

# COACHES COACHING COACHES

teaching, training, learning



# Table of Contents

---

Editor's Message

**What Will You Remember, and What Will They Remember?**

Jake Olson, Perham High School

4

**Improving the Coach-Athlete Relationship: How to Increase the Trust  
Between A Player and Coach**

Brad Kiser, University of Arkansas at Little Rock

6

**The Importance of Perspective**

Brandon Lewis,

9

**Relationships: The True Meaning of Success**

Michael Lyons, North Dakota State University

12

**How to Building a Team Culture in Athletics**

Andrew Parochka, Moorhead Public Schools

15

**Women Coaching Cross Country - The Immediate and Long-Term  
Benefits for Athlete**

Shari Wetzel, Morton Gingerwood School

18

# Editor's Message

---

Every year, newly graduated college students enter the coaching profession. In most cases, these newly minted coaches have completed at least one coaching course with some earning a coaching minor. But, as every experienced coach knows, no amount of book learning or required college courses can truly prepare one to be an effective coach. There is truly no better way of learning than through experience.

An adage I learned many years ago truly explains how one learns and how one helps the next generation learn.

I do, you watch, and we talk.

I do, you help, and we talk.

You do, I help, and we talk.

You do, I watch, and we talk.

And then we each go help the next person

Coaches Coaching Coaches (CCC) is a supplement to Dakota Coach. The purpose of CCC is to provide an outlet for coaches to share coaching knowledge that helps other coaches become better coaches. CCC is interested in all topics related to coaching, for example, skill techniques, game tactics, coaching strategies, practice planning, team and individual psychology, nutrition, culture, first aid, training and conditioning, motivation, parent relationships, practice planning, mental health, leadership, mentoring, and relationships.

To submit an article to Coaches Coaching Coaches, send your article in Word format to [bradford.strand@ndsu.edu](mailto:bradford.strand@ndsu.edu)

*Brad Strand*

# What Will You Remember? What Will They Remember?

Jake Olson, Perham High School

---

When asked about why did you begin coaching? I know the answer should be to coach kids in the sports that I love. The real answer is that I had a coach that I loved and looked up to. He showed me the fire and desire to excel and be good. He made me feel like I wanted to make him proud. He showed me how to be humble in victory and defeat. He gave me memories that will last a lifetime. He was tough, comforting, strong, approachable, and scary.

We all think we will remember the great things about coaching, and push what we hated out. What will you remember, and how will you be remembered? Wins? Losses? Players? Parents? There are many things that coaches can hang their hats on as a successful season or career. But, what do those things mean to you? What do you want? Are the things you want going to fulfill you or will they make you feel successful as a coach? You can't remember everything, but what are the things you will do? Here are some things that I know.

Here are some misconceptions. Championships and wins make for the best, and most memorable seasons. Is it easier to have a winning season, or to have a losing season? If it was all about the wins then it would be easier. With winning does it get easier? More pressure to keep winning, more parent issues to see their kids as a part of the winning, parents with the pressure from other

parents to have a winning child? As coaches, we will say coaching is because of the players and relationships we form, but winning makes it a whole lot more fun and memorable. False, I was watching a hunting show, but this isn't a regular hunting show. This show depicts the actual struggles of finding the animal and the failures that are involved well before the shot is even taken. The host was miles upon miles in the deep mountains of Alaska. It was 30 degrees for 4 days, and it was raining. Sounds rough, doesn't it? Yes, but that's what makes for the best memories. He opened up about struggles and memories of the "good old" days. He talks about how much he has forgotten but finds that he remembers all the tough things he's had to do to fill his tag or miss a shot he had perfectly lined up after days of searching. Both are successes, it all depends on how you look at them. Arnold Schwarzenegger said, "Strength does not come from winning. Your struggles develop your strengths" How true is this statement? If you never have to struggle then you would never know how resilient you are, or your players.

This got me thinking about my life and the things I remember. Wins, Losses, tough players, tough parents, big games, awful losses, for better, for worse, in sickness, and health. Recently, I was having supper with my parents and we started talking about how tough my kids can be. I talked about how my son throws a fit when I flush the toilet or turn on a light

and he doesn't get to. They said I did the same thing, but I threw a fit when I couldn't put the dishes away. How do you remember that? They started telling me story after story about how difficult I could be at times. For us with kids, we remember the tough times in our lives. Can this be the same with coaching?

It's not only the tough things that we remember, but tough times are things that all coaches can relate to. Some coaches never have a winning season, some coaches never have a losing season. Tough times are things that all coaches must go through. My first three seasons as a high school baseball coach were 17-Way too many to count. I don't remember the wins. I don't remember the losses. I remember a freshman using the batter's box as his own personal litter box, dance-offs in the rain, pizza parties, road trips, graduating seniors, my wife in the stands, watching my son run the bases after games, and walk-off home runs. On the other side, I remember cuts, parent conversations, costly errors, times I've been too hard on kids, blown calls by officials (come on, everyone remembers those), and bad coaching decisions.

I have found that I have remembered the important things or the things that have shaped the way I coach today. I'm not saying a blown call has shaped my coaching, but the way I reacted and carried myself in that situation has haunted me for years. I have realized as my coaching tenure has lengthened, my rules, procedures, and practice planning have become old hat. I find myself thinking about how I will be remembered. What do my players say about me, parents say about me, assistant coaches, rival coaches, and alumni? Do they see me as the pizza parties and blown calls, or do they see me as pizza parties and road trips? I find myself hoping they see me as the latter.

I have asked a lot of questions. Here is what I think the answers are. Coach your players to be family men, hard workers, humble winners, gracious losers, and positive leaders. When you win a game, talk about the positives, be specific, and ask how they handled the adversity in the game. When you lose a game, talk about the positives, be specific, and ask how they handled the adversity in the game. Talk about the character-building it can bring. Give examples of the positives they did together. Not necessarily about the X's and O's, but how they came together in the face of a challenge. Arnold Schwarzenegger said, "Strength does not come from winning. Your struggles develop your strengths."

Many great coaches have said teams with a strong bond can be very successful. Like Time Walton discusses how individuals can be strong, but together they can be a team. If the individuals are represented by bricks stacked up the team is on its own. Then it is easy for them to fall over and everyone goes their way. If you add mortar between the bricks then the wall is strong. Then if the wall falls over the mortar will keep the bricks together, and you can stand it back up. The mortar represents the bond players have for each other, and that is what makes the team strong. This is a great representation of how to keep your team together. Build character. Build Family, Become Resilient. This is a motto I use with my program. They remember it and understand what it takes to be a team player.

#### **About the Author**

Jake Olson is a physical education teacher at Heart of the Lakes Elementary School and a coach at Perham High School, Perham, MN.

# Improving the Coach-Athlete Relationship: How to Increase the Trust Between A Player and Coach

Brad Kiser, University of Arkansas at Little Rock

---

From an outsider's perspective, coaching can seem like a straightforward and obvious thing. Every Sunday spectators sitting in their living rooms yell at the television as the coach of their favorite football team appears to have made a bad play call, mishandled their clock management, or burned a critical time out because the team's offense looked unorganized. What prevents a coach from achieving a 10+ year career like Bill Belichick, Mike Krzyzewski, Geno Auriemma, or Patty Gasso of their perspective sports? These coaches all work at historic franchises or elite college programs, but does the name on the front of the jersey hold all the power, or does the culture at these places make them a destination for recruits and free agents? I believe the coach's ability to build belief and trust in the system is what makes the players want to be part of that team and play for that coach. Trust is not typically the word used within athletics, but instead sports media and personnel will label this trust as "buy-in" from the players. There are a few different ways a coach can build this buy-in amongst his or her athletes. Some coaches' track record precedes them, and players will be bought into a coach's methods, strategy, and tactics the moment they step on campus. However, for a newer coach, the values you hold, the approaches you take, and the relationships you build with your athletes will speak volumes when it comes to their buy-in into your program.

Unless you have already achieved a reputation like the coaches listed above, many coaches start with low levels of leadership.

John C. Maxwell describes this as the Position Level of leadership. The position level means that your athletes are going to show respect to you because they have to. You have the title of Coach, and they know they are supposed to listen Maxwell describes this as the shallowest of leadership positions, which means we must grow this to a deeper level. The stronger we can make our relationships with our athletes, the more they are going to respect us and trust our plan.

The first way to build up this relationship and trust within our athletes is to be consistent with our philosophies. This can look different from coach to coach, but consistency needs to be there for each program. Is North Dakota State football going to run the ball in the A-gap? YES! Are the Golden State Warriors going to limit their three-point attempts to focus on midrange jump shots? Not. Coaches will set the standards and players need to be held to them. As a strength and conditioning coach, I stick to fundamental and foundational strength movements that have a proven track record of success. I do not waver from my plan if one day does not go as smoothly as I would like. I stay consistent and don't get swept away by some new trend that is going around. I stay consistent with my approach and with my message toward my athletes. This does not mean that modifications cannot be made, but the foundation should remain the same. This consistency will give the athletes something to rely on and their trust will grow.

Building upon this consistency within our approaches to the sport we coach, we also need

to be consistent with our values, personality, and spirit. Coaches with this level of authenticity practice what they preach and lead their teams from the front. They don't let outside noise or pressure lead to abnormal behaviors or reactions. They allow their values to guide their decisions and they don't let their mood dictate how a practice or training session will go. An authentic coach will lead and inspire players to do the right things and develop positive character traits for the athlete. Athletes will be able to see through coaches who put on a false persona, and this can only lead to frustration and rebellion instead of trust. The authentic coach utilizes his or her strengths and allows his or her personality to shine through. For example, if humor is part of a coach's personality, use it! Let your athletes see that side of you and it helps them to get a better understanding of their coach.

The next approach to developing trust within our athletes comes from our investment in building relationships with them. To do this, we need to ask open-ended questions and actively listen to the responses our athletes give us. We should want to know what is truly important to our athletes and what motivates them. The more we can understand about our athletes, the better the opportunity to put them in situations to succeed. After we listen, we must try to relate to them. Many coaches face an age gap between themselves and their players and this can act as a roadblock to creating a strong relationship. Even with this roadblock, coaches should try to relate with their athletes as they try to get a better understanding of them. Building this relationship with an athlete will help to open the communication channels between the athlete and coach, and strong communication channels will lead to more honesty, better training, and personal growth.

To build trust and develop an understanding of our athletes, we need to practice empathy. Seeing what it is like to walk in our athletes' shoes allows us to develop a

better understanding of their perspectives. It is important to put the needs of our athletes ahead of our own. Sometimes we need to adjust our practice plan to better match how our players are feeling. Sometimes outside stress gets brought to practice and a coach needs to acknowledge how a player is feeling. If we take the opportunity to give ground, stronger trust will develop, and then we can gain more ground because of it. Sometimes athletes need to be heard by their coach. Roadblocks can arise in this situation too. Coaches can be insensitive to this type of situation because outside stress is supposed to be "left at the door" before a player enters the practice gym. Other times a player gets the label as not being "mentally tough." Instead, coaches should be aware of the things going on in their players' lives and should be a resource for the players to go to.

The final strategy for building buy-in amongst our athletes takes some power away from the coach and puts the metaphorical ball in the player's court. By giving our players autonomy over their practice time, they develop a sense of ownership when it comes to their development. Now, this is not to suggest that coaches need to allow their players to run practice, but they should allow for some variability within the practice plan. For example, a basketball coach can allow his players to choose from 2 options: 1) a shooting drill or 2) a ball handling drill. Instead of having everyone do one, it gives the players the choice as to which one they want to (or feel they need to) work on. This helps to motivate them because they have the choice to do which one, they feel is more important at that moment. This can boost their effort and focus on that skill and the athlete will appreciate the time to practice. This is just one example of how to do this, but coaches should give some power to their players. Developing this sense of ownership will increase the athlete's trust in the program because they will feel more and more like the program belongs to them.

Overall, there are many ways a coach can build their player's buy-in towards the program and within the coach himself or herself. New coaches, especially, start at the lowest level of the leadership pyramid and need to invest time with their athletes if he or she ever wants to move up to the top ranks. First and foremost, a coach needs to be consistent with their philosophies and approaches. A consistent coach is easier to trust because an athlete will know what to expect, even if the relationship is still in its early stages. Furthermore, a coach needs to be authentic with their approaches because nothing will burn trust faster than someone pretending to be something they are not. It takes time to build trust within our athletes, but we can begin the process by asking questions and actively listening to the answers our athletes provide. By actively listening, we will create moments to connect with our athletes and start to develop a deeper understanding of him or her. Along with listening, there may be times when we must empathize with them, thus boosting our

understanding of them. We can make modifications to better match how our athletes feel. A coach is in a great position to make an athlete feel heard. And lastly, we should give some ownership to our athletes to help them feel in control of their program. Following these steps will grow the athlete-coach relationship and will increase the levels of trust the athletes have in their coach.

### **References**

- Bartholomew, B. (2017). *Conscious coaching: The art and science of building buy-in*. CreateSpace Publishing
- Maxwell, J. C. (2011). *The 5 levels of leadership*. Center Street.

### **About the Author**

Brad Kiser is the head strength and conditioning coach at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.



# The Importance of Perspective

Brandon Lewis, North Dakota State University

---

The mind is a powerful tool. It can also be very detrimental to you if not used properly. The mind can be positive and negative, right and wrong, helpful and hurtful. The mind is a powerful tool. We hear, "If you believe it, you can achieve it," quite often in athletics. There is a lot of truth behind that statement, if you think you can, you will, if you think you cannot, you will not. An athlete's brain being wired negatively may be the reason for certain hardships and struggles with school, practice, or competition. That said, we will explore the importance of having an athlete's mind working with them and not against them. This could be in any setting; these skills could be used in an Algebra class, the gym, at home, etc. During this article, I am going to talk about things that I have learned throughout my coaching career, in coaching classes, or during firsthand experiences that I faced as an athlete.

To begin, let me tell you a little bit about myself. My name is Brandon Lewis and I have two college degrees, Physical Education and Health Education. I also have a minor in Psychology. At the moment I am pursuing a master's degree in Leadership in Physical Education and Sport. For both my undergraduate degrees and my master's degree, I attended North Dakota State University in Fargo, North Dakota. While I was in college, I was also a track and field athlete with my main event being the long jump. So, you can imagine as a Division 1 athlete, I had a lot of ups and a lot of downs in my athletics career. With all the ups and downs came mental barriers that I had to break through. That is where the importance of perspective comes into play.

As a coach, you must take something about perspective away from this article and

use it to better your athletes, especially their character. Coaches like to talk about being mentally tough. How are athletes supposed to do that when they do not know how to do that? Where do they even begin when thinking about being mentally tough? Mental toughness starts with where the mind is at. Before talking about being mentally tough, we need to discuss ways to get the mind thinking about things it should be thinking about. We need to turn the mind towards a positive perspective before talking about mental toughness.

One of the most effective strategies to help perspective is affirmations. Affirmations are something that someone can do themselves to help them feel better about themselves. Positive affirmations can be done alone, I like to do them in the mornings while looking at myself in the mirror. When doing positive affirmations, you must be looking at yourself when you are practicing them. It is important because it creates the illusion that you are talking to yourself and giving yourself compliments. After doing them consistently, you will notice a positive difference in self-confidence. You will learn to feel more confident and comfortable with yourself. For example, my jumping coach would have his daughters do affirmations every morning in the mirror. He would have them say, "I am beautiful, I am smart, I am awesome, and I am a badass!" It is such a simple technique that can help someone tremendously with how they look at themselves. Another way to practice affirmations is by creating an affirmation card. Something to hang on the refrigerator or the bathroom mirror or even to put in your wallet to help build self-confidence. My personal affirmation card says, "Do the Damn Thing."

To others, that may not be helpful, but it is helpful for me. It helps give me the motivation to wake up every morning and get the job done. Whether that is at a track meet, class, practice, or any other situation, it motivates me to do the best that I can and be proud of my best no matter the result.

Being proud of yourself leads me to my next discussion, failure. We must remain proud of ourselves, even when we do not perform to our standards. We have all heard of the glass half full and the glass half empty mentalities. Now, eliminate the glass-half-empty mentality from your brain, do not think of it, and forget about it entirely. Glass-half-empty mentalities are some of the worst mentalities that someone can have. Yes, sometimes people think about potential as a glass half full, but if you want an athlete to grow, you must teach them how to create a glass-half-full mentality. What do I mean by glass half full? Let's say one of your athletes has one of the worst performances of their career. Right away they have two options; they can either think that the world is over, and they suck and should not be doing athletics at all, or they could think about the things they did well, things they did not do so well, and how to improve the things they did not do so well. With the glass half full, we want the athletes to remember to not let one performance define their careers, rather, let that one bad performance shape them into better athletes and better people down the road. With some comparison, it is evident that the glass-half-full mentality is the superior of the two mentalities. Do not think and worry that your glass may be getting "emptied," instead, think about how you can fill your glass to the brim by thinking about what you can get better at, rather than thinking you cannot get better at all.

Failure is a folk tale. If you think you have failed, you have not. The only way that someone can truly fail is if they perform poorly and choose not to learn anything from that performance. Failure does not just happen;

failure is a choice. After that poor performance, you are given a choice to pout about it, or go back to the drawing board and take away the good things and start to look for the not-so-good things. After that, you want to figure out what you could do to improve on the not-so-good things that happened during the performance. True failure is choosing to give up and thinking that you cannot get better. The mindset we are shooting for is to help the athlete understand that they can improve, but also understand it will not happen overnight. Improvement is a process, and with that process comes positive consistencies. Progress is shown through positive consistencies. When you become consistent at a new level, that is when you know you have progressed. All progress starts with a single decision. Deciding to want to improve rather than give up is the first step in the direction towards a positive perspective, positive consistencies, or a growth mindset, which we will talk about later in the article.

Coaches need to teach athletes how to grow versus collapse and give up. Helping the athletes grow can start to happen by simply asking the athletes open-ended questions about a certain performance, play, or repetition. These questions could be, "What did you feel?" "What could be done better here?" "What good things did you do?" "How can we make this better?" "What should you do in this situation?" Asking open-ended questions will help the athletes understand more clearly what is expected of them and will help wire their brains to think about trying to fill their glass. Effective coaches also know how to address coaching with "You did \*this\* very well, let's try and do \*this\* on the next one." Complimenting them to start will help them gain confidence in themselves so they know they are doing things right and can continue to do the right things. After giving them a confidence boost with the compliment, you want to add something that they can work on. Let's say an athlete during a basketball game has a great chance for an open shot but misses

a shot because they do not jump as high on the shot as they usually do, causing them to miss the shot short of the basket. From there, as the coach, you could say, "That was a good shot you just took, you received the pass well, set the shot up just how you are supposed to, and shot it just like we practice every day. I did notice, however, that you did not jump as high as you usually do while you shoot. I believe that is the reason why you left that shot a little short. Next time, let's make sure to jump, just like you know how to do, and I believe it will go in." A simple conversation can help an athlete go from thinking they are terrible to thinking they can get better with everything they do. After missing that shot, that athlete was probably feeling down, sad, and mad at themselves, thinking their teammates are blaming them for missing a shot and possibly losing a game in that specific situation, but after that conversation with the coach, they will likely keep shooting the ball with confidence.

One thing my jumping coach had us do to help with confidence is weekly meetings. We would meet as a jumping group in a conference room and the coach would have us go through an interactive PowerPoint. The PowerPoint that stood out to me the most was based on perspective. It was the difference between having a growth mindset and having a fixed mindset. Having a growth mindset is all about having the proper perspective, a positive perspective. Having a fixed mindset is having a negative mindset where you think that you suck at everything you do and will never be able to progress and get better at a certain skill. As a coach, you want to promote having a growth mindset and speak of having a growth mindset and how important it is for the athletes to achieve the goals they have set for themselves. You will have athletes who think they are too

good and think they do not need to shift their thinking, but perspective is what makes or breaks an athlete and their potential. Those athletes that think they are the best, promote the growth mindset, but sometimes those ignorant athletes need to do poorly in a competition to have a humbling experience to realize that they should adapt to the growth mindset. Athletes with a growth mindset know they are not the best and know that mistakes will happen. They are simply better at handling their own mistakes and realizing the next step to get better at the things they may not do as well as others.

We have learned that perspective is the best way to ensure athlete success. Negative perspectives can tear away an athlete and leave them feeling like they are worthless and cannot do anything properly. Positive perspectives leave an athlete thinking that they are doing good things and have a lot more potential with the things they do properly and the things they may not do so well. Athletes with a positive perspective will have more success and will give themselves a much better opportunity to achieve the goals they have. It will take time for the athletes to adapt to this, but eventually, it will be worth it as a coach and for the athlete and their character. We are trying to make our athletes better people as well as better athletes as coaches. Teaching the importance of a positive perspective will help achieve the goal of building character within the athletes.

#### **About the Author**

Brandon Lewis is a graduate student at North Dakota State University and a volunteer coach with track and field at the University of Minnesota.

# Relationships: The True Measure of Success

Michael Lyons, North Dakota State University

---

As someone who has been in athletics my entire life, whether that be as an athlete, youth coach, or athletic trainer, I have never truly taken the time to ask, “What drives the highest level of a coach to be their very best?”. In most instances, some might think that the Bill Belichick, Mike Krzyzewski, and Nick Saban type coaches are the best because they have better game plans than their opponents, or maybe they just have better athletes on their team than the average Joe that makes up most of those same opponents. That might be the case, but their success may be attributed more to the mindset and beliefs on how to win that they pass on to their coaching staff and athletes. Watching these videos over the past sixteen weeks has opened my eyes to what it takes to be the best coach, not just in terms of wins and losses, but in terms of building a culture that focuses on teaching athletes how to be great people and prepare them for the challenges that they may face on and off the field.

I believe that one of the most important parts of building a winning culture and finding success comes from knowing whom you are working with in terms of your coaching staff and athletes. When a coach loses a job, one of the first things you may hear is that they did not really know their athletes, or they may not have cared about them like they said they would in the recruiting process. On the other hand, some of the most successful and well-respected coaches have the reputation of caring for and building a relationship with the people within their organizations. To accomplish this, I believe you must sit down with those in your organization and have open

conversations about what you all genuinely want out of one another. Of course, we all want to win and be the best, but we also know that we do not know what life has in store for each of us and do not know how our journey in athletics will go. Having a chance to sit down and learn about what makes each person in your organization unique can help a coach discover how to get the best out of that person.

During these conversations, it is critical to be vulnerable with athletes and not feel as if we must always keep a “tough guy” facade up. There is always a time and place when we need to be tough and critical of not only ourselves but those that make up our team. However, if there are times when we show a more human side of ourselves, then we may receive the results that we want. We may also see more athletes' buy-in to our team goals and the culture that we set as coaches. As someone who has had coaches on both ends of the vulnerability spectrum, I can say that I had more of a competitive drive for the coach who showed me a vulnerable and human side of his personality, over the coach who thought he needed to swear and yell at all times of the day. As a coach, we can accomplish showing vulnerability by talking with our athletes about things that do not only concern athletics; whether that is talking about school, family life, or just having a conversation about a random topic that you may both find interesting.

In addition, giving everyone a chance to have their voice in matters concerning the team could be extremely beneficial to finding overall success. By no means am I saying that a head coach should be submissive and not have their

voice; but I think that allowing others the chance to speak up on some matters can be helpful as it shows your team that you care about their thoughts and opinions. One could accomplish this by having team meetings before the year and weekly throughout the year where individuals can speak their minds on the direction the team is heading. A preseason meeting may give athletes the chance to decide on a team motto or mindset that they believe can define the upcoming season in a way that drives them to be the best. The weekly meetings may open our minds and allow us the chance to step back and see if we are accomplishing the goals we set for ourselves in the preseason.

Throughout many of the videos we watched, there seemed to be one overarching theme that rang true with all the successful coaches we heard from. That theme, or should I say mindset, was that of developing our athletes to be prepared for competition and life outside of sport. One of the first things we could do to accomplish this as coaches is to give more attention to the development of good character traits. Of course, we want our athletes to be hard-working and dedicated individuals, as both of those characteristics are needed in all aspects of life; but some may lose sight of the importance of things like honesty, trustworthiness, compassion, respect, and accountability.

As coaches of athletes between the ages of say thirteen to twenty-three, we know that the athletic careers of most of our athletes are dwindling by the day, therefore it is our responsibility to instill traits in them that prepare them for the world after sports. One way we could accomplish our goal of character development would be to have weekly lessons that take time to talk about the traits our athletes need to succeed. As a coaching staff, we could work to think of the most prevalent traits that intersect with athletics and the real world, define them between each other, and then decide how to develop a lesson we could

connect to our sport. These lessons may also help develop ourselves as coaches because there are certainly times when we lose our real purpose in life, in the pursuit of wins.

One of the things that I find to be extremely important these days, is the importance of mental health within athletics. Not only as coaches, but as human beings, we need to remember that everyone is different, and everyone may be dealing with something that we might never be able to fathom. Mental illness comes in a variety of forms whether it be eating disorders, burnout, depression, or anxiety, among others. Getting out in front of these topics with our athletes could prove to be critical later down the road. As coaches, we also need to learn about these issues in order to face them head-on when mental health situations arise. Staff-wide training with a licensed professional may only be the starting point that we could need as coaches. Being vulnerable with our athletes about the importance of mental health may help lay the groundwork for open discussion down the road. As someone who recognizes the importance of maintaining good mental health, the value of having someone to confide in should not be underestimated.

Success within athletics is defined in a variety of ways depending on everyone's mindset. Of course, we all want to win championships and go down as one of the greatest to ever do it; but we also know that may not be possible. In the game of life, the impact we leave on others may prove to be worth more than the wins and losses we find in the record books. When I sit back and think about what I want my legacy to be, I think about two things; do I want people to think of me as the person who only made an impact on the field, or do I want people to think of all the good I did for others and know that I left a lasting impact with someone for the rest of their life? As coaches, we must make our athletes know there is more to life than athletics, which is why we need to focus on

things like character-building and preparing them for the real world. The lessons we teach them about being a good human being, rather than just being the best point guard, quarterback, or pitcher, will stick with them for the rest of time. I believe that a true measure of being the best coach is not your titles, but how many individuals you leave a lasting impact on because of what you taught them and did for them while on this Earth.

### **About the Author**

Michael Lyons is a graduate assistant athlete trainer with baseball at North Dakota State University. Prior to his time at NDSU, Michael graduated from Presentation College with a bachelor's degree in athlete training and a minor in exercise science. He was also a center and tight end on the football team at Presentation College. While in college, Michael coached a VFW 14U baseball team and was an athlete training intern with the Arizona Diamondbacks. Michael grew up in Pierre, SD where he was a three-sport athlete. Michael resided in the Fargo area with his wife, Brooke, and his dog, Millie.

# How to Building a Team Culture in Athletics

Andrew Parochka, Moorhead Public Schools

---

To have success in team sports whether coaching college or high school athletes, it is vital to build a team culture, however, this is no easy task. The highlights on television that young athletes are consuming place a strong emphasis on the individual over the team. When a professional athlete scores a touchdown, or dunks the basketball, you will often see them celebrate, making it about themselves. There can also be a focus from athletes on obtaining an athletic scholarship and therefore need to “get theirs.” Parents and fans can also place pressure on athletes to perform at a certain standard. So how does a coach go about building a successful team culture? How do you get players to buy into a “we” over “me” mentality? The purpose of this paper is to offer ideas for the development of a successful team culture in athletics.

Culture can be defined as “the way we do things around here” and “the way we behave around here”. Whether you can define your culture or not, every team has a culture (Haigh, 2022). According to Haigh (2022) “culture is not what you think, or **want** to do, it is **what you do**” (p. 1. par. 2, sent. 3). To define what a successful team culture looks like; you must first define and understand what an unsuccessful team culture looks like. Unsuccessful team culture is typically filled with negativity, constant conflict, and unhealthy competition (Taylor, 2016). Gossip, poor body language, and pouting are also signs of an unsuccessful culture, (McDowell, 2022). An athlete will not perform at their very best in this type of environment (Taylor, 2016). Taylor (2016) offers 3 essential pillars of a successful team culture: values, attitudes, and goals (Taylor, 2016). According to Taylor, these 3 essential pillars will “support all team

functioning and performance” (p. 1. par. 9, sent. 1).

## Pillar 1-Values

Values are a set of beliefs that a team has concerning desirable modes of behavior. Simply put, values are things that are most important to you, and they should not be compromised (Hanson, 2022). Why is it important to define your values? Values set a standard for the team, and they are designed to motivate and guide the decisions and choices you make as a team and as individuals, (Taylor 2016). Without a value structure, there is nothing to unify a team and it makes it extremely difficult to hold anyone accountable.

There are a couple of approaches when developing your team values. Some coaches believe in staying back and giving the players the responsibility when determining a set of values and allowing the culture of the team to grow organically. This can be beneficial if it works as the players will feel a sense of ownership knowing they created the culture. This approach can come with risk as certain players may take it upon themselves and exclude members of the team, creating a toxic culture. An alternative approach is collaboration with the players, having the coach facilitate and act as an example of the cultural values of the team. He can make his voice heard by discussing what is important to him during practice and setting an example of what that looks like through his or her behavior, but still allowing the players to have a voice on what values are important to them. (Ohio University, 2020). Here is an example of cultural values for a team to have success: ownership, hard work, purposeful, quality,

teamwork, trust, humility, and respect for self and competition (Taylor, 2016).

It is easy to make a list of cultural team values, but how do you carry them out? How do you let your values guide your behavior? There will be adversity throughout the season but having a core set of values can guide you through the tough times by staying true to them. Values are more important than your feelings. There will be days you do not feel like coaching, and the players may not feel like playing, however, you allow your values to guide your behavior, not your feelings. Coach Geno Auriemma says there are two reasons a player may not do something, either they do not know how, or they do not feel like it. If they do not know how, then the coaches can help them learn how, but if you do, and you are still not doing it, you do not feel like it (Film RoomTV, 2018). This is when your value of hard work needs to guide your actions. Doing demanding work on the days you do not feel like doing it is what separates the good from the great.

### **Pillar 2- Attitudes**

Attitudes also play a significant role in building team culture in athletics. Taylor (2016) defines attitudes as “the way you think and feel about something” (p. 1 par. 11 sent. 1). Taylor (2016) goes on to say that attitudes are “vital because they guide how athletes think, feel, and act toward their sport” (p.1 par. 11 sent. 2). There are times in life or sports when things happen that are out of your control, however, having a positive attitude is something you can always have control over, (Natelast, 2017). Maintaining a positive attitude when things are going your way is easy. It is when things are not going well that is a true test of a player or coach's attitude. When something negative happens and your attitude is not kept in check, things can spiral down a slippery slope creating more negativity and affecting an athlete's performance (Admin 2017). When your mind is focused on problems, it will create more

problems such as lower confidence, loss of focus, and anxiety (Cohn, 2018). How does one go about developing a positive attitude? A positive attitude is a mindset. When your mindset is in a positive state your actions will follow. Cohn (2018) says “A positive mindset can be summed up by the phrase “whatever it takes” (p. 1. par. 5, sent. 1). A positive mindset looks to solve problems and focus on solutions which will keep you emotionally centered and allow you to be confident (Cohn, 2018). Here is a list of attitudes that will allow a team to build a positive team culture: focus on the process, not the outcome, mistakes/failures are good, seek out discomfort, experiment, and never give up (Taylor, 2016).

### **Pillar 3-Goals**

Setting goals is the final pillar of building a successful team culture in athletics. Taylor (2016) defines goals as “the object of a person’s ambition or effort; an aim or desired result” (p. 1. par. 14, sent. 1). What is the purpose of setting goals? Having goals is important because it is motivating, and directs your aim. Whether you are setting an individual goal or a team goal, you must make your goals precise and clear, so you know what to aim at. The challenge of writing your goals with a clear, concise aim is that when you specify your aim, you are also specifying your failures. Setting a goal acts as a judge and who wants to be judged? So many people will keep their goals fuzzy so they do not know when they fail and then they can fool themselves. The key to goal setting as a team is having a long-term aim and then decomposing that aim into small goals (the daily work you are doing) so there is a connection to your long-term aim (Peterson, 2019). For example, the long-term goal is to win the section finals and make it to the state tournament. Then you must ask your team what are the things we need to do on a daily, consistent basis to reach that long-term goal of making it to state. Taylor (2016) offers these goals as an example: support and communicate with your teammates, respond positively to



adversity, be prepared for practice and games, develop a growth mindset, and have fun. These are goals that could be used in a variety of team sports, but you can make them sport-specific as well. In basketball, you could have the goal of having fewer than 13 turnovers per game. Then in practice, you can focus on drills that will help your team improve on ball handling and passing efficiency to meet your goal of having fewer than 13 turnovers per game. In short, to achieve your long-term goal, you must create daily micro goals.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to offer ideas on how to successfully build a team culture. Developing a team culture is extremely important if you care about success and performance. The environment in which athletes practice or compete influences how they think, feel, and perform (Taylor, 2016). When the culture is negative and filled with conflict, it will affect the performance of the team. When each team member buys into the set values, attitudes, and goals, they will perform at a higher level.

### References

- Ohio University. (2022). *Building a team culture: Tips & Insight*. <https://onlinemasters.ohio.edu/blog/building-team-culture-tips-for-high-school-athletic-coaches/>
- Cohn, P. (2020, September 19). *How to develop a positive mindset: Sports psychology coach*. *Sports Psychology Coach*. <https://www.sportspsychology.com/how-to-develop-a-positive-mindset-in-sports/>
- FilmRoomTV. (2018, January 28). *Geno Auriemma | Part II*. YouTube. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q\\_3cN86pWdY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q_3cN86pWdY)
- Haigh, M. (2015, March 3). *Why a sports team's culture matters*. *Athlete Assessments*. <https://www.athleteassessments.com/why-sports-teams-culture-matters/>
- Hanson, B. (2016, March 1). Values and behavior in sport. *Athlete Assessments*. <https://www.athleteassessments.com/values-and-behavior-in-sport/>
- McDowell, Q. (2020, February 25). *5 signs of toxic leadership on your team*. *Coaches Toolbox*. <https://www.coachestoolbox.net/leadership/5-signs-of-toxic-leadership-on-your-team>
- Natelast. (2017, March 10). *The benefits of positive thinking and right attitude in sports*. <https://www.mentalgritconsulting.com/having-right-attitude-in-sports/>
- Peterson, J. B., Doidge, N., & Sciver, E. V. (2019). *12 Rules for Life: An antidote to chaos*. Penguin Books.
- Taylor, J. (2016, September 7). Build a team culture for athletic success. *Psychology Today*. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-power-prime/201609/build-team-culture-athletic-success>

### About the Author

Andrew Parochka is a physical education teacher at SCR Elementary School and a coach at Moorhead High School in Moorhead, MN.

# Women Coaching Cross Country - The Immediate and Long-Term Benefits for Athlete

Shari Wentzel, Morton Gingerwood School

---

Imagine a high school cross-country coach who has recruited all levels of runners. A coach greets all the freshmen as they enter the halls for orientation and encourages them to at least come out for practice. Imagine this cross-country coach has a team captain who is the slowest runner on the team but the biggest seller of what it means to be on the team. The captain promises friendships, team bonding, and inspiring coaches. The captain is quick to point out that practices and races are hard work but worth all the effort in the end because not only will you be building up your physical stamina, but you will also be building up your mental tenacity.

Any coach could be the coach mentioned above, a coach that inspires their players and brings out the best in a runner who's not number one on their team. The scenario above, however, illustrates what a women's coach can bring to the table. Young women are inspired by outstanding female role models and women coaches serving as positive role models assist with retaining girls in sports and the sports industry (Everhart et al., 1998; Lockwood 2006; Wasend et al., 2019; Zarrett et al., 2019). A woman coach brings something a little extra when coaching young women – she is a woman. She can have open discussions comfortably “about periods, about body image, about relationships, and self-confidence” (Strout, 2021). She has lived these experiences herself and the self-connection and relatability is there in real time.

Now is the time for more women in general to step up into coaching roles. In 2022 we celebrated the 50th Anniversary of Title IX, which banned discrimination based on sex in higher education. We can celebrate this victory with the 220,060 women who are currently competing in sports at the collegiate level (NCAA Demographics Database, 2022). We can celebrate with the NCCA that reports 44% of current athletes are women (NCAA Demographics Database, 2022). Unfortunately, what we can't celebrate is the decline in women's coaching at the collegiate level.

Since the inception of Title IV, the number of women coaches at the collegiate level has shrunk from 90% in 1972 to 40% in 2022 (Hutchins et al., 2019). “Passage of the law flooded women's sports with money and created many more jobs, many of which went to men” (Hutchins et al., 2019, para. 3).

One way to change this narrative is by encouraging more women to coach cross country. Why cross country? This answer is complex and simple at the same time. There are components regarding women coaching cross country that are interconnected. One needs to understand the responsibilities of coaching in comparison and contrast to the reasons women find it difficult to maintain a coaching career. These facts intertwined together illustrate why women and coaching

cross country are a great fit and will benefit future generations of women coaches.

One main reason women leave coaching and/or find it difficult to coach is the time commitment directly impacts the home-life balance (Kamphoff, 2010); Kane et al., 2018; Zdroik et al., 2021) “Women acknowledge that they face unconscious discrimination regarding societal expectations, particularly regarding family expectations” (Zdroik et al., 2021, para. 3). This is perceived as a constraint to women’s success from men, parents, and referees. (Messner 2009; Kane et al., 2018; Zdroik et al., 2021). Women coaches feel a conflict between working as a coach and motherhood; others see women with children as “distracted” by motherhood. Simply put, coaching and motherhood are in direct conflict with each other, often forcing a woman to choose between a career or her family (Team, 2022).

A second main reason women leave coaching is the marginalized roles that women are placed in within the coaching arena. Often traditional gender roles contribute to the perception that sport requires a more masculine approach and leadership would struggle under a woman’s purview (Darvin & Lubke, 2020). Women have to balance conforming to their dominant gender role, which is for women being nice and quiet, caring and nurturing with being competent, assertive, tough, taking charge, and acting like a coach (LaVoi, 2016).

The two main reasons women find it difficult to coach are alleviated a bit within the sport of cross country. Cross Country practices are typically shorter. Practice for cross-country athletes is mostly made up of running - tempo, interval, fartlek, progressive, and recovery runs are the majority of practices (Meyers, 2021). Practices are intentional yet shorter per se than a basketball, volleyball, or softball practice

would be. Planning for practices is also not as time-intensive since runners are running based on their own pacing. Once a baseline has been established, coaches place runners in the correct grouping for workouts. Additionally, meets tend to be shorter and not as extensive such as a volleyball or basketball tournament. This shorter time needed to be effective can provide women with more home-life balance.

Secondly, cross-country coaches are often the experts and lone people overseeing the sport. Great cross-country coaches are approachable, discuss body image, provide resources, and check on mental health (Kelly, 2021). Women understand women and women’s bodies and minds. This relatability allows women the opportunity through cross country to build young women’s physical fitness and mental fortitude providing them with a lifetime skill to keep them healthy and fit (Mann & Hacker, 2022). Essentially women coaching cross country are role models for those that they coach and anyone witnessing their coaching skills. They are far from being marginalized.

Cross-country coaches can take advantage of recruiting young women by connecting team friendships to the benefits of health. Since most sports require coaches to cut players, cross country enables a coach to build large teams. A team can have a mix of running abilities. Both high performers and beginner runners are striving for their personal bests either for individual distances or individual courses. This allows coaches the ability to match up runners together in practice, adjust specific workouts, and for each runner to feel successful when they meet their own goals. Coaches can strive to focus on personal and physical growth for each runner. Even the slowest runner on the team may surprisingly be the most inspirational. This runner

understands and respects her limitations, is not afraid to show up and give every practice and race her best, and is building her mental stamina one day at a time. She may end up being the best team recruiter, spokesperson, and even the team captain, such as in the example above.

Although there is no specific research to support the possibility of the slowest runners becoming team captains, there is, however, research supporting the impact of women coaches on young women. Research shows that women benefit from outstanding examples of other women helping them overcome gender barriers to achieve success (Lockwood, 2006). Additionally, Zarret (2019) pointed out that character development within youth activities can have “far-reaching (long-term) positive impacts through the lifespan” of youth. Kotschwar, (2014) points out that young women are “more likely to experience additional professional benefits with 4% of women business executives reporting they played sports in their youth.

If we wish to see an increase in women coaches at the collegiate level, we need to have more women in the formative years who are well-respected in their fields and who are positive role models (LaVoi, 2018; Zdroik et al., 2021). Young women see someone like them as being successful, someone they look up to, and someone that they aspire to be (LaVoi, 2018; Zdroik et al., 2021). This in turn may turn them into the future coaches we see at the collegiate level.

## References

Darvin, L., & Lubke, L. (2020). Assistant coach hiring trends: An updated investigation of homologous reproduction in intercollegiate women’s sport. *Sports*

*Coaching Review*, 10(1), 38–60.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2020.1760001>

Everhart, C. B., & Chelladurai, P. (1998). Gender differences in preferences for coaching as an occupation: The role of self-efficacy, Valence, and perceived barriers. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 69, 188–200.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02701367.1998.10607683>

Hutchins, C., Curry, E., & Flaherty, M. (2019, December 31). Where are all the women coaches? *The New York Times*.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/31/opinion/Women-coaching-sports-title-ix.html>

Kamphoff, C. S. (2010). Bargaining with patriarchy: Former female coaches' experiences and their decision to leave collegiate coaching. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 81, 360–372.

<https://doi.org/10.5641/027013610x13088600028851>

Kane, M. J., & LaVoi, N. (2018). An Examination of Intercollegiate Athletic Directors’ attributions regarding the underrepresentation of female coaches in women’s sports. *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal*, 26(1), 3–11.

<https://doi.org/10.1123/wspaj.2016-0031>

Kelly, E. (2021, November 2). Great Coaches help runners thrive on and off the run-here's how. *Runner's World*.

<https://www.runnersworld.com/runners-stories/a29856642/qualities-of-great-coaches/>

Economics, P. I. for I., & Kotschwar, B. (2018, August 31). Women, sports, and development: Does it pay to let girls play? *PHE*.

<https://www.piie.com/publications/policy-briefs/women-sports-and-development-does-it-pay-let-girls-play>

- LaVoi, N. M. (2016). Paradox, pitfalls, & parity: Where have all the women coaches gone? *Tucker Center for Research on Girls & Women in Sport*. Minneapolis, MN. <https://nmlavoi.com/2016/10/28/lavoi-gives-distinguished-lecture-on-women-in-sports-coaching/>
- LaVoi, N. M. (2018, September 5). 8 reasons why women coaches matter. *SwimSwam*. <https://swimswam.com/8-reasons-why-women-coaches-matter/#:~:text=Women%20love%20to%20coach%20just%20as%20much%20as,something%20they%20are%20passionate%20about%20and%20good%20at%21>
- Lockwood, P. (2006). “Someone like me can be successful”: Do college students need same-gender role models? *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 30(1), 36–46. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2006.00260.x>
- Mann, M. E., & Hacker, C. M. (2022). Triple jeopardy: The impact of race, class, and gender on girls and women in sport and physical activity. *Psychological Services*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ser0000676>
- Meyers, A. (2021, November 19). *5 Essential cross country workouts explained*. *stack*. <https://www.stack.com/a/cross-country-workouts/>
- NCAA. (2022). NCAA. Demographics Database. *NCAA.org*. <https://www.ncaa.org/sports/2018/12/13/ncaa-demographics-database.aspx>
- Strout, E. (2021, March 29). Women coaching women: A winning combination at the NCAA Championships. *Women's Running*. <https://www.womensrunning.com/culture/news/ncaa-cross-country-championships/>
- Team, B. H. E. (2022, November 28). Balancing two roles: Career woman & mother. *BetterHelp*. <https://www.betterhelp.com/advice/careers/being-a-career-woman-and-a-mother-how-to-find-balance/>
- Wasend, M., & LaVoi, N. M. (2019). Are women coached by women more likely to become sport coaches? Head coach gender and female collegiate athletes’ entry into the coaching profession. *Women in Sport and Physical Activity Journal*, 27(2), 85–93. <https://doi.org/10.1123/wspaj.2018-0043>
- Zarrett, N., C., C., & Veliz, P. V. (2019). Coaching through a gender lens: Maximizing girls play and potential. *Women's Sports Foundation*. <https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/coaching-through-a-gender-lens-full-report-web.pdf>
- Zdroik, J., & Veliz, P. (2021). “It Takes a village”: Women’s experiences coaching high school sport. *Journal for the Study of Sports and Athletes in Education*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19357397.2021.1989281>

### About the Author

Shari Wenzel works as an Adapted Physical Education Teacher for ABLE and EASE Schools in South Holland, IL, During her free time she is a freelance writer specializing in health and fitness