

Building Relationships & Character Through Sports

User Guide

Peter C. Scales, Nanyamka Redmond, Search Institute, Minneapolis, MN; and Cassidy Lichtman, Grant Lichtman, P/ATH (Progress Through Athletics), Poway, CA, Building Relationships and Character Through Sports: Video Playlist User Guide. January, 2022

Introduction

Great coaches know that athletics is about helping youth develop habits that keep them mentally and physically safe and healthy, having fun, and helping kids develop life skills that matter both on and off the playing field.

This brief User Guide will help youth sports coaches make the best use of three short videos (about 3 min each) of famous athletes and coaches talking about life lessons from their sports experiences. The videos and User Guide will help coaches build a team culture where student-athletes grow as players and people of character; where a great team is defined by more than just wins and losses.

The User Guide gives coaches a simple 4-step road map for taking just a few minutes of practice time to:

1. WATCH the videos
2. Have a BRIEF TEAM DISCUSSION
3. Take ACTION around the messages in the videos.
4. ANSWER QUESTIONS FOR COACHES TO REFLECT ON, with links to additional resources for both coaches and their teams for those who want to take a deeper dive into these critical skill-building activities.

Like everything else we do in sports, the more time you give to these themes around strong, developmental relationships and a mentally healthy approach to the game, the more likely they are to make an impact with your young people!

This approach merges decades of significant experience we've had as athletes, coaches, educators, and researchers with the evolving technologies and social media that can connect kids directly with sports influencers. We leverage sport and psychological science research about building relationships that truly affect how young people develop in the long run.

However you use the videos and this User Guide, we think they will be a helpful resource for any youth sports coach who wants their players to grow as both players and people! This 3-video project is a brief window into a much larger resource of action-oriented skill-building; it is a great place to start!

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Keys to Building Relationships and Character Through Sports

All student-athletes should enjoy a sports experience that involves positive relationships with caring adults and peers while also having the opportunity to grow in character and perform at their personal best.

We can do this as coaches, parents, and student-athletes by creating a Developmental Relationships and Compete-Learn-Honor culture in youth sports.

These 5 Elements Make a Relationship “Developmental”—More Than Just Positive:

- **Express Care** - Show me that I matter to you.
- **Challenge Growth** - Push me to keep getting better.
- **Provide Support** - Help me complete tasks and achieve goals.
- **Share Power** - Treat me with respect and give me a say.
- **Expand Possibilities** - Connect me with people and places that broaden my world.

These 3 Habits Create a Mentally & Emotionally Safe & Strong Youth Sports Climate:

- **Compete** - Give 100% effort at all times.
- **Learn** - Be an open, curious, and humble learner.
- **Honor** - By how you act, bring credit to yourself, teammates, coaches, opponents, officials, family, school, community, and the game.

Building Relationships & Character Through Sport

Playlist



Culture of Camaraderie

Jermaine Kearse

Super Bowl Champion Jermaine Kearse on building a strong team culture through trust, respect, and accountability.



Defining Success

Ezra Frech

Ezra Frech, the youngest U.S. Paralympian in Tokyo in 2021, on how success depends on picking yourself back up when things don't go your way.



Love to Compete

Cat Osterman

3-Time Olympic medalist Cat Osterman on why she loves to compete and how pursuing your passion can open all kinds of doors.



WATCH



[View the video](#)



Culture of Camaraderie

Jermaine Kearse

Jermaine Kearse won a Super Bowl as a wide receiver for the Seattle Seahawks.

Discuss



Discuss video
with the team

Key Takeaways:

A strong team culture starts with creating the conditions for players to build relationships built on trust, respect, and accountability.

In order to build that trust, people who may be from very different backgrounds need to learn about each other.

Coaches can create the conditions for this to happen, but teammates need to build the culture for themselves.

Suggested Discussion Questions:

What do people do, how do they act when they're being a great teammate?

How do we hold each other accountable for our performance on and off the court/field?

What are your ideas for how players can have a say in the culture and decisions of this team?



WAYS TO PRACTICE



Active Engagement

Select an option or come up with your own:

Write a paragraph or talk for a few minutes to your team about one of your teammates; “introduce” them to the team.

Start a list and post it in the team room or on a shared virtual space: what do we hold each other accountable for?

Want more?

For optional extended activities:



Depending on chosen activity

The Name Circle

Draw a big circle; all players and coaches write their names on the outside of the circle. Discuss what it means that we are all equal on the circle; our commitment is to each other. Post it up in the locker or team meeting room.

(Details in Worksheets & Resources—[\[link\]](#))

Mystery Person

Players write down three of their strengths and toss them into a circle. Others pick up one of the notes and the team tries to guess who wrote it.

(Details in Worksheets & Resources—[\[link\]](#))



COACH REFLECTION

(for coaches only)



Think about, write down, record audio or video, whatever helps you to deeply reflect:

Think about a time when you let your players make a meaningful decision; when you were willing to share power and leadership with them. How did that go? How can you do that more often, within the boundaries of safety?

How do you let players know, in appropriate and physically and emotionally safe ways, that you care about them? What do you do?

Describe a time when you felt your team culture supported a climate of inclusion, where everyone of different backgrounds felt welcomed and supported. How did you create that climate?



WATCH



[View the video](#)



Defining Success

Ezra Frech

At 16 years old, amputee Ezra Frech was the youngest U.S. Paralympian in Tokyo in 2021 where he competed in high jump and long jump.

Discuss



Discuss video with the team

Key Takeaways:

“Success is the ability to go from failure to failure without losing your enthusiasm.” - Winston Churchill

It’s about how you pick yourself back up when things don’t go your way. Successful people are just people who tried another time after failure.

Suggested Discussion Questions:

What are some of the individual and team failures that have impacted your performance in the past?

How do you feel when things go wrong? What can we do to help us not get overly excited by wins or overly down about losses or failure?

How do you define success?



WAYS TO PRACTICE



Active Engagement

Select an option or come up with your own:

Share with a partner or in a small group: Talk about a time in sports when you were disappointed. How did you respond and how can you improve on that response in the future?

Over the next week, OUTSIDE of sports, pick a time when you did not perform at your best. Share that example, and how you responded, with your teammates.

Want more?



Depending on chosen activity

For optional extended activities:

Resilience Recall Worksheet

Remember a time when you were in a difficult situation, went through tough times, or faced loss or adversity. Write down and optionally share how you got through it; describe the values and qualities you displayed during that difficult time.

(Details in Worksheets & Resources—[\[link\]](#))



COACH REFLECTION

(for coaches only)



Think about, write down, record audio or video, whatever helps you to deeply reflect:

Remember a time when you pushed and challenged your players to perform at the next level. How did you challenge them in a way that pushed them but that was supportive and healthy for them?

Think about the team culture that you think best supports student-athletes' emotional health and safety? What do you as a coach do to help create that culture?

What do you do specifically to create a team culture where players work hard to win, but where they know their self-worth isn't defined by their performance?



WATCH



[View the video](#)



Love to Compete *Cat Osterman*

Cat Osterman has three Olympic medals with USA Softball and is one of the most successful pitchers of all time.

Discuss



Discuss video with the team

Key Takeaways:

If you love what you are doing, inside or outside of sports, you will be driven to get better in ways that are measurable and tangible.

Excelling at something you love can open doors and create opportunities beyond the initial reason you pursued your passion. Go all in and see where it takes you!

Suggested Discussion Questions:

What are you really passionate about? What are you willing to do to get better at it?

*What are the most enjoyable things about competition?
What are the most challenging things about competition?*



WAYS TO PRACTICE



Active Engagement

Select an option or come up with your own:

Make a list of all the things you love about playing your sport. Why did you start? What keeps you motivated?

With a partner, pick one thing you're passionate about (may or may not be your sport) and set two goals you want to achieve over the next month to ensure your progress. Make sure you check back in within the month!

Want more?

For an optional extended activity:



Depending on chosen activity

Goals & Obstacles Worksheet

Players and coaches list three areas in which they would like to improve, and obstacles to reaching those goals. Optional sharing (when others know our goals they are more likely to help us reach them). (Details in Worksheets & Resources—[\[link\]](#))



COACH REFLECTION

(for coaches only)



Think about, write down, record audio or video, whatever helps you to deeply reflect:

Think about a time when you connected players to places, people, or dreams that were beyond what they thought was possible for themselves. How did you do that? How did you expand their sense of what's possible for themselves and the team?

Think about a time when you gave your players the support they needed to deal with a tough situation or problem. What did you do in that situation? How can you recognize when your players need that kind of support, and give it to them when they need it most?



CONNECT WITH US AND OTHERS

TAG P/ATH ON YOUR POSTS:

When your athletes or team post evidence of their discussion and actions, tag us and we will share your posts!

SEND FEEDBACK:

Send us an email at info@pathsports.org. How can we better serve you and your athletes?

SUGGEST NEW CONTENT:

Do you have an idea for new topics you would like our athletes and coaches to address? Let us know!

REFER A SPOKESPERSON:

Does your school or team have an alumnus, parent or friend who would be a good spokesperson for P/ATH? Let us know!

REQUEST A VIDEO CHAT:

Would you like P/ATH founder Cassidy Lichtman to meet virtually with members of your community? Send a request!

P/ATH - pathsports.org

P/ATH is a nonprofit organization that provides coaches, teachers, student athletes, and parents with content that teaches empathy, equity, and empowerment through the voices of powerful athletic influencers.

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Search Institute - SearchInstitute.org

Search Institute is a nonprofit, Minneapolis-based organization with a sixty-plus-year history of collaboration with partners around the world to conduct and apply research that promotes positive youth development and advances equity.

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