

COACH GUIDE

Self-Knowledge & Handling Pressure

SCIENTIFIC BASIS

- Ntoumanis et al. (2021): autonomy-supportive coaching increases intrinsic motivation and well-being
- Zuber & Conzelmann (2014): self-knowledge in young athletes predicts performance under pressure
- Deci & Ryan (1985, 2017): self-determination theory, sense of competence and relatedness
- Hanton et al. (2009): mental preparation for worst-case scenarios reduces competitive anxiety

OBJECTIVE

Players record their personal values, recognize energy sources in their team, and mentally prepare for pressure. This forms the foundation for the rest of the track.

COACH TIP

Lead by example: briefly share your own worst case best case for an important moment in your coaching career.

WATCH OUT FOR

Don't force anyone to share out loud. Writing alone already has value. Don't force vulnerability.

EXERCISES, ONE BY ONE

Everything per exercise, in order

1 Personal values compass

8 min

PURPOSE	Players become aware of the values that actually drive their behavior, not the values that "sound good". This is the foundation for all later conversations about behavior and team.
SAY TO PLAYERS	<i>"You'll get six values. Give each one a score from 1 to 5: how important is this value for how you want to play and be on this team? There's no right or wrong answer, and you don't have to share anything you don't want to."</i>
EXAMPLE	A player scores "courage" a 5 and "loyalty" a 2. Ask: "What does courage mean for you on the court? Taking the shot in the final seconds, or saying something to a teammate?" This makes the value concrete instead of abstract.

2 Energy giver vs energy drainer

10 min

PURPOSE	Players learn to spot the difference between situations/behavior that give energy and that drain it, so they can later steer this consciously instead of passively undergoing it.
SAY TO PLAYERS	<i>"Think back to the past few weeks at practice and in games. Write down: which moments or behavior from others gave you energy? Which drained your energy? This is about situations and behavior, not about tearing others down."</i>
EXAMPLE	A player writes "energy from: when someone encourages me after a mistake" and "drains energy: when people grumble after a missed chance." Discuss in pairs how they can consciously give more of the first and less of the second.

3 Worst case best case

12 min

PURPOSE	Players practice mental preparation for pressure by realistically thinking through scenarios, instead of letting anxiety grow from vague uncertainty.
SAY TO PLAYERS	<i>"Think of an important upcoming game. Write down the worst that could happen, the best that could happen, and what the most likely scenario is. Also think: if the worst happens, what would you do?"</i>
EXAMPLE	Worst case: "I miss the winning shot and the team loses." Best case: "I score the winning shot." Most likely: "it's a tight, back-and-forth game where I have good and less good moments." Help the player see that this last scenario is very manageable.

COACHING IN DEPTH

How to help your team**HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR TEAM**

1. Build psychological safety before going deeper: start with something light and explicitly state there are no wrong answers.
2. Use the values from exercise 1 actively in your language for the rest of the season: "this is exactly what perseverance means" makes it tangible.
3. Check non-verbal cues along the way: players who look away or go quiet sometimes just need a bit more time or a 1-on-1.
4. Tie the energy giver/drainer exercise to concrete team behavior you observe yourself at practice, not just in games.
5. Never end the session abruptly. Leave at least 5 minutes for a calm landing before returning to the regular program.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. Which value surprised you the most when you had to rank them?
2. Who on the team gives you energy without realizing it?
3. What would you say to yourself right before an important game, as a good friend would?
4. When did pressure last feel overwhelming, and what actually helped then?
5. Which of your values do you see too little of in your own behavior on the court?

FOLLOW-UP IN THE COMING WEEKS

1. Turn the group's values into a short, visible overview (e.g. on the notice board) for the coming weeks.
2. At the next high-pressure game, briefly check in with 2-3 players: "how did this compare to your worst/best case?"
3. Plan a short individual check-in with players who clearly struggled or went very quiet during the exercise.
4. Use the energy giver/drainer insights when forming small groups for future exercises.

COMMON PITFALLS

- Moving on too quickly to the next exercise without room for reflection undermines the effect of the whole session.
- Filling in yourself what a player "probably means" instead of truly listening.
- Letting the worst case exercise end on the negative scenario without returning to the manageable, most likely scenario.
- Using energy givers/drainers as an excuse to publicly criticize players.

COACH GUIDE

My Role & Team First

SCIENTIFIC BASIS

- Bruner et al. (2021): role clarity in teams is linked to higher team cohesion
- Eys et al. (2015): role acceptance predicts team satisfaction and effort
- Carron & Eys (2012): team cohesion as the strongest predictor of team performance over time
- Holt et al. (2020): peer feedback increases self-insight in youth athletes
- Tod et al. (2011): public commitment, such as signing, increases adherence to agreements

OBJECTIVE

Players recognize their natural role, practice giving and receiving feedback, and record their personal contribution to the team contract as the closer of the track.

COACH TIP

Keep the signed contracts and bring them back midseason as a check-in moment.

WATCH OUT FOR

For the feedback round: pair trios deliberately, avoid combinations with existing tension without guidance.

EXERCISES, ONE BY ONE

Everything per exercise, in order

1 Role compass

10 min

PURPOSE	Players get language for their natural contribution to the team, which strengthens role clarity and, with it, team cohesion.
SAY TO PLAYERS	<i>"Score each role from 0 to 10: how strongly do you recognize this in yourself? There's no best role, a team needs all four."</i>
EXAMPLE	If almost everyone scores high on "leader," discuss as a group: "What might the team be missing then? Who could be the steady force this month?" This turns role distribution into a team conversation, not an individual contest.

2 Feedback round trio

15 min

PURPOSE	Players practice giving and receiving constructive feedback in a safe, small setting, which builds self-insight and mutual trust.
SAY TO PLAYERS	<i>"In your trio, each player gets two minutes of feedback from the other two in turn: one strength you see in them, and one growth point. Be specific and use examples, not generalities."</i>
EXAMPLE	Model it yourself first: "Your strength is that you always communicate on defense. Your growth point: take the shot yourself a bit more instead of always passing." Players then repeat that format in their trio.

3 Reflection after feedback

5 min

PURPOSE	Players actively process what they just heard, so the feedback doesn't evaporate but turns into a concrete intention.
SAY TO PLAYERS	<i>"Write down: what did you hear about your strength and your growth point? What will you concretely do differently in the coming weeks?"</i>
EXAMPLE	A player writes: "In the next few practices I'll consciously take 1 shot per practice when the chance is there, instead of always passing." Concrete and measurable works better than a vague intention.

4 Sign the team contract

15 min

PURPOSE	Public commitment (such as signing) increases the chance that players actually keep their promises, and symbolically closes the track.
SAY TO PLAYERS	<i>"Write three concrete promises you make to the team this season. Make them specific and achievable, not vague intentions. Then sign with the date."</i>
EXAMPLE	Instead of "I promise to be a better teammate," help the player toward: "I promise to be on time for every practice" or "I promise to encourage a teammate after every mistake they make."

COACHING IN DEPTH

How to help your team

HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR TEAM

1. Give feedback to one player yourself first using the format (one strength, one growth point) so trios know what's expected.
2. Watch the role distribution: if everyone scores "leader," ask the group what the team is still missing and who could fill it.
3. Keep referencing the team contract in your coaching, not just during this session: "remember what you promised?"
4. Turn the signed contract into a visible object (photo, poster in the locker room) so it stays a living document.
5. Celebrate when a player visibly lives up to their promise, in front of the team.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. Which role do you recognize most strongly in yourself, and which role would you like to grow into?
2. What was hardest to hear during the feedback round, and why?
3. Which of your three promises is hardest to keep over a full season?
4. Who on the team would you now find it easier to give feedback to than before this session?
5. What does the team need from you, specifically in your role, to get stronger?

FOLLOW-UP IN THE COMING WEEKS

1. Display the signed team contract visibly (locker room, team app) and actively refer to it during evaluation moments.
2. Plan a short check-in midseason: have players reread and add to their own contract.
3. Use the role distribution from exercise 1 deliberately when forming line-ups, captain choices, or leadership tasks.
4. Follow up on whether the feedback from the trios actually lands: ask briefly a few weeks later what was done with it.

COMMON PITFALLS

- Scheduling the feedback round without modeling the format yourself first often leads to feedback that's too vague or too harsh.
- Forming trios randomly without accounting for existing tension in the group.
- Letting the team contract sit unused after the session, so the promise fades away.
- Using role insights to pin players to one label instead of allowing growth.