

EN 106

Prof. Lester

03/25/16

What Makes an Efficient Coach?

On July 5th, 2015, the U.S. Women's National Team became the number one women's team in the world. Competing in the Women's World Cup the U.S Women's National Team made it through the group stages finishing in first place. They then progressed through to the "sweet 16" stage and made it all the way to the final to play against Japan. The final score was USA 5: Japan 2! A blow out! Throughout the whole tournament the US team conceded just three goals and scored an impressive fourteen! But what does it take to become a great team? Is their success at the women's world cup purely down to the hard work and dedication of the players? Or does a team's success come from the coaching staff?

You many be wondering why I am writing this paper. I belong to a community where soccer is the most important aspect. Park University Women's Soccer Team. First of all, I think it is important to inform you of the issues within my community. Park University women's soccer team may seem like any other team. But the cracks that began behind the scenes are now beginning to show on the field. Team sports require respect for all team mates and the coaching staff. So what happens when a coach loses his authority causing players to not show respect to him and their teammates?

I began to wonder what it is exactly that makes a successful coach? To answer this question, I needed to do some research. I did some thinking. Who, in my opinion, is a coach that has achieved so much and has a reputation of being an efficient coach. Sir Alex Ferguson is

considered to be one of the greatest soccer coaches in the history of the sport. Biography.com states that “He was the first British manager to win the treble: The Premier League championship, the FA Cup and the European Cup”. I believe there is no one better to ask as to what makes an efficient soccer coach. In a blog on BetterSoccerCoaching.com the ex manager of Manchester United claims that there are four main skills that make a good coach. These four skills are: Observation, Perseverance, Imagination, and Communication. I decided to look at these characteristics and analyze what Ferguson states about them and compare his opinion of why they are important to how my coach uses these skills.

Observation. According to Ferguson a good coach requires good observation skills and states that “It is a good idea to stand back sometimes and watch someone else coach while you observe the players.” This is something that has not happened in my community and is something I think our coach would find interesting. Instead of being involved with the sessions and only focusing on a selection of players, our assistant coach should run the session. This would allow our coach more time to concentrate on each player and observe what his players struggle with, what works well, and how the players work together to solve problems.

Perseverance. Coaching is not an easy job for anyone, including the professionals that get paid a lot of money to do it. Ferguson states that a coach needs to “come back after a defeat full of confidence and ready for the next game.” He also states that “You have to keep the fire in your belly.” I feel that this is a skill our coach already possesses but sometimes he lets the result of the game affect him. If we lose a game he is never happy, which most coaches never are, but he doesn’t encourage his players until he has had time to dwell on what has happened which can sometimes last 2-3 days. I feel that this is an issue that players can not really change. It’s all in our coaches’ mindset. If that’s how he deals with the situation, then it’s up to him to change it.

Imagination. This mainly comes into play when you are coaching younger children, but can still help when coaching college students too. It doesn't mean you have to create new drills that have a game theme to them but by simply improving "how you get things across to the players." Ferguson suggests that imagination allows a coach to get things across to all players because it forces them to think and solve problems, either individually or as a team. I personally have not seen this with my current coach but I have seen and experienced examples of it throughout my soccer career.

When I was younger one of my favorite soccer drills was based on my favorite game at the fair ground. The coconut shy. The aim of the was to throw baseballs at coconuts balancing on poles. If you hit a coconut and it fell down, you got to keep it. But how is that relevant to soccer I hear you ask. Well it was a team game that made you concentrate on your passing. From direction to accuracy to pace and height, this game taught young players the most basic concept of a soccer game in a fun but competitive way. Other inventive games I have come across when moving up in soccer abilities include target zone games. In this game it also helps improve players most necessary skill, passing, but with advanced skills. Target zones are set up all across the playing field in a variety of shapes and sizes. Players will then strike a ball, in the strike zone, towards a target of their choice. Points are rewarded according to where the ball lands in perspective of the target zone. The main focus of this drill is passing but it also helps teach players how to advance their passing abilities and show them what they need to work on to have a wide range a passes in their locker.

Communication. Communication is vital for a coach but it's important that they know how to use it. It's crucial that a coach lets players know what is required from a training exercise, without saying too much. Ferguson states that "You see those training sessions where the coach

is talking all the time and the message is lost.” He claims that players just want to get on with the drill and don’t want to hear their coach rambling on about what needs to be done. Ferguson also suggests that “talking too much is a big danger for a coach.” In my coach I have noticed that he sometimes struggles with communicating what he is expecting from the team or even something as simple as what to do in a drill he has created. I understand what Ferguson is saying when he talks about how talking too much can cause players to lose focus but it’s important that a coach clearly explains what to do and then allow his players to participate before stepping in with comments and/or suggestions.

After reading these key skills a coach needs I had a thought. Thinking back to one of my very first questions; “Is the U.S Women’s National Team success at the women’s world cup purely down to the hard work and dedication of the players? Or does a team’s success come from the coaching staff?” I wanted to know if the U.S Women’s Team had experienced any issues with their head coach Jill Ellis. Appointed as head coach in the summer of 2014, Ellis had never coached a team higher than college level before. June 8th, 2015, Ryan Rosenblatt wrote an article for Fusion.net suggesting that the appointment of Ellis was a confusing decision for many U.S soccer fans. After discussing how the U.S team did not perform well at the Algarve Cup in 2014 under management of Tom Sermanni, Rosenblatt claims that “The appointment of Ellis, a replacement with no full-time experience above the collegiate level, just pushed those eyebrows higher.” Even though Ellis has worked within the U.S soccer system for many years, she has never had a leading role as she had previously been an assistant coach for Pia Sundhage. Sundhage is known for being the coach that made the U.S Women’s team the dominating team they are today. Rosenblatt states that “Even under Sundhage she (Ellis) was never the team’s top assistant. Toss in a conservative personality — rarely willing to say anything of interest in a

press conference, often giving unclear answers that leave the media to guess her intentions — Ellis certainly hasn't warmed hearts and minds.” Suggesting that Ellis's personality is not correct to deal with the U.S national team, Rosenblatt then goes on to state that fans “know the team inside and out, a world power that has been together for the better part of a decade,” but no one knows Ellis. “We don't know about her. Not at this level, and not under this pressure. We learn about her and do so with skepticism and uncomfortable unfamiliarity.” Even though this information comes from a fans perspective of things it made me wonder if any of the players had any concerns about working under Ellis.

I did some research to see if I could find any information or players perspectives of their manager but I had no luck. I thought this would be the case though because no professional athlete that wants to play would ever publically call out their coach and say they don't like them. However, I did find an article published in The Washington Post on June 24, 2015. The article titled “Former USWNT star Michelle Akers puts U.S. Coach Jill Ellis on blast.” Although this article was not exactly what I was looking for it was interesting to see that ex U.S soccer players are willingly talking to journalists and expressing their opinions on head coach Jill Ellis. Akers claims that “If shes [Ellis] is pleased with the way we played tonight then what the hell is she doing coaching our U.S team.”

After looking at my research to discover what makes an efficient and, successful soccer coach, I believe that the coach here at Park University could do with reading this paper and learn more on how he can improve. I'm not saying our coach, Ken Hefner, is a terrible coach who has no idea what he's doing because he has coached college soccer for many years leading other teams to National Championships. But what I am suggesting is that he could always find ways to improve as a coach so he is more suitable for his current team just like players always need to

improve to impress a new coach. If he worked on improve the four main skills Sir Alex Ferguson talks about, Park University women's soccer team could improve on and off the field and hopefully return in the fall and become National Champions!

References

Alex Ferguson: What makes a good coach. (2010, September 24). Retrieved April 02, 2016, from <http://soccer-coaching-blog.com/2010/09/24/alex-ferguson-what-makes-a-good-coach/>

Bonesteel, M. (2015, June 24). Former USWNT star Michelle Akers puts U.S. Coach Jill Ellis on blast. Retrieved April 04, 2016, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/early-lead/wp/2015/06/24/former-uswnt-star-michelle-akers-puts-u-s-coach-jill-ellis-on-blast/>

FIFA Women's World Cup Canada 2015™ - Matches - FIFA.com. (2015, July 06). Retrieved April 05, 2016, from <http://www.fifa.com/womensworldcup/matches/>

What Makes a Good Soccer Coach? (n.d.). Retrieved April 04, 2016, from <http://justplaycleats.com/what-makes-a-good-soccer-coach/>