



How Can I Keep Jealousy From Splitting My Team?

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 coach a U-13 boys lacrosse team, but this question could apply to any team sport. We have two natural goal scorers, who also distribute the ball to teammates when they’re open, often assisting on goals. Yet some players call these leading scorers ‘ball hog’ or ‘selfish’. I emphasize ball movement, assists and winning ground balls. What else can I do to keep resentment from the ‘non-scorers’ from fracturing our team?”

PCA Response by Eric Eisendrath, PCA Lead Trainer

Your current emphases have laid the groundwork for improving this situation. You may just need to tweak some of the ways in which you continue to deliver consistent messages about the importance of ball movement and make sure you positively reinforce the behavior you desire.

In terms of tweaking messages, you may need to explicitly explain or remind players that the goal of ball movement is to get the ball into the most advantageous place to score – and that sometimes a player keeping the ball and driving to the net is the best option. You also should emphasize the need for players who want the ball more to work hard to get open, check back to the ball, cut to the crease, etc.

In terms of positive reinforcement, make sure to reward unselfish play and ball movement. You might use a PCA tool, such as a “targeted symbolic reward” (i.e., a game ball or helmet sticker to the player who makes the best ball movement decisions, including wise choices to advance the ball into proper position on their own). It also will help for players to hear you consistently praising ball movement during game action and between periods.

Perhaps the most important thing to address is a notion of respect for one’s teammates. Without mentioning names or discussing any players’ accusations, explain to the whole team how you expect them to address each other. Stress the importance of respecting teammates as a component of Honoring the Game.

Advise your players on better ways to communicate with their teammates. For example: “If you are upset with a teammate, or feel you are open, express it in a positive way. ‘Hey, I know they were coming at you pretty fast, but take a look to your left. My man is really playing off me.’”

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You may need private, individual conversations with each of the accusers to reinforce the importance that they communicate well with teammates. In those conversations, resist any temptation to refute any players' claims or to defend the players accused of being "ball hogs."

All these methods, and sharing Jim Thompson's *Elevating Your Game*, will clear the air within your team, maintain or improve your team's on-field performance and provide important life lessons about respecting teammates that will help your players in their relationships with family, friends and future work colleagues.

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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