

## Promoting Engagement among Elite Rugby Players

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20/05/2015

Player engagement (PE) is an enduring, relatively stable sport experience, which refers to a positive affect and cognitions about sport as a whole (Lonsdale, Hodge, & Jackson, 2007). PE has been defined as a persistent, positive, experience in sport that is characterized by confidence, dedication, enthusiasm, and vigor (Lonsdale, Hodge, & Jackson, 2007).

Some Rugby coaches undertake what is known as transactional management. This is where the coach/manager believes that everybody should just do what they are told because they are expected to 'do a job'. This type of coach/manager believes that it is not their business to motivate players and it is the players fault if things go wrong. Whilst players who are handled by this type of Coach/Manager may not quit the team in these circumstances, they will only do the minimum required for the role. The most successful Coaches/Managers understand that to get really good or excellent performance, they need to engage with their teams and individual performers (Lonsdale, C., Hodge, K., & Raedeke, T. (2007). Here are some ideas to generate true player engagement:

### **Seek their opinion**

Players feel they are valued by their Coaches/Managers when they are consulted on issues. Being able to have players' opinions listened to, can be a huge motivator (Okech, 2013). As well as gaining cooperation from people it may also encourage them to help the Coach identify potential problems that had not been considered.

### **Show genuine interest in their Wellbeing**

Coaches/Managers who show that they care are often rewarded by loyal team members (Reeve, J., Jang, H., Carrell, D., Jeon, S., & Barch, J. (2004).

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Players who are parents may want to have their children, spouses or close relatives attend their league games and receive VIP seats. Players will appreciate if the Coach spares time for personal visits to their homes during birthdays, and other social functions. The Coach needs to have an interest in Careers and academic aspirations of His team players (Mageau, G.A., &Vallerand, R.J. (2003)).

### **Ask For Feedback on your Management Skills**

It is easy to assume that you are a good Coach/Manager and that everybody is happy with the way that you manage the team. The only true way to assess whether your management skills are effective is by asking for feedback (Hollembeak, J., & Amorose, A.J. (2005)). One would do well to ask team members to tell you one thing that works for them and one thing that you could do even better. This way the Coach/Manager will keep it fairly positive and avoid a barrage of negative comments.

### **Praise & Recognition**

In a survey of top Rugby players in Kenya (Okech, 2013), recognition from their Coach/Manager was found to be the top motivator, higher even than money which came in at number three. Showing individual players that you appreciate what they are doing goes a long way in engaging with them. It shows that the Coach/Manager is paying attention to them.

### **Look for Suggestions for Improvements**

Most Rugby players are aware of at least one thing that could be done better in the training or competition ground. Creating a climate where people are comfortable in recommending improvements will work wonders for engagement especially if they are a new member of the team who has played somewhere else or for a different team. In these days of increased competition, it is often the most efficient and innovative Rugby teams/clubs that will survive.

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