

# Coaching Psychological Skills in Soccer

Dan Freigang, Ph.D.



*“Dano, what exactly do you do with teams?”*

I get asked this question a lot, because positive psychology is a new field in sport. The following will explain what I do with coaches and teams. Each team is unique. I work with each coach individually to find out what their specific needs are. Sometimes coaches know exactly what they want and need. Sometimes I come in to do an evaluation and give recommendations to the coach. The outline below will be a guide for you to start the beginning of our journey together. The psychological aspects of soccer can seem daunting. Don't fret! I'm going to simplify the psychological component of soccer for you, so that you can understand and decide to implement some basic psychological skills in your program. There are four basic areas of psychological planning you are responsible for as coach. Throughout the year I am available to help in these areas.

## \* Organizational Psychology \*

This concept is the same idea that corporations use to streamline their thinking and maximize production. What is your team's organizational philosophy? Do you have a mission statement and objectives? How do you benchmark performance and make progress as a team? How do you structure the roles and personalities on the team? Do you know what kind of leader you are and how are decisions made on the team? What do you do with conflict on the team? What are the team building activities? Can you recognize a destructive clique? How do you know if your team is cohesive and performing? Are the parents clear on their expectations to help their children learn to discover passion the game may provide? Are the parents clear on their role modeling responsibilities with the team and in the stands? The best athletes always have a clear support system that can enhance development. All of these questions have scientific answers to help you organize team structure and set the standards of communication and expectations within the team. This is the first area of psychological planning you should assess.

## \* Coaching Psychology \*

The coach is a central figure on most teams. You have authority, influence and responsibility to help the team function well. With this responsibility comes the following tasks:

- ❶ A written, revised and tested personal philosophy of coaching.
- ❷ How do you know what kind of teacher you are? Perform coaching observations and evaluations.
- ❸ What is your communication style? Have you checked the content of your message?
- ❹ How do you improve as a coach? Who coaches you?
- ❺ How do you handle motivation within the team? Can you recognize motivational styles?
- ❻ Does coaching help you in life, or are you tiring and burning out?
- ❼ How do you handle your family, work and schedule with coaching demands?

The life of the coach can be rewarding if handled properly. These are the areas that need to be addressed if you want to maximize your own coaching effectiveness and the growth of your players.

## \* Mental Toughness Training for the Player \*

This may be the most obvious area when we discuss psychological skills in soccer. We are teaching players to maximize their performance on demand. Our goal is to teach players to resist fatigue, handle distractions, and regulate emotional turmoil. The ability to control these demands are the markers of mentally tough players. The fun part of this is you can teach these skills over time. Here are the basics:

- ❶ Mapmaking and goal setting skills.
- ❷ Performance profiling, a skill to increase awareness.
- ❸ Identifying and controlling fear.
- ❹ Maximizing confidence and control in tough situations.
- ❺ Understanding personal motivation and playing in the zone.
- ❻ Teaching players emotional control with coping skills.
- ❼ Mental skills training, relaxation, concentration and imagery.
- ❽ Game preparation and re-focusing skills for competition.



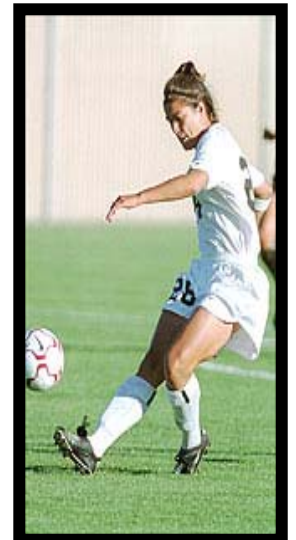
## \* The Training Process \*

I've worked in player development on national teams and professional sport for many years. Talent is only useful if given time and resources to develop. We are all trying to improve player's performance through various practice methods. To do this, we all need to understand how players adapt and improve.

- ❶ There are individual patterns of recovery and adaptation. How do you allow for growth?
- ❷ Periodizing training for mental skills within the training cycle. Have you revised your seasonal plan?
- ❸ Skill development in training environment. How do you benchmark skills?
- ❹ Designing effective practices. Are you designing effective training sessions?
- ❺ Dealing with fatigue, staleness and burn out. What methods of recovery and recuperation do you use?
- ❻ How does strength training affect skillful performance?

The training process is critical in the long-term growth of players. I use the analogy of taking a carton of eggs and throwing them against the wall and only keeping the eggs that didn't break. You can coach this way and lose many players or you can choose to allow all of the eggs to hatch and thrive. This requires a superior sport knowledge and coaching technique. Yes, cream usually rises to the top, but we are in the role of developing talent and ensuring a healthy growing environment for all children. This is why all the areas of the psychological realm should be addressed. Throughout the year, I am here to provide information to improve your coaching skills and provide educational support. The greatest resource in the world is in your hands, the health and happiness of our children.

Dr. Dan Freigang is a sport scientist working with the U.S. National Team in Sport Psychology. Dano travels the country doing clinics and workshops with players, parents and coaches. Dano was an international athlete and national team coach who presents his workshops as unique blend of scientist and coach. He is currently in private practice and invites your comments and inquiries:



"In the Zone Training Systems"

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