

## **Mental Strength for coaches**

**Wednesday, February 28, 2007**

### **Berti Vogts - Current Azerbaijan National Coach**

**FORMER: World Cup winner with Germany / Bayer Leverkusen coach / Kuwait national team coach / Scotland national team coach / Nigeria national team coach.**

"If I walked on water, my accusers would say it is because I can't swim," Berti Vogts,

Coaching can be a lonely job, especially when results are poor. Most observers only see the coach on match days and perhaps do not appreciate the amount of time that is spent behind the scenes - researching training routines, making phone calls, dealing with beurocracy etc.. There will inevitably be times when even the most successful coach questions whether the effort is worth it.

However, the coach is a role model, and all those additional pressures must be put to one side in public. To get the best out of players, he or she must be able to inspire and imbue a sense of positivity and self-belief, regardless of how they actually feel inside.

This level of self-discipline creates its own pressures that the coach must learn to cope with. Ultimately, the imperative is to remember why you became a coach in the first place - to empower others to fulfill themselves on soccer pitch, not feed your own ego.

### **Dealing with pressure**

- Body language often speaks louder than words. A positive demeanor is essential. Hunched shoulders, sulking and dismissive gestures will be picked up by players and perpetuate a negative atmosphere
- Set realistic targets rather than trying to do everything in one go. Tangible progression provides a positive basis from which to move forward for players and coaches alike
- Make time to enjoy and reflect on the good things in life - family, music, other sports etc..
- Always keep in mind why you are there - you got involved because you love the sport not for potential accolades

### **Handling difficult players**

Inevitably some players will carry what is often called 'emotional baggage'. It may be the result of home life, problems at school or the work place or simply an over-developed ego. This can manifest itself in many ways, such as an inability to communicate and inappropriate aggression.

While the coach is a mentor, he or she is not a social worker. Expression through sport is a great way for troubled individuals to escape from outside pressures. By providing a

consistent and well regulated environment the player learns the importance of team-work and responsibility to others.

- Frustration can lead to aggression and sanction. Encourage the frustrated player to express his concerns to his team-mates and the coach, and take action accordingly
- Focus on the positives - illustrate and enforce what they bring to the team
- Make it clear that a lack of discipline on the pitch has wider consequences. Winning a game with 10 men is always harder than it is with 11

### **Player motivation**

All players are individuals. A good coach does not rely on a one-size-fits-all approach.

1. Talk to your players individually - every position in soccer has subtle variations so make sure they understand what is expected, the different scenarios they are liable to encounter and allow them to question and feed back - being addressed personally gives a sense of worth
2. Reward excellence - Re-enforce how good play aids not only personal but team performance and results
3. Show your passion - Quote great players and managers. Let your players know that you have a thorough understanding and love of the game

### **Fear of losing**

Even the greatest soccer team lose occasionally. This is why soccer is such an extraordinary sport. How can it be 'fair' when the genius of the post 2nd World War Hungarian team or the 'Total Football' of the seventies Dutch team never actually won the World Cup?

Bad luck, poor judgment by an otherwise totally reliable player or an error by an official can tip the balance. Approached well, loss is the factor that galvanises a desire to succeed.

Fundamental lessons are better learnt by failure, not success

1. Loss is an important learning tool - Why did we lose, how did I get certain things wrong etc..?, encourage reflection
2. You only learn how to do things right once its been done wrong
3. Establish parameters. Maintain reasonable expectations and be honest about them

### **Preparation**

- Give the player ownership - create individual challenges
- Encourage a wider view - what was good and what was bad in game situations

- Make it fun - Emphasize that you are engaged in a game and want to do well. By playing soccer you are not trying to change the course of the world.

## **Nerves**

The coach is as liable to be nervous about outcomes as players. There are many situations in soccer that require a level of self-discipline and personal understanding.

Nerves can be mitigated by:

- Positive re-enforcement - draw on successful outcomes
- Remember past achievements - you are still the coach because you have done well in the past
- A calm coach is a 'can do' coach