

## EGOTISM VS. CONFIDENCE: TOO MUCH VS. TOO LITTLE AND HOW TO STRIKE A BALANCE

By Dr. Steve Baron

**Egotist:** A conceited, boastful person

**Confidence:** A feeling of assurance or certainty, especially concerning oneself (*The American Heritage Dictionary*).

**W**hether it is youth soccer, school or business, performance is maximized when we strike a balance between too little confidence and too much ego.

Can anyone perform their best if they are filled with self-doubt or insecurity? Conversely, how probable is it for an ego-maniac to reach the top, especially in a team sport such as soccer? If self-doubt and egotism were placed on a continuum, despite the fact that we might want to err slightly toward the egotist side, it is truly a balance we must strive for if we are to maximize performance.

Optimal performance is highly unlikely without confidence. It is confidence which facilitates a solid first touch, a quick, correct decision regarding distribution vs. possession or any other aspect of play. A player with too little confidence is most likely driven by fear and anxiety, both of which decrease the probability of maximal performance. Such players expend far too much unnecessary nervous energy. These players are also more likely to struggle with coach feedback. Due to their lack of confidence coach feedback is generally taken as a “verbal attack” vs. teaching or constructive criticism.



On the other side of the coin we have an equally harmful force - egotism. This is the player who can do no wrong; the player who is always able to tell you who is to blame (never them, of course); this is the player who does not distribute, does not get back on defense, does not put out the extra effort to win a 50/50 ball, etc... This is the player who criticizes but never accepts criticism (even if it is just coaching). This is also the player who will struggle as time goes on! The player who goes from being a U-10 star (with all the pomp and circumstance that goes with it) to the U-15 player who is no longer the star, rather, they have now become a frustrated, confused, and angry player who is thinking about quitting the sport.

Who are the important people in determining whether a player achieves that optimal balance? Understandably, this one

is a “no brainer”. The key people are, the players themselves, the coach and the parents (we might also want to throw in the “fans”). Each plays an important role in determining whether a player stumbles due to a lack of confidence (at one end of the spectrum) or falls due to an out-of-control ego (the other end of the spectrum).

The following are a few thoughts for how coaches, parents and players can find the correct balance between egotism and confidence.

### COACHES

*How coaches can help* – Get to know all of your players. Work to find out which players need more reinforcement and which players may already be on an “ego trip”. Try to avoid assumptions. Try to mentally keep tabs to make sure you are interacting with all of your players. If you have a good relationship with your players, your time and attention is sought by the players. In and of itself, it is a reward. As such, a lack of attention, (even if it is due to the fact that you feel the player is doing everything right) may be perceived as a punishment (“coach doesn’t even talk to me, he/she doesn’t support me”).

In addition, as your players get older, honesty becomes increasingly more important (not that it isn’t when they are young). The point is, as players get older and become increasingly knowledgeable about the game they will look for honest and accurate critiques. Any attempts to “blow smoke” will probably back fire (pardon the pun).

*How coaches can hinder* — Remember, youth sports coaches tend to be very, very important people to their young players. NEVER forget it! Your words (or lack of words) carry a lot more weight than you think. What you may be offering as a “minor critique” may be received as a devastating attack. Perhaps even more devastating to the player is when coaches ignore them. Unless you are trying to tell the player that you don’t care and/or don’t support them and/or they don’t matter, keep your players aware of what is going on! Part of the coaches job is to keep the gifted player’s head on straight and the slower developing player from losing all confidence! As has been discussed in a previous “Body and Soul” article, communication is the key!

### PARENTS:

*How parents can help* — Everyone needs support. Everyone needs to know they are important and that they count. Make a few sacrifices. Tell your child that you are proud of them. Help them establish goals and make sure they take away the pride they have earned from working toward their goals. Avoid using

condemnation of others as a form of praise for your child. To do so is to increase the likelihood of creating an egotist.

*How parents can hinder* — We all love our children and tend to see them in the brightest of light. We should! But, sometimes the light blinds us to reality. When this happens we run the risk of creating the player whose ego does not permit them to work with others or grow as a player. Furthermore, parents can produce devastating effects by constantly setting higher and higher goals and placing greater and greater expectations on their child. To do so is to risk creating the kind of anxiety and insecurity that can erode even the greatest of talents.

PLAYERS:

*How players can help* — Work hard. Be honest with yourself. Don't be afraid to admit mistakes or errors. In fact, these can be your greatest assets for growth. Be proud. Be humble.

*How players can hinder* — Insecurity! This can cause nothing but problems. This makes it hard for coaches to correct your mistakes and suggest points for growth. Insecurity will erode your confidence and ability to grow!

CONCLUSION

Everyone wants and needs praise. But, you know the old adage: "too much of even a good thing..." All parties need to monitor themselves with regard to the type, frequency and general use of praise, criticism and avoidance. Again, it is better to err on the side of too much praise as opposed to excessive avoidance or criticism. Furthermore, we have to remember to treat each player as an individual. What may be too much for one player may not be enough for another. BE HONEST! Not brutal, just honest and fair!

To maximize performance we must consider the whole person. They are not just soccer players, they are people. As such we all have egos. Egos can be weak, strong, fragile, excessive or non-existent. If you, the coach, parent or player, wants to do your best, never forget that players are humans and, like it or not, all have thoughts and feelings. If we can strike that delicate balance between egotism vs. a lack of confidence we stand a much better chance of seeing the player at their best vs. what they are at their worst. ⚽



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### Law 1 The Field of Play

The field must be **SAFE** (the referee makes this decision). If the field is not safe, the referee will not let the game begin. If the field becomes unsafe, the game must be stopped.

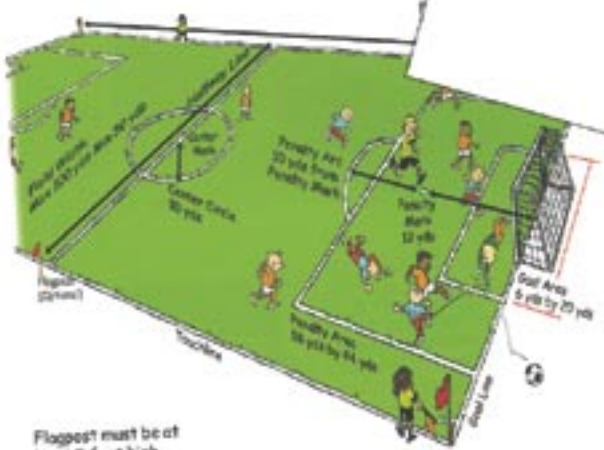


Portable goals must be securely and **SAFELY** anchored to the ground.



### The Field of Play LAW

Here are the important parts of the field and the names of them:



Flagpost must be at least 5 feet high.



Corner Arc  
1 yard

### Goal Measurements



The length and width of the field and the size of the goal can be different depending on the age of the players (see local rules).

