

## **Making a Difference on Match Days**

**You CAN make a difference on match day, yet few coaches take as much care during the vital minutes of the match as they do with the pre-match preparation. And whilst every coach has a different style, they all share a common goal – to get the best out of their team when it really counts. Follow these simple do's and don't's, and you will make a difference once the game is underway.**

**DON'T** micro-manage the game. As a coach with your experience and ability, it is easy to talk particular players through every move. This is potentially destructive because it stifles their instinct for the game, or their innate ability (which may even exceed the coach's). Positive encouragement will give players confidence. Psychologists tell us that it is better to say "hit the target" than "don't miss".

**DO** find the right moment. Information needs to be given when players are most receptive i.e. when they can concentrate on what YOU are saying – NOT in the middle of a play or even within 30 seconds of the half time break.

**DON'T** get distracted away from the game. Talk to spectators and the other coaches afterwards. Your players need your full attention. Create a bubble for you and your team. Make sure at half time the bubble continues. Youth teams suffer the most from a babble of comment from parents, confusing the main message you want to deliver. Your team needs to avoid conflicting messages.

**DO** remember to play for today. Focusing on future aims during the game adversely affects players' concentration.

**DO** break the game down in chunks with achievable targets e.g. no points/goals against for the next ten minutes, even when at half time you are well ahead.

**DO** watch first, worry later. Keep your emotions under control – panic, anger, frustration and fear are all mind killers. Players depend on the coach to be the coolest head on the pitch. Observing from as many different watching angles as possible will enhance your perspective on the game. For example, the shape of a team is more discernible from a distance, speed easier to gauge from the side and physical fitness more apparent when standing close up.

**DON'T** argue with the referee. It distracts the players and draws attention to the possible shortcomings of one person rather than the game in hand. It is also unlikely to have a positive influence on the outcome of the game and is not in the spirit of the game anyway. Referees and umpires of all levels and abilities will rarely change a decision once it's been made and it may even turn them against you.

**DO** create and refer to a checklist. When the game starts, as a coach you should be able to read effectively the opposition's strengths and weaknesses and alter your strategy accordingly. Use a simple checklist with the tactic you will apply to counter strengths or exploit weaknesses. For instance, identifying their best player may change the way they are marked, or noting whether that player is left or right sided.

When the whistle blows for the start of the match, it also starts a concentrated period of thought, action and reaction for the coach. Having spent the days, weeks, months before preparing a team for this moment, the coach also needs to be

prepared, mentally and emotionally. Whether you can find glory in defeat, humility in victory, can you say you made a difference on the day?