



The Need to Know of Coaching Female Athletes

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Questions – re: coaching women athletes?

- ✓ What issues are you facing?
- ✓ What solutions have you found?

Women athletes

- ✓ An empirical study on women volleyball players – *how did they learn to be good players*
- ✓ Research on differences between women and men – particularly in terms of socialization and communication

A few results: who were these women players?

- Competitive desire ‘to be the best’ — “I just had so much passion to try to be the best”
- Open to feedback, asking lots of questions “ - “I never was thinking I know everything”
- ‘I love playing this game’
- Self-aware — “I made it my mission to learn about my self, what I needed”

How did they actually go about learning?

- Immersed in the game, and playing with older, more experienced players:
“playing with girls two years older than me kind of made it really hard for me not to get a lot better”
- Not just about volleyball - also about the relationships they developed – *“cool for me to be able to see the kind of relationships you do build through sport teams”*

Importance of a positive, supportive environment

“The only way that I can learn and be open to criticism is when it is a positive setting. If I have a good relationship with a coach and I know he isn’t going to yell at me, then I feel free to play. That was a little bit of a team motto we had once - just being able to make mistakes and learn from those mistakes”

“He would never really take it easy on us - But he also wouldn’t really ever get angry at us”

“It was just always ‘you can do this.’ I think I still would have done it but I am not sure I would have progressed as quickly”

“She was really intense and she really knew what to say at the right time. You wanted to play well for her”

Deborah Tannen (2001) – *You just don't understand, women and men in conversation*

- *Linguistic styles* – what we say, how we say it, speed, tone, direct/indirect – (fundamental differences between women and men)
- *Socialization* - Girls play in small groups, talk, downplay ways one is better; boys play in large groups, have leaders, negotiate status

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- *Confidence* - Verbally, women tend to downplay their certainty, men tend to minimize their doubts – implications for coaching either gender??
- *Asking questions* – how and when questions are asked send signals about competence and power – often, males see asking questions as putting them in a ‘one-down’ position (power dynamic), and may also form a negative opinion of those who ask questions!!!

What have coaches said?

- One has argued - it is more about readiness and maturity than gender – *“all great athletes ask questions and want to know everything”*
- Another, who has coached both men and women, said *“women need to know why – explain, and they will work very hard - for men, they have been playing for so long, they just want the how”*

Three key points to coaching women athletes:

- ✓ **Talk** – you get to talk, they get to talk – And, let them have a chance to socialize – build it into your practice/ manage it
- ✓ **Listen** – let them ask questions, ask why, and listen, and then provide good reasons for your decision – *‘educate them on how to train hard’*
- ✓ Create a *clear, tough, and encouraging* environment – and this is a hard combination to create in competitive sport