

Enhancing your team building skills

The more unified your players are, and the deeper they care about each other, the more enjoyable their experience will be. Use these tips to bolster your team building skills and forge cohesive units that relish playing together.

As a coach, would you rather have a team of talented players who do not care for one another nor get along, or a team of athletes who may not be as skilled, but get along well, trust each other and communicate effectively?

Ideally you may want talented athletes who are also united. As a coach, you likely spend a lot of time helping to develop physical skills, but you may not be sure about how to help build the cohesion, or unity, of your team. Games and activities only require a small amount of practice time, but can have a large impact on how bonded and unified a team is. Read on for ideas to get you started.

Ice Breakers

Ice breakers are get-to-know-you activities that allow athletes to learn more about each other, find commonalities amongst themselves and get more comfortable trusting their teammates. By helping athletes get to know each other, you are setting the stage for a stronger team because the athletes are able to become more comfortable, they are able to understand each other better, and they will be more inclined to communicate with people who they feel they know.

For a brand new team, an ice breaker may be a name game where each athlete shares his name, and an adjective, food or action that starts with the same letter as their first name, for example, Smiley Sara. The next person would then repeat the



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first person's, and create their own. The third person would repeat the first, second, and so on. This gives everyone a chance to learn each other's names.

For a team that has been together for a bit longer, but still would benefit from a get-to-know-you activity, try a game like "This or That." You'll instruct the group that you will give them two choices, and they have to choose this or that. Designate one side for "this" and the other side for "that." For example, you would ask questions like "Do you like Pepsi or Coke?" "Do you prefer summer or winter?" "Do you prefer lakes or oceans?" Essentially, you'll create pairings of objects, activities or ideas, and the athletes need to choose one or the other. They don't have to justify or explain their choice, but they will begin to see similarities and differences among their teammates.

Create categories that are not controversial so that the activity remains fun and light. At the end you can have everyone check in about something they learned about a teammate.

Ice breakers get individuals more comfortable with one another and coaches can even play, too.

Group challenge activities

Another way to help a team create a stronger bond is to present them with challenge activities or games which give a team an opportunity to work on solving a problem together, as a group.

The lessons learned in the game can then be applied on the field.

Consider the age and developmental level of the team before choosing your activity. For a group of any age, you could do an activity like "Footbridge." All you need are carpet squares (or something similar), an open space, and cones that designate the start and the finish. Generally, you will give one less square than there are people, and choose a length of field that is a challenge to get across (It can be 20-30 feet).

With a large team, break up into smaller groups of 4-8 individuals. To play the game, the athletes may only step on the carpet squares and must work together to get across the field, from one set of cones to the next. In order to be successful, they will have to communicate, be in close proximity to one another,



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and work together to accomplish the task. Since there is one less carpet square than people, they will have to share a square.

Additionally, if the course is long, they will have to pass squares from the back to the front to create a path that moves with them. If they step off of the path, you can require that they start over, or lose a square. Give them a fun way to get that square back, for example, singing a song. After the game is done, have a discussion about what challenges they faced, how they navigated those challenges, what they did to be successful, and how those lessons can then be applied on the field.

The group may have realized that at the start they couldn't be successful because they were all working

independently, but toward the end, as they communicated, they were able to accomplish the task. The games are fun, but the importance is in the lessons that are learned.

Additional resources

There are a number of fantastic books that outline teambuilding activities that you as coaches, can lead. Two of my favorites are *104 activities that build: Self-Esteem, teamwork, communication, anger management, self-discovery, and coping skills* by Alanna Jones; and *101 teambuilding activities: Ideas every coach can use to enhance teamwork, communication and trust* by Greg Dale and Scott Conant. **sk**



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