

Team Talks

WOULDN'T you love to hear the team talk of Alex Ferguson prior to the crucial second-leg Champions League quarter- final with Bayern Munich. This weekend team-talks in the National League dressing rooms of Tyrone, Derry, Monaghan, Kerry, Armagh, Donegal, Antrim, Dublin, Mayo etc, will be carefully thought out, with promotion, joy or relegation safety the prize.

How valuable are team-talks?

Fifteen minutes before the game is the one time it is almost guaranteed that every team is subjected to a talk by coaches/managers.

Some instruct, some seek to inspire, some are a call to arms and some target the opposition.

In truth, most team talks are a mix of these. Often they are a last ditch attempt to cover every possible eventuality so that nothing is left to chance.

Many players remember when a rousing speech had them 'champing at the bit' or how the 'brave heart' monologue before the game helped them blitz the opposition.

They quickly forget that at times those similar speeches or monologues had no bearing on the result - a defeat.

Timing the talks?

When asked to choose those times they believed to be most effective the same players picked:

- in the changing rooms before training sessions;
- before the next training session and after a defeat;
- at half-time.

The latter was seen as more important than immediately before the game because they already had an experience to build on, (i.e. the first-half action).

The former two were seen as chances to give focus to a training session, with the opportunity to work to solve problems and improve skills.

These same players did not disregard the value of the other team talk situations but they did agree that the best talks were those that allowed players time to put the theory into practice on the training pitch.

Who does the talking?

The nightmare scenario is when as many as four mentors gave their opinion on how to approach the game.

Well meaning but often each one repeated what had been said. Worse still, when they interrupt each other with bits of advice that were lost in the muddle.

Managers, coaches, players must come to an understanding about who speaks. They should, agree WHAT to talk about, WHEN the talks are most appropriate and WHY the talk is needed if full value is to be gained from them.

Remember, there is only room for one emotive speech.

Talking practice.

Team talks are only as useful as the work done to back them up.

Having a talk about tactics prior to a game will have very little effect on team performance if those tactic have not been practiced repeatedly during training sessions.

Players of all ages must constantly HONE SKILLS that coaches want displayed in a game.

In the heat of battle a player will rely on instinct (habit).

If coaches want low kick passes to team-mates' but if players' instinct are to kick (balloon) high into the air and coaches have not sought to correct this, then the players' muscle memory will favour the kick the players know best.

Coaches/managers often fail to understand that much of what we tell players is forgotten, simply because the brain has a limited ability to remember the spoken word.

Yes, players won't do what you tell them, they will do what you train them.

This becomes even more relevant just before important games what a lot of what is said is lost in the first 10 minutes.

Players always return to their instincts under pressure, unless coached to do otherwise.

My team-talks?

Mostly walking, walking through the tactics, game sense and game shape I've coached as well as reaffirming to each player and then collectively what exactly they will do.

As I started, team talks????

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