



How Coaches Can Make Effective Speeches

Executive Statement: This study examined athletes' positive and negative perceptions of both content, and delivery of their coach's pre-game and intermission speeches. A highly successful team was interviewed in order to find the most effective coaching practices.

Introduction: A coach's beliefs and behaviors influence athletes' beliefs and behaviors. It has been suggested that coaches' addresses to their athletes during pre-game and intermission periods can influence athletes' emotion and motivation to perform. However, there is little systematic research on the types of information and modes of delivery athletes prefer. This study examines athletes' positive and negative perceptions and interpretations of an elite coach's pre-game and intermission speeches in naturally occurring, real-life situations.

Methods: A Canadian university women's hockey team that had won numerous conference and national championships was purposefully sampled for this case study. Twenty female hockey players between the ages of 18-22 participated with an average of 2.8 years of experience playing at the university level. The head coach had thirteen years of coaching experience and a winning record above .900 over this period. He had a Physical Education bachelor's degree and a level three qualification from the Canadian National Coaching Certification Program. Athletes completed two semi-structured interviews, each time the day after a home stand during the regular season, unless they were healthy scratches.

Results: Findings suggest that different athletes perceive the same messages in contrasting ways and that the coach was likely delivering speeches that the athletes perceived more positively than negatively. Positive perceptions include: displaying genuine emotions, keeping messages short and meaningful, and referring to team values. Negative perceptions of the coach's speeches include: longer, poorly timed or rushed speeches, disagreements with speech content, and any omissions of expected information or surprises.

Conclusion: Coaches in similar roles should deliver speeches with genuine emotion, ensuring they are paying attention to the needs and emotions of their athletes and not being overly intense or angry. The most effective speeches are meaningful, short, reference team values, and are not rushed. They should not include anything the athletes may disagree with. Speeches must not interfere with players' routines and care should be taken when using video, making changes or introducing new things during speeches, especially if it is unexpected by players.

Recommendations: It is recommended that coaches include the identified themes in their pre-game and intermission speeches.

Reference: Breakey, C., Jones, M., Cunningham, C., & Holt, N. (2009). Female athletes' perceptions of a coach's speeches. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 4(4), 489-504.

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