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Today's Topic

Welcome back to the Coach's Corner!

This week I want to dive into a topic that we've talked about a few different times over the past few months of this newsletter, but still haven't talked about it in as much depth as it deserves. I'm talking about Relationships.

'Relationships' are a topic that comes up a lot when talking with both coaches and athletes because they really are that important. If our relationships with the people in our lives are unhealthy or ineffective, it impacts everything else we do. This applies both on and off the field, but today we are going to primarily talk about the relationships within sports.

Think back on your own career as an athlete... I'm sure you have some very fond memories of the great and influential coaches you had, and the great relationship you had with them. There isn't anything quite like that close relationship with a coach, it's hard to describe. But, on the flipside you've probably also got some negative memories involving a coach that you didn't have that type of relationship with. I know for me, I have a ton of those memories...

I say all of this to show you the power of those player-coach relationships. There is a reason that you still remember them today, good or bad. They're incredibly influential relationships and we don't want to overlook them when we are in a place of influence, like a coach.

From a coach's perspective, the relationships we form with our athletes should be one of the most important things we do. Without a strong foundational relationship with our athletes, we are pretty much stuck from the very beginning. Without those relationships, we are missing out on so many things that help make great teams as great as they are.

When coaches form strong and healthy relationships with their athletes, they are:

- Creating a close-knit team culture
- Creating a personal bond that transcends sports
- Creating more buy-in from their athletes
- Preventing drama
- Providing genuine transparency

Teams go as the coach goes. This isn't much of a secret in the world of sports. If a team is lacking strong leadership and effective coaching, they will most likely struggle throughout the course of their season. This is because of a lack of the things we just listed above.

Coaches are the first piece to the puzzle of creating a healthy team culture and molding athletes into the best versions of themselves and it all starts with relationships.

Most coaches really do care about their athletes, I will never discount that, but there are still strategies and techniques that will improve those relationships even more and help you build the team culture you have always strived for.

How Can I Apply This?

When talking about player-coach relationships we have to look at them much differently than other relationships in our lives. They are drastically different than the relationships we have with our friends, boss, significant other, co-workers, etc. They are really unique bonds we have to build.

We want these relationships to transcend simply being 'coach and player' but we don't want them to go as far as real friendships. As a coach we are technically still 'in charge' of our athletes, but we don't want it to necessarily feel that way. It can be very tricky to find the right balance, so I want to provide you with 3 different tips to build these relationships as strong as possible.

Tip #1: Destroy the Hierarchy

The traditional structure of sports is that the coach is in charge, they're all powerful, and the athletes essentially work for them. Athletes are expected to do whatever a coach asks of them no matter what. This can create some fractured

relationships and prevent a true sense of trust from forming between player and coach.

In order to build the team culture that we want, we want to dismantle this old-fashioned model and eliminate the hierarchy of power that coaches have over their athletes. We don't want our athletes being 'forced' to perform for us. Instead we want our athletes to play FOR us and FOR the team, instead of in spite of us.

In order to do this, we have to set that example by:

- Owning our mistakes
- Admitting we don't know it all
- Being a human with our athletes
- Treating our athletes as equals to us

By creating an 'equal environment' for everyone on the team we are preventing them from being afraid of us or being afraid to mess up. If athletes can see us owning our own mistakes and treating everyone as equals, they will emulate that.

Just because you have the title 'Coach' doesn't mean you are untouchable or above anyone else on the roster. Everyone on that roster should have the same goal no matter their role. And the title attached to your 'job' shouldn't play any role in how you interact with everyone else.

Starting from the ground up and forming a new set of relationships within your team is the first step in creating that culture you want. Where your athletes play tirelessly for you and their teammates instead of in spite of everything.

Tip #2: Provide Autonomy

Providing your athletes with some sense of autonomy allows them to feel that they have more power on the team and the decisions they make matter much more to the overall outcome. Giving our

athletes some say in what goes on is one of the most powerful gifts we can give them.

This doesn't mean that you just sit back and allow your players to run practice, devise game plans, and run the entire organization. Instead, we want to create situations where our athletes have the power to choose what they want to do instead of always following orders and listening to whatever you decide to do.

Some great opportunities to allow your athletes to be autonomous include:

- Choosing where to eat when on the road as a team
- Picking what activity they do for conditioning
- Picking the uniform they wear for a game (if applicable)
- Letting them try a new position or role on the team

When we create this feeling of autonomy for our athletes they automatically feel like they have more skin in the game and are more likely to play with higher effort and more passion.

When athletes have this type of freedom they are able to play much more stress free and feel that they have more power than they are used to. This provides them these feelings without sacrificing anything on your part as a coach. The athletes are still completing everything you want them to in practice, but this time they got to choose exactly what that looked like (for example: choosing their conditioning method).

Creating a democracy among your team as opposed to a dictatorship makes everything much smoother and helps to build those strong relationships with your athletes that become the backbone of a healthy team culture.

Tip #3: Be More than 'Coach'

As I said in the first tip, we want to dismantle the power hierarchy that sports traditionally have. Another way to do this is by redefining what a 'Coach' is.

As a coach, you have the opportunity to do so much more than simply teach a sport. You can become a go-to person for your athletes off the field, you can become so much more than just a figurehead for them. We want our athletes to feel comfortable coming to us for advice or help when they need it. But if we haven't established that trust and belief in one another, we can never expect this to happen.

This is where these relationships are so important. In order to become more than just their coach, it all starts with building a holistic relationship that encapsulates more than just their performance for you.

This can be accomplished in a few different ways.

-Take an interest in them outside of your sport: Attend their other activities, check in on how school is going, learn about their family, learn their other interests, care about them regardless of the role they play on your team.

-Relate to them: Talk to them about what's going on in their lives, take an interest in their interests, don't be an 'outsider'. I understand that it can be difficult to relate to teenagers at times, but if you put in the effort, they will be more than willing to help you out and explain things to you... Helping to create that 2-way relationship we want.

-Share your story: Help them get to know you better, talk about your past as an athlete and coach, explain what got you into coaching, share your goals, explain why coaching matters so much to you.

When our athletes have a better understanding of us and know us as a person, they can treat us as just another human, instead of this fear driven relationship that often forms when that power hierarchy takes center stage.

I understand that it can be very difficult for coaches to stray from their normal behaviors and allow themselves to open up to their athletes. But I promise that it's worth it. The relationships you will build will not only improve the culture of your team, but it will also build relationships that can last a lifetime and transcend coaching and sports altogether.

Not every athlete you meet will need to be treated the same, but you will never truly understand how to treat them if you never form that relationship to begin with. Once you have that relationship, then you can determine what they respond to best and find the most effective way to 'coach them up'.

At the end of the day it is all about being a good human. If you can respect everyone, provide them with healthy human interaction, they will reciprocate that and play hard for you, doing whatever is best for the team and you as their coach.

This Week in Sports

1. The Fall Classic is off to a great start.

Tuesday night was the start of the 2021 World Series between the Houston Astros and the Atlanta Braves. With the Cardinals missing the World Series once again I was left without a team to cheer for, that was until the Braves clinched the NL spot to take on the Astros.

Ever since the 2017 cheating scandal that landed Houston a World Series victory, myself and most other baseball fans outside of Houston have despised the Astros and many of their players. Making me a die-hard Braves fan for the rest of the 2021 season.

Atlanta started their quest for a Championship with a dominant 6-2 win over the Astros in Houston Tuesday night, but at the cost of losing their ace Charlie Morton to injury. Except, Morton wouldn't go down as easy as you might expect.

In the second inning, Morton was hit in the leg with a line drive off the bat of Yuli Gurriel. He didn't seem to react much to being hit and returned to the mound to throw 10 more pitches before completing the inning. Then Morton came out the next inning, threw six more pitches (the final pitch struck out Public Enemy #1, Jose Altuve), then finally left the game due to an injury.

Later in the game we found out that Morton had fractured his fibula when he was hit with that line drive the inning before. So... Morton faced 3 batters while on a broken leg, struck out two of them, and still touched 96 MPH with his fastball. This dude is a stud!

I think this performance by Charlie Morton will be remembered for a long time and it was such a sweet start to what hopefully becomes a 4-0 sweep for the Braves over the Astros.

2. The Red Birds Find Their New Manager

A few weeks ago the St. Louis Cardinals fired their manager, Mike Shildt, somewhat out of the blue. In his tenure as the Cardinals' manager Shildt was far from perfect, but I was shocked to see his firing after the run the Cards made this year to make the postseason.

My opinion on the firing is entirely irrelevant to the Cardinals, but this week they named their new manager: Oliver 'Oli' Marmol.

When the announcement was made I had never heard of Marmol and didn't know what to expect with him at the helm of my favorite team. But I quickly learned that he is a Cardinal through and through. After being drafted by St. Louis in 2007, he played 4 years of minor league ball in the Cardinals' system and then transitioned into coaching for the Cards in 2011. Spending his entire professional career as a part of 'The Cardinal Way' is a good sign for what he can bring to the manager position.

Over the past 10 years he has held a number of coaching positions throughout the Cardinals' organization and has now

been named the manager of the big league club that drafted him over a decade ago. I think this is such a cool story and I am excited to see what he can do as manager for the Cards. I'm already looking forward to next season!

Other Sport Psych Resources

1. [The Impact of NIL Laws on College Football](#)

This week I had another article published for Culture in Sports, and this time instead of writing about Major League Baseball I decided to take a look into the changes we've seen in college football over the past few years. While it may not be a 'sport psych' specific article, there is still some very interesting stuff going on in the world of college athletics.

In specific, I'm talking about the new Name, Image, and Likeness rules that allow NCAA student-athletes to make money from sponsorships and brand deals while they are competing in college. I am a huge proponent of this new rule because I think these athletes should have the ability to make money off their own name while competing and bringing in millions of dollars to their universities.

But this is a big change for college sports and it will undoubtedly have some major ramifications on the world of college athletics as a whole.

In the article I take a look at one of the faces of college football, Spencer Rattler of the University of Oklahoma, and where all his NIL deals will fit into his future in college football after this season hasn't gone according to plan for him.

I am interested to see how these new rules impact the culture of college sports over the coming years.

[Check out the full article HERE.](#)

2. [Building the Best Routines](#)

This week one of my favorite Mental Performance Coaches, Justin Su'a of the Tampa Bay Rays, shared another great YouTube video. I have shared some of Justin's work in this newsletter before and I'm sure I'll share his work again. This is because he is one of the best in the game working at the highest level of sports.

In this video Justin talks about the power of creating sound routines for your life and sports both.

He provides tips and strategies to make sure your new routines are as effective as possible and will stick with you for the long haul.

I talk a lot about routines and why I think they are so powerful for coaches, athletes, and everyone alike. Creating solid routines that you can follow daily does so much to improve your day to day quality of life.

I highly recommend checking out this video and applying some of the things Justin talks about to your own life.

[Watch the Full Video HERE.](#)

Quick Quote



"The most important thing is to try and inspire people so that they can be great in whatever they want to do."

-Kobe Bryant

Check out Older Editions of the Coach's Corner at the Bottom of the Page Here:

<https://www.streckersportpsych.com/coachs-corner>

Thank you for reading and until next week, remember:

Today is a great day to change a life!

Cheers,

Bryce Strecker M.S.

Applied Sport Psychologist | Mental Skills Coach

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