

One of the many challenges of being a youth sports coach is that no matter how well your practices go during the week, you never know how your team will perform on game day.

While many of the circumstances that affect a game are out of your control, you can be a difference maker with your team's mindset by mastering motivation.

Instilling confidence and a strong work ethic in your team so that they give you every ounce of energy and effort that they have all game long – regardless of the score – is incredibly valuable and enables your team to perform at a higher and more consistent level all season long.

"I think that it's really important to be positive with kids and find that line where you have to be able to teach them that everything isn't going to be rosy, everything isn't going to be perfect and everything isn't going to be a positive," says Jeff Lebo, head men's basketball coach at East Carolina. "If they are playing poorly you have to be able to talk to them in the right way. If you communicate in the right way to young people they'll respond to you. The most important thing is if they know you care about them they'll run through a wall for you."

Keep the following tips in mind to help motivate your players and get the best out of them:

MISTAKES ARE OK – LET KIDS KNOW THAT

Of course you'd love for your team to perform perfectly during games, but sports don't work that way – at any level. Mistakes, miscues and poor decisions are part of the game, so you can't become frustrated or show displeasure with your players, as doing so chips away at their confidence and makes them less aggressive by being afraid of making a mistake.

"Kids are going to make mistakes," Lebo says. "But find something in that mistake that they did well and you end up with something that's really positive for the kids."

ALLOW KIDS TO MAKE DECISIONS – GOOD AND BAD ONES

Sometimes coaches have a tendency to be a source of non-stop instructions for their players, which infringes on kids' abilities to make quick decisions in the heat of the action. Yes, players are going to make wrong decisions from time to time, but they will also learn from those errors. Of course, they are going to need to hear your instructions at various times throughout the game, just make sure that while providing input that you also allow them to play the game without shouting at them every time they go to execute a skill.

DON'T PUT ON A SIDELINE SHOW

Make sure that you don't ruin anyone's experience by becoming a sideline distraction. If you're bouncing out of your seat every time your team prepares to do something your players are going to notice and it may distract them. Of course, you don't need to act like you are in a movie theater either and remain silent, as kids respond favorably to positive energy. Just keep in mind not to go overboard and allow your actions to become more of a distraction than a help.

RECOGNIZE EFFORT ENTHUSIASTICALLY

Your players can't control how many points they score or how effective they are at stopping the opposition. But the one factor they can control is how hard they play and hustle when trying to score points – or keep the opponent from scoring them. Applaud your players' work ethic enthusiastically and reward their hustle with recognition and praise. When you instill this enthusiastic attitude in your entire team they're more likely to reward you with their best effort.