

How to handle a blowout

In a perfect world, every game would be a true “contest,” but that’s not the case. And no matter which side of a blowout you’re on, you should be prepared to handle the situation with class and dignity. Here are some simple guidelines and useful tips you can use on the field.

Who is affected? EVERYONE

The players: Whether you are coaching teens or children, the kids learn life lessons through soccer and you are a role model. Kids need to win with humility and lose with dignity. A 12-0 blowout will certainly do wonders for a winning’s team psyche, but at what cost to the kids on the losing end?



The fans: Remember that the people on your sidelines as well as the opposing sidelines could be neighbors with kids attending the same schools and parents interacting through business relationships. And grandparents, aunts, uncles and more join parents at the game to support the team. But it’s natural for our protective instincts kick in when we see our little ones being embarrassed to the point that they quit on the field. That’s when things can, and often do, get nasty among the spectators.

The coach: Unless your name is Lombardi, or they call you “Bear,” your coaching legacy will not be measured by margin of victory and championship rings. What kids will respond to, and parents will appreciate, is the outstanding example you set by showing class and sound judgment regardless of the score. Do that and you’ll always leave the field a winner. To that end, remember there’s absolutely no room on the sidelines for personal vendettas. When you run up the score, the kids are the real victims in your quest for revenge.



Why isn’t there a mercy rule in Region 678? A little history...

Region 678 once had a modified mercy rule that penalized teams in the standings for excessive scoring, rather than end the game prematurely like in youth baseball. But the end result was that when scores got lopsided, the game ceased to be soccer as the winning team was reluctant to play for fear of being penalized and that took away from any positive things the losing team did. As a result we dropped the rule and now encourage coaches to use instructive ways of dealing with a blowout while not humiliating the opponent.

When is a lead big enough?

In the past, frustrations have boiled over when coaches wait until the score is grossly lopsided before putting kids who had never scored on offense. By that point, the opposing sideline is dejected and any cheering by the winning team, however well intended, seems like rubbing it in. **As we said, there is no easy answer for when to pull back, but...**

- A THREE-GOAL lead is certainly time to start thinking about pulling back.
- A 5-0 lead is definitely a blowout in progress
- If the game is in hand, think about sitting your star(s) in the final quarter. (remember they still must play 3/4 of the game even in a blowout, so this requires you managing your rotation).
- If you are going to pull back, consider discretely letting the opposing coach know during a break in play. It can dispel any misperceptions that you are pouring it on.
- Don’t wait until after your entire front line each has scored a hat trick to make lineup changes. That is a sure recipe for trouble.

For strategies and tips for coaches turn to the next page.

How to handle a blowout: strategies and tips

For the winning coach

- Be discrete when instructing your players to back off. It doesn't help an opponent's confidence when you yell, "No shooting" or "Don't score."
- Give less experienced kids a chance to score. Even better, designate one or two as the only kids who can shoot, thus forcing your other players to work on passing.
- Move your top players to defense or even the bench.
- Play a "Passing Game." Make your players connect on a set number of 3 to 5 passes (depending on age) before they can shoot. If a pass gets intercepted, the count starts over. You can increase the degree of difficulty as needed.
- Have kids only shoot with their opposite foot. This will encourage skill development.
- Go to a "Pack-it-in defense with each defender player having at least one foot in the penalty area at all times, thus allowing your opponent to penetrate deeper into the attacking third of the field and challenging your kids to clear the ball effectively.
- For non-competitive divisions, get an agreement with the opposing coach to add a player to the team that is losing to make the game more competitive. No one is keeping score, right? If the game is out of hand both teams can benefit from a more competitive game.

For the losing coach

- There is no better time to be 100 percent positive, during AND after the game. Don't let your kids get their heads down
- If you consider the game out of reach, you may want to discretely let the opposing coach know, so he can make adjustments and pull back.
- If the winning coach has pulled back, or sat his key players, you may want to reciprocate. What better time to let players learn and enjoy positions they might not otherwise get to play in a more competitive contest?
- Watch your kids for growing frustration and hard play. Don't let them adopt an attitude of "We may lose the game, but we're going to win the war."
- Let the game end on time. Don't ask for injury time.

For both coaches – final thoughts

Manage your sidelines — Fans on the winning side may think they are just "cheering their kids on" but to the opposite sideline it can appear to be taunting. Conversely, parents on the losing side may let their frustrations get the better of them and have a slip of the tongue. You need to be mindful and manage your sidelines accordingly all the way through the handshake and leaving the field — regardless of what side of the score you are on.

The bottom line is a positive experience for the kids — win or lose!

If you have any ideas to add to this document, please contact the Regional Coach Administrator at coach@ayso678.org or the Assistant Regional Commissioner-Competitive at arcompetitive@ayso678.org.

