



# How Should Coaches Handle Player Cuts?

*This resource stems from a question submitted to the Ask PCA blog. Responses come from our experts including PCA Trainers, who lead live group workshops for coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes.*

**“Is there a script for kind and positive ways to talk with a player who has to be cut from a team?”**

## PCA Response by Joe Scally, PCA Trainer—Chicago

While being cut is most painful for the child who doesn't make the team, making the cut is also difficult for the coach. As a result, some coaches avoid communicating about this topic with players and parents. Coaches should recognize that if they handle the cut process openly, thoughtfully, and respectfully, they will provide important life lessons and increase the chances that players who are cut stay involved in sports.

It helps to tell players ahead of time the expectations for tryouts and something about the criteria for selection. These could include skill, size, speed, and strength as well as intangibles like coachability, work ethic, potential, commitment, and complementary skill sets. If they know the criteria ahead of time the players will feel the process is fair. This can take some of the sting out for a player who is cut. It can also help players who are cut focus on their next steps rather than feeling mistreated.

If a player is cut, the coach has an important role in helping that player move on and nurturing any desire the child has to continue in sports. The coach should have an individual meeting with each player who is cut. Tell a player that being cut is not a judgment of them as people, but rather an assessment of their fit with the team based on a brief snapshot during the tryouts. Offer a reminder that the picture can, and probably will, change. Kids' bodies and minds grow and change. Skills can improve through hard work.

Provide the player with an assessment of current strengths and areas for improvement. Make specific suggestions about steps to get better. Encourage the player to keep on trying. Avoid comparing the player with others. If other opportunities to play are available, tell players about them. It's OK for the coach to admit that he or she may regret cutting the player.

When I was in high school, two of my friends were among the last players cut from the freshmen football team. One of them tried out the next year, barely made the team and went on to play college and professional football. The other switched to wrestling, competed in that for four years, and is now a successful businessman.

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There are tens of thousands of similar stories. If we encourage kids, give them the room to find their purpose, then they will not only survive being cut, but will learn life lessons that will help them flourish.

The coach should have a similar conversation with parents. Tell parents to encourage, without pressuring, their child to keep on trying. Let parents know that, while being cut is painful, it is an opportunity for their child to learn some important life lessons. Learning to bounce back will help them with future disappointments they are bound to experience.

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