

OVERCOMING MISTAKES:

HELPING YOUTH ATHLETES MOVE FORWARD WHEN THEY MESS UP



**A WHITE PAPER
BY ECSELL SPORTS**

An errant pass that results in an own goal... a missed free throw that could've tied the game... a throwing error that leads to the go ahead run. Mistakes are common in youth sports and every athlete is likely to make a major one at some point. And after they do, they will either learn from their mistake and get better or they will get down on themselves and lose their confidence. Our research shows that how an athlete responds to a mistake can depend a lot on how their coach handles it.

And most importantly, coaches can get better at handling mistakes with a few key changes to their approach.



THE DATA ON COACHES' RESPONSES TO MISTAKES

At Ecsell Sports, we constantly research what coaches are doing to support the growth, development, and overall experience of their athletes. Our data shows that learning to respond effectively when an athlete makes a mistake is one of the best ways for a coach to create more confident athletes who find more enjoyment in playing their sport. In fact, if a coach can help an athlete learn from a mistake, that athlete is three times more likely to rate their overall athletic experience highly and over 12 times more likely to say their coach helps build their confidence.

While a coach's reaction to mistakes clearly has a significant impact on their athletes, many coaches struggle to respond effectively. Our surveys of over 13,000 youth athletes show that only 44% rate their coach as highly effective at helping them learn from their mistakes. Similarly, many of these athletes are very concerned about messing up in front of their coach, with 37% admitting they worry about how their coach will react if they do something wrong. And about 42% of athletes feel that their coach overreacts. All of our data points to one clear conclusion... about 2 out of every 5 coaches need to get better at how they respond to their athletes' mistakes.

*Athletes are **12x more likely to be confident** when their coach helps them learn from their mistakes*

WHAT THE BEST COACHES DO

What can coaches do to respond more effectively when their athletes make a mistake? To pinpoint how coaches can improve their reactions, we look to the examples of the best coaches. Our research shows that the coaches that get the highest ratings from their athletes in how they respond to mistakes tend to do three things differently and better than coaches that get lower marks:

- They give feedback in ways that work best for athletes
- They teach their athletes the correct techniques
- They help re-build their athletes' confidence

"She always gives us confidence and tells me what to do better when I make a mistake"

- ATHLETE SURVEY COMMENT



HOW COACHES CAN IMPROVE

Following the example of the coaches that respond most effectively to their athletes mistakes, here are a few specific strategies coaches can use to improve:

- **Ask the athlete how they like to receive feedback.** Do they want you to share your thoughts right after the game or wait a day? Do you need to be gentle in your approach or do they prefer directness? Do they want you to ask questions to help them self-assess or just tell them what to do differently? By learning how athletes like to get feedback, your message will be more effective.
- **Help the athlete improve their technique.** When coaches help athletes improve their skills or technique, the athlete will not only be less likely to make the same mistake again, but they will also have greater confidence that will succeed the next time. So go in-depth with your athlete on how to improve their skill or technique to help them re-bounce from their mistake.
- **Share your belief in the athlete.** When they've made a mistake, an athlete's confidence is likely to be at a low point. Knowing that a person they respect still believes in them can help them start to believe in themselves again. So be vocal in sharing with your athlete why you have faith in them. Be specific about the talents and abilities you see in them that you know will lead to their success.

ABOUT ECSELL SPORTS

Ecsell Sports, a division of Ecsell Institute, is a research organization that helps athletic directors, coaches and club directors improve the experience of their student- athletes by quantifying coaching effectiveness.

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