

"What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us." ~Oliver Wendell Holmes

THE 'ELLESMERE' WAY

A philosophy for coaching sport.

It is natural that we constantly refine our philosophy on coaching. At Ellesmere we have a great opportunity to harness our energy and influence the lives, in a positive way, of the young people in our care. Sport provides a unique opportunity to develop life-skills that are difficult to replicate in other settings. It is important that we direct the children in a similar way. Allowing individual coaching flair is desirable, but this must be tempered with a clear set of guidelines on how we approach the coaching environment.

Prioritisation and Delineation of Coaching Objectives

It is an indisputable fact that children are their parents' and nation's most precious asset. It may seem natural to assume, therefore, that the majority of adults mean well for children. Yet, how often do we wish something for our child, and then step back and take the time to find out whether this is what the child really wants? More often than not, adults feel they know better, and thus, exclude children from the decision making process. Youth sport, unfortunately, is a prime example of this phenomenon.

A study commissioned in 2002 of 10,000 students ages 10-18 investigated their feelings about sport. The students reacted to questions such as why they participate, why they quit, and what changes they would make in order to get involved again in a sport they dropped.

The most important finding of the study was that winning, which is the most publicised and pursued goal of sports, never ranked higher than seventh even among the most competitive athletes. "To have fun" and "to improve my skills" were consistently the first two choices why the students chose to play sports. When asked why they dropped from sports three of the first five reasons were "I was not having fun," "coach was a poor teacher," and "too much pressure." How many coaches you know would have predicted this outcome?

Below is a list of some fundamentals that provide a framework for a philosophy of coaching the 'Ellesmere' way.

Teamwork + friendship = Teamship, together we are stronger.

For Coaches

- Become a communicator, a listener and a giver of feedback.
- Recognise the needs of your players and balance your needs with theirs.
- Fun is pivotal both in practice and matches. If it's not 'fun,' young people won't play sport.
- Develop perspective: remember what you were like at their age and what you could do then; don't judge the players by what you can do now.

- Seek out opportunities and coach education that teach not only sports-related skills but also communication and interpersonal skills that will help you work with parents and get the most out of your players.
- Try to work with parents and make them part of the team rather than viewing them as critics to be avoided.
- Skill development is a crucial aspect of fun; it is more important than winning even among the best athletes.
- The most rewarding challenges of sports are those that lead to self-knowledge.
- Intrinsic rewards (self-knowledge that grows out of self-competition) are more important in creating lifetime athletes than are extrinsic rewards (victory or attention from others).
- Develop sportsmanship and the value of teamwork without sacrificing fun
- Children make mistakes; we must not berate them for this as this is a valuable part of the learning process.
- Performance is crucial. Constant and never ending improvement.
- It's not just winning and losing that matters; it's how you teach your players to win and lose
- If winning wasn't important we wouldn't keep the score, however we must have a double goal to win but more importantly to use sport to teach life lessons.
- Play to your strengths – find your Factor X
- Keep the common touch
- Believe that the job you do makes a difference, Don't settle for success: Make a difference – strive for significance

Players, when they reflect on their time at Ellesmere, will rarely remember an exact score line. Time usually allows for exaggeration. What they will remember however is their friendship, the fun times they had and occasionally a memorable coach who inspired them, and made sport fun regardless of results. We want to pursue improvement and success, but this can be measured in many ways, not just by results.

The goal for sport is to focus on individual and collective improvement and performance whilst creating a dynamic learning environment. We must have a commitment to encouraging lifelong participation in sport and keep a perspective that the students are 'just passing through our hands'. Achievement, self-awareness, friendship, fun and self confidence can be some of the benefits of a well managed games programme. These long-term goals should be at the forefront of our coaching philosophy not the short term self gratification of a win at all costs attitude.

We have a huge opportunity to create a vibrant games structure

Key points for coaches to help apply this philosophy.

- Ensure you conduct a warm up at each session. Cool down is not so important but a plenary is.
- Ensure the environment is safe for practice
- Register and keep a record of attendance for each session.
- Be punctual for practice and matches.

- Administration – place team lists and arrangements on notice boards, write match reports, write articles for the Ellesmerian as necessary. Pass on results/news to master i/c, Head of sport and marketing manger.
- Support the master i/c each sport and communicate with them about players, kit, pitches and any problems as they arise.
- Give positive feedback to players, encourage them to improve.
- Always have a team talk after the match. Pick out 4 positive and 2 negatives. Finish with the positives.
- We must never berate a player in public, shout or abuse the referee. We all get emotional about sport but we must control our emotions. It is, in the end, only a game.
- Always take the time to point out to players what they are doing well.
- Take a long term view of practice and matches. Winning is fun, but the majority of matches are friendlies. Player improvement is the goal regardless of results.
- Encourage the students to attend match teas and socialise.
- Where possible have a player meet the opposition bus.
- Clear away the kit that has been used and ensure the environment is tidy for the next user.
- Have a medi bag available (these can be collected from sister). Refill the bag as necessary.
- Take opportunities for inset in your sport
- Set the highest standards in everything that you do.
- Demand high standards from the pupils in terms of
 - Behaviour on and off the pitch.
 - Dress
 - Effort in practice and matches.
 - Conduct towards other players

It is almost impossible have a definitive list, but we all can recognise good and bad practice.