

CHAMPIONSHIP PERFORMANCE

Coaches Corner

Interview with Texas' Gail Goestenkers

This month we interviewed Texas Women's Basketball coach Gail Goestenkers.

While at Duke, she led the Blue Devils to two undefeated ACC records and Final 4 appearances. She discussed various aspects of what has made the Duke program so successful.

You have put together highlight films of the team's best moments as a motivational tool. Are there any other creative ways you have found to motivate your team in the past? When we played a regular season game at Georgia Tech, I took the team to the Georgia Dome (site of the Women's Final 4). Our theme last year was "One Team, One Dream." We went inside the Dome and I told them to get comfortable with the surroundings. We had five freshmen on the team who I especially wanted to see what it was like. I talked about the dream and what it would take to make it happen.

■ More Goestenkers Wisdom

- Duke has a buddy system where players are paired up, usually a reserve with a starter. During time-outs, the buddy not playing provides a drink and encouragement to her partner. To prepare players for how to act of the bench, the Duke coaches demonstrate how to be supportive, including cheers and the best way to high five.
- Players contribute to scouting reports, watching tape with coaches and writing down the strengths and weaknesses of opponents. They also have a practice player of the day and year, based on hustle and fundamentals.
- Roles are generally accepted by players for the good of the team. One player commented: "We always talk about how knowing your role is so important. Although some of us would like bigger roles sometimes, we need to perfect the ones we have, especially during tournament time. It helps us to hold each other accountable."

If an athlete gets into a shooting slump, but her technical form is fine, what would you say to that player to help her recover?

First, I would give them more personal attention. I would start to shoot with them. I would give positive reinforcement, "Don't worry - you are a great shooter." while I'm shooting with her. I would play some fun shooting games like horse, where they can relax and not think too much about their slump. This way they won't stress out as much about their shot. Generally, if the form is fine, but you struggle, confidence is an issue. The game then becomes stressful. I want the game to become fun again. They usually get their confidence because they can beat me. Then we'll put together a highlight tape of them making shot after shot. That will help them regain their confidence and touch of when they were shooting well.

Are there any particular team building exercises you have used that have been consistently beneficial to your team over the years at Duke?

When they get back from summer, we do show and tell - just like you did in kindergarten. Everybody has to bring something from home that means something to them and something that the team doesn't necessarily know about. Five minutes before each practice session, we have a different player do their show and tell. This brings the team closer together. They're sharing themselves and they're childhood with each other.

It's also nerve-racking for the freshman when they get up there for the first time. It gives the rest of the team empathy because they've all been in that situation where you're speaking in front of the team for the first time and you're sharing part of yourself with them.

We have them do book reports. Players have to stand up in front of their teammates and kind of put themselves out there and talk about what they have learned through the book. I probably have

about thirty books that we have used over the last couple of years.

Are they mostly sports related or about any subject?

Anything, but mostly sports related. "It's Not About the Bike", by Lance Armstrong is one of my favorites. There are basketball books like "A Season is a Lifetime" by Duke's Coach K and "Values of the Game" by Bill Bradley which are great. Short books like "Who Moved My Cheese" or "the Precious Present" can be read very quickly. In cases like that, I'll assign them two books. We assign the books to players depending on what we think they need to hear.

For instance we gave "Who Moved My Cheese" to a freshman because she was very rigid in her ways. She needed to become more flexible and understand that there are other ways to do things. It was good because after she read it, she said "Okay, now I get it". She knew exactly what I was trying to get at with her. Since we've read all the books and know the themes, we sit down as a staff and decide which book will be assigned to which player.

When you're talking to someone who is feeling pressured and stressed out, is there any advice you can give to a student athlete like that?

When they are feeling overwhelmed, we tell them to write down everything that they are doing within a day. Find out where they are wasting time and where they can be more productive.

Instead of coming over to Cameron (the training facility) on three different occasions, let's get you over here once to do your practice and your study hall and your weight lifting all at the same time as opposed to three different trips. Usually you can find some time that's been wasted. Watching Jerry Springer in the afternoon is not real productive. (Laughs)

Dealing with the Problem of Hazing

The latest hazing twist is that photos depicting demeaning behaviors are now appearing on Internet sites such as facebook.com, webshots.com and badjocks.com.

Elizabeth Allan, a professor of higher education leadership at Maine, has conducted a national research project on hazing. Her take on why students would voluntarily post possibly compromising photographs on the Internet: "It's a complex social phenomenon that boggles the mind. I think there are many factors that affect motivation to be part of it and go along with it. We know peer pressure plays a major role. People want to be accepted by the group – it's a human need. When you combine alcohol to the situation, judgment is further impaired.

The popular media and the normalization of these kinds of behavior make it more likely that students will not question whether it is appropriate or not. There is a culture of wanting to prove one self – to earn your status, show that you are tough enough and can take the hazing and show you belong."

The Elon University baseball program learned a hard lesson when they thought they had removed compromising photographs taken at a party from facebook.com. Later, the same photos appeared on a site called badjocks.com.

"Once these things get out, there is no such thing as privacy. You are vulnerable and it can explode on you. All the sudden,

the pictures appear all over the universe," said retiring Elon athletic director Alan White.

Rookie players often assent to participation in these activities in order to belong and to gain entrance to the group and be part of the group identity. For veterans who participate in hazing, the reasons are more diverse.

First, it allows them to assert power over the newcomers and boost their own status. Second, athletes do not make final decisions on who gets cut or not. By forcing rookies and first year athletes to go through such rites of passage, it gives veteran players a chance to feel like they have had a say in who makes the team (or what their standing on the team is.) Last, many of them want to participate in hazing simply because they had to endure it and now it is their turn to be the aggressors.

Recommendation: More schools athletic departments are becoming pro-active and forming policies on what can and can't be posted on the Internet. Mandatory education seminars for student-athletes on both the Internet and hazing in general are also helpful.

What else can be done? Since a lack of awareness and understanding of hazing is what often makes it so difficult to identify and stop, one of the most important tactics is for teams to have clear and concise policies on hazing.

These must include explicit definitions, which are consistently and strongly enforced. Athletes have said in interviews that they would not report hazing in part because the administration would not handle the situation appropriately. Therefore, a trusted and qualified person to whom incidents can be reported should be designated as part of your anti-hazing policy.

Additionally, teams should design and implement structured training and initiation programs with positive, team building activities that are challenging, even physically demanding, but that don't humiliate or degrade any athlete. This will help take the pressure off student-athletes to come up with their own initiation rites. When you turn initiation rituals into something positive instead of dangerous or even illegal, you build unity and chances are you will start a tradition that can be passed on from year to year.

P.S. You can allow some "minor hazing" rituals such as forcing a rookie to sing their college or high school fight song during lunch or having newcomers do some menial jobs for veterans. But serious humiliation never builds team unity.

Family Style Method of Communication

In families, if one parent is the heavy or disciplinarian and the other is the supporter or positive reinforcer, both parents will have less impact on their children. As parents, they will not be fully functioning. Sometimes, two or more coaches on a staff can take on these roles.

Case in point: A split pattern developed between four coaches at a university. Two of the coaches were consistently critical while the other two were consistently positive. Therefore, as you might guess, the players were not responding to the positive comments or to the negative criticism.

Giving one kind of feedback lessens the impact of that feedback. If someone always says "you look great", you may not value their opinion very much. Furthermore, if someone always says, "you play like dirt", you may stop listening to their opinion or suggestions.

In an effort to help all four coaches be both critical (suggesting change) and positive (being supportive) in their feedback, the coaches were given an "odd-even" day task.

They would switch roles on odd and even days so that each day two coaches were looking for what players were doing right

and commenting on this specifically and two coaches were noting areas which needed improvement and commenting on that specifically. This task allowed all four coaches to develop a new pattern with each other that eventually became spontaneous.

As players heard both types of feedback from all four coaches, the comments carried more weight and the players listened and responded to the points the coaches were trying to get across.

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Team Building

Team Building Exercise: Adapt to Situations

You or the team’s sport psychologist can set up role playing scenarios to help team members learn how to react more positively to a given difficult circumstance. The exercises can help athletes see the big picture of how their attitude impacts the team in a positive or negative manner.

Before starting, solicit input from your athletes regarding situations that cause frustration or where athletes have a tendency to respond poorly.

Directions: Separate your team into groups with no more than 4 or 5 people per group. Each group will receive a scenario that they will role play for the rest of the team to observe.

First, the group will act out the situation with a negative response. Next they will act out the same situation with a positive response. Encourage the teams to have fun with this activity and be creative as possible.

Here are two sample scenarios: 1) A crew team has to row in inclement weather. Typical negative responses are pre-match talk of ‘always performing poorly in bad weather’, talking about how uncomfortable they are, complaining about how the weather always brings out the worst in the team.

Positive responses show teammates pumping each other up with talk of how they can’t wait to get into the water, that the team rows well in bad weather, about how they are looking forward to the extra challenge.

2) A field hockey team brings in a stellar freshman class and a few juniors and seniors lose their starting positions.

Negative responses include complaining about those ‘young idiots - who the heck do they think they are’, poisoning team chemistry with talk of

quitting or transferring, bad mouthing the coach behind his or her back, etc.

Positive responses include welcoming the opportunity to compete against the younger players in practice and accepting their move to second string, encouraging the new players to rise to new heights in performance, and becoming mentors to the younger players - even if they eventually lose their starting job.

Objective: The main goal of this activity is for athletes to become more aware of certain scenarios that arise in their sport and the best and worst ways to deal with them.

Often times, athletes will exaggerate the responses which can be used later in post exercise discussions. By discussing these possible scenarios and solutions, a link will be created in the athlete’s memory on how to best cope with such a situation should it arise in the future.

You can help reduce some uncertainty in the future by helping athletes become aware of the situations in the present.

Conclusion: This activity may involve many situations and open up discussions that encourage problem solving. The team will be able to work together and help each other with a variety of responses that one athlete alone may not have considered.

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Winning Ways

2 Takes on Female Motivation

The following article provides two perspectives on female motivation. The first comes from a female sport psychologist - Gloria Balague. The second from an executive leadership journal.

“When I work with women athletes, relatedness often arises as an important motivational element. Most of the women I speak with will talk about the importance of their relationship to their coach. The personal relationship seems to be a central concern, as is having a group of teammates where they feel a sense of belonging. Often they feel that their coaches did not understand the relatedness need, resulting in frustration for all parties concerned.”

A specific example of this has been my work with elite gymnasts at the national level. They have complained to me about coaches who paid more attention to them (because of their performance excellence) and ignored or paid less attention to other gymnasts at the club where they trained. This source of stress results in a climate of tension and blame for something that was beyond their control. These young girls were looking for good relationships and feelings between all the gymnasts and felt undermined by the differential treatment by the coaches.”

A study conducted on executive middle managers over a four-year period found that males were much more driven by the prospect of furthering their careers, while female executives were primarily more concerned with co-worker and customer relations.

Once they reached a higher level in their careers, men and women also differed. Men defined success by the rewards of their position or prestige of their company. Women gave more thought to being empowered and having supervisors who helped them with their career development. They put a high emphasis on fostering positive relationships with co-workers and clients they interacted with.

Coaching and Communication

Examples of Positive Communication During Practice

The following article describes different communication behaviors with examples of how each can be used in a positive manner.

- *Use of first name:* Using the first name of a player when speaking directly to them during practice while they are executing a drill.

Examples: “Nice pass, Sue.”
“Taylor, you must use better technique with your slide tackle.”
“Get lower in your stance, Jen.”

- *Questioning:* Any question to players concerning strategies, techniques, and assignments specific to your sport.

Examples: “What is your role in this particular defensive alignment?”
“What is the correct technique for

a throw in?” “How would you use a box out technique to get better rebound position?” “Where is the ball going when we are in this formation?” “Is this play legal or would we be penalized if such and such happened?”

- *Hustle:* Verbal statements intended to intensify the efforts of the players.

Examples: “Run it out. Run it out.”
“Keep pushing. Don’t let up.” “Come on, faster, faster, move it.”

Team clapping to pump up the team’s intensity before the start of practice or a game. “Rise up. Tigers will rise up. Rise up. Tigers will rise up.”

- *Use of humor.* Verbal remarks that contain irony, sarcasm, or witty comments relating to the players

performance in practice. Used sparingly, this can really help a practice change the pace if things aren’t going well.

Sarcasm: “I would trade you guys in, but I don’t think the dealer would give me anything.”

Wit: “With that kind team speed, we don’t need light rail around here.”

Irony: “If you guys had played like this last week, there is no way in heck we would have lost to X.”

Mental Toughness

3 Characteristics of Mentally Tough Athletes

According to Jim Loehr, author of *The New Toughness Training for Sports*, the most successful athletes are ones who can combat negative thoughts and can even change the way they are feeling.

“Tough competitors,” writes Loehr, “consistently use images of success, of fighting back, of having fun, of staying relaxed, of being strong in the face of adversity, to move their mind and emotions in those directions.”

The goal all athletes should strive for is to make their self-image “strong, vivid, and courageous.”

Elite athletes know how to “see” themselves succeeding. Through techniques of “visualization” and “mental rehearsal,” many athletes go through the exact motions of a competition in their head mentally practicing each move, noting their feelings, even the way they are breathing at a

certain moment. Sports psychologists say mental rehearsal actually improves the brain-body links to help your moves come more automatically—and that studies have shown that athletes who visualize success better their chances during competition.

They learn to see stress as a challenge, not a threat. Athletes who view stressful situations as a threat actually produce more hormones and chemicals in their body that can impair physical and mental performance. Athletes who meet stress as a challenge create a rush of adrenaline and sugar inside their bodies—a natural “high” that is probably responsible for what athletes call a sense of “flow,” of heightened awareness as they perform. If athletes can learn to encounter stress and say, “Great! I’m ready for this!” they are more likely to succeed.

They use humor to break up ten-

tion. “When you think nutty, goofy, silly, funny, off-the-wall thoughts, fear and anger vaporize,” Loehr notes.

Sport psychologists say the ability to ask tough questions (*What could I have done differently? What have I learned that I can use in the future?*) is critical.

They develop what Loehr calls a “just for today” spirit. Sometimes it seems too hard to say “I will always do something”, whether it’s eating right, studying hard, or practicing a boring drill in your sport.

But successful players develop the self-discipline to commit themselves to doing it right just for today. Mentally, it’s easier to think about controlling what you do on a single day - and if you succeed today, tomorrow becomes a little easier.

Motivation

Dr. Collen Hacker on Motivational Audio/Visual

This month, we interviewed Dr. Colleen Hacker, an assistant coach and sport psychology consultant for the U.S. Women's National Soccer team on the key components of producing peak performance AV materials.

What are the first steps a coach should take before attempting to produce a motivational type video? The first question you have to ask is: 'who is my audience and what is my purpose?' Second, if you are devising peak performance audio/video/CDs/DVDs - you need to use the technology your athletes are most comfortable with.

Can you give an example of a specific motivational tape that you would produce? Let's say you have come off a devastating loss. Now you have to play an opponent you haven't beaten recently. Let's say you're playing an opponent who beat you the last time out. Maybe you are taking over a program that's been in the middle of the pack or down toward the bottom and you want to build it to a league championship.

The purpose is to develop a motivational tool. **But motivation for what?** That becomes a second question. You want motivation to develop confidence in your team's abilities. Sometimes athletes are afraid of failing or afraid to look bad. They may even be afraid to succeed because even more will be expected of them.

Once you've answered these questions, every answer leads to another question. What captures those feelings? What would make that message have more impact? I have done motivational tapes that include little clips from movies, movie highlights, maybe it's something from 'Remember the Titans' or 'Searching for Bobby Fisher'. Some people may think, 'A chess movie?', but you'd be amazed at some of the scenes. Maybe it's something from 'Thelma and Louise' or 'Rocky.' You want to infuse movie scenes that will capture your particular ethic or mood, and really drive home this message.

Another direction to go is where you tightly editing quality clips of your team making a basket, scoring the goal, stuffing the opponents defensively, or incurring

floor burns because they're hustling after every ball or diving for a ball before it goes out over the touch line.

The movie clips by themselves can be unbelievably powerful and engaging. Another method is to combine the movie clips with tightly edited tapes of your own team, and your own players exhibiting this style, this skill, or this quality. Shorter is better than longer.

You want to capture people so that it's engaging, it's motivating, it strikes at the heart, rather than the head. The messages should be subtle and powerful. There's a real art to it. That's why some movie directors are better than others. The science is the technology. The art is how you apply the technology. The best coaches are skilled both at the art and the science of creating these tapes.

Can you discuss the difference between imagery tapes and motivational tapes? With imagery CD's/DVD's/tapes I've made for individual athletes, I want to create a mental skills training tool, not motivation. I want to help them improve their game. This isn't for motivation, this is for actual skill improvement.

When I'm going to make an imagery tape, what do I want to capture? What are all the different uses? I can do an imagery tape to help an athlete perfect skills or techniques that he or she has been working on. You can create an imagery tape to help athletes learn tactics, plays, or strategies.

For example, here we are changing the point of attack. Here we are in our match-up zone defense. Here's a player being able to execute a serve to perfection in a volleyball or tennis match.

There are many specific aspects of a player's game to work on: inbounds plays, rebounds, shooting, blocking out, one on one, zone, whatever it might be. The purpose is to instill confidence in a player's unique personality, imprinting this particular part of their game.

I do imagery tapes for athletes coming back from injuries, so they understand what strengths they have, and their

triumphs and their accomplishments. You can create imagery tapes for a lot of different outcomes.

These should be extremely individual, personal, tailor-made unique. It's generally helpful to include athlete selected music as the backdrop, but I also use raw footage as well. When you have lots of people cheering - that's a pretty powerful audio message as well.

What about team versus individual tapes? Generally, the most positive benefits come from individually created tapes. I also create team oriented tapes as well. In my experience, I would want every individual to have their own before I'd want to do one for the whole team. You can create a team tape following the same principles. Here's us being successful against big-time opponents. Here's us using the strategy successfully that we're going to need to use in Saturdays' game. Here's us triumphing against this opponent that we've never beaten before because that's what we're going to do in this upcoming game.

What are some of those different ways you have to adjust your strategy when working with the best of the best? In individual tapes, I will show them performing their signature moves, their signature strengths and skills. I want to show them at their best. I will pick from a very small number of players in the world who on a particular skill, technique, or event, these top elite athletes would find worthy of respect.

If you're the best in the world at what you do, then you only want to hear from other people who are the best in the world at what they do. There aren't many 'mastery models' to speak of. It's not unusual for me to show the elite soccer players that I work with an NBA or MLB champion athlete. There's not many people that have faced what our athletes have faced at this level.

If you're a high school coach in the state play-offs, then showing your team a college tape of the NCAA division one finals would be a good model to use.

Goal Setting

Specific vs General Goals

“Do the best you can.” That seems like an excellent goal. But can a goal like this be met? It’s a safe bet, because no one really knows what an athlete’s best really is. This vagueness can kill a good goal setting program. In all honesty, doing one’s best is not really a goal at all. It’s a long term objective that one can continuously strive for.

Specific goals are more effective because they direct behavior more precisely by specifying the criterion for success. Consequently, they communicate clear expectations to athletes. Specific goals should be quantifiable and specify a time period of precise event.

Here are 10 sport specific examples of goals that can be quantified and measured.

- Run the 1,500 meter race this Saturday in X time.
- Keep the person I’m guarding in the next game from having no more than 3 open shots.

- To block the correct person every time in today’s scrimmage.
- To read the defense correctly 90 percent of the time and to call the correct audible every time the defense lines up in a certain formation.
- To score 72 in the championship round of the next golf tournament I play in.
- Hit at least 70 percent of my first serves in the next set.
- To make solid contact with the ball 80 percent of the time during this week’s batting practice. • To pitch the ball to the spot called for by the catcher 80 percent of the time in tomorrow’s game.
- To extend my concentration practice today from five to six minutes.
- To record at least half of my negative thoughts today in a journal. Then spend 20 minutes this evening practicing the substitution of positive, but realistic thoughts to put in their place.

When Praise Won't Motivate

Praise can be a great motivator, but praise all the time for any reason can actually backfire.

If you hand out praise the wrong way, at the wrong time, or for the wrong reasons, it can do more harm than good. Here are some guidelines to follow when using praise to motivate athletes.

1) *Be very specific about when you praise.* Don’t say: “Jill you’re doing a good job keep up the great work. Wait for something very specific to praise. For example, “Jill, you did a great job blocking out Smith the last game. Keep that up and we’ll be in great shape.”

2) *Do not praise ordinary performance.* If you praise athletes for doing routine task - they will not be motivated to get better. If and when they do something better than ordinary, the praise won’t mean much.

3) *Don’t praise hit and run.* When a player does something truly excellent, call that player aside and spend some time letting that person know what his or her performance means to your team’s long run success. Consider praise in front of the group, but don’t over use.

4) *Use praise to improve poor performance.* If an athlete is doing well in one area, but poorly in another, use praise to improve the poor performance. Sit the player down and privately praise what she is doing right. Then say, “Now I want you to take the same approach on this other situation.”

5) *Never assume praise is enough.* If an athlete consistently delivers superior performance and work ethic, praise in and of itself is not enough. Other forms of appreciation are absolutely essential at some point.

Peak Performance Bullets

14 Ways to Say “Well Done”

Sometimes offering praise is harder than it should be. In a busy practice it’s easy to forget to complement and voice your appreciation. But praise can really make a team member’s day. Here are 14 ways you can say “well done”. There is no faster way to build confidence than to use praise that is sincere. Make sure the athlete has earned it however.

1. I am proud that you are on my team.
2. You keep improving every day - well done.
3. Thank you so much for your consistent effort.
4. I really admire your perseverance.
5. Your upbeat mood always lifts the teams’ spirits.
6. You have earned the right to be called a champion.
7. Great effort - great intensity.
8. You make every one around you a better player.
9. I have great confidence in you.
10. You have grasped the concept (or offense) so well.
11. You are a valuable part of this team.
12. Your efforts are really making a difference.
13. You help make this team’s vision come alive.
14. What you are doing inspires the whole team.

Interview with 6 Time National Champion Softball Coach Sue Enquist

This month we interviewed Sue Enquist, head coach of UCLA women's softball.

The will to win. Is it inherent in a player or are there things you can do as a coach to bring that desire out of an individual?

The will to win is present in everyone. The challenge is to teach the student athlete how to unwrap those things that inhibit your will. The most common denominator to inhibit the will is fear. Fear inhibits a player's will to 'go for it.' Fear inhibits my will to work harder than everyone else because if I do, I will be responsible for the outcome. The challenge for athletes in this generation is to be freed up by giving it everything they have. Ultimately, if they lose a game, you win the process. At the end of the day, if you can win the process, the game usually ends up being extremely fun and successful. At UCLA, there are 3 entities: Ourselves, the opponent, and the game. Those 3 factors interact all throughout practice preparation and competition. If I can get my athletes to focus on the game and ourselves, they will learn to love creating that strong will to win each and every day. You don't minimize your opponent – you get educated about them, but they are simply a player in this triangle. Other than educating ourselves on their defensive schemes and a pre-set strategy on the pitcher we will face, we don't focus a lot on them.

Do you ever change the way you are preparing a team during the season if things aren't going as planned? Winning and fun go hand in hand. You're not going to have fun and win if you can't physically execute. Our conditioning and training hold up that trampoline of fun and winning. You can sometimes do all the right things and not get the end result you want. In that case, it's my job to remind the team of the things that they are doing right.

Here's an example. In 2005, we were top 3 in the country at the beginning of the season. We were defending champions and we ended up playing selfish softball, in my opinion, to start the year. Instead of hitting the ball to the right side and moving runners, we tried to hit home runs and collectively collapsed as a team and dropped to thirteenth. Never in the history of our program had we dropped so

far. But then the team collectively started to see we need to recover and get back to what made us great which was process based goals, team goals, and team softball. What does that mean? Having the mindset of purposely wanting to put the ball in play on the right side of the infield or the outfield to advance that runner.

Early on we would get so frustrated and just try to hack our way out of our previous failure of not getting the bunt down. So here's what would happen: In the dugout, I would have lists of goals they could check off. One set of goals were really process oriented goals. These were goals that we all knew we could be successful at. They didn't even involve the opponent. For example, when you are at bat, the player would take two deep breaths. That has nothing to do with getting a hit or not.

We were able to do things regarding tempo. I wanted them three times in a game to call a timeout and reconvene in the infield when they saw a momentum shift. These were things we could be very good at and feel good about taking control of our game.

I wanted to change the negative self talk to positive images. I took all our positive self talk words and printed them, laminated them and posted them all over the dugout in the last third of the season. I wanted them to see words and say those words in their head constantly so we could get to the point where we would start being more positive, and start playing team softball.

When we started to do that, we weren't winning right away, but we were playing better. Instead of looking at our team batting average, I wanted them to look at our advancing runner stats. So we began to break our game down into the simplest terms like advancing a runner. So a player could ground out, but did she move a girl from first to second? There are different ways to look at success.

Our team batting average was .250 moving runners from second to third, but our team stat from moving first to second was .390 so I asked them: "Were you putting pressure on yourself?", "Are you getting overconfident?" I told them not

to put a greater value on advancing the runner at second.

So you're telling me you can hit .390 moving her from first to second, but you can only hit .250 from second to third. So what is going on there? Have the same mind-set like you are trying to advance the runner from first. They hung on to that philosophy and it literally carried us through the post-season all the way to the championship game.

Can you give an example of a practice drill used to motivate players?

Softball is a failure sport, so we were always trying to find new ways to motivate the athletes. Here is an example: At practice the other day, they knew that suicide bunt challenge was on the line. This means that 13 out of the 14 hitters have to put the bunt down. The reward of completing this may be less running or a social event where they do something fun as a group. This day, 12 out of 14 laid the bunt down. Their favorite come back is 'double or nothing.' We have two specialized runners on the team who do a lot of training on their own within the team. I picked one of them as having to make the bunt.

The team said, "No fair coach." My reply: "The game is not fair. How are you going to handle the situation?"

So the team all gets together with this pinch runner and gives her a quick pep talk on how to get the bunt down. They tell her to use positive self-talk and wait until she is ready for the pitch. This freshman with all the pressure on her put down a bunt that could have won a world series game.

After that drill, I asked them what was the lesson learned? Good talent combined with a different attitude can do anything. Good talent is flexible because the season will offer so many different challenges. That's a motivational drill that worked. There were many similar ones where the team simply didn't get the lesson. You have to be honest with them and admit things didn't work. This shows accountability on the coaches side.

Motivation II

David Marsh on Gender Motivation

Advisory Board member and former Auburn swim coach David Marsh discussed motivational differences with female athletes.

Having now coached both national champion mens and womens swimmers, what have you found to be the greatest motivational differences? What are the greatest lessons you have learned over the years of what not to do with women athletes?

As a general rule (there are exceptions), the typical guy can compartmentalize his athletics a little bit easier than the female athlete. The way God has designed males is that they can ‘turn off’ things going on outside the pool when they are competing and doing battle. On the women’s side, they ‘bring in the day’ with them to practice.

Be more aware of what is going on in the athlete’s world on the women’s side. You need to be pro-active because things can fester for weeks at a time. If you can find out the problem and talk through it, you’ll be fine. We have a co-head women’s coach here which is a big part of our success. The athletes have a variety of staff to go to on different issues or topics that they may feel comfortable with. The key is open door communication and that their needs and concerns are being heard.

How do you help women athletes stay focused on the task at hand? Generally, we have more meetings where we really encourage the captains to allow the other athletes to share their concerns. Females also may count on more support

from the coaches than your typical male. Relative to scale, you get a lot more production from a female by maintaining a positive open line of communication. And with all athletes it’s important to praise publicly and criticize privately.

In the day in and day out of training, the women’s team can handle more high stress training. Men, for physiological and mental reasons, tend to break down sooner. They have to be monitored more closely in the area of recovery. This may have to do with the nutritional choices of the college aged male versus the college aged female.

Off the Field II

Helping First Year Athletes Adjust

Making the adjustment from high school to university, or university to professional level sports can be traumatic for many athletes. The environments they were accustomed to are now radically changed. There are numerous problems first year athletes face. Questioning one’s ability is a common problem. This self-doubt increases pressure and the athlete may try to overcompensate by trying too hard. Playing time for first year athletes is usually severely limited. The former star has to cope with playing only a few minutes a game while trying to make a favorable impression. First year athletes no longer get the special attention they were used to which often leads to letdowns in performance. According to former Boston

Celtic player and coach Tom Sanders, “Stepping away from coaches who won’t hold their hands is the primary adjustment most first year athletes face.”

- Recommendation:**
1. Making friends can help the athlete better cope with a stressful situation. It becomes crucial for the player to build his own support network, perhaps for the first time in his life.
 2. Veteran players may add to young players insecurity. Encouraging older players to be supportive of first year players makes adjusting much easier. Sometimes veterans view first year players as a threat to their jobs. Foster an atmosphere that is competitive but fair.
 3. Athletes need to be educated about

various off-field temptations. Young and naive athletes can be led into dubious business schemes, substance abuse and lots of partying which can all quickly short circuit a young player’s career. 4. A lengthier season, more practice time, and lots of travel requirements require physical as well as mental adjustments. Athletes must learn how to pace themselves or else become prime injury or burnout candidates. An athlete better prepared for the challenges to be faced, will be more productive.

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Turn Around Negative Feedback

Coaches have to be negative to correct mistakes and provide a way for the athletes to improve. But by being negative, is there a way to communicate that will help the athlete improve rather than focus on their short comings and lose confidence.

1) Describe what you observed. Avoid generalizations like “always” and “never”. This invites a bitter reaction from the team member.

Example: “Cindy, during practice today,

I noticed that you weren’t taking care of the ball.” is better than “Cindy, you always turn the ball over. Get it together.”

2) Describe the behavior. Steer clear of words that imply motive or attitude, such as “uncooperative” and “not a team player.” Simply describe exactly what you saw.

Example: “Today in practice you cursed out a teammate twice. We can’t have that type of behavior on the team and expect to have any success.”

3) Explain the behavior’s impact. Talk about the bad behavior, not the person. Use the neutral pronoun “it” so you don’t make the team member feel defensive. “It makes me feel...” instead of “You make me feel...”

4) Make a specific recommendation for improvement. You may have to yell out “stop”, when an athlete is making the same mistake over and over. But make sure they understand what the problem is and what they are doing wrong.