



5 tips for developing players' confidence

SHAY HADDOW explores the best ways to boost the self-esteem in your team

After working with hundreds of youth and college female athletes, I have found that for players to have unshakeable confidence, there are two factors at play.

First, is a person's internal environment - their mindset, self-esteem and outlook on life. The second is their external environment - their social circles, coaches and family.

In order for a player to have unshakeable confidence, they need to have a positive internal and external environment.

If they have a positive internal environment, but their team or coach is toxic leading to a negative external environment, it will be much more difficult for a player to have that unshakeable confidence.

As coaches, we must understand that the way we interact and communicate with our players has an enormous impact on their confidence - especially if you are working with teenage girls.

We all want our players to be successful and confident, but we don't always go about supporting their confidence building the

right way. And, to be honest, it is not always an easy task when coaching female athletes.

So here are five ways coaches can develop the confidence of their female players:

01 ENCOURAGE MISTAKES AND CREATIVITY

One of the biggest things that holds players back from playing full out is their fear of making mistakes - specifically, because they don't want to get yelled at by the coach.

Girls are natural people-pleasers, so if they make a mistake and get subbed out or can see the disappointment on their coach's face, they automatically start to believe that they did something wrong, and therefore they are not good enough.

Now, I know most coaches want their players to train on the edge, and in fact do encourage their players to make mistakes. But telling them isn't enough. As a coach, it's important to show them - actions speak louder than words.

If a coach tells their player to take chances

but then they yell at them when they mess up, that is proving to the player that mistakes are bad.

02 DON'T COMPARE THEM TO OTHER PLAYERS

Comparison is right up there with fear of making mistakes as one of the biggest obstacles to becoming confident.

We live in a world where girls are always being compared and, truthfully, comparing themselves to each other - their bodies, their skills, their grades. The last thing they need is for us coaches to compare them as well.

Here is what I have learned from coaching both boys and girls - comparing works with boys, but does the opposite of what you want with girls.

More often than not, when female athletes are compared to other players, their initial thought is 'I'm not good enough' - whereas a boy's initial thought is probably along the lines of 'I'll show you'.

Instead of comparing, give the player



Shay Haddow is an expert coach and speaker on confidence and mindset for female athletes

information on how to improve or fix a mistake.

When girls get compared to other players, all they tend to think about is the fact they are not as good as the other girl. Essentially it takes the focus away from her and puts the focus on the other person, who she has no control over. Instead of them focusing on what they can do, they focus on the gap and what they can't do.

03 GIVE FEEDBACK AFTER MISTAKES

One of the biggest complaints I get from the girls I work with is that their coaches don't give them enough feedback after they make mistakes.

I get it - as coaches, we can't possibly give feedback on every little thing. But, if you have time to point out a mistake, at least find the time to give feedback on it.

One simple tip: in addition to correcting the mistake and showing them what to do, celebrate their courage and confidence in getting outside of their comfort zone. In doing so, they will start to learn that mistakes equals growth, and they can take that feedback and do something with it - as opposed to overthinking and going down the spiral of negative thoughts.

This is especially important when you sub a player out of the game, particularly if it

was because of something they were doing wrong. Don't just give them a high five and move on. Instead, take 30 seconds to give feedback that they can work on when they step back onto the field.

04 CREATE INCLUSIVE TEAM MEETINGS AND BONDING EXPERIENCES

The social aspect of sports plays a vital role in female athletes' confidence - from the recreational youth level, up to the professional level.

One of the biggest roadblocks to confident teams and players is toxic team environments such as cliques, mean girls and exclusion. As you can imagine, an environment like that would make it hard for anyone to be truly confident and perform at their best.

It is important to develop an awareness of the social dynamics of your team and how they interact with each other, and watching for any players or small groups that are excluded from conversations or drills.

One of the most effective ways to cultivate a unified team is regular team meetings that are player-centric - meaning coaches are a fly on the wall or not involved at all.

The goal of these meetings is to give each player a space to express themselves and let their voice be heard. Not only will this create a better team dynamic, but it will help each

player to feel like they belong, which is such an important thing for teenage girls to feel in social situations.

05 INVEST AND CARE ABOUT THEM AS PEOPLE FIRST, PLAYERS SECOND

Last, but most certainly not least - show your players you care about them as people first, players second.

Here's something you can try. Identify one player each practice or game to have a conversation with - not about soccer, but about what's going on in their life. Ask them how school is, how their weekend went, what exciting things they are up to.

This may seem like a seemingly insignificant task, but I promise that when coaches do this, players feel like they truly matter. They feel like you care which helps them to be able to open up and trust that you have their back.

And when that relationship is formed, it makes everything else I've mentioned in this article much easier to do.

I hope these five tips have brought some awareness as to how you can better support your players in developing confidence. Just as when learning any new skill, the more you can practice and use these tools as a coach, the better you will become at cultivating confident teams and individuals.