

The Post-practice Huddle – An Educational Opportunity

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The athletes have worked hard at practice and need to shower and catch rides. It may be late and getting something to eat is probably a priority and, of course, let's hope that your players do some homework. However, it is also important that coaches take a few minutes at the end of a practice session to huddle with their athletes to recap practice, reconfirm goals and interject life-long lessons.

During this brief meeting, you will want to recap what you've accomplished in the practice session in preparation for your next game. You will also want to mention what you will cover tomorrow, and don't forget to remind your players what time practice starts. This is particularly important if your teams have a rotational schedule wither week to week or perhaps daily. Beyond these items, what else should or could you cover and how can you best handle this educational opportunity?

The following are some general hints for your post-practice huddle:

1. Have your players sit in the center of the floor by the goalposts or some other logical location as you stand to address the squad. By using this technique, you usually will get better attention than if everyone is standing and perhaps moving around. If the field is wet, you can alter this approach.
2. Keep you comments as brief as possible. After all, this effort represents a recap and not a major speech. You can always cover additional material after the end

of the next practice session or in a team meeting. Do remember that your athletes have other obligations.

3. Try to end with an optimistic, positive tone and message. Certainly, there will be times in which you will have to correct behaviours and attitudes, but these may best be handled either before or during the practice session. You want to set a basis and blue-print for the next day, for your upcoming contest or for the remainder of the season.
4. Allow your assistant coaches to occasionally contribute and address the squad. It would be a good idea to previously discuss this opportunity with your assistants so that they will be prepared and their presentation will be more effective. It is important for the athletes to see that assistants offering insight and suggestions and know that they are also an integral part of the team. This little stop can help to build credibility for the assistants.
5. Use this time to praise and encourage those who have worked hard, improved and may not normally get noticed. Naturally, starters and high scorers get mentioned in the media and this huddle is a great opportunity to motivate and recognize the contribution of backups and, most importantly, seldom-used players.

While sport-specific items are certainly important to cover, these post-practice sessions also present a great opportunity to use teachable moments. If you aren't aware, these are issues, topics and happenings that occur with life-long lessons. Actually, teachable moments are ever-present; we just have to be observant and incorporate them into our approach with the team.

Since we purport that athletics has educational value, we really have to incorporate these learning possibilities at every opportunity. If we don't employ teachable moments, we would be hard-pressed to justify having an athletic program in our school system. The development of the complete person is one of the major factors that distinguishes high school athletics from recreation and club teams.

When we talk about teachable moments, there are a lot of topics that naturally occur and we should cover. Just take a look at the problems in athletics and in today's society and you will find an unending list. Here are a few possibilities that many of us should try touch upon.

- **Steroid and substance abuse**
- **Alcohol and tobacco abuse**
- **Hazing**
- **Sexual harassment**
- **Tolerance and avoidance of discrimination**
- **Sportsmanship, citizenship and respect**

If you read the newspapers, Web sites and many magazines, there is abundant material that you can refer to and use. A good opening comment with your team could be as simple as, "Hey guys, did you see last night's newspaper and the article concerning...?" This reference is all that you will need to get the topic rolling. You might even have photocopies of the article available for the players in the locker room to take home with them.

Also use situations that occur in your games and practice sessions as an example to illustrate or teach values and positive codes of conduct. Major penalties incurred in most sports, the mercy rule in sports such as softball and football, the reaction to officials' call and rising above the taunt from an opposing player are just a few that could be covered. Almost anything can provide the material and impetus for a teachable moment.

It is especially important to talk about many of these topics before you have a problem. By being more proactive and addressing relevant issues, you may actually be able to head off a problem or at least lessen its impact. Speaking with your team for a few minutes at the end of practice can pay huge dividends. **CQ**