



Coaching the AYSO Way

Effective Date	September 19, 2003
Class Length	1 hour and 15 minutes

Change Summary	
June 1, 2003	New Lesson Plan
October, 2007	Revised for 2008 Section Conferences
October, 2008	Revised for 2009 Section Conferences
December, 2010	Revised for 2011 Section Leadership Conferences
November, 2011	Revised for 2012 Section Meetings
November, 2013	Reviewed for 2014 AYSO EXPO

1. Lesson Plan Goals – Coaching the AYSO Way

In their first course, AYSO coaches learn about the six basic philosophies that guide all AYSO activities. In every practice and match the coach is confronted with how to apply four of these: Everyone Plays, Positive Coaching, Good Sportsmanship and Player Development. This workshop is designed to bring the coach beyond remembering labels and confront what these fundamental philosophies of AYSO mean in the practical situations coaches face daily.

2. Class Length

1 Hour and 15 minutes

3. Instructor Requirements

Two Coach Instructors or Advanced Coach Instructors, preferably with experience in coaching both boys and girls through U-14.

4. Learning Objectives

By responding to challenging questions and situations posed by the instructors, students will confront and assess how they have applied four of the AYSO philosophies: Everyone Plays, Positive Coaching, Good Sportsmanship and Player Development. Students will leave with a deeper understanding of what these philosophies mean and practical ways of modeling them.

5. Student Skills Acquired

The skills acquired in this course are applicable to coaching at any age level.

6. Prerequisites

None

7. Materials

Power Point Presentation – preloaded onto conference laptop and available on www.ayso.org along with the lesson plan

8. Equipment

LCD Projector and Screen
Flip Chart and Markers – on request

9. Special Instructor Notes

Each central part of the lesson plan includes a primary point to be communicated. The text and questions that follow are designed to achieve that point but need not be followed in a slavish fashion. Instructors need to adjust the material to fit the level of the audience (is it primarily coaches of younger ages), the audience size and their own personality and style of presentation.

These topics often evoke extensive discussion. The Positive Coaching Alliance has an entire workshop just on positive coaching techniques. There was an entire workshop on fair play and coaches. In this workshop we just scratch the surface

and it will not be possible to reach a conclusion on all these points, so keep moving. Our goal is to begin a discussion and reflection, not reach a conclusion.

10. Body (Lesson Procedure)

Introduction of Instructors.

Introduction of workshop theme:

There is no higher calling than coaching. It requires that we know the game well enough to teach it to our players. It requires that we know how to teach our players. And, in AYSO, it requires our coaches to adhere to the six fundamental philosophies of AYSO as we teach the game to the kids.

Ask: When was the first time you heard the six philosophies of AYSO?

Ask: What are they? Write the six on the flip chart:

- Balanced Teams
- Everyone Plays
- Positive Coaching
- Open Registration
- Good Sportsmanship
- Player Development

Ask: Which of these does the coach apply every week? We are looking for Everyone Plays, Positive Coaching, Good Sportsmanship and Player Development. Explain that in this workshop we are going to explore these four and see what it means for us as coaches when we deal with our players at practice and in matches. To do this we are going to have to challenge each other just as we challenge our players in practice.

Let's start with - **Everyone Plays...**

Everyone Plays:

(Budget 20 minutes for this section) The object of this section is to get coaches to understand that much more than playing time is involved in this philosophy.

We require that everyone plays $\frac{1}{2}$ of every match (and in most regions, no one plays four quarters before everyone plays three).

Ask: Why do we do that? Write the answers on the flip chart and arrange so when finished two large categories appear.

1. To learn the game one must play it, not sit on the bench and watch others play it.
2. To be relegated to little or no playing time sends the clear message to the player that she/he lacks the skills to play at this level and thus encourages dropping out.

Everyone Plays is all about player development!

Playing time sends the message that the coach has confidence in the child and accepts him/her at whatever skill level they are at. But this confidence and acceptance is communicated not just by how much playing time we give a child but how we play them. Here are three things we as coaches can do to make sure that each player has not just the right quantity of playing time but quality time as well.

1. Watch when we play and sit out players.

Players are very aware of who plays the first and last quarter. If, as a coach, we want our strongest team on the field at the end of the match and thus sub out our weaker players, how do you think they will respond?

The point we are looking for here is that the player will conclude “coach does not have any confidence in me. I never get to finish a match.” The same is true for who gets to start.

Ask coaches what technique they use to keep from falling into this trap?

The simplest way is to write down who plays in what positions what quarters and then see if a pattern develops. Note: This is not just checking off who played in what quarters but who played in what positions.

[We might also explain that these records are very useful when a parent comes and complains because Jimmy is not getting enough playing time or is always stuck in a particular position.]

2. Give the less skilled player support but do not isolate them.

Since support for teammates on the pitch is part of good soccer, the wise coach will make sure that the slower player who has little ball skills has support in front, to the side, and behind. But that is very different from trying to isolate Sarah Slowfoot by sticking Sarah at right back and telling her to mark the corner flag.

Such isolation is harder to do in small-sided soccer so the coach places Fiona Fastfoot in support of Sarah. More athletic with better soccer skills than Sarah possesses, Fiona dominates Sarah’s part of the field and leaves Sarah to watch and conclude that she does not belong on the team.

Ask: What does the coach do to prevent this?

Answer: Teach Fiona how to get open for a pass from Sarah (and be patient if it never comes). Sarah learns to make her best effort and Fiona learns how to work with a teammate rather than do it all herself.

3. Give every player a chance:

Ask: “On your team, who takes goal kicks? Who takes the throw-ins? Who takes PKs or free kicks close to the goal?”

Ask: What is the natural inclination of a coach in these situations?

Answer: The player who can do it well takes the throw-in or the kick.

Ask: From the point of view of player development, what is the danger with that policy?

Answer: The player who is not very good at a throw-in or a kick will not improve if he is not given the opportunity to do so in a match.

Ask: Will a kid who is never allowed to take a free kick in a match work hard on that skill during practice?

Answer: Unlikely unless coach encourages him to do so because he will be asked to do it in a match. But coach has to make sure it really happens in the match.

When we have a four-goal lead it is easy to

- Sit out your best players in the final quarter.
- Lose possession by allowing a poor thrower to take the throw-ins.
- Put Sam Stumblebum in at center forward.

Ask: Why is it so hard to do this when the game is tied?

The answer is simple. We want to win. Our players want to win. We want our players to have the joy of winning.

But the bottom line is that often we would rather win than help our players develop. We have to give them playing time.

Ask: Do we have to give them an opportunity to affect the outcome of the match?

Answer: Yes. The opportunity to be at the center of where it is happening is embedded in the philosophy of Everyone Plays.

Transition to Point 2:

Before we ask our players to do something in a match we prepare them in practice – teach them how to do it, build up their confidence, and show our confidence in them by allowing them to do it.

How we teach them is the next philosophy, Positive Coaching.

Positive Coaching:

(Budget 20 minutes for this section) The objective of this section is to provide the coach with practical things to be done that constitute positive coaching.

Probably every AYSO coach subscribes to the concept of positive coaching. Probably very few of us actually practice it fully.

It is the rare AYSO coach who is abusive: “Timmy, what is wrong with you? You have all the mental and physical agility of a rock. Why don’t you take up chess?” But positive coaching is not the absence of abusive treatment.

Some AYSO coaches are inappropriately positive. “You guys did great today.”

Players respond: “Come on coach, we sucked. We couldn’t pass, shoot, dribble or defend.”

Offering praise where it is not warranted is not positive coaching.

So what does the positive coach do? (Here you can write points on a flip chart.)

First of all, the coach accepts players for what they are and works to help them improve. In practice this means the coach does the following THREE things:

1. Assume they will learn. “We are going to work on your left foot and by the end of the season let’s see how many shots you can take with it.” The non-positive coach says “you don’t have a left foot, better use your right.” The player says “I can’t kick with my left foot.” The coach says “Not now, but we can help you learn to do that.”
2. Encourage players to take risks and make mistakes. They are not just inevitable but desirable since they mean the player is pushing him/herself beyond their comfort level. So the positive coach does not say mistakes are okay if.... She just accepts mistakes as part of the learning process. She does this in word (“keep at it, you will get it next time.”) and body language (never turns her back on the team or drops her head in dismay when there is a mistake on something practiced at length in practice. (Instructor can model such behavior.)
3. Lets them play. Nothing shows confidence in players more than letting them play rather than micromanaging everything they do. The only thing the player hears from the coach during the match is shouts of encouragement and congratulations and an occasional tactical adjustment the coach wants to make.
A coach running up and down the touchline telling players how to play is not being positive. In fact, he is telling the players that he, the coach, does not have sufficient confidence in them to give them the freedom to play.
Just as importantly, the coach who is constantly telling players what to do in every drill and scrimmage is giving the same message.
Probably the hardest this for us to do is shut up and let them play.

Ask: Does all this mean the coach cannot “chew out” a team?

Answer: It depends on their age and the coach’s personality. But there are times when a team needs to be told it must shape up. But this is done tactically by the coach, not out of anger. And the coach always makes it clear that he or she is asking the team to play at a level it has shown the ability to play. (“I know you guys can do this. You know you can do it. You have to decide whether you want it badly enough to play at that level.”)

In addition, the positive coach helps players focus on their successes. We all know that a “nice kick” or “good idea” goes a long way. But here are TWO other ways to focus on success.

One: Keep statistics on a variety of things done during a match.

Possession maintained on goal kicks and throw ins.

Frequency of checking to the ball.

Passes completed.

Shooting opportunities accepted.

Defenders delaying and not stabbing for the ball.

[This is also a very useful way to keep overactive or too vocal parents occupied during a match.]

Then the coach shares the positive statistics with the team and works in practice on the others. When progress is demonstrated, the coach can go back to the team and say “Four games ago we kept only 25% of our throw-ins. This game we kept possession 80% of the time. You guys are playing much better.”

This is far more productive than saying to our team. “Look, we have lots of work to do if we are going to be competitive.”

Two: Chart good things a player does. If we can chart five things during a match or practice, then we are allowed to offer a suggestion for improvement. If we cannot find five things then we do not offer the suggestion.

Ask a coach to demonstrate. If none can, use the following:

“Gigi, you played well in this scrimmage. You used your speed well, cut the ball nicely, took on the single defender at the right time, and took the shot when you were in range.” Then the coach proceeds with the positive suggestion. Work on cutting to your left to get a better angle on the goal. You can do that and it will really pay off in our next match.”

Compare this approach to that of the coach who thinks he is being positive and says: “Nice ball handling, nice shot. But you ruined the set up by cutting to your right. You need to cut to your left.”

Without a five to one ratio of appropriate positive comments before a criticism (expressed positively) the player will focus on and resist the criticism. And charting really means just that – writing down the positive points on your clipboard.

Positive Coaching pays off.

- Research by sport psychologists consistently shows that athletes do better when coaches reward them for their effort than punish them for their shortcomings.
- Put simply, nothing is gained by telling a player who makes her best effort and comes in second that she has to run a sprint or do some push ups.
- And the player who is not making her best effort is more likely to try harder if the coach identifies what she is doing right and encourages her (strongly at times) to improve her effort than if the coach tells her she is slacking off and she needs to run until she decides to work harder.

Transition to Point 3: True positive coaching is probably the most important thing we can do to help our players develop and it is far more complicated than being “nice.” But since we are dealing with young people, the third philosophy becomes critically important for their overall development.

Good Sportsmanship:

(Budget about 20 minutes for this section) Rather than spend long periods belaboring a single point, move rapidly through the examples.

FIFA, the body that governs international soccer, calls for Fair Play.
The Positive Coaching Alliance calls for players to Honor the Game.
AYSO says we practice Good Sportsmanship.

Everyone believes in Fair Play/Good Sportsmanship.

Ask: By a show of hands, how many of you in here are liars and cheaters?
How many of you teach your players to lie and cheat?

Let’s define cheating as “deliberately violating the laws of the game in order to gain an advantage.” [If we are going to avoid teaching our players to violate the laws of the game we had better know what the laws are.]

Here are some situations, let’s see who thinks this is cheating or for those who would like a more delicate term, *unsporting conduct*

1. A player pulls out a knife and cuts her opponent to force her out of the game.
Okay, we can agree that this is not fair play. That was easy.
2. A player on the red team grabs the jersey of a blue player and holds her back.
A clear violation of the laws of the game.
As a coach, would we respond differently if our player did it deliberately and often to gain an advantage as opposed to doing it rarely and impulsively?
In either situation there is an infraction. But in terms of fair play there is a difference between the deliberate action calmly entered into and the impulsive action the player may not even be aware of.

What if the ref does not see it?

Is it okay to cheat if the ref does not see it?

What should a coach do if she sees her player cheating?

[The philosophy is that fair play does not depend on getting caught.]

What if the ref sees it but does not signal an infraction?

Is it okay to violate the laws if the ref fails to enforce them?

What if it was a poor ref who had lost control of the match?

What if this were a friendly scrimmage between two teams at practice and there was no referee? Should the players still abide by the laws of the game?

[The philosophy is that weak enforcement does not excuse unfair action.]

What if the Blue player had been pulling the jersey of Red players and the Red player retaliated?

Is it okay to cheat if the other team is doing it too?

[The philosophy is that because others cheat does not give us license to cheat.]

What if the Blue player was about to break free and score the winning goal.

Is it okay to cheat if the game is on the line?

[The philosophy is that the benefit does not justify the bad conduct.]

The laws specify a code of behavior whether or not the referee sees it, whether or not the other team is playing fair, whether or not anyone is going to enforce the laws, and regardless of what is at stake.

Let's consider another situation.

Ask: How many coaches train their players to yield ten yards on a free kick only when the referee asks them to do so?

Ask: What does the law say about this?

It says that a player must yield ten yards immediately without being asked to do so by the referee.

Ask: So why would a coach teach players to deliberately violate the laws of the game?

Why would a coach train players to cheat?

Because the referee is rarely going to punish this infraction?

Because other teams do it?

Because it could prevent a score and thus possibly mean winning?

Do we really want to be coaches who tell our players that it is okay to cheat if there is little or no punishment, everyone does it, and we get something for it?

[Note: The discussion might raise the point that at different levels different actions are acceptable. Far more physical contact is allowed in professional soccer than at U10 for example. So it is reasonable to conclude that what the laws require and what constitutes fair play depends on not the precise wording of the law but the application of the law within the culture of that level and location of soccer.

The question to be raised in response to this point is what kind of culture we want to establish within AYSO.

Ask: How should a coach respond to the following situation?

A very skilled player on your team has learned how to stick her arm under the arm of the opponent and then fall down so the referee believes the opponent pulled her down. You see what she is doing.

Allow the audience to present different ideas on how to act but conclude with the point that young people are very observant. They are impressed more by how we act than what we say. If we say “play fair” but condone unfair play, what lesson do you think our players will learn?

If time permits, you can move to “gamesmanship” actions such as when a player signals his team gets the throw-in when he clearly knows possession belongs to the other side. Is lying acceptable?

How far should a player take it? If it is clear the Blue team kicked the ball out of play but the referee gives the restart to the Blue, should the Blue player send the ball out of play in order to give the restart to the Red team?

Player Development

Ask the Question. What is Player Development?

Make sure you explain that total player development is about all players becoming all that they can be, not just on the field of play.

Talk about:

- Developing soccer skills
- Physical attributes
- Tactical awareness and knowledge of the game
- Self-efficacy and increasing self-esteem in players.

Player Development in all players aids them to:

- Perform at a higher level
- Avoid injury
- See the results of their hard work and achievement
- Have fun.

Talk about the responsibilities that each volunteer coach assumes concerning player development.

End the Player Development with this:

We believe that all players should be able to develop their soccer skills and knowledge to the best of their abilities, both individually and as members of a team, in order to maximize their enjoyment of the game. *Show the slide from US Soccer with this explanation: **Like AYSO, US Soccer is asking all coaches to focus on four things – Development over winning, Age appropriate training, Quality training, and Inspire the kids to have fun.***

11. Conclusion (Closure)

We have lots of words used to describe youth sports: recreational, competitive, select, premier. Perhaps the word that should be our guide is ***DEVELOPMENTAL***.

We are helping young people develop as soccer players, as athletes, and as good people. It is a tremendous trust we have as coaches. If we really examine how each of us applies good sportsmanship, positive coaching, and everyone plays we may be a little better at our job and help each child develop to the best of his/her ability.

12. Bridge (Transition)

None