

EFFECTIVE COACH-PLAYER MEETINGS

INTRODUCTION

When we devote time to meeting one-on-one with our athletes, they recognize their value and build trust with us as coaches. This helps enhance communication and understanding throughout a season. Building rapport in individual meetings increases the likelihood that messages will be received positively on either end of the conversation.

For a coach, there are two major parts to leading a productive individual meeting. First, listen and ask questions with the genuine intent to learn more about your athlete. Second, communicate ideas, lessons, discipline, etc. to an athlete in an effective way.

**“OUR MOST
PRECIOUS
RESOURCE IS TIME.”**

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS & LISTENING WELL

Ask most questions in the open-ended format. These questions elicit a detailed response instead of just a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’. If the athlete does respond with a one-word answer, reply with “Tell me more” or “Can you elaborate?”. In general, try to avoid asking “Why?”. Some listeners can interpret this question as judgmental. Some athletes might need time to collect their thoughts and emotions, so be comfortable in this silence while they find the words to express themselves.

Another important part of one-on-one conversation is showing the athlete that you are listening. This can be done by summarizing and reflecting on what they say. Always moving onto the next question without repeating part of what the athlete has said can make the athlete feel unheard. Below is an example of poor-quality questions and listening. On the following page, you will find an example of a conversation with good questions and listening, as well as example questions for how to elicit answers out of your athlete.

ONE-ON-ONE CONVERSATION EXAMPLE 1

Coach: “Are you enjoying playing on this team?”

Athlete: “It’s been ok.”

Coach: “Why?”

Athlete: “I don’t know. It has been fine I guess.”

Coach: “Do you get along with your teammates?”

Athlete: “For the most part.”

This first example includes yes or no questions without the coach effectively reflecting and building on the responses of the athlete.

The “Why?” question might have come across as defensive and guided the athlete to brush off their true feelings to avoid potential conflict.

ONE-ON-ONE CONVERSATION EXAMPLE 2

Coach: "What has your experience been like on the team so far?"

Athlete: "It's been ok."

Coach: "Just ok? Tell me more about that."

Athlete: "Well, I sometimes feel left out. A lot of my teammates are friends outside of hockey."

Coach: "You feel the other kids have strong friendships and don't go out of their way to include you or others."

Athlete: "Yeah. And I sometimes feel like they talk about or make fun of me behind my back."

Coach: "Thank you for letting me know about this. Our coaching staff will be watching and we don't tolerate negative behavior but we don't always catch everything. Can you make sure to let us know if something is going on?"

Athlete: "Yeah."

This example requires the athlete to be more detailed in their responses. Because the coach accurately summarized what the athlete stated, the athlete felt comfortable sharing more information.

The coach then offers support, reassuring the athlete that they feel heard and are cared about. Conversations like this one are productive - the athlete will leave the conversation knowing their coach genuinely cares about their wellbeing and that they aren't just checking off a requirement for an individual meeting.

Also, this meeting gives the coach something to act on. This coach could speak with some of the leaders on the team and through careful questioning find out more about the situation. In addition, the coach could task the leadership of the team to bring this athlete into the fold, invite the athlete to a non-sport related gathering of players on the team, etc.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR ATHLETES

Enjoyment

- What has been the most fun part of playing for this team? Least fun?
- What do you think about your teammates?
- Do you get along with your teammates?

Parent Involvement

- What do your parents have to say about your hockey game?
- Have your parents made it to any games this season?

Ownership of Team & Self

- Are there any drills you want to do more or less of in practice?
- What are the top three areas you think our team should work on?
- How would you describe our team's game?
- Where are we the strongest? Weakest?
- What are the top three areas you need to work on as an individual?
- What are your top three strengths as a player?

Catch All

- Is there anything else you want to talk about?
- How can I help you succeed this year?