

The Bucket Ceremony

The Development and Permanence of “The Team”

This is one of my favorite lessons and one that your team will remember long after your season ends. In youth sports it's critical to teach kids that as part of a team, they are playing for each other by contributing their unique talents. The Bucket Ceremony shows the players that they have created something new, special and everlasting and that they have dedicated themselves to each other when they formed a team.

A player's value to the team is not measured in playing time or any other performance statistic. The value of a player is based solely on his or her personal commitment to his or her teammates. Therefore the player's value is as unique and personal as his or her own fingerprint.

The Bucket Ceremony is simple to do. The only supplies needed are a bucket, clear plastic cups and a few large bottles of water (about 6 ounces per player and coach).

Place the empty bucket on the ground and gather the team around it.

Coach: Congratulations. You have come together as a team and played for each other in practice and/or games (depending on when you hold the ceremony). Each of you has brought your own talents and gifts to this team. By combining your talents and gifts, you have created something new and something very big. To celebrate this we are going to have our Bucket Ceremony.

Give each team member, including coaches, a cup filled with water. To save time, the cups can be filled and arranged on a table or bench if one is available. As the cups are distributed, tell them NOT to drink the water.

Coach: On the first day of practice, I could see that each of you brought “It.” “It” is your unique talents and gifts. “It” is your smile, your laughter, your friendship, and your effort. I only wondered one thing, “would each of you give “It” to the team”? You have shown me that the answer is “Yes.” Our Bucket Ceremony today celebrates what you have accomplished. Take a look at your cup. The cup represents you, the water represents what you have to offer, and the bucket represents our team. As you can see the bucket is completely empty right now. We are about to change that. I would like each of you, one at a time, to come up and pour your water into the bucket. (Do not tell them how much of their water they should pour into the bucket, as this is a powerful part of the ceremony.)

Before any players begin to pour, ask them to please hold their cups for the remainder of the ceremony. Let them begin one by one. As they pour out their water, you will be amazed that each player will instinctively pour all of his water into the bucket.

Coach: I want you to look inside your cup. Not one of you kept any water. I didn't ask you to pour out all of your water, but you did. Everyone gave everything they had without being asked. Now, I want you look at our bucket. It's not empty anymore. In fact, our bucket has more water in it than each of your cups could hold on its own. Together we created something new, and it's bigger than any one of us. Since your cup is empty, you may be thinking that you have nothing left to give. The amazing part about being you is that you never have to worry about filling your cup. What you have to offer is endless and has no limits. Your effort, talent, compassion and love are infinite. Your job is simply to pour it out and give it away. That act is exactly what you have done this season for this team.

Pick one player to come up with his/her cup.

LESSON SEVEN



Coach: We have one more step before we are done. <Player's name>, I want you to scoop out your water with your cup. You have to be sure to only take your water. You can't take anyone else's water; only yours (the player typically smiles and admits that it's impossible). That's right; we can't undo our team. This team is real, and it is forever. From now on we are teammates and friends. Congratulations team!

Give the kids high fives and fist bumps to emphasize the accomplishment and encourage them to do the same with each other.

Take a few moments to assess comprehension and answer questions. Then move on to a summary statement or prayer that references and reinforces this ceremony.

Reaffirm the APIVEO commitment with the team cheer.

Coach: Ok, are you ready? I want your parents to think we're crazy loud!

Start the cheer in a normal tone and get louder each time you ask the question.

Coach: Always play for who?

Team: Each other!

Coach: (louder) ALWAYS PLAY FOR WHO?

Team: (louder) EACH OTHER!

Coach: (really loud!) ALWAYS PLAY FOR WHO?

Team: (screaming loud!) EACH OTHER!

Coach: Stand up with authority and yell "[TEAM NAME] ROCK!

Following the cheer, I will always talk to each player after every practice to thank them for "bringing it" to practice. This only takes 10-15 seconds per player, but is worth its weight in gold. There are a few players that will be headed for the parking lot before the cheer is done, so you must be intentional and act fast. I typically get right in front of the player and, then, get on one knee, look him/her in the eye and mention something positive about his/her performance in practice and how glad I am that he/she is part of our team. You need to be quick to respect the parent's time, but you also need to be sincere.

NOTE TO COACHES: I've held this ceremony with more than a dozen teams and can tell you with absolute certainty that it is something that will be remembered by your players all season and beyond. The concept of team is powerful but difficult to share with kids. The Bucket Ceremony is a fun visual activity that clearly demonstrates the team that your players created. Furthermore, The Bucket Ceremony is a unique and standalone lesson that can be administered at any time during the season. Implement this when you feel the players have become a team.

Be intentional and remember, Always Play 4 Each Other!™