Technology in Youth Soccer

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When the first day of class began, I was unsure of how I would relate technology to coaching. It took me about three classes until I felt comfortable and could relate to the topics. I did not have much influence with technology in my youth sports career besides watching minimal professional footage. I also have not seen any other coaches in the field use technology before at the youth level, other than emails and some communication tools. As a college athlete the game became more in depth and we were required to watch and analyze video as a team. The question became, how could I use video analysis in youth sports? The parents on my youth team have a huge video recording rig that reaches 20 feet into the air and stares down on the field like a hawk. Usually a few of the dads on the team would congregate around the camera, taking turns maneuvering the camera to follow the flow of the game, while sharing their commentary of "Ooh's" and "Ah's" as the game went on. After the game is over, later that night, the video is uploaded to YouTube where anyone can watch the game. Now I had the resources for video at the youth level, but the question became, how could I use the video and how can we discuss certain topics with the video?

YouTube was too public of a platform for posting and did not provide a well-organized discussion and commentary space. This led me to researching different platforms that would allow my players and myself a safe space to discuss our topics. After searching YouTube clips and key words on google for "discussion platforms", I stumbled across Wix. Wix is a free website creating platform that allows anyone to choose from premade templates or create a template from scratch. Wix is a very easy "drag and drop" platform and has a host of creative tools. After messing around with the platform for three straight hours I had a website with a safe space for my players to write posts and respond to discussions. Here is a solution to the

use for the video, but more questions came to mind, how do we respond/how do we engage players to respond, how in depth should the discussion topics be, and what will the players and coach learn from the discussions?

Responding/Engaging in responses

Now that the website was ready and the videos were on YouTube all that was needed was a discussion topic. Being this was a new area for the youth level I thought it would be good to start very simple and explain how we respond to discussion topics and reply to teammates. Knowing that children already know how to use most media sites and can pick up on media use quite easily, the most urgent need was to explain how they should respond to online posts and how they should leave comments. It is easy to set up an online page for people to post what they want, but in order for the players to learn they needed to be able to post comments appropriate to the topic that would also be useful for other players and parents to view and read. In order to promote digital citizenship, I put together an email to the parents and players about what this website meant and what we would use the website for. I also described how we would respond to topics and that we should not target or be negative towards one another, as our goal is to learn from mistakes and improve our game. As Marc Prensky described in, *A Pedagogy for the New Educational Landscape*, "Respect is, of course, a key element of any teaching and learning, but it is especially important for teaching and learning via partnering" (Prensky, 2012). I reminded the players that we must respect one another's views and that we may see things differently from time to time, which is good, and provides room for more discussions and learning. The discussions and response would help frame the trainings for the

team or would make me revisit trainings and go more in depth in the explanations of the topic and why/how it relates to our game.

The trouble with the responses was that players would not post and as each topic came up there were less and less players responding. Being there is no grade and there is no requirement for them to post anything, I began to think to myself how can I engage the players in discussions? The struggle, for me, was to not make this feel like mandatory assignments and homework, as I had already heard some players mention "this feels like school now". I want the players to engage as a viewer of the game and enjoy the game as a spectator, just like they enjoy it as a player. The website was set up to mimic other media sites, like the ones players would use day to day on their own. There were areas on the discussion pages to "like", "comment", and see how many "views" their post got. This, at first, seemed to work as players would "like" some of their teammates comments and then quite quickly players quit using this feature after a couple of assignments. The next step was getting them to own the problem and encourage players to have ownership of the work. As Alan November mentioned in, *Emerging Roles within the Knowledge Community*, "Students must have a sense of owning the problem than seeing it as an assignment from the teacher" (November, 2017). I thought if I could give them ownership of the task and freedom to explore on their own, then maybe they would respond more. However, this was not the case, in one discussion, I let them choose any video from YouTube that showed their favorite team or player or goal scoring highlights, and yet still not many jumped at the topic. This worry of low responses made me question, how in depth the discussion topics should be? What will engage them in more discussion: personal reflection, group discussion, or group videos?

Depth of Discussion

As stated above, the video analysis is a new area both for the players and myself at the youth level. The areas of discussion were endless, there were so many trains of thought, from personal reflection to team reflection to group discussion and group projects. I had a new and amazing way to reach players and distribute knowledge but at the same time I did not want to overwhelm the players. Being conscious of this fact of "new technology", the conclusion I came to was that, as a group, we need to start very general with overarching team reflection. The hard part was making sure not to give direct answers and let the players have their own interpretation and ownership of the problems and solutions. Alan November brought up the point that it is "Important for students to share in identifying the problem" (November, 2017). For me, this was an important point because the players need to take responsibility and find the problem within the video themselves. In order to do this, the discussions had to be open to their own idea of the game and interpretation of the game they were watching. As a team, we have main concepts that we train but at the same point I did not want them to just utter back meaningless words out of context, like robots repeating the code they were programed to do. Instead of saying, "find moments where we did not do well in build-up", I asked them to find, "two strengths and two areas of improvement in WE". The "WE" means they had to focus on when our team had the ball, but left the discussion open to their interpretation of certain moments of the game, like defense, offense, possession, or transition.

As alluded, in the previous section, the engagement piece is the struggle and has made me re-evaluate the depth of the topics. The trouble with using this platform at a youth level is finding out how in depth the topics should go and what the players can handle. There had to be

a base understanding set in order to see what they were capable of, and now there is a need to find a way where the discussions encourage more outside engagement and responses. I came to the decision that the players will work together on a group video activity, where they come up with a soccer video and can make it about anything they want. This will hopefully make them work together on solving a problem and make them accountable by having teammates there to work with, while also giving them the freedom to create their own piece of work. Along with this I will add more personal reflection in the discussions. The players were given a sheet to write down their own strengths and areas of improvement and this may be a big motivator for some to watch the video and see how they perform, especially those players that want to continue to better themselves and reach the next level. They can reflect deeper on their individual goals and they can find out their real focus for training on their own.

Learning and Teaching Outcome

The learning outcomes for the player and the coach are to help us see the game from a different perspective, which will help us grow the depth, understanding, and knowledge of the game. There are three main learning outcomes that are intertwined together, like strands of a rope. These areas include: watch and analyze the game, reflect on the game, and create curiosity and ownership of the game. The outcome of watching and analyzing the game is done by simply watching the video we have available. Patricia G. Lange and Jessica K. Parker discussed in, *Chapter 3: Creating, Connecting, and Learning Through Video*, an interview that Patricia Lange did with her students where many students "felt they learned quite a bit by watching their own videos and recognizing mistakes and areas of technical and creative improvement" (Parker, 2010). The video analysis allows the players a chance to review the

game, rather than try and remember the moment. Many players can barely remember what happened on the field when they came off because of physical and mental fatigue, so giving them this option to review will allow them to see what their decisions were during the game. Allowing students/players the ability to self-correct themselves and reflect can provide more impact on their knowledge of any given topic.

This website gives us a safe space to reflect and analyze the game together, rather than the traditional idea of a coach telling the players everything after the game just ended, that they need to do better in certain categories, that they could have been technically better, or thought more about their tactical decisions; they can see it on the video. As Marc Prensky said, "Most students, no matter what their age or grade level, prefer to take an active role and find things out for themselves, rather than be told them by a teacher" (Prensky, 2012). This freedom of an "active role", of taking initiative and ownership, creates the curiosity to study the game. The curiosity to get better as an individual and as a team. The outcome of curiosity ties into the ownership piece and also the reflection piece, as Lange and Parker stated, "as they [students] continued to make media, many kids began to recognize areas of improvement for their work and wanted to devote more time and energy" (Parker, 2010). This continuous making, editing, and devoting of time directly relates to players watching and reflecting because they can see for themselves what they need to improve on. They can take initiative by going out and working on their own to improve their technical skills or find personal trainers who can help with areas they need improvement in. The hope is not for them to just see what happened during the game but to take initiative and responsibility for their own development and spend time on their own or with friends improving themselves.

Conclusion

This class presented a huge challenge and I could not see an end goal and direct link to coaching. I did not recognize the role technology could play in teaching my players at the youth level. However, this challenge of technology completely changed my view on its use and purpose within soccer. With this wonderful new tool, I need to make sure that I do not overwhelm and use it in the wrong way, like Beatham said in, *Tools of Inquiry,* "unless teachers clearly distinguish the nature of the subjects they teach from the tools used for its inquiry – for themselves and their students – students will not correctly learn their subjects" (Beatham, 2009). I need to continue to make clear that the videos we watch have relevance to our style and way of playing. I need to make sure that the discussions we have will continue to drive players knowledge and reflection of the game in the right way. This tool is extremely helpful, while at times unnerving because of the unknown possibilities, yet I believe this tool will help the whole team grow individually and collectively on our knowledge and depth of understanding. From the topics and videos, we will become curious and reflective people that look to discuss together the ways we progress forward as a group.

Resources

Beatham, M.D. (2009). Tools for inquiry: Separating tool and task to promote true

learning. Journal of Educational Technology, Vol. 37(1) 61-70.

Parker, J. (2010). Chapter 3: Creating, connecting, and learning through video.

Teaching tech-savvy kids: Bringing digital media into the classroom,

grades 5-12. Corwin.

November, A. (2017). Chapter 4: Emerging roles within the knowledge community.

Educational technology for School Leaders, Corwin.

Prensky, M. (2012) Chapter 1: Partnering: A Pedagogy for the New Educational

Landscape. Educational Technology for School Leaders, Corwin.