



Ideas on how to coach Girls.

Extracts from Nathan Burke, Herald Sun, Feb 2018.

More females in sport, of any age, is a simple fact of life in the Australian sporting landscape. And its been long overdue.

The female side of sport, as well as football, has been growing at an astonishing rate over the last few years and will not abate. The females put as much effort into their games as do the males and deserve the accolades afforded to them.

However at junior level, we need to recognise the different way that boys teams and girls teams operate and respect the motivation of both genders. If we try and treat the girls in the same way that we have treated the boys then we would have failed miserably and do our sports no favours.

Sport is the greatest levelling field and the greatest way to engender respect, understanding and cooperation across society and communities. The girls do and will play a huge role in this by helping to pull down the gender barriers and mould a society that will respect all sides regardless of gender, faith, colour or creed. So with that in mind here are a few tips from some experts of how we need to go about managing girls teams.

“Basically, if we coach young female footballers the same way we coach boys then we will lose them to the game.”

More importantly we will lose them to any game which is not how we want to see ourselves as a society in Australia.

“The issue is that with a [huge] increase in teams [is that] we [will] need to find per [many] more qualified coaches.

This is no easy feat and anecdotally what we are left with is reluctant fathers or mothers putting their hands up, or the guy who has coached boys for 10 years magnanimously stepping forward. The way he has coached the boys has been successful so why should these girls be any different?

Big mistake.

Girls are different. Not better or worse, just different.”

Interestingly, the current crop of Matildas have mostly trained and played with boys, so there is some discussion on the benefits of having mixed teams to bring the best out of the girls.

The views expressed here relate to regular community teams, like NCMJFC, and not to elite teams that would view the Matildas as their pathway.

“Girls...

Are more likely to insist on fairness.

Girls don't easily reconcile with injustice and notice favouritism readily. Boys will say it is OK to favour the good players, but girls won't tolerate it. An even playing ground is vital. Information must be shared with all players, training be available to all players and importantly time spent with all players.

Hate to be played off against their peers.

I don't know any females young or old who enjoy being compared to others. Challenging them with comments like “Kate has your position now” or “Kate would've kicked that goal” serve only to demoralise, not inspire.

Are sensitive to changes in your body language and changes in your relationship with them.

This includes grumpy looks, throwing your arms in the air after a mistake or simply going several sessions without talking to them. Girls are often more concerned with how you say things rather than what you say. Body language and the tone of your voice are important as a girl will not have fun with a coach they think doesn't like them. Girls notice the small stuff and it can drastically affect their confidence. The saying "they don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care" is spot on.

Need to hear the whole story.

If you demote a player, bench them, train them with a different group, or change their position without telling them why, they will assume the worst. They will make up their own story and it will rarely be accurate. When the parents add in their version of the story the situation becomes increasingly confusing.

Younger ones especially don't have the wisdom to understand coaching motives or tactics and are therefore likely to think negatively. "Over-communication" must be your mantra.

Are more likely to internalise criticism.

Boys may deflect criticism onto the team, but girls will stew on it for days or weeks. Expecting them to just get over it won't happen. Never single out girls for criticism in front of their peers because you will turn that girl off and most likely others who hear it. Asking them to leave their problems at the door won't work. A good coach will notice changes in demeanor and if the player is strong enough to bring the matter to you, then you have to applaud their courage and treat what they say and feel seriously. To dismiss their feelings, even if they are not based on fact, is to dismiss the person.

Need to learn that mistakes are OK.

Girls are more likely to avoid embarrassing situations than boys. They are less likely to take risks and potentially look silly, especially if you are a coach who publicly yells or constantly points out mistakes. Mistakes are learning opportunities and you must coach in a way that encourages risks and applauds the effort not the outcome.

Are more likely to form cliques and ostracise outsiders.

You must keep a vigilant eye on the demeanour of your players and notice subtle changes. Do they seem less happy than previously? Are they coming to training less often? If you notice something you have to act before it spirals out of control. Many coaches choose the easy option, which is to pretend not to notice.

Are more sensitive to body image.

Off-the-cuff comments about size or athletic ability can cut deep. You need to understand that there will be tears as girls are more likely to cry and express their emotions. It isn't a sign of weakness, it just shows they care.

A coach who handles the above issues might well find that coaching females is the most rewarding experience of their coaching careers.

Many who have changed from coaching boys to girls say they will never go back.

The key to maintaining this amazing level of growth is great coaching. While focusing on creating [Matildas] talent is important, it is equally important to ensure the ones who aren't good enough are still loving and playing the game in 10 years time."

So the challenges are there for every girl's team and coach to re-look at the way things were done and to create a new way of doing things.

If you keep these points in mind next time you are working with a girl's team then both you and the team will get so much more out of it.

Yours in football,

NCMJFC Football Dept.