



What Coaches Can Do When An Opponent Trash Talks

This resource stems from a question submitted to the Ask PCA blog. Responses come from our experts including PCA Trainers, who lead live group workshops for coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes.

"There are some opposing coaches in our league who "trash talk" to our players during the games. It's beyond things like "she can't go left" and more like "she's scared, she's too weak, she's got nothing" etc. It has certainly distracted our players several times. What is the best way to address this? I feel like confronting the other coaches will only escalate things, and I've asked the referees to step in, but they have never responded. I've told our players to ignore it and just play, but that's easier said than done. What do I do?"

PCA Response by David Jacobson, PCA Trainer & Senior Marketing Communications and Content Manager

You should focus mostly on what you communicate to your players. Communicating with referees and opposing coaches is fine, and encouraged, but you will experience differing levels of success that way. Their interests – officiating effectively and coaching their teams, respectively – are not the same as yours. However, you and your players share one or more common goals, such as winning games and developing them into the best players, people and team they can be.

Therefore, your players are more likely to align with you when you address the issue of someone else's trash-talk. It is not enough to tell your players to ignore it and just play. You must help them do so. On a deeper level, explore concepts of the cowardice that drives an opponent's trash-talk and the courage it takes to overcome that trash-talk. Without demonizing the opponent who would trash-talk, heroize those who rise above such tactics, such as your own players. Help them see their opponents' insecurity and take it as a source from which to bolster their own confidence.

Use that situation to talk about your players controlling what they can control and letting go of that which they cannot control. Some of these concepts receive elaboration from Cleveland Indians Sports Psychologist and PCA National Advisory Board Member Charlie Maher in [this article](#) and in [this article](#).

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Trash Talk, continued

Focusing your conversation on your players – rather than the refs and opposing coaches – sets an example to your players in controlling what they can control. It also emphasizes to them how much you care about developing them as players and people (as opposed to the message sent by continuous talk to refs and opponents, which your players may perceive as, “coach is trying to get an edge” rather than “coach cares about us”). Most importantly, focusing your attention on your players, you are more likely to teach them critical life lessons about how to fend off outside distractions that would derail their work in other important aspects of life, such as academic achievement, commitment to family and career success.

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