COACHES' BEHAVIOUR AT GAMES

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In a previous chapter, we said that coaches should understand the function of games within the context of their team's activities and consequently, programme games to fulfill this function.

It is also important that coaches *control their own behaviour* during games. The coach is not a fan and should not behave as one. The coach is an expert who should control his/her behaviour to make the games, whatever their function, a valuable experience for his/her team.

5.1. COACH'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS BASKETBALL GAMES

As with training sessions, coaches working with young players should have an objective, constructive and positive attitude towards basketball games:

- *Objective*, because they should objectively assess what their players can do (before the game), what they are doing (during the game) and what they have done (after the game).
- *Constructive*, because whatever happens during the game, coaches should use it so that their players, both individually and collectively, obtain benefits that will influence their athletic and human development.
- *Positive*, because, without losing objectivity, the game is not the moment to make an in-depth analysis of mistakes but to emphasise the players' positive behaviour and to encourage them to do things without being afraid of failing.

Coaches should be very clear as to what they can realistically expect from their players and not demand more from them; they should assume that the players will make many mistakes which are natural considering their obvious limitations and also the following facts:

- the best players in the world, during their best games, have missed shots that seemed easy. How can a coach get angry with young players when they miss shots that seem easy?
- the best players make mistakes when passing and lose balls. How can a coach get angry with young players when they make mistakes passing and lose the ball?

Many coaches who work with young players lose the appropriate perspective and the self-control that they should have during games when their players make perfectly normal mistakes, and instead of concentrating on aspects that should be made taken advantage of, they stress the players by making unproductive comments that increase their insecurity, turning the game into an aversive experience.

In fact, many young players who start out enthusiastically playing mini-basketball or basketball lose this enthusiasm and, in many cases, quit, because *games become very stressful experiences* that they cannot deal with. The coach's behaviour is an essential element in avoiding this problem and in getting games to be positive, whatever the result.

Therefore, the coach should establish *realistic goals* for the game and realise that certain aspects will not go well:

 some because this is normal considering the players' level, since they will not be able to do more than what they are capable of;



• others because this is normal bearing in mind that, in this sport, there is an inevitable margin of error that has to be accepted; that is, no matter how well prepared the players are, mistakes will be made in areas of the game that they have mastered, as occurs with the best players.

So coaches should be prepared to tolerate their players' mistakes and continue to coach the game without letting those mistakes to affect them emotionally.

Coaches should also be prepared to make *constructive use* of the experience of the game, whatever it may be:

- on one hand, reinforcing positive aspects so that the players will repeat them;
- on the other hand, observing what goes wrong and what can realistically be improved, in order to work on it in later practice sessions.

Games are not the appropriate environment for correcting serious mistakes (that is what practice is for) and, therefore, it is useless for the coach to waste his/her energy on this; furthermore, by doing this, the coach will only harm the players' performance.

During a game, coaches should *concentrate on positive aspects*, reinforcing them so that they will be repeated, and limit themselves to correcting details that can realistically be changed.



Nor should coaches spend too much time on past plays (this can be done later, when they analyse the entire game) but *concentrate on the present and the future of the game*.

The important thing is not what has already happened and cannot be changed, but what is happening right now or what could happen during the rest of the game.

- * For example: what is important is not that the opposing team has scored several baskets using fast-breaks, but to use this experience so that this will no longer occur from that moment on.
- * Therefore, the coach should not worry about baskets scored by the opposing team or recriminate his/her players because of this, but rather give them constructive instructions with contents that the players have mastered in order to correct or reduce this problem for the rest of the game.

This objective, constructive and positive outlook is very important in order to efficiently lead young players' teams in every aspect.



Practical Exercises

- Think about how mistakes made by your players affect you and remember your reactions.
- Reflect on what you expect from your players during games. Do you establish realistic goals? Do you simply demand of them what they can realistically do? Do you accept that they will make mistakes?
- Consider whether you use the experience of each game in such a way that your young players continue to progress regardless of the score and of success or mistakes made. Do you take advantage of games that generally went well? Do you take advantage of games that generally went badly?

5.2. COACH'S BEHAVIOUR BEFORE THE GAME

As we have already said, before the game the coach should decide on the goals of the game and have realistic expectations concerning his/her players' possible performance. What can I expect of them? Is this realistic? What can they really do?

Preparing for the Game

As an example, Table-13 provides a tool that could be useful for the coach in preparing for a game:

- first of all, coaches should specify the goals and plans for the game (obviously bearing in mind their teams' characteristics and general objectives);
- secondly, coaches should anticipate the most likely problems to arise during the game (for example, a mini-basketball coach could anticipate that his/her players will lose the ball when the opposing team pressures them);
- thirdly, coaches should *decide what they will do* to offset these problems (in the previous case, for example, tell the players not to worry and encourage them even when they lose the ball).

By *anticipating possible problems*, these will not take the coach by surprise, so he/she will not get angry at the players and he/she will know what to do when difficulties arise during the game.

GAME:		
DATE:		
GOALS AND PLANS FOR THE GAME	MOST LIKELY DIFFICULTIES	WHAT WILL WE DO TO CONTROL THOSE DIFFICULTIES?

Table 13. Example of tool to prepare for games. Coach should establish goals and plans, anticipate possible difficulties and be ready when the difficulties appear.

By *deciding what to do if problems arise*, the coach can prepare a strategy (for teams with more resources) or prepare the strategy that he/she will use when coaching the game.

The previous example shows what can happen with a mini-basketball team. It would be absurd for the coach to try to prepare a basketball strategy to offset the negative effects of a possibly press defense on the part of the opposing team, because it is unlikely that his/her players will be prepared to assimilate it. However, it is appropriate that the coach know beforehand what he/she will do in his/her role as coach when this problem arises to make the game a positive experience in any case.

Depending on the level of the players and the type of difficulties, basketball strategies can perhaps be prepared for older basketball teams but, in any case, it is important that the coach prepare the strategy that he/she will adopt in his/her role as coach directing the game.



Practical Exercise

During your team's next game, prepare yourself beforehand, following the guidelines set out here: decide on your team's goals and plans for that game; anticipate the most likely problems; and decide what you will do if these problems arise.

Kind of Comments

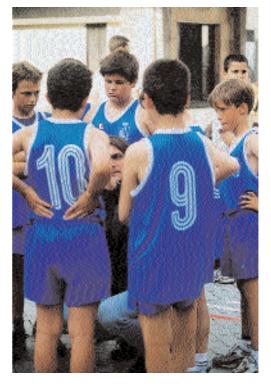
Coaches should also be careful of their behaviour with respect to the players. What does the coach say to them? How does he/she control their expectations? How does he/she avoid the players making the game more important than it is? Let's look at some suggestions:

- in general, it is important for the coach to maintain a *balanced attitude* around the players, with respect to the games;
- it is not a good idea to talk too much about the game beforehand, nor refer to the possible score, especially using stressful comments such as, «We've got to win next Saturday»;
- the coach should remind the players that the important thing is for them to enjoy themselves and do the best they can;
- the coach could also tell the players that, whatever happens, it is important for them to continue to improve, so they should concentrate on what they have to do and forget about the score («Whatever happens, we do our thing.»).

At such moments, it is important for the coach to strengthen the players' perception of control. To do this, he/she should avoid referring to aspects that they cannot directly control (the final score) and concentrate on controllable aspects, basically own behaviours that they have mastered.

Thus, the team's goals before a game should be *only performance goals*, and the coach's instructions and comments should be centred *solely on the players' behaviour*.

Also, right before a game, the coach should keep in mind that the players tend to be nervous, anxious for the game to start, and that under these conditions their attentional capacity is very reduced, so he/she should avoid trying to transmit too much information or complex information.



At times like these, coaches should limit themselvesf to reminding the players of three or four key aspects of the game, briefly outlining the specific behaviour that they consider essential and which the players have mastered.



Practical Exercise

 Using the contents discussed in this section, think about what you should tell your players before the game.

5.3. COACH'S BEHAVIOUR DURING THE GAME

During a game, the coach's behaviour can decisively influence the players' performance, either postively or negatively. How should the coach behave so that his/her players do their best and make the game a beneficial experience?

Following are some suggestions, differentiating periods of active participation from pauses:

- periods of *active participation* are those during which the players are playing;
- *pauses* are those other periods when play is stopped (after a personal foul, time-outs, half-time, etc.).

Periods of Active Participation

During periods of active participation, the coach's behaviour can interfere negatively with the appropriate performance of the players.

* For example: the coach who, from the sidelines, reciminates his/her players or gives them instructions during these periods, may make them more nervous or distract their attention from the game. Thus, he/she will favour players' mistakes.

For this reason, it is better for the coaches to talk to the players during pauses and not during periods of active participation.

In any case, if they feel that they should speak to them during the periods of active participation, they should refer to what the players should do at that moment, not to aspects that have already occurred and that may be important later on but which right then are not relevant.

* For example: let's think of a player who made a mistake while playing defense, allowing the player he was guarding to score. The coach gets angry and gets up from the bench to recriminate the player for what has happened, warning him to pay attention next time.

While this is happening, the team is attacking: the players have rapidly taken the ball and they are now moving forwards to get a good shot. Hearing the coach, the player who made the mistake gets nervous and distracted, so when he gets the ball he makes a wrong decision and loses it.

What happened? Although perhaps the coach was right in telling the player off, he did it at the wrong time, and this had a negative effect on the player's performance in the following play.

Helping Players' Concentration

Continuing with this example, even if the coach had not recriminated the player for his mistake, simply by referring to an aspect that *is distinct from*

what is happening at the moment, he will have favoured a division of the player's attention between two very different types of stimuli:

- on one hand, the player has to listen to and assimilate what the coach is telling him concerning the defensive error;
- on the other hand, he has to observe the stimuli that are key in executing the offensive task at hand.

The coach's intervention would have been more efficient if, instead of acting impulsively, he had mastered the skill of using his comments to positive effect.

* For example: it would have been more appropriate not to say anything at that moment, allowing the player to concentrate on the offensive task at hand, and make a constructive comment on the defense *immediately before the next defensive play*.

This way, the coach would not have altered the player's concentration while he was participating in the offensive play, and the coach's comment would have been much more efficient in avoiding another error if it had been made at the right moment.

Therefore, if the coach transmits instructions during periods of active participation, these should be related to the task that the players are performing at the moment at which they receive them (not the other way around).

Because basketball is a sport in which defense and offense situations alternate, coaches should be careful to give, during these periods, instructions concerning defensive aspects when their team is defending, and instructions concerning offensive aspects when their team is attacking.



Practical Exercises

- Watch a coach directing a game and note down how many times he/she addresses his/her players during periods of active participation and how many during pauses (without counting time-outs or half-time).
- Watch a coach when, during a game, he/she address his/her players during periods of active participation and note whether his/her comments are related to the task being performed by the players at that moment or if they refer to different aspects.
- For both exercises, a tool such as that shown in Table-14 can be used.

	PERIODS OF ACTIVE PARTICIPATION			
	COMMENTS RELATED WITH PRESENT TASK	COMMENTS NOT RELATED WITH PRESENT TASK	PAUSES	
1 QUARTER				
2 QUARTER				
3 QUARTER				
4 QUARTER				

Table 14. Example of tool to record frecuency of comments from coach to players during periods of active participation and pauses.

Kind of Comments

In general, during periods of active participation, the players should be allowed to act without the coach giving them instructions, with his/her intervention being limited to very relevant moments.

This measure is especially important for teams of young players, because it allows them to show initiative, take on responsibility and develop their talent instead of waiting for the coach to tell them what to do.

Likewise, the coach should avoid insults and derogatory remarks, adopting a positive and constructive style in order to help the players.

Therefore, more than recrimination and correction, it would be more appropriate during these periods for the coach to prompt or reinforce the individual or the collective behaviour he/she wants to consolidate.

- In the first case, the coach could make a comment such as, «Tommy, go get the ball!» (prompting) exactly in the situation and at the moment when the player can perform this action.
- player gets the ball with or



Prompting should be used *infrequently* because the point is not to tell the players what they have to do every minute of the game but to remind them of certain behaviour at very specific moments. This can be especially appropriate to centre the players' attention after an error.

> * For example: a player misses a lay-up and the coach tells him, «Alex, move down quick to defend.»

However, reinforcement should be generously used, especially with minibasketball teams and 13/14-year-olds; the coach should take advantage of every deserving opportunity to reinforce his/her players.

When coaching their players during periods of active participation, coaches should concentrate on reinforcing correctly executed actions, including efforts made.



Practical Exercise

 Using a tool such as that shown in Table-15, observe a coach and note the number of times he/she reinforces his/her players when they execute an effective action.

Apart from verbal behaviour, a coach should be careful with his/her *non-verbal expressions* (his/her attitude on the bench or on the sidelines, his/her gestures, etc.) because this also affects his/her players' performance.

In the same way, the coach should control comments made within earshot of the players sitting on the bench, avoiding insults and derogatory expressions made about the players on the court or any comment that shows his/her lack of control over the game (for example, "This is a disaster! I haven't got the slightest idea what to do!").

Comments such as these lead to rejection and a lack of confidence on the part of the players, both those not playing who overhear them as well as for their teammates when they find out.

In general, when coaching the game, coaches should avoid making ges-

tures of disapproval, anger or discouragement respecting the behaviour of their players, maintaining a *relaxed attitude* which will help both the players as well as themselves to perform better.

Pauses

The activity of both the coach and the players during pauses is essential. If properly used, breaks in the game can be a great help for the players to recuperate physically (as far as possible) and prepare themselves to perform better during upcoming periods of active participation; but if the pauses are poorly used, they can be very negative because the players have time for negative thoughts or images or they can be influenced by external elements that alter their optimum per-



COACH REINFORCES GOOD ACTIONS		
PLAYER	DEFENSE	OFFENSE
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		
12		
13		
WHOLE TEAM		

Table 15. Tool to record frecuency of reinforcement from coach to players during periods of active participation.

formance (things happening around them, comments made by the coach or their teammates, etc.).

In basketball, pauses can be divided into three categories: during game time when the referee stops the game (when calling a personal foul, when the ball goes out, etc.), time-outs and half-time.

Pauses in Game Time

The behaviour of the coach during pauses in game time could benefit from the following recommendations:

- his/her comments to the players should be very *clear*, *specific* and *concise*;
- the principal purpose of his/her comments should be to centre the players' attention on key aspects of the upcoming period of active participation, without stopping to analyse what has already occurred in previous plays;
- he/she should *not speak or yell without a specific purpose*; if he/she is nervous or angry, he/she should use another procedure to calm down, but not speak to the players if it is not necessary;
- he/she should not continually address the players to tell them how to act;
 - they need autonomy and they cannot be constantly dependent on the coach. Besides, many players feel uncomfortable if the coach corrects them frequently, and this increases their anxiety, causing them to perform even more poorly; often, these players disconnect and ignore what the coach tells them;
- the coach can use pauses to reinforce efforts made by his/her players on less showy tasks (for example, defense behaviour, helping teammates, running back, etc.) or suitable actions which he/she feels he/she should insist upon even though these have not yet produced a positive result;



- * For example: a team of 13/14-year-olds is trying to execute Fast-Breaks, following the coach's instructions. After an attempt ending in a bad pass that goes out, the coach reinforces her players, saying «Good, that's the way. Keep working on the fast-break!».
- the coach can also use breaks to encourage the players after their errors, getting them to concentrate on tasks during the next period of active participation;
 - * For example: a player has lost the ball and then made a personal foul. The coach tells her, «Go on, Sally, forget it and defend your player».
- just as in periods of active participation, the coach should avoid derogatory, disapproving or discouraging gestures and comments;
- when working with young players, the coach should not use this time
 or any other to insult or question the referee, but should be a model of
 behaviour for his/her players, accepting and respecting the referee's authority and his/her work.

Time-Outs

These same guidelines can be applied to time-outs and half-time although, in these cases, because there is more time available, the coach should establish a *working routine*.

During time-outs, the coach could follow suggestions such as the following:

- get the players used to moving quickly to the sidelines or the bench;
- allow fifteen seconds for the players to drink water, dry off the sweat and relax a little while the coach decides what he/she wants to say to them;
- establish that the only person to talk during time-outs is the coach; not the assistant coaches nor the players, only the coach. Otherwise, the players' attention will wander and they will not be able to concentrate on the comments that the coach has decided to make;
- do not try to say too much, especially to younger players;
- do not speak too quickly; speak energetically but without getting «wound up». Use full sentences, give clear and precise instructions, use words and phrases that are understandable to the players;

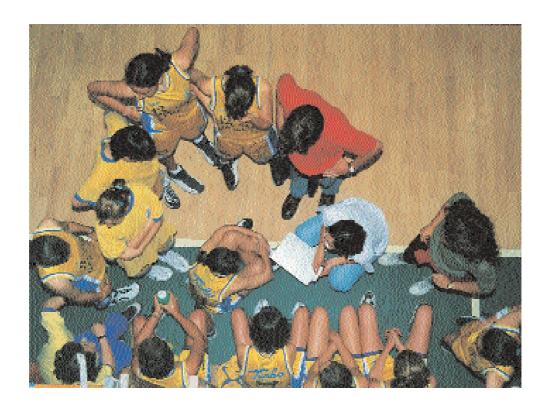


- when addressing the players, in the first place, if the last play or plays have been unfortunate, make a brief reference to this so that the players forget about it and concentrate on other aspects (for example, «Forget that run of mistakes, let's concentrate on what we have to do from here on»);
- then, briefly reinforce the correct behaviours that he/she considers most important (for example, «We're doing a good job moving quickly down to defend. Keep it up.»);
- if the team has had a good run just before the time-out, the coach should reinforce the effort and concentration related with this («You're making good passes, keep on looking for unguarded teammates.»);
- after briefly reinforcing the previous principal actions, the coach should centre atten-



tion on actions that should take precedence during the next period of active participation (for example, "You've got to move faster to get the ball"; "Max, try to play 1 on 1 when you get a pass", etc.);

- finally, the coach should say some words of encouragement (for example, «Come on, boys, go out and have a good time», «Go on, keep fighting»);
- in general, it is appropriate that the coach divert the players' attention from the scoreboard and centre it on what they have to do (for example, "Forget the score", "Play as if the scoreboard isn't there", "Just focus on what you have to do").



Time-outs are great opportunities to educate the players, helping them to improve both individually and as a team. Do not waste them, but use them efficiently.



Test Exercise-8

• Think about how you behave during time-outs and answer the following questions choosing one of the three options (Usually, Sometimes or Almost Never). You will find a comment on your answers at the end of the book.

1 12/2/2	Usually	Sometimes	Almost Never
1. Do your players move quickly to the sidelines or the bench?		0	
2. Do you give your players time to drink water and relax a bit before starting to talk to them?			
3. Are you the only one who talks during time-outs?		0	
4. Do you tell your players off for mis- takes made during previous plays?		0	0
5. Do you reinforce good plays that you want the players to repeat?		0	
6. Do you speak quickly so that you have time to say a lot?		0	
7. Do you try to centre the players' attention on the most important behaviour for the upcoming period of active participation?	0	0	0
8. Do you remind your players that they should think about winning?		0	
9. Do you make fun of a player when you want him to react and play better?		0	
10. Do you run out of time to say everything you want to the players?		\circ	
11. Do you tend to say something encouraging just before the players go out onto the court?	0	0	0

Half-Time

Half-time is the longest pause and therefore, the moment when the coach can intervene directly in the greatest measure.

Half-time should be used for the players to rest, go to the bathroom, drink water, adjust their equipment or bandages, apply ice to alleviate the pain of a blow, etc., and for the coach to talk to them about improving their performance during the second half.

This is precisely the objective that coaches should have when they address their players during half-time, to *help them improve their performance during the second half*, leaving for another moment comments about what happened during the first half that are not relevant to achieving this objective.

- In the first place, just as with time-outs, the coach should establish a working routine for the half-time, including all activities appropriate to this period. This way, he/she will make the best use of available time.
- Before talking to the players, the coach should briefly meditate on what he/she wants to tell them instead of acting impulsively, without any type of strategy. The half-time break is very valuable and should not be wasted on improvisation dictated by the coach's mood. Even though there is little time, the coach should decide what his/her goals and strategies should be in order to make the best use of the half-time break.
- When giving instructions the coach should follow the guidelines that usually predominate for a game: the instructions should be few, precise and very clear, centred on the specific behaviour that the players should produce during the second half.

Briefly, the coach should *remind*, *correct or reinforce* actions from the first half, *as long as these are relevant to the second half*, finishing up with very specific instructions for the second half.

The kind of behaviours from the first half that the coach should reinforce so that they will be repeated during the second half should be:



- *effort behaviours* (anticipate in defense, run fast-breaks, block rebounds, etc.);
- *concentration behaviours* (quick reactions when playing defense and offense);
- *control behaviours* (handle the ball well, not make personal fouls by lowering the arm, etc.);
- *cooperation behaviours* (play with the post, pass to unguarded teammates, talking in defense, defensive help, etc.).

However, it is not a good idea to highlight sporadic abilities (for example, a flashy shot).

This way, the reinforcement will strengthen the players' self-confidence by highlighting behaviour that depends mainly on them.

In any case, the coach should finish his/her talk by specifying the main *performance goals* for the second half, and transmitting an optimistic message to encourage the players.



Practical Exercise

 Using the previous information and the tool in Table-16, think about what you usually do during game half-time and note down aspects you can improve.

5.4. COACH'S BEHAVIOUR AFTER THE GAME

Once the game is over, the coach should adopt a balanced attitude regardless of what has occurred. He/she should neither be euphoric when his/her team wins and the players have played well nor be depressed when they lose and play badly.

A coach working with young players should remember that games are a *unique educational experience*, with the most important moment coming at the end of the game. It is then that young players have to learn to tolerate the frustration of defeat or of having played badly and also to place victory and a good game in the proper perspective.

A young players' coach is a role model who, at such moments more than any other, should demonstrate the proper behaviour that the players will imitate, and the same should be said of parents.

WHAT DO I USUALLY DO IN HALF-TIME	WHAT ASPECTS MIGHT I IMPROVE

Table 16. Half-time self-assessment.

When the game is over, it is important for the coach to control his/her feelings and teach his/her players to congratulate their opponents and the referee in a relaxed, sportslike manner.

The game has finished and there will be time to analyse it later. What is important now is that the coach show his/her support for his/her players. It is not necessary to organise a talk or, for example, try to convince the ones who are sad that losing is not important. It's enough that the coach be there with them, that he/she say a few encouraging words (without going too far) and that he/she take leave of them optimistically until the next practice.

This is not the moment to analyse, explain or correct anything. The players *need time to live their*

emotions in peace, because this too is something they can learn from basketball.







Test Exercise-9

• Answer the following questions, choosing one of the four options (Usually, Sometimes, Almost Never or Never). You will find comments on your answers at the back of the book.

When you coach your team in a game...

1		Sometimes	Almost Never	Never
1. Do you tend to see the negative aspects of your team more than the positive ones?	0	0	0	0
2. Do you get angry when the players make mistakes?	0	0	0	0
3. Do you reinforce the players when they try to produce the correct behaviour, even if they are not successful?		0	0	
4. Do you encourage the players when they make a mistake and try to centre their attention quickly on the task at hand?	0	0		
5. Do you assess your players' performance based on the final score: if they win, you think they have done almost everything right; if they lose, you think they have done almost everything wrong?	0	0	0	0
6. Do you constantly tell the players what they have to do?	0	0	0	0
7. Do you insult or make fun of the players?				
8. Are you capable of coaching the game objectively, regardless of the scoreboard?	0	0		
9. Do you insult or protest to the referees?	0	0		
10. Do you tend to transmit positive messages to the players?	0	0	0	0
11. Do you spend most of the half-time recriminating the players for mistakes made during the first half?	0	0	0	0
12. Do you make disapproving gestures or comments to your players?	0	0	0	0
13. Do you congratulate the coach of the opposing team after the game and teach your players that they should do the same with their opponents?	0	0	0	
14. Just after losing a game, do you organise a talk with the players to tell them what they did wrong?		0	0	0