

Soccer Calling: A Handbook for Youth Soccer Coaches

By Dean Conway

In Soccer Calling, Dean Conway, this year's recipient of the prestigious Thomas Fleck award for service to the soccer community, shares with the reader over thirty years of soccer knowledge. The book is ambitious, in that it touches on numerous coaching topics, but at the core, of each topic, remains a Player Centered philosophy. The coach is there to serve the player, not the other way around.

Some of the material covered in Soccer Calling is:

- Kids are kids, not adults! (patience)
- How to deal with parents (importance of a pre-season meeting)
- How to improve your Club (must be stronger than a few members)
- Coach as a role model
- Youth Soccer is about Fun and Learning (Individual development over team development)
- The value of small-sided soccer (repetition of skill & decision-making)
- Fair Play & Sportsmanship (life lessons)
- Age specific practices and a progressive development plan
- Ideas about soccer fitness

Dean endorses the Discovery Method (allow the player to learn through activity without the coach dictating orders) while offering insight into why this may be the best approach.

"We coaches should be stimulating the kids and challenging them from their earliest days as players: asking them questions as opposed to constantly making statements, provoking their own curiosities. It is probable that the more we tell them what to do, the less curious they will become." (p.18)

Summary: Soccer Calling is a terrific book for any coaches' library. There are numerous examples on how to deal with players and parents, prepare and plan for a training session and coach or manage on game day. These are all insightful and helpful tips, but the overwhelming theme throughout the book is soccer is a game, a great game, that should be enjoyed as a healthy competition and kept in a proper perspective. Let's allow players to make mistakes and learn from them. Although we should endorse and embrace the games' competitive elements, we need to always remember what stage the kids are at in their development both physically and psychologically. Our job as coaches (or activity leaders) is to create a well prepared, match realistic, training environment where players develop technical skills and a tactical awareness, but most importantly, a love for the game that they can carry with them no matter what their level of play.

Highly Recommend!