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Today's Topic

Welcome back to the Coach's Corner!

Confidence...

It's something we hear about all the time both inside and outside the realm of competitive sports.

In this week's newsletter I want to take a deeper dive into Confidence because it plays such a huge role in an athlete's success both on and off the field. We will discuss what

confidence is, look at how to cultivate it in our teams, and figure out why it is so important to success in the first place.

Confidence is simply defined as "the feeling or belief that you can rely on someone or something."

When taking that definition and applying it to sports it gets a little more complex.

We want our athletes to have high levels of confidence in multiple things. We want them to obviously be confident in themselves and their abilities. But we also want them to be confident in us as coaches, that we have sufficiently prepared them to compete. And we want them to be confident that the teammates around them will also be able to execute on their responsibilities.

Confidence in sports isn't as simple as a good pre-game hype up speech. A confident team culture is something that is built and cultivated over time through effective training, team bonding, and trust being built from top to bottom of a team or organization.

When looking at **Self-Confidence** there are a lot of things at play, but none being more important than preparation and practice.

What this means is that in order to build Self-Confidence in our athletes, a lot of it boils down to effective preparation through our practices and training. We want to put our athletes in training situations that replicate game situations. This allows them to experience that 'high stress, competitive' feeling in the 'lower stakes' environment of practice. This way, when they get into a heated game-situation, they have already had that experience and are confident in the skills they worked on during training.

Our athletes can gain a lot of confidence in their 'sport specific skills' through their practice and preparation, but there are a ton of other factors that also impact their overall Self-Confidence.

For example: ***Maybe half of my team failed a test the morning of our big game.***- This is going to have a massive negative impact on the mentality of my team as a whole. They all have something else on their minds that will impact their performance in competition.

When outside factors like this scenario are impacting Self-Confidence, it is more important than ever to rely on the other aspects of confidence discussed at the beginning.

When an athlete has full **Confidence and Trust in their Coaches**, they are able to go out and compete with the belief that their coach is right with them through good times and bad... But that feeling of trust didn't happen overnight. Instead it was built over time through those strong relationships between player and coach.

If an athlete has full trust in their coaching staff it is much tougher for them to second guess or hesitate when a coach asks them to do something. When they trust you, they are willing to do anything that will help their team succeed. And that is where all coaches strive to get their players.

As a coach, it takes a lot of leg work on your end to build this trust and confidence in your players. But once that foundation is there, you will be able to notice a shift in the behaviors and mentalities of every single one of the athletes who has bought into what the team is trying to do.

This trusting player-coach relationship falls heavily on the shoulders of the coaches. You have to be willing to let players trust in you, and you in them. Without this, you can't expect athletes to buy into what you are asking of them.

Trust Amongst Teammates is the final piece of confidence we want to take a look at today.

Team sports are such an interesting dynamic because they can bring together young people from all different backgrounds and put them on a course with a common goal. There aren't many other things out there like this. And if you aren't able to get

everyone on the same page, that common goal of success becomes much more difficult to reach. That is why creating trust and confidence between each teammate is so dang important.

Similar to trusting their coaches, when an athlete has full confidence in the person right next to them, they no longer have to worry about what that person is going to do. Instead, they already know that their teammate is going to give full effort and execute their job to the best of their abilities. This takes away so much anxiety and worry that athletes are typically dealing with throughout the course of a game.

When teammates have a strong trust and belief in one another, they will automatically be willing to fight harder, give more effort, and put themselves out there for each other. This is the type of team dynamic we see in all the great inspirational sports movies like *'Friday Night Lights'*, *'Remember the Titans'*, and even *'Major League'*.

These movies are examples of the team dynamic that all coaches dream of, but they don't just have to exist in movies. These dynamics can be built in real life, just like the real stories that many of these movies are based off of.

Now, this isn't everything there is to know about confidence, but it is a small introduction into what types of confidence are at play in competitive sports and why they are all so important.

When you combine all three forms of Confidence, you have the recipe for a close-knit, highly competitive team that will go out and give their all no matter what the situation.

So, how do I cultivate this team dynamic in my own situation???

How Can I Apply This?

1. Self Confidence

Instead of trying to figure out how to 'build' confidence in our athletes, I like to look at it as 'revealing' the confidence that is already within them instead.

No matter who you are or how long you've been playing sports, there has undoubtedly been a time that you felt better than normal while playing. You were highly confident in everything you did and nothing could stop you. So let's figure out how to get back to that feeling and replicate it for every single competition.

Helping athletes feel more confident in competition all starts with practice. The goal of practice is to prepare your athletes to play, right? So let's make sure our practices are effective and give our athletes the best chance of success when it is game time. This can be done by:

-Replicating Game Situations: Playing loud music or crowd noise as a distraction, creating highly competitive drills to encourage competition, or simulating 'end of game' situations to prepare for those high stress moments.

-Making Practice Harder than Games: Scrimmage with unbalanced teams, don't allow teammates to communicate verbally, or mixing up teams randomly to throw off their rhythm. This creates an environment that is even more difficult than anything a game can bring. So come game time, nothing can happen that would be tougher than what they've already practiced for.

-Applicable Drills: Working on skills, plays, and game plans that will actually be used in game. Instead of doing the same things every single week, you can utilize drills and activities that are specific to your upcoming opponent. This allows the athletes to get that quality practice on things that they will need in the upcoming competition.

All of these options will differ depending on your sport, competition level, and overall situation. But no one knows your team better than you, so think outside the box and create practice plans that utilize these things and start to create a highly competitive and confident culture among your team.

2. Confidence in Coaches

If we want our athletes to trust us and truly believe that we are doing the best things for them, we have to be able to prove that to them. Both ourselves and our athletes have to believe in everything we do if we want to reach that full potential that we know is in there.

We can build that trust and confidence with our athletes in a few different ways:

-Explaining WHY We Are Doing Something: If we can give a concrete answer on WHY we are doing a certain drill or learning a certain skill, an athlete is much more likely to give their full effort and actually buy into it. If we can prove that this drill directly correlates to something in game, it is easier to understand its importance. This also prevents us from doing things just to do them, and instead creating a practice structure that is focused toward performance in game.

-Being Vulnerable: Put yourself in your athletes' shoes for a minute. Why should they trust some complete stranger who is telling them to do something? Is it just because you have the title of 'COACH'? That isn't good enough! If we want our athletes to trust us, they first need to know us and understand who we are. By opening up and telling your athletes your story, you are building that trust and relating to them on a much deeper level than just player-coach. Now I'm not saying you need to share your entire life story on the first day of practice, but sharing bits and pieces of your own story throughout a season is a great way to build that trust amongst your team.

Try sharing WHY you got into coaching in the first place. Or, tell them a story about your playing days. Or even tell them about what else you enjoy outside of coaching (what hobbies do you have, what teams do you cheer for, what is your family like, etc.).

Building this trust with your athletes takes time and a lot of effort from both parties, but by being a genuine person and

showing that you actually care about your athletes, win or lose, it makes it a lot easier for them to trust you!

3. Trust Amongst Teammates: Self-Confidence and Confidence in Coaches are very important, but in team sports, if the athletes don't trust each other... well, you are pretty much up a creek without a paddle.

The good thing is that building trust among the players on your team often involves activities that are outside the norm and usually pretty fun for those involved. I'm talking about good ole fashioned 'team building activities'.

As old and cliché as some team building activities are, they really do work. They help to bring these individuals together into a cohesive unit that fully trusts one another and will do whatever they can to help each other succeed.

Some of my favorite team building activities include:

-**Sharing our WHY's with each other:** Everyone on the team explains WHY they play sports and what motivates them to keep going. This gives everyone a better understanding of each other so they can more easily relate and have that drive to compete for one another.

-**Team Problem Solving:** This could be a scavenger hunt, solving riddles, building gingerbread houses, or really anything that presents your athletes with a problem that needs solved. This promotes good communication among teammates, teaches them to deal with adversity, and brings them closer together through challenging times.

This is far from a comprehensive list of team building activities, but it is a start. I've learned that oftentimes, the most obscure and off-the-wall activities seem to yield the best results when it comes to building that trust amongst teammates.

Like I stated at the beginning of this email... Confidence is something that we hear about all the time, but it is much more complex than we often realize. Cultivating it within a team takes a lot of work and buy in from everyone involved, but in

the end it's all worth it because there aren't many things better than a team full of fully confident athletes!

This Week In Sports

Apologies in advance if you aren't a baseball fan, but it's that time of year when baseball is really starting to heat up. So you may see a lot of baseball content in this section for the next few weeks.

1. **Salvador Perez sets an MLB Record**

On Monday, September 20th Salvador Perez of the Kansas City Royals made baseball history with a 429-foot homerun against the Cleveland Indians. This was Salvy's 46th homerun of the 2021 season which broke Johnny Bench's record for most HRs in a season by a catcher. Bench set the record with 45 during the 1970 season.

This historic homerun also pushed Perez closer to another record. This bomb to left field was his 198th career homerun with the Royals, which was enough to push him past Mike Sweeney for 2nd place for Royals all-time career homeruns. Perez is still 119 homeruns from catching George Brett for the all-time lead, but seeing a catcher that high on the list is impressive to say the least.

Salvador Perez has had an incredible offensive season and done everything he could to help his Royals make a push back to the playoffs, but sadly it looks like the Royals will fall short once again as they are 16.5 games out of both first place in the AL Central and the last Wild Card spot in the AL. (Sorry Royals fans!)

2. **Conor McGregor's First Pitch at Wrigley Field**

On Tuesday, September 21st Conor McGregor, UFC Champion and internet superstar, threw out the ceremonial first pitch before

the Chicago Cubs took on the Minnesota Twins at Wrigley Field in Chicago.

Now, celebrity first pitches are often something to look forward to because they usually go one of two ways:

1. The celebrity surprises us with a great pitch, a strike right down the middle.
2. Or, the pitch is comically bad and it goes viral on the internet.

Conor's toss definitely falls into that second category.

While wearing an aggressively tight-fitting sport coat, McGregor wound up and fired a pitch a good 25 feet wide right of home plate, missing the catcher, the Cub's mascot, and a few cameramen before it ricocheted off the backstop.

Love or hate Conor McGregor, its always hilarious to see an elite level athlete, like him, struggle with a basic skill from another sport other than the one he is accustomed to.

Here is the full video of his atrocious first pitch :

https://www.espn.com/video/clip/_/id/32254057

Other Sport Psych Resources

1. Sport and Performance Psychology Continues to Grow and Spread Toward New Avenues.

As mental training and mental health as a whole continue to become more mainstream, we are constantly seeing new fields pick up on it and implement it in their own unique ways.

One of the new fields picking up on the importance of Mental Skills Training is eSports, in specific I am talking about the Kansas City Pioneers (a competitive eSports organization in KCMO).

Within the past month the Pioneers announced that they were bringing on a Mental Skills Consultant to help assist their players in performing to the best of their abilities.

I get it, we're talking about video games...

But this isn't the casual gaming that people my age used to do when we would get home from school.

eSports organizations like the KC Pioneers have teams competing all year in different games for prize pools that can reach 7 figures. There are some seriously high stakes here, so it is important for them to give their players every advantage possible to perform at their best.

In a podcast the Pioneers put out last week they spoke with their new Mental Skills Consultant, Isaac Gardner, who shines a light on what he does within the organization and explains how his work impacts the performance of what looks to be a group of kids playing video games.

Things like this are what excites me about the field of Sport and Performance Psychology because there seems to be endless different ways that these topics can be applied and make an impact on someone's life.

The podcast is a little long, but there are some great insights throughout that explain how these topics translate so well to eSports. [Watch the podcast HERE.](#)

2. *'The Champion's Mind'* by Jim Afremow.

The second resource I wanted to provide this week is actually a full length book.

The book is called 'The Champion's Mind' and it was written by [Jim Afremow, PhD](#), who is a world renowned sport and performance psychologist.

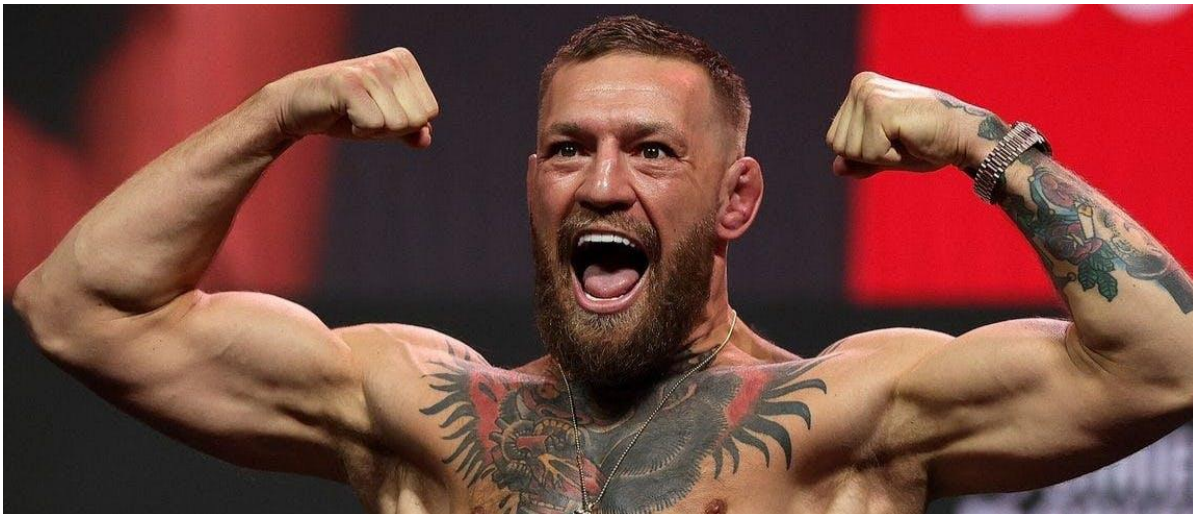
This book is an amazing introduction into sport psychology while also providing plenty of applicable tips on how to put this stuff to work every single day whether you are an athlete,

coach, parent, or just an everyday person looking to better yourself.

Afremow is probably my favorite 'sport psychology specific' author because he is so good at making this stuff applicable. If you have heard me speak in person and then you read this book, you are going to see a lot of similarities because I have learned a TON from this man and recommend his work to everyone I encounter.

So if you are looking for your next great read, I highly recommend 'The Champion's Mind' or any of the other books written by Afremow!

Quick Quote



"At the end of the day you've got to feel some way. So why not feel unbeatable, why not feel untouchable?"

-Conor McGregor

UFC Champion

Thank you for reading and until next week, remember:

Today is a great day to change a life!

Cheers,

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