

FOOTBALL COACHING PHILOSOPHY

ERIC R. RICE

“If you believe in yourself and have the courage, the determination, the dedication, the competitive drive and if you are willing to sacrifice the little things in life and pay the price for the things that are worthwhile, it can be done.”

--Vince Lombardi

Eric R. Rice
Coaching Philosophy

Football is a game that has intrigued me ever since I was a little boy. I have always loved the game of football, and probably always will. This game has been very good to me. It helped me earn a scholarship, so that it was possible for me to attend college. It has helped provide for me financially, as it has provided me a career aside from teaching. **I feel very passionately about football** because not only is it a great game where you learn a lot about yourself and your potential, but the game also teaches you a lot about life. It is a game where you must learn to interact and cooperate with others in order to achieve success on and off the field. I could go on and on about this wonderful game, but I will stop and present my philosophy on coaching this game.

There are several points that I think are critical to stress in order to be a successful coach, to have a successful team, and to build outstanding young men in the process. First and foremost, I believe that in order to be successful I have to lead by the example I set forth for the young men that I am coaching. Next, I have to be extremely organized in every single thing that I do. There can be no success without organization. I believe you need to be disciplined and dedicated. A major duty of a head coach these days revolves around building the character of the young men who play for me and then making positive connections with the players and parents alike. I need to have goals and have a plan of how to achieve them. I need to be positive and upbeat. Fundamentals must be taught at all times, and when coaching during a game, I believe we need to attack and be aggressive. Finally, I have to work as hard as I possibly can, and so must our players and staff, if success is to be achieved. I will now explain all of these points in greater detail.

Lead by Example

I am, and always will be, a believer that the best way to achieve success when you are coaching is to lead by the example you set for your players. This is especially when you are coaching very impressionable high school athletes. When you are a head coach, the players that are playing for you always have, and always will, look to the head coach for leadership. It is my opinion through long experience from both coaching and playing, that if the head coach does not provide leadership through a positive example he sets, then the players will never respect the head coach. They will never really give the coach, their teammates, or the program in general their best effort. I never want my athletes to be able to say that Coach Rice says to do this, but he does not do it himself. Not only do I expect myself to set a good example, but I expect all of the assistant coaches to do so as well. The one thing that I always remind my assistant coaches, my players, and myself is the fact that athletes, and football players especially, are always in the spotlight of a school whether the season is going well or not. You are constantly going to be under the scrutiny of those around you in a school or out in the community. Therefore, it is vitally important for me to set a good example, first, so that the other coaches and players will follow my lead and set a good example for all those they come into contact with, either on the team, in the school, or out in public. One of many quotes that I love to use from Vince Lombardi, and one that I firmly believe in is, **“Leadership is based on a spiritual quality; the power to inspire, the power to inspire others to follow.”**

Organization

I believe that organization is a huge key to being successful. Every single aspect of my program will be run in an extremely organized manner. Coaches will meet on Saturday or Sunday to plan and prepare for the upcoming week of practice, and to plan an offensive and defensive strategy for each game. Coaches will also meet at the completion of each practice to discuss how the day went and to adjust the schedule for the following week, if necessary. Position coaches will meet with players in their position group once or twice a week to study the upcoming opponent. The off-season workouts will be organized and planned out with team and individual player goals in mind. Fundraising events, meetings, and anything that parents help with

the program, will also be organized and planned out far ahead of time so they can run smoothly and successfully. All other details will be highly organized.

The equipment room will be extremely organized and clean at all times. Also, every piece of equipment that is issued to a player will be documented and signed out for by each player at the beginning of each season. We will expect the players to be accountable for their own equipment at all times in hope that they will learn the responsibility of taking care of the expensive football gear that has been issued to them. The locker room and weight room areas will be organized and clean, and the coaches and players will learn to work together to make sure that these things are taken care of. My belief is that if you leave things unorganized, trashed out, and dirty, this demonstrates a severe lack of institutional pride. A lack of pride or respect for the school will not be tolerated at any time. This takes me into my next point, which is to be disciplined and dedicated.

Be Disciplined and Dedicated

From my experience coaching, I believe that the most important component to any team, both on and off the field, is great discipline. A lack of discipline will never be tolerated on my team. I have one simple rule that my team will follow, and that is, “**Do What is Right.**” That statement, applied to life and football, will lead a person to become a disciplined football player, and more importantly, a disciplined person off the field. It is very important to me as a coach that I am guiding young men to be good people as well as good football players. One thing that I always stress to my players is that being part of a football team is a privilege, not a right. Discipline on my team will be strictly enforced, or the players’ privilege of being on the team will be taken away. I always want my players to conduct themselves with class and integrity either on, or off, the football field. If I am guiding young men to lead disciplined lives, and to be disciplined football players, then they will conduct themselves with class and integrity on and off the field. When you have a team of disciplined young men, then this will lead them to be tremendously dedicated to their school and to their team. Dedication is a must if you want to have a successful program. You have to dedicate yourself and be passionate about football if you want to be successful and have fulfillment from this game. Dedication to becoming a great student-athlete leads to institutional pride, which is extremely important in my program. If the players feel pride in themselves, their team, and the school they attend, then our chances of being a successful team are always going to be better. In summary, discipline leads to dedication which in turn leads to institutional pride, which will help us in becoming a great football team and will also build good young men who present themselves with class and integrity in their everyday lives. Discipline and dedication are two of the main things I will stress when coaching young men.

Build Character and Make Connections

As I mentioned before, it is vitally important that our young men do what’s right in this program. Above and beyond anything that I expect from my young men that play for me is for them **to be a good person** first and foremost. My players will hear me tell them this over and over throughout the four years that they play football for me. It is far more important to me that my players are good people before we ever worry about how good of an athlete that young man is or can become! Being **a good person** is why I firmly believe that building character day in and day out is an important part of my job. I hope that what I do extends beyond just making my athletes competitive football players; I hope that I am making them strong young men and valuable members of society. It is important that every day we have some discussion to how what we are doing on the field is vital to building character. I want to instill these men with values that will last them a lifetime. Often, some of the best lessons they can take from the playing field—either in victory or defeat—are lessons that they can apply to their life outside of sports.

In addition to discussing character and applying life lessons, I believe in doing things to better the community. Community service is a great way for these young men to give back to the community and find joy in helping others. It is a way for them to realize how blessed they are in many ways by helping others who are often less fortunate. I know that these community service opportunities are incredibly enriching experiences for these young men, and I believe that working together as a team only fosters deeper

relationships between players and with coaches. So, when community service opportunities present themselves, we will find ways as a football team to help out others as a good person is expected to do.

I also firmly believe that is very important to make connections with your players at a personal level. Now, there still has to be a distinct line of a coach/player relationship. I cannot be a player's friend, but the players do need to know that myself and all of the coaches on my staff care about them as people. I also believe it is necessary to reach out and try to make connections with the parent group, as well. This means regular attendance at all booster meeting and functions and being punctual when it comes to responding to phone calls and e-mails of concerns that parents might have. Now, athletes today want to know that their coach cares about them in their personal/academic and athletic life, and I want to try to do that at some level with all of the players on my team. It takes a coach being open and honest with communication and trying as hard as possible to be easily approachable so that players and parents know that they can come to me with any problem or difference in opinion to be able to discuss things and try to reach solutions together.

Have Goals

As a coach, I believe that it is vital to the success of your program to have goals, and to set out a plan of how to achieve them. As head coach, I have to have personal goals for myself as a coach, and as an educator of your young men. I will never decide what our team goals are alone. My staff will always be involved in helping me to decide these goals, because I believe that I can never be a great head coach without the help and support of the people working with me. I also believe that team goals should be set with players' opinions and input in consideration, as well as the coaches. I believe goals should be challenging, but not completely unattainable. Whatever the team goals are, they will be posted in locker rooms, weight rooms, training rooms, and anywhere else that players frequent. If you don't constantly see your goals, and are if you aren't constantly being reminded of them, then it becomes easy to forget what your goals are and makes it easy to quit working towards those goals.

At the completion of each season, we try to meet with every single player individually to allow the players to talk to me about how they think the season went. I will also give them an opportunity to express to me things they think I can do better to help them, and the team, become more successful. During this meeting, the player and I will fill out a goal sheet. The student-athlete at that time will set goals for school, life, physical fitness, and football. The student-athlete will keep a copy and I will keep one, as well. Every so often, I will have my student-athletes come in and meet with me, and at that time we will review their goals to keep them fresh in the boys' minds of what they are working towards, and if they are working hard enough to accomplish their goals. Another reason for me to keep a copy of their goals is that when I, or any of the other coaches, have to discipline any of the players, we can pull out their goal sheet and go over it again with them. At that point in time, when one of the players has gotten into trouble, showing them their goal sheet will help them see they are keeping themselves from accomplishing their goals.

Be Positive and Upbeat

I think it is vital to the success of a program for the coaching staff to be positive and upbeat with the players. Nobody likes constant negativity. I believe that the team will play their hearts out for coaches that they respect and admire. We cannot expect the team to respect or admire the coaching staff, when it is a staff full of bad attitudes and negative personalities. One of the things I always try to keep in mind when I am coaching is how important it is to over- accentuate the good things that the boys do on or off the field. When they do something that is really awesome in life or in football, I will make a big deal out of it to the entire team. This way, the entire team will see the individual being praised and acknowledged for his accomplishment. We all know that everybody wants to be praised and acknowledged for the good things that they do, especially in front of a group of their peers. Hopefully by over-accentuating the positive things that a player does, it will inspire all of the others on the team to strive for the same kind of accomplishment.

Now, we all know that coaches cannot be happy all the time. There will be times when we are disappointed in what one of the players has done either on or off the field. As far as football is concerned, what I try to do is tell a player something they have done correctly before I go into what they have done

incorrectly. Then, put that player back into the practice or game very soon after the mistake to give them another chance to do their job and to correct their mistake. I never want a coach to pull a player out of a game, or practice, when they have made a mistake and not talk to them about what they did wrong and how to improve their performance. It is not fair to the player and will eventually lead to the player resenting the coach and not wanting to play for him. If that happens, we will have players that have negative attitudes, and all it takes is one negative attitude to bring the entire team down. I believe the appropriate quote is, "it only takes one bad apple to spoil the bunch." This is why I try to be positive and upbeat and will expect the same from assistant coaches and players, too. One final thing I would like to comment on about attitude is that bad attitudes won't be tolerated. They bring everybody down. I want our kids to be excited and confident about being student/athletes in their school, but at the same time to be humble. I cannot stand cocky football players who present themselves like they can do no wrong, and neither can society. This is why I will always teach my team to be positive and upbeat and that it is okay to be confident in their abilities, but to stay humble at the same time. So, to review, it is important for me to be a positive and upbeat coach, as well as all of my assistants. I want my players to feel good about themselves through encouragement and positive feedback from the coaching staff.

Teach Fundamentals

It is my belief, after coaching for many different teams at many different levels, that there is nothing more important to teach on the field of play than the individual position fundamentals. If the boys on the team cannot perform their fundamentals and techniques correctly, then they cannot function within any offensive or defensive scheme that you are trying to install. This has never been more apparent to me than in my first year as Defensive Coordinator at Green Mountain High School. Going into the playoffs that year, we as a coaching staff, decided to keep teaching fundamentals rather than cut practices short and simply focus on team strategies. The result was one of the most dominating state title runs in the history of high school football in Colorado. The difference in games was clear that our boys were far more fundamentally sound than their opponents and the results spoke for themselves. When you get right down to the guts of football, it is blocking, tackling, running, throwing, and catching. Those are the basics of football, and if players cannot perform these fundamental tasks then who really cares what your scheme is because it will be ineffective.

Teaching fundamentals was once again proved to me to be the most important thing to emphasize when coaching. As Defensive Coordinator at New Mexico Highlands University, I was foolish and assumed that because the boys we were coaching were college level that we could get away with teaching fewer fundamentals and focus more on defensive schemes. I learned a valuable lesson during that season. We were never good enough fundamentally and we could never execute our defensive schemes properly, and therefore, we lost games often by lopsided scores. I learned that teaching the basic fundamentals of football are by far the most important thing to emphasize when coaching football. Coaching is a continuous learning experience. Thinking that I know everything that there is to know will never be the way that I coach. I always want to improve myself as a person and as a coach. I always want to have the ability to learn from my successes and failures, and apply them to my life and to my coaching. The ability to adapt to new ways of doing this is critical. Being open minded to new techniques and to input from your assistants on your staff is vital to the success of a program. I definitely want to achieve success, and this is why I will always try to learn as much as I can as a coach, and apply it by teaching my athletes what I have learned.

Attack and Be Aggressive

To get detailed about game planning and coaching during practices and during games, my plan will always be to attack and be aggressive. I do not want to sit back and hope that victories will come to my team. My approach will be to go out and get victories. As a coach, you have to be willing to take some chances during the course of a game. It is far better, in my opinion, to lose by attacking teams with everything you've got, rather than to sit back and let losses happen because you have only been running your most basic stuff down after down. Now, you can run your base offensive or defensive package, but I believe

you have to coach the boys to be aggressive and attack while running basic offenses/defenses. Aggressiveness, to me, means sprinting as hard as you can on each play, firing off the snap of the ball as hard as you can, and finally, hitting harder than your opponent on every play. Let's face it, football is a contact sport where the more physically dominant team usually wins the game. Now, I do not want to confuse the issue here. I strongly believe that you can be a physically dominant team that hits hard all the time. I also very strongly believe that you can accomplish this and still be a classy team. I do not approve of, or ever will tolerate, cheap shots, trash talking, or dirty play of any kind. Play the game from the start of the play to the whistle that ends the play, and do it with class, poise, and composure every single time.

Hard Work

Hard work in my program will be mandatory for everyone involved. It starts with me, my assistants, and finally, the players. Getting the players to work hard requires a great example from the head coach and from the assistants as well. There is a saying that I like to use, and I very much believe to be true, and it is, **“You can't get much done in life if you only work on the days that you feel good.”** Hard work requires you to get things done and push on when you don't always feel like it. I have always been a big believer in working hard for things that you want. That is why young men that work hard, and invest their time and effort into bettering themselves as football players, will always be rewarded on any team that I coach. For example, if I have two players, one who is a naturally gifted athlete, but doesn't really work very hard to better himself or the team, and the second player who may not be as gifted as the other player, but works himself as hard as he possibly can, then if the two are even remotely close in level of performance, I will always play, and most likely start, the player who works the hardest. The reason for this is simple. If you work really hard at football by practicing intensely every day and work hard by running and lifting beyond the normal class time in the off-season, then you have invested a lot of your personal time and therefore are going to really care about the way you perform and will probably have incredible team loyalty and pride. This is the type of player I want on the field for me because it is so very true what Vince Lombardi said many years ago, **“The harder you work at something, the harder it is to surrender.”**

Now, I want it to be known that not only do I expect hard work from the boys on the field, and in the weight room, but also in the classroom. I have said it before, and I will say it again, football teaches you lessons in how to live your day-to-day life. I believe that if I can set a good example, and work hard, and then get my players to work hard, that it will become a character trait they will possess for the rest of their lives. If I can get young men to work hard on the field, then I expect and demand it to transcend to their academic performance as well. There is so much more I could say about hard work, but I think it is best left said that I will work hard first, and will expect and demand the young men that are on the team to work hard at everything they do, as well.

Vision for the program/Development of players

Developing players is something that begins early in my program. Sometimes I am blessed to welcome freshmen athletes who have grown up playing football, but other times I am tasked with teaching beginning players who have never played the game. Whether the athlete is new to football or not, my belief in developing players is consistent: teach them fundamentals, guide them in becoming team players, and model for them how to carry themselves on and off the football field.

At the freshman level, I believe that it is important to spend a lot of time focusing on the fundamentals of the game. This is also the opportunity to install our offensive and defensive schemes so that all levels are using the same terminology and play calling. This will help build a foundation for our entire football program. While I find value in the freshmen level football, and the bonds that develop between these players when they first begin, I also believe that the players need to be promoted if the talent and maturity is evident. If an athlete demonstrates that he can handle the rigors of JV/Varsity football, I am a firm believer in having that athlete play at that level. I know that the freshmen year can be filled with challenges as these players are learning a new system. While we want all of our levels to bring home victories, I use this year as a chance to remind players that even in defeat, if they have tried their best, then

they are winners. I also instill in them that this is a time to develop as players, and that overcoming adversity (losses) can be a valuable tool as they grow into young men.

I believe that the junior varsity athletes play a significant role in our program. They not only continue to develop their skills/fundamentals, but they also help as scout team players to prepare our varsity for upcoming games. My vision for this level is for them to continue to mature as players, to grow more comfortable in my system, to experience victory on the field, and to handle challenges with poise and maturity. I have witnessed some of the most growth in players in their time playing JV football.

I have high expectations for my varsity players. Any coach has the expectation to win football games, and I am no exception. My motto is “Work hard, THEN expect to win!” and we live by this motto at all levels. This is especially true for the varsity players. We will work hard at all times—in the weight room, on the field conditioning, when we practice, and when we play. This commitment extends throughout the year—I want my players to play multiple sports and to be ready to put in the work for football in the off-season. I believe that producing a winning team takes a lot of effort from everyone involved. The best way to achieve success is through a strong weight lifting program, athletes who are conditioned and prepared for the rigors of the season, time spent learning and watching film, and practices that demand intensity from all players/coaches. When these pieces come together, what we produce on the field is something we can be proud of at the end of the season.

Practices are by far the most important time for me to prepare my teams to be successful. I have found, over the years, that there are many elements of practice that will help me get the best out of my players. I always remind them that you play the way you practice—so if they are not willing to give a strong effort on a daily basis, then they won’t earn the victories on Friday nights. My practices incorporate a lot of competition (team periods where we put the best offense against the best defense, individual periods where we can match-up players—for instance, the top wide receiver versus our top defensive back, the Oklahoma drill, etc). These are all ways that I can get my athletes to practice with intensity since all of the players want to compete as much as possible. I have my teams compete in intersquad situational scrimmages, where my freshmen team plays against my junior varsity and the varsity is split into two teams. Often, I tie rewards to winning the various competitions (less conditioning at the end of practice). This serves as a great motivator for them as they play. Surprisingly, more often than not, all players (winners included) end up conditioning together at the end because they are a family. The “winners” won’t allow their “brothers” to complete that conditioning without everyone lined up side by side. This family atmosphere has been one of the main reasons my teams have been successful—they fight hard for one another.

Our preparation means that when those lights shine down on the field each Friday night, I am confident in the team that runs out of the locker room. I know that they are willing to go All Out Every Play (A.O.E.P.) because it is how they practice. They are willing to do their job each play because they know that is the expectation. They are willing to fight through fatigue and adversity because they know that is what is expected of them by their coaches and their teammates. They also know that if they give their best effort in everything they do, then no matter what the scoreboard says, they are winners in my book. In game situations, my players know that they play whistle to whistle, they play hard at all times, they handle themselves in the right away, and they are respectful to their opponents.

Academics

I think that one final thing that I need to add is how much I stress the importance of success in the classroom. The importance of academics will constantly be stressed to every player in my program. They are in school to earn a diploma and to get an education that will prepare them for life. One thing that I always tell my players is that you cannot be successful on the football field, and not be successful in the classroom. If you give me great effort and total concentration out on the football field, I expect nothing less than the same in the classroom. In fact, I expect a better effort in the classroom than the effort you give out on the field. I want my players to set a good example at all times. I believe that when the boys are not paying attention in class, goofing off, not turning in assignments, and disrespecting any teacher, then that is a reflection of what kind of job I am doing with my players. I obviously have not let them know how important and vital their academic success is to themselves and to our program. I get very embarrassed and

angry with myself, and our players, when any teacher comes to me complaining of football players that are discipline problems in their classroom. I believe in implementing study tip packets for players that are having difficulties, and even holding study table sessions at the school if I think that our team needs that kind of discipline with their schoolwork.

We will have a tougher than CHSAA ‘Grades to Play’ policy in our program here. Players will not be permitted to play in games with D’s or F’s for the most part. Obviously certain extenuating circumstances sometimes apply in each different student/athletes case and therefore each student/athlete will be handled on a case by case basis in regards to this grades policy. During the season and even in the off-season, I will always monitor the progress of my players to see how they are doing in their classes and to check their attendance to see if they are showing up regularly and on time to their classes. This provides me with an opportunity to talk to the athletes if I notice their grades are slipping or they are missing classes. My players will always know that I am aware of how they are doing—it serves as extra motivation to do well in the classroom.

My point is that I will do whatever it takes to make sure that my players are achieving academic success because I believe that there can be very little success on the football field without success in the classroom first. One final thing that I plan to stress with my players is how the NCAA Clearinghouse works, and what the requirements are that they must meet for those players of mine who have an interest in playing sports at the collegiate level. So many boys do not know that their core GPA is what is important, and that colleges do not care that you aced P.E. class four years in a row. To prevent myself from being long winded, I will close this topic by saying that I take academics very seriously, and want my players to know that if they do not take their classes seriously that there will be no place for them to be a starting football player at any level in our program.

Summary

To summarize all the topics that I have discussed in my philosophy on coaching, I think it is fair to say that I am a hard working, dedicated, and goal-oriented coach. I believe in being organized and disciplined when coaching. I believe in teaching fundamentals, and, on game days, attacking and being aggressive. I am very passionate about football. It is the game that I have grown up with, and love, and have chosen it to be my profession (along with teaching) in life. I think it is important for people to know that I do not coach only for selfish reasons. I always have the best interests of my players in mind. I coach so that other young men can have a great and positive experience with football, just as I have had. I truly enjoy seeing young men become successful people and athletes through the things that I have taught, and tried to instill in them. This is where the true joy of coaching is for me. Seeing the success of the young men that I have taught, and watching those young men go on to become great at whatever endeavors they choose to involve themselves with later on in life. In closing, I like to use one more quote from Lombardi, another one that I believe in and think is a good description of what it takes to be a winner in life: **“Success is like anything worthwhile. It has a price. You have to pay the price to win and you have to pay the price to get to the point where success is possible. Most important you must pay the price to stay there.”**