



BETTER ATHLETES
BETTER PEOPLE

Use Kid-Friendly Criticism

An excerpt from "The Power of Double-Goal Coaching" by Jim Thompson

Criticism is important to learning, but it often drains people's tanks, which decreases their capacity to learn. John Robinson, who as Head Football Coach at the University of Southern California won a national championship, understood the tank-draining impact of criticism. I love his statement: "I never criticize a player until they are first convinced of my unconditional confidence in their abilities."

Kid-Friendly Criticism provides players with useable information that empowers them to improve while minimizing tank draining. Here are some practical ways to give players Kid-Friendly Criticism.

- **Avoid Non-Teachable Moments:** There is too much emotion in some moments for criticism to be heard or acted upon, no matter how accurate, well-meaning, and perfectly delivered it may be. Discipline yourself after a tough loss or a painful mistake. Wait until the emotion has dissipated before giving feedback.
- **Criticize in Private:** Anyone can be embarrassed by public criticism so wait until you can give a player feedback in private. Praise in public; criticize in private.
- **Ask Permission:** Asking permission makes criticism easier to hear and apply, especially for the kind of youth who may not be able to handle feedback. "Judy, I noticed something that might improve your shooting. Are you open to hearing it?" If she says, "No," honor that and return to it later. Her curiosity may even cause her to come to ask you about it. But don't use this tool for something that requires immediate intervention, such as poor sportsmanship or safety.
- **If-Then Statements:** If-Then Statements are easier for kids to hear than telling them what to do. "If you bend your knees when you shoot, (then) you'll get better range on your 3-point shots" works better than saying, "Bend your knees when you shoot" especially if done in an annoyed tone of voice. If-Then Statements help players feel in control, which makes them more open to criticism.
- **Criticism Sandwich:** Sandwich a criticism or correction between two positive reinforcements. "I like the way you keep your eyes on the basket when you shoot. If you bend your knees more, you'll get better range. And way to go with the follow through!" You've just given three pieces of feedback and made the criticism easier to take.

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