

Subject: Youth Soccer Insider: How coaches' mouths lose games

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How coaches' mouths lose games

By Mike Voitalla

I suspected this many times as a coach and spectator, but it comes through even more clearly when I referee: Coaches can destroy their teams with the way they shout from the sidelines.

When you're reffing, you see up-close the children's faces after they get screamed at. It's a sad sight.

In my most recent example, a 10-year-old team had so much bad luck I had to restrain myself from consoling the kids (not part of the ref's job description). While going down 1-0, they hit the post three times and all the while they're getting reprimanded by screams from their coaches. (I'm using the plural because this team -- like many I've seen -- had *two* coaches doing minute-by-minute sideline screaming.)

In this game in which they dominated but got very unlucky, they collapsed and went down 4-1 by halftime -- despite being the more talented team. The game also marked the fifth time this year, in games from U-14 to U-9, that I saw a goal scored because a key defender was distracted -- looking to the sidelines -- by the coach's instructions.

And it wasn't just the coaches. Screams came from the parents' sidelines. I heard them all so the players' must have as well. And I wish I was making this up, but these are real examples:

"We need a new defense!"

"If you're not going to pass, then at least take a shot!"

The latter after a 10-year-old took the ball in his own half, smoothly faked out three players, but before shooting had the ball



poked away. His efforts may not have produced a goal, but the dribbling was fabulous and he won a corner kick.

There's no doubt in my mind that the coaches' screaming creates an environment that emboldens parents to yell -- and even creates discord among the players. The coach constantly "instructs" and berates the players, the parents follow suit, and the players start believing that when something goes wrong the suitable reaction is to place blame.

It's hard for me to believe that the boy who yelled at a teammate, "What are you doing!?" wasn't inspired because the *exact* phrase had come from the sidelines earlier in the game.

When we coach, we have a very strong desire to help our kids succeed. With good intentions, we want to aid or correct right away. But most people -- big or small -- who get hammered right after they make a mistake experience a giant loss in confidence. Not productive during a competition.

My recommendations for youth coaches:

- * Referee some games -- to get an up-close look -- and watch how the children react to getting screamed at. Decide for yourself if it brings out the best in them.
- * Do not prowl the sidelines. Watch from a chair. Nervous energy makes one want to stand and pace, but the children notice how unnerved you are and it doesn't instill confidence. (*Further Reading: [Claudio Reyna: 'Coaches should sit down'](#)*)
- * When you spot the mistake or bad decision -- and that urge hits to address it with a scream from the sidelines -- instead of yelling, jot it down in a notebook as something you'll bring up in an unemotional way at halftime or at a future practice.
- * If you have a really hard time suppressing the desire to articulate your frustration, chat with your assistant coach.
- * Consider the probability that what's going wrong in the game might be your fault.

(Mike Woitalla, the executive editor of Soccer America, is co-author, with Tim Mulqueen, of [The Complete Soccer Goalkeeper](#) and co-author with Claudio Reyna of [More Than Goals: The Journey from Backyard Games to World Cup Competition](#). Woitalla's youth soccer articles are archived at [YouthSoccerFun.com](#).)

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