

Coaching Youth FOOTBALL

FIFTH EDITION

Endorsed by



*“...a great benefit
to those serious
about learning
how to coach...”*

—Howie Long

American Sport Education Program
with Joe Galat

Coaching Youth Football

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Human Kinetics

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Coaching youth football / American Sport Education Program, with Joe Galat ;
endorsed by AAYF. -- 5th ed.

p. cm.

ISBN-13: 978-0-7360-8566-3 (soft cover)

ISBN-10: 0-7360-8566-1 (soft cover)

1. Youth league football--Coaching. 2. Football for children--Coaching.

I. Galat, Joe. II. American Sport Education Program.

GV956.6.R66 2010

796.332077--dc22

2010009059

ISBN-10: 0-7360-8566-1 (print)

ISBN-13: 978-0-7360-8566-3 (print)

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The Web addresses cited in this text were current as of April 2010 unless otherwise noted.

Content Provider: Joe Galat, American Youth Football President; **Acquisitions Editor:** Amy Tocco; **Managing Editor:** Laura Podeschi; **Copyeditor:** Patrick Connolly; **Permission Manager:** Martha Gullo; **Graphic Designer:** Nancy Rasmus; **Graphic Artist:** Francine Hamerski; **Cover Designer:** Keith Blomberg; **Photographer (cover):** Kevin Heitzman, © American Youth Football; **Photographer (interior):** Neil Bernstein, unless otherwise noted; photos on pp. 1, 11, 21, 37, 57, 75, 87, 137, 169, 189, and 203 by Kevin Heitzman, © American Youth Football; **Visual Production Assistant:** Joyce Brumfield; **Photo Production Manager:** Jason Allen; **Art Manager:** Kelly Hendren; **Associate Art Manager:** Alan L. Wilborn; **Illustrator:** © Human Kinetics; **Printer:** United Graphics

We thank Flamingo Park in Miami Beach, Florida, for assistance in providing the location for the photo shoot for this book.

Copies of this book are available at special discounts for bulk purchase for sales promotions, premiums, fund-raising, or educational use. Special editions or book excerpts can also be created to specifications. For details, contact the Special Sales Manager at Human Kinetics.

Printed in the United States of America 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The paper in this book is certified under a sustainable forestry program.

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To my favorite coaches: Faye, Gregg and Tracy, Shane and Tracy,
Joe and Diana, Adam and Jamie, and Jessica and Norman

To my children's children: Nic, Gabrielle, Abigail, Max, Gabriel,
Grace, Isabella, Mia, and Aiden

Welcome to Coaching

Coaching young people is an exciting way to be involved in sport. But it isn't easy. Some coaches are overwhelmed by the responsibilities involved in helping athletes through their early sport experiences. And that's not surprising because coaching youngsters requires more than bringing the balls to the field and letting them play. It also involves preparing them physically and mentally to compete effectively, fairly, and safely in their sport and providing them with a positive role model.

This book will help you meet the challenges and experience the many rewards of coaching young athletes. You'll learn how to meet your responsibilities as a coach, communicate well and provide for safety, and teach tactics and skills while keeping them fun, and you'll learn strategies for coaching on game day. There are more than 70 drills and games included to help you with your practices. We also provide a sample practice plan and season plan to help guide you throughout your season. For access to some of this information online, visit the following Web site: www.HumanKinetics.com/CYFootball5E/ExtraPoints. Such materials are marked with this symbol in the text:



This book serves as text for two online courses developed by the American Sport Education Program (ASEP). *Coaching Youth Football: The AYF Way* is the official coach-certification course of American Youth Football (AYF). Coaches and administrators affiliated with AYF can visit www.AYFCoaching.com for more information or to register for the course.

The ASEP *Coaching Youth Football* online course is available to all youth sport organizations and coaches. For more information about this course or other ASEP courses and resources, please contact us at the following address:

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Welcome From American Youth Football

On behalf of the national staff and the many volunteers of American Youth Football (AYF), I welcome you to *Coaching Youth Football*.

This book, like all American Sport Education Programs (ASEP), details the most important components of participation, safety, and sportsmanship. In *Coaching Youth Football*, not only will coaches confirm their existing ideas on coaching, but they will also find many new ideas. Some of the techniques and drills will be familiar; others have been closely guarded by their inventors.

Football, one of the greatest team sports in history, is a laboratory of life's lessons. From AYF to the professional ranks, there are no shortcuts. Every fundamental technique a player learns helps to expand his knowledge of the complex sport of football, and repetition in practice is required to hone his skills at each position. The experience of seeing a young player learn a new skill because of your instruction is unforgettably rewarding. "A teacher affects eternity," and one of the highest levels of teaching is coaching.

I encourage the support staff of your association to also review this valuable and important resource. A successful team needs a community of volunteers, administrators, parents, trainers, and coaches working toward the goal of teaching football for its values and enjoyment.

Football is America's game. It is no coincidence that many community and national leaders have been former football players. Thanks to football coaches everywhere who provided us with a positive experience, we are now dedicated to giving back to our next generation. Nothing is more important than helping kids.

To those we call coach: Thank you!

Joe Galat
President
American Youth Football, Inc.

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Key to Diagrams

Offensive Positions

BC	Ballcarrier
C	Center
F	Flanker
FB	Fullback
G	Guard
HB	Halfback
O	Offense
OL	Offensive lineman
QB	Quarterback
RB	Running back
SE	Split end
T	Tackle
TB	Tailback
TE	Tight end
WB	Wingback
WR	Wide receiver

Defensive Positions

CB	Corner back
DB	Defensive back
DE	Defensive end
DL	Defensive lineman
DT	Defensive tackle
FS	Free safety
LB	Linebacker
MA	Middle linebacker, weak side (Mack)
MI	Middle linebacker (Mike)
S	Outside linebacker, strong side (Sam)
SS	Strong safety
W	Outside linebacker (Will)
X	Defense

Special-Teams Positions

FG	Field-goal team
H	Holder
K	Kicker
KR	Kickoff return team
LS	Long snapper
P	Punter
PC	Punt coverage team
PR	Punt return team
R	Returner
SS	Short snapper
SV	Safety valve

	Player movement
	Block
	Tackle
	Pass, snap, or handoff
CO	Coach

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Stepping Into Coaching

1



COACHING

If you are like most youth-league coaches, you have probably been recruited from the ranks of concerned parents, sport enthusiasts, or community volunteers. Like many rookie and veteran coaches, you probably have had little formal instruction on how to coach. But when the call went out for coaches to assist with the local youth football program, you answered because you like children and enjoy football and perhaps because you wanted to be involved in a worthwhile community activity.

Your initial coaching assignment may be difficult. Like many volunteers, you may not know everything there is to know about football or about how to work with children. In our society, anyone involved in football needs to have a high level of credibility. As a coach, you also have a significant responsibility to the sport of football and to the young people whom you will coach. *Coaching Youth Football* presents the basics of coaching football effectively. For access to some of this information online, visit the following Web site: www.HumanKinetics.com/CYFootball5E/ExtraPoints. Such materials are indicated by this symbol in the outside margin of the text:



To start, we look at your responsibilities and what's involved in being a coach. We also talk about what to do when your child is on the team you coach, and we examine five tools for being an effective coach.

Your Responsibilities as a Coach

Coaching at any level involves much more than designing scoring plays for offense or drawing up defenses that keep the other team away from your goal line. Coaching involves accepting the tremendous responsibility you face when parents put their children into your care. As a football coach, you'll be called on to do the following:

1. Provide a safe physical environment.

Playing football holds inherent risks, but as a coach you're responsible for regularly inspecting the fields and equipment used for practice and competition (see the "Facilities and Equipment Checklist" in the appendix on page 216).

Before the start of the season, make sure you explain to the players and parents that football is a contact sport. Everyone should understand that the players will experience the following during the course of the year:

- They will get bumps and bruises.
- They will be tired and will need extra rest.
- They will need to increase their fluid intake to stay hydrated.

Teach players and parents the importance of keeping their equipment in good working order (see chapter 3 for more information). You should reassure them

that you will be teaching the safest techniques in order to help players avoid injury and that you have a safety plan in place (see chapter 4 for more information).

2. Communicate in a positive way.

As you can already see, you have a lot to communicate. You'll communicate not only with your players and their parents but also with the coaching staff, officials, administrators, and others. Communicate in a way that is positive and that demonstrates that you have the best interests of the players at heart (see chapter 2 for more information). Psychologists who study children have found that the level of a child's understanding varies with age. Reports indicate that the average age at which a child can safely navigate crossing a two-lane road is eight years. Most children think that an automobile driver can see them if they can see the driver (Whitebread and Neilson 1996). This implies that young players may not be capable of judging the angle needed for tackling a ballcarrier or the arch of a football on a long pass. A good coach will understand that the players perceive the game according to their age.

COACHING TIP Although it may take more thought and may require you to plan ahead, always explain to parents what you are trying to accomplish as a staff. In addition, explain to players what you want them to do rather than what they should not do.

3. Teach the fundamental skills of football.

When teaching the fundamental skills of football, keep in mind that football is a game, and therefore, you want to be sure that your players have fun. We ask that you help all players be the best they can be by creating a fun, yet productive, practice environment (see chapter 5 for more information). To help your players improve their skills, you need to have a sound understanding of offensive, defensive, and special-teams skills (see chapters 7 to 9 for more information).

The fundamental skills required for playing football can be better taught if you provide mental images and key words for the tasks you are teaching. Sport psychologists are employed by most professional sport teams. Although the relaxation techniques and mental rehearsal exercises used by professional teams are more sophisticated, we will introduce the basic learning concepts to you. In the following chapters, we provide some common images and key words used to teach football (e.g., "eyes up," "hit on the rise," "uncoil," "wrap up the ballcarrier," "drive the man," "snowplow him back," and "pancake him"). As a coach, you will soon develop your own fun vocabulary.

4. Teach the rules of football.

Introduce the rules of football and incorporate them into individual instruction (see chapter 3 for more information). Many rules can be taught in the first practice, including properly aligning the offense, avoiding illegal procedures, and

handling being caught offside. Plan to review the rules any time an opportunity naturally arises in practices.

5. Direct players in competition.

Your responsibilities include determining starting lineups and a substitution plan, relating appropriately to officials and to opposing coaches and players, and making sound tactical decisions during games (see chapter 10 for more information on coaching during games). Remember that the focus is not on winning at all costs but on coaching your kids to compete well, do their best, improve their football skills, and strive to win within the rules.

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

We want you to help your players become fit so that they can play football safely and successfully. We also want your players to learn to become fit on their own, understand the value of fitness, and enjoy training. Thus, we ask you not to make them do push-ups or run laps as punishment. Make it fun to get fit for football and make it fun to play football so that your players will value fitness throughout their lives.

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 skill of blocking well. We ask you to teach these values to players by demonstrating and encouraging behaviors that express these values at all times. For example, in teaching blocking, stress to young players the importance of learning their assignments, helping their teammates, playing within the rules, showing respect for their opponents, and understanding that they are responsible for winning the individual battle on every play—even though they may not be recognized individually for their efforts.

You should also introduce your players to the concept of giving back to the community. Point out that many people within the community have helped make it possible for the players to participate in football; volunteers range from coaches to concession stand workers to various other positions filled by parents and community members. Players can learn to give back to their community through projects such as cleaning up a park, writing letters to support our troops, and participating in charity drives to help the homeless. These are some of the projects that have won the Giving Back to Community award, which is an award presented by American Youth Football (AYF) to those who help others.

These are your responsibilities as a coach. Remember that every player is an individual. You must provide a wholesome environment in which every player has the opportunity to learn how to play the game without fear while having fun and enjoying the overall football experience.

Coaching Your Own Child

Coaching can become even more complicated 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 also responsible for the organization, all the players on the team, and their parents. Because of this additional responsibility, your behavior on the football field will be different from your behavior at home, and your son or daughter may not understand why.

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

- Ask your child if he 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 behavior to when you are in the coaching role.
- Avoid parenting during practice or game situations in order to keep your role clear in your child's mind.
- Reaffirm your love for your child, irrespective of his performance on the football field.

Five Tools of an Effective Coach

Have you purchased the traditional coaching tools—things such as whistles, coaching clothes, sport shoes, and a clipboard? They'll help you in the act of coaching, but to be successful, you'll need five other tools that cannot be bought. These tools are available only through self-examination and hard work; they're easy to remember with the acronym COACH:

C	Comprehension
O	Outlook
A	Affection
C	Character
H	Humor