

Report Card, Don't Sweat it!

By Dave de Hart

I confess. I am a thief. I steal great ideas, concepts and methods from other teachers and coaches. I take the knowledge and experience of my peers and I make it my own. I don't hide my thievery and I will never stop. I read books, watch videos, observe training sessions, attend clinics and coaching courses, invite guest coaches to train my teams and **I ask questions**. I do all this because I owe it to the kids that trust me to teach them. And, so do you coach.

Our commitment to our athletes, as teachers and coaches, is to be the best we can be and to never deny any young athlete an opportunity that may help them to improve their development and growth. Top coaches and teachers use every available resource to provide the best learning environment possible for their team. Our youth coaches must never be afraid or concerned of the report card that a more experienced coach may provide on their coaching abilities. These resources must be embraced and used as mentors. Great teachers and coaches don't have all the answers, but they will work tirelessly to find them.

Exceptional teachers and coaches seek knowledge. They are on a constant quest to improve and evolve their methods and approach to teaching the game. They look for a bigger teaching opportunity and see a bigger, more complete, picture that isn't based on the most recent won or lost match. Outstanding coaches teach more than the game and have results that reach far beyond the playing field. These coaches' egos are not at stake based on the outcome of a Saturday afternoon youth soccer match. They are in the business of long term development and use all available sources to reach their goals of player and team development.

It's concerning that youth soccer in the United States is too often used as a means for adults, posing as youth soccer coaches, to gratify their own egos. Because most parents know little of the sport, unlike baseball, American football or basketball where we all have a measure of experience, youth soccer can be an area of instant expertise by simple default. Youth soccer coaches can roll along as the king of their little world never really being challenged or questioned by busy parents and trusting children. Of course, for this facade to remain securely in place they must, albeit at the cost of player development, avoid being exposed by the report card of an actual educated and experienced soccer specialist.

These coaches are in a treacherous battle to keep young athletes and their parents in the dark. Keep them in a controlled, blind little box and do not let them see a report card that may cause them to question. I can think of nothing more counterproductive to the development and advancement of youth soccer in the United States. Coaches need education and experience to educate. The clear truth is that all of us, as teachers and coaches, are all on the same team. We should all want the kids to have great opportunities and experiences from youth soccer without concern as to where the credit falls.

Don't ever be fearful of someone else's coaching background. Club Administrators should look for and engage the best and most experienced to enhance and build a coaching staff. Coaches must search and seek out those more experienced than them and never be afraid to ask for help. As a University Athletics Director and Head College Soccer Coach for fifteen years I never conspired to hire someone weaker or less qualified than myself. The better my staff was at their jobs, the better they made me at mine.

For thirteen years I taught licensing courses as a member of the CYSA-North Instructional Staff and developed and taught licensing courses as the State Director of Coaching for the State of Nevada. You get it, lots of coaching courses. In all those courses some of my most satisfying educational experiences were the many times when the cocky, I don't need this garbage people would show up for the league forced CYSA-North licensing clinic. You could tell from the minute they showed up, always just a bit late, that they believed themselves to be well above the level that any portion of this clinic could possibly teach them anything. However, time after time, these people would complete the course and have a wonderful new, positive and appreciative attitude. That was the best!

So, heed this warning. I'm looking for you. If you have anything different, new, better or just something I like I'm going to take it and I'm going to use it. I will steal from anyone. I'm sure everyone, the most acknowledged expert or the beginning novice, has something to offer. Something my kids can use.

Never be afraid of the report card that another coach may provide on your abilities. Embrace it and use it and share it. The game is way too big for any of us to go it alone. Be confident, be honest and don't sweat it. The long term appreciation and gratitude of your athletes for their successes is the only report card you need.

Dave de Hart,

- 30 years of coaching experience
- 15 years - Head College Coach - NCAA
- 4 time college Coach of the Year
- Director of Athletics – University of the Ozarks
- State Director of Coaching – Nevada
- CYSA-North Instructional Staff – 13 years
- CYSA-North ODP Head Coach – 8 years
- Author – *Teaching and Understanding Soccer Goalkeeping*