

RIVER FALLS YOUTH BASEBALL COACHING GUIDELINES

We all like to think of ourselves as pretty capable at our day jobs, but when it comes to coaching kids in baseball, lack of experience can be a source of frustration and bad feelings all around. While it helps to have played a lot of baseball yourself at some point in your life, it's not a prerequisite to being a good coach. Just like in the sport itself, coaching has certain fundamentals.

Your two biggest concerns when coaching kids at the lower levels should be:

- 1. Make the experience fun:** That means fun for the kids, and fun for you too. If everyone is having a good time, you're doing something right.
- 2. Teach the game.** There is a multitude of books on the finer points of coaching, teaching skills, drills, etc. Take the time to read these, but first, you must know how to teach. One rule of thumb when talking to a young player one-on-one (as simple as this sounds) is to not stand over him and talk down to him. Bend over so you're face level with him, or even kneel down, so he is even with you or a little above. It's amazing how this will prevent intimidation, and rivet his attention. Keep in mind that your highest goal at this level is to instill a love for the game in your players, so they'll want to continue playing for years to come. Helping them to succeed at the basics of the game, so that they're better at the end of season than when they began, is more important than any number of wins.

There are ten items of prime importance to be effective as a coach, which makes for a more successful (not to be confused with winning) team:

1. You Have to Like Young People

This has to be number one: you have to like being with kids. Your primary reason for coaching should be to watch young people grow, mature and develop. Sure, everybody likes to win, but if winning is the only thing that counts, you'll never get that deep feeling of pride and satisfaction that comes from watching your kids succeed at life. And it doesn't matter what age or gender you're talking about. "Kids" range from the "Little League" stage of five years old until they graduate from college. College coaches even refer to their players as "my kids." You have to be in coaching for the right reasons. You must like youngsters and want to teach them proper values. These values include discipline, work ethic, conquering fear and tension, pride in their team and teammates, establishing reachable goals, and most importantly, the burning desire to accomplish those goals.

2. Organization

A good coach is always prepared, whether it be for practice or for a game. That means coming to practice with a specific plan as to what you will be working on that day, right down to the drills and stations. For game days, have your line-up and fielding rotations figured out ahead of time and charted on paper. You won't accomplish half of what you set out to do without a concrete, workable plan.

3. Enthusiasm

If we could bottle enthusiasm and sell it, we would be the richest people in the world. Enthusiasm is a must in coaching baseball. It is such a fantastic game to each and every one of us. The thought of working with "your kids" should truly motivate you and get you excited about what they are doing. Going back to the first premise of being a good coach, caring and liking kids, it would be a complete contradiction if you were not enthusiastic about teaching them the game.

4. Patience

The gift of patience - what a virtue! The ability to go over things time and time again, never losing your enthusiasm, is an absolute for a great coach. Every great athlete had a mentor, a friend who had the patience to teach him the fundamentals of the game. One of the greatest joys of coaching is to see the least talented player suddenly blossom, and all because you never gave up on him.

5. Persistence

Patience and persistence are certainly a marriage. It is difficult to differentiate between these two virtues, and they truly go hand in hand in the coaching profession. You must persist, and you must teach your kids to persist. Each of us fail. It is what we do after we fail that is important. The beautiful aspect about defeat is that it is a powerful learning experience.

6. Sincerity and Concern

We get back to a coach's most important virtue - caring. You must be sincerely concerned about your athletes first as human beings and secondly about their physical abilities. If it's vice-versa, it won't work and resentment will be the end product of your relationship. Being truly concerned, to listen as well as teach, is not an easy virtue to acquire.

7. Being Fair

Being fair goes along with sincerity and concern. Everyone wants a fair chance to show what he can do. They want the opportunity! Each day the coach has to evaluate his players. Each team member must be reviewed and analyzed. Great coaches have the gift of being able to evaluate players quickly and get them into the proper position and in the proper pecking order. But even great coaches get fooled when a player comes out of nowhere to make a great contribution to the team. An excellent attribute of many coaches is that they will spend as much time as possible with the "second stringers" and make them feel their worth to the team. Championships are won in many situations because the second team constantly pushed the first team to greater heights.

8. Integrity And Respect

Never compromise on rules. Rules are exactly that - rules! They are not suggestions. Society today treats the Ten Commandments as if they were the ten suggestions. Never compromise on right or wrong. It is a black and white situation, not a gray area. In dealing with umpires, referees and those that govern the game, we want the play called right at least 90% of the time. Instant replay has proven time and time again that we can't expect more than that. Officials are human and they will make mistakes. The important idea here is that you must support your officials rather than tearing them down or ridiculing them.

9. Communicate With Parents

The parents can make coaching a joy or a chore. Distribute a roster with phone numbers. Assign duties, such as snacks, field maintenance, etc. Let them know your game and practice schedules, enforce pick-up times (you're not a babysitter), and encourage them to voice concerns to you, not behind your back.

10. Your Best Friends In Coaching - Your Support Personnel

Recognize the importance of your support personnel at every opportunity. They are the ones who care the most. Praise them all, including any grounds keepers, custodian, or volunteer helpers. You can't effectively do everything without their help.