



BETTER ATHLETES
BETTER PEOPLE

Maximize Effort By Rewarding Unsuccessful Effort

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

All coaches reward players who make the play. As crazy as it may sound, reward players who try hard but fail to make the play to maximize your team’s effort.

When a player makes the play and is cheered by her coach, she will tend to assume her coach is happy about the outcome, even if the coach points out the effort involved. So look for great efforts that aren’t successful. Then when you praise a player’s effort, there is no confusion. You can only be recognizing the player for effort, which sends a message that you notice effort no matter what the outcome.

A benefit of this tool is that it can transform your own negativity when a player fails to make a play. A coach who understands the power of this tool for building a team of gritty, hard-trying players will be less disappointed at failure because he will see it as an ideal teachable moment to strengthen his team’s habit of effort.

PCA’s Tina Syer notes that in field hockey and soccer, wings who stay wide force defenders to cover them, which can leave the striker open. Tina notes that sometimes a player will run 60 yards down the field but not be rewarded with the ball. She makes sure to reward this verbally so they will make this long run to be in the right place in the future when they may get a pass. In the absence of recognition by the coach, a player may not do this again, especially since it is a lot of work.

PCA Trainer Mike Legarza wanted his college basketball players to aggressively drive to the basket so he never criticized them for missing a lay-up. I once saw him react to a missed lay-up with, “Great drive, John!” He overlooked the failure to reward the unsuccessful effort.

Opportunities to reinforce unsuccessful effort abound in every sport, for example, when outfielders run to back up a potential throw to a base. When the throw is not made to that base, you can reinforce effort by calling attention to the outfielder who made the effort to back up the play just in case.

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