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# Are Players Over-Coached?

*This resource stems from a question submitted to the Ask PCA blog. Responses come from our experts including PCA Trainers, who lead live group workshops for coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes.*

**“Do we ‘over-coach’ our players? I have two sons, 13 and 16, who participate in a variety of sports. In baseball, for example, I notice coaches calling all the pitches. It is also prevalent in lacrosse and basketball as plays and advice are yelled in from the sidelines.**

**“Is the result a more mechanical, thoughtless player? Does the game have less flow? My oldest recently participated in a track meet, where coaches aren’t allowed on the field and yelling instructions from the stands is discouraged. My son explained after his event that several athletes were unable to ‘self-correct’ their mechanics. I wonder how many youth athletes have ever been that isolated from their coaches. Are the coaches to blame?”**

## PCA Response by Joe Scally, PCA Trainer-Chicago

The type of coaching you describe is all too prevalent. Among the reasons is a win-at-all-cost mentality that makes some coaches want to control every aspect of the game. In *The Double Goal Coach*, PCA Founder and Executive Director Jim Thompson describes the “Romance of Leadership,” a concept he first heard of from Jeff Pfeffer at the Stanford Business School. The idea is that coaches tend to feel that they must be making things happen. They are aware that others may perceive the “hands-on” coach as doing a better job.

Also, exercising authority can feel good, so coaches may do it even when it would be better to let players take the lead. Media images of overcoaching coaches, pacing the sidelines and yelling out plays, model this type of behavior for youth sport coaches.

Whatever the reason coaches overly insert themselves into games, it is almost always better for youth sport coaches to let players make decisions for themselves on the playing field. A coach can prepare the players in practice for the types of decisions they will have to make in a game. The coach can explain why some choices are better than others so that players will understand not just the mechanics, but the thinking process as well.

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Players can ask questions. Getting players involved in this way makes the game more interesting for them. It also develops players who can make decisions on their own, an important life skill that can be learned through sports and one that often enhances productivity on the field, too.

Of course, players will still make mistakes. However, given the opportunity to make decisions for themselves, they can work through these mistakes and come up with some better solutions. This does not mean that coaches should never correct players during a game, but such corrections must be limited and simple.

The heated atmosphere of competition does not allow for many teachable moments. When coaches try to force teaching or direct every action of the players, such overcoaching can stifle the flow and disrupt the players' feel for the game. Over coaching may confuse or demotivate young athletes. Rather than micromanaging, coaches should use game time to educate and prepare players on the bench or to note items that need work in upcoming practices.

If coaches let the players solve the challenges presented by the competition, players will have more fun and develop a deeper understanding of the sport. Many times, a player has a better feel and perspective for the game than that which the coach can get from the sideline. What coach hasn't said under her breath something like, "Don't pass it now, don't pass it there.... wow, what a beautiful pass."?

*PCA Trainer Joe Scally is a longtime soccer coach based in the Chicago area. Joe spent several years as PCA's national director of training.*

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