

## The problem with over coaching from the sideline



A typical youth game on a Saturday, a spectacle involving players, coaches, fans, and officials, the game is most likely the highlight of the weekend for most of the parties involved. As meaningless as the game may be in to the big picture of life, this event means the world to everyone who has gathered on that day. You can always tell what spectators look at the game in pure envy of the players participating or even of the coach on the sidelines, wishing they would be more involved and have more of an influence on the outcome. Thus we sometimes see the pure energy and expression of their egos pore out of them during these games. Coaches yell for the entire match to their player's directions, instructions, and tactics. Parents will yell encouragement and at other players who will not pass the ball to their son or daughter. Both parties will yell at the referee as the man or women in the middle in undoubtedly the scapegoat for their frustration with the outcome.

We sometimes forget about the players involved, we forget to ask how they will benefit from this game experience. If a player is constantly being told what to do by a coach from a sideline, or constantly yelled at for his or her mistakes, is the child really taking anything from the experience? Coaches and parents who find it necessary to shout instructions to individuals or coach their team through the entire match are eliminating one of the most important aspects of players development, the ability to make mistakes. Allowing players to make mistakes on their own, without the threat of immediate backlash from a coach or parent, or without the ability to blame someone for shouting the wrong instruction to him or her, is one of the critical elements to any players growth in the game.

Players need to make mistakes on the field in order for them to realize what needs to be done the next time around in order to see a different outcome. Tottenham Hotspur and now England midfielder Eric Dier, in a recent article in The Guardian, spoke about his experience in Sporting Lisbon's academy in Portugal. He mentioned the coaching style of the Portuguese coaching staff at Sporting Lisbon, and their relaxed style.

"It's a very relaxed approach at Sporting in terms of football," Dier says. "They pride themselves on bringing you up as a polite and respectful person. They would never get angry with you if you missed a pass but they would do if you were disrespectful to someone. There was no shouting. I hear a lot that that is the case in England.

"A good player for them was someone who could understand when they made a mistake and correct it for themselves. When I first came to England to play I saw coaches having a go at players when they made mistakes and they would literally be talking them through the game".

"In Portugal the coach would sit on the bench and not say a word. We'd just play. It was a matter of us making mistakes and learning from them by ourselves. You understand the game a lot better that way".

Coaches in the US are paid a substantial amount of money by clubs and parents to ensure their children see success in the game. So it may be hard for coaches who are getting eight grand or more a year to coach a club team to sit back and allow for players to experiment with trial and error. It is in the best interest of the player for the coach to show patience in this developmental process. Allowing for players to understand their mistakes should be the mission of the coach. If a player continues to make the same mistake over and over again, then the coach should step in and find a solution to the problem the player is having. When coaches take away the ability to make mistakes and think from the players, they almost make the game into their own version of FIFA with players being moved around by a controlling force off the pitch.

I was coached this way as a young player, and luckily played enough on my own outside of my club setting to not become a victim of over coaching from the sidelines. Coaches who shout instructions constantly to players on the field make the game uncomfortable for the player and in turn when the coach is not there, the player is lost on the field. You have to let them make their own decisions, it's just like life. Thus why it is the people's game, you make your own decisions on the field, you're not told what to do constantly by someone on the sideline.

There is a setting for shouting instructions and over coaching in my eyes. If you are coaching a lower level club team, with very inexperienced players who are not really interested in playing after their youth careers, then possibly they would benefit from some instruction given to them on the field. The players may welcome instructions being given to them by a knowledgeable coach, as they are really only interested in playing to win and for fun. That being said there is little reason to ever "have a go" at a young player on a team where the interests lie in the overall experience rather than development.

If the goal of the team is player development, in hopes of pushing players to the next level, then there is no real room for coaches who stand on the sidelines shouting constant instructions. Coaches need to understand they lose control of the match the second the whistle is blown, and any hopes the game is played exactly how the coach wants it to be played should be lost. Of course in game changes and tactical decisions can be made if the result is for some reason important, but attempting to play the game through the players on the pitch should be discouraged. Sooner or later the voice in the player's head fails to be their own, and they will see others as the reason they are not succeeding, rather than looking internally and seeking solutions on their own. Soccer is a thinking game, with constant commotion on the field caused by an overly excited parent or coach, the player's ability to think about decisions may be affected negatively.

I remember numerous conversations with my dad as a teenager about the coaching styles we would see from coaches. We used to think of the coach who sat back as his or her team struggled on the field as an arrogant, somewhat lazy coach who was just interested in getting a suntan on the sideline while his team played.

Now at that time, US soccer had not come far enough yet to allow for that style of coaching to exist. The exposure the average youth soccer player had to the game in the early 2000s was nowhere near the

levels we see today. The days of rushing home on Tuesdays and Wednesdays in an attempt to stumble upon the rare Champions League match are long over. Now players are exposed to the global standard of football, they understand systems of play, and can rattle off players in every position that play at the top level. There is little need to shout constant instructions to them when playing in my eyes because they have been exposed to what the game should look like, leaving little room for constant shouts of pass, shoot, or any other advice. I would have cherished someone giving me that sort of advice as young player.

So how can a paid coach justify his salary? This can be accomplished by running quality training sessions, ensuring the players act respectfully and responsibly on and off the field, by holding the players to a work ethic standard...the list goes on and on. One way to not justify getting paid is by controlling players in game settings like you have the headset on in the booth. It may look like you are giving it your all and really caring about the team and it may satisfy the parents on the sideline who are also shouting instructions, but it is crippling the player's personal decision making abilities. Coaching points can be made during games, but constant shouting should be limited in my opinion as player's should be able to cherish the freedom of decision and action the beautiful game supplies.