

THE COACH MAKES THE DIFFERENCE

*Develop Your Vision on Leadership, Talent,
Motivation, and Selection*

Mauro van de Looij

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THE COACH MAKES THE DIFFERENCE REVIEWS

'The lessons and examples are so universal that this book is also very useful for coaches in other sports and the 17 million national coaches with a management job.'

Elly Stroo Cloeck - Reviewer 1001 ManagementBook

'A book that clearly indicates that every trainer can play an important role in the development of youth football players. With expertise, an open mind and, above all, love for the game.'

Foppe De Haan - Former Netherlands U21 Head Coach

'I wish every child a coach who deals with his players as described in this book.'

Bastiaan Riemersma - Assistant Coach FC Eindhoven

'This weekend I dug into your book... AMAZING! And I can certainly imagine that your book is very valuable for teacher training.'

Mariken van Roosmalen-Noppen, teacher and teacher educator

'This book is a basic document for every youth coach.'

Toon Gerbrands - Former Olympic Volleybal Coach and General Director of PSV Eindhoven

'Mauro makes scientific insights practical in a fun way.'

Art Langeler - International soccer coach, former Dutch FA

'Read, studied and highlighted it.. A book I love to delve into to develop myself.'

Dennis Reus - International soccer coach, former Ajax Amsterdam

For a fun and educational time on the sports field for as many children and their coaches as possible.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mauro van de Looij is a sport and performance psychologist. He's worked as a youth coach at PSV Eindhoven and Willem II Tilburg, he now teaches (performance)psychology at Fontys University of Applied Sciences and he coaches students, teachers, athletes, and sportscoaches. Learning and sharing insights from psychology to get the best out of himself and others is what drives him.

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Preface

I feel truly honored that I was asked to write this preface. As long as I can remember I've loved to work with other people and I am completely obsessed with soccer. You could say becoming a soccer coach is a logical consequence. On top of that I try to improve myself to become the best I can be on a daily basis. That drives stems from my passion. I am convinced that if I become the best version of me others, like my players and staff, will profit from that too. More knowledge and experience means better coaching and better craftsmanship. Especially for soccer coaches these competencies are indispensable.

I know for sure this book will bring you further as a coach. I won't say I'm a good coach myself, however I am convinced I am a better coach than I was seventeen years ago when I started my internship with PSV Eindhoven Academy. Mainly I've grown because I was open to everybody and everything to learn from according to my goal to learn. I suggest you too keep your eyes and ears open so that you can learn from the situations and people around you. Whenever I see behavior that appeals to me I try to it. Whenever I see behavior that doesn't fit me I try to pinpoint what I would different in that same situation. In both cases it's about combining the knowledge with your own ideas so you can form your own vision. That's what makes this book Mauro van de Looij wrote so valuable. He shares knowledge that helps you be at your best, especially when you add your own way to it.

Because I became a soccer coach suddenly, without experience and a very limited vision I can imagine you like this opportunity of receiving guidelines, a vision, experience and knowledge. This book will no doubt present you the greatest secrets to being a great coach. Why does one coach get the team in a flow whilst another coach struggles to create a mastery climate focused on learning? What should you definitely take into account as a coach and what do you say to your team so that every player understands what you mean? If you're eager to learn these kinds of secrets then I recommend you to quickly read on. Remember that you're halfway already if you are able to develop your own vision and can convey this to your players. It sounds easy, but it comes

down to that. The magic of forming and conveying a vision is not that easy though. I know for sure this book will take you a big step in the right direction. I wish you all the best on your route to becoming the best version of you and most of all enjoy this wonderful book!

Kind regards,

Willem Weijs

2023-2024 FC Eindhoven head coach

Former PSV Eindhoven Academy, Ajax Amsterdam Academy, NAC Breda U19, Willem II U23, RSC Anderlecht (assistant-coach)

Introduction

When I think back on our youth days on the sports field with my former teammates – I have done several sports, but in particular, I have played a lot of soccer. We become aware of how wonderful and educational that time has been for us. That is what I wish for every child and probably, maybe it is your wish too. It is my dream, and maybe yours too, that kids who do sports now, later, have fond memories of their sports experiences during their youth and have a clear idea of what football, or sports, to them are all about. Ultimately, they think back to you, the coach, with a smile. When I started my career as a coach at PSV Eindhoven, I had no experience as a soccer coach. I also had no coaching badges. Perhaps, you are a novice trainer with no experience. Are you in the same boat, like I was then? Or maybe you are already fairly experienced, but would you like a better substantiation for what you do? Any soccer coach, certainly with little or no experience, has uncertainties and questions.

What is it all about, as a coach? What do you want to achieve with your team and players?

What are the best training exercises? How to select players for a team or match? How do you ensure that your players develop and perform optimally? These questions are still relevant to me as a coach, even now when I have more experience and coaching badges. Only now do I have answers from a clear vision that I would like to share with you.

Why This Book?

In recent years, I have discovered something. As a coach, I was looking, probably just like you, for ways to make a difference for my players. I gained experience in doing training sessions and coaching during matches. In the same period, I read scientific studies, and I learned from the experiences of famous and lesser-known football players and coaches by talking to them. If it wasn't possible to talk to those men, I read their books, listened to podcasts or watched a documentary about them. That gave me a lot of new insights.

In doing so, I discovered how coaches make a difference, and It was different than I expected. Exemplary for that discovery is what I learned about Sir Alex Ferguson. He was the manager of Manchester United, one of the largest Soccer clubs in the world. In a period of around 25 years under his spell, United became national champion thirteen times, won the FA Cup five times, won the Champions League twice, and twice the world cup for club teams. How did Ferguson do that? Van Nistelrooij told me, “He (Ferguson) never talked about tactics with us (the players).”

The Other Side of Training

A good soccer coach has football know-how. He knows the tactics, has good training exercises, and is aware of the football trends. That’s how we see the coach. Just look at the coaching badges courses, at least in the Netherlands. During these courses, you learn to devise the best training exercises for every level and make match analyses and annual plans. In addition, the internet is full of websites for soccer coaches. These websites offer the best training exercises, match tactics, and the latest match analyses. That specific soccer know-how is important to a coach.

But do you make a difference for your players with that know-how? Just think back to the coaches you have had yourself. How did your favorite coach differ from others? Was it the technical knowledge, one particular exercise, or the match tactics, or was it something else?

I have discovered that for most players, their favorite coaches make the difference in another way. This concerns things such as: How does a coach react when his player makes a mistake? How does a coach motivate his players? Does the coach contribute to his players' self-belief? Does a coach show interest in the person behind the player? How does a coach, coach his players? The way the coach interacts with his players is how he makes a difference. That is how coaches differ from each other, I found. And with that, your favorite coach probably made the difference for you.

In summary: most coaches make the difference in the way they interact with their players. So did Ferguson. He was a real people manager.

“Ferguson knew perfectly how to deal with his footballers,” the Portuguese soccer player Nani tells Tribuna Expresso. “He always felt how he could best guide us professionally and humanely. Thanks to him, I have had some unique experiences. “

In this book, I want to talk about how you interact with your players, mostly children and young people. How do you respond to the motivation of your players? How do you get and keep their attention? How do you create a bond with each other and within the team? Of course, it is also about how you deliver training sessions and coach the team during the match. In short, this book is about how you can connect with your players and how you can pass your knowledge and experiences on to your players. This makes sure that they have fun playing soccer, learn and become better soccer players. In other words, this book is about how you can make a difference for your team and every single player.

Sharing Experience

I believe my experiences can help you answer these kinds of questions and to make a difference for your players. Why do I think so? Let me tell you.

From an early age, I have had a passion for Soccer and understanding and helping other people. On my thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth, I played soccer in the youth academy of FC Eindhoven. Later I went to study Child and Adolescent Psychology at the University of Utrecht. In my bachelor's research, I investigated the effectiveness of different types of compliments on the behavior of children with behavioral problems. After that, I studied Sports and Performance Psychology at the University of Amsterdam. In my master's research, I looked at the role of mindset on learning and performance within PSV Eindhoven's youth academy. In 2014, after my studies, I co-developed the PSV FUNdament program, which at the time was very innovative.

Then I started there as a youth coach. After that, I worked for Willem II's youth academy for two seasons. Again, as a coach but I was also responsible for youth scouting, talent development, and culture. In July 2020, I made a switch, and since then, I have been teaching psychology at Fontys HR and Applied Psychology. Besides teaching, I have been involved in a cool project in

which we conducted research into study success and supervision. In Soccer, I have been active at V.V. DBS Youth Under 19, have got my UEFA C and UEFA B licenses, and soccer players come to me for personal coaching.

Theory in Practice

For years, I have been able to test the scientific insights regarding learning and performance, which I gained in my studies on the soccer pitch. With experiences ranging from recreational teams to the highest youth level in the Netherlands. Because of this, I have developed a vision on education, training, and development. In addition, I bridged the gap between science and practice. On the soccer pitch, you do not always have time to think about what you say or how you behave. You do what your intuition gives you, and often that is good, but certainly not always. By acquiring knowledge, thinking about your role as a coach, and gaining experience stimulates your intuition, so that you unconsciously say and do the right things on the pitch, allowing you to connect with your players.

In This Book

In this book, we will first discuss your leadership. What is your style of leading? What does coaching entail? What do you stand for? You learn to answer these questions for yourself in chapter 1. In chapter 2, we look at managing your team and the individual player. How do you motivate your team and players? I believe in the power of intrinsic motivation. What I strive for is that players play as much as possible from their own drive, and I don't have to push them ahead. I primarily teach practical tips and tools for motivating your players. In addition, I strongly believe in mindset. How does a player view things? What is his perspective? What beliefs does he have? Which mindsets help him in the process of learning and performing, and which ones do not? How can you change those mindsets of players? See Chapter 3. You will also discover in this chapter what you and your players can best focus on. In chapter 4, I will discuss the selection of players for your team and match selection. How do most trainers do that? I will use scientific insights to answer questions such as: what is talent? Once you have the players in your club and in your team, in what kind of performance and learning culture do you want

to work with them? Making appointments with the club, your team, and their parents is central to Chapter 5.



When your ideal culture is clear, we go to the pitch. In chapter 6, I will give you direction for organizing and giving your training sessions. You get handles in the form of didactical principles, enabling your training session to run smoothly, so that you and your players learn, perform, and have fun during your sessions.

In this chapter, you will also find a number of soccer exercises that work well in my experience and underline my vision. In matches, you would like to see what you are working on during the training sessions. In Chapter 7, you get tools to help your players as well as possible to guide and coach them during matches. Chapter 8 is about putting the ideas from this book into practice. Then follows a chapter about the books and people who have inspired me. Do you need more information or training exercises? You will certainly find several concrete starting points here.

Finally, you can see which sources I used. In this book, I refer occasionally to inspiring videos. You can find the overview of all videos in this book on my website: <https://www.bauer-vandelooij.nl/bijlage-boek>.

Even after the release of this book, I will keep adding inspiring examples here.

Football Is For Everyone

For the sake of readability, I have made a choice in this book to write “he” where you could also read “she”. Because the youth players I trained are mainly boys, many examples from my own practice are about them. Also, I use a lot of male football players and coaches as an example, as many readers will know them. Unfortunately, most female top players (at the moment) are less well-known. That could give the impression that I regard soccer as a men's sport. Nothing is less true. I would urge anyone who likes it to play soccer. I am convinced that everyone - regardless of gender, age, intellect, or origin - can become a better soccer player.

Finally

The knowledge and experiences I share with you, works for me in my practice. I continuously improve my way of working through the knowledge and experiences that I keep on getting. At the same time, it remains my way, not 'thé' way. Just like you, I strive to be a good coach. There are several ways to be one. With this book, I hope to get you thinking about that. Ultimately, only you, yourself, decide what to do with the knowledge and experiences from this book.

With my examples, I could give you the idea that getting players in the first team is the sole purpose of youth soccer. That can be a goal, certainly. Ideally, at the highest level, in the national team, one of the few sports teams that can fraternize a nation in such a way. But I think another goal is as least as important. That is to develop children by playing sports, in this case by playing soccer. They learn skills while playing soccer that will help them for the rest of their lives, such as working together, pursuing goals, and persevering.

In addition, soccer or sports, in general, stimulate a fit and healthy body and friendships. The most important thing about playing soccer or exercising is having fun. Fun in football brings energy, with which future generations can be inspired.

Eindhoven, November 2023,

Mauro van de Looij

1.1 WHAT IS YOUR STYLE

“You better go under with your own vision than with the vision of another.”

-Johan Cruijff

What do Guardiola, Klopp, Hiddink, and Van Gaal have in common? They all have won a European club prize, the Champions League or its predecessor. But to what extent did they win it in the same way? Did they train, have their teams play, and guide their team and players in the same way? I have my doubts. I think they each have their own way, and several of which can lead to success or to failure. Klopp has more often not won a prize as a coach. Also, the other three coaches have had seasons without a prize or championship. They were sometimes even fired.

Scientists have written books about leadership styles and which style would be best. Partly, because of the above, I do not believe that one leadership style is best; that one strategy works for every group of players, at every club, and in every culture. I do believe in a match between the style of a coach with the player, group, and club. To have a match, it is important first that you know what your style is. What is your unique way of playing soccer, doing training sessions, managing, coaching, and dealing with people? Therefore, here are some questions to think about. What's your view on the following matters?

- What have you learned from your coaches, teachers, and coaches regarding leadership?
- What is your style of dealing with others? How do you manage others?
- What is your definition of learning? What role does motivation play in this? And talent? How do you think performance comes about?
- What kind of people inspire you and why? What do you find important in dealing with others? What do you stand for?
- What do you want to achieve with your team and players individually? What impact do you want to have on your players?
- Finally: they sometimes say a team is a reflection of the coach. What would you like to see in your team?

These questions have no right or wrong answers. Every coach has his personal way of thinking and doing. That way of thinking influences how to interact with players. What is your way?

“

**In matters of
style, swim with
the current.**

**In matters of
principle, stand
like a rock**

Thomas Jefferson



2.3 COMPETENCE

- Do You Look At What Your Players Can Do?

"I've never done it before, so I think I can do it."

-Pippi Longstocking

What answer do your players give when you ask them what they prefer to do? Chances are they will name something they are good at. You, me, your players, everyone likes to do what they do well. It feels good when things work out. It satisfies the need for competence. You feel competent when things work out, and others see it. It is much more fun to fix a tire if you actually succeed in doing so. It is much more fun to speak Spanish when you find that Spaniards can understand what you say. It's a lot more fun to keep the ball high if you can. And it's great when others confirm and acknowledge that you can do something well.

Doing what you can do well makes you feel that what you do is useful and that you contribute to something. The need for competence is the second factor leading to intrinsic motivation. Already it has been shown that competence only improves intrinsic motivation when someone feels he himself is responsible for the successful behavior. Competence must always be accompanied by a sense of autonomy. What can you, the coach, do to increase the sense of competence in your players? Focus on what your player can do, offer an appropriate challenge, and value effort and initiative.

Focus On What Your Player Can Do

Alex van Roessel, goalkeeper coach at the Willem II Soccer Academy, told me a nice anecdote about parents in today's society, "A child comes home with his school report card in his pocket. He's got one nine, three eights, two sevens, three sixes, a five, and a four. What do parents start talking about? About the four and the five. Many parents look at what a child cannot do and what is not there. The same trend is common in soccer. What do we achieve with that?"

Coaches look at what players cannot do and coach them accordingly. That is an essential part of coaching; you help your players do things they could not do at that level before, with the effect of players knowing how they can improve themselves. But, an approach focusing on everything that players cannot do, on what isn't there yet, can have detrimental effects. It can cause you to become negative towards your players, which can eventually lead to a sense of *No matter what I do, it is never good*. Many youth players of various levels and ages tell me they have experienced a coach with such an approach. It demotivated them to play football, and they had even thought about quitting. How many players have actually quit because of coaches that only focus on what is not going well, on what is not there? Fortunately, you can also choose a different approach.

It is Saturday morning, and my team is participating in a two-day tournament. Our first group match is in an hour and a half. Tournaments are a wonderful experience for players, especially when they are as young as my players were, about ten years old. In the preliminary discussion of the upcoming two days, I had the name of every player written on the coaching board. I told them they knew how we wanted to play and what kind of memory we wanted to give the audience. After all, we had trained for almost a season and already discussed what was important to us as a team. The most important thing, for now, was the coaching board.

Boys, you all know Arjen Robben, right?"

Yes, they all knew him.

"What is Robben's weapon?"

Soon they came up with the answer that Robben, as a right winger, dribbles from the right to the center so that he gets the ball in front of his left foot, which often leads to a chance or goal.

"Exactly, and I think everyone knows Robben goes from the outside to inside. His opponents are preparing for this. Their coaches probably even tell them Robben is going to do that. Despite the defenders being prepared for it, Robben succeeds almost every time. He dribbles past his opponent by coming

in, and then he scores with his left foot. He has scored many goals like that. Why is that?’

This is a more difficult and broad question for this age, yet one answers, “Because he’s super good at it.”

“Exactly! Robben is so good that he succeeds almost every time, even though everyone knows what he’s going to do. How’s his right foot? How’s his defending? Is he good at heading the ball? No, those are not his qualities, really. Robben is not good at everything. But he is super good at going inside. He has become so good that he has been playing at the highest level for years. We can learn something from that. Here you see your names on the coach-board. In a moment, you can write what you think you are really good at as a player. You write down your weapon. The goal of this tournament is that you, in the matches you play, show and practice your weapon as much as possible.”

With this goal, I put the focus on what my players felt they were good at. I didn’t look at what they couldn’t do yet, but I looked at what they could and wanted to do. A nice alternative is to let players tell each other the strengths they see in one another.

Another way to focus on what players can do is by sometimes giving players the role of coach. During the season, I repeat exercises. Plenty of players understand the exercise and therefore know what the goal is. Sometimes an exercise is not clear to others because they are from another team but are training with us, because they are on trial, or because they simply have forgotten. When players know the goal of the exercise, I hand them the opportunity to explain the exercise to the other players. Are they always complete and clear in their explanation? Certainly not, but then others or myself can add.

Okay, player X has already told two of the three rules. Who can add the last rule?

7.1 WANTING TO WIN

- The Aim Of The Game?

“Whether you win or lose, you can always grow.”

-Ali B

A few years ago, I spoke with Joshua Brenet when he was still playing in PSV 1. At the time, Brenet was the PSV player with the record of the longest run of matches being unbeaten in PSV1. PSV were champions a few times during that period in the Netherlands, so in our conversation, winning was a hot topic. He told me that with PSV, only winning matters. Yet I had a pressing question to which I couldn't predict his answer a hundred percent.

“Joshua, I want to present to you two scenarios for next season, as if we could look into the future. Scenario one is that PSV become champions. Great for the club, but you play little or nothing. Scenario two is that you play everything, you develop yourself, and therefore you might attract attention from other clubs. Only with PSV, you do not become champion, but you finish second or third. For which of the two scenarios do you choose?”

Of course, it's hypothetical, but I was very curious to what extent winning is the most important thing at the highest level in the Netherlands. What do you think he chose? What would you choose? What would your players choose?

Consequences of the Focus on Winning

Every player, every team, and every coach wants to win and wants to do a lot for that to happen. You play a game to win, that's one of the reasons why you train. But at the same time, I think almost everyone has experienced the negative sides of a focus on winning in youth can have.

Coaches from various sports at home and abroad have expressed their concerns about the focus on winning in youth divisions. The American Valerie...

Are you interested in more?

Please see:

<https://thecoachmakesthedifference.com>

or

<https://a.co/d/3MNg0Sn>

(Paperback will be available from December 18th 2023.)

For a fun and educational time on the sports field for as much children and their coaches as possible!