

COACHING BACKGROUND AND PHILOSOPHY

DAN RUFNER

As a coach I make an effort to get to know my players both on and off the field, so I feel it is important for players and parents to know me. I grew up playing for a number of clubs in Colorado as well as three years on Colorado ODP. My high school team was ranked 6th in the nation and coached by a later winner of National High School Coach of the Year; much of what I practice comes from his mentoring. Though not the star on the team (my co-captain was on the national team) I was JV MVP and awarded most inspirational player both years on varsity as well as defensive MVP my senior year. I had planned on playing for UC-San Diego but continued injuries took me out of competitive play and into recreational play and coaching.

I have a long way to go to be the coach I desire to be and am continually trying to improve. I began formal coaching as the head coach for Service High in 2002 and club coaching with AKUnited in 2003. I'm glad to be out of club now and focus energy on Service, Alaska ODP (since 2005), and the college bounds counseling and select program I run, Alaska Northstars (since 2004). I have a USSF 'D' license and an NSCAA National Diploma. In 2011 I became certified as an Ethical Youth Coach through the Center for Ethical Youth Coaching. At one time I was a certified FIFA referee, but I have no intent on renewing that! From Point Loma Nazarene University (worked closely with many on the men's soccer team) I earned a Masters in Education with emphasis in Counseling and Guidance, and after ten years as a middle school counselor I now love my job as a counselor at Service High since 2011.

As a coach I strive to reach the highest level of success for our team. Success is not promoted in simply winning but in the development of players for all aspects of life. Soccer is the means by which youth learn that hard work, discipline, dedication, attitude, and desire are keys to reaching one's goal, whatever it may be. I promote these five characteristics through focused practices with high expectations, developing team and individual goals, developing relationships with players, and modeling through personal behavior. I expect players to display sound character and class in both winning and losing. My philosophy as a coach is based on the following:

Similarly, encourage young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good. In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us. Titus 2:6-8.

I realize that it is a challenge for a coach to please all players and parents all the time. Though I make decisions I feel are best for the team I hope players and families feel free to approach me with suggestions and feedback, both positive and constructive. I try to base my leadership on a model from Chris Bonnington (Everest expedition pioneer) who lead by 'consensual leadership'. Through comments, input, and understanding concerns I attempt to arrive at decisions and actions based on the consensus of what is best for our team. This is not my team. I take pride in what I do as a coach, but the team will always be for the players, then families, then coaching staff. Working together I am confident our team, and individual players, will achieve success.

Dan Rufner,
Robert Service High Boys Soccer Coach
Alaska Northstars Director

"A STAR CAN WIN ANY GAME; IT TAKES A TEAM TO WIN EVERY GAME"

COACHING STYLE

DAN RUFNER

I focus my coaching on five foundations: **Technique, Creative Tactics, Conditioning, Fun, and Mental Readiness.**

I will be the first to admit that coaching technique is not my area of expertise and is why I prefer to coach at the U-16 to U-19 level where competitive players should have well developed technique and touch on the ball. At practice I routinely work different skills to perfect our technique and make every touch come naturally. Though not as exciting as playing, I do believe in repetitive drills that allow our touch to come so easily smart and creative play will follow.

The majority of practice will incorporate lots of play to work on tactics. I attempt to work both general and specific tactics with players. General tactics include knowing different systems of play, field positioning, defensive formations, and attacking principles. Specific tactics include immediate play on and off the ball with surrounding teammates. This is much more difficult to instruct but is done through demonstrating options, developing communication, and understanding basic play concepts which translate to creative play during game situations.

I strongly believe conditioning is a major factor of success. I don't believe I am a demanding coach; I try to create environment where players will have innate desire to push themselves. I employ training methods used when I competed in long-distance triathlon racing. Early season is used to build an aerobic base through longer, less intense workouts including runs of 5-8 miles for an hour. Mid-season work is focused on developing speed and strength, most of which I try to have done with a ball. As we approach tournaments we taper but do not stop training.

Practices are focused with high standards and expectations, but through variety, games, camaraderie, challenges, and humor we will have fun, which should be the reason we all play.

I work to prepare my players mentally through a number of means. Through tough practices players learn how to push themselves the extra step. We have physical training and physical practices that builds resiliency. I incorporate goal setting into the season as well as individually for every game. I believe in a personal time to focus, visualize, pray, concentrate, and mentally prepare for the game. I expect players to not talk to referees (that is a coach's job) nor be condescending or disrespectful to other teams, both of which takes our mind off the task at hand, which is playing soccer. Quality teams play with class and respect for the game.

I believe in promoting both individual and team success. Individuals find success in attaining personal goals, developing and perfecting skills, gaining strength and speed, making a great play, and always giving 100% in all efforts. Team success is developed through team unity, reaching team goals, playing with all players, and being proud of who we are as a group. All players contribute to the team during practice and believe all players on a team deserve playing time. That said, I think starters have shown better and deserve more time. Rarely will it be an even split. However, when championships are on the line those playing the best will be playing. On the other side, during no-so-competitive games players not normally receiving as much playing time can expect more. All players are expected to support the playing time, playing style, and performance of all teammates at all times.