

ACTIVITIES THAT BUILD TEAMWORK



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Strong team chemistry is something coaches intentionally cultivate through real relationships. When athletes feel a true sense of belonging, they are more likely to enjoy the game, develop skills on and off the field, and perform at their highest level. Coaches can ignite this team bond by focusing on three key areas: connection, communication, and fun. This guide provides coaches with teambuilding activities that center on these three areas.

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A NOTE ABOUT PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL SAFETY

To support both the physical and emotional safety of athletes in the activities that follow:

- Confirm the activity area is clear of hazards and that boundaries are well-defined.
- Create a culture of belonging by guiding how athletes pair or group up. Left alone, athletes naturally gravitate toward familiar friends or similar skill levels, which can inadvertently leave others feeling excluded.
- Keep an eye on the group's energy and always offer a low-pressure way to opt out or adjust participation if an athlete feels uncomfortable with the activity.

The activities on the pages that follow are designed to fit seamlessly into a practice schedule. Most require a few minutes of setup or planning to be most effective.



TEAMWORK ACTIVITIES THAT ENCOURAGE CONNECTION

Activities that build peer relationships are critical to creating team connection. These exercises provide athletes the opportunity to learn about their teammates' perspectives and experiences off the field to help them build trust and understanding on it.

When selecting the discussion prompts used in this section, be mindful to avoid assumptions about an athlete's home life, socioeconomic status, or lived experiences. Approaching these questions with intention allows coaches to honor the unique composition of their team, centering athlete belonging, and helping each athlete feel safe to engage in the conversation.

TRY THESE ACTIVITIES TO HELP ATHLETES GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER BETTER:

CONVERSATION STARTERS

This activity helps athletes break the ice and build consistent, low-pressure relationships, creating a foundation of trust that makes it easier to connect in future interactions.

- During warm-ups, pair athletes up to build intentional connection.
- Help them ease into conversation by providing a topic: "While you warm up with your partner, find out who your partner's favorite sports team is and why." or "Ask about their highlight and biggest challenge of their day yesterday."

WHAT YOU NEED

A list of pre-planned topics for conversations.

SKILLS APPLIED

- Active listening
- Empathy and perspective-taking
- Building trusting relationships

PROGRESSION/VARIATION

Use during fitness drills: "With your partner, do 3 sets of 10 sit-ups. In between your sets, discuss your favorite movie."

EMOTIONAL/PHYSICAL SAFETY CONSIDERATION

If you have an odd number, create a trio so every athlete is included. Remind athletes that they can always 'pass' on a topic if they aren't comfortable sharing.

RECOMMENDED DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- What did you learn about your teammate today that surprised you?
- How does learning more about a teammate help us support each other during a game?



TEAMMATE SHARE OUTS

This activity provides a dedicated space for athletes to share their personal experiences and cultural identities, creating a deeper sense of connection, mutual respect, and belonging.

- Choose a new set of teammates each week to share a bit of their story before practice starts. This intentional time allows athletes to authentically represent their cultures and identities, fostering pride and self-confidence.
- Some examples of what they can share:
 - A family or cultural tradition that is important to them
 - A highlight and a challenge they experienced this week
 - A favorite annual tradition
 - Something meaningful to them that their teammates might not know

Allow the other athletes to ask one or two supportive questions to deepen understanding.

WHAT YOU NEED

A season-long schedule to ensure every athlete has an opportunity to be heard by the group.

SKILLS APPLIED

- Public speaking
- Self-expression
- Empathy
- Active listening

PROGRESSION/VARIATION

Invite athletes to bring a meaningful object to practice - something that represents a hobby, a cultural tradition, or a personal achievement- as a talking point.

EMOTIONAL/PHYSICAL SAFETY CONSIDERATION

Inform athletes a few days in advance so they feel prepared and confident sharing in front of their team. This may help athletes who feel overwhelmed speaking in front of large groups. To maintain a pressure-free environment, always offer a supportive way for an athlete to opt out or choose a different topic if they feel uncomfortable.

RECOMMENDED DEBRIEF QUESTION

What stood out to you about what [athlete's name] shared with us earlier?



HIGH FIVE, LOW TEN, SECRET HANDSHAKE

This activity helps athletes discover shared interests and commonalities with a variety of teammates while encouraging them to build quick, positive touch points.

- Use different pairing mechanisms to get athletes into groups of two, where they'll answer a personal question.
- Each partner becomes a different type of “buddy” for the rest of practice - a high-five buddy, a low-ten buddy, and a secret handshake buddy.

FOR EXAMPLE:

- **High-Five Buddy:** “Find someone who was born in the same season as you.” Have them share a high-five and a personal prompt, i.e., “What is your high-five buddy’s favorite subject in school?” Give athletes a couple of minutes to discuss.
- **Low-Ten Buddy:** “Find someone who shares a favorite food or snack with you.” Give each other a low-ten and share a prompt, i.e., “What is your low-ten buddy’s least favorite day of the week and why?” Give athletes a couple of minutes to discuss.
- **Secret Handshake Buddy:** “Find someone who prefers the same type of weather as you.” Give them a few minutes to develop a secret handshake together.
- **Throughout Practice:** when the coach calls out “High-Five”, “Low-Ten”, or “Secret Handshake”, athletes should quickly find that specific partner and perform their greeting to ignite connection and energy.

WHAT YOU NEED

Establish a clear playing area using cones or other markers. Prepare three inclusive pairing mechanisms and three questions.

SKILLS APPLIED

- Active listening
- Building trusting relationships
- Creative collaboration

PROGRESSION/VARIATION

Add a **‘Reset Buddy’**. Athletes spend a few minutes developing a shared reset - like a specific word, gesture, or phrase - to use when things get tough or a mistake is made. During competition, athletes can connect with this specific teammate to help them reset their focus, continue playing with confidence, and embrace the moment as an opportunity to grow.

EMOTIONAL/PHYSICAL SAFETY CONSIDERATION

If you have an odd number of athletes, join in as a partner or create a trio to ensure every athlete has a place and feels valued as a teammate. Be mindful that some athletes may have different comfort levels with physical touch; allow pairs to sub a ‘fist bump’ or ‘peace sign’ if they prefer.

RECOMMENDED DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- How did it feel to find things in common with teammates you might not usually talk to?
- How can having these quick rituals help us stay connected during high-pressure moments in games?



TWO CIRCLES

This activity encourages athletes to learn about several teammates, engage in active conversations, and foster a deeper sense of belonging by valuing each other's perspectives.

- Divide athletes into two groups.
- Ask group one to make a large circle and group two to make a smaller circle inside it, with athletes facing a partner from the opposite circle.
- Provide athletes with a fitness skill and a prompt, i.e., “With your partner, do 10 jumping jacks, then share one thing they could say to help you overcome a mistake in a game and why it would help.”
- Give athletes 30 seconds each to share, then have the inner circle rotate to the right to meet a new partner.
- Repeat until athletes have had the chance to connect with multiple teammates.

WHAT YOU NEED

A list of pre-planned fitness exercises and discussion prompts.

SKILLS APPLIED

- Active listening
- Perspective-taking
- Building trusting relationships

PROGRESSION/VARIATION

Speed Rounds: Decrease the time to answer questions to 15 seconds for easy prompts, like “What is your favorite pre-game ritual?” - to create a sense of urgency and fun.

EMOTIONAL/PHYSICAL SAFETY CONSIDERATION

Remind athletes they can pass on a specific prompt if they aren't comfortable sharing, focusing instead on actively listening to their partner.

RECOMMENDED DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- What did you learn about a teammate during this exercise that can help us better support each other during a competition?
- How does knowing what your teammates value help us build a stronger culture of belonging?

TEAMWORK ACTIVITIES THAT ENCOURAGE COMMUNICATION



Communication is the engine of great teamwork. While connection activities help athletes better understand one another, communication activities provide the practical tools they need to collaborate through both verbal and non-verbal cues. The following activities empower athletes to build the trust and clarity necessary to navigate challenges and thrive as a team.

TRY THESE ACTIVITIES TO HELP ATHLETES STRENGTHEN THEIR COMMUNICATION SKILLS:

WOLVES AND BUNNIES

This activity highlights the power of non-verbal communication and collaborative strategy.

- Divide your athletes into two groups: Wolves and Bunnies. Bunnies should outnumber the wolves 5 to 1. (8 bunnies, 2 wolves for a group of 10).
- The Wolves work together to tag all the Bunnies by touching them with a soft ball. The Bunnies can move all about the play area; their goal is to avoid being tagged.
- Wolves can move freely without the ball, but once they catch it, they can only pivot and reach out to tag a Bunny. They must pass the ball back and forth to trap the Bunnies. When a Bunny is tagged, they become a wolf. Bunnies cannot interfere with or intercept the ball.

WHAT YOU NEED

One soft ball for every ten athletes. Use cones or markers to define clear boundaries that support safe, active movement.

SKILLS APPLIED

- Strategic thinking and planning
- Decision making
- Anticipation
- Agility

EMOTIONAL/PHYSICAL SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

Remind Wolves to lead with care by using a gentle touch when tagging Bunnies. Encourage the Bunnies to keep their heads up to avoid collisions.

RECOMMENDED DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- How did the wolves communicate their plan to their partners without letting the Bunnies know?
- How did the Bunnies support each other to stay in the game as long as they could?



TRIANGLE TAG

This activity challenges athletes to synchronize their movements and communicate under pressure to protect a teammate.

- Split the team into groups of four. Three athletes hold hands or link elbows to form a triangle. The fourth athlete is “it”.
- The athlete who is “it” identifies one specific teammate in the triangle as their target. They will try to tag their target by moving around the formation, but they cannot break through the arms of the triangle.
- The triangle must work together to shield the target, anticipating the moves of and reacting as a unit to the person who is “it”.
- Once the target is tagged, rotate roles so every athlete has the opportunity to be “it”, the target, and part of the protective formation.

WHAT YOU NEED

A clear playing area without enough space for multiple groups to move safely. No equipment is required.

SKILLS APPLIED

- Evasion
- Reaction time
- Agility
- Anticipation
- Collaborative movement

PROGRESSION/VARIATION

The Silent Triangle: Once athletes get the hang of it, have them try it again - only this time, the athletes in the triangle cannot speak. They have to communicate using noises or head gestures.

EMOTIONAL/PHYSICAL SAFETY CONSIDERATION

Encourage athletes to be mindful of their physical intensity so that everyone feels safe while playing. Ensure athletes are holding hands or linking elbows in a way that is comfortable for everyone in the group.

RECOMMENDED DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- How did your team work together to keep the target from being tagged?
- How did it feel to be the target?



BALL TOSS RACE

This activity challenges athletes to maintain focus and clear communication under pressure, helping them to build necessary skills to operate as a team when the game speeds up.

- Split the team up into groups of four or five and have them form a circle.
- The group leader begins by tossing a ball to another athlete while saying their name loudly and making eye contact.
- That athlete then passes it to someone else who hasn't received it yet, continuing until everyone has touched the ball and it returns to the leader.
- It is important for athletes to remember who they pass the ball to - they will follow this pattern throughout the game.
- Once the pattern is established, add in more balls one by one so there are several balls following the pattern simultaneously, requiring high levels of focus and verbal communication.

WHAT YOU NEED

At least three to four soft balls or tennis balls per group to keep the activity challenging and fast-paced.

SKILLS APPLIED

- Memory
- Verbal communication
- Focus
- Concentration
- Collaborative problem-solving

PROGRESSION/VARIATION

The Time Challenge: Time the athletes and have them count how many full rounds they can complete. Challenge them to cut their time by 7-10 seconds. Give them two minutes to strategize and then retime them.

EMOTIONAL/PHYSICAL SAFETY CONSIDERATION

Have athletes focus on encouraging each other, even when a ball is dropped. If an athlete is struggling with the pattern, remind the group that supporting their teammate helps the whole group succeed.

RECOMMENDED DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- What did this exercise teach you about communication with your teammates?
- How did clear communication and eye contact help when things started to move faster?



ALL TANGLED UP

This activity challenges athletes to navigate a complex, physical problem by practicing patience, negotiation, and collaborative strategy under pressure.

- Divide athletes into groups of up to twelve - it must be an even number in each group - and have them form a tight circle.
- Tell athletes to take their right hand and grab the right hand of anyone in the group except their teammate standing on either side of them.
- They are then to extend their left arm and grab someone else's left hand.
- The challenge is for the group to untangle itself without letting go of each other's hands.
- Emphasize that athletes must communicate constantly, listening to every teammate's perspective to find the best path to accomplish this.

WHAT YOU NEED

No equipment required!

SKILLS APPLIED

- Negotiation
- Patience
- Strategic thinking
- Communication

PROGRESSION/VARIATION

Once athletes get the hang of it, make the groups larger and add restrictions to their communication.

EMOTIONAL/PHYSICAL SAFETY CONSIDERATION

Since this activity involves close physical contact, check in with athletes to ensure everyone feels comfortable. If there are athletes who do not feel comfortable, they can act as a strategist from outside of the tangle, offering their perspective and coaching the group through untangling.

RECOMMENDED DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- When the group got stuck, what kind of communication helped you stay positive and keep trying?
- How did you feel when it was hard to untangle?
- What is one strategy you learned that will help you contribute to the team?

TEAMWORK ACTIVITIES THAT FOCUS ON FUN



While connection and communication activities build a strong foundation, sometimes a team just needs to play. The following activities are simply designed to ignite joy, shared laughter, and fun. Empower athletes to choose which activities to play, shifting the focus from coach-led instruction to athlete-led fun. This intentional hand-off builds team buy-in, centers their voice, and gives athletes ownership over their experience.

TRY THESE FUN-FOCUSED ACTIVITIES TO BUILD ENERGY AND TEAM SPIRIT:

EVERYBODY'S IT

This activity boosts team energy while building agility by challenging athletes to stay constantly engaged in a fast-paced, low-pressure environment where everyone is responsible for their own success.

- Within the game's boundaries, everyone is actively "it" while also avoiding other athletes' efforts to tag them.
- If an athlete gets tagged, they should continue trying to tag other athletes while avoiding getting tagged.
- **Round One:** Athletes aim to tag each other on the back.
- **Round Two:** Athletes target each other's shoulders.
- **Round Three:** Athletes focus on tagging each other's knees.

WHAT YOU NEED

Clearly define boundaries using cones or markers to ensure a safe, contained playing space.

SKILLS APPLIED

- Agility
- Evasion
- Strategic thinking

PROGRESSION/VARIATION

The Point Challenges: Athletes keep score in their heads, earning one point for each teammate they tag.

EMOTIONAL/PHYSICAL SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

Before the first round, lead a quick demonstration on the appropriate strength of touch to ensure everyone feels safe and comfortable competing at full speed.

RECOMMENDED DEBRIEF QUESTION

What was the most challenging body part to protect and how did you adjust your movement to stay safe?



QUICK LINE-UP

This activity sharpens athletes' reaction time and spatial awareness as they work together to maintain their team formation, creating a sense of shared focus and synchronization.

- Divide the team into four groups.
- Line athletes up in their groups, shoulder to shoulder, making a box around the coach - one line in front, behind, and on either side.
- Instruct athletes to note their specific position in line and placement relative to the coach.
- Explain that no matter what direction the coach faces, they are always to be standing in that place.
- The coach begins the game by simply turning to their right or left. Athletes need to quickly reform their original line order, making sure they are also in the right spot in relation to the coach.
- Once each group has correctly reassembled, athletes are to grasp hands, lift them up, and yell, "Quick line up!"
- The coach should then change direction again, or step out of the square and go to another part of the field, and athletes have to follow and assemble in their spots.

WHAT YOU NEED

No equipment required!

SKILLS APPLIED

- Decision making
- Reaction time
- Agility

PROGRESSION/VARIATION

The Silent Scramble: Challenge athletes to reform their lines in total silence. They must rely entirely on their visual connection to the coach and their teammates to find their spots.

EMOTIONAL/PHYSICAL SAFETY CONSIDERATION

Remind athletes to keep their heads up and stay aware of their surroundings to avoid collisions while moving quickly. Encourage them to guide one another into the correct position with encouraging words rather than pushing, pulling, or demanding - ensuring everyone feels supported during the scramble.

RECOMMENDED DEBRIEF QUESTION

- What was the most helpful way a teammate helped you find your spot when the group was moving?



ROCK, PAPER, SCISSORS CHAMPIONSHIP

This activity builds a high-energy atmosphere of positive encouragement, teaching athletes how to transition from competitors to supporters who loudly celebrate each other's success.

- Split the team up into pairs.
- Ensure everyone is familiar with the rules of rock, paper, scissors - paper beats rock, rock beats scissors, and scissors beats paper.
- Each pair plays three rounds of rock, paper, scissors - or enough rounds to break a tie.
- When an athlete wins the series, their partner immediately becomes part of their team, following them to their next match and cheering for them loudly.
- This pattern continues with each round - the winner advances to play again, and their opponent, along with their cheer squad, all become part of the team.
- The game culminates in a massive championship where the entire group is split into two sides, rooting for the final two competitors.

WHAT YOU NEED

No equipment required!

SKILLS APPLIED

- Supporting teammates
- Resilience
- Team energy

PROGRESSION/VARIATION

The Ultimate Face-Off: Once an athlete winner is crowned, have them face off against the coach. The entire team then joins together to root for their teammates in one final, high-energy match.

EMOTIONAL/PHYSICAL SAFETY CONSIDERATION

Remind athletes that this game is rooted in positive encouragement. Encourage them to focus on loud, creative cheers rather than putting down the opposing side.

RECOMMENDED DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

- How did it feel to have your team rooting for you?
- How can bringing this level of energy to our teammates during a game help us perform better?