



Coaches Handbook

First Edition

February, 2013

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“If anything goes bad, I did it. If anything goes semi-good, we did it. If anything goes really good, they did it. That’s all it takes to get players to win football games for you.”

~ Paul Bear Bryant

“Practice does not make perfect. Only perfect practice makes perfect.”

~ Vince Lombardi

“Your talent determines what you can do. Your motivation determines how much your willing to do. Your attitude determines how well you do it.”

~ Lou Holtz

Dear Coach,

Welcome to the Youth Football program for Vigo County and to the upcoming season. The VYFL continues to grow and provide a great opportunity for the families living with Vigo County School district.

Our Mission statement is:

“It is the mission of Vigo Youth Football League to promote the continued development of young athletes as it relates to the fundamentals of football, sportsmanship, and athletic competition. This will be achieved through participation in games and other football related activities and competing at the highest level possible. Coaching each player in reaching their maximum potential and contribution in the game of football and in transforming those skills from the football field to become tomorrow's leaders.”

On behalf of the VYFL Board of Directors, we want to thank you for your commitment to teaching what we believe is the greatest team sport in the world. No other sport is as demanding, physical, exciting, and rewarding as football. It truly is the ultimate “team” sport. To ensure that all participating members (players, parents, coaches, etc.) have a pleasurable experience, the VYFL Board of Directors have created this handbook to provide coaches with proper guidelines to build and execute a consistent approach to coaching youth football.

We hope that you will read and follow these guidelines to help build the VYFL program interest and to help the players build lasting memories, friendships, and life lessons.

Again, we want to thank you for your time, participation, and commitment to our league. It is through the dedication of volunteers such as yourself as well as supportive parents and sponsors that our league continues to thrive.

We welcome any ideas, comments, suggestions, and discussions you may have. Please contact us on our website at <http://www.vigoyouthfootballleague.com>

Good luck this year!

VYFL Board of Directors

Background Checks

In the best interest of VYFL, it's Board of Directors, Coaches, Parents, and Players; all Head Coaches, Assistant Coaches, and anyone coming in contact with any player (i.e., "dummy coaches") will be subject to a background check. No exceptions.

VYFL is proud to continue a working relationship with the National Center for Safety Initiatives, through which we will engage in a comprehensive background screening program.

Responsible Coaching

Responsible Coaching can mean a number of things to different people. It can be interpreted differently as well. VYFL believes that responsible coaching is a commitment to:

- Understanding that the life lessons you teach your athletes carry far beyond the playing field.
- Ensuring player safety at all times.
- Coaching player development with fundamentals and skills.
- Teaching positive life lessons ahead of wins and losses.
- Showing a high level of sportsmanship as a representative of our league.
- Always respecting spectators, parents, coaches, officials, and league representatives.

Goals to focus on for your players outside of the X's and O's are:

- Teamwork and Sacrifice
- Confidence
- Persistence, Effort and Over-Coming Adversity
- Leadership
- Sportsmanship

VYFL has established a specific code of conduct for coaches to abide by. These rules should be respected and followed at all times. Some of these rules are:

- Any outburst of profanity, temper, name calling, abusive language of any sort, will not be tolerated at any time.
- The use of tobacco or alcohol will not be allowed on the field.
- Coaches will stay and supervise all players until they have been picked up, this includes games, practices, and other team activities.
- Allow the officials to do their job. No one call can cost a team to lose.

In VYFL, we do not condone or accept unethical or unsportsmanlike behavior. This is youth football and the focus and goals of each of you should revolve around making this an enjoyable, positive learning experience – both good and bad. VYFL and its Board of Directors reserve the right to address any and all issues as made aware. The Board of Directors also reserve the right to discipline, suspend, or remove any Head Coach or Assistant Coach who fails to meet the league's best interest and/or Responsible Coaching directives.

No Head Coach can do it all by himself. You need Assistant Coaches and parental support to build a successful team and program. Try to surround yourself assistants who know the game and are just as enthused as you are about coaching. You can help build the program by having well trained coaches from your team to possibly become future Head Coaches in the years ahead. Assign responsibilities for each assistant coach (Defensive Coordinator, Offensive Coordinator, Lineman, etc) and let them run the drills and be accountable for all evaluation processes.

Minimize parents from coaching their own child. If you or an assistant is the parent of one of the players, it is usually best for the child if the parent is coaching an area that does not include his own child. Also, for parents that are not coaching, caution them to not over coach the player(s) to and from practice and at home. Most parents are too critical and will not give them room to grow into the position they play. Allowing these issues to happen without guidance will destroy any confidence that you are trying to build with your players and team.

Parent meetings - have several during the season. It is required to have a parent meeting either on or before the first day of practice. Once a roster is confirmed, you should reach out to those parents, introduce yourself and schedule a team meeting. The key to not having parental issues is communication and transparency. Every Head Coach and Assistant Coach should make themselves available after each practice and game to answer questions and open the lines of communications with parents. If you ignore and shut parents out of practices and communication you are setting yourself up for failure of the entire team.

Sign up parent volunteers prior to first game to work behind the scenes. Every team will be required to supply either a chain crew, game announcer, game clock representative, or spotter for all home and away games. Other duties may apply as the League changes or grows. Having a scheduled list of parents to handle these items prior to the start of games allows you to concentrate and focus on the team and the players. Most teams have team Mom's and they can handle coordinating these types of functions as well. The important thing to do is keep the parents involved.

Coaches and Referee Communication. Just as much as the playbook, game plan, and defensive schemes are a part of the game of football, so is the relationship between officials and coaches. The most important aspect of the relationship is how we both communicate with each other. The old saying, "treat others as you want to be treated" applies greatly when communicating with the officials. A coach who constantly yells, berates, and argues with every call loses credibility and respect in the eyes of the officials. These types of attitudes foster and maintain

an adversarial relationship, which makes the sidelines an unpleasant place for coaches and officials, but more importantly, your players. How do we earn respect? The key is effective communication. Some of the major points are as follows:

- **Speak to every official in a calm tone.** This is hard considering that football is an emotional sport and people get caught up in the moment. Remember that your players are watching how you handle every situation. They will respect you more if you handle an issue without yelling and screaming.
- **Know the rules.** Nothing will destroy your credibility faster than arguing a basic rule or you apply a college or NFL rule to a game governed by either High School or youth specific rules. Please reference the VYFL Rules of Play document.
- **Never argue a judgment call.** Remember each official works a specific zone and the other officials may not have seen what another official sees or doesn't see. Before any foul is administered, the crew will get together and discuss what happened and if anyone saw the play differently, that is the opportunity for another official to provide input. Remember that officials are not out to "get anyone".
- **Expect the officials to make mistakes just like you do.** Every Coach and every official makes a mistake in a game. If you expect it to happen and communicate the issue responsibly, you will earn respect from parents, officials, and most importantly, your players.

Understand the qualities of a good coach.

- Keep perspective.
- Coach with an enthusiastic attitude.
- Telling players that you believe in them.
- Coach with positive attitude.
- Be patient and be organized.
- Balance discipline and fun.
- Coach every play.
- Talk to players on their level, literally. If you have to get down on one knee to look at them eye to eye, do it.
- Give only one correction at a time.
- Repetition pays off.

Understand the qualities of a bad coach.

- Letting the parents, assistants, and players lose perspective.
- Makes the final score the most important part of the game.
- Uses profanity.

- Makes fun of his or another team's players.
- Giving up on a player if they are not "All Star" material.
- Touching a kid in anger.
- Intimidating a kid by yelling at him.
- Taking cell calls during practices and games.

Preparation, Tempo, and Results. Always follow a master schedule and plan for the sake of others. Visualize how you want your practice to be before it happens. Always coach on the run, and keep a steady pace. Minimize standing around and have quick transitions from station to station and from drill to drill. Results are about noticing repetitive techniques and fundamentals being carried out on the playing field.

Organization

Be prepared! Whether this is your first season coaching or your 20th season, you will find that the more organized you are the better your experience will be. Many successful coaches in the league are masters of organization. Parents will spend a ton of time planning and taking their kids to practices and games. If they see a coach that is unorganized their assumptions will be that you either don't care about what you are doing or that you are in over your head. On the subject of organization, perception is reality. Some organizational ideas can be as follows.

- Be at practice early to allow setup of drills, stations, etc.
- Print out your practice plan that shows exactly what you will do and how much time to utilize for each drill or station.
- Have extra equipment such as mouthpieces, whistle, helmet snaps, etc.

Handling Parents

Coaching youth football is exciting and rewarding, but from time to time you may experience difficulty with parents. Some may want their children to play more or they might question some of your judgments as a coach. This is normal, so don't feel that you're alone if this happens. Here are a few thoughts to remember when dealing with parents:

- Always listen to parent's ideas and feelings. Remember, they are interested and concerned because it is their children that are involved. Encourage parental involvement however resist unfair pressure. You are the coach and it's your responsibility to make the final decisions. Most importantly, be fair. If you treat all players equally, you will gain respect!!
- No coach can please everybody so don't try! Know what your objectives are, communicate them to the parents and do what you believe to be of value to the team, not the parents.

- From the very beginning of the season, make certain all parents know your ground rules. Have rules, regulations, your philosophy, your phone number, practice dates/times, etc., printed on a sheet of paper you can pass out to all parents.
- Be consistent. Try not to change your rules or your coaching philosophy during the season. If, for some reason, you must do so - make sure every player and every parent is informed immediately.
- Handle any confrontation one-on-one, not in a crowd situation. Don't be defensive. Don't argue with the parent. Listen to their viewpoint and thank them for it. If necessary, contact the League Director and schedule a meeting to settle any differences.
- Never, ever, ever discuss individual players with other parents. Remember, the grapevine will hang you every time. Make sure your assistant coaches also adhere to this rule.
- Ask parents not to criticize their children during a practice or game. Don't let your players be humiliated, even by their own parents. Explain that you must be under complete control of your team when they are on your "turf".
- Ask your player's parents to remember that Game Officials are human and may make a mistake. In fact, they may make several mistakes. Officials should not be subject to criticism during ball games - not by coaches, not by players, and not by parents or other spectators. Explain that the rules we play by are not the same as the rules they see at the pro and college level. Most of the abusive fan criticism and behavior is simply a result of their lack of knowledge of our playing rules.
- Ask your parents to get involved. There are many activities in which they can be of great help and benefit to the team and to the league, such as: car pooling, keeping statistics, cleaning the field after games, score keeping, fund raising, etc.
- Always remember that you will be dealing with all types of children and with parents of differing backgrounds and ideas. One of your main challenges as a coach is to deal with these differences in a positive manner that will lead to cooperation, enthusiasm, and enjoyment for all.

Safety

The safety of everyone involved in VYFL activities including spectators, coaches, players, and officials is our #1 priority. VYFL stresses the importance of always making safety the top priority in all situations including:

- Inclement Weather
- Conditioning
- Hydration
- Injury Handling
- Medical Conditions
- Equipment
- Warm-Ups
- Proper Techniques

Inclement Weather:

Severe Heat – when outside temperatures exceeds 90 degrees, special care and consideration should be given when holding practices and events.

Lightning – with any sign of lightning, practices and games must be suspended immediately. Practices and games should not be resumed until there has been no spotted lightning for a minimum of 30 minutes.

Weather Warnings – any weather warning issued for your immediate area during the course of an activity will be cause for immediate suspension or cancellation of the activity until it is deemed safe to resume.

Conditioning:

Ensure that a portion of every practice is dedicated to conditioning. Proper conditioning can and should include football drills prior to all practices and games. Studies indicate that a well-conditioned athlete suffers fewer injuries than a lesser conditioned athlete.

Help players to understand the importance of conditioning and how it can improve their performance of the entire team. **DO NOT EVER MAKE CONDITIONING A PUNISHMENT.**

Dehydration:

Proper hydration always starts days before any activity and not right before any conditioning event. However, adequate water breaks should be taken repeatedly throughout any practice or game situations. Fluid intake should also continue after practices and games as well. If adequate fluid intake does not happen, than dehydration

can occur. Dehydration can result in very serious injury or even worse. Excessive sweating, absence of sweating, high fever, prolonged vomiting and diarrhea are some of the common causes of dehydration.

Who's at risk – Any child who exercises in the heat may be at risk of dehydration. Your players may be particularly vulnerable to dehydration and other heat-related illnesses during summer conditioning or practices if he or she:

- Rarely exercises.
- is overweight or obese.
- Has had a recent illness that caused vomiting or diarrhea.
- Has had a previous heat-related illness.

How to spot dehydration and other heat-related problems – Even mild dehydration can affect your players athletic performance and make him lethargic and irritable. Left untreated, dehydration increases the risk of other heat-related illnesses including heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and possibly heatstroke. Encourage your players to pay attention to early signs of dehydration including:

- Dry or sticky mouth
- Thirsty
- Headache
- Dizziness
- Cramps
- Excessive fatigue

Remind your players and encourage them to report these or any other signs to any coach right away. Do not let embarrassment keep your players on the field. If dehydration is detected early, fluids and rest may be all that is needed. If a player seems confused or loses consciousness seek emergency care immediately.

Treatment – Increased fluid intake and replacement of electrolytes are usually sufficient to restore fluid balances in patients who are mildly or moderately dehydrated. Severe dehydration can require hospitalization and intravenous fluid replacement. If an individual's blood pressure drops enough to cause or threaten the development of shock, medical treatment is usually required.

Concussion Awareness:

Any athlete who exhibits signs, symptoms, or behaviors consistent with a concussion must be immediately removed from the practice or game and will not return to play until cleared by an appropriate medical care professional. Some symptoms of concussions are:

- Appears dazed and confused.

- Is confused about assignment or position.
- Forgets plays.
- Is unsure of game, opponent, or score.
- Behavior or personality change.
- Short term memory loss.
- Headache, nausea, or vomiting.
- Balance or dizziness problems.

If any of the above signs are present in any one of your players, notify the parent or guardian immediately and have them seek medical attention for the player. The player may not return to contact activities until they have been evaluated and released from a licensed medical doctor.

Injury Handling:

When a player becomes injured, do not attempt to move them or their equipment until the situation has been properly assessed and it is safe to do so. Ask questions of the injured party, immobilize them if necessary and seek medical treatment if warranted. If you are unsure whether to move the player or not, than do not move them. Always be sympathetic to the injured party and attempt to make them comfortable.

Prior to the start of the season it is recommended that you identify parents that may have advanced medical backgrounds such as nurses, doctors, etc. In cases where advanced medical treatment is necessary seek these people out or the fastest qualified care provider.

Each team should have access to a basic first aid kit with them at all practices and games.

In the event of a serious injury, do not move the player – call 911. Emergency responders are typically only a few minutes away.

Medical Conditions:

Always error on the side of caution when dealing with a medical condition, issue, or concern. Ask the parents to share any pre-existing or known medical conditions with you to help advise on care and treatment. As an example, if a player has asthma, they should not be practicing without having proper medication and/or an inhaler at each practice, game, or event. Failure to come to practice without the inhaler means the player cannot practice. Knowing these medical conditions upfront can make your job easier and help you identify and treat issues before they become serious.

Equipment:

Please make sure that you have inspected all equipment prior to contact. Replace any damaged or improperly sized equipment before allowing the player to participate in contact drills. A properly fitted mouthpiece is required to participate in any and all contact practices and games. Check player's equipment regularly throughout the season to make sure there are no new issues that have occurred. Issues should be addressed immediately before contact is continued. Injuries are much less likely to occur when players are fitted properly and using equipment that is working properly.

Warm-Ups

Make sure that adequate time is devoted to stretching and warming-up prior to any contact drills or games. Warm-ups should include proper stretching of all parts of the body. Additionally, small to moderate physical exercise is recommended as a part of proper warm-up. There are all kinds of dynamic warm-up routines available if researched but make sure you choose the proper warm-ups for the age group you are coaching.

Proper Techniques

As a youth football coach, it is imperative that an emphasis is placed on the teaching fundamentals of football. There are proper techniques involved in all phases of football, including stretching, warm-ups, position techniques, tackling, etc.. A large portion of your practices should be geared towards teaching these fundamentals.

A great source for information for proper technique and fundamental football is USA Football. All coaches are encouraged to visit the USA football website at <http://www.usafootball.com>. Additionally, USA football offers their own "Coaches Handbook" that advises on how to teach proper techniques through a variety of drills.