

GSM International Coaching Education Articles for Developing Your Players

COACHING STRATEGIES FOR HELPING THE INJURED PLAYERS COPE

AS A COACH BE EMPATHIC

Let your players know that you understand what they are feeling and having to go through. Understand where their anger, frustration, and disappointment comes from and allow them time to mourn. Do not expect them just to suck it up, shake it off and be strong. Instead, let them have their feelings without indulging them in self-pity. One of the most potent things that you can do as a coach is to care enough about your player so that you take the time to understand what they are feeling and going through. Your genuine empathy and caring will go a long way towards strengthening the coach- player relationship and aiding the healing process.

WORK WITH THEIR SELF-ESTEEM

Understand that the injured player has just suffered a major blow to their feelings of self-worth and is, therefore, feeling quite vulnerable. Let them know in both your actions and words that you still value them as a person, not just as a player. Do not avoid or act disinterested in that individual. Remember, it is your responsibility to reach out to them, not vice versa. You are the qualified adult and professional. You must act like one. Far too many coaches completely ignore the injured player, which ends up indeed destroying their already shaky self-esteem. Reach out and help that athlete feel important and valuable.

GIVE THEM A ROLE ON THE TEAM

Help the injured player fight their feelings of worthlessness and identity confusion by giving them another role on the team. Assign them a job as assistant coach or consultant into team functioning. Seek out their opinion and advice during practices or competitions. In fact, your injured player may have some valuable insight into the inner workings of the team. Actively utilize his expertise in this area. Make them feel important and that he still has a vital role to play on the squad.

DON'T ALLOW THE PLAYER TO ISOLATE THEMSELVES FROM THE TEAM

Insist that your player continues to function as an important member/part of the team. Assign another player on the squad to monitor the injured player's involvement and to intervene whenever that player begins to withdraw and isolate themselves. As mentioned previously, take it upon yourself as the coach to actively reach out to this individual. The coach can have a powerfully positive impact on the injured player's feelings of inclusion. Be there for them and do not allow them to go into withdraw mode.

LET YOUR PLAYER KNOW THAT YOU CARE

Increase contact and communication with the injured player. Call your player if they are unable to show up at practice. If they are recovering from surgery, visit them in the hospital. A little of your time at this point in the recovery process will dramatically help ease the emotional and psychological pain that the player is experiencing. I remember the first team I ever coached and a player got injured. I went to visit him, and he was shocked I showed up. He almost fell out of his hospital bed. He was also very appreciative, and so was his parents. I was a hero and never knew it.

WHEN APPROPRIATE, EXPECT YOUR PLAYER TO PRACTICE

Whether it's limited physical or purely mental, let the injured player know that you expect them to continue their training, however, modified. When possible, assign them a personal workout that fits the limitation of their injury. Take an interest in their training and regularly check on how it's going.

HELP THE PLAYER GET IN TOUCH WITH OTHER AREAS OF PERSONAL STRENGTH

Help the injured player understand that excelling in soccer demands a tremendous amount of success and life skills that they have already developed and that they can learn to transfer to other areas of their life. Spell out for them what these areas are and help them begin to see their application in other arenas.

IF THE PLAYER'S DEPRESSION DOES NOT LIFT OR IF THESE ARE WARNING SIGNS IMMEDIATELY REFER THEM TO A PROFESSIONAL

If the player is severely depressed (has lost interest in activities, shows changes in eating and sleeping habits, or is having suicidal thoughts or feelings), it is essential that you refer him/her for professional counseling.

If you are particularly concerned about your player, you may need to play a powerful, advocate role where you enlist the parents' aid in helping their son or daughter get the professional help that is needed. The eating/sleeping warning signs of depression must be taken very seriously.

CONCLUSION

A player injury, whether temporary or permanent, is and always will be a painfully disruptive and uncontrollable interruption in an athlete's life. If you follow some of the guidelines put forth in this article you can speed up the rehab process and lessen the psychological and emotional pain that typically accompanies most player injuries. Keep in mind though that the rehab process is more often than not very slow and painful.

Understand also that when you as a player first get back out there on the field or court, you will naturally be preoccupied with worries about hurting yourself again. Don't be alarmed by this. Fear of re-injury is normal. It's also pretty standard for the recently recovered player to find themselves mentally replaying the injury over and over again in her mind's eye. This tendency to focus on "what you are afraid will happen" will distract you from the task at hand and leave you performing physically tight. In this condition, you're far more vulnerable to re-injury! To counteract this natural tendency, discipline yourself to concentrate on what you want to have happened, not what you're afraid will. Focus on what you need to do to execute correctly. While this may be far easier said than done in the beginning, discipline your players to maintain a positive focus on their performance.