

How Can Coaches and Parents Improve Youth Sports?

In answering this question, sport psychologists Frank Smoll and Ronald Smith conducted over 25 years of research at the University of Washington. Drs. Smoll and Smith are the co-directors of a project known as Youth Enrichment in Sports (YESports). The objective of the project was to develop, evaluate, and deliver child-centered educational programs that benefit young athletes. Supported by grants from the National Institute of Mental Health and the William T. Grant Foundation, Smoll's and Smith's approach illustrates what is called "evidence-based practice" in the field of medicine. At every stage of the process, scientific research played a key role in developing YESports programs.

YESports training programs are designed to help coaches and parents create a mastery climate that promotes healthy achievement in all areas of life, including sports. A mastery orientation emphasizes skill development, maximum effort, and fun; and it occurs within an encouraging and supportive interpersonal environment.

What is the Mastery Approach to Coaching?

In their research, Drs. Smoll and Smith developed the Mastery Approach to Coaching, which is the only scientifically validated coaching education workshop that has been shown to have the following outcomes:

- Fosters positive coach-athlete relations and greater mutual respect
- Increases the amount of fun that athletes experience
- Creates greater team cohesion and a more supportive athletic setting
- Promotes higher mastery-oriented achievement goals in sports and in school
- Increases athletes' self-esteem
- Reduces performance-destroying anxiety and fear of failure
- Decreases athlete dropout rates from approximately 30% to 5%
- Produces equally positive effects on boys and girls teams

During a workshop, coaching guidelines are presented verbally with the aid of animated PowerPoint slides. They stress a "positive approach" to influencing athletes, which emphasizes

the provision of reinforcement for effort as well as performance, the giving of encouragement after mistakes, and the desirability of giving technical instruction in an encouraging and supportive fashion. Coaches are urged to decrease punitive behaviors, which produce stress and decrease enjoyment of the sport experience. Instruction is given in how to (a) correct athlete mistakes, (b) increase communication skills, (c) develop a team-oriented approach to maintaining order and discipline, and (d) deal with violations of team rules. Behavioral feedback and self-monitoring techniques are taught as ways for improving coaches' self-awareness and compliance with the guidelines. In addition, group-learning exercises are used to cover other topics, such as keeping winning in a healthy perspective, combating fear of failure, and working cooperatively with parents.

What is the Mastery Approach to Coaching Self-Instruction Program?

To facilitate distribution, the workshop has been transformed into a self-instruction program, consisting of a DVD and a companion manual. The 66-minute DVD presents video-recorded segments of a live workshop that incorporates several educational procedures (lecture, dynamic interaction, modeling, and role playing). It is specifically designed to teach the mastery-oriented principles with the aid of animated coach-athlete cartoons, photos, and embedded videos. The self-instruction program also includes a coaching manual, the content of which is linked to the DVD. This provides a fully-integrated instructional package.

How Can You See a Preview of the Mastery Approach to Coaching DVD?

A 12-minute demonstration video has been produced. The video presents an overview of the 66-minute DVD. You are invited to view it on the YESports website (www.y-e-sports.com – click on “DVDs & MANUALS” on the menu bar). The website also contains expanded descriptions of YESports programs, summaries of research, and information about the availability of Mastery Approach DVDs.