

**PLAY LIKE
A CHAMPION
TODAY**

Character Education Through Sports

Champion Coach Note

Educating and Forming Champion Coaches

Focus



Those who have participated in *Play Like a Champion's* High School Coach Clinic will remember that psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi coined the term "flow" to describe the state of humans being totally absorbed in what they're doing. Sometimes we also refer to this as an athlete being "in the zone" or "in a groove." That's the imagery that coach and administrator [Andrea McCabe calls to mind when she talks about focus in the video to the left.](#)

Focus is a term we use often as coaches as critical to maximizing athletic performance. So how do we help our athletes to focus in order to experience the moment described in the video? We can start by setting the right environment. When talking about *Flow*, Csikszentmihalyi notes that it's important athletes are relaxed, positive and enjoying the activity in which they are participating. The same is true when discussing focus: it's hard to focus when you have too much on your mind or when you would rather be somewhere else entirely. To help athletes focus, coaches can ask themselves the following questions when planning for practices and games:

- What can I do to make sure my athletes are having fun, even while working hard?
- Am I positive in my interactions with athletes? Do I create an environment where it's okay to fail, or are my athletes anxious and afraid of making mistakes or being corrected?
- What situations are my individual athletes dealing with that might prevent them from focusing on the task at hand? How can I help them deal with those situations or provide a safe environment where they are able to thrive?
- What outside distractions can I eliminate from practices? Games?

Distractions can range from serious situations at home or school to something as simple as another team practicing in the same space. While it may be difficult to eliminate all distractions for your team, being aware of them can help coaches to manage them and improve focus.

Another important component of focus is to make sure our athletes are focused on the right thing. Too many coaches and athletes focus on things they can't control: opponents, officials, weather, or even the outcome of the game. These may all play a role in competition, but they can distract the athlete from maximizing performance. The *Play Like a Champion* approach emphasizes a concentration on *process* rather than outcome. When it comes to focus, this means emphasizing things like technique, tactics or intensity - things each athlete can control during competition. It also means doing your best to ignore the call that just went against your team (a distraction). Remember that athletes take their cues from coaches, so a positive team environment that emphasizes the correct values and goals will go a long way toward improving focus and maximizing athletic performance.

Want additional reading on focus? [Check out this blog from Psych Today](#) and Dr. Jim Taylor. Though it may be dated years ago, it's commentary on focus in sports is no less true today!

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you. ~ Philippians 4:8-9

New: Access the Coach Notes Archive

As a *Play Like a Champion* partner, you have exclusive access to Weekly Coach, Parent & Athlete Notes during the school year. Now for the first time, we're making the full library of archived notes available to you as well! Looking for information on a particular topic? Access previous notes on topics from *Adaptability* to *What Makes a Champion* and see videos and writing from experts across the *Play Like a Champion* community.

To get the full archive of notes, simply email us at information@playlikeachampion.org and let us know you would like to access. We'll provide a link with access to a full PDF archive sorted by topic. Take advantage of this great resource for coaches, parents and athletes today!



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Enthusiasm

How does a Head Coach's Attitude affect the team?

Enthusiasm is an important element of coaching at the youth and high school levels. Our attitude as coaches has a great effect on our athletes and sets the tone for practices and games. Watch the video above and consider what Notre Dame Men's Basketball Coach Mike Brey has to say about the importance of a coach's attitude during practices and games. Having won several Conference and National Coach of the Year Awards, Brey is considered by his peers one of the best coaches in college basketball. Brey's enthusiasm is contagious. Just watch his team play. Their positive energy and confident attitude has helped them to routinely outperform expectations and maximize their potential.

Wisdom for Coaches



"I've observed that if individuals who prevail in a high competitive environment have any one thing in common besides success, it is failure—and their ability to overcome it."

~ Bill Walsh, Hall of Fame Football Coach

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