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Who To Listen To?

from the FineSoccer Kids Newsletter

Frequently, when a player is on the field, they will have multiple people telling them what to do. For example, their teammate is yelling, “man on”, the coach is yelling, “pass the ball” and a parent is yelling, “shoot”.

The question that is going through the player’s mind, when all of this is happening, is what should they do and whom should they listen to.

First of all, it’s extremely important for a player to know when their teammate is telling them something, it’s being said to help the player. If that isn’t the case, then there are other problems that need to be addressed. For example, if the player calls “man on”, they are simply letting the person with the ball know there is a defender right on them. They are not implying the player thinks the person with the ball is selfish and should share. If the person calls for a ball to be passed back, they are simply letting the player with the ball know if a back pass is made, it will put the ball into a position where more can be accomplished. It does not mean the person making the call thinks the player with the ball is a bad player and should give it to someone who is better.

Knowing the teammates are making calls to help, this means the players on the field should definitely listen to their teammates on the field. It doesn’t mean the player with the ball has to do what they are told, but rather that it’s an option. For example, if a player calls for the ball to be played back, it means this is an option that is available. It doesn’t mean it has to be done. The player with the ball might see the back pass but also see a through ball opportunity and take that option instead.

In other words, teammates on the field should be listened to but their directions not always have to be followed. If you choose not to follow a teammates advice (and realizing that is fine) it is a good idea to acknowledge their comment later (thank them for the call and maybe even, on a dead ball, explain why you chose to do otherwise). The reason for doing this is you want them to know you heard them and appreciate the suggestion and that in the future you want them to continue to make those suggestions.

Now for the hard one - the coaches. It’s extremely important for the coaches to know that they shouldn’t be telling their players what to do, step by step. Soccer is a game of thinking on your feet and reacting to the situation as opposed to the pre determined movements of some other sports. Because of this, the good coaches will allow their players to think and make their own decisions throughout the game realizing that this would be a learning opportunity. If a coach does this, when the coach does tell them something during the game, the player must realize it’s very important and as such, do as they are told. For example, if the coach tells the player to switch positions with another player, that isn’t a suggestion but rather a command and should be abided by right away.



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On the other hand, when coaches are shouting directions constantly throughout the game, it's extremely difficult (if not impossible) to follow them every time. I am NOT going to tell a player to ignore their coach if the coach is constantly shouting directions but, I as a coach do know that if I constantly yell during games, the players on the team I am coaching are most likely going to completely tune me out (and one reason I know that at least some will do this is because I, as a player, did that exact thing). When a coach calls out an occasional direction, it's something that is easy to hear and follow. When a coach yells constantly, they tend to be ignored much of the time.

When a parent yells at a player (or players) to do something, the player should treat that the same as if a random person on the side called for them to do something and ignore it completely. The parent doesn't know exactly what has been taught during the training sessions, and they don't know what exactly the field player has been told to do in that situation in the past and as such, the parent should be ignored on the field during games. I'm not saying the player should ignore their parent off the field but during games, they should focus on themselves, their teammates and the coach. Likewise, the parents have to realize that this is true and, if they really want to do the right thing, they would not be yelling during games but if they can't stop themselves from doing that, at the very least, they have to understand their children are not going to listen.

Knowing who to, and who not to listen to during games is extremely important for a player and it can make their time on the field much more enjoyable if they understand each persons roles