



RESPONSIBLE SPORTS: DEALING WITH DISRESPECTFUL PLAYERS

On a number of different levels, the early teens are a challenging age group to coach. It is a normal part of this age to test and push the limits of those with authority over them – parents, teachers and yes, basketball coaches too. Nevertheless, when it comes to team behaviour coaches should follow this saying, "The standards you get are the standards you set."

In situations when players pushback, do not go to the extreme of giving in to them, levying a consequence or cutting them from the team. The next time one of them behaves inappropriately in front of the team, coaches or team manager, then immediately pull that player aside individually and address the matter directly. Based on the culture of the team, the head coach must make it clear to the player which behaviours are acceptable. Do not punish the player at this time. Be matter of fact in the tone you take and with your body language. Your goal here is twofold. First, you must begin to modify the player(s) behaviour; and secondly, you want to keep the player(s) on the team. If the player(s) act out again during that training session or competition, then remind the player of what had just been discussed. Be consistent in your expectations of the players. But don't harp on it either. Don't take the misbehavior personally—it is young players testing the limits. That testing is sometimes a youth's way of finding out if this adult authority figure really does care about them.

If the inappropriate behaviour continues after a week or two of the coach addressing it directly with the player, then ask the parents to be involved in the next discussion. The parents' support is critical in the positive growth of the player. The perspective of the player, and other mitigating circumstances, will often come to the surface during the discussion.

If the behaviour still does not improve, involve the club Technical Director in the discussion with the player and parents. After that step is taken, and if the misbehaviour continues then, the Board may make the decision to release the player from the club. This is the final step and hopefully all options have been exhausted before dropping a youth player. Our overarching goal in all of youth basketball must be to keep kids in the game for a lifetime.

Another analysis of the inappropriate behaviour should include a self-reflection by the coach. The seed of the problem could be weak coaching. Sometimes young players act out when the coach fails to avoid the three L's: lines, laps and lectures, or they may be reacting to negative comments. Coaches should avoid these actions during a practice (and during a game). It's not only an inefficient use of floor time, but it is also boring. The kids came to practice to play basketball. They did not show up to stand with the coach and talk about basketball, stand in a long line waiting to shoot the ball one time and then go to the back of the line or to run laps around the gym. They came to practice to PLAY basketball! Coaches must balance practice activities around individual skills, advantage drills and game-like simulations. The challenges of

game-like activities and the problem-solving situations are not only fun, but they help players develop a higher level of understanding of the game. Take it a step further and have the players who have been acting out to be the leaders in some of the activities. Ask them questions during the training session that cause them to think deeply about the game, give them leadership responsibilities and challenge the limits of their talents. When the abilities of these players are met with an appropriate basketball challenge then it is likely that the misbehaviour will disappear. Be persistent and patient!

A coach can design rich drills and engaging activities by using the following checklist. Whenever you put together a lesson plan for a practice ask yourself these questions:

- Are the drills/activities fun?
- Are the activities organized?
- Are my players highly involved in the activities?
- Have I provided opportunity for creativity and decision-making?
- Are the spaces used appropriately?
- Have I provided opportunity for competition within the activity?
- Is my feedback appropriate?
- Have I connected the activity to the way the game is actually played?

Basketball is easy to teach to players because many of them already know a good deal about the game with the success of the Raptors. Using simple principles, professional organization, appropriate incentives and unlimited encouragement—any committed and caring coach can be successful.

Coaching teenagers is not always easy! The good news is you don't have to make a choice between giving in to them or kicking them off the team. Although it may sound counterintuitive, try giving these misbehaving players more responsibility at practice. Ask them to run a drill or to demonstrate. By putting players in charge, they often feel more invested in the drill going well, so they put in more effort and are more focused.

If this does not work, and they are still acting out, ask them to sit on the bench until they feel they are ready to re-join the team with the right attitude. You might also do this in the middle of a scrimmage (or drill they really like). If they come back and are still acting out, then sit them down again and tell them you'll let them know when they can re-enter practice.

After letting them sit for a while, calmly talk with them about whether or not they feel they're ready to take part in practice in a way that will benefit our team. Ideally, you must do this in a way that is very low profile. Perhaps your assistant coach is still running the practice, and you can talk one-on-one with the player.

Many athletes who are acting out at practice are doing this to get attention (even if it is negative attention), so do your best to address these players in a calm way that does not inadvertently reinforce their behaviour. The silver lining to this situation is that turning around these players will be a tremendous coaching accomplishment!