

# What Makes a Successful Coach?

## *Are wins and losses the only measure?*

*By Lawrence Fine*

In order to define what makes a successful coach, the first thing to be done is to establish parameters to measure "success" in coaching. In a discussion with a friend a few years ago, several possible definitions were advanced. What may be surprising to some is that none of our definitions included a good won/loss record.

The first idea we developed was that a successful coach was one who prepared his or her team to play at the next level. The next level could be anything from a higher-level club team, high school varsity or JV, college, state team, region team, national team or some other level – it would be different for each player. Another concept was that a successful coach was one who could teach in a manner that allowed the players to learn and work hard while enjoying themselves at the same time. I realize that many coaches don't believe you can work hard and have fun, but that's one of the real challenges of being a successful coach.

We finally realized that a coach's success could be determined only by each individual coach, depending on his or her individual situation. However, some of the traits of a successful coach would include the ability to teach the techniques and tactics of the game while at the same time instilling in the players the capacity to love the game.

Without overemphasizing the importance of coaching in the overall scheme of things, I believe that coaching is both a science and an art. **The science of coaching** is the ability to teach the techniques of the game as well as the tactics. In soccer, this can be learned by attending both NSCAA and USSF coaching courses in the United States. Through courses and clinics like these and professional publications, you can learn the type of drills and ideas that are necessary to become a coach.

Does this mean that anyone with a high coaching license will be a successful coach? Not necessarily. Through courses, clinics, books and playing experience, you can learn the science part of coaching. However, without having a solid mastery of the art of coaching, you will not be a successful coach.

**The art of coaching** is the hard part. It's the ability to actually teach and motivate a player or team. In the same way that a mathematician does not necessarily make a good math teacher, a soccer player does not necessarily make a good coach. True teachers have the ability to actually understand each of their players and know that each player has different

buttons to push in order to get them to learn, work hard and enjoy the game. Coaches who truly have the art of coaching are easy to spot. Watch them speaking to their team – you'll see every player's eyes on the coach, absorbing everything he or she says. When a coach doesn't understand the art of coaching, the gazes of that same team will wander when the coach is speaking.

Which is more important, the art or the science of coaching? In my opinion this is a "no-brainer." I would much rather have the art, the ability to teach and motivate, because learning the rest is relatively easy. If I only had the science part of the game down, it wouldn't be of much use to me without the ability to transfer this knowledge. If I only possessed the art of coaching, I could learn the science by going to courses, watching the game and talking to other coaches. It is much more difficult to learn the art.