COMMUNICATION IN SPORTS

ABSTRACT

Communication is the art of successfully sharing meaningful information with people by means of an interchange of experience. Communication in sports is among the most important ingredients contributing to the performance and growth of games and sports participants. The purposes of communication are persuasion, evaluation, information, motivation and problem solving. Communication from the coach to athlete will initiate appropriate actions. This however, requires the athlete to receive the information from the coach but also to understand and accept it. Further, the success of any coach, at perhaps every level of competition, is determined by his or her ability to effectively communicate with athletes and in turn getting them to better communicate with each other. It’s easy to focus primarily on the technical elements of sport — putting together good game plans and teaching good technique — but also easy to lose sight of the need to communicate effectively. Coaches may be knowledgeable and highly organised, but without good communication skills, these attributes may never be reflected in the performance of their athletes.

INTRODUCTION

Like developing any skill, teaching players to communicate effectively takes time and practice. Because it’s not directly related to any physical skill or ability, players may not immediately recognize the importance of learning and improving communicative habits. However, in time it should become evident that instilling good communication habits will help players improve in almost every area of games and sports.

Types of Communication in Sports

Off the Field

Off the field is when players and teams get better, not on an execution level, but on a camaraderie level. Often, it’s in the locker room that you learn the most about your teammates. Talking about past experiences, things you like to do during downtime and family history can help you understand that person better. That way, you know what things to say, and what not to say, when trying to motivate them on the field.
On the Field

Unlike off-the-field communication, effective communication on the field varies considerably from sport to sport. For example, in football there is constant communication going on. From coaches calling plays into the players on the field, to players making adjustments and calling out blocking schemes; however, in baseball communication is minimal at best. In fact, most players on the field are acting purely on their training and instinct after the bat makes contact with the ball.

Non-Verbal

According to the Association for Applied Sport Psychology, 70 percent of human communication is non-verbal. In some sports, this number is even higher. Many times hand signals and a series of signs are used to indicate what a player is supposed to do on the field. Thus, making sure that every player has memorized every possible signal, and ensuring that the signals are complicated and varied enough so that other team can't pick up on them easily, are extremely important aspects to effectively communicating during sports.

Tips for improving coach–athlete and team communication

1. Be approachable:- Establish open lines of communication with your players. Ask questions that specifically address injuries, hydration status, and recovery. Pay attention to both the verbal and non-verbal messages your athletes send. If they look tired and lack effort, they may be sending an important non-verbal message about their hydration and nutrition status or their need for additional rest.

2. Be an active listener:- Hearing what your athletes say and understanding them are distinctly different. When in doubt, paraphrase what they say, so they know you are listening. For example, ‘What you are saying is…’ or ‘Are you suggesting that …’ helps athletes know you are listening and understand their concerns.

3. Define roles:- Give every athlete a sense of how he or she fits into the big picture. By recognising the role each of your players contributes to the team, you give your athletes a sense of worth and achievement. You should instill in every team member a sense that they can improve their status by hard work and commitment.

4. Set goals:- Encourage your athletes to set realistic goals and communicate how to achieve them. Discuss the differences between individual and team goals and the need to sometimes sacrifice personal goals for team objectives. The ability to set goals with a sense of purpose is a life skill that will help your athletes beyond their sport.

5. Establish mutual trust:- Positive relationships are built on mutual respect and trust. Your athletes must know that they can depend on you to be fair and positive, even in intense competition. Criticise behaviours or decision-making, but leave personality out of it. Criticism must be constructive, positive, consistent, and oriented around improving performance. None of your players will improve when made to feel worse about themselves.
6. Communicate with a positive approach:- When providing constructive feedback, think good, better, how.
   Good — start with something they did correctly.
   Better — give instructional feedback on how to get better.
   How — finish with a compliment so they want to get better.

7. Empower athletes:- Within the context of a disciplined and structured environment, empower your athletes to make decisions and control various aspects of a game or competition. Thoroughly teach concepts with each athlete understanding his/her part. Then, charge your athletes to execute their part by making adjustments on the run and communicating problems with you. Responsibility and authority must go hand in hand. Avoid coaching a fear of failure into your methods of communication and encourage risk taking as an integral part of athletic competition.

8. Fuel athletes’ minds and bodies:- Your athletes will not be able to perform mentally and physically without the proper foods and fluids. Educate athletes about food and fluid selections that focus on refuelling and rehydrating. Sports drinks offer athletes more than water because they replace fluids and electrolytes lost in sweat and put back carbohydrate energy. Properly fuelled athletes are able to perform at a higher level physically and mentally.

9. Develop a communication plan:- Plan for communication opportunities just as you plan for game structure. Opportunities for communication can be as simple as searching out an athlete after a difficult practice and asking if they understand the reasons for the criticisms given. Your athletes can only apply coaching guidance in so far as they understand what is desired of them. An excellent technique for developing lines of communication is a season-end interview. You can engage an athlete in ‘20 questions’ in a quiet environment so that they feel you are interested in them as a person.

10. Use communication to improve teamwork:- Better teamwork is an interaction of five key elements-
    Effective communications, Winning attitudes, Team ego, Motivation, Discipline.

Communication Blocks

Sometime coaches do everything but still some hurdles can be seen:
- The athlete's perception of something is different to yours
- The athlete may jump to a conclusion instead of working through the process of hearing, understanding and accepting
- The athlete may lack the knowledge needed to understand what you are trying to communicate
- The athlete may lack the motivation to listen to you or to convert the information given into action
- The coach may have difficulty in expressing what she/he wishes to say to the athlete
- Emotions may interfere in the communication process
- There may be a clash of personality between you and the athlete

Effective Communication – How?

Before communicating with an athlete, coaches should consider:
- WHY they want to communicate
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- WHO they wish to communicate with
- WHERE and WHEN the message could best be delivered
- WHAT is it that they want to communicate
- HOW they are going to communicate the information

Basic elements of effective communication

- Clear - Ensure that the information is presented clearly
- Concise - Be concise, do not lose the message by being long winded
- Correct - Be accurate, avoid giving misleading information
- Complete - Give all the information and not just part of it
- Courteous - Be polite and non-threatening, avoid conflict
- Constructive - Be positive, avoid being critical and negative

CONCLUSION

Coaches should:

- Develop their verbal and non-verbal communication skills
- Ensure that they provide positive feedback during coaching sessions
- Give all athletes in their training groups equal attention
- Communicate as appropriate to your athlete’s thinking and learning styles
- Ensure that they not only talk to their athletes but they also listen to them as well

REFERENCES:-


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