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That is a question I get asked quite a bit. I also am a little perplexed when someone that is a poor coach by most definitions is called a "good coach".

Before we can determine if a coach is "good" or not, we first have to determine what the goals of a youth football coach should be. The goals should include both football skills goals and character building goals. Too many programs go to the extreme on either. The "win at all costs" coach that cares little about integrity or playing time is just as damaging as the coach that is disorganized and has no clue about what he is doing but is the nicest guy and lets all the kids play the same amount.

The goal of the youth football coach should be to teach the basics in a safe and technically sound manner. He should be organized and confident in his approach and skills. He should make the practices and games fun to the point that the kids lead by example showing the highest possible standards of integrity and sportsmanship. He should coach the kids up to their legitimate ability to compete while ensuring all players that meet minimum behavior and attendance standards play at least some each game and feel part of the team.

So should youth football coaches be judged based on win/loss records?

Partly but not solely. Football teams should play up to their God given potential, but we can't ignore all the other factors that the coach should be judged on. If a coach is losing most of his games year after year after year, something is wrong. I personally know one coach that has coached in three different organizations in the last 4 years, and has a 4 - 40 record. Is it possible that he had the worst team in the League by chance with 3 different football organizations? Doubtful.

The same is often true of good football coaches, are they just lucky every year? Doubtful. My first football coaching position was in a blind draft football league. All we had to go on for our selection process was the kids age and weight. So over time the teams are going to be pretty even size and talent wise, since we all have the same number of kids. Well in the 5 years that I was the KWAA League in Omaha, Nebraska the Dolphins won 6 League Titles (2 age groups). Out of 20 teams the Dolphins won 60% of the League Titles. The only time they didn't win was the two times my teams were the best because of overwhelming talent and the other time was when the entire coaching staff turned over. Yes, they went from 1st place to last place after the coaches moved on in my final year in that League and before I went to the Single Wing. Youth football is much more than who has the Jimmy's and Joe's, it has much to do about coaching, X's and O's. If it was all about Jimmy's and Joe's, why bother having coaches at all, just let the kids go out there and call their own plays. Or better yet, if you could choose between a soccer mom and Tom Osborne coaching your kids youth football team who would do a better job?

Football coaches can coach competitively as well as meet all the other criteria. Unfortunately many of those that have great records do not play all the kids, they are "win at all costs" coaches, they berate the referees and their player's.

However, it can be done, the amazing Durham Fighting Eagles Pop Warner Pee Wee football team whose record over the last 5 years is something like 62 - 2, have done it. So does Jim Barg in Rochester, NY, Eric Strutz in Stateline, Illinois and many others. I promise you none of my personal Screaming Eagle

teams has ever had a coach or player flagged for unsportsmanlike conduct or had anyone tossed from a game. You can be a great sport and play competitive football.

I have also seen "good" coaches that have great records for a year or two based solely on talent. They run their fastest kid around end with little or no blocking for touchdown after touchdown and somehow they are a great coach? Why? Because by geography a blazer ends up on his team and he has sense enough to run him around end 20 times per game?

A good football coach has a win/loss record that is at or above what most would consider the potential for that particular team. If your team is in its first year of existence and are playing against experienced kids, sure a 4 wins season may be "playing to potential". Or if your leagues is divided up into "A" and "B" squads and one of your "B" squads gets put in an "A" division to even out the teams you win potential may be very low, but in most cases it isn't.

Most common Excuses for Losing at the Youth Football Level:

**We are too small:**

This is a good one, the kids are too small yet the coach chooses a system that requires one on one blocking "I" or wishbone formation plays. We had one team in our league, a nearby "rival", complain to all that would listen that they couldn't compete because they were too small. The very next year they showed up with the biggest teams at age 11 - 12 "A" and 13 - 14 "A" that anyone had seen in 20 years. They were incredible, their 11 - 12 team dwarfed my 13 -14 team with at least 5 kids over 200 pounds. This team must have spent all summer recruiting every big kid in the area to play for them. That season their 11 - 12's won 1 game and their 13 - 14's won 2. In the subsequent league meeting now they said they didn't have any speed and the big kids they had were "soft". In 2003 this same organization had what they called the "fastest kid they had had in 25 years" at age 13 - 14, he had to lose 10 - 15 pounds to make the running back weight rule, a real specimen. Predictable they won just 2 - 3 games. Every year a different excuse, the real reason was that their coaching was downright poor. On the other hand Scott P of the KWAA Panthers, now Omaha Thunder and Monte O'Hara of the CB Panthers win year in and year out with average sized and average speed teams. Scott's teams have even won 4 - 5 National Unlimited "Top Gun" National Championship. Look at the small De La Salle High School teams from California, they won 150 straight games with small kids.

Many of the teams running the Single Wing, run it because for whatever reason, they seem to lack size from year to year. My 2004 8-10 year old team went 11-0 and was by far the smallest and youngest team in the league with just one player over 100 pounds and 13 eight year olds. If you think we had speed, think again we scored on one sweep the entire season. Same for my 2002 team, just 1 player over 1000 pounds and one sweep score for the year. We were so slow, that our main weapon was the fullback wedge, our fullback Josh A, had over 30 wedge TDs that year. We were also the youngest team in our division and won the League Title.

**Our kids lack heart :**

Some kids naturally have a bit more "moxie" than others, but it can be developed in most players. The reason most players do not play aggressively is not because they aren't comfortable and confident in their technique, number two : they are not aggressive rarely happens if a player is not 100% confident in his ability to perform the techniques required in the task or 100% confident about what the heck he is suppose to do.

How can a football player feel confident about who he is suppose to block when he has only been told to "block the person across from you". What happens when there is a player in both his inside and outside gap, two players "across" from him?

Many football coaches on the first day of pads throw the lambs to the wolves. They do full speed tackling drills to "see who can hit". Of course most of the first year players do poorly because they are not comfortable with their technique and they don't know the how's or why's of "accelerating through the contact". We slowly build up to full speed tackling to landing pads with little or no acceleration. By the time we do full speed tackling every player would have executed at least 300 tackles of far less impact. In fact my personal teams rarely if ever get out hit, but we do full speed hitting rarely more than 50 minutes per week total.

If the kids are not playing aggressively 9 times out of 10 it is the head coaches fault.

Other Excuses :

**We play in a tough football league :**

We saw a team on our league move to another league and have nearly similar results. Good and poor coaching supersedes any league the team may be in.

**We don't practice as much as other teams :**

Most teams waste their practice time. We don't practice just 2 days per week after school starts and we went 51-1 doing it this way against teams that practice 3 to 5 nights per week.

**We are just trying to have fun :**

You can have fun and win at the same time. This is what teams that expect to lose say. No player that loses every game or nearly every game year after year is having fun he probably isn't being coached well either.

**Good Sportsmanship :**

We can't control the other teams we can't control the kinds of kids that end up on our teams, but as adults we take responsibility for our actions. That means setting a perfect example as far as sportsmanship goes. Since we only allow adults to coach and adults are old enough to know that youth football is NOT life or death, and that the example they set is far more important than arguing about a call that will not be overturned, we should expect no less. If a coach cannot control his emotions in this area it's strike one, two and three, no matter how well he does in the other areas, the game is over, send him on his way. We all suffer from bad calls from time to time, it is part of the game that we all must both expect and overcome, like a bad snap, fumble, or interception.

**Organization :**

Football practices just aren't fun if they aren't organized. The football team that I have studied that did well every year, had highly organized practices. They all had written practice plans that all of the coaches were working off of. There was no panic, but there was a sense of urgency and a quick pace at the practices. Their practices were also fun, they had drills that were fun that the kids were really getting into. The coaches felt confident and even joked around a bit as long as it did not slow the practice down.

**Playing Time :**

Playing time is a privilege that can be taken away from those that do not attend practices or meet other agreed upon criteria. It is where character is revealed in coaches. If a player is not meeting attendance or other criteria (like grades) he should be benched regardless of impact on the team. Your players, that player and the parents will respect you for it.

I don't believe that all players should play the same amount of time regardless of ability. If player A is better than player B and player A is meeting all the teams standards, he deserves to play more than player B. However, I also believe player B should get playing time in the game regardless of game circumstances. I set internal minimum play standards for each of my teams based on team size before each season. It may be 8 plays, it may be 16, whatever I set, I stick to no matter what. We get very aggressive and creative to make sure each deserving player gets his "plays".

**The goody goody coach:**

This is everybody's best buddy, the nice guy who rarely if ever wins a game. He just lines the kids up and rotates everyone into a different position all the time. His practices are poorly organized, his mantra is "having fun". I promise you, the kids are not having much fun losing every game and not knowing what they are suppose to do. If the parents goal is to have a babysitter for 4 to 6 hours per week, he's great, if you want your kids to have fun and learn the game, he's a poor choice.