**Coin Toss**

The officials and the team captains always administer the coin toss, without coaches present, so the coaching staff must educate the captains about the proper choices for each game and appropriate behavior. The greeting handshake during the coin toss is the beginning of displaying good sportsmanship and is mandatory. Obviously, the four possible choices at the beginning of the game are to kick, to receive, to choose a goal to defend or to defer the option to the second half. Although the team that wins the toss usually chooses the defer option, some teams prefer to start the game with the ball. Other teams place a priority on having the wind or the sun at their backs if those conditions are significant. Regardless of your preference, one option that your captains should never choose is to kick. Your team may end up kicking because of your choice to defend a certain goal, but if you just choose to kick, you have gained absolutely nothing. Instruct your captains at the beginning of the season never to choose the option to kick at the coin toss. The list of instructions to the captains can be cumbersome, especially if you decide, for example, that you would like to defend a certain goal because of the wind. Some coaches have a lengthy meeting with their captains to rehearse all possible options. One simple and easy method of instructing the captains for the coin toss is to give them a list of the top three priorities. So, if you tell your captains, “Defer, ball, scoreboard,” they will know that the first choice is to defer. If that’s not available they will take the ball, and if the other team takes the ball they will defend the scoreboard. The list can change each week, and it might include just two words if you want the ball or the wind whether you win the toss or not. In any event, this simple priority system takes the uncertainty out of the coin toss.

**After the Game**

When the game is over, the coaches and players should meet in the middle of the field and shake hands. When the teams meet at the center of the field, the players’ actions will reflect the training, or lack thereof, that you have given them about this ceremony. Long before this moment, preferably at the beginning of the season before the first game, you should address this situation to the players. A simple formula for the handshake is to be brief and, in defeat, to extend congratulations and quickly move on. Any further comments could be perceived as either provocative or patronizing. After the handshake ceremony, you must always meet with your team, either on the field if you can cordon off an area, or in the locker room. At this time, you must address the team, regardless of the outcome. Remember to take a deep breath, think before you speak and be careful and understated whatever your emotional condition. In defeat, console the team and praise their effort without indicating that you are satisfied with the outcome. Find positives to build on and move forward to the next opponent. In victory, let the team know that you are happy but follow up by pointing out any areas where they need to improve. Refer to the game plan and reinforce how a productive week of practice prepared them for their performance. You can allow players to speak to the team at the postgame meeting, and they often provide the most poignant messages. At the beginning of the year, you must set up a team policy that players’ comments must be positive and sincere. Players should keep their comments brief, compliment teammates who played hard and well, and try to motivate the team for the next game. When the player meeting ends, you and certain players may have to meet with the media. Again, you must train the players before the season starts about how to handle interviews. They must be complimentary of their teammates and their opponents, and avoid making excuses or commenting about the officials. They should be polite, brief and positive about future games but not overconfident. They should answer only the specific questions that are asked, and they should not provide extraneous information. They should also decline to comment about injuries, player dissension, coaching decisions and playing time. As the head coach, you should again take a deep breath and slow the racing tempo of your thoughts before beginning to answer questions. Many of the instructions for the players apply to you as well, but the media will ask you about your team. In victory, give your players the credit. Talk about how hard they practiced, how well they executed, how they battled back and so on. In defeat, deflect the blame from your players by talking about how well the opponent played and possibly referring to what the coaching staff might have done to change the outcome. At all costs, avoid two common pitfalls of the postgame interview—first, the comment that “our team didn’t show up today” or “we didn’t come to play,” and, second, the comment that “the players just didn’t execute today.” Both comments blame the players for the loss; either they lacked motivation or they played poorly. But it is your job to motivate the players and teach them the skills of the game. If the players aren’t motivated, you have to do a better job of motivating; if the players aren’t executing, you have to do a better job of teaching. We can’t separate ourselves from our teams, even when we are tempted to do so after a heartbreaking loss. We are in this game together, all the time, especially in the postgame crucible. Finally, the postgame media session ends, but you have one final, important task. You make your trip to the locker room and spend time with the players who just gave everything they had to try to win the game. If the game went in your favor, tell them how proud you are and how happy you are for them. If the game ended in a loss, tell them how proud you are and how much you appreciated their effort. Your players will vividly remember these postgame moments. They will never forget that you coached them in life as much as you did in football.