

Pel ot Performance Coaching

Building self confidence in Sport: The Performance Break Point

The dictionary definition of confidence is as follows: "Belief in oneself and one's powers or abilities", "Full of trust, belief in the powers, trustworthiness, reliability of a person or thing"

Fundamentally, being confident in ones self or one's ability is a decision, unfortunately it is a decision that can make or break an athlete's performance on any specific day. An athlete's confidence level has a major influence on his/her physical abilities. Low levels of confidence usually lead to poor performances and vice versa, high level of confidence lead to good performances. EXAMPLE: If a baseball player truly believes that he is not a good hitter, he has already accepted that when he goes to bat, he will not perform.

There are factors that can either aide in increasing or decreasing an individual's level of confidence. Some sources that are responsible for building confidence typically come from influential people. People who fill these roles are usually parents, teachers, friends or mentors. Coaches play the biggest role in either building or breaking down an athlete's confidence. Most coaches realize this, but fail to think about this perspective during a practice or game. During games and practices, it is common for coaches to become overly involved in winning or become focused on the negative aspects of an individual's performance. This mindset can be detrimental to an athlete's development. Consistent focus on an athlete's inabilities or poor performance outcomes only increases pressure and ultimately increases an athlete's fear of trying.

Goal setting is a very important part to an athlete's long-term development, but unfortunately it is commonly overlooked. Goals can be very beneficial for improvement and can help make an unsuccessful athlete successful. When setting goals, it is important that an athlete set goals that are attainable. If unattainable goals are set, they will lead an athlete to undesired outcomes. Having unattainable goals can be the cause to low levels of self confidence.

What is your standpoint on failure? Is it good? Is it bad? Can it be beneficial?

One of the many roles of good coaches is teaching. In order to be an effective teacher, it is important to be patient and try to create an environment that helps improve an athlete's ability. Typically, failing is seen as negative and unproductive, but for a coach looking to improve his players, failure can be the driving factor for improvement. How a coach views failure is very important for the development of his athletes. Failure can be seen as positive and helpful to increase ability level, but failing can also be seen as negative which may lead an athlete away from sports. The key ingredient for building confidence is feedback; feedback can be both verbal and non-verbal and plays a vital part in the athlete's confidence and ability. If an athlete is consistently receiving negative feedback, the athlete may loose excitement for sports participation all together.

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An athlete should not fear failure. The fear of failing places a tremendous amount of pressure on the athlete. It is common that coaches unintentionally set expectations for their athletes. Coaches do this through their actions and interactions with their athletes. What a coach says or how a coach reacts to a specific situation can have a powerful impact on an athlete's outlook and performance level. A coach's actions can display to his athletes that failing is negative and unacceptable. This sort of coach can immediately instill a certain level of fear or failure into his/her athletes. It is always important to remember that coaches are in a position of authority and have a tremendous influence on their athlete's development.

Youth sports coaches play one of the most important roles in an athlete's sports career. Youth sports coaches can either create or destroy an athlete for life solely by how he/she communicates with his/her athletes. It is important for the coach to set the expectation that failing is going to happen and that failing is not only a part of sport, but also a part of life. It is also important for the coach to get his/her athletes to understand that failing is a learning experience and that failing can lead to improvement.

Increased self-confidence is attained through a series of positive experiences. These positive experiences place more emphasis on setting small attainable goals. Experiences that result in positive outcomes or positive feedback will have a positive influence on an athlete's confidence level. Experiences that result in a negative outcome are going to be detrimental to an athlete's confidence. This increases the importance of the coach's role in the development of an athlete. Putting the athlete in positions or situations where the athlete can be successful will only increase his/her number of positive experiences, ultimately boosting the athlete's level of confidence. This increase in confidence will then transfer into the athlete's playing ability.

Confidence can be affected by self-talk. Self talk is a way that an athlete can get motivated and increase his commitment to his/her abilities. Using positive self talk will help an athlete increase their confidence. If an athlete tells him/herself that he/she can do something, the athlete is more inclined to be successful. If an athlete's confidence is lacking or the athlete doubts his or her abilities, performance may be compromised. EXAMPLE: I WILL TRY and I CAN are certainly more positive than I WON'T or I CAN'T.

Suggestions for Coaches

Be positive, understand that there is an ultimate goal that the coach may want to accomplish, but understand that all athletes are different and each learns at a different rate. It is important to point out experiences that an athlete may need to improve, but it is important to not dwell on these experiences. Dwelling on negative performances will leave an athlete feeling as if he/she is unable.

It is important that a coach not consistently focus on what the athlete is not able to do, but what the athlete has done and can do. The coach should help provide the proper path (training techniques or areas of focus) in which the athlete will develop. Goal setting will

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help the athlete and the coach develop a system to help improve the athlete's performance.

Provide the athlete with small challenges that challenge the athlete's ability, but not so challenging that it will overwhelm the athlete. An analogy I use is "It is important to not throw someone who can not swim into a deep pool". Challenging an athlete with a task that he/she will not be able to overcome will leave an athlete feeling defeated. A defeated athlete's confidence goes down fast.

Coaches should spend more time building up an athlete rather than breaking down an athlete, this is even more important during youth or early teen years.

Coaches should spend more time talking and teaching his/her athletes about failure and how failing is a learning experience. Athletes should be reminded that when failure does happen it is not the end of the world. Coaches should set the expectation that failure will happen and that failure will breed improvement.

Coaches need to teach their athlete's how to use positive and confident self talk. EXAMPLE: "I will" instead "I can't". It is important that the athlete not just say it, but believe it.

Coaches should encourage his/her athletes to develop goals for themselves and then the coach should go over these goals with the athlete to make sure the goals are attainable

Coaches should provide feedback to allow the athlete to reach his/her goal