



# POWERPLAY

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## Introduction



It gives me great pleasure to put pen to paper once more to the coach development newsletter! The 2023/2024 summer season is upon us, and it brings along with it very exciting cricket activities that I am certain we are all looking forward to.

The Proteas' performances at the ICC's 2023 world cup edition were encouraging and we are certainly looking forward to what this group of players and its management team will achieve in the near future. Congratulations to the ICC World Cup 2023 edition champions, Australia on a very successful campaign!

A big congratulations should also go out to the Springboks for their back-to-back World cup victories. The Springboks success truly gripped and united the country in a special way and all South Africans have been beaming with pride in recognition of this achievement!

Cricket SA and all its business units including Cricket Services are focusing on the theme of **"creating positive experiences for all its participants"**. This newsletter will focus on this theme.

The first article will look at aspects of the mental wellness of cricketers and the implications for coaches in understanding how to deal with players experiencing mental health issues.

The second article will cover the impact of aggression by coaches, parents and players in trying to win games at all costs at cricket matches. The CSA Coaching Philosophy is centered around the principles of creating environments that are **coach driven but player centered**. To create environments that drive positive experiences for participants, especially children, the South African cricket community needs to guard against the aggression that is directed towards match officials, coaches, fellow parents, and opposition teams in the name of a cricket match victory. Coaches and captains are custodians of the spirit of cricket, and we urge them to do everything possible, to encourage teams to play the game in a way that promotes the values and standards of the game.

The third article of "The 10 Golden principles for coaching Children: Introducing ICOACHKIDS pledge" which also has a vision of *creating positive experiences for kids and fostering the love of sport and physical activity*. Cricket is a vehicle that coaches, administrators and volunteers use to shape young people's lives. This article will touch on the topics of holistic and inclusive coaching.

The fourth article from Wayne Goldsmith speaks to A performance focused approach to teaching skills. As we engage with cricketers in-season we need to take cognizance of how performance looks like for different stages of the pathway and teach cricketers to be able those skills under competition conditions.

Cricket SA and its Members are proud to put out the best talent in the pathway development structures on display at the upcoming national weeks.

I would like to wish all the participants the best as they pit their talents and skills against the opposition teams at the CSA tournaments below:

National Week	Dates	Venue
Under 16 Girls	12-16 December	Pietermaritzburg
Under 16 Boys	10-14 December	Oudtshoorn
Under 19 Girls	10-14 December	Cape Town
Khaya Majola Week	16-20 December	Makhanda
USSA B	28 Nov-1 December	George
USSA A	4-8 December	Cape Town

I have had the great pleasure of seeing some of the mini cricket, youth and club cricket that is on the go in the highveld, and to see the great joy that the boys and girls find in the game of cricket is truly something to behold. Let's continue with creating positive experiences for children and participants involved at every level of the game. To ensure we can create these environments all coaches should hold a suitable coaching qualification, complete a Safeguarding Awareness Course training and be vetted against the criminal check, sexual offenders and child protection registers.

Enjoy a Summer of Cricket by supporting your local teams and the Proteas in the holiday season. Woza Nawe!

**Coach Education office**  
**Gift Mathe**



**WOZA  
NAWE** BE *PART*  
OF IT  
CRICKET SOUTH AFRICA

# Best Practices for Coaching an Athlete with Mental Health Concerns

Jane M. Simoni, PhD

Psychological problems in youth including depression, self-harm/suicidality, anxiety, substance use, and eating disorders are a growing concern, only exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Elite-level youth and college athletes are not immune from this psychological distress.<sup>5</sup> Although engaging in highly competitive sports can be a rewarding and life-enhancing activity, it also is extremely demanding. Challenges in the recruiting process, competitions, training routines, and pressure to consistently perform at the highest level may create distress or exacerbate underlying mental health conditions in elite athletes.

When an athlete shows signs of psychological distress or is experiencing a mental-health-related problem, a coach may feel disappointment in the player's performance, fear they will lose a player, worry it will impact the team and perhaps negatively affect other players, be concerned it will scare new recruits, and harbor doubts about their own coaching and the possibility they contributed to the distress of the athlete. These are understandable concerns, but they must not interfere with appropriately addressing the needs of the distressed athlete.

A best-practice approach to coaching and mental health includes the following steps:

- **BE PRO-ACTIVE.** Expect that your athletes are going to be under duress at times and normalize this experience for them. Let them know others may be having a difficult time, too. Bring in experts to work with your team in a prophylactic manner – preventing distress is easier than curing it. Cultivating healthful sleeping, eating, and mental health practices and addressing substance use should be an integral part of elite training. Given their influential position, coaches can serve as role models with respect to healthful behaviours for their players and staff.

- **ENCOURAGE ATHLETES** to express their worries and concerns to responsible adults, as well as to seek support from their teammates, other coaching staff, and you. Let them know they do not have to suffer in silence.

THANK the athlete when they do have the courage to come to you and share their distress. Tell them you are glad that they spoke up because now you can help them get the support they need. It is a testimony to the relationship you have developed with players if they trust you enough to share their concerns.

- **EXPRESS EMPATHY.** Say you are sorry they are not feeling well and that you want their sports experience to be

positive. Acknowledge elite competition can be challenging, but it should not be overwhelming.

- **ASK THEM** what they need from you, what would be helpful. Even slight variations in training schedules, practice routines, or coaching strategies and communication styles might make a big difference. Would a brief time away from some team responsibilities be useful? Work with the athlete on a plan for return to health and let them know that it is OK to take time away from their sport if needed.

- **DESTIGMATIZE** mental health concerns. If an athlete told you they were experiencing feeling physical pain, you would probably know what to do to find them help and to ensure their proper treatment and healing to be able to return to play. It should be the same with mental health pain. It is no more their fault than is a physical injury. The main difference is that the athlete might experience stigma, feeling ashamed or embarrassed or “weak” because of the emotional distress. Indeed, some coaches may have told them as much. Acknowledge that athletes should not be asked to push through significant mental pain, just as they are not asked to push through physical pain from serious injuries.

- **MAKE REFERRALS** to appropriate experts. You are not responsible for solving the athlete's problems, but you should be a source of information for how they can get help. If the athlete indicates in any way that they are planning to hurt themselves or that they want to die (and you can ask them directly about this), get professional assistance immediately. Seek advice from university representatives, colleagues, and students themselves about services for additional support.

- **MAINTAIN CONNECTION.** Even if athletes need to take some time off to heal (and this applies to healing from longer-term physical injuries as well), be sure to continue to check in with them and make available to them the positive aspects of team bonding and coaching staff support. They should not be isolated, ostracized, or punished because of their problems. If the player grants permission, you can share with teammates information so that they can support the player. This has the added benefit of showing to other players that they can expect support if and when they need it as well. A player's eventual return should be celebrated.

These best practices are not difficult to implement, yet many coaches do not follow them. They show anger and disappointment and shame the athlete. They act as if having psychological difficulties is surprising, abnormal, a sign of weakness, a lack of commitment, a willful disregard for the team, or even a personal insult to the coach.

What makes it difficult for some coaches to respond appropriately and effectively? They may have been trained in a system that was not in line with current best practice, and this is the only approach they know. They may feel it has worked with some athletes in the past. In addition, they may be struggling themselves. High-level coaching is a demanding occupation with considerable challenges. When one is feeling stressed, it is difficult to tolerate distress in others and respond with empathy. However, the coach, a professional and the responsible adult in these situations, must find a way to rise above their own concerns at least to the extent that they can be available for the athlete in distress. Coaches deserve the same kind of support that

athletes do, and they should seek out such support from experts or other adults outside of the team when needed so their distress does not detract from their coaching. Coaches might benefit from reflecting on their own views about mental health in their athletes and examine their own personal barriers, if any, to implementing the best practices outlined above.

In sum, playing sports at an elite level can be rewarding, but it is challenging. Athletes, like everyone else, are not immune from experiencing psychological distress at times. Coaches have the ability – and the responsibility – to effectively intervene to assist the player in distress. This will not only help the athlete but will contribute to a more positive and satisfying experience for the coach and, ultimately, to the greater success of the whole team.



## “Headmaster’s Hoekie”

Something which has become an increasing source of concern for me is the amount of aggression displayed by adults during schoolboy competitions ... well, mostly during rugby matches, actually. Strangely enough, this aggression doesn’t come particularly from parents either (although, I must admit, I sometimes have to agree with my colleague, a primary school headmaster, who maintains that the difference between a primary school rugby mommy and a crazed pit bull terrier is lipstick!). However, I daresay most of XXXX High parents understand the old saying of being a proud parent and not a loud parent. Mostly.

But I am indeed proud of our parents, whose support is of extreme importance to the boys and a really big help to the school. A case in point is the braais around the hockey Astro on those chilly Friday evenings and around our cricket pitches on those lazy, lengthy, leisurely summer afternoons, generally creating an atmosphere of goodwill, good spirit, and enjoyment to complement the hard work of our boys competing on the field.

No, this aggression, the kind that translates to rudeness, lack of manners and discourtesy, seems to come by and large from the school staff tasked with looking after these schoolboy teams, coaching them, looking after their health, and generally, as a common-law understanding, instilling in these boys gentlemanly

values such as respect, humility and grace (all applicable to the field of competition), all the while giving one's best regarding the competition. Case in point again I'll never forget: in 2009, at XXXX, our XXXX High team beat a star-studded team from XXXX High in XXXX rather unexpectedly, playing excellent rugby in the process. Afterwards, the XXXX coach (and excuse me for making specific reference, but I just want to point out that these events actually happened and I'm not making it up) was so angry that he headbutted the referee after the match. This was because the poor whistle-wielder, quite rightly red-carded a XXXX player who, twice in succession, stiff-armed one of our boys, the by now well-known Mr XXXX, staff member of XXXX High and also one of our current first team coaches. As a result, this coach was suspended from all forms of coaching in Gauteng. Having met this gentleman afterwards, and finding him an amicable, well-spoken sort, I've often asked the question: What on earth made him act like that? At a schoolboy match, I mean?

Now these days we have the so-called 'roamers' around the field – those water bottle-toting fellows, ruggedly dressed in base-ball cap and PT clothes, dispatching water and shouting instructions to their charges as if this was the Ali-Foreman fight. There where I stand behind the poles with the coaches, as I always do, I have many times found that these gentlemen direct some very emotional exchanges at us, some of them swearing like sailors even, and I wonder why, since we've never even met before. If things aren't going well, some coaches

then also have a real go at the poor boys for playing badly.

I believe that part and parcel of every teaching situation is showing the pupil where he/she went wrong, what they can do to make it better and generally inspiring them to give their best, but certainly not by insulting them. Watching a match at XXXX recently, I was catching some shade in the referees' gazebo when I heard one coach castigating his charges. One of the referees, clearly a local, remarked: "Hou op, man, jy skel nou op n ander antie se kind!" Certainement, as the French would say.

Perhaps we're forgetting that coaches are teachers too. I know that some schools have so-called "directors" of this, that, and the other thing, but mostly "directors of rugby", meaning people sitting in offices, rarely seen elsewhere and, especially, never coming within a country mile of a classroom. This, I believe, is a recipe for disaster. That's why our structure at XXXX High is that of "MIC of coaching" where it is not the sole task of the appointed to coach the first team, but to make sure (a) that adequate coaches are appointed for all teams, (b) that they are regularly upskilled AND then, most importantly, (c) that they also find themselves in the classroom.

If you work with young people, you are, by necessity, an educator, and (even more so in this era of expanding technology and knowledge at the push of a button)

an ethical facilitator of knowledge, setting the proper example yourself as a major part of the process.

What prompted me to write this short, concerned piece? All because of what happened to me last Saturday after the first team match. After the match both teams shook hands, and some of the opposition XXXX Boys came to shake hands with me. I told them that they played well, and I really meant it. And at some point, after shaking the hands of the row of opposition boys walking past me, the next person in line was a member of the conditioning staff of the opposing school apparently, who promptly instructed me, in Afrikaans nogal, to "Sê net dankie en hou op met k\*k praat!" – as shocking as load-shedding, one would think. And I still wonder what I did to inspire this aggressive outburst from the young man. I'm sure the headmaster will address the incident, but the question remains: is having more points on the board than the other team, on one specific day in one specific year, worth it?

And yes, we are here to take young boys and teach them the finer points of the sport and indeed, make them the best rugby players that we can. Having coached rugby for various levels for almost 40 years, I understand this very well. But we're also here to instil in young men gentlemanly values, such as integrity, honesty, and of course, striving to be victorious on the field of competition, but the latter never at the expense of the former.

I shall certainly tackle this with other education leaders at every chance that I get."



# The 10 Golden principles for coaching Children: Introducing the ICOACHKIDS pledge.

Sergio Lara-Bercial et al., 2022.  
[Forum KIND Jurgend Sport 2022:3:154 -160.](#)

## The 10 Principles Identified are:

1. Be Child centered
2. **Be Holistic**
3. **Be Inclusive**
4. Make it Fun and Safe
5. Prioritize the love for the sport over learning the sport
6. Focus on foundational skills
7. Engage parents positively
8. Plan progressive programs
9. Use the difference methods of learning
10. Use competition in a development way

## The ICOACHKIDS pledge:

*"The ICK Pledge offers guidance to support coaches in creating youth sport environments that put children first. Each of the 10 principles are underpinned by the acknowledgement that one size does not fit all, and instead affords coaches the opportunity to consider how they are already fulfilling them, while also planning for how they may achieve it in their given context".*

*"The vision of ICOACHKIDS is a world where every child has access to positive sport experiences that foster a love of sport, play and physical activity".*

## Introduction:

The International Coaches Federation defines: "Coaching as partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential".

The International Council for Coaching Excellence (ICCE) has defined sports coaching as: "The guided improvement of sports participants in a single sport at identifiable stages of participant development" (ICCE, 2013, 1.2, p. 14).

These definitions that defines Coaching and sport Coaching, as stated above, will assist to understand the role and responsibilities of the coaches in terms of working with children, or for any player at any age and level of participation.

Coaches working with children need to understand the importance they play in the sport development of children. The environment they create plays an important role in attracting the kids and create lifelong participation, healthy life style in adulthood. Creating an Environment where children should feel psychological safe and physical safe should be high on the priority list for coaches. It is therefore suggested that coaches working with children upskill themselves in this area by ensuring the get the necessary qualifications or certification in this regard.

In this article the focus will be on the following topics:

- Principle 2: Be Holistic  
Principle 3: Be Inclusive

## Principle 2: Be Holistic

Physical, Psychological, Social, Technical and Tactical (PPSTT) characteristics has been identified for development in youth sport performers (North et al., 2014, 2016). These identified characteristics (PPSTT) should be understood as desirable - and potential developmental outcomes for all participants at any level but more so for children. It is becoming more acknowledged that youth participants (children) should be thought of by coaches as being a human being first. An individual with its own history,

personality, ideas, preferences, strengths and weaknesses (Erickson et al., 2017). This should be applied to all sport participants and not only to elite or developing athletes. Cote and Erickson 2015 and Whitehead 2011 argued the previous point to be of utmost importance to develop lifelong participation and interest in a sport. Holistic development of the youth sport participant serves as a vehicle to assist the youth participants to reach their bespoke goals in sport, life and personal environments (Miller and Kerr 2002).

Effective coaching should account for all the requirements as stated above (Cote and Gilbert, 2009). Important to remember that at the youth stages there are different levels of athlete development, personal development and performance development due to chronological age and biological age the development doesn't have to be exclusively on one aspect alone. All of these aspects are interactive with each other and developing all aspects allows for better and healthier people making better sport participants (Miller and Kerr 2002).

### Practical applications as identified by authors:

*"Coaches should aim to develop children's psychosocial skills and capabilities not just their physical ones."*

*"Coaches should give Children opportunities to develop a positive sense of self by valuing each child regardless of their skills and by helping them focus on their own personal improvement and effort."*

*"They should also create an environment that caters for and promotes the development of children's social, emotional, cognitive and moral repertoire."*

*"To do this, coaches could use activities that engage the children at more than just the physical level, make the most of teachable moments and challenge them to think, problem solve and manage relationships, as well as to move."*

### Principle 3: Be Inclusive

Coaches should adopt an inclusive focus in their philosophy (Cote and Gilbert, 2009). One size fits all approach will not suit all participants due to different motivations, levels of development and skill levels therefore sport coaches should be able to cater for the bespoke needs of the youth participants. Very important for a (sport) coach to be cognizant of the specific environment (sport: recreational, professional) they are coaching in (Camire et al., 2012). The needs of the environment and the participant (Balyi et al., 2013) and how not set the appropriate goals for individuals (short, medium or long term) (Abraham and Collins 2011).

### Practical Implications as identified by the authors:

*"Coaches should ensure that they remove all barriers to participation so that every child feels welcome."*

*"Especially at an early age and in grassroots contexts, this means avoiding things such as exclusive selection policies*

*that risk excluding children and young people from sport participation."*

*"Coaches should pay equal attention to all children regardless of their ability."*

*"Create sessions where all children are engaged, stretched and learning is important. Effective differentiation requires a lot of planning and knowledge of the children."*

**Working with / Coaching, children is a responsibility not to be taken lightly. Educating yourself of what is expected from you as a coach working with children in certain developing ages will not only improve your coaching product but also allow you to improve the life of a child at any stage of development.**





# Teaching Skills – A Performance Focused Approach to Teaching Skills

By Wayne Goldsmith | In Coaching Tips

What's the difference between **learning sports skills to play sport** and **learning sports skills to win in competition conditions**?

**Playing the sport** is about learning and executing the skills of the sport.

**Winning in competition** is about executing skills to a high level of mastery, at high speed, in fatigue conditions and under pressure and consistently making the right decision about when, where and how to execute the skill.

So, why do so many coaches insist on teaching the basic skills without progressing them from playing level to performance level?

When you think about it, athletes move through six different levels of skills development:

- **Skill level 1: Initial Learning** – The athlete learns the skill; this first level is all about optimising learning through creating an environment where athletes want to learn and are genuinely engaged with the learning process. The faster and more effectively athletes can learn, the faster they can develop and improve.
- **Skill level 2: Skill Mastery** – The athlete masters the skill; perhaps the greatest challenge for coaches in this century – creating a learning environment where athletes are engaged in and committed to the learning process to a point where they willingly repeat the skill in a high quality practice until it is mastered.
- **Skill level 3: Add Speed** – The athlete masters the execution of the skill at high (competition level) speed; all sports – maybe with the exception of darts, lawn bowls and chess – require mastery of skills execution at high speeds.

- **Skill level 4: Add Fatigue** – The athlete masters the execution of the skill at high speed when fatigued; there must be a million research studies on the impact of fatigue on the accuracy and quality of skills execution – there is no disputing the fact that as athletes get tired, their skills will show signs of fatigue and failure. So creating practice situations which demand excellence in skills execution with the on-set of fatigue is vital.

- **Skill level 5: Add Pressure** – The athlete masters the execution of the skill at high speed when fatigued and under pressure; the biggest difference between amateur and professional sport is the level of pressure. Professional athletes must be able to consistently execute quality skills under the glaring eyes of fans, sponsors, media and coaches whilst performing at the highest level of their sport. It makes sense then to create practice situations where players are required to demonstrate technical excellence under pressure.

- **Skill level 6: Make the right execution decision** – The athlete masters the execution of the skill at high speed when fatigued and under pressure and consistently makes the right decision about when, where and how to execute the skill; in this final skills development level, successful athletes consistently demonstrate technical excellence at the "right" time. That is, they are able to execute technically excellent skills fast, when fatigued and under pressure but most importantly they execute skills at times which create a performance advantage for themselves, creates a performance disadvantage for their opposition or both.

**And here is an important skills teaching issue we all fail to address.**

Often in competition, skills are not executed in "textbook" fashion. Particularly in team sports – and specifically in football codes, hockey, basketball, netball and contact sports where opposition players are applying physical and mental pressure on players and their ability to execute skills, the art of skills improvisation becomes important.

How many times do professional players execute an effective pass or a kick or tackle or scoring shot while standing on one leg, bent at the hip 45%, with one eye closed and three players climbing on their back? In pressure situations, often it is not the technical excellence of execution but the effectiveness (outcome) of execution under pressure. It may not look pretty...but it worked!

So the question is again – are we preparing athletes to perform “textbook” quality skills or are we preparing them to win on the field, on the court, on the track and in the pool? Do we – and how do we practice winning “ugly” – i.e. being effective with improvised skills execution?

So, the challenge for all coaches is to look at their skills practices and learning programs and ask themselves:

*“Am I teaching the athlete to execute the skill or am I teaching the athlete to execute the skill in competition conditions?”*

If the answer is “in competition conditions” then ensure your skills practices progress learners from the basic skill learning to the mastery of skills execution in performance situations.

You wouldn’t send an athlete into a game only partially fit.

You wouldn’t send an athlete into a race only partially flexible.

Yet sending an athlete into the “battle field” without ensuring that their skills execution will withstand the

challenges and demands of competition conditions is only partial preparation.

We’ve all heard the rhetoric – “train the way you want to play”.

We all know it is right. Why aren’t we doing it?

Enquiries for coaching courses should be directed to the following email addresses:

Boland – [bolandcoachingcourses@cricket.co.za](mailto:bolandcoachingcourses@cricket.co.za)

Border – [bordercoachingcourses@cricket.co.za](mailto:bordercoachingcourses@cricket.co.za)

Central Gauteng Lions – [cglcoachingcourses@cricket.co.za](mailto:cglcoachingcourses@cricket.co.za)

Eastern Province – [epcoachingcourses@cricket.co.za](mailto:epcoachingcourses@cricket.co.za)

Easterns easterns – [coachingcourses@cricket.co.za](mailto:coachingcourses@cricket.co.za)

Free State – [FSCcoachingcourses@cricket.co.za](mailto:FSCcoachingcourses@cricket.co.za)

Mpumalanga – [mpumalanga.coachingcourses@cricket.co.za](mailto:mpumalanga.coachingcourses@cricket.co.za)

Limpopo – [liccoachingcourses@cricket.co.za](mailto:liccoachingcourses@cricket.co.za)

Northern Cape – [ncccoachingcourses@cricket.co.za](mailto:ncccoachingcourses@cricket.co.za)

North West – [nwreception@cricket.co.za](mailto:nwreception@cricket.co.za)

Northerns – [ncucoachingcourses@cricket.co.za](mailto:ncucoachingcourses@cricket.co.za)

South Western Districts – [swdcoachingcourses@cricket.co.za](mailto:swdcoachingcourses@cricket.co.za)

Western Province – [wpcoachingcourses@cricket.co.za](mailto:wpcoachingcourses@cricket.co.za)

KZN Coastal – TBC

KZN Inland – TBC

