

BEST PRACTICES FOR PLAYER TRYOUTS: SCHOOL SPORTS

POSITIVE
COACHING
ALLIANCE®

School team tryouts can be stressful for athletes. Especially for athletes trying out for their middle school or high school teams for the first time who may have never experienced the sink-or-swim, make-it-or-not stakes of a tryout experience. It's important to recognize that many of the athletes may be nervous. Coaches and evaluators should try to do what they can to help athletes relax so they can perform at their best. When conducting tryouts, here are some best practices to consider to set athletes up for success:



BEST PRACTICES FOR TRYOUTS:

> SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

Before the action starts, assemble the athletes as a group to explain generally what you are looking for in terms of athletic ability, character traits, chemistry, and the right mix of sizes and skills for positions to be filled. Also, detail how the tryouts will be run (how many days/weeks, will there be multiple rounds of cuts, etc.). Remind them that you want them to succeed and invite them to ask questions along the way.

> DO YOUR BEST TO TREAT PLAYERS EQUALLY

Give all of the players name tags and refer to all athletes by name (not just the ones that you know already). Alternatively, if you decide to have athletes wear numbers, refer to all players by their numbers. Athletes will notice if you are referring to some of them by name and not others.

> EASE INTO DRILLS AND COMPETITIVE SITUATIONS

Start slowly so that disparities in skill are less obvious to everyone involved in the tryout. This gives some lesser-skilled athletes a chance to gain some confidence. It also reduces the chance that the lesser-skilled have a humiliating or traumatic tryout experience. It doesn't cost anyone much time and you'll be able to further evaluate skill disparities as the tryout progresses

BEST PRACTICES FOR PLAYER TRYOUTS: SCHOOL SPORTS

POSITIVE
COACHING
ALLIANCE®

> CREATE A VARIETY OF COMPETITIVE ENVIRONMENTS

It does little good to simply assess athletic ability. You need to see who works well together, which athletes excel in which situations, and with which other athletes on their side. Make sure your assessment goes beyond an individual athlete's athletic skills. What kind of teammate will they be? How will they respond after a bad call, or after being subbed out of a game? Create situations during tryouts to assess these non-skill based attributes.

> CUT AS FEW ATHLETES AS POSSIBLE

The more roles you can find for more athletes, within reason, the more positive impact you can have. Keep anyone who can contribute, learn, grow, and benefit from being in your program.

> IF CUTS ARE NECESSARY, HANDLE THEM HUMANELY

When you have decided on your final roster, distribute it in such a way that not all players are in one place looking at it together. This could mean posting it on a website or emailing all players who tried out at the same time. Reach out to athletes who did not make the team directly for 1-on-1 conversations.

All athletes who try out deserve a dignified private conversation explaining why you decided to cut them. Thank them for their effort, acknowledge what they did well, and explain how they can improve to stand a better chance next time. Offer other roles to stay involved with the team, i.e. team manager, score keeper, stat tracker, etc.

Handling this process thoughtfully and respectfully will provide important life skills and increase the chances that players who are cut stay involved in sports.

