

Assistant Coach – Your Asset – Your Liability – Your Choice

Assistant coaches can be invaluable or they can be more of an annoyance than anything else. Most times the determining factor is up to the Head Coach..

One mistake made by many head coaches and assistant coaches is to not have an understanding of responsibilities and duties ahead of time.

Too often, assistant coaches become nothing more than cone picker uppers. This usually is because they don't know what else to do or what is expected of them.

One key is before the season begins for the head coaches and assistant coaches to get together and talk about each other's roles. This is when they should start to work out each other's responsibilities and their expectations.

As an example, if I'm the head coach, I prefer the assistant coach to run the warm ups. The warm up process is extremely important and if I can have the assistant take on this responsibility, it allows me to concentrate on the next phase while making sure the first part isn't neglected. In order to make sure everyone is on the same page I will frequently run the warm up phase for the first couple of sessions and then step back to allow the assistant to take on this role. This way, we are both doing it the exact same way. Once the assistant takes over the role, for the first couple of sessions, I will assist the assistant. By doing this, it accomplishes a couple of things. First, it makes it easier for the assistant since he has help. Second, it makes it easier for me to make sure it's done the way I want. Third, it's important for the team to see the head coach is willing to help the assistant and it's not always the other way.

Once the assistant is comfortable running the warm up on their own, I step away but still monitor to make sure the quality stays high and also so the players understand it's still important. While this warm up is going on, I will frequently start setting up the second phase (technical stage). I run that phase while being help by the assistant and then one of us will step away to set up the third stage while the second stage is finishing up. If we haven't discussed things in advance, we aren't able to do this efficiently.

When speaking with the team, it's important for the team to hear a single voice. When speaking before training or games, it's perfectly acceptable, and expected, to disagree with ideas, approaches etc. If the assistant coach always agrees with the head coach, the assistant really isn't adding to the program. While they can have different ideas and thoughts in private, when speaking with the team, they must have a unified thought. Too often, the assistant coach goes along with the head coach in front of the team but then might make some comments to individual players expressing their differences. This is NOT acceptable. In front of the team or

individual players, they must show agreement with each other. In private with each other is when different views can be expressed.

While I consider it to be important for the team to hear “one voice” this doesn't mean only one person can speak to the team. Rather it means when either speaks, the team hears similar ideas, concepts. It does help for them to hear similar concepts from different people. This is a good way to reinforce the team beliefs.

During games, frequently the coach will be looking “big picture”. This means looking for team tactical changes, formation issues, etc. This allows for the assistant to look more at specific match ups, individual strengths or weaknesses and other smaller issues. By “smaller issues” I don't mean less important, just from a different view. If this isn't discussed in advance, both will be looking at the same thing and the advantage of two people gets neutralized.

During games, the head coach is usually going to spend more time dealing with players on the field. This means the assistant has to deal with players on the bench. Games are a great teaching opportunity and frequently it's the assistant who has the opportunity to do this.

There are many ways for an assistant and head coach to work together. The key to remember is without proper communication before hand, many of these opportunities will frequently be lost.