

17. Managing the “Good Practice – Poor Game” Player

I specialize in helping individual athletes overcome performance fears, blocks and slumps and take their game to the next level. However, some of the complaints that I get from these athletes are inadvertently exacerbated by their coach's pre-game talks.

To give your players the best chance of achieving a successful outcome, then it's critical that you understand what you should and shouldn't be saying to your athletes right before that big game.

Say the wrong things and you risk getting your players distracted, over-thinking and playing tight. Say the right things and your athletes are much more likely to remain loose and confident and therefore, execute exactly the way you've coached them.

Recommendation: Here are 4 Do's and 4 Don'ts to get the great practice player to replicate their performance when it counts.

1) DON'T ever coach the importance of the game and the need to win, (unless you'd like to lose). The more you build up the game's importance, the tighter you'll make your players and the more tentative they'll play. When you coach outcome in this way, you and your athletes will end up disappointed.

2) DO coach the process of the game. Focus your players on specifically what they need to do in order to play their best. Get them to concentrate on their job, moment by moment in the game/performance.

3) DON'T threaten your team with negative consequences for failing. Using fear in this way will only distract them, get them worrying too much about making mistakes and therefore make them more likely to choke.

4) DO stay positive with them and let them know that you believe in them and their ability to get their job done well.

5) DON'T spend excessive time talking about technique, mechanics or even the opponent. The more information that you give them to think about, the more you risk pushing them into their FRONT, conscious-thinking brain. No one can perform to their potential when they're thinking and far too many coaches overdo the pre-game talk, filling it with too much front brain info.

6) DO keep your instructions simple and limited. You know the rule of thumb here. KISS. Less is more! The less information you give them right before a contest, the easier it will be for them to focus on the task at hand in the competition. Remember, the time to give a lot of technical, mechanical and/or strategic information is in practice, NOT right before or during a game!

7) DON'T frame your instructions negatively like I'm doing here! Instead, tell your

athletes exactly what you WANT them to do. This will help their brains execute correctly. It's fine to use DON'T as long as you immediately follow it up with a DO!

8) DO stay relaxed yourself and keep your players loose. The secret to playing well is relaxation. If you as the coach are an uptight, anxious mess pre-game, then soon your players will follow your lead. Stay calm and relaxed to help your athletes do the same.

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