



Coaching Players of Mixed Skill Levels

Coaches are tasked with creating a **positive sport experience** for **all** of their athletes. This can be made harder when coaching a team that includes athletes of mixed skill levels. Ultimately, it is the **coaches responsibility** to ensure everyone, regardless of skill level, is engaged, supported, and having fun. **Coaches Can:**

- **Help players learn a team concept** - Create a supportive team environment where athletes connect with and encourage each other. Have athletes participate in acknowledging improvements they see teammates making through the course of the season.
- **Focus on individual progression** - Assess all athletes for their strengths and areas for improvement. Develop a plan to help each one progress and celebrate successes.
- **Praise effort over results** - Regardless of skill level, athletes have more control over the effort they give than the results they'll get. Focus your praise on their efforts towards improvement and reframe mistakes as learning opportunities.
- **Avoid using labels** - Don't refer to athletes as talented and others as not. Either label will limit an athlete's development. Be enthusiastic and mindful of your body language and tone when working with all athletes.
- **Make practices fun** - Research shows that having fun, making friends, becoming a better athlete, and other factors are more important to most athletes than winning. If you teach skills in a fun and positive environment where every player feels a part of the team, winning will take care of itself.

When your athletes know that you are willing to work to help each one of them progress, to encourage them despite mistakes, to give each an opportunity to learn and play different positions, and that you value their effort, they will feel fairly treated. They'll learn a valuable lesson that everyone has talents that they can contribute to a team effort.

This resource was developed by Joe Scally, PCA's former National Director of Training.

