



Winter weather coaching

1) Experience

Some children may have little or no experience of participating in winter outdoor training.

Taking that into account - we have to make sure that the experience they get is a positive, rewarding one.

2) Understand children's bodies

Kids go cold quickly, therefore it's vital to keep them busy as soon as they arrive. Planning for early tag games, small sided games (1v1, 2v2, etc)... is crucial to keep them engaged early in your session and shift their focus from poor weather to fun activities.

3) Big 'no' to waiting

Always seek to plan a session where every child is involved and active all the time. Where possible set up a few pitches of maximum 2v2, 3v3 to maximize their movement time. Although involving more numbers is by no means wrong (i.e. 4v4, 5v5), during cold weather this still may cause some form of waiting and may lead to the child being cold and disengaged in practice.

4) Consider your interventions

It's fair to say that stopping entire groups may not be the best idea. When it's really cold and wet, the last thing children want is to listen to lectures or instructions from their coaches.

Instead, give players individual tasks and work with them on an individual basis without having to stop the entire group. Individual tasks keep players concentrating and provide a clear learning focus which they will be engaged with.

5) Play games

Play is the highest form of creativity and the best way to keep children engaged. Design games that have a clear learning focus, keep players' excitement levels high and have scoring systems that increase their interest all the time.

6) Equal teams matter

You should know your children best. Avoid situations where one team has significantly more quality than the other. Players on both teams will quickly become bored and disengaged.

7) Talk less, say more

Children in general have very short attention spans and don't respond well to long talks in normal weather conditions let alone in bad ones. Try to keep your communication to a bare minimum. If you must say something, think whether it would be better to talk to the individual rather than the entire team.

8) Observation is a vital coaching method

We love coaching and therefore sometimes we fall in the trap of over-coaching, in particular during good weather. Observe players during sessions as you can see things that won't catch your eye when you are coaching in the middle of the pitch. Winter gives you a great opportunity to let children play and observe their behaviour and how they respond to problems posed by the game situations.

To conclude, we as coaches have to make sure we create memories, that children will love the game and love playing even when weather is not on our side. Then we develop an engagement not only during winter months but hopefully for a lifetime. The positive and long-term benefits may be that we will have more referees, volunteers, and coaches that influence next generations the same way we did and that can only be a good thing!