



Weekly Coach Note: Carrot or the Stick?

Frustrated with slow learners or immaturity, coaches often resort to a "carrot and stick" approach in coaching. While punitive and encouraging actions are not always wrong, the approach does not accomplish what we are trying to teach young people. Athletes who train to pursue carrots and avoid sticks will do just that, but they will not gain the understanding of why coaches and other authority figures require them to do certain things.

It is a widely accepted pedagogical method that teachers and coaches should not reward behavior that is simply expected of a student or athlete. In the trophy-happy culture we live in, we must remember that the joy of playing sports is reward enough! If children become accustomed to receiving rewards for ordinary or pleasurable experiences, we are cheating them into a false sense of reality. This is not to suggest that coaches should not recognize hard work and commend effort, but always remember that young people need to recognize that sport is fun, in and of itself!

On the other end of the spectrum, coaches must avoid the over-use of "stick" mentality. Athletes won't learn why they should pursue good behavior, but will hone their energy merely on avoiding negative consequences. Additionally, receiving punishments for poor performance or bad behavior will only discourage players from putting in effort or improving their conduct. This is not to say



"Rewards and Punishments are the lowest form of education."

~ Chaung-Tzu

that punitive measures have *no* place in coaching (e.g. starting a fight warrants reprimanding), but coaches must temper any inclination to punish rather than improve a situation.

Play is a right for children, and taking that away revokes their ability to have fun and explore the awesomeness of sports! Running excessive laps or doing excessive pushups can be developmentally harmful, and will teach young people to associate negative experiences with activities that are meant to promote strength and fitness. Often times poor performance or conduct are symptoms of larger issues at play in an athlete's life. Coaches would be better off investigating the bigger problems of an athlete's life rather than just aggravating the situation.

So when you coach, remember always to find a balanced approach where you promote an intrinsically rewarding experience where athletes understand and appreciate what you require of them!