

Why I Coach

By Mike Singleton

In the first article I wrote for the *Baystater* I stressed that my decisions as State Head Coach and Director of Coaching will be based on what is best for the player. Many people have commented to me upon that statement, asking what I truly meant by it. In fact, in recent months, I have been asked a number of questions. People have asked about my playing background, my coaching background, and my plans for the future of Mass Youth Soccer among countless other things. Interestingly however, one question that I have not been asked is why I coach. It seems a simple question, but I believe it to be the most important question a coach could ask him/herself.

Any of us who have been coaching for a few years will have met a variety of coaches with a variety of motivations. We have all met the coach who is entirely driven by winning or ego. We may also have met the coach who is living vicariously through the players. Other coaches may coach because it gives them a release from “regular life”. Others may coach because they have fallen in love with the game and want to share that sentiment. Some enjoy working with children and watching them grow up. Some have found it to be a great way to spend time with their own child. Yet others are coaching because if they had not volunteered, their child would not have had a team on which to play. Whatever the reasons, we now find ourselves committing much energy and time to the youngsters with whom we work.

Encountering such varied motivations every day leads me to ask myself what my motivation for coaching is quite often. I have won a few championships as a coach, but those titles themselves do not play a part in my motivation in any way. Do not mistake me, I have as much competitive fire in me as anyone and I do enjoy winning. It is not my motivation for coaching however. Years ago when beginning to attend college, I told myself that I wanted to make children’s lives better. In whatever way I could manage to do that, I wanted to make children smile and feel good about themselves and about life. At times, after a stressful day or a tough loss, I question if I am staying true to this goal and if I am truly making any difference. Other times, the players I coach make me feel like the luckiest person in the world to be doing what I am doing and assure me of my focus. The smile of a 5 year-old running to practice and screaming “HI COACH MIKE!!” makes me share in that bright smile and feel incredibly lucky that I am able to do that. Laughing when a parent tells me their 7 year-old asked if I could join them on their family vacation or having players ask me if I saw the skill they performed for the first time successfully in their life as excitedly as they would ask if they could see the presents Santa left, lets me know something is right. What signs are you seeing in your players to indicate this to you?

When taking this job I left a team and received some emails wishing me good luck. One email read: “to me it seemed like you really cared enough to get to know us as players as well as individuals off the field. We loved all the team bonding activities and that season really brought us all to become better friends and teammates. I think that you were the best thing that happened to our team Mike, you really helped us learn the game from different angles, and you renewed our love for soccer.” Another wrote: “... you made me love the game and want to play my heart out not only for myself, but for you too. You've helped me develop immensely as a player, and you made soccer fun. You knew us as players like no other coach does, and it really made the difference. Our team could have never done as well or been as close without you as our coach.” These are my most cherished trophies and no championship I ever win will ever mean as much to me as those words. They will shine brighter in my mind than any trophy could. These players told me I not only helped them develop as soccer players, but that I enabled them to have fun and build close relationships with others on the team. Most importantly, they knew I cared about them as people, regardless of what happened on the field. I think they may have even smiled once or twice. I know why I coach.

With these thoughts in mind, I ask you...why do you coach? Are you seeing signs from players that the coach you see yourself as is the coach they see? Have you looked back over your actions as a coach of late to determine if your actions fall in line with the philosophy you have as a coach? When people ask me if I believe that a coach is a good coach I ask myself if I would want my own child playing for that coach and trust in that coach's guidance for my child. Is that you?

Season after season, year after year, we sometimes drift off the path we originally set for ourselves. Sometimes it takes a little push or question from another person to steer us back to that path. For the players' sake, let's be the people providing that push or asking that question of one another. In the end, it is the players that will benefit most and keep us smiling as well.

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