

COACHING YOUTH *Cricket*



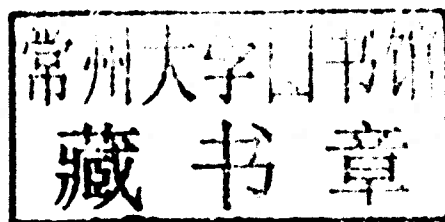
Ian Pont

Foreword by
Andy Flower



Coaching Youth Cricket

Ian Pont



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Foreword

If I was asked what is the most important thing for a youth coach to be if they wanted to be successful, I would say, “to be encouraging.” Because the truth is, if you do nothing else in your coaching career but encourage, you will have one of the best tools for bringing through any young cricketer.

Coaching isn’t necessarily about finding fault or even correcting things you see. In fact it’s easy to be critical. But coaching is rather about facilitating so a player can develop and evolve themselves with your guidance—and that’s because the greatest gift you can give any player is one of self-awareness.

Whether you ultimately have a long career as a coach or not, you’ll probably find that you can influence young players far more than older ones. And coaching at youth level can be one of the most rewarding things you’ll ever do. You get a chance to start a player out on the road and be a big contributor to their enjoyment. It is, after all, this enjoyment of cricket that binds us all together.

Even though I made it into the ranks of International cricket, I started out as a junior like anyone else, getting coaching from enthusiastic coaches at school and club who influenced my development. It was their passion for cricket that helped me take the steps on the road and build a fire inside me for cricket. Whether you are a fully qualified coach, enthusiastic volunteer, or proud parent, there is a synergy and love of the game, which you’ll need to get across in your coaching. So I would say to you this—make cricket fun and encourage young players to discover things for themselves by letting them make mistakes. It is by making those mistakes that they will learn. And it is by learning that they improve. This coaching ethos works well at all levels of coaching, right to the very top.

The author of this book, Ian Pont, is someone I have had the good fortune to work with while I was at Essex as a player and he was coaching there. Ian’s style has always been one of challenging me as a player and getting to the answers in sometimes a different and unique way. This book is written in a similar thought-provoking way, which I urge you to read and enjoy. It’s aimed at first-time coaches and those who want to get a grounding in how to teach the basics correctly.

Finally, coaches can be truly inspirational. And that starts with inspiring yourself. If you have energy, drive, enthusiasm and are fair-minded, you will

have many of the attributes needed to bring through the next generation of youth cricketers. I can assure you there is no greater feeling for any coach than to witness those you work with becoming better players. That journey starts right here. Good luck and I wish you well—however far up the coaching ladder you climb.

Andy Flower
Director of Cricket
England and Wales Cricket Board

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Also note that the coaching methods and styles are those approved by Mavericks Cricket Institute (MCI), founded by the author for the improvement of players and the development of cricket talent. MCI is an independent and world-respected coaching organisation committed to excellence as well as advanced coach education. For further information about the author or the coaching, please visit www.maverickscricket.com.

Introduction

This book is a guide and companion for those of you embarking on the road to coaching youth cricket. It has been written with you in mind. It's not meant to be a definitive guide but rather a series of well-organised ideas and suggestions you can apply right away and over the season to get your young players performing well.

Coaching Youth Cricket is based on the experiences of coaches as well as the thoughts of people in cricketing authorities, clubs, schools, counties, and international teams. Because the book is based on real experiences, it is a practical, no-nonsense guide including many tried and tested sessions, examples, games, drills, and coaching tips to help you avoid many of the coaching traps coaches can fall into.

We can only urge you to learn from other coaches and take ideas from those who have more experience and thus better knowledge. Many of the cricket drills are based on exercises that have worked for years but have been tweaked here to be more modern and relevant for young teams. If you have ideas of your own that might work well, don't be afraid to try them out.

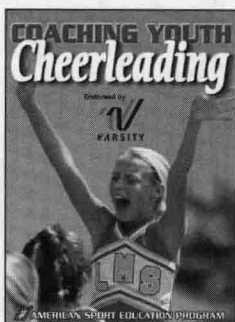
Any good coach is always learning. Strive to be a coach that can take in new information and apply it to your programme. Be open minded. Share ideas with other coaches. Remember that no one—not even cricket authorities!—has the exclusivity of being right all the time. This is why it's important to remain flexible and to work with people to achieve your coaching goals. And your goal is, and as a youth coach always should be, to provide enjoyment for youths and bring through as many cricketers as possible. Without young cricketers, the game will die. I salute you as a youth cricket coach. Enjoy the experience.

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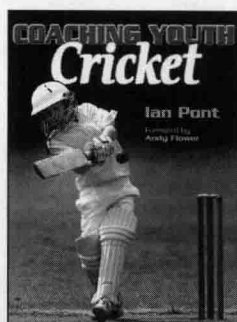
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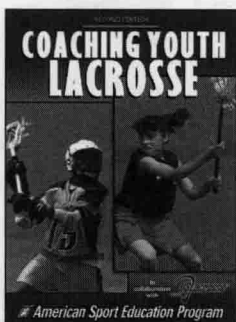
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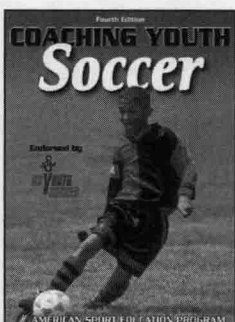
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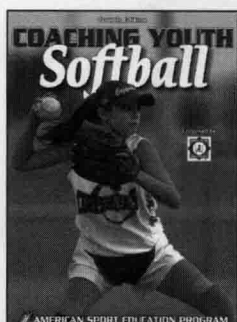
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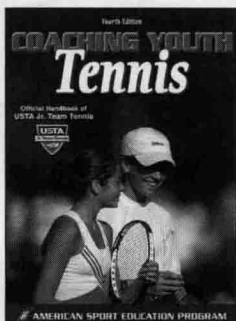
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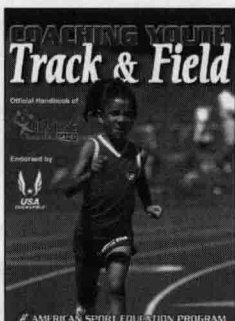
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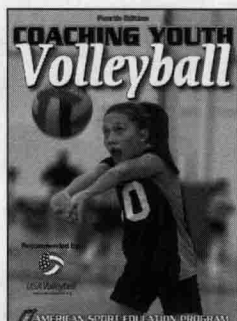
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You, a Youth Cricket Coach?

If you are like most junior, school, or club coaches, you have probably been recruited from the ranks of concerned parents, sport enthusiasts, or community volunteers and have had little or no formal instruction on how to coach. When the call came for coaches to assist with the local youth cricket team, you might have answered because you like children and enjoy cricket and perhaps wanted to be involved in a worthwhile community activity. You might have played, or still play, the game yourself or have a son or daughter who plays. Or perhaps you answered the call to coach because you have always loved giving young people guidance and support and saw coaching as an excellent opportunity to do so. Whatever it was that brought you here, welcome to youth cricket!

Let's start with the single most important thing about coaching—something too many coaches lose sight of once they get caught up with the job of doing well. Something so fundamental, it's worth making clear right at the outset. Coaching isn't about you. It's all about the ones you coach. Beware of the coaching trap of thinking you are more important than your players. You are here for them.

So let's begin by looking at your responsibilities and what's involved in being an effective coach. After that we will discuss what to do when your own child is on your team and look at five tools for being an effective coach.

Your Responsibilities as a Coach

Coaching at any level involves much more than creating a batting order or teaching your players how to field properly or bowl at the stumps.

Coaching involves accepting the tremendous responsibility of parents putting their children in your care. This responsibility can be daunting. As a youth cricket coach, you'll be called on to do the following:

1. *Provide a safe physical environment.*

Playing cricket holds inherent risks, but as a coach you're responsible for regularly inspecting the practice and competition fields and equipment (see the facilities and equipment checklist in appendix A on p. 160). Assure players and parents that to reduce injury risk as much as possible children will learn the safest techniques and that you have an emergency action plan in place for when something unexpected occurs (see chapter 4).

2. *Communicate in a positive way.*

As a coach you will have a lot to communicate. You'll communicate not only with your players and parents but also with coaching staff, umpires, administrators, scorers, and others. Communicate in a positive way that demonstrates you have the best interests of your players at heart (see chapter 2).

3. *Teach the fundamental skills of cricket within a fun environment.*

When teaching fundamental skills to young athletes, keep in mind that cricket is a game and meant to be fun. Help all your players be the best they can be fundamentally while creating an enjoyable environment. We'll show you an innovative games approach to teaching and practicing the skills young players need to know—an approach that kids thoroughly enjoy (see chapter 5). Also, to help your players improve their skills, you must yourself have a sound understanding of batting, bowling, and fielding skills (see chapters 7 through 9).

4. *Teach the laws of cricket.*

Introduce the basic laws of cricket and incorporate them into individual instruction (see chapter 3). Many laws can be taught during practice, including the LBW (leg before wicket) law, wides and no balls, limited overs, fielding laws, and how to run between the wickets. Plan to review the laws whenever an opportunity arises during practices. This is often the best way to help young players learn how they work.

5. *Direct players in competition.*

This includes selecting your team, relating appropriately to umpires and opposing coaches and players, and making sound tactical decisions during games (see chapter 10). Remember that your focus is not on winning but on coaching your kids to compete well, do their best, improve their cricket skills, and strive to win within the laws. It doesn't matter if you win or lose—it's all about giving the kids a chance to have fun and do their best. You might remember from personal experience that a good teacher in your formative cricket years can go a very long way.

6. *Help your players become fit and value fitness for a lifetime.*

Help your players become fit so they can play cricket safely and successfully. We also want your players to learn to become fit on their own, understand the value of fitness, and enjoy training. Don't make your players do push-ups or run laps for punishment. Make it fun for them to get fit for cricket; this will help them stay fit for a lifetime. Cricket has changed so dramatically from the 1970s and 1980s, when fitness was not high on the agenda. Today, modern cricket requires that players are fit and healthy and look after themselves. Once players enjoy the benefits of good health they want to retain them for life, not just for sport.

7. *Help young people develop character.*

Character development includes learning, caring, being honest and respectful, and taking responsibility. These intangible qualities are no less important to teach than the skills of hitting the cricket ball and bowling fast. Teach these values by demonstrating and encouraging behaviours that express them. Also remember that players learn and benefit from camaraderie. Cricket is a game played by individuals on a team. Individuals get to have gladiatorial one-on-one battles yet must rely on others to ensure victory. This is something youngsters should learn early. Stress the importance of learning to back each other up, even when not directly involved in fielding the ball or receiving a throw. Also emphasise playing within the rules and showing respect for opponents and officials.

These are your responsibilities as a coach. Remember that every player is an individual. You have a responsibility to your young players during their formative years. You must provide a rounded environment in which every player has the opportunity to learn how to play the game without fear while having fun and enjoying their overall cricket experience.

Your players will look up to you as one more experienced than them, especially if you have played the game yourself. If you haven't, that's okay—you can learn along with your players. If you don't know much about the game or how to coach it, don't worry. Much of the game is logical and straightforward. If you're a beginner, simply go over the basics and help develop confidence in your youth cricketers.

If you start coaching with the view that your players' development and enjoyment are of primary importance, you have a chance of getting things right from the get-go. This type of coaching is called player centric. It places the player at the centre of everything you do—or should do. For

Coaching Tip

Think of how you would like to be coached if you were learning something new. This can help you understand how difficult some players find being coached in a certain way even while others respond to the instruction well. For example, some people learn best by watching a demonstration of a skill. Others do best by viewing a photograph or video clip. Others learn best through trial and error as they try to execute the skill themselves.

elite-level players, top coaches spend much of their time asking players what they want out of sessions, how they wish to progress, and how they can facilitate that for them. This style of coaching works well for this level of player. When coaching youth cricket, try to get your players to take responsibility for their own experiences as soon as they can. Naturally, you will have to guide them and advise them, cajole and nudge them. And at times you will have to communicate information in an authoritative way so they understand some things are not negotiable. But overall, help your players believe they are paving their own way and that your input is simply a guide.

The best coach a player can have is him- or herself. The coach should be the next best. Try to help your players overcome their dependence on you. They need to learn to take responsibility. Some players are unable to perform without their coach and may use you as an excuse for bad performances. Don't let this happen. Be a mentor and guide as needed, but also help your players learn to take responsibility and build character by understanding how much depends on them. They will respect you for helping them with this. Young people like to be treated like grown-ups.

People learn from making mistakes. As babies we fell down dozens of times when trying to walk, but this didn't stop us from trying again. No one ever says, "This baby is not a walker, forget it." Coaching cricket takes the same format: Kids learn by falling down. Always encourage your players to go out and get things wrong because they must not be afraid to "fall," or make mistakes. Tell them, "Make as many mistakes as you need to." Engrain this in the minds of your young players with the caveat, "Just don't keep making the *same* mistakes." You want your players to progress, learn, evolve, and finally walk on their own.

While we're on the subject of making mistakes, remember that young players will take what you say at face value most of the time. Very few will question your words, so be cautious in what you say because they will probably try it. Even if your advice is not 100 percent accurate, if you speak with conviction you can be inspirational to youth cricketers. This is, after all, what we seek—to inspire our players to become interested in, excited and passionate about, enchanted by, committed to, and smitten with the wonderful game of cricket. You should be too. As a coach you are taking the first steps in one of the most important and fun tasks you can embark on: helping the next generation enjoy the game we have come to love ourselves.

Coaching Your Own Child

Coaching becomes even more challenging when your child plays on the team you coach. Many coaches are parents, but the two roles should not be confused. As a parent, you are responsible only for yourself and your child, but as a coach you are responsible for the organisation, all the players on the team, and their parents. Because of this additional responsibility, your behaviour on the cricket pitch will likely differ from your behaviour at home, and your son or daughter may not understand why.

For example, imagine the confusion of a young lad who is the centre of his parents' attention at home but is barely noticed by his father (the coach) in the sport setting. Or consider the mixed signals received by a young player whose skill is constantly evaluated by a coach (who is also her mother) who otherwise rarely comments on her daughter's activities. You need to explain to your child your new responsibilities and how they may affect your relationship when coaching. Take the following steps to avoid problems when coaching your own child:

- Ask your child if he or she wants you to coach the team.
- Explain why you want to be involved with the team.
- Discuss with your child how your interactions will change when you take on the role of coach at practices or games.
- Limit your coaching behaviour to when you are in the coaching role.
- Avoid parenting during practice or game situations to keep your role clear in your child's mind.
- Reaffirm your love for your child, irrespective of his or her performance on the cricket field.

Ideally, other parents watching a practice or a game should not be able to tell which player is the coach's son or daughter. You should treat all players equally and avoid singling your own child out in any way different from others on the team.

Coaching Tip

Discuss your interest in coaching the cricket team with your child before making a decision. If he or she has strong reservations about your taking over the head coaching job, consider becoming involved in a smaller role instead, such as being an assistant coach, serving as the scorer or umpire for the team, or organising a group of parents who provide drinks and snacks at practices and games.

Five Tools of an Effective Coach

To be successful you'll need five tools that can't be bought. These tools are available only through self-examination and hard work. You can remember them by the acronym COACH:

- C** Comprehension
- O** Outlook
- A** Affection
- C** Character
- H** Humour

Comprehension

You must comprehend the rules and skills of cricket and understand the basic elements of the sport. If you are new to cricket, here are some ways to improve your comprehension of the game:

- Study the rules in chapter 3 of this book.
- Read about the fundamental skills in chapters 7 through 9.
- Read additional cricket coaching books, including those available from your local or national cricket authority.
- Contact youth cricket organisations.
- Attend cricket coaching clinics.
- Talk with experienced coaches.
- Observe local school and youth cricket games.
- Watch cricket games on television.

In addition to having cricket knowledge, you must implement proper training and safety methods so your players can participate with little risk of injury. Even so, injuries may occur. And more often than not, you'll be the first person responding to your players' injuries, so be sure you understand the basic emergency care procedures described in chapter 4. Also, read in that chapter how to handle more serious sport injury situations.

Outlook

The second coaching tool refers to your perspective and goals—what you seek as a coach. The most common coaching objectives are to have fun; to help players develop their physical, mental, and social skills; and to strive to win. Thus your outlook involves your priorities, your planning, and your vision for the future. See *Assessing Your Priorities* for more on the priorities you set for yourself as a coach.

Coaching Tip

Local school games are a low-cost way to improve your knowledge of the game and also to allow players of all ages to see the technical and tactical skills they're working on in action. Consider working with your team's parents to organise a team outing to a local game in place of an after-school or weekend practice.

Here's a motto to help you keep your outlook in line with the best interests of the kids on your team. It summarises in four words all you need to remember when establishing your coaching priorities:

Players first, winning second

This motto recognises that striving to win is an important, even vital, part of sports. But it emphatically states that no efforts in striving to win should be made at the expense of the players' well-being, development, and enjoyment.

Assessing Your Priorities

Although all coaches focus on competition, we want you to focus on *positive* competition—keeping the pursuit of victory in perspective by making decisions that, first, are in the best interest of the players and, second, will help win the game.

So, how do you know if your outlook and priorities are in order? Here's a little test:

1. Which outcome would you be most proud of?
 - a. *Knowing that each participant enjoyed playing cricket*
 - b. *Seeing that all players improved their cricket skills*
 - c. *Winning the competition*
2. Which statement best reflects your thoughts about sport?
 - a. *If it isn't fun, don't do it.*
 - b. *Everyone should learn something every day.*
 - c. *Sport isn't fun if you don't win.*
3. How would you like your players to remember you?
 - a. *As a coach who was fun to play for*
 - b. *As a coach who provided a good base of fundamental skills*
 - c. *As a coach who had a winning record*
4. Which would you most like to hear a parent of a player on your team say?
 - a. *Nick really had a good time playing cricket this year.*
 - b. *Nick learned some important lessons playing cricket this year.*
 - c. *Nick played on the first eleven cricket team this year.*
5. Which of the following would be the most rewarding moment of your season?
 - a. *Having your team want to continue playing, even after practice is over*
 - b. *Seeing one of your players finally master the skill of fielding and throwing accurately to the stumps*
 - c. *Winning the competition*

Look over your answers. If you most often selected “a,” then having fun is most important to you. A majority of “b” answers suggests that skill development is what attracts you to coaching. And if “c” is your most frequent response, winning is tops on your list of coaching priorities, and perhaps you should think again. If your priorities are suitable for youth cricket, your players' well-being will take precedence over your team's win-loss record every time.