



How Can I Support Players and Still Speak Honestly About Winning?

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.

“I am struggling with the balance of supporting my players while making sure they always push themselves. Before a game against a team with a comparable record, I told our players we would need to play our best to have a decent shot at winning the game. One player said something like ‘Coach, don’t you have faith in us?’ How can I express faith in my players while still being honest about the team’s prospects for winning?”

PCA Response by Eric Eisendrath, PCA Lead Trainer

While I understand your points, I suggest you look at “winning” in a different light. My goal as a coach is to create an atmosphere that helps athletes perform at the peak of their ability. You do this by focusing on maximum effort, learning and not being afraid to make mistakes. We call this the ELM Tree of Mastery.

“Winning” is simply a by-product of great play. To play poorly, yet win on the scoreboard, is not very rewarding for either players or coaches. However, to perform to the best of your ability, even if you fall a bit short on the scoreboard, still leaves you feeling proud of your accomplishments.

Therefore, I urge you to remove winning from the discussion. Simply point out to players that you have faith in them as the type of people capable of giving maximum effort every time they take the field. Even if they were to “win,” but not try their hardest, then in the end they would have let themselves and you down. Much better to show faith in their ability to give their all, as that is a goal they should achieve 100% of the time.

Eric Eisendrath is a former Division One hockey goalie at Brown University, and has coached soccer, lacrosse and hockey at a variety of levels.

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