7 Manager

Background

Managers often communicate in very different ways, depending on the circumstances. With the media, they have to explain their decisions and defend themselves and their team selection and tactics. Many of the best managers are quite guarded when they speak to the media. They try not to be too expressive and they try to stay calm.

When managers speak to their players, they are very expressive, they are not calm and they speak almost exclusively using imperatives: Pass the ball, get over here, shoot! etc.

The job of a modern manager is a very difficult one. For example, if a manager signs an expensive player that doesn’t perform well, he can be sacked, or if his team lose a few games, he can also be sacked. However, perhaps the greatest challenge facing modern managers is controlling a dressing room full of young confident professional footballers, some of whom have very large egos.

When we watch a game on television, we often see shots of the substitutes’ bench. Sometimes the substitutes look unhappy to be there and it’s safe to assume that all of the substitutes would rather be in the starting line-up. But what we don’t see are the meetings between the unhappy player and the manager or the phone calls from an unhappy player’s agent to the manager, or the phone calls from an unhappy player’s agent to another club to come and rescue his player. All of this puts more pressure on the manager, making a difficult job even more difficult. Players are often selfish. They want to play every game. The manager, as well as coaching the team, buying and selling players, speaking to the media, watching opposition teams play, and coping with the pressure of results, must also perform the delicate art of keeping players feeling motivated and valued in order to maintain a happy dressing room.

Jargon buster

bend v to strike the ball with the outside of your foot, in such a way that it changes its trajectory in mid-air. This technique is normally reserved for free-kicks; a famous example is Roberto Carlos’s phenomenal goal for Brazil against France in 1997
chip n a technique in which you get your foot under the ball whilst leaning forward when you kick it; players often try this when they spot the goalkeeper off his line, and try to measure the height of the ball so that it drops over the keeper’s head and into the net (also n)

curl n another technique aimed at changing the direction of the ball in mid-air; it involves striking the ball with the inside of the foot; David Beckham perfected this technique, famously scoring for England against Greece in 2001 by curling the ball over the wall and into the top left-hand corner from 30 yards to ensure England’s World Cup qualification; you can also use this technique to achieve in-swinging corners

Don’t lose your man! n coaching instruction which means that a defensive player mustn’t allow the opponent he is marking enough space and time to rid himself of his marker

Hit the target! n coaching instruction which implores an attacking player not to waste a shooting opportunity; ideally, the attacking player has either to score, or at least force a save

lob n to strike the ball whilst it is in the air, often by side-footing it, usually with the aim of sending it over the head of the keeper and into the net

make a substitution n to replace a player on the pitch by taking him off, and sending on one of the players on the bench, so that the number of players on the pitch remains unaltered; players who rarely start a game, but who are brought on to make an impact, often by scoring a late goal, are commonly referred to as super subs; Ole Gunnar Solskjær famously fulfilled the super sub role at Manchester United, and when he came on late in the 1999 Champions League Final, he managed to score the last-minute winning goal

man-management n ability to keep individual players happy within the group. It often involves making players feel wanted and valued, even when they are not selected to start games; such players need to feel confident, and integral to the collective, as they might be called upon to play at any time

promotion n when a team win a league, they are usually promoted to the next highest division the following season; in many leagues, the second and third teams are also promoted, or have the chance to gain promotion through play-off matches

protect a lead n to make a tactical change, normally by introducing an extra defender, especially when a team are winning in the final stages of the game, in order to defend an advantageous score-line to the end of the match

relegation n often when a team finish in the bottom three places in a league, they are automatically relegated to the next lowest division the following season; teams therefore fight to secure enough points to avoid slipping into the relegation zone

sign a player n to recruit a new player to the club by offering him a contract
**squad rotation** *n* managers who have enough players in the squad to do this, sometimes change the personnel in the starting eleven between games, so as to rest players, or increase competition for places; this is particularly common with big clubs who are involved in different competitions at the same time.

**Stay onside!** coaching instruction which implores an attacking player to stay onside in accordance with the rules of the game; the offside rule is highly polemical, and is possibly the most mystifying law of football to people who are not football fans; essentially, it means that an attacking player must not stray into a more advanced position than the last defender at the time the ball is struck by a team-mate; thus, he is offside when he is nearer to his opponent’s goal than both the ball and the last defender (though not the goalkeeper).

**Activity assistant**

1) Tell the students to imagine that they are managers. Ask them what they would say to a striker that had no confidence. Encourage the students to use imperatives.

2) Ask the students what they are going to do when they leave school. Ask them to write five sentences, using going to.

3) Ask the students to list what they think are the most important aspects of a manager’s job. Ask them to explain their answers and discuss them with the group.

4) Tell the students to imagine that they are going to become managers of their favourite teams next season. Ask them what they are going to do to improve the team. Ask them to write five sentences using going to.

5) Ask the students what attributes are necessary in successful managers.