

Does Anyone Like to be Embarrassed?

I don't think I know anyone who likes to be embarrassed by someone else. I don't think that I have ever even heard of anyone who likes to be embarrassed especially in front of others. Why do coaches think that players are okay with it? Why do coaches think that if they embarrass a player - especially the younger or heavier ones - that it will make them a better player? I never understood the philosophy that yelling at someone or doing things that belittle that person, equate to making them a better player and person.

I took a team of college players to Germany and the Netherlands in July. We had a couple of exhibition games in Germany and then on to a tournament in the Netherlands. During the tournament there were teams from other countries, and one of those teams did not win a game. They were young, but they were supposed to be the Junior National Team of their country. The heart was there but not the skill. Here again, have they been taught the skills to be competitive? Somehow, I don't think they have been taught the skills, physically nor mentally. After we played them, their team was taken to an adjoining field. I watched from a distance to see what they were going to do and after a short meeting they started to exercise.

First of all, squat thrusts went out of the exercise choices a long time ago. It's an exercise that is not good for the knees and puts a strain on the lower back. This team had a young player that was very tall (over six feet) and very big. She would be termed by some as obese since I am sure, just by looking, that her percentage of body fat was over 30%.

All of the players were doing squat thrusts and must have been doing a certain number of them, since the girl was the last to finish. You could tell that she was really struggling to finish. In fact, she was the last to finish as they did sprints and the last to finish as they jogged. Now, I only watched for a short time, but I wondered if their practices/exercise programs were the same as I had just witnessed. If so, no wonder I never saw the girl smile at any time during the weekend. I take that back. I did see her smile when she traded T-shirts with one of my players.

When teams, especially younger teams or teams that are not recruited, are exercising, running, doing sprints or anything else as a team, please do not do it by number of repetitions. Please do it by time. If the team is jogging, please have them start at different starting points, versus all together; or have them run randomly around the field, instead of in a circle.

Everyone is still getting exercise according to their level of ability, and no one is being embarrassed by always coming in last. The players know if anyone isn't doing their best. The idea is to encourage improvement day by day. Set goals so that the players in the best shape are challenged. The players not in good shape are also challenged but their shortcomings are not emphasized to everyone, everyday. Don't misunderstand what I am saying - no one gets out of conditioning. But it is done in such a way that heavier athletes are not singled out by being last, all of the time. Yes, this does take organization and extra work by the coach; but we are in coaching to help the players - not embarrass or humiliate them.

We do a lot of drills during our practices that incorporate running and sprinting. I never liked to take a lot of time away from skills practice, to get the players into shape. Our time in the gym was short and we could not get on the field, due to weather, until after our season started, which was our spring trip to Arizona. So, spending a lot of time on getting in shape, only, was not going to happen. We did our conditioning by choosing drills every day that challenged the players physically.

Here are a few drills we used - to not only work on their skills but also on their physical well-being.

1. **Football:** One of two lines (one to start) where every player has a ball. They hand the ball to the coach, one player at a time, and take off from where the coach is standing. First time out, they split to the left; second, to the right; third, straight out and back in for a dive. The coach then throws a pass like in football and the player catches it on the run. The coach can challenge each player according to their skill level and can also increase the difficulty of the catch as the player progresses. The player has to have success at the beginning; so throw it so they will successfully catch the ball but also be challenged a little. If they are not, some players will lose interest. Success breeds success. Keep making the drill harder and harder, and they will improve little by little. This way, you have happy little campers who are

getting better and better, instead of unhappy campers developing bad attitudes.

2. **Quick hits:** This drill is great for bat speed and for strengthening the forearms-which, in turn, makes the hands stronger. Why do you want strong forearms and hands? First of all, to swing the bat efficiently with good snap and power. Plus, with strong hands, a player can "wrist" the ball out of the infield for a hit against almost any pitcher. If they get fooled on a pitch or just are overmatched, with strong hands, they will have the ability to "muscle" the ball out of the infield. The hit may not look pretty but goes down in the book the same as a screaming base hit. Do the drill with whiffle balls, preferably; but real balls will work also. Another player tosses the balls very quickly from the side to the hitter. It is an art for the tosser to be able to toss correctly and may take weeks to get it right. The hitter uses mainly the forearms to hit the ball and snaps the bat back as quickly as possible. Another way is to take the bat quickly over the head, to hit again as quickly as possible. They will start out missing, a lot; but if they keep doing it, soon they will become very quick at it. This is a great drill for the arms and bat speed.
3. **Quick fielding:** One player takes a bucket of balls from a hitter and fires to each base, going from one to another, quickly. As soon as the fielder is back in ready position, the hitter hits another ball to her. This teaches the player quickness and accuracy, while working the cardiovascular system a bit as well.

There are many other drills that can be used to incorporate exercise into your practices. Keep them moving without embarrassing them. A happy player plays better than one who has been humiliated.

Look for Cheleste's article next month.