

The Five Pillars of Evaluating Players

In evaluating soccer players, we look at the 5 pillars of the game and see where they rank in all 5 categories. The five categories are:

1. Mental
2. Physical
3. Technical
4. Tactical
5. Lifestyle

The first category is mental (or some might call this psychological). It comes down to whether a player is capable of handling everything that comes at them. This includes things like whether they see their team accomplishments as being more important than their individual accomplishments, whether they can handle pressure, and also includes things like their character (if they say they will be there for you, can you trust them etc). Also included in this will be how do they deal with their teammates, coaches, refs (and ref decisions) and the fans. Things like discipline and dedication would come into this category as well.

The second pillar we look at is the physical part. A player's size, speed, strength, coordination and conditioning are included in this category. In looking at speed, it's more important over a 10-40 yard area than over a 2-mile distance. Other ways to determine this ranking would include a person's body fat percentage as well as jumping ability etc.

The third pillar to look at is the player's technical ability. Do they strike the ball properly? Do they receive the ball properly? Do they run properly? (while a person speed is factored into the physical category, running technique would be in this one because if a person runs incorrectly, this could be corrected and the physical category rating could be upgraded). Also, do they play balls properly in a game situation (there are loads of players out there who can strike a ball beautifully without pressure but put them in a game situation and they become useless).

The tactical pillar consists of things like do they know where and when to be places on the field? How is their positioning and how is their decision making on the field? Do they dribble too much or not shoot enough?

The lifestyle pillar is one that is most frequently forgotten. Does the player eat properly? Does she get enough sleep? Does she party too much? Is she well mannered? Does she live in a clean environment? Is her lifestyle the type that you want representing your team? These are the types of questions that would be taken into consideration under the lifestyle pillar.

Having just been involved with the evaluating of an entire team using these 5 pillars, I can honestly say that in doing this, you can really see what you need to work on with your team (if you are a coach) or with yourself (if you are a player). We gave each player a + if they were thought to be a positive in that pillar, a - if they were thought to be a negative in that pillar and a “?” if we didn't know (we actually went with +? and ?- if we thought they were leaning one way or the other). When you see a lot of -'s in the technical pillar, it sure makes it easy to figure out what the next sessions should be about. If there are +'s in the tactical side, it means you are doing a good job there. This is true with Mental and Physical. With Lifestyle category, if the reason players didn't grade very well was because they don't eat very well, then bringing in a sports nutritionist might be the answer.

One of the best things you can do as a coach is to evaluate the players and then share the evaluations with them. Sit down with them and talk to them about why they were graded poorly in a certain area. Or, tell them why they were thought so highly of in other areas. Once you explain the reasons for the grading (and it's extremely important that they be done honestly and not a case where everyone is given a +), help show them how they can change their grade by improving in that pillar. This is where your role as a coach can influence them far greater than just be teaching them soccer. Show them how character matters, how attitude matters, how lifestyle matters, how physical conditioning matters in a persons long term success and happiness and you will be successful as a coach.

If you are a player, evaluate yourself objectively and then see what you need to work on to get all +'s (by the way, with the college team I was evaluating, only one person received 3 +'s, no one else had more than 2 and this is a high level group so that is what I mean by being objective and not giving all +'s).

Use these 5 pillars to make yourself better and to make your team better and in the long run, you will be successful.