

The Importance of Feedback in a Team Sport!



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Soccer is an invasion game. To score, you must invade the opponent's territory and score in their goal, which also means the ball has gotten past a lot of players—sometimes 3, sometimes 6, sometimes 10. And don't forget about getting it past the keeper, too. Players in soccer can move to any part of the field during attacking or defending play and although we see some individual moments of brilliance that lead to scoring or defending a goal, for the most part, soccer is won or lost by the team—everyone on the team.

So... why do we praise the striker for scoring a goal, or condemn the goalkeeper for letting one in as if they were alone on the field? The scoreboard shows the team score, not the individual score or save. It's good to call out a play and give a player some love, but let's remember, it's still a team sport, moved by a group of players. I've seen keepers come off the field upset that they "lost the game" for their team. Wait... what? Goals scored that involved multiple players being beaten by the opponents in any number of strategic or athletic ways before finally getting the ball past the last line of defense. It makes me think that perhaps we are directing feedback in the wrong way, at the wrong time.

When something goes "wrong" on the pitch, you often hear the blame game start. The referees get blamed for bad calls (truly bad calls are pretty rare); coaches take blame for play calls or positioning that led to poor performance; Mother Nature gets blamed for making the pitch wet or slippery. C'mon. We get to make a choice about how we react to wins and losses in these scenarios. After all, we're talking about youth sports. In hindsight,



it's easy to see that blaming weather, referees, field conditions, or even individuals for what goes on in a team game, a team result, a team performance is not how we should be remembered!

When feedback is given with knee-jerk reactions and emotions, it is very hard to be received by the person to whom you are directing. For example, yelling at a player "what were you thinking?" (chances are good that they weren't thinking of ways to sabotage the W), "why did you let that player past you?"; or at a referee? "Come on ref, are you blind?!" is not going to inspire better performance. One play or player, or ref call, doesn't make the game successful. The team chemistry and combined efforts result in wins... and losses. There's no hero or zero. Someone's got to win and someone's got to lose, but placing blame on a single player or circumstance is just silly.

If you are part of a good sports organization, they have a team that works together to help provide a fun and nurturing environment for our children to play sports. One that rewards individual effort but still focuses on the importance of teamwork

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to drive success. One that can develop strategy and ball movement so that every player on the field feels relevant and needed. And one that can get excited about a bicycle kick goal but recognize that the team helped put the striker in a position for the glory shot. And conversely, when a keeper allows a goal, recognizes that it had to go through 10 other players before it got past the goalie.

Let's think about how we are giving feedback to our players, parents, coaches, and organization. If we want positive change, that feedback must be given at the right time, without emotions, and in a way that the individual or group can accept it. After all, soccer is a team sport, and you do not have to be a player to be part of the team. We are all on the team!

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