

5 Ways to Ensure Your Athletes are Competing Well

As a coach, you have the ability to either help or hinder your athletes' pursuit of success in sport, as well as their overall wellness. A [good coach](#) ensures that mental and physical wellness are prioritized for their athletes, even if it means de-prioritizing performance and wins. This might mean reworking your definition of success, but in the long run, your athletes will perform better and be healthier, happier humans as a result.

When it comes to supporting physical and mental wellness, your goal should be helping athletes develop healthy habits, rather than quick fixes and win-at-all-costs mentalities. Here, the [U.S. Anti-Doping Agency's](#) Chief Science Officer, Matt Fedoruk, PhD, shares his top five ways to ensure your athletes are competing well and able to thrive in all areas.

1. Prioritize rest and recovery

"We're conditioned to take this 'more is better' type of approach across the board, whether it's around training, supplements, or gear. But for a young athlete, we know adequate [rest and recovery](#) is more important than extra training hours," says Fedoruk. [Overtraining is common](#), especially for serious teen athletes who are focused on getting an athletic scholarship—but while training extra hours may pay off at first, it can have consequences that can take athletes out of the sport for the season or for life.

2. Encourage multi-sport athletes

"These days, there is a lot of pressure to specialize in sport from a very young age," says Fedoruk. As a coach, it's tempting to want your athletes to be fully committed to your team and your sport. But that's not the best long-term approach to success in sport or in life. "I know from the scientific literature as well as from personal experiences working with athletes that the best athletes are the most well-rounded athletes," says Fedoruk. "[Multi-sport athletes learn technical skills and gain the experience](#) they need to figure out which sport is right for them. Multi-sport athletes are also more likely to stay in sports longer, which is especially important now as kids are dropping out of sport at very high rates."

3. Skip the supplements

Supplements have become a common cure-all for many people and athletes in particular. It might be tempting to buy into the big promises that supplements make, but in doing so, you're encouraging the idea that a solution can be found in a pill—which we know isn't the case!

"There are no magic bullets, and [no supplement will be a shortcut to success](#). I think there's a lot of pressure these days to cut corners, and we're all pressed for time," says Fedoruk. "But at the end of the day, parents and coaches need to take a step back and ask, 'How do I best fuel my athlete to be successful?'" He suggests focusing on a [food-first approach](#)—try more [red meat for athletes who may need more iron](#) or an extra serving of chicken or dairy for those looking to build muscle—and leaving any supplement recommendations to a physician or dietitian. If you do find that a supplement is ultimately necessary, try to stick to third-party certified supplements to [reduce the risk of contamination](#) and exposure to harmful ingredients.

4. Invest in mental health

As a coach, you play a huge role in the [mental health and wellbeing of your athletes](#). You can create positive change by bringing mental health experts in to speak to the team about game day nerves, goal-setting, and dealing with stress and anxiety. You can also create an open door policy to encourage athletes to talk to you about anything they're struggling with. And you can [share resources](#) with them that improve their understanding of what it means to be mentally well. Lastly, make sure that there is space for athletes to simply have fun during practice and even within competition. "Sport can help solve a lot of problems, but only if you as a coach are taking a holistic, positive, and fun approach to it," Fedoruk adds.

5. Focus on growth instead of outcomes

As coaches and parents, we know that sports can not only teach young athletes how to score a goal or run a mile, sports can teach them life lessons like [leadership](#), [perseverance](#), and [goal-setting](#). An outcome-focused coach with a 'win-at-all-costs' mentality might see early results—but as the season wears on and athletes become tired, overtrained, or simply mentally exhausted from so much pressure to perform, the wins will start to wane and the athletes will suffer. Focusing on sustainable growth for your team, with an emphasis on effort and hard work rather than results, will result in athletes who bring more to their team and their community.

Takeaway

It's tempting to simply push your athletes to win competitions and games at any cost, but the better long-term strategy is to focus on wellness, which leads to more happy, healthy lifelong athletes. That means ensuring athletes have the information and resources to make smart choices around food, mental health, rest, recovery, and even playing other sports.



About TrueSport

TrueSport®, a movement powered by the experience and values of the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, champions the positive values and life lessons learned through youth sport. [TrueSport](#) inspires athletes, coaches, parents, and administrators to change the culture of youth sport through active engagement and thoughtful curriculum based on cornerstone lessons of sportsmanship, character-building, and clean and healthy performance, while also creating leaders across communities through sport.

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