

INCLUSIVE COACHING



TEN PRINCIPLES OF INCLUSIVE COACHING

1

Language Matters

Make sure athletes are referred to the way they want to be-with proper pronouns and only nicknames they've approved. Watch for the default masculine language in sport and use gender-neutral language instead, i.e. "y'all" or "folks" instead of "guys."

2

Drop "Leave it at the Door"

When we tell athletes to leave parts of their lives at the door, we tell them they can't bring their whole lives to the team. Genuinely be interested in their lives, build in transition time before practice to acknowledge their experiences outside of the team, and give them opportunities to receive support from teammates.

3

Be Predictable

When athletes know what to expect, they feel safe. Be as predictable as possible by having a set practice routine, previewing what's ahead (for the week, the day, the next exercise), and sharing your decision-making process. Most important is to be as predictable as YOU can be - do your athletes know what to expect from you?

4

Create Connections

Nothing makes us feel safer than being around people we know and trust. Be intentional about the time you give your team to connect with each other by thinking about how you group them for activities, how you plan for unstructured time, and how you model positive connection.

5

Give Unconditional Positive Regard

An athlete should never feel like their worth is determined by their performance. Make sure they know their value is in their humanity, not their outcomes. This means showing interest in their lives on and off the field. Asking more questions (and doing less "telling") is a great way to reinforce to your athletes that you're interested in them.

6

Brave, Not Perfect

Encourage athletes to take risks (and learn new things) by focusing on the effort, not the outcome. Make sure you have a way to let go of mistakes (like a mistake ritual) and give "bravery" shout-outs. You could even replace the MVP award with a Bravest Player award.

7

Fair, Not Equal

Equal is everyone getting the same thing. Fair is everyone getting what they need. This means differentiating instruction (with technique and social and emotional skills) AND differentiating reactions to and consequences of challenging behavior. Every athlete is on their own path and has to be treated that way.

8

Encourage Team Rituals & Traditions

Not everyone is going to be the star of the team. But everyone can be part of the team rituals. Encourage the team to engage in rituals (like a team warm-up or cheer) and traditions (pre-meet team dinners or end of year celebrations).

9

Share Power

Empower athletes to contribute meaningfully through leadership roles, decision-making, and active feedback. Redefine success beyond skill to recognize each athlete's unique, essential contributions to the team's overall achievements.

10

Plan for Tough Moments

Plan how to best support each player when things go wrong. Consider their receptiveness to immediate feedback, emotional state, and preference for team support or solitude. Ask them and tailor your approach to avoid tension and meet individual needs.