

Teamwork Makes the Dream Work: How Coaching Teams Can Work Together

As a coach, it can feel as though you are solely responsible for your team. But whether you lead a large program with a full staff or coach after school while relying on shared resources and caregiver volunteers, you can build a coaching team that better supports athletes and strengthens the program as a whole.

Keith Barnett, a [TrueSport Expert](#), longtime volleyball coach and recruiter, former player, and father of a current high school athlete, shares his advice for building a coaching team that works toward a shared goal.

Decide who is on your coaching team

A coaching team can look very different depending on your circumstances. You may have a paid assistant coach, team manager, or athletic trainer, as well as access to dietitians, sport psychologists, and medical staff. At the middle or high school level, you may be a full-time teacher who coaches after school, shares an athletic trainer with several other teams, and relies on caregiver volunteers to organize carpools, record statistics, or film practices.

No matter the size of your program, the first step toward making your coaching team more effective is defining who is on it and how each person can contribute.

For programs with paid staff, Barnett says head coaches must recognize that their role involves more than coaching athletes: They also need to lead their staff.

For smaller programs, coaches can build a team from the people who care about the athletes and the program. [Reach out to the caregivers of your athletes](#) with a list of specific ways they can help. Consider the areas that regularly create stress or take up too much of your time. Do you need help organizing carpools? Recording statistics? Filming practices? Clear, manageable requests make it easier for people to step in.

Set shared standards and create consistency

Whether your coaching team includes paid staff, volunteers, or occasional expert support, such as a registered dietitian who consults with the team, Barnett says a head coach's most important responsibility is to [set clear standards and expectations for staff and athletes](#).

"There needs to be alignment within the staff," he says.

Athletes should not be confused about how to communicate with different members of the coaching team or whom to approach with certain questions. If an athlete asks multiple staff members the same question, they should receive a consistent answer.

That alignment happens when the staff establishes systems and boundaries before the season begins, then meets regularly to discuss team needs and challenges.

Whether you lead a large-scale program or connect with caregiver volunteers for 20 minutes after every other game, regular meetings matter. “If you’re doing your job well as the team’s CEO, you’re meeting often,” Barnett says. “This gives you a chance to share your experiences, share your expertise, and make sure that you’re all on the same page.”

Identify and address weaknesses

The hardest part of leading a coaching team, Barnett says, is making room for different skill sets and perspectives. It may be tempting to bring on staff members or volunteers whose strengths and personalities resemble your own. You may get along more easily and agree more often. But, in the long run, that approach is less effective.

“Your goal should be to find people whose strengths complement yours and who will address your weaknesses,” Barnett says. “But to do that, you have to acknowledge that you have weaknesses, which doesn’t always feel great. Then, you have to allow those people to help you with them.”

Each person should have ownership of the areas where their talents are most useful and where the team is currently falling short.

At first, this can create more disagreement and conflict. “It takes time for a coaching staff to start to mesh,” Barnett says. “But if you start looking for where you do align, you’ll often be surprised at how similar you actually are, even if it doesn’t seem that way at first. The longer you’re together as a coaching staff, the better you’ll become as a team.”

Give staff a voice and ownership

It is easy to assume that silence from your coaching team means everything is going well. Often, though, silence means people do not feel empowered to raise concerns, offer ideas, or disagree respectfully.

Creating a structure that allows staff members to voice concerns and make suggestions can be one of the most powerful things you do as a coach.

“I tell my coaching assistants to bring me their insights, but only after they’ve explored them on their own and come to me with practical suggestions,” Barnett says. “I find it most helpful when a member of the coaching team has a recommendation for how we can improve or fix a problem.”

This approach gives the coaching team more ownership of solutions rather than positioning the head coach as the sole problem-solver. Of course, concerns that require escalation, such as an

athlete feeling threatened or harassed by a teammate, should be brought to the head coach or athletic director immediately.

Plan ahead and delegate responsibility

The best way to lead a coaching team is to plan ahead, especially when you are already balancing a busy schedule. The more organized the team is before the season begins, the more smoothly the season is likely to go.

“The further ahead that you can plan, whether that means setting standards for the athletes and the coaching staff or handling logistics like booking travel for away games, the better prepared you’ll be when the season gets messy,” Barnett says. “The team will perform better in that moment if you have already organized a lot of the logistics.”

Think about what would be most helpful throughout the season and where you tend to struggle with planning. A caregiver volunteer, for example, may be better positioned to make travel arrangements and coordinate with other caregivers than a coach who is also teaching full-time.

“So many coaches, and people in general, have the ‘I’ll just do it myself’ attitude,” Barnett says. “Other people can help make your life easier, and giving them meaningful responsibility also helps them feel ownership of the team. This ultimately creates buy-in and makes the team stronger.”

The more you let others help, the more you can trust them and share responsibility. “As a coach, you do have to remind yourself that done is better than perfect,” Barnett says. “Maybe you would have done something differently than the volunteer or your assistant coach did. But it got done, and you can always tweak and adjust things later.”

Barnett’s biggest piece of advice for head coaches is simple: [Allow others to take ownership and lead](#). Sometimes, that means stepping back yourself.

“One of the best things I’ve ever done was leave the room,” he says. “I had assistants who were responsible for looking over scouting reports and video, and I was always in the room with them, watching the video and making comments. I realized I needed to leave and let them do their jobs. I walked out and closed the door, and I never went back. And that was good leadership.”

He adds, “I didn’t need to be in that room; I needed them to be in charge of that process. I trust them, and now they’re empowered to do their jobs and take on that responsibility in a meaningful way.”

Takeaway

Letting go of control can be difficult, but giving your coaching team meaningful responsibility makes the entire program stronger. Bring people on board whose strengths complement your weaknesses. Establish systems for communication, boundaries, and shared standards. Most importantly, create space for your coaching team to raise concerns, contribute ideas, and lead.



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<https://truesport.org/teamwork/how-coaching-teams-work-together/>