important as being prepared!

2. Focus on the fundamentals.

You are working with kids, not pros! Just don't worry about turning a triple play before your kids can throw and catch properly. A lot of new coaches worry about impressing other coaches, parents, the officials or league administrators, and assume that if they turn their entire team into a squad of superstars they will have done their job. In reality, your job is A) to teach the basics and B) to ensure the kids have fun while doing it! A coach can make or break a player's season, and we want kids to learn to love sports and love being active. If you run your Little League team like it's the MLB spring training camp you risk losing some players that might have otherwise played for years!

3. Keep your cool.

Remember that you are dealing with kids of varying athletic ability. Some kids might be picking up a baseball bat for the first time; others might have 2-3 years under their belt. Some kids are happy to be there, others will drag their feet the whole season. But they are still kids; they are going to make mistakes, lose focus, goof off and so forth. Just remember to keep your cool no matter how frustrated you may get. Yelling and screaming and throwing things might work for Bobby Knight but a new coach doesn't need to turn into a jerk in order to get players (and parents) to pay attention. We're not saying you can't ever raise your voice, but make sure you have a real purpose behind every action you take.

4. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

Another mistake many new coaches make is that they don't ask for help when they need it! Don't be afraid to talk to another coach you respect and trust and ask them for any tips on how to run practices, work with the kids, handle aggressive parents and so forth. Truly great youth sports coaches are happy to share their knowledge because they know the truth of youth sports--it's all about the kids! An experienced coach can help you avoid some common pitfalls because they've been there, done that and want to save you the heartache.

5. Find a coaching style that works for you.

Some coaches are a little more aggressive, others are more soft-spoken. Some coaches are more like task masters while others just want to have fun. There isn't necessarily one coaching style that works better than another, it really comes down to what your team responds to. You don't need to scream and swear and kick the dirt to make a point, but at the same time you don't have to fall over yourself to compliment players when they haven't earned that level praise. So what kind of coach are you? Only time will tell!