

4 | Disruptive Kids

Some of your players have short attention spans and frequently disrupt team conversations and drills. Most players pay attention and do what you ask but seem as frustrated as you. As a Double-Goal Coach, what can you do?

Every coach at every level has players who misbehave, goof off, or lack focus during practice. Here are three basic principles for shaping the behavior of your players.

- 1. Reinforce desired behavior.** Attention, good or bad, can reinforce behavior you *don't* want. As strange as it may seem, yelling at a kid can reinforce inappropriate behavior. Give attention to kids when they do what you want. Thank those who respond right away: "Artemio, Jalmer, Nico, thanks for hustling in!" Tie their cooperation to the team's success. "With limited practice time, it really helps when you come right away!"
- 2. Ignore undesired behavior.** Vic *didn't* come when you called, so ignore him. Until he does what you want, Vic doesn't exist (actually you keep an eye on him so he doesn't get hurt). When Vic realizes he can't get your attention by misbehaving, he'll likely try to get it by complying. When he does, reward him: "Vic, thanks for doing what I asked!" This tends to work like magic, but not always, so read on.
- 3. When you can't ignore, intervene in a least-attention manner.** Sometimes you can't ignore behavior – a player may put herself in danger or disrupt your practice – so intervene in a "least-attention manner." "Tina, I need you to sit here until you can follow my directions. When you're ready to do what I ask, you can rejoin the team." If this doesn't work, add a check-in. "Tina, sit here. I'll be back shortly to see if you are ready to rejoin the team." This is a great time for a fun activity that Tina will miss. Before she can rejoin the team, have her acknowledge what she needs to do. "Tina, can you follow my direction now?" She has to agree before you let her rejoin the team, even if it's just a head nod.

As a basketball coach, I made sure every player had his own ball. When I wanted their attention, I said, "Hold the balls." If a player didn't, I calmly took it. If he got upset, I said, "When you learn to hold your ball when I'm talking, you can keep it." This worked like a charm.

These principles are simple but not easy. It's all too easy to get angry at misbehavior and ignoring misbehavior can feel unnatural. But if followed, these three principles will help you regain control of your team. Here are some other thoughts:

- Get to know your players as individuals. Learn their names and interests and make a connection as quickly as you can. Smile and greet each player by name at the start and end of every practice.
- Keep the three C's in mind: Calmness, Consequences, and Consistency. You'll get much farther with Calmness than anger. A calm correction connected to a Consequence works far better than a shout. And Consistency in applying consequences helps players come to understand what is expected of them.
- The best defense is a good offense. Kids engaged in purposeful and fun activities are far less likely to misbehave.
- Keep rules simple, especially with younger kids. For them, these three rules can cover almost anything: 1) Give your best effort, 2) Support your teammates, and 3) Listen when coaches talk.
- Involve older players in developing team rules at the beginning of the season. Get their agreement, including the consequences for violating them. Then when there is a violation, you can remind them of their commitment to obey the rules and the consequences that you established together.
- Get your assistants on the same page. Your effectiveness at managing player behavior is undercut if they give attention to undesirable behavior.
- Consider making an especially difficult child Player of the Day (see page 37).

Developing Winners in Sports and Life

THE POWER OF DOUBLE-GOAL COACHING



By Jim Thompson



Foreword by Phil Jackson



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