

# 10 Steps for Coaching Success

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**1. INCH BY INCH** - Teach your players how to win. Teach them the importance of the 'little things'. What is their responsibility on this play, in this series, in this drill, at practice, in the class room, at home? How can we measure all those little things and how do they affect our lives?

*"You find out that life is just a game of inches. So is football. Because in either game, life or football, the margin for error is so small. I mean one half step too late or too early you don't quite make it. One half second too slow or too fast and you don't quite catch it. The inches we need are everywhere around us. They are in every break of the game, every minute, every second.*

*On this team, we fight for that inch. On this team, we tear ourselves and everyone around us to pieces for that inch. We CLAW with our finger nails for that inch. Cause we know when we add up all those inches that's going to make the difference between WINNING and LOSING ... between LIVING and DYING.*

*I'll tell you this, in any fight, it is the guy who is willing to die who is going to win that inch. And I know if I am going to have any life anymore it is because, I am still willing to fight, and die for that inch because that is what LIVING is. The six inches in front of your face."*

*~ Al Pacino in Any Given Sunday*

If you fight and claw for every inch, you will be a winner. Sounds like simple logic but it is a tough lesson to teach. Stay focused on right now and how to win that next inch. Do your job. Don't worry about anybody else. Don't worry about 'what if' or 'what happened'. Kids and even some coaches spend too much time worrying about where we were and not where we are going.

**2. CONFIDENCE** – Confidence is the most important attribute in football.

Players need to have and display confidence in:

1. System (it works, it wins and we have answers for opponents game-plans)
2. Equipment (it fits, it protects and it will keep me safe)
3. Themselves (I am smart enough, fast enough & strong enough to do my job and help this team win)
4. Teammates (they are smart enough, fast enough & strong enough to do their jobs and help this team win)
5. Coaching Staff (they love me, they love the team & they know enough to do their jobs and help this team win).

Assistant Coaches need to be confident in many of the same things and all good Head Coaches address this issue before they ever start dealing with the players. Teach your ACs about your schemes and your plans for the team to get them 100% on board with everything you plan to do so that the kids never get any mixed messages. **Mixed Messages Kill Confidence!!!**

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**3. COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENT** – Create competition in everything you do as a team. Create competition where there is none. In a society where winning and losing seems to be frowned upon in many sports, the teams that win understand that it is ok to win (and it's ok to lose, it's just not as much fun).

Whether you love winning or just hate losing, competition is how we get there. If you want to be truly great you have to crave competition. You have to try to win every play, every point of contact, stop every advance made by your opponent and do not give them one moment of victory. The players and teams that can focus like this will win a lot more than they will lose. And this starts at practice by teaching them that everything in your sport is a competition. Who runs the fastest, who does the most pushups, who lifts the most weight or who has the most endurance. These things are measureable and they all help toward teaching the lesson that if we work to win at the 'little things' then the 'big things' like touchdowns and shutouts and victories and championships will take care of themselves.

Another lesson we teach our players in a competitive environment is that losing is part of life (there is in fact far more losing than winning) and while we don't like to lose, it isn't the end of the world; instead it is the beginning of an opportunity to improve ourselves so we can perform better next time. This is a life lesson that far too few of our children are learning and we can help by creating a competitive environment in our program.

The last thing we hope to get from all this competition is a sense of 'fairness' in the eyes of our parents. We understand that you can never completely get rid of those parents who claim you are 'holding their child back from getting an athletic scholarship' because you chose someone else to play quarterback or whatever other position they believe 'little Johnny' should play. However, when the kids are competing at everything in practice it is much easier for some parents to see the shortcomings of 'little Johnny' or to accept that he is actually a great Center or Safety instead of a Quarterback or Wide Receiver. It is even easier when the kid does well at something and he is proud that he wins a Sumo Drill or Snap in a Bucket Drill and he WANTS to play where you needed him to play all along.

Competition will also ensure MAXIMUM EFFORT all the time. Kids tend to give better effort during contests than they do during practice. So we make sure they are involved in a lot of contests.

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**4. DEVELOP AGGRESSION** - This is one of the most commonly asked / toughest to answer questions by youth football coaches. I know that if you do the first 3 steps on this list, it makes this step much, much easier. Aggression is one of those things that most parents discourage in their child almost from day one. Instead of teaching kids that there is a time and place to be aggressive, we simply teach them not to do it at all. It is one of the biggest reasons that kids who have 'no home training' do so well in youth sports where aggression is an asset. They seem like bullies or thugs off the field but they get the job done on the field. So how do we get the other kids to be aggressive on the field? Well age is one factor. As boys age they have hormone changes that bring out aggression. But as a coach you don't get to control the when a child grows up or has hormonal changes. So what can you do?

We do many things but these are the most important:

1. First we remind the boys often that is ok to be aggressive and play physical and compete to win.
2. We create as many competitions as possible and we show the players how being aggressive will help them win those competitions.
3. We reward aggressive play by the non-aggressive kids. No we don't reward bullying or bad behavior. But when they do something that is based on attacking or being aggressive or just being physical then we make a big deal over it so they have incentive to do it again.
4. Finally, we use schemes and techniques that are based on aggression; it is in the job description so to speak. Their job is to move forward or attack downhill or hit low to high or finish the block, etc. etc. Then the kids who 'do their job' get to play more and playing time motivates players.

**5. SIMPLE SCHEMES** – Offensively and defensively you need to keep things simple yet still be adaptable to talent, team, and opponents (both league type and specific opponents). This doesn't always mean just run 4 plays or just sit in one defensive front all the time. You can 'Keep It Simple Stupid' through the use of blocking rules, simple front calls that keep responsibilities the same, changing formations to give different looks for the same play and series based offensive schemes where the footwork is the same for many different plays to keep the learning curve down. One very important benefit from using 'simple schemes' is the amount of time you need to teach these schemes. It will be significantly less than what it takes to teach elaborate or difficult schemes. The time saved can be spent on other things; better fundamentals, better athletes, more competitions, stronger brotherhood, etc. etc. etc.

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**6. FOCUS ON FUNDAMENTALS** – We are talking about things like Blocking, Ball Handling & Finishing Plays when you are on offense. Then on defense we want to focus on Tackling, Turnovers and Proper Pursuit Angles. You rarely find a great team that isn't fundamentally sound. Sometimes talent can overcome fundamentals but nothing beats talented kids with great fundamentals. There is more information about fundamentals in the practice planning segment below.

**7. IMPROVE ATHLETIC ABILITY** – Most coaches don't believe this is possible in the short time they have with their players and this is probably true when talking about the top 10% of the team. But most of the time you don't really need to improve the top 10%, it's the bottom 90% of your roster we need to get better. You can get good improvements in speed, strength, lateral movement, and explosiveness over a short period of time due to kids being able to adapt quickly to good training.

These improvements really help with Step #2 and overall they help your program. And it can be as simple as incorporating Dynamic Warmups or Core Strength Training for 15 minutes per practice or using a voluntary conditioning program in the summer before the season starts. Any little bit helps and the more you can find time to do, the more your players will benefit. As you read the rest of the steps you will hopefully find a few more minutes each day you can use toward improving the athletes on your team.

**8. WARRIOR SOCIETY** – Work to create a band of brothers. You work so hard on the practice field (blood, sweat and tears) that the games are easy. This isn't as easy as it sounds. You can't just beat on the kids until they hate the sport. You have to instill an attitude where the players desire to work hard at practice. You have to convince them that this is what will make them into monsters on game day. Dave Potter used to say it was *'hard to play against his teams but it was harder to play for his teams'*. He sets high expectations and his kids achieve those expectations. One of those expectations is 100% Effort in everything you do. Don't underestimate what kids can or will do. The only sure bet is that they will never achieve **more** than what you ask of them.

**9. COMMUNICATION** – Be a great communicator. Keep it simple and to the point so you don't confuse anyone. Never let it be said that people don't know what to expect from you or they don't know what you want or they don't know where you stand on a subject. Be honest with your players, parents and Asst. Coaches. Have a schedule and stick to it. And speaking of schedules ...

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**10. PRACTICE PLANNING** – Create a practice plan so that you can always accomplish what needs to be done. Our plan is simple with a few adjustable spots so we can progress each day. But the majority of our practice is the same each and every day; the techniques and skills that make our players better.

**EVERY DAY DRILLS** – warm-ups and fundamentals done as a team

EDDs should be ritualistic enough that your kids can do it without any coaches. Now that doesn't mean our coaches don't have to work. It just allows them to focus on the 'little things' while the boys drill. This is a great spot to break in 'new' coaches as well. It is also generally more than half of my practice each and every day.

1. Dynamic Warmups – Skills & Drills
2. Stance Drill
3. Cadence Clap Drill
4. LEG (blocking & tackling progression)
5. Sleds & Chutes (whole team)
6. Tackling Circuit (whole team)

Very little changes in our EDDs from day to day. We might only work on 2 pt. or 3 pt. stance some days or we will change up a tackling drill from time to time. But we do these things every day without fail and it usually takes from an hour to an hour and 20 minutes depending on the size of the team and how quickly we finish 5 and 6 ... 1 - 4 takes about 30 minutes.

**INDY DRILLS & FUNDAMENTALS** – individual drills done in smaller groups ... this is when all the real coaching happens.

Once we finish our EDDs, we will break into Offensive or Defensive groups. We do this every day (that is why we used to consider it part of our EDDs) but the drills we choose will vary greatly. Some days we will use this time to install schemes and other days we will work on fundamentals or techniques involved in those schemes.

On Offensive days this is usually Backs and Linemen but can change based on need. Sometimes we need to work on passing to our Tight Ends so those days we change up our groups a little bit.

Obviously the defense you use and how you coach it will determine those groups when you want to work on Defense. For our 33 Stack we usually just have a Pressure Group and a Cover Group when we break apart although I do like to spend some time with just the DOGs from time to time.

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**Offensive Fundamentals** - blocking, footwork, ball security & finish every play.

1. Blocking progressions are muscle memory and must be done every day. This includes stance, steps and technique.
2. Footwork & Pathways of your Backs on plays must be precise.
3. Ball Security is important. You lose the ball you lose your position.
4. Faking is important. Do it right every time. Get your eyes on a defender and convince him that you have the ball and you are going to score.

**Defensive Fundamentals** – tackling, 11 men to the ball, turnovers & aggression

1. If you want to make tackles in the game, you have to make tackles in practice. You don't get good at anything you don't do repeatedly.
2. Defenses that 'swarm' or 'gang tackle' are always good defenses no matter what scheme they choose.
3. Create turnovers and you create opportunities. Make this a priority and your team will win the turnover battle.
4. Aggressive defenders will attack and win ... PERIOD.

Then we have the remainder of practice to rep plays as a team or install special teams or do some live scrimmaging or whatever we deem as important for that day. But the key to our practice plan is our EDDs. We go through that entire segment in 60 to 70 minutes each day with water placed between the drill stations so it is always available to anyone in need of a drink. This keeps us at a high pace which helps condition our kids while having the added benefit of them knowing exactly where to go and what drill to do next for the first hour of practice. We don't waste any time talking about what comes next or reminding our kids where they are going when this is finished. It also keeps me from pulling my hair out when a player is late because of whatever reason and I needed him here to work on installing our new trick super-secret handshake kick return or whatever else we needed to do. Now if a player is late, he is just hurting his athletic and skill development and he is not cutting into my teaching time.

**There you go ... 10 Steps to Success ...**

**Don't worry about winning games or Championships ...**

**Just do the 'little things' and the 'big things' will happen ...**

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