

Youth Coaches Learn Positive Coaching Techniques

By George Wessberg

The Athletic Committee sponsored a Positive Coaching Workshop in the Board Room on November 19th for all youth coaches. PCA trainer, Robert Baarts from Beaverton, OR, conducted the two-hour session. Rob, currently on staff at the University of Portland, is a former professional soccer player.

The Positive Coaching Alliance, based in Stanford, CA, evolved from studies of attrition in youth sports conducted by researchers at Stanford University. By applying the PCA philosophy at the collegiate level, Stanford University has won the Director's Cup the past eight years. This prestigious award is voted by the Athletic Directors at all major universities across the nation.

Rob Baarts stressed the importance of PCA training when he said, "The youth sports experience provides opportunities for children to learn important lessons about determination, commitment, hard work, teamwork, and empathy while acquiring increased self-confidence and positive character traits."

Unfortunately, statistics reveal that 70 percent of Hawaii's youth athletes drop out of sports by the time they turn 13 years old because of negative coaching experiences.

According to officials from the Positive Coaching Alliance, "Youth coaches are untrained in and unfamiliar with principles of effective motivation and age-appropriate teaching strategies. There is no room in youth sports for a win-at-all-costs mentality."

Research has shown that positive coaching can increase an athlete's self-esteem and self-confidence, which results in more enjoyment from participating, which causes a child to be more likely to continue playing a sport.

More than 25 coaches from our Canoe Racing, Volleyball and Surfing programs attended the workshop. Jaren Hancock and John Marshall, youth paddling coaches and members of the Board of Directors also attended.

Rob impressed upon the coaches that Positive Coaching is "not soft and easy" or merely "happy talk", but a concerted effort to develop high standards for athletes. The consequence of implementing Positive Coaching is individual growth in every athlete and personal fulfillment for the coach. The goal of "attaining mastery" instead of "winning at all costs" eventually leads the team to higher performance in the sport.

The PCA philosophy embodies three fundamental principles:

- Honoring the Game
- Defining a Winner
- Filling the Emotional Tank

Rob concluded the workshop by saying, "Support by the leadership of the organization is essential to the implementation of the Positive Coaching principles. The development of an appropriate "culture" and "elimination of impediments" will allow the "positive coaching epidemic" to spread throughout the organization and infect every coach, parent and athlete."

Siana Hunt, a youth paddling coach said, "We will definitely implement the PCA techniques into our girls paddling program next season. Our parent's orientation meeting at the beginning of the season will clearly define our expectations and our goals for the kids."

Terri Needels, Chair of Surfing and coach said, "My psychology background helps me appreciate the significant benefits of positive coaching on our kids."

Keoni Kino, Head Coach of the Canoe Racing Youth Division said, "I liked the emphasis on organization of practices, the communication techniques, and the involvement of parents to clarify



Mike Town leads discussion at Positive Coaching Workshop.

expectations. I also liked the attitude that coaches are responsible to help every kid improve instead of just thinking about winning races."

Mike Town, youth paddling coach said, "Using athletics to teach kids the skills they will need to succeed in life truly resonated with me. Anyone who plans to coach would benefit from the workshop."


Jimmy Austin, waterman and youth paddling coach said, "I've had so many coaches in my career that should have taken this workshop. I really liked it when Rob told us that fitness training should not be used as punishment. I also liked the concept of creating a positive team culture for our paddling program."

The two-hour session passed quickly and Rob engaged nearly every coach. The participants posed several coaching scenarios for Rob to address with positive coaching techniques. By the end of the workshop, the motto of the Positive Coaching Alliance was clearly evident to the entire group; "transforming youth sports, so sports can transform youth" is a goal that can be achieved within any organization.


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A Tribute to Positive Coaching



Lindsay Wessberg

By Mary Wessberg

Approximately 70 percent of Hawaii's young athletes give up on sports by the time they become teenagers. Lindsay Wessberg was almost one of them. Instead, the Punahou junior became the ILH Girls Kayaking Champion on November 9, 2002 at Keehi Lagoon.

Slightly more than two years ago, Lindsay was discouraged with canoe paddling and had decided to hang up her paddle. Then Kisi Haine invited Lindsay to practice with her and friends Paula Crabb and Anne Marie Mizuno on Sundays. Eventually they entered the Kanaka I Kai Ka races in an OC-2. The following spring Kisi invited Lindsay to steer for her Women Masters paddling practices and eventually for the Open Women on Saturdays.

Head Women's Coach Mike Beyer encouraged Lindsay's steering efforts and more importantly, introduced her to the Olympic kayak, the K-1. Mike guided Lindsay to the Hawaii Canoe and Kayak Team that summer. Sarah Field, a member of HCKT and the 2000 ILH Kayak Champion from Punahou, was very enthusiastic about the program, so Lindsay started the eerie morning ses-

sions on the dark Ala Wai Canal with coaches Chris Ball, Geordan Purdy and Eric Chun.

In July, Lindsay trained under Paul Podgorski, the USACK Sprint Coach, at Lake Placid, NY. She spent a month with Paul, who motivated her to train harder than she had ever worked in her life. Lindsay said, "Paul just made me want to get up early, work hard and do my best."

Lindsay Norcross, 2001 ILH Champion and member of the USACK Jr. National Sprint Team, also became a source of motivation for Lindsay. They eventually teamed-up to win a gold medal in the K-4 1,000 meter and a silver medal in the K-4 500 meter sprints at the U.S. Jr. Nationals at Lake Lanier, GA. Lindsay also won two individual bronze medals in K-1 500 meters and 5,000 meters.

The Punahou Girls Paddling coaches also supported Lindsay's paddling efforts last year. Coaches Marion Lyman-Mersereau and Reney Ching selected Lindsay to steer the Varsity crew and that really elevated her self-esteem. Kayaking coach, Denise Darval-Chang, helped Lindsay modify her training program to accommodate a shoulder and back problem during the season and always provided positive comments.

Australian coaches Shelley Oates-Wilding and Guy Wilding were nearly indispensable with the physical and mental conditioning programs they introduced to Lindsay for kayak racing. "Shelley is an Olympic athlete," said Lindsay, "so she inspired me to reach beyond my limitations. When I lost a race, Shelley taught me how to work through it, rebuild my self-confidence and come back even stronger."

"I look back on this kayaking season and realize that it took a lot of hard work and a little good luck to win the ILH Championship, but I know I wouldn't be where I am today without the many good coaches that helped me along the way," says Lindsay. "Regardless of how far I go in kayaking, I know the skills I am learning from these terrific coaches will help me be successful in life."

"My parents tell me that coaches like Kisi and Shelley are very special because they personify the spirit of positive coaching," says Lindsay. "They sure made a difference for me. Two years ago I was ready to quit paddling and now kayaking is one of the most important things in my life!"