

# 13 Ways to be More Coachable

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5/30/2015

This article was written by Lindsey Wilson. Lindsey is the Co-Founder of [Positive Performance Mental Training Zone](#). Lindsey played basketball at Iowa State and then played professionally overseas. She has been teaching, writing and speaking about mental training for the last 6 years.

I hope you can find a few points that you can share with your players that will have a positive impact on your team.

## Presented by:

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By Lindsey Wilson

Sports are filled with mental challenges, many of which we athletes bring upon ourselves. The coach-player dynamic is only one of the multitude of difficulties we face, but at the same time it is often the most difficult to navigate. And it's not surprising why: receiving criticism in any area of life is tough – from teachers in the classroom, from the boss on the job, or from family or friends in our personal lives – **but being able to graciously receive advice and mentorship is a necessary part of growth.**



Today, I want to talk about **being coachable**. But, first, let's define it. Being coachable is:

- **Being grateful** that someone cares enough about you to push you to improve beyond where you would get on your own.
- **Being vulnerable** enough to know you're not perfect.
- **Being open to honest feedback** (even if it hurts).
- **Working to actively change bad habits.**

Uncoachable athletes show certain key behaviors. It doesn't take long for a coach to spot an uncoachable player, and very rarely can a coach make a player coachable.

## How does one coach an athlete who fights back? It's a daunting task.

No question: We athletes can be sensitive people. Though we may look tough on the outside, we can be delicate underneath. In talking with a number of coaches, trying to sort out those characteristics of coachable versus uncoachable players, this is what we discovered about athletes in general:

- We tend to roll our eyes or take things personally that we shouldn't.
- We can seem ungrateful even to those who help us most.
- We read into things more deeply than we should.

- We often believe everything is about us, even someone else's bad day.

As a former collegiate athlete, I'm guilty of all of the above. While I tried my best to be coachable and to not take things personally, my attitude was (and sometimes still is) something that needed constant attention and required constant mental work.

(Becoming more coachable isn't something that can be achieved with more drills, more reps, or multiple coach-player conferences. Those are external methods of repair that a coach can implement, but a player's coachability is a mentality that requires diligence and attention *from the athlete*. In other words: **coachability is up to the athlete, not the coach**. The worst of it is that, most of the time, athletes don't even KNOW they're uncoachable! It can be a shock to find out that it isn't the coach, it isn't the team, it isn't the sport, isn't the equipment... it's actually themselves who are making life so hard.)

But, before an athlete can start on the road to becoming more coachable, they first need to understand the benefits of having a coachable mentality. Top 5 potential benefits of being more coachable:

- **More playing time** (and less drill or bench time).
- **Greater cohesion** with team and/or coaches.
- **Accelerated learning.**
- **Deeper and more fulfilling relationships** with your coaches.
- **Greater internal calm:** accepting criticism for what it is (INFORMATION) instead of what it isn't (AN ATTACK) requires a solid internal foundation.

## 13 ways to be more coachable

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Now that we've established why being coachable is critical to your development as an athlete, let's go through the steps: 13 Ways to Become MORE Coachable:

1. **Listen to what your coaches say, not how they say it.** Easier said than done but, like any skill, the more you do it, the easier it becomes. Practice "mean no offense, take no offense" when both speaking AND listening to your teammates and coaches.
1. **Trust me: It's NOT about you.** If your coach is having an 'off' day, don't take it personally. You don't know what happened to them that day. Did they get reprimanded by the athletic director? Did they lose a big recruit? Did they have a fight with their spouse? Is their son failing math? Your coach's bad day could be a result of any of the other 99% of what is happening in their life. So, odds are, it's not you.
1. **Remember 'coach' is only one hat they wear.** Many coaches have spouses, children, families, friends, and lives outside of making sure your catered dinner is ready on the road trip. While you are important to them, remember they have lives outside of you. Respect that.
1. **They really (REALLY) want you to be your best** even if it sometimes comes out sideways. They are there to help you be successful. Trust them.

1. **Your coaches are more stressed than you can probably imagine.** Give them a break if they aren't perfect or if their tone isn't right in line with what you'd prefer.
  
1. **Always say 'thank you'.** In fact, say it more often than you think you need to. Thank your coaches for taking you on a road trip. Thank them for making you watch film (and for editing the film so it's not as long as it could be!). Thank them for scouting your opponent late into the night. Thank them for totally committing themselves to your improvement. Thank them for holding you to a high standard. And especially thank them during those moments when you don't feel thankful... those are times when they're helping you most.
  
1. **Always look your coaches in the eye.** Don't hold your head down. Don't look away. You want to be treated like an adult, so BE an adult; have confidence and class and look your coach in the eye. Doing so isn't even for them: it's for YOU. (Yes – this time it IS about you.)
  
1. **Shocker: Your coach is human, too.** They aren't perfect (and – surprise! – neither are you). Their stresses and emotions get misplaced just like yours do. They get hurt by things you do, say, and they feel pain when you disregard them or don't appreciate them. (See #6.)
  
1. **Don't roll your eyes.** It's immature and says more about you than the person you're offending. (See #7.)
  
1. **If you really have something to say, SAY IT.** I'm big on communication. Huge on it, in fact. So, if all else fails and you just don't get what you need from your coach, be an adult and communicate that in a mature way. Whining about something constantly, or tuning out and not committing yourself to your team, is NOT a solution. In fact, it's the exact opposite: absolutely detrimental to you, your team, and your coach's ability to effectively train you.
  
1. **Directly ask for feedback.** Your coaches have a whole roster of players to look after and might not always get around to you as quickly as you'd like. Every coach would love to have one-on-one conversations or meetings every day with every player, but that's simply not a realistic goal. Therefore, if they don't get to you right away, go to them and ask for their thoughts and feedback.
  
1. **Be prepared.** Take five minutes before every practice to release from your mind the rest of your day's activities. Remember your goals and remember why you're practicing. Remember that your coach has put in uncountable hours to prepare drills, runs, plays, and practices for you. So, have some respect: when you're at practice, really, truly BE at practice. Click here for our pre-practice mental routine-the **BRAVR** technique.

1. **Set up a weekly check-in with your coach** in a place where both of you can chat informally about your strengths and skills that need working on. This doesn't have to take long. Just a few minutes after practice can be a huge help in keeping you on track to your goals.

So, that's my list. And, because transforming yourself into a more coachable athlete is mental training, there are many, many more ways other than these simple 13 that you can use to improve.

## **Now, huddle.**

Athletes, I encourage you to get together with one or more of your teammates and see what their thoughts are on this list. What would you add to it? What can you expand upon? What are some times you've found it REALLY hard to keep to this list? If you are a more senior athlete, have you felt frustration while mentoring a less experienced player? How did the uncoachability of that player make you feel?

And, if you're willing, please tell me about your experiences with coachability by sharing in the comments section below.

## **Here's to self-improvement through mental training!**

P.S. **Too many rules to remember offhand?** Download and print this [How to Be More Coachable](#) out as a consistent reminder on keeping yourself coachable. Tape it in your locker, post it in the locker room, toss it in your gym bag, share it with others... whatever you need to do to grow and maintain your coachability and to steadily improve your mental skills as an athlete.

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