



Yelling Coach

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.

“My child’s coach is a yeller. He yells constantly during practices and games. He yells at his players and criticizes them when they do things wrong. He even yells when they seem to be doing things right. His teams consistently have winning records, and as far as you can tell, the players seem to handle the yelling without getting down on themselves or each other. My questions are:

- **Would you want your child to play for this coach?**
- **Does his winning record excuse his yelling?**
- **Would your answer change depending on the age of the athletes?”**

PCA Response by Jim Thompson, PCA Founder

Coaching is much more art than science, and certainly is not a cookbook activity. There is no single recipe that will work all the time. Great coaching requires a foundation of values that you are absolutely clear about, together with the presence of mind to respond flexibly to what is happening in the moment. Athletes are different, game situations are different, etc., so it can be a tough topic to be definitive about.

Nonetheless, let me offer some thoughts on coaches who yell.

Yelling is a limited tool to be used in a limited fashion. Kids (people) tend to block out continuous noise, and a coach who yells all the time risks losing his/her players’ attention. Then when something serious comes along that needs to be addressed in dramatic fashion, a coach raising his/her voice seems just like normal, and the import is lost.

Much of the time, yelling is a distraction. Athletes usually need to focus on what they are doing. Being yelled at by a coach can distract them from focusing on what they need to do to make a play.

Yelling can make lessons harder to learn. If I am embarrassed to be yelled at, I am less likely to take to heart the information being communicated that might help me improve. Criticism given in a more respectful way can be more easily taken to heart.





Yelling Coach, continued

Some kids just can't take yelling. While the yelling coach may be able to motivate some kids, others will be turned off. A coach who yells all the time risks not being able to reach a (perhaps) big percentage of kids. And when athletes have choices, they tend to go towards coaches who build them up rather than yell. So yelling can be self-defeating in this respect.

I understand that some rare individuals are able to be successful with a yelling style of coaching. These individuals can somehow convey to their athletes that they care about them so the yelling isn't a problem for them. But most of the yellers I have seen are not able to do this and their athletes, and their record in terms of the scoreboard, suffer.

Great coaches have a big toolbox of motivational techniques. They don't rely on a single approach. As the saying goes, if all you have is a hammer, every problem looks like a nail. If you are accustomed to yelling, you are more likely to yell even when the problem requires a different approach.

In general, great coaches use yelling sparingly.

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