

Positive Self Motivation

Our family recently got a dog, and I checked out some dog training books from the library. I found the following paragraphs from the book "Don't Shoot The Dog" by animal trainer Karen Pryor possibly very useful for soccer players and coaches.

Early in the book, she describes her experience as a dolphin trainer at Sea Life Park in Hawaii:

"I had trained dogs and horses by traditional methods, but dolphins were a different proposition; you cannot use a leash or a bridle or even your fist on an animal that just swims away. Positive reinforcers - primarily a bucket of fish - were the only tools we had."

A bit later on, she tells this story:

"Positive reinforcement can even work on yourself. At a Shakespeare study group I belonged to I met a Wall Street lawyer in his late forties who was an avid squash player. The man had overheard me chatting about training, and on his way out the door afterward he remarked that he thought he would try positive reinforcement on his squash game. Instead of cursing his errors, as was his habit, he would try praising his good shots.

"Two weeks later I ran into him again. 'How's the squash game going?' I asked. A look of wonder and joy crossed his face, an expression not frequently seen on Wall Street lawyers.

"'At first I felt like a damned fool,' he told me, 'saying "Way to go, Pete, attaboy" for every good shot. Hell, when I was practicing alone, I even patted myself on the back. And then my game started to get better. I'm four rungs higher on the club ladder than I've ever been. I'm whipping people I could hardly take a point from before. And I'm having more fun. Since I'm not yelling at myself all the time, I don't finish a game feeling angry and disappointed. If I make a bad shot, never mind, good ones will come along. And I find that I really enjoy it when the other guy makes a mistake, gets mad, throws his racquet-I know it won't help his game, and I just smile....'"

I don't know what the percentage of youth soccer players is who get down on themselves when they make a mistake, but it's probably fairly high. Maybe teaching them to let the mistakes go and praise themselves for good play will help them have more fun and play better.

By kamiudeen shonowo