



## general coaching guidelines

### foreword.

Hi, I'm Keith Place, a qualified rugby union coach and all round sports enthusiast. I have got a lot out of being a coach but particularly rewarding is when you see young people of all abilities getting involved in games and sports and seeing how much fun they can have. When you have coached young people from 7 through to 17 years old and they are still actively participating in sport of all kinds then you can rank that as the ultimate success. My son gave up rugby union at around 13 years old but continued to play cricket for a local club and football in the park with his mates. This year at 17 he started playing rugby again...the seeds were sown and he has realised that sport can play a part in his life on his terms.

### introduction to coaching.

If you are a sports coach, you are no stranger to planning activities for young people that keep them actively engaged and enjoying their activity. However there are many people whether employed to do so, say through schools, or who are acting as volunteers, that might need some more guidance on how to run sports activities in a safe and engaging way.

It is paramount that coaches establish an enjoyable environment for all players in their care. This will be beneficial in the short term by encouraging young people to actively participate in your sessions and in the longer term by encouraging participants to continue with sports and games into the future.

Stick to the APES principle below and you can't go far wrong;

**ACTIVITY** – all players involved at all times

**PURPOSE** – ensure there is a clear objective

**ENJOYMENT** – make the session varied and fun

**SAFE** – activities and play areas must be appropriate

### the role of the coach:

Sports Coaching, rather like all forms of teaching, is a rewarding and challenging way to spend your time. As a coach you will have to adopt a range of roles such as:

Leader, organiser, manager, counsellor, motivator, decision maker, role model, etc etc

### good coaching requires you to be able to:

- Continually improve all players
- Get the best out of all the players
- Develop techniques into skills
- Develop the players 'game sense' i.e. their ability to assess what's happening around them and make appropriate decisions



### **a quick checklist of simple positive steps to take.**

1. Make sure the area is clean and safe before you start.
2. Set some simple rules of engagement and state them clearly at the outset
3. Gain players attention before giving information or instruction
4. Get them doing something simple straight away – use it as the warm up
5. Make sure you have all equipment to hand at the outset
6. Check that the participants are appropriately dressed for the activity and the conditions
7. Understand what you will do if a player is injured, ie stop the activity etc
8. Maximise the involvement of all players. Some sports/games have higher required skill levels than others.
9. Choose appropriate activities for the ages and abilities of the players
10. Maintain players good behaviour throughout the session
11. Provide Variety and Challenge during the activity
12. Provide demonstrations to facilitate learning
13. Encourage players to play within the spirit of the game
14. Conclude the session positively and appropriately

### **1. Make sure the area is clean and safe before you start.**

Remove rubbish, clean up after dogs, remove loose bits of paving and or other potential trip hazards etc. Then check all equipment for damage, loose fittings and any other potential hazards. Check that the surface on which you about to play is suitable for the activity you have chosen, it is particularly important to recognise hard ground in extremes of drought or cold. This is just common sense and takes a few minutes at most but is often a neglected part of ensuring the area is safe to start off with.

### **2. Set up some simple rules of engagement.**

For example, before rugby training I had a specific ‘no kicking’ policy. All the lads loved to run out on the pitch, grab a ball and just kick the hell out of it. “No real damage done” you might say. However, most lads couldn’t kick properly (we hadn’t coached this bit), balls flew everywhere, there had been no warm up, and it took a few minutes of valuable time to get the balls back and for everyone to be ready for the session. So, by rules of engagement, I mean just simple straightforward clear messages as to what you want them to do when they reach the games area. This might be; “walk to the games area, get one ball between three players and pass it to each other along the ground until I blow the whistle for you all to gather round ready to begin”.

### **3. Gain players attention before giving information or instruction.**

The younger the participant, the more important this is. Attention will wander, as I am sure teachers will know only too well. So keep this short and simple. In your plan (we’ll talk about this in a little while) have a simple, fun and inclusive session to start with. Keep it very simple and get the session going quickly. Use an individual or group to demonstrate what needs doing and make sure the groups are all listening. Check understanding and then let them get on with it. If you are outside, stand



facing the sun, don't make the children squint into the light, it will distract them.

**4. Get them doing something simple straight away – use it as the 5 minute warm up.**

As I have alluded to above, a planned simple activity will be great as a warm up and to get the session going. You do not want participants standing around getting bored or cold whilst you explain the intricacies of the off-side rule or the different ways you can be out in cricket! How often have you seen teachers picking sides, explaining rules or getting the pitch marked out while the children stand around? (Too often!) This can be a managed session like a sequential warm-up or just jogging around the pitch holding hands. Whatever it is, keep them all moving and get them warm.

**5. Make sure you have all equipment to hand at the outset.**

If you have to get equipment ready, this should be part of your prep before the session starts, but if equipment is rudimentary, you can prepare this whilst the group is warming up, providing you can keep an eye on proceedings at the same time. With more than one coach on hand, this stuff is all very simple to organise. I ask the participants not to touch any equipment before I say so (one of my rules of engagement). This way my well prepared activities aren't ruined by all the cones, ladders, bags and so on being moved or interfered with and no one can hurt themselves on any of it...you don't want a child picking up a javelin and throwing it do you?

**6. Check that the participants are appropriately dressed for the activity and the conditions.**

I have turned out to see my own children play sports of all kinds and I have seen them freezing, even though I sent them out with plenty of gear to wear in their sports bag. I also know that they are unlikely to put on a hat and/or sun screen unless reminded by a teacher or coach. It is your responsibility as coach to ensure that all participants have enough clothing on and the appropriate clothing/apparatus depending on the activity. Many sports require mouth guards, pads and protectors and so on. The safety gear is usually quite obvious and I am sure you will check. However, too often kids don't wear enough layers. Again using the rugby example, we insist on appropriate layering even when the lads were 15 years old. They often had no more sense than when they were 7! It's OK for you as a teacher or coach to be warm and snug beneath all your layers but within reason, make sure all participants are well wrapped up. If children get cold they will not concentrate and they certainly won't enjoy the activity. If it is hot, ensure there is plenty of water available and make sure you allow for quick breaks when they can get a drink.

**7. Understand what you will do if a player is injured, stop the activity etc.**

There will be a process within your environment, albeit a school or sports facility, for dealing with injury and accident. However, you can still plan for the unexpected and let the participants know what it is. If you have to treat or tend to an injured player, stop the game and perhaps get the players to repeat the warm up routines whilst you deal with the situation. If they are very young, get them to all wait together until they can be led to a safe and warm place. I have been in a situation waiting for a helicopter to arrive following a suspected neck injury. We sent all the players into the changing



with two well-known parents, (never just one), as a safe and warm place to await further instructions.

**8. Maximise the involvement of all players.**

Nothing will put a young person off sport more than a lack of involvement. Standing around waiting for something to happen is no fun and they are not learning anything and frankly it's your fault. Move players around from position to position, give them specific tasks to perform, set up mini sessions of just a few players at a time. For example, football can be several 3 v 3 sessions, not just 11 v 11 on a huge pitch. You don't want to hold back the talented few, but you do want to aid the development of the many. I have seen examples of 'dumbing down' and 'playing up' and neither is satisfactory.

**9. Choose appropriate activities for the ages and abilities of the players.**

Some sports are very difficult for younger players to grasp. It is often more fun and far more productive to get children running around and competing with very little ball skills involved. Relay Running Teams, perhaps with obstacles of various kinds, can be great fun, noisy, competitive and engaging. As a rugby coach this never failed to miss and the players would ask for this activity as part of the longer session. As part of Long Term Athletic Development, (LTAD), speed, balance and agility are all addressed using this type of activity. Add a ball into the equation and you can gradually add other techniques which can be developed into skills.

**10. Maintain players' good behaviour throughout the session.**

Just like in the classroom, disruptive behaviour will affect the attention of all players not just the individual concerned. In a sports club in extreme cases the individual can be asked to leave (happily I have never been put in this situation). However, I have had to remove participants from sessions when they would not behave appropriately. In a school environment it's not always so easy. So, focusing on the tasks and keeping momentum from one task to another will help the participants' attention and prevent attention waning.

**11. Provide Variety and Challenge during the activity.**

Just as above, players will become bored with the same activity over and over again. In a sports club, repetition through drills can be a useful tool for skills coaching but in mixed ability groups it is good to move from one activity to another to keep interest and attention.

Gradual increments in skill level can add more challenge and is another way to build in variety.

**12. Provide demonstrations to facilitate learning.**

Clearly explain each activity, using demonstrations as much as possible. Watch the groups carefully to check that the instructions have been understood. Get the more advanced members of the group to demonstrate the more difficult skills and other players the less demanding activities. It is still important to involve everyone even at this stage.



This may be a rugby union mantra again but I make no apologies. It is important that everyone involved in sport show respect to each other; the players the coaches, the spectators. I actively encourage competitive spirit in all forms of sport and activity but this must go hand in hand with respect and good behaviour. It is your chance as a coach to shape how young people respond to decision making during a game and how they respond to adverse results. You will also have to deal with parents and spectators' behaviour on occasion. Let the parents know what you expect from them at the start of the session, perhaps as part of the briefing. I use this to very good effect; I brief the teams and let the parents gather round and listen, and let everyone know about code of conduct. For another guide as to how one might approach attitude, I like the 5 tenets of Taekwon-do; Courtesy, Integrity, Perseverance, Self-Control, Indomitable Spirit. These tenets are at the heart of the positive development of the individual for this particular martial art. They could just as easily be the guide for approaching any sport or activity.

#### **14. Conclude the session positively and appropriately.**

It is good to finish the session on a high. Children often love to play British Bulldog at the end of a rugby or football session. This doesn't have to be physically challenging for the smaller children, just running from one end of the area to another with a person in the middle playing 'tig'. It could be the final 20 minutes playing a full game of football after training and so on. It is important to finish on a high, with a culmination of activity that you might have practiced during the session, allowing the more advanced players the chance to show off their skills and the less adept, being able to practice and participate. When you bring the game to a close, in the final minute or so (remember you don't want them to get cold or dehydrated), you can explain very briefly what it is you have just practiced and thank them for their effort.

## **conclusion**

#### **Coaches of young players should:**

- Recognise the importance of fun and enjoyment. Most learning is achieved by doing.
- Appreciate the needs of the players before the needs of the sport.
- Be a positive role model.
- Keep winning and losing in perspective – encourage young players to act with dignity in all circumstances.
- Respect all referees/officials and the decisions they make – at all times, ensuring that all players do the same.
- Provide positive verbal feedback in a constructive and encouraging manner, both during coaching sessions and games.



## just for fun!

- Don't send the class for a 5 mile run while you have a fag behind the sports pavilion.
- Don't send the class on a 5 mile run because you've got a hang-over and need a coffee.
- Don't laugh at players who clearly have no clue which direction they are even supposed to be playing in!
- Don't laugh at players who run away when the ball comes towards them.
- Don't laugh at players when they get hit in the face with a ball and are pole-axed (even if it looked funny)
- Don't chat up the parents whilst you're supposed to be coaching the session
- Don't take off a player during a game for missing an open goal!
- Don't take off a player because you don't like their parents.
- Don't take off a player because they didn't do their Maths homework.
- Don't pick a player who wears bright red football boots. What's all that about!
- Don't pick a player just because you fancy their Mum.
- Don't call everyone mate..or say yeah? after every sentence. Coaches really don't do this.
- Don't shout at/threaten the referee for all the stupid mistakes that they WILL make during a game.
- Don't volunteer to be a referee unless you can help it...you'll make loads of stupid mistakes during games and in lessons!
- Don't yell at children for crying when they're cold..sometimes I feel like crying when I'm cold. Send them back to the classroom and give them a hot chocolate.
- Take the p-ss out of kids who dive when they're tackled – like they've seen on telly!!
- Don't let Mothers rush on to the pitch every time little Jonny falls over.
- Don't let Fathers go into denial when little Jonny needs the air ambulance.
- Send girls off for squealing at everything during any kind of ball game.
- Send girls off for standing about chatting during any kind of game.
- Send girls off for playing with their hair during any kind of game.
- Don't argue with parents about refereeing decisions – it will lead to a fight.
- Don't be truthful about a child's abilities in front of their parents – it will lead to a fight.
- Don't laugh at a child's sporting prowess in front of their parents – see above.

...Just for fun...but there's just a hint of truth in here too.

Have great fun coaching, I know I do.

**keith**