

HOW TO HANDLE YOURSELF

1. Don't argue or yell.
2. Look at the situation objectively.
3. Ask for feedback.
4. Listen.
5. Treat feedback like a peanut.
6. Reframe mistakes.
7. Stay involved in the game.

Optimal Performance Consulting

Sam Maniar, Ph.D. is the President and founder of Optimal Performance Consulting. He has worked with amateur, collegiate, professional, and Olympic athletes and teams. He is available for individual and team consultation/workshops for sport & business.

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To contact Dr. Maniar, please call 614-571-5506 or email at opc@doctor.com.

Optimal Performance Newsletter

How to Handle Being Benched

DOs and DON'Ts for Players and Coaches

Sam Maniar, Ph.D.

Maybe you've been playing poorly; it's just not your day. Or, maybe you thought you were doing well. Either way, you just got taken out of the game by your coach. Now what? How can you handle yourself in order to increase the likelihood that you'll go back in the game?

Suggestions for Players

- DON'T argue, yell, or become defensive. Even negative body language can convey the same message as arguing. If you are upset, take a moment to walk away and collect your thoughts. You can also try taking a few deep breaths or going get a drink of water. If you are upset and your coach wants to talk to you right away, ask him or her for a few moments to collect yourself. Your coach will respect you more for this than for losing your temper.
- DO take a step back and look at the situation objectively. Maybe you were taken out to give someone else a chance to play. Maybe you were taken

out to make a tactical change. Or, maybe you were taken out so that your coach can tell you something and then send you back in.

- DO approach your coach and ask for feedback. Be ready to hear some negatives. You must remember that in the heat of the game, your coach may not have the time to think through the most positive way to phrase criticism. By asking for feedback, you will show your coach that you are willing to learn and improve.
- If you disagree with your coach, DON'T try to prove you are right and/or get defensive. Now is not the time. You can approach your coach individually after the game to discuss the things you disagree upon. Arguing with your coach in front of the team is never a good idea. Now is the time to LISTEN.
- If your coach yells at you, DO treat the feedback like a peanut. When you eat a peanut, you throw away the shell and keep the nut. So, throw away the way that the message was delivered (yelling), but keep the message. Remember, if your coach didn't care about you, they wouldn't bother saying

anything (positive or negative) to you!

- DO show your coach that you are aware of the mistakes you made and ask for help on how to fix them. Maybe you made some mistakes. Depending on how you look at it, though, mistakes can be a GOOD thing. Mistakes are not failures; mistakes are learning tools. Sometimes the only way to get better is to make a mistake, learn from it, and then make an adjustment. Take a moment and see what you can learn from those mistakes.
- DO encourage your team, pay attention, and maintain positive body language. Negativity is only going to decrease the likelihood of your return. Sometimes you can learn more from watching from the sideline than you can from on the field. That may even be the reason your coach took you out.

Suggestions for Coaches

- DO give your player a moment to collect themselves and their thoughts.
- DO take a moment to collect yourself and your thoughts. Yelling is never as effective as offering positive suggestions.
- DO help your player solve the mistakes they are making. It's more powerful if they can

come to the solution on their own. So, if possible, *lead* them to the solution, but DON'T tell them the solution.

- DO use the "sandwich technique" when giving feedback. In other words, try to sandwich a negative in between two positives. For example, "I really liked how hard you ran back on defense. Try and remember to keep your weight forward. You are too talented for this team to handle."
- DON'T use the word "but." The word "but" essentially negates everything said before it. For example, suppose you say, "Jenny, you are such a hard worker, but today you are getting beat too often on defense." use the "sandwich technique" In Jenny's mind, the word "but" served as a single to negate everything that came before it. Instead, try replacing the word "but" with "and."
- DO tell your athletes what you want them to do as opposed to what you don't want them to do. Instead of telling them "Don't stop running," tell them "Keep running through the ball and it'll work next time."
- DO keep your feedback limited to 2-3 things. Anymore than this will be too much for your player to think about and will increase the potential for choking. (For more on

choking, see the previous Optimal Performance Newsletter devoted to this topic.)

- DON'T keep your players on a "short leash." If you pull them out as soon as they make a mistake, or if you tell them that you will pull them out of they do make a mistake, your players will play fearful as opposed to excited. This will also increase the likelihood of choking.

I hope the above suggestions will help players get back in the game quickly and coaches get the most out of their athletes. As always, if your organization or team would like help with this, or any other aspect of performance, please let us know. We'd love to help.☺

About Dr. Sam Maniar

Sam Maniar, Ph.D. is a former athlete and coach, and the President and founder of Optimal Performance Consulting. He is a licensed psychologist who specializes in sport and business performance. He has worked with amateur, collegiate, professional, and Olympic athletes and teams, and his work has been featured in numerous magazines, newspaper articles, radio shows, and scholarly journals. He is available for individual and team consultation/workshops for sport & business.

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