

Five Ways to Make New Players Part of the Team

A successful soccer team is often a stable team. Here is a guide to reducing the sometimes unsettling nature of new blood.

1. Get to know your players

You may have a very clear idea of the particular soccer qualities that a new player possesses, but what do you know beyond that? By gaining a greater understanding of your players as individuals you can help improve your ability to integrate and motivate them.

Players care about what you know when they know that you care about them. Get them to complete a player information sheet that asks them about all areas of their lives (see below).

Encourage the players to be as honest as they can. Emphasise that it helps build effective teams and encourages clear communication. Most importantly, once you have collected this information – use it!

By making the effort to get to know the player, and not just for their soccer, can pay dividends when trying to understand their wider motivations. The process of asking is a classic motivational tool for the player – it shows you care.

2. Make use of your senior players

Ask them for their opinions on how best to integrate new players, as well as feedback on how the new players are settling in.

Pair up new players with experienced team members. This will help the new players feel less like outsiders and will help them quickly pick up the values and behaviours expected of and by the squad.

3. Avoid cliques

Cliques are groups of players who stick together. Avoid cliques by splitting up players to work in different groups or on different teams in training. If you have the opportunity, for example on tour, vary whom the players room or eat with.

Team discussions (see below) can also promote positive relationships within the team and make players aware of the damage cliques can cause. Whilst it is inevitable that players will spend more time with some team-mates than others, cliques tend to be disruptive and are exclusive.

4. Team meetings

Spend time before or after training with team meetings. New players can be given the opportunity to work with other players in small groups (thus continuing the work of avoiding cliques), can be given the responsibility of feeding back to the whole squad, or their views on a particular issue, for example match strategy, can be invited.

To help the new player the coach can let them know in advance, or even discuss on a one-to-one basis, what they will be required to comment on. This gives the player time to prepare and approach the meeting with more confidence. In this way the new player can begin to feel a part of the squad as his views are shown to be valued.

5. Roles and responsibilities

Make sure a new player understands (and accepts) his role within the team and any responsibilities that go with it. Clarify any other expectations concerning for example, behaviour, match day dress, and so on.

All players hate being criticised for doing (or not doing) something they did not know about in the first place! As with all the other points, this is about maintaining clear and open communication.

One useful exercise for clarifying responsibilities is to list all the responsibilities a player has in a specific position whilst asking them to do the same. Any discrepancies can then be clarified, and the role can be understood and agreed to by the player.