



Punished for Poor Performance

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.

“My daughter’s high school coach punishes the team for poor performance by having them run laps and do push-ups. What do coaches and parents think about that technique?”

PCA Response by David Jacobson, PCA Trainer & Senior Marketing Communications and Content Manager

One of the ultimate ironies of sports occurs when coaches discipline “lazy” players by making them run. Why is that ironic? Because it is lazy coaching.

If your players need conditioning, help them get it. If your players need discipline, help them get that. But don’t fall back on running as discipline.

There are at least two reasons: 1) Your players will come to despise running and other forms of conditioning because it feels like punishment. You want them to love running so that they will want to run and become the best-conditioned athletes possible. 2) You are abandoning an opportunity to teach life lessons about discipline, which is best done by talking about the subject and setting an example by exercising the discipline necessary to coach well.

For example, let’s say that in an intra-squad scrimmage your players have trouble passing or receiving on the run. Don’t default to punishing them with extra running. Instead, recognize the problem as one of conditioning and/or insufficient practice at these skills.

Address both issues at once by interrupting the scrimmage and instead of ordering laps in the name of “discipline” conduct a drill that demands running, passing and receiving. This way, their skills and conditioning both improve.

Your drill could include a competitive element, such as splitting the team in half and seeing who can complete the most passes on the run in a given time period. That helps avoid resentment that comes from mindless, endless laps and makes the practice fun so that players will want to continue acquiring the skills and conditioning they need. And you demonstrate creativity and discipline in your problem solving.

You then can explain to your players after the drill that instead of knee-jerk reactions, creativity and true discipline are better approaches to problem solving in sports and in life.

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