

George Kostelis Coaching Philosophy

“The goal in life is just the same as in basketball: make the effort to do the best you are capable of doing –in your relationships, in school, at your job, in the community, for your country. Make the effort to contribute in whatever way you can.” —John Wooden—

Coaching encompasses more than teaching a particular sport. It became relevant to me when I was in college, that sport is a microcosm of life. A coach must take on different roles: peer, parent, educator, guidance counselor, and leader. In meshing these roles together, the coach needs to be the ultimate role model. As a role model, a coach needs to understand the influence they have upon youngsters. These influences can be positive or negative, which can have a lasting affect upon a child. When I play the game of soccer, I want to be perceived as “great.” Therefore, as I coach, my expectations for myself need to be greater, due to the fact that I have the responsibility of influencing a team.

When teaching the game of soccer, I focus on developing the fundamentals of the game. Players need to become technically efficient in the skills of passing, receiving, shooting, heading, and dribbling. Without these fundamental skills intact, the game will not reveal itself to the players. Technical skills are the foundation of the player. These abilities will carry over to each team and level. As a coach, we have a vision of how the game should be played. This vision entails having their players utilizing those skills. Pele’ coined the phrase, “the beautiful game.” The game will only remain beautiful if players possess technical skill. As a coach, I want to try to develop a player’s individual skill so that they will have the opportunity to further advance their playing careers. Our role is not only to prepare players for the present, but provide players with the opportunities of playing at a higher level.

The fundamental skills of soccer need to be applied to the game. The technical ability of the player has to be challenged within the game environment. As a coach, we must structure our training sessions so that players are performing under realistic situations. Under these circumstances, players are forced to utilize the skills trained, but are also developing their tactical awareness. This next phase of the player’s development focuses on “decision making.” Under pressure, players need to make sound decisions. Within the game, there are numerous scenarios that can occur, therefore, training sessions need to replicate the game. Coaches need to address attacking principles, such as penetration, support, mobility, width/depth, and scoring, as well as the defensive principles like chasing, delaying, pressure, cover, balance, compactness, and winning the ball. To ensure the tactical development of the players, coaches should progressively teach the topic from individual, group, team, and tactical functional training. Progressively teaching tactics will allow for tactical concepts to appear, such as transition, vision, communication, and speed of play. As coaches, when we increase the knowledge and understanding of the players, we increase the probability of individual and team success.

Developing the psychological component of the individual or team is essential for success. Addressing “mental skills” is crucial in player development. Psychological characteristics, such as confidence, concentration,

determination, dedication, discipline, and commitment (just to name a few) will vary from player to player. However, through classroom, training sessions, and games, coaches can educate and influence their players in improving these characteristics. Typically, players will need assistance in coping with failure. In these situations, coaches should consult the individual/team about learning from the experience. Fear of failure for competitive athletes is common. Coaches should reaffirm the individual/team, that mistakes will be made and that you need to stay focused on the moment. Part of the developmental process is educating players how to deal with adversity.

Setting team goals and expectations is another aspect of developing the psychology of the players. Prior to the start of the season, meeting with the team as a whole, then as individuals will assist players to understand their role on the team. Determining the direction of the team will put all players “on the same page.” As a group, targeting the goals and mapping out the team plan ensures commonality. This process helps forge the bond between players, and the approach to the season. As the season progresses, the unity and chemistry amongst the players becomes evident in every meeting, training session, and game. The importance of involving the team in “goal setting,” essentially encourages the players to take responsibility and ownership for their season.

The game of soccer is physically demanding. Therefore, coaches need to develop and train their teams to be physically fit. The physical components that coaches should consider developing are: strength, power, agility, flexibility, and coordination. Furthermore, coaches should understand aerobic and anaerobic fitness, and how to apply these components to soccer specific training. Higher level coaches are fortunate to have access to strength and conditioning coaches to develop programs for their teams. Though most youth clubs do not have strength and conditioning coaches employed, youth coaches need to implement various types of fitness into their training regimen. The key to improving the teams’ physical fitness is making the experience positive. Thus, coaches should stray away from using physical fitness as a punishment. Emphasizing the value of physical fitness can create an environment of well-being. This type of positive reinforcement will encourage players to embrace being healthy.

“Life” is illustrated in the four components of soccer. The technical demonstrated the importance of skill development, and forming a foundation. The tactical focused on decision making and cognitive thinking. The psychological displayed the power of the mind. Finally, the physical stressed the importance of well-being and health. Those four components can be translated directly into valuable life skills. The essence of life can be sought by playing soccer, or any competitive sport. Life is mirrored in sport and the journey will have unforeseen obstacles and highlights that will create lasting memories.

“The highest courage is to dare to be yourself in the face of adversity. Choosing right over wrong, ethics over convenience, and truth over popularity....these are the choices that measure your life. Travel the path of integrity without looking back, for there is never a wrong time to do the right thing.” —Unknown—