

COACHING



SOCCER

for Beginners

Tony Schiavone

COACHING SOCCER FOR BEGINNERS

*A Guide for Coaching Players who have
never Played,*

For Coaches who have never Coached

Tony Schiavone

Coaching Soccer for Beginners
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"COACHING SOCCER FOR BEGINNERS" is an indispensable tool for first-time coaches working with young children. Written especially for non-experts of the game, this book thoroughly explains the rules and theory of soccer, as well as the positions and their responsibilities; how to assign each child his or her position, practice drills, and other game preparation tips. It is a great reference source, containing diagrams, illustrations, a glossary, a list of FIFA rules, and explanations as to how they apply to youth soccer. Finally, unlike any other soccer-coaching book, "Coaching Soccer for Beginners" contains actual agendas for your practices.

"COACHING SOCCER FOR BEGINNERS" is humorous, light-hearted, and packed with useful information. Reading this book is the first step toward a fun and successful season!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Tony Schiavone has been involved with youth soccer since 1995. He has worked with boys and girls, indoor and outdoor teams, and children ranging in age from six to sixteen.

A graduate of Youngstown State and Kent State Universities, Schiavone works as a freelance writer and illustrator, best known for his "Grampa's Gang" comic strip.

Schiavone has three children, Vince, Andy and Alexandra, and a wife, Pamela. They live in Ohio where Schiavone coaches youth soccer.

DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to Vince, Andy and Alexandra, my three wonderful children, and to Pam, my beautiful bride.

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INTRODUCTION

Here is the story of how I “volunteered” to coach my first soccer team. If you are reading this, it is probably similar to yours.

Shortly after registering my six-year-old son to play in the local recreational league, the director called and said that not enough parents had signed up to coach. Unless I agreed to coach, children would have to be cut. Knowing absolutely nothing about soccer, I went to the library and researched the game. The books that I read were very technical and complicated, and though I gained an in-depth knowledge of the sport, I was intimidated by all the minute details. As the season progressed, I realized that most of what I had learned had nothing at all to do with soccer as it is played by elementary school children at a recreational level.

This book contains what I consider to be the essentials necessary to coach at that level of play. It is written for people who have no understanding of soccer and are coaching young children who have never played the sport.

Good luck, best wishes, and above all else, have fun!

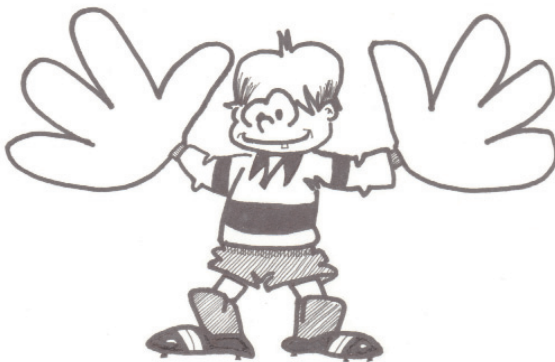
CHAPTER ONE

POSITIONS

Before we can discuss the finer points of coaching soccer—if indeed there are any “finer points” when working with small children—it is important to know the names of the positions and what their responsibilities are.

GOALIE: The goalie is easy to recognize; he is the player with the different colored long-sleeved shirt. He lines up in front of his own team’s goal, and his main job is to prevent the ball from going into the goal, which would result in a point scored for the other team.

RESPONSIBILITIES AND STRATEGIES: As stated above, the goalie’s job is to prevent the other team from scoring. To do that, he may use any part of his body to keep the ball out of the goal, including his feet, head and hands. He is the only player on the field allowed to touch the ball with his hands while it is in play. When he gets the ball, he should punt, kick or throw it downfield and at an angle away from the goal. He should never, ever kick the ball



The goalie is the only player on the field allowed to touch the ball with his hands. Some children are more naturally suited than others at this position.

straight back up the middle, unless he can boot it about thirty yards. This is because you don't want to risk giving the other team the ball right in front of your own goal, which could result in an easy shot for them. We'll discuss this concept more in Chapter Two, "Strategy."

SWEEPER (or defender): The sweeper, a defensive player, lines up about five to ten yards in front of the goalie. His job is to kick, or "sweep" the ball downfield and out, away from the goal. The sweeper's position is back by the goal; he normally does not run the field. Depending on the number of players you are playing—your league will set the number—you will most likely have one or two sweepers.

RESPONSIBILITIES AND STRATEGIES: If you only have one sweeper, then his job will be to cover the entire back side of the field by the goalie from sideline to sideline. If you have two, one will be the right sweeper and one will be the left sweeper. Their job is to cover the entire backside of the field, but they should stay in their own lanes, the right and left lanes respectively.

When the ball is on the other team's side of the field, the sweeper should move forward. How far up-field he moves depends on his ability to get back in time. Many of the teams in the older age divisions will actually move their sweepers up as far as the midfield line during the game in an attempt to stifle the opposing team's offense (we'll explore this when we discuss "offsides"). However, at this level of play, how far up-field your sweeper will advance is determined more by his maturity level than by his athletic ability. Let me explain. Picture a five-year-old sweeper who is more interested in what kind of bugs he can find in the grass than in the ongoing soccer game. If the ball is on the other end of the field and you move him to a more forward position, i.e., closer to midfield, he probably would not react in time to an opposing player suddenly streaking past him with the ball. He may be too busy counting the spots on the back of the ladybug he just found! However, if you keep a young player like that back by the goal, you might just get lucky—the ball might hit him and bounce away while

he is digging for night crawlers! (I'm not kidding, I've seen this happen more than once!)

Note: many coaches like to play two sweepers, one on either side of the goalie, even when playing with as few as nine players, but I feel that that is too conservative. I'd rather make one of them a midfielder (a position further up-field), where he will have a better chance of moving the ball up into a scoring position.

FULLBACK: The fullback is the most important defensive player on the field. He is the equivalent of the middle linebacker in football. Normally, he lines up about five to ten yards in front of the sweeper.

RESPONSIBILITIES AND STRATEGIES: Like the sweeper, the fullback moves forward when the ball is on the opponent's side of the field, roughly to about the midfield line. Should the other team gain possession of the ball and try to advance it on to your side of the field, the fullback is the first player on your team they will face as they try to cross midfield. This is what makes the fullback the most important defensive position; he has the opportunity and the responsibility to keep the opponents from crossing midfield. With a talented fullback, the ball will rarely be on your end of the field, so the sweeper who spends the whole game counting spots on ladybugs won't drive you crazy!

To repeat, a great fullback keeps the opponents from crossing midfield. However, if the other team has already crossed midfield with the ball and has gotten past the fullback, he does not just stand there and watch the sweeper play defense. Should that happen, the fullback's job then becomes to drop back between the opposing player with the ball and your goal and prevent a goal from being scored, either by stealing the ball and passing it up-field or by blocking the opponent's shot.

MIDFIELDER (or halfback): The midfielders are the players who line up in front of the fullback, midway between the fullback and the midfield line. Primarily a defensive position, a midfielder ideally must also have some offensive skills, such as dribbling and shooting.

RESPONSIBILITIES AND STRATEGIES: The midfielders' job is to stay in their lanes—right lane or left lane if you use two of them, or right, left, and center if you use three—and *follow* the ball downfield, about ten yards behind the forwards. It is their responsibility to get the ball and pass it on up to the forwards, who can then try to shoot and score. A well-coached set of midfielders should be moving together in a straight line, like a wall, perpendicular to the sideline.

Even though the midfielder is primarily a defensive position, I have seen many of these players score on long shots. If your forwards are moving the ball up-field and the opposing team manages to intercept a pass or otherwise steal it, the midfielders are the first line of defense. They must try to steal back the ball and pass it up to the forwards or wings, or at least slow down the opponent and prevent a fast break. Should the player with the ball on the opposing team get past your midfielders, they (your midfielders) should all immediately drop back in their lanes between that player and the goal and play defense. Remember, this is the same thing your fullback is supposed to do, so, theoretically, the opposing team should never have a clear and easy shot on goal. Even if they have penetrated to within mere feet of your goal, at least four players on your team should be standing in front of them: a midfielder, a sweeper, a fullback, and the goalie.

The biggest challenge you will face with your young midfielders is getting them to stay *behind* the ball when one of your forwards or wings has it. The natural tendency for children this age is to gravitate toward the ball like a swarm of bees, which is just another way of saying that young children love to play “magnet ball.” A good coach has to teach them to stay in their lanes *and* in their positions, which for midfielders is about ten yards behind the ball.

WING: The wings are offensive players. Think of them as being similar to the wide receivers on a football team. The two wings line up on the outside of the front line, one on the left side and one on the right, at the midfield stripe.

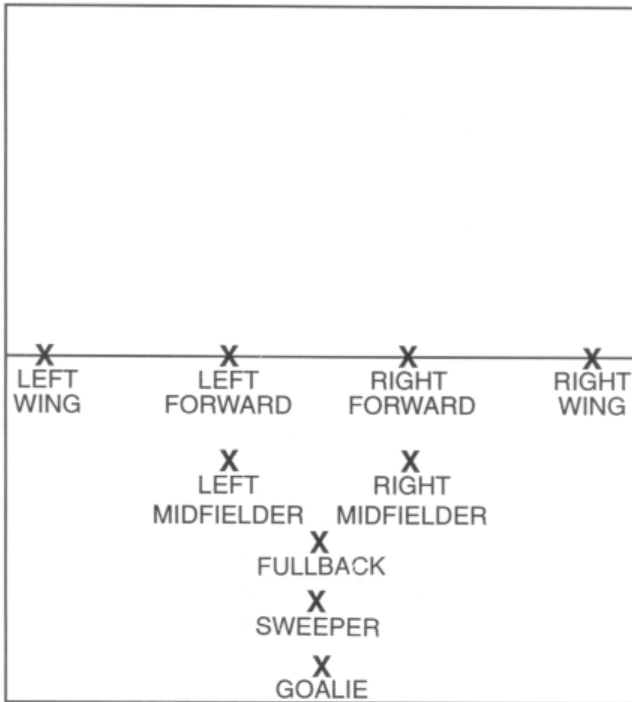
RESPONSIBILITIES AND STRATEGIES: The wings must stay in their lanes; this is not a soccer rule, this is just good coaching strategy. At the kickoff, they should sprint downfield *in their lanes* and *in front of the ball*. Your wings should *always* be playing downfield, in their lanes, and unless they actually have the ball, in front of whoever has the ball. Then they will be able to receive a pass, take a shot, and get the rebound if the goalie mishandles it.

Defensively, the wing is the least important position. The wings should retreat on defense only as far back as your goalie can punt, kick or throw the ball out. Once the opposing player with the ball gets beyond that point, the wings should let their fellow teammates take over. The reason that the wings do not drop back any further is because, should your goalie get the ball, he needs someone to punt it to. If all of your players are back playing defense in the “red zone” (a commonly used term for the area directly in front of the goal) and your goalie punts it out beyond there, who is going to receive the ball? The other team, of course.

FORWARD (or striker): The two forwards—the left forward and the right forward—line up in the center of the front line at the midfield stripe. (Naturally, if you want a third forward, he would be your center forward.) This is the “glamour” position. The forwards kick off and do most of the dribbling and shooting. Therefore, they should be your best, most aggressive athletes because, for most of the game, they will control the ball.

RESPONSIBILITIES AND STRATEGIES: Like the wings, the forwards should stay in their lanes, left and right, and if they don’t have the ball on offense, they should be in front of the person who does, so they can receive a pass. As with the wings, the forwards should drop back on defense only as far as your goalie can punt the ball out. This is what a forward is *supposed* to do, and this is what you should teach them. However, in actual practice, because the children who play forward will be your best, or sometimes, your *only* athletes on the team, they usually have a lot more free rein to run to the ball wherever it is. In fact, the forwards will probably do more running than all of the other positions combined, so these players must be in good shape.

POSITIONS



HOW TO ASSIGN POSITIONS

Knowing which position to assign to which player is an art, not a science, but here are some basic guidelines. Divide your players into three groups by athletic ability. Your best, most aggressive athletes should be *forwards* because they not only do most of the running, but also control the ball the majority of the time it is in your possession. Your *fullback* should be one of your better athletes because he has the most defensive responsibility. Your *midfielders* should be the average athletes. They have neither the ball control responsibility of the forwards, nor the defensive responsibility of the sweeper; all they really do is slow down the opponent until someone gets there to help them. Your least