

# Traits and Gifts of a Good Youth Coach

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The elements of good coaching are divided into three areas: personal qualities, organizational abilities and soccer expertise. With the U6, U7, U8 players by far the most important qualities are personal. Then come organizational, with soccer expertise a distant third. At U10-U11 the personal qualities are no less important, but organizational abilities become more so. Players at that age need enjoyable, challenging games, in appropriate spaces for the appropriate amount of time. And soccer expertise is good to have, because these are critical learning years. At U14-U16 personal qualities are still very important, but kids are more self-reliant and resourceful. Organizational abilities are still important. Kids may pass coaches by; they've played for years, and are asking questions coaches can't answer.

## Several important personal qualities for youth coaches:

- **Energy and enthusiasm-** Kids have abundant energy. It's important to match that energy, in order to guide and lead. A coach may love soccer, but if has "adult self-control" he won't inspire his players. A coach needs good body language, to move around with kids and demonstrate enthusiastically.
- **Humor-** This quality is very important. Today's world is increasingly serious, but soccer is really playful and humorous. Fun should always be in the air. It lightens kids up, and decreases anxiety.
- **Affection-** This is about human sensitivity. Kids should know that we look at them as emerging human beings, not just athletes to throw on the field.
- **Patience-** A lot of adults are so concerned with kids not making mistakes, that they lose patience. Coaches have to accept that mistakes are good. Mistakes are how you learn, how you prove you're willing to take risks. Coaches must keep cool in the constant stream of mistakes that make up a soccer game. It is unrealistic to expect consistency of young players, so patience is crucial. Playing well one night and poorly the next afternoon is simply the nature of kids.
- **Self-control-** A coach should be reasonably dignified. You have to watch your verbal language, your body language, your entire demeanor. It is not easy for a coach to manage frustration, but it is vital. It's so odd to see an otherwise rational adult lose it in a game or practice. We all must look at ourselves in the mirror and listen to ourselves constantly.
- **Selflessness-** none of this stuff is about us. It's about the kids. Soccer is a wonderful game, with tremendous opportunities for players to grow upright, be strong and persistent. We have to always realize it's about them and their growth, not us and our whims.
- **Generosity-** The little gestures about extending ourselves to others. Particularly important is the gift of time, in short order today.
- **Confidence-** A good youth coach must exude the sense that everything is fine. If you're secure in the decisions you make, the kids pick up on it. That doesn't mean being brash or cocky, and you don't want your kids to be overconfident. But conveying security sends a good message to the kids: "Let's roll."