

Softball Coaching Tips

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What is coaching? It is a way of relating to people in order to help bring out the best in them. I suspect there are many similarities in coaching and in leading or managing any kind of company or business organization. We all have coaches in our lives - people who help guide, teach and motivate us to be the best we can be. They are our parents, teachers, friends, and sports team coaches. It is indeed a special role, and one I have loved. Over the years that I have been involved in college coaching, I have learned a great deal. I learn new concepts every year from my teams and from the experiences we share together.

I have formulated a number of principles over the years to guide me as I assume the privilege of leading another team through a year of learning, practice, improving, competing and becoming the best team we can be. These are the principles that govern my duties as coach.

1) Believe Strongly in What You are Doing and That What You Are Committed To is Important

I believe in Augustana College, in its mission, and that it has a great education, great facility and administrators, a great atmosphere and a great athletic program. I feel very good about recruiting a student to Augustana because of this.



I believe what I am doing is important because I have the chance with my role as a coach to really be involved in young people's lives at a time when they need counsel and direction. They are growing up, making decisions about their future, struggling with problems - family, school, roommate(s), boyfriend. It's good to be able to support them as they go through this part of their lives.

Problems such as academic concerns, family illness and sports injuries, as well as boyfriend or roommate problems are common and significant. Support at these times in a college student's life can be crucial.

I also believe in the value of athletics for women - what it teaches about discipline, teamwork, excellence and commitment. I believe it provides excellent experience in leadership, helps cultivate lasting friendships, and allows women to have the same chance at an athletic scholarship as men do.

2) Lead By Example

Or, practice what you preach. I believe being fit is especially important in my work. I work out every day and it helps me to stay in peak condition for my job. During practice and warm-up for games, the coaches run with the team and go through warm-ups with the team. When we work concessions or other fund-raising projects for the team, the coaches are involved as much as the players. Don't be afraid to let the players know you are still learning, that you may be wrong sometimes, and that there will always be problems that need to be solved.

3) Create a Family Atmosphere

Do some fun things together. Gather at the coach's house for a meal. Work at fund-raisers together. Volunteer together. Last January, our team volunteered at our local soup kitchen, buying groceries, cooking and serving the meal for 300 guests, and eating with the people who came. What a great experience to share! We also have a Christmas party, with a cookie decorating party and wrapping of presents for needy families. The key is doing some fun and meaningful things together as a team.

4) Never Talk Down Your Competition

Whether you are recruiting or competing, talk your own program up.

5) Have Respect For....

- Yourself, by taking good care of yourself.
- Your opponent, but not over or under estimating them.
- The officials - they are an essential part of the game.
- The coaches - they are our leaders.
- The game - if you don't, it will humble you!

6) Create a Challenging Schedule

You get better by facing tougher competition. We see good teams on our trips south to Kansas, Missouri and Florida, as well as scheduling tough tournaments in our own region.

7) Learn What Each Player Needs for Motivation

Everyone needs some kind of inspiration. For some, it is an in-your-face confrontation, but for others, it is lots of positive encouragement.

8) Be Honest!

9) Communicate

Communicate all the time, with everyone: one-on-one, in small groups, with special groups. Communicate with assistants, team managers, captains, seniors, pitchers and catchers, juniors, sophomores, the whole team. Tell them how they're doing, where they stand, what they need to do better, how you see their roles on the team. Be honest.

10) Be Enthusiastic and Positive

Avoid giving instruction from the negative. Instead of "Don't do it that way," try to give instruction positively: "Do it this way." Instead of "Don't make your stride that long," say "Shorten your stride for better power." If you are not enthusiastic about what you are doing, it will be contagious. Teams tend to reflect the coach's personality and approach to the game and to life.

11) Drill on Fundamentals

Remember, it is unrealistic to expect players to do something in games that they have not practiced and mastered in practice.

12) Learn to Focus

Our theme is to play the game the same way with the same intensity for every pitch of every game no matter who the opponent is. It doesn't always happen, but it is a goal.

13) Raising Money and Managing Your Budget Dollars Wisely Helps Build Team Cohesiveness, Appreciation and Ownership.

Many softball programs must rely on some fundraising for auxiliary funds. Our program is no different. What I have found is that these functions can be valuable team-building experiences and can create ownership in the program. It depends on your approach.

I have found when you work for something, it means more. Working together for a common goal builds team camaraderie. Each of our own children has helped pay for at least a portion of their college education.

14) Don't Believe What Players Say About Each Other, and Don't Repeat It to Anyone Else.

Listen to the complainer, ask questions, clarify the story and ask for her opinion about what the outcome should be.

15) Tell Players What You Expect of Them and Keep On Telling Them!

Just because you say it doesn't mean they hear it.

16) Create Pride In Your Program.

Do it the hard way: through hard work and success; through items of clothing - sweatshirts, jackets, t-shirts and uniforms - with neat team logos; through publicity, through your own effort.

17) Establish Traditions

Through doing some of the same things every year, you develop a sense of solidarity and significance in your program. Examples include home tournaments, family weekends, senior game day, a fall retreat, volunteering, a spring trip and special meals.

18) Developing Leadership

Help people within your organization grow and develop and your organization will be better for it. Help your assistants know what their roles are and give them feedback about how they're doing. Help the seniors and other team leaders understand their roles and give them praise and appreciation for their efforts.

19) Coach Within Yourself

You can't be someone you're not, or conduct yourself as a coach the way you see someone else do it. Get comfortable with yourself and do it your way.

Conclusion

You don't have to be a good player to be a good coach. You can have limited experience as a player and still be effective as a coach if you are willing to learn what it takes to have a successful program and have a passion for doing so. Openness, care for your people and a willingness to do whatever it takes will take you a long ways. Have fun and don't take yourself too seriously, but at the same time, work hard and believe passionately in what you're doing!