

## How Do You Always Keep a Positive Attitude as a Coach?

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By Joe Haefner

One of my weaknesses as a person is that I can be a perfectionist and be a little too critical sometimes. This is something I have to be very aware of as a coach, because if you are too critical and always pointing out your players' mistakes, they are going to lose confidence and play scared. As Don Kelbick has told us over and over, you want to "reduce the fear of failure" in your players. That's the best way to get them to play to their potential.

This point leads into a story from Thanksgiving Break this year. I made the drive up 35 North from Kansas City to Iowa this year to go home and visit the family. My dad told me my old high school coach Kevin Barnes, who is now coaching his son's 8th grade boys' basketball team, wanted me to stop in for a practice and help out. This really got me excited, because I hadn't talked to Coach Barnes for a while and I love coaching kids and just being around basketball. I hadn't been around the coaching atmosphere for almost a year, because I took last year off of coaching in an effort to build this website with my brother. I also wanted to pick his brains about his experience coaching his son's team.

Anyways, one of Coach Barnes's greatest qualities is his ability to remain positive. Even when he corrects a player, he has an uncanny ability to make a joke about it and get a laugh out of the player. When you walk into his practices, you can just feel the excitement and the positive vibe.

One time during the scrimmage at practice, a boy led a 2 on 1 fast break and got a little too deep under the hoop. He stopped and attempted to pass the ball, but it was too late. Another defender had hustled back and stole the pass.

My initial thought was "You probably should have passed the ball earlier or just attacked the hoop. If you are going to stop like that, you need to be aware of your surroundings so you make a good pass."

Coach Barnes's reaction was "Great hustle, Bobby. Way to get down the court and break up the play." He didn't say one word to the boy who made the bad pass.

Now you may be thinking, "Well, how does the kid know what he did wrong?" or "You should correct that bad play right away." I used to have the same mentality that you needed to correct every mistake the second it happens. *What I learned relatively quickly is that if you correct every mistake, you get a player who is SCARED TO PLAY, and that's the worst kind of mentality for your players to have.* You want your players to be fearless. They also tend to think too much which causes them to freeze up instead of just reacting to the play. Not to mention, the player never learns how to think for himself if he is always corrected and misses out on self-discovery which can hurt the child from a development standpoint.

Most of the time, you'll find that the player will make the mistake a few times and correct it himself without you even saying a word.

Now, I'm not saying that you should never correct the player. If the player consistently makes the same mistake, then you should correct him in a positive manner. I like to use the sandwich technique from Morgan Wooten. Which is positive statement, correction, positive statement.

Positive: "Hey Jimmy, way to hustle to start the break. You always do a great job of that."

Correction: "But next time try to make the decision a little earlier."

Positive: "Keep playing hard, buddy. Love the way you always seem to be there on the hustle plays."

Remember, the younger they are, the more time you should give them to discover the mistakes that they are making.