



Champion Coach Note: Coaching in the Digital Age

We live in the digital world. Your athletes were born in it. As a coach, you've probably noticed the dramatic changes that the last 15 years have had on the habits, attention spans, and attitudes of young athletes. The internet, cell phones, social media, iPhones, and all of their derivatives have changed the landscape of coaching. Young people simply are not the same as they used to be. Regardless of whether you are 25 or 65, your athletes rely on a very different "social" experience than we experienced as children. To be an effective coach, it is important to understand that experience, and develop a strategy for navigating this digital landscape.

Everyone knows the perks of the advancement of technology, but as adults trying to mentor children, we are also very aware of the deficiencies that they can create in young people's development. It is important, therefore, for coaches to recognize the prevalence of social media, smart phones, etc. and develop a strategy that utilizes them, but doesn't overuse them.

Coaches also need to be very conscious of their presence on social media. In the world we live in, people in power (e.g. coaches) are held under a microscope of scrutiny, and social media only make that magnifying glass bigger and more accessible. Remember that perception is reality, and even if what you portray on social media is your own business, it



"I'm a great believer that any tool that enhances communication has profound effects in terms of how people can learn from each other, and how they can achieve the kind of freedoms that they're interested in."

~ Bill Gates

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can dramatically affect public opinion.

Play Like a Champion Today offers some pointers for coaching in the digital age:

- Know your league's/school's social media and communication policy. If it does not have one, suggest that one be created.
- Obtain contact information of all parents and athletes. Make sure to ask if they have regular access to internet, to cater to anyone who may not have instant notifications of team happenings.
- Offer your cellphone number to parents and athletes (age appropriate), but set up criteria for appropriate hours of communication, and what sort of issues are better dealt with in person.
- Send texts/emails to captains (for older athletes), and empower them to communicate with the rest of the team.
- Send a bi-weekly email to update parents about how the season is going.
- Set up a Facebook Group for your team, and update it with important information (practice locations, cancelled games etc.). This functions much more efficiently than the old-fashioned "phone tree." Tell athletes to check the group if it is raining, or if there is another reason practice would be cancelled.
- Set up a "phone rule" for practices and games. Athletes should be allowed to have phones, but other than emergencies or calling for a ride, practices should be a no-phone zone.
- Limit your social media visibility to current (and former) athletes. No matter how old your former athletes are, compromising pictures/tweets/statuses of you can affect your coaching credibility.

We could talk for days about suggestions, but the important thing is to realize that you are coaching a different generation of young people in a different world. Instead of being fearful of or even rejecting the digital age, embrace it for all the tremendous opportunities it can hold for

a sport team – just remember to manage its
use appropriately!