

## Raising Confidence in a Player

No one would question the importance of confidence in determining success. In the game of softball, it is quite obvious that all the physical talent you may possess will not always be the key factor in performing on the field. It takes confidence in using that talent that will take your performance to the next level. There are many examples of the average player that seems to perform above our expectations due to the fact that their self-confidence propels them to the top of their game. This is the reason why coaches and parents are always wondering what they can do to create confident players.

We must all realize that confidence is tied closely with performance or our ability to be competent at the required skills of the game. Although I am always gaining insight from sports psychology, I have realized that pep talks, handbooks, audio tapes etc. are not the ultimate answer to our pursuit of a more confident player. The confident player comes from our ability to increase their performance, make them feel the connection with the team, and learn to control the controllable!

Improving performance comes from developing and mastering the skills of the game. We have all heard that softball is a game of fundamental skills and even at the college level, we spend large amounts of our time developing the ability for our players to play catch. The foundation for our game is catching and throwing, yet we have not done a very good job of teaching those skills. As a coach or parent, getting your kid involved in a program that has a foundation of teaching the skills vs. winning games can pay dividends down the road. If we can stress to our players that these skills can be acquired and we as teachers must be able to break down the skill into parts that can be understood and able to be performed by the player properly. Simply, our ability to provide step by step learning is essential to mastering the skill. Our sport gets caught up in repetition but that repetition needs to be done correctly to develop proper skill development.

Every time our players successfully interact with others, their confidence grows. Some of the greatest things about our sport are the number of opportunities to become a member of a group or team, to learn leadership and team skills and to feel that you belong to something that is bigger than yourself. I have found in today's culture, we must encourage our players to display their leadership skills and put them in team building exercises to show the importance of belonging! This is not something that comes naturally for most but when they see the importance of each link in the chain, they finally realize the importance of their full participation each day. I took my team this year to an airbase and had them spend 22 hours with a drill sergeant in their face, learning how to march in formation, participate in a flag ceremony, going through the obstacle course, eating rations, and constantly being challenged to focus on the task at hand. Our leadership increased and our team work has become very exciting!

The final element of developing confidence is to control the controllable! It is very hard to feel confident when you are totally out of control and you have no control over the things around you. In the game of softball, I ask my players to control their attitude, effort and most importantly today – FOCUS! The greatest players in the game have a knack of keeping the game simple, staying positive, and most of all they show tremendous emotional stability. Yes, we all will be challenged to learn in life that everyone has the opportunity to fly off the handle in certain situations and lose control. The successful and confident players understand when they are getting into the Yellow and return to the Green vs. heading into the Red. Our ability to demand these skills daily from our athletes will help them achieve the confidence they need to play the game. As a parent, you can help your child by giving them that quiet confidence regarding their ability to play the game. After you have done your best in preparing your child, it is time to relax and watch them enjoy their experience.