



# Strategies

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# Effective Leadership in Coaching:

## 13 Strategies to Support Players

By Javad Karimi , Shahrouz Ghayebzadeh , Carlos Alberto Figueiredo da Silva ,  
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**E**ffective leadership in coaching is one of the most crucial elements in the success of sports teams. The coach, as the team leader, plays a highly influential role in shaping the team environment, fostering motivation, developing game strategies and tactics, and adapting to the abilities and weaknesses of the players (Cotterill & Fransen, 2021). Coach leadership impacts many aspects, such as team cohesion and athlete performance, and it is evident that it correlates positively with team strength (Baird et al., 2020).

However, the concept of coaching leadership has evolved and expanded beyond its initial coverage to align with updated literature (Lisá et al., 2023). Coaching leadership influences athletes' key outcomes in accordance with the definition of coaching effectiveness (Rowold, 2006).

Coaching in sport is recognized as one of the most challenging roles, requiring a multifaceted skill set to effectively organize and lead teams, enhance player performance, and navigate various obstacles and stressful situations. Effective



coaching in sport necessitates strong leadership skills and a multidimensional dynamic approach (Cronin & Miller, 2012). Key dimensions of coaching leadership include training and instruction, psychology, democratic behavior, authoritarian behavior, social support, and feedback (Yenen et al., 2022). Notably, positive feedback has been shown to enhance coach–player relationships and positively influence player ability, effort, and performance (Patsiaouras, 2021). Conversely, when overshadowed by authoritarian behavior, social support appears to have no significant effect (Horn et al., 2011). The coaching context, as well as the characteristics of both the coach and the athlete, determine coaching leadership, all of which align with the conceptualization of coaching effectiveness (Reardon et al., 2022; Vella et al., 2010).

In sport, the role of coaches as leaders and mentors for elite sport teams is vital and impactful. Besides imparting training and honing technical and physical skills, these seasoned coaches bear the responsibility of nurturing personal growth and fostering elite sport players' competitive spirit and motivation. Therefore, the coach–athlete relationship plays a significant role in such a definition of coaching leadership, as the use of coaching leadership impacts athletic outcomes and can establish high-quality interpersonal relationships (Lopez de Subijana et al., 2021). While understanding leadership behavior is crucial, coaching effectiveness extends beyond mere knowledge of leadership dimensions. Recent research emphasizes the significance of coaches' understanding of players' resilience, as coaching behavior can influence players' ability to cope with challenges and maintain performance (Llanos-Muñoz et al., 2023). Resilience is an individual ability that facilitates positive adjustments in response to adversity, contributing to overall performance consistency. Furthermore, fostering collaboration and teamwork by promoting team mentality and effective communication can foster a cohesive team environment. Additionally, efforts aimed at performance optimization, such as structured conditioning, tailored strength and conditioning programs, and nutritional guidance, can significantly augment athlete performance and capabilities.

Strategies used by effective coaches serve not only to enhance players' prowess in the game and competition but also contribute significantly to their character and mindset. Coaches serving as team leaders must possess robust managerial, motivational, and communication skills to harness their players' abilities and talents effectively, guiding them toward greater achievements. Given the paramount importance of this matter, the purpose of this article is to provide 13 strategies for coaches to support elite sport players.

1. *Skill-centric training*: Design exercises to enhance aspects of motor performance and motor patterns to maximize performance in specific skills. Exercises need to be increased gradually in complexity, incorporating game-like conditions into drills.

2. *Advanced game simulations*: Simulate real-game scenarios and conditions during practice to enhance athletes' decision making and collaboration with teammates.
3. *Feedback analysis*: Utilize feedback analysis to identify technical flaws and tailor training programs accordingly. Provide constructive feedback that motivates and engages the athlete and focuses on specific areas of techniques or tactics.
4. *Integration of technology*: Incorporate motion capture or virtual reality, Global Positioning System, and video drone technologies to enrich training experiences and support athletes returning from injury. Virtual reality, for example, can replicate complex game conditions and scenarios, offer engaging practice sessions, and provide technological support to players.
5. *Mental growth*: Cultivate a winning mindset by fostering motivation for consistent effort and confidence in overcoming adversity. Encourage athletes to learn from mistakes and view challenges as opportunities for growth.
6. *SMARTER goal setting*: Collaborate with athletes to establish SMARTER goals (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound, evaluate, review) that guide their progress, and reinforce their improvements while improving focus and motivation.
7. *Team culture and mentality*: Organize activities beyond training to strengthen relationships, trust, and teamwork. Activities may involve team-building exercises or social events that foster a cohesive team environment.
8. *Effective communication*: Establish safe, clear, and continuous communication channels with athletes to encourage open dialog and create a supportive atmosphere for expressing concerns or questions.
9. *Sleep hygiene education*: Educate athletes on the importance of sleep hygiene for optimal physical and mental performance. Encourage consistent sleep patterns and establish routines conducive to restful sleep, including the devices that measure players' sleep patterns.
10. *Time management skills*: Equip athletes with time management skills to effectively balance training schedules, academics, and personal responsibilities.
11. *Stress management techniques*: Teach stress management techniques, such as deep breathing exercises or mindfulness practices, to help athletes cope with stressors effectively.
12. *Injury prevention and rehabilitation*: Emphasize injury prevention through regular flexibility exercises, dynamic stretching, and appropriate warmup and cool-down routines.
13. *Variety in training*: Reduce the percentage of similarity and employ diverse approaches in training and support methods. This reduces the risk of monotony and ensures that athletes receive a well-rounded developmental experience. For example, provide different and challenging drills to simulate personal growth.



## Summary

By implementing these diverse strategies, coaches can ensure a comprehensive support system that guides sport players to succeed both in and outside of the sporting environment. The support strategies implemented by coaches for athletes play a crucial role in performance enhancement and personal development. Owing to the significance of this topic, employing various approaches for athletes' technical development, fostering a champion mindset, nurturing collaboration and teamwork, striving for performance optimization, and promoting mental and emotional well-being can result in notable improvements in athletic performance. In this respect, coaches should continuously innovate and adapt their strategies to meet the evolving needs of their players, thereby maximizing their potential and success.


## Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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## Submissions Welcome!

Readers are encouraged to send “Coach’s Corner” submissions to *Strategies* Editor at [lstrecker@shapeamerica.org](mailto:lstrecker@shapeamerica.org).

The purpose of the Coach’s Corner column is to feature short articles about one specific coaching lesson that readers can immediately implement with their team. Articles should contain a brief introduction, followed by quick-hitting information such as bullet points or lists. Submissions should not exceed 1,000–1,500 words (or roughly four typed, double-spaced pages).