

**“Catching a problem on the Field of Play”**

Too often, a coach sees a problem but doesn't know how to fix the problem and as a result, the proposed solution creates an even bigger problem. For example, a player hits a shot over the goal. The coach sees this as a problem and announces “the next time a player hits the ball over the goal; the whole team is going to run after practice”.

Let's look at the decision making process the coach should go through and compare it to the above coach.

The very first decision the coach should make is whether it's a real problem or just a onetime issue. If the player makes the same mistake repeatedly, it's a real problem but if it's a onetime event, it could be the ball took a bad bounce, or some other issue that doesn't need to be addressed. Let's assume the decision has been made that it's a problem and not a onetime issue.

The next decision the coach should make is “is the problem technical or tactical?” In the above situation, the problem is most likely technical (problem with plant foot or problem keeping the head down) yet the coach’s threat of making the team run if it happens again doesn't address the technical issue at all.

Next the coach would decide whether this is a single player’s problem or a whole team’s problem. While the repeated missing of good goal scoring opportunities might affect the whole team, if it's just one player making this mistake, it's not a team issue and should be addressed in a one on one situation. If there are numerous players making the same mistake, than it's a team issue and should be addressed as a group.

Next the coach would determine whether the problem is a physical one. While that might be the case (if the player is out of shape it might result in them always being a step behind the ball when the situation arises and that could result in the problem) in this case, the decision has already been made that it's a technical problem. The way to correct a technical problem is through teaching and repetition and NOT by threats and punishment.

The last question for the coach to ask is whether the problem is a psychological one or not. In the case described above, what started as a technical problem most likely turned into a psychological one as well. Not because of the initial problem but rather because of the coaches reaction to the initial problem.

When a coach has determined that there is a problem, he should quickly go through this checklist before deciding how to address the problem:

Is it technical or tactical?

Is the problem individual or team?

Is the problem physical?

Is the problem psychological?

Do they understand it's usually a combination of the above (in the example above, it started as technical and individual and then because psychological as well).

Once a coach knows the answers to the questions above, they will be better prepared to make an informed decision as to how to help fix the problem.