

Helping Athletes Identify Life Skills Through Watching Sports

While participating in a positive sports experience can help athletes access the many benefits that sports can provide, they can also gain valuable insight, perspective, and life skills by watching them. A caring adult in an athlete's life (whether sports parents/caregivers or coaches) can play a critical role in helping athletes identify and critically think about what they are watching. Below is advice on what to look for and how to watch sports in a way that helps athletes draw out life skills.

Sports parents/caregivers and coaches can:

Ask open-ended questions

By asking questions rather than telling, caring adults can help athletes think critically about what they are watching and develop their own opinions and thoughts.

- Ex. In a pivotal moment in the game, a player is awarded a penalty kick. She steps to the spot and scores a goal that likely wins the game. Ask your athletes: "What do you think the player was feeling before the penalty kick?" and then "Is there anything you can take from this and apply to your game?"

Keep an eye out for both positive and negative instances within the flow of play

Young athletes can learn by observing and thinking about both positive and negative actions by athletes.

- Ex. A basketball player misses a critical shot with 2 minutes left. You see her take a deep breath, steal the ball back, and make the same shot she missed a few seconds ago. Ask your athletes: "What did you see the basketball player do to overcome her missed shot? What stands out to you about this play?"
- Ex. After a third strikeout, a baseball player throws his bat towards the dugout and yells at the umpire. Ask your athletes: "Why do you think he reacted that way? What could he have done differently?"
- Ex. In a soccer game, a referee calls a player offside and ruins a scoring chance. The player, not believing they were offsides, walks over to the ref and you see them exchange words. They quickly shake hands and return to play. Ask your athletes: "What are the benefits of moving on quickly from a call you disagree with? What could have happened if the player acted displeased with the call?"

Look for positive and negative social media behavior

Social media usage can present many learning opportunities - especially with professional athletes as accessible as ever and fans sharing their reactions in real time.

- Identify both positive and negative reactions by athletes and fans on social media to begin a conversation about treating others with dignity and the effects that social media can have on those who use and consume it.



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Highlight athlete responses to disappointment

Young athletes can learn a lot by how professionals deal with a loss or disappointing performance - and especially how they support their teammates in these instances.

- Point out when athletes pick their teammates up after a loss or disappointing performance. Ask your athletes: “How can you pick up your teammates/classmates/friends when they are down?”

Pay attention to post-game actions

Following a game or match, pay attention to the reactions of both the winners and losers.

- How are the athletes on the winning team celebrating? How are the athletes on the losing team dealing with the loss? Ask your athletes: “What might the winning athletes be feeling? What about the losing athletes? What can you keep in mind when you are on the winning team or the losing team?”

Interviews

Before, during, and after professional sports games, broadcasters have various opportunities to interview coaches and players. Through these interviews, players and coaches can narrate their thoughts and feelings on certain plays or experiences. Young athletes can also observe how interviewees are treated.

- Ask your athletes: “What stands out to you about the dynamic between the interviewers and the interviewees? What can you observe about the relationships between the two? Why is it important for there to be mutual respect and trust between the two?”

