

4 Methods to Improve Athlete/Coach Communication

Improving communication skills is an ongoing process which requires constant attention and effort by coaches and athletes. Effort should be directed toward developing effective communication patterns which involves both sending messages and receiving and understanding those messages.

Recommendation: 1. *Do not assume the communicator and receiver interpret the information in a similar manner.* Coaches frequently address this problem when giving instructions to a group of athletes. The same instructions will be interpreted many different ways. It is important to make sure the information is presented in various ways so individuals will have ample opportunity to understand what is being communicated. When responding to athlete's questions, do not jump to conclusions. How many times has an athlete said to you, "But that isn't what I meant."

2. *Avoid screaming, berating, or insulting athletes.* Although this seems like a common sense rule, it is amazing to see the number of times coaches lose control in pressure situations. If coaches don't exhibit control, players quickly learn they don't have to either. When coaches lose control, the emotional element of communication may override the content element. This can occur in situations where content is essential and critical to improving performance. Effective communication does not involve making athletes feel inferior.

3. *Communicate in a consistent and fair manner.* Athletes need to be treated alike whether they are in the starting lineup or third team players. Verbal communications must be consistent with nonverbal communication. All side-line behaviors communicate some message. Understand that these behaviors may

communicate more than you desire. The cliché "A picture is worth 1,000 words" is appropriate here. Become aware of all the messages you send on the channels you have available for communication.

4. *Be receptive to athlete feedback.* If you demonstrated behavior that would be detrimental to an athlete's performance, would you feel comfortable hearing about it from the athlete? Frequently, the communication line concerning coaching behavior has not been an avenue the athlete would pursue without expecting penalty or reprimand. Create a communication environment which allows for exchange in both directions without either the coach or athlete feeling threatened, inferior, or in jeopardy.