



How to Develop Team Chemistry

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.

“Can you provide some specific tips and tactics for developing chemistry among teammates on the youth football team I’ll be coaching this fall? Any applicable advice drawn from other sports might be helpful, too.”

PCA Response by Dave Cisar of winningyouthfootball.com

The first point is to understand that you have to earn the right to be heard by kids these days. Gone are the days when you say, “Jump” and they answer with “How high?”

The first step is making sure you get to know everyone. You may know some of the players already, and you should commit to learning all the players’ names by the end of your first practice. Smile and call every player by his or her first name; kids love hearing the sound of their own names.

Too many coaches get to know the names of their athletic super star players that first day, but struggle for weeks to remember the names of their other players. Kids pick up on this in an instant and may feel de-valued. When players understand that you care about them beyond what they offer on the football field, they listen and they start to trust. Repeating players’ names on every drill will help you remember and also lets them know you care enough about them to make the effort to learn their names.

Another method to help you and your players remember names and bond is to use your water break times to instruct. For example, on the first day of our youth football practice, our first water break would include learning the backfield numbering system. We take four kids from the group and put them in our base backfield alignment. Then while the boys are sitting and drinking water, we review each players number and name.

It may sound like this: “This is our 1-back position. His name is Tommy. This is Joey, and he is our 2-back.” We continue through all four positions. Then ask players from the larger group something like: “Back over here, what is his name and number again?” Then we point to a player in the group and ask him, by name, to jog over and touch a certain player on the shoulder. For example, “Gary, you tap the 1-back. Mike, you tap Joey.”

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You can also use the partner program to help you accomplish this task. Partner players together for the entire season, careful to put a shy player with one who is more outgoing, or a more athletic player with someone less talented. Don't match up players who already are friends.

Another chemistry-builder is a "question of the day." Have partners ask each other a different question each day (How many pets do you have? What food does your mom make that you think is disgusting? Who is your favorite NFL player?, etc.). At water breaks you call on each player and ask him how his partner answered the question.

A willing smile from a coach who knows and uses your name and a partner you talk to at every practice helps players feel wanted and part of the team. It can take time for kids to develop love or passion for playing on a team or in a specific sport. Creating a safe and welcoming environment can help buy you the time needed to develop that love and passion in all your players.

Dave Cisar is founder of the Screaming Eagle Football Program in inner-city Omaha, Neb. the Greater Lincoln area. With over 25 years of youth coaching experience, Dave has instructed more than 120,000 youth football coaches in clinics throughout the country. The teams he has coached in the last 10 years have retained more than 95% of their players, his book, Winning Youth Football, is endorsed by legendary Nebraska Cornhuskers Coach Tom Osborne. His web site is www.winningyouthfootball.com.

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