

Keeping the Poison Out of Your Youth Football Team

By Dave Cisar, Winning Youth Football

So many coaches spend most of their time working on X's and O's and technique. Those are all great things to have expertise in when you are coaching youth football. However just think about some of the great teams had in the past. What was the most impressive thing about those great teams?

In my case what set my best teams apart from others was team chemistry and execution. My best teams weren't my most talented teams and I'm sure that is the case with your teams as well.

How do you develop great team chemistry? That can't be answered in just one article, but I'm going to show you one technique you can use to show your team how being negative can destroy a team. Unfortunately in youth football, there are people involved that often have agendas that have nothing to do with what's best for your team or the long term development of the kids. In today's "what's in it for me", selfish, "me first" world many kids have yet to learn how to be a great teammate. Maybe mom and dad have failed to progress past adolescence and model or even encourage selfish behavior at home. In youth football it's even possible mom and dad are being critical of the team right in front of your kids and hence negatively affecting the player and in turn your team.

We can't expect that being a great teammate will be "caught" by the kids, it has to be "taught". One of the first steps is to show the kids what just a tiny bit of negativity can destroy an entire team. One way **David Cottrill** teaches this is by using his "Eye Dropper" demonstration. After practice and in front of the entire team, David takes a large clear bottle of water filled to the top with clean water. He tells his players that this represents the fragile attitude of the team. A 12 ounce bottle of water would contain over 1,000 drops of water. David also brings an eye dropper filled with red food coloring. He tells the boys that the food coloring represents negativity, negative comments, dirty looks and poor attitudes.

David then holds the bottle of water high so all the kids can see and he adds one tiny drop of red food coloring from the eye dropper. After just one drop there is a dramatic change in the color of the water in the large water bottle. After just 3 drops are added the water in the bottle is very red. The players can see for themselves that tiny miniscule amounts of negativity (red food coloring) affects the much larger body (your team attitude) or clean pure water in a very dramatic way.

That's the way it is when it comes to team dynamics, just a tiny bit of poison can ruin an entire team. Tell the kids what negativity is, give them a bunch of examples, maybe some things that have reared their ugly heads on your very own team. Ask the kids if they are going to be the "one", that drop of red dye that ruins the entire season for the whole group? Teach the kids how to encourage their teammates, don't assume they know how to do it. Remember this stuff isn't caught, it's taught.

I also let the kids know we are a team, a family. If they are having a problem with the team or their role on it, they need to come talk to me in private. We don't air our dirty laundry in public where it can poison the entire program.

A positive, encouraging team of average kids will often crush those self-centered fragmented teams we see every season. From a coaching perspective this is the difference from having a fun dream season and having that coaching nightmare that leads many youth coaches to quit coaching altogether.

Getting your team to come together is as important as your X's and O's, don't neglect putting the time in to make it happen.