

10 tips for the well-organized coach: presentation matters

By Don Norton Jr.

One area of coaching that is occasionally overlooked is how we present ourselves to our players at training. I do believe in the old adage that you "never get a second chance to make a first impression." By present ourselves, I am referring to how we look, the words we use when speaking, and the overall preparation that went into our session. The coaching schools in the United States and across the world stress to their candidates the importance of being prepared for every session and never "winging it."

Here are my 10 Rules for every training session:

- 1.** Arrive 20-25 minutes before every session, well groomed and wearing appropriate soccer gear. I have always told my players that if they arrive on time, they *are* late. They know that means they need to get to training before it is scheduled. (I do realize young players don't drive themselves ...) When I blow my whistle all my players have water, their socks are pulled up, shinguards on and their shirt is tucked in. They are ready to train.
- 2.** Check the field to make sure that it is safe to train upon. I always walk around and check all areas of the field and make sure that the goals are properly secured and that there are no holes in the nets. The environment that my players train in must be safe.
- 3.** Carefully empty the ball bag, bibs and lay out all my cones for that day's session. I never waste time putting cones down during training. Having cones laid out makes for a smooth transition from one activity to another, saves valuable time, and shows my commitment to the session. We all ask a lot from our players and we must give back just as much. Being prepared for every session is a given. And yes from time to time I will stop play and quickly "adjust" the distance of the cones that I laid out.
- 4.** I welcome every player with a smile and a handshake. I am a role model. The words I choose when speaking are important. I know that my player's experience in training and in the games can have a lasting impact on them.
- 5.** Start every session on time. I bring all my players together and they know that "if I can't see your face, you are in the wrong place." I take the sun and position my players so that there no distractions. I give a very brief age-appropriate talk about the day's activities and off we go. "No lines, no lectures and no laps." In every session we play small-sided games. I try to have a relaxed tone to my sessions, meaning players are never afraid to make mistakes and are encouraged to "try moves." Training is where mistakes are made, confidence is born and a love for the game blooms.
- 6.** Have my training session written down on a notecard that I carry with me. Coaches of all levels across the world carry them. If I need to refer to it, and I often do, it's there for me.
- 7.** Deliver coaching points to my players using the PIP method. Positive -- "I loved your run down the flank." Information -- "Don't forget to lock your ankle and get your hips square when

shooting.” Positive – “Keep up the good work.” I try to never “over coach,” meaning I don’t stop play often and strive to always have a theme and flow to training. I am always reminded of **Alex Ferguson**’s quote that “talking too much is a big danger for a coach. The words get lost in the wind.”

8. Have our assistant coach lead parts of every training session. I value “my colleagues” knowledge and want him to know that I respect his talents. Former Scottish national team head coach **Craig Brown** spoke at my SFA course and said “I never referred to our assistants as my assistants, but as my colleagues as a sign of respect.” There is no better way to show him (and the players) your confidence in his abilities than to have your colleague lead parts of training. No egos allowed; it’s not about me, but always the team. The beauty of the game is that every coach brings his own style and unique perspectives to training and games. I believe that a player needs to hear different voices throughout his soccer career.

9. Bring all players together at the end of training and very briefly summarize a few points about the session and make some “house-keeping” points if needed. I always want to leave my players on a positive note. Coming to training and playing the world’s greatest game should always be something that all players relish. I am the last person to leave the field.

10. Evaluate the session in my Log Book later that day. I grade myself regarding what went well during the session, were my objectives achieved and what could I have done better. We all learn from our mistakes and every coach has had training sessions that they wish they could do over. Even though we have a plan for our training being flexible is important. Sometimes our players lead training in a different direction that is to be expected. I begin to prepare for the next training session.

(Don Norton Jr. is the men’s assistant coach at Rowan University. He has the USSF “A” license, FA Ireland “A” license (UEFA “A” License), Scottish FA “A” Certificate, NSCAA Premier Diploma and USSF National Youth License. He is a NSCAA associate national staff coach and a USSF state coaching school instructor for the New Jersey and Eastern Pennsylvania Youth Soccer Associations. His writings have been published in various soccer magazines. He has a BA from Gettysburg College and a MA from Rowan University.)