

BUILDING A COACHING METHOD FOR TEENAGE GIRLS

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Our coaching method for teenage girls

Introduction

The PB18 has been actively participating in the development of women's sports by training young people for over 20 years. The experience we have acquired must now allow us to transmit our knowledge to a larger number of educators, by proposing them tools to intervene in the most relevant way possible. To do so, we have joined forces with two other foreign clubs to share their experience and vision. All these exchanges are supervised by our psychologist to ensure that our methods are adapted to the public.

For two years, our Building a Coaching Method for Teenage Girls program allowed 6 coaches to exchange with the psychologist and the 72 girls in the program from Serbian and Scottish clubs. The objective was to test a common method with these young girls. Throughout the year, we proposed adjustments to arrive at the finalized method which was presented during a conference at the end of 2022.



THE METHOD

Understanding the players

For most coaches, addressing a group of male players and a group of female players does not engage the same representations. We have a highly developed image of male sport because it is more common and more represented in the media. But, what are the issues for adolescent girls who play sports? This is a new audience for many coaches and, faced with this novelty, they may resort to stereotypical and automatic representations that generate a simplified image. This is why it is essential to understand each player you coach. This understanding comes from meeting the player and the discussions that take place between them and the coach throughout the year.

EMPATHY

The coach is a learning mediator for the players. He must allow the players to recognize their mistakes in order to improve. This is why the coach's empathy, i.e. the way in which the coach understands the players' feelings and adapts to them, is fundamental. During training, empathy cannot take place without the coach understanding the player as a whole, which implies, for example, understanding the player's place in her family and her history in order to truly relate to her. However, one must be careful not to be overwhelmed by the player's feelings, as these feelings belong to her. The coach has to stay away from the player's emotions while listening to her. This can be difficult, but this distance allows the coach to accompany the player so that she can find her own solutions. Otherwise, a co-dependent relationship between the coach and the player is established: the coach becomes the savior and the player is disempowered.



The coach needs to understand why a learning experience is difficult for a player.

- **There can be many causes. It may be due to:**
 - **physical difficulties (physical abilities, motor coordination difficulties...),**
 - **or psychological difficulties (concentration and emotional regulation skills or limiting beliefs).**
- **The coach can share elements of her story, and how she has experienced successes and failures to help players cope with challenges.**
- **The coach can also inform and direct to other actors (mental coach, physiotherapist, psychologist, doctor or nurse).**

EMOTIONS, STRESS AND LIMITING BELIEFS



Each player has her own set of emotions when she plays her sport. As a coach, you may have to ask yourself: how can I help players manage their emotions? There are techniques to reduce the intensity of an emotion or to switch to a more pleasant emotion. These techniques can be discovered with a mental trainer or a sophrologist. The coach must be informed of these techniques and be able to direct the players towards these partners. However, it is still in the coach's interest to talk about the emotions and stress felt by the players, because they influence their learning. These feelings are sometimes related to limiting beliefs (e.g., "I could never do this task perfectly").



Managing an insecure player in practice:

For players who have a negative mood or are stressed, it is more difficult to succeed at a task because they do not imagine themselves succeeding.

- **The coach can offer a mental imagery exercise, for example, by asking the players to try to see themselves making a successful basket before they shoot. For many players, seeing themselves making a basket is not an easy task. The coach can help them practice this.**
- **The coach can ask them about their feelings (such as anger, stress, sadness) during learning and competition situations (in training or in matches) so that they are better able to identify and regulate these feelings.**
- **The coach can also offer relaxation time through breathing and open a dialogue on the players' mood. Very simple exercises such as the "body scan" can help players to understand their feelings. They consist in asking a group of players to sit comfortably, to pay attention to their breathing in and out and to ask themselves where the negative emotions are in their body, starting from the head and going down to the foot.**

injuries

The injury also needs to be reflected upon by the coach. In order to understand the player, it is important to ask "does this injury say something about this player? Injury can occur when a player practices too intensely, but for many other reasons as well. For example, when she is preoccupied with a problem, or when she forces herself to play, or when she is not heard by those around her other than through a body-related complaint. Sometimes the player does not immediately understand the reason for the injury. This player may need attention that is not solely focused on the body and medical issues, i.e., talking to her about how she is doing with her family, her social relationships, her schooling, or her mood.

The consequences of the injury for the player must also be considered by the coach. For many sportswomen, emotions and stress are managed well because sport is a good way to channel them, a kind of bubble that allows them to "let go". For these players whose practice can be intense, the difficulty lies in stopping the sport, in case of injury for example. Sometimes it is the pain and shock of the injury that is difficult to overcome. In other cases, it is more the loss of the "escape" that the practice of sport represented that destabilizes the player.



Managing an injured player in practice:

- **The coach should refer the player to a sports medicine physician.**
- **The coach should talk with the player about the possible causes of the injury and take an interest in herself if she is not on the field.**
- **The coach can offer them the opportunity to attend practices in order to maintain a connection with the team.**
- **The coach must continue to monitor injured players and keep up with their medical follow-up.**
- **He can also refer the player to a psychologist if needed.**

GOING BEYOND ONESELF

It is important that the coach has an explanatory discourse on what is the surpassing of oneself in the sport because it is an abstract concept. Sport can be considered as a game that aims at surpassing oneself, it is a challenge that we set ourselves and that gives interest to what we do. The coach is present to remind this value of sport, to transmit it and explain why it is important for him. This explanation is also important to focus the attention of the players and get their support.

Surpassing oneself is a challenge that consists in managing one's effort to go beyond one's limits without getting hurt. The way of living this surpassing of oneself has a different coloration for each player. For some players, it can be experienced as an escape, for others it is a form of submission to the authority of the coach, for others still, it is above all an exploration of themselves and their physical and mental limits. This surpassing of oneself can also be experienced painfully physically or morally.

Prior to the implementation of our practice exchange, many coaches in our program may have thought that boys made more effort, despite the pain, than girls. We would like to emphasize here that there is no generalization to be made on this subject. Each player is more or less capable of surpassing herself during practices and matches, depending on her management of effort, her understanding of surpassing herself and the limiting beliefs she has received about the efforts she can make.



Managing overcoming in practice :

- **Explain to players what it means to push themselves**
- **Explain to the players how to surpass themselves, to cross the line of the "convenient" sport to progress without getting injured. These efforts involve not only the body, but also diet and sleep.**
- **Have strict rules about how injuries are treated. Resumption of practice is only allowed with the doctor's approval (this can be verbal).**
- **Ask them at the beginning of practice, "Are you having any problems today (injuries, fatigue or anything else)?" "Are you ready to train? You are training to improve your level.**
- **Ask them during practice, "Are you at your best?"**

Transmission of sporting values

When meeting a new group of players, the coach opens up to them and explains what he wants to convey to them in his coaching style. He presents himself with words, but his behavior also brings additional information to the players with which they will build an image of the personality of their coach.



THE IMPORTANCE OF WORD CHOICE

When the coach engages in discussions with the players, he or she must be open-minded and careful to ensure that the players also open up. In these discussions, players can also reveal their attitudes towards their sport. In this regard, some of the coaches in our program tended to think that girls, compared to boys, played sports more to be with their friends. This idea was not shared by the female players we interviewed. Getting to know each other clears up this type of confusion.



Managing communication with players in practice:

- **At the beginning of the year, the coach presents his coaching philosophy and the values he wants to transmit. Words are put into words at the first meeting and can be illustrated with images, examples of athletes or films that speak to the young people. But this sharing continues throughout the year.**
- **The coach must take the time to discuss the players' goals with them and their families on a regular basis, both in good times and in bad times.**
- **It is crucial to talk to all players, regardless of their level and even if everything seems to be going well for them. Indeed, sometimes players are not noticed because they are not able to identify or put into words their family, personal, school or sport problems.**
- **It is important to establish short-term individual and team goals at the beginning and middle of the season, but also long-term goals regarding the players' professional choices, so that they can prepare themselves.**

COACH'S BEHAVIOR

Coaches are role models for the players and their behavior conveys a lot of information about how they view coaching. In order to be fully present, the coach must leave their private issues at home and stay focused on the positive and the time spent with the players.

In doing so, the coach shows her players what it means to have a competitive spirit by being a role model herself who can find the energy and adapt when she fails. Explaining in words what it means to have a competitive spirit can be difficult because it is an individual drive. Initially, we need to be in a competitive situation to know what makes us tick at that moment. Some of the coaches in our program thought that the girls were less competitive than the boys, perhaps because they have groups of players who are not demonstrative. It seems essential to us to check with the players that they do not have this preconception, because the competitive spirit is a fundamental quality of athletes, and to explain to them that having the competitive spirit is acquired and requires work on oneself.



Sports attitude management in practice:

- **The coach must show dynamism and enthusiasm.**
- **The coach can help players learn about the driving force behind their competitive spirit by experiencing it through role-playing (competitive versus non-competitive drills, competition with self or others) and competition with other teams.**

Create link



The social environment in which we work is very important for learning and motivation. The bond between the players and the coach is even more important in team sports because the team does not change.

FOSTERING RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE GROUP

In team sports, team spirit is essential for skill development. When a group does not get along well, it is difficult for the group to progress and the players' skills are less able to cope with the stress of competition. The role of the coach is to define the players' roles in the team and encourage them to solve their problems.



Relationship management in the group in practice:

- **To show players that they are there for each other as a team, coaches can suggest:**
 - **team-building exercises at the beginning of the year,**
 - **exercises in groups of different sizes.**
- **In observation, the coach must be vigilant to the place of each one in the group (affinities, isolation or exclusion from the group).**
- **When creating working groups, it is important to mix the players to avoid clans and to facilitate the integration of new players.**

COACH-ATHLETE COMMUNICATION

It is important that the players can express their needs to facilitate their learning and well-being. But having a real communication with the players also means that the coach is willing to be surprised by their suggestions about the situations on the field, how they think and feel about the situations. Listening to the players shows them that they are important.

The coach must convey the idea that he is reachable, open to discussion and open-minded on all subjects (family, school, friendship, intimate relationships). During these discussions the coach listens, without judging and without imposing a solution. He can suggest solutions or refer to a more qualified person if needed.

Some of the coaches in our program tended to think that girls were shyer than boys, while the girls did not share this view at all. This idea about the character of the players can influence the way the coach communicates with them, as he may be too careful not to offend the players when he talks to them when they don't need it. It can also give them the idea that they are not good listeners. Some players are indeed shy. For these players, the coach must keep in mind that one can be a good player and be shy at the same time. It is then necessary to adapt the teaching method.



Facilitating players to speak up in practice:

- **To send a clear message that he or she is open to discussion and that it is important to him or her, the coach can establish a routine at the beginning or end of practice to get players to share their moods. These communication routines improve coach-athlete communication and communication between players on the team.**
- **Discussions that take place off the field provide even more opportunities for interaction. The coach should emphasize that these situations allow for bonding and are very important for team building. These times of exchange do not happen by chance, they must be planned by the coach, when he plans outings with his team, or when he stays a little after the training.**
- **When communicating with the players, the coach should also be approachable by using vocabulary that "speaks" to the players, so that they feel it is easy to talk to him.**
- **To get them to speak up and use the technical terms of the sport, the coach can also ask a pair of players to choose a drill they would like to do or to imagine one.**



Managing shy players in practice :

- The coach should not ask this player to speak or demonstrate until she is comfortable.
- Tutoring solutions should be encouraged to help the shyest students integrate.
- It is best to give her feedback during individual moments when she is relaxed.
- Some players are shyer in the presence of their parents during games (or during practice if the coach allows parents to be present). Indeed, on the one hand, the player may need to be with her friends without her parents, and on the other hand, sometimes the parents give feedback that contradicts those of the parents:
 - The coach can ask the parents to come less often in order to move forward.
 - The coach can talk to the player and her parents about how to support the player.

THE POSITION OF THE COACH

The coach must keep in mind that he is there to transmit his knowledge. He must also ask himself about the players' motivations but he must not force their hand. If he has too many expectations (desire to win at all costs, desire to be admired), these can impinge on the players' own expectations and install a dependency in the coach-athlete relationship or he can favor certain players and neglect others. In this case, the team may lose confidence.

The role of the coach is to constantly come back to the players' motivations. For some coaches, these motivations are difficult to see because they are based on generational differences. For example, some coaches thought that sports jobs (sports journalist, coach, manager, referee, mental trainer, sports psychologist) are more for men than for women. But this idea is not shared by the current generation of female players, who see more and more female sports models. The role of the coach is to allow the players to discover the professions of the sport and the growing place of women, to facilitate their investment in their sports practice. The opening of mind must also be done at the family level. The coach can talk to the parents about these possibilities and their commitment to follow their child.

When recruiting, it is crucial to look at the profiles of women coaches. In addition to the role model they represent for the players, women coaches in the club also enrich the representations that the coaches have of the needs of the players and their capacities. The women coaches are a privileged interlocutor of the players, because they follow similar life paths.



Knowledge and skills of the coach

To be a coach is to be a sports educator. The coach transmits knowledge (for example: history of basketball, physical development) and know-how (practice of basketball) and must reflect on this knowledge and the way he wishes to transmit it.

MASTERY OF KNOWLEDGE

It is important to have a reference grid concerning the physical, behavioral and social expectations specific to each age group. This reference grid is built by reading sports coaching manuals specific to each age group. However, when we come into contact with groups of sportswomen, we understand that for the same age group, there are great differences in levels to be considered.

The coach must also master and update his knowledge. For each exercise, he must know exactly what skill he is trying to develop.



Mastering knowledge in practice:

- **When giving instructions, the coach should explain to the players what skills they are learning, as this is motivating for the players and facilitates their learning.**
- **The exercises must be proposed from the simple to the complex, from the individual movement to the collective, from the simple task to its tactical application.**
- **You should not be afraid to ask for advice from your colleagues (ask for a reading idea or an opinion on a specific point) to improve yourself because this is a job where you are always learning.**

FEEDBACKS

The coach can give feedback to facilitate learning. Positive feedback is used to encourage and value while corrective feedback is used to correct. Both should be used alternately or together. When the coach clearly sees a player's needs, abilities and potential, it allows him/her to provide feedback on the player's efforts, even if the results are not as good as those of the rest of the group.

Feedback shows players that they are cared about, helps them focus their work, and gives them confidence in their progress. Players pay attention to any preferences a coach may have and are uncomfortable with their coach forgetting them or giving more positive feedbacks to others than to them.



Feedback in practice :

- **The coach must give feedback to all players.**
- **It is important to ensure that there is more than just corrective feedback. Without positive feedback, players can become demotivated.**
- **Whether the feedback is positive or corrective, for it to be useful, the coach must also pay attention to how the player responds to it. In other words, the coach must ensure that the player understands and accepts the feedback and uses it.**
- **Feedback should be given when the player is calm and able to receive it.**

LEARNINGS

"Repetition is the key to learning" is a basic rule of pedagogy. The same action must be repeated several times under different conditions for the learning to be generalized. But repetition leads to weariness. To avoid this in our players, we must consider the cultural evolution of society to transmit its knowledge and vary the teaching aids (for example: video, social networks).

Being a teacher also means adapting to the different learning modes of the players. For each person, remembering an instruction can take place in two modes: auditory and visual. Some players are able to memorize only when they hear the coach's voice giving the instruction, others only when they see the action taking place in front of them. For others, seeing and hearing simultaneously facilitates memorization, while for others, combining the two together provides too much information and leads them to lose focus. It is only once the instruction is understood and memorized that the learning of movement (kinesthetic mode) can take place.

It is important and interesting for the coach to observe himself when giving instructions or feedback. Are the vocabulary and the wording of the sentence understandable by the players? Is the speech rate not too fast? Is there not too much information being transmitted for it to be understood and remembered? Do I stimulate the different channels (visual, oral, auditory and kinesthetic) sufficiently? Observing yourself allows you to distinguish your own abilities and difficulties. For example, for some coaches who have difficulties in conveying their ideas with words, they want to move immediately to a demonstration so as not to lose the idea they want to convey, sometimes even touching the player's body directly to obtain an adequate placement (for example: lifting the player's hands, rather than telling her where she should place her hands). However, it is not necessary to touch the player's body to convey an instruction or feedback and this can be taken badly by the player, and rightly so.





Facilitate players' learning in practice:

- **It is important to review the same exercise several times in situations ranging from the simplest to the most complex (first at a technical level only, then in a competitive situation, then in a tactical application, etc.).**
- **The coach can take an interest in what's hot for the players right now and new ways of learning and communicating. This motivates the players and facilitates their communication with the coach. The coach can create new teaching materials :**
 - **Videos of recent games can be used as an example of an exercise to be performed during training.**
 - **Newly released films, series or books provide examples of personalities that players can relate to and find solutions to the difficulties they face.**
- **When the coach uses social media to communicate about upcoming competitions, he or she can use it to discuss competitive spirit or stress management.**
- **To facilitate the memorization of complex instructions, the coach should first give the instruction orally only, then visually only (using a chart), then orally and visually simultaneously during a practice example. Finally, the exercise can be put into action.**
- **In order to promote learning, the coach can explain that each person has different ways of learning and that it is possible for players to talk about what they need and ask for feedback from their players on their needs.**
- **The coach should not touch the players to make himself understood.**
- **The coach can observe himself (using a camera) to improve the formulation of his instructions and feedback.**

Establish a framework and respect it

The framework is a reference for the coach and the players. It fixes the place of the meetings, the schedules, the contents of the trainings, the rules, the sanctions and the values which will be the framework of the exchanges and the learnings.

DEFINE THE FRAMEWORK

The framework is co-constructed by the coach and the players. The rules and sanctions can be proposed by the coach and discussed together or proposed by the players and discussed together. Co-constructing this framework takes time but it allows the players to get to know each other better and to speak out. The co-construction of the framework is not a waste of time but a gain of time and energy. The authority of the coach cannot be done without a consensus between the players and the coach on the framework to be respected. In other words, for the rules to be respected, they must first be adhered to. If the framework does not suit the players, they can negotiate changes when they have the verbal skills and feel comfortable enough with the coach.



FINDING THE RIGHT DISTANCE

The way to relate to others depends on the history of the coach (were his relatives at the right distance?), his personality (impulsiveness, sociability...) and his professional experience (experience in group management, knowledge of the public according to age groups...). Finding the right distance with the players takes time for the coaches and depends on their profiles. Here are some profiles:

If the coach is too rigid and communication with the players is poor, they may become unmotivated because they have no way to make changes to the framework or cross the boundaries of the framework because they do not have the words to discuss it. A rigid coach may need to distance herself from the players to avoid feeling too much empathy and to avoid feeling invaded. In this case, the coach may have the team's goals in mind more than the individual needs of the players.

If the coach is too permissive, he may find himself listening too much to the players' requests for change and not being heard. A permissive coach may need to be recognized by his players as a pillar but be afraid of being rejected and therefore not establish rules. The coach may then lose sight of the general objectives, lose efficiency and organization to be close to the players.

If the coach is too self-effacing, he/she may find himself/herself misunderstanding the players and failing to connect with them. A self-effacing coach may simply not understand his or her own needs with respect to the players or may not feel able to coach.

It can happen, especially with young coaches, to be in these extremes for fear of not mastering what could happen with the players. Feeling comfortable comes with practice, so with the experience of the years and the understanding of the players. Improvement also comes from sharing difficulties with other professionals and in the coach's ability to be willing to change. It is important for the coach to talk to caring people because his coaching profile depends on his personal and intimate history. The fears that block the coach in certain behaviors should not be judged but listened to.

SANCTIONS

Sanctions for non-compliance must be clearly defined (by the coach or by the coach and players together) and be acceptable to the players. The importance of the sanctions must of course be proportional to the gravity of the limits crossed. The application of the sanction must be systematic (or almost) in case of overstepping the limits so that the framework is clear in the players' minds. When the coach is able to clearly establish these rules (sometimes it is necessary to write them down so that it is clear) and to communicate them to his group, and that he applies them methodically, then he is able to have a position of authority.

At the time of punishment, if the coach is too hesitant, or loses his composure, he loses credibility with the entire group. And yelling will not help him regain credibility. You must learn to state the penalty calmly for it to be effective. When a player behaves inappropriately, it is possible to give a penalty at the time, but it is important to communicate the penalty later, when the player and coach are calm, to facilitate the transmission and understanding of the information. Discussions can take place after the practice, talking individually with the player, in a calm environment.



Establishing a framework and having authority in practice:

- **The coach establishes a clear framework. This framework can be co-constructed with the players.**
- **The framework established must be agreed upon by the coach and the players.**
- **If necessary, the coach can write the framework down so that it is more easily remembered.**
- **The rules of the framework are about respecting:**
 - **schedules,**
 - **material,**
 - **work posture (e.g. come with a positive attitude)**
 - **and other people present.**
- **The framework also specifies penalties for non-compliance.**
- **The coach must ensure that the framework is appropriate for the players by discussing modifications with them on a regular basis.**
- **The coach keeps his authority when he respects his rules and systematically applies the sanctions, while remaining calm.**
- **If he is not calm, the coach loses credibility.**

GOOD TRAINING COACHS !