



Define and Communicate Roles for Top Athletic Performance

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Although strategy and skill are extremely important for top performance, it will not be achieved if players do not know their roles with utmost clarity. Defining roles on the team and in certain game situations are the responsibilities of both the coach and player. The coach must take the lead and communicate his or her expectations of the players on the team or in certain situations. At the same time, players must take responsibility for asking any questions if the role is unclear in anyway. Many times neither of these tasks occur.

From the coach's standpoint, defining roles has certain challenges. Coaches cite frequently that they communicate the roles of the team clearly, but that the players do not execute. Sometimes this is the case and sometimes it is not. Furthermore, numerous coaches can easily get caught up in the X's and O's (or one of their many other roles) that they fail to spend more time on defining roles. Finally, defining a role for a player who does not share the coach's view can create tension, and therefore communicating about that role is avoided.

Coaches must make certain to clearly explain and define roles with confidence and clarity. Even though athletes may have high levels of talent, a lack of clarity in their role can decrease confidence and therefore performance. Furthermore, as many coaches know, the lack of clarity by one player can have detrimental effects on the team. The following are tips to keep in mind to make certain roles are being clearly defined and accepted.

1. Create a role description: The more clear the role in a coaches' mind, the more clearly it can be communicated to the player. Write down the roles and provide them to players.
2. Assess the player: Continually assess and evaluate how the player is doing with the assigned role. Make certain there is no lack of clarity. If it boils down to non-acceptance of the role by the player, then that is different story.
3. Design relevant practices: Make certain that the practices are designed in a way that players can practice and become more confident in their roles. This also allows for players to walk the walk, not just talk the talk.
4. Bias practice for success: Build and take the player through small manageable steps to create success and motivation along the way in their assigned roles.

5. Criticize with care: If a player is not quite getting it, keep a positive attitude and continue emphasizing what they need to do, not what they do not need to do.

Coach Hard, Coach Fun, Coach Well!