



Champion Coach Note: Working with the Exceptional Athlete

Have you had a situation like [this](#) occur on your team? Every coach has had athletes with ADHD on their teams, but do you know how to most effectively work with these exceptional athletes?

It is the responsibility of coaches to strive to create a positive sporting experience for every athlete. When it comes to working with athletes who have an exceptionality, such as Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), an understanding of the symptoms and specific coaching strategies are necessary to help the athletes thrive. Research shows that coaches with positive attitudes towards athletes with disabilities (visible & "invisible") and in their ability to coach effectively show increased likelihood of making accommodations to facilitate successful sport participation for the exceptional child.

Thanks to support from **Shire Pharmaceuticals**, we have created resources for coaches to work most effectively with athletes with ADHD. **Refer to our [New Web page](#). Resources include [ADHD FAQ's](#), [ADHD Overview](#) and [Reading Material](#).**

Coaching Strategies—ADHD

**Please view the resources on our website for detailed explanations of each strategy.*

- Establish concrete goals. Identify a quantity, level, or standard of performance.
 - Examples:
 - Golf: make two 4-foot putts in a row
 - Basketball: make 2 foul shots in a row
- Issue one task at a time and be sure to establish eye contact. Go one-on-one when



The Notre Dame campus is in Spring Bloom!

"So I exhort the elders among you...shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; Not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering to those in your charge, but being examples to the flock."

~ 1 Peter 5:1-4

Click here to view the full [Video](#) of ADHD expert Dr. David Baron, Chief of Psychiatry at USC's Keck School of Medicine, specialist in ADHD and Sport Psychiatry. Dr. Baron has written numerous articles addressing issues within this realm. Thanks to our supporter on this project, Shire Pharmaceutical Corporation

necessary.

- Provide visual aids and nonverbal demonstrations (e.g., visible schedules, drawings on white boards and clipboards, videos). Give simple, one-step instructions and check for understanding.
- Positive reinforcement
 - Praise specific behaviors instead of making a general, vague statement.
 - Example: "I like how you ran hard all the way to first base," instead of "Good job."
- Maintain boundaries
 - Corrective feedback can be helpful if provided appropriately. Correction points out what the child should do... not what not to do. For example, it is better to say, "Keep your eyes on the batter," as opposed to, "You are not paying attention."
 - Be consistent when implementing team rules. Establish consequences for misbehavior and enforce them immediately. If safety becomes an issue (e.g., child is pushing), consider implementing a "time-out." This can be followed by corrective feedback.
 - Stay calm, exercise patience, and always avoid ridicule, criticism, or any tactics that may humiliate an athlete.
 - Modeling: Demonstrating the desired behavior or skill
 - Most effective when paired with verbal rules/instructions
 - A team buddy can also serve as a peer model – children are more likely to imitate someone who is similar to them
- Shaping: Providing reinforcement (e.g., via praise) in small increments for each step of a desired skill or behavior until it is fully achieved
- Assign tasks to keep athletes busy in the "downtime" and take breaks throughout practice – consider structuring practice into intervals.
- Administer rewards for sportsmanship,

attentiveness, following instructions/rules by using a Token Economy. Create a chart to document instances of desired behavior. These can be pre-determined, reviewed with all of the athletes, and established as team goals. Designate someone to maintain the log (e.g., assistant coach, team mom, student manager). Consider publicly posting the chart.

- Implement the Three R's:
 - Routine: Provide a structured environment and somewhat predictable practice format
 - Ritual: Engage in collective acts the team can share in (e.g., pregame huddle)
 - Relaxation: By helping an athlete enhance his or her ability and confidence, he or she will be more likely to feel relaxed...AND perform in **the zone.**
- Drill with continuous energy & variety and rotate positions when feasible. Build upon the strengths of each athlete.

Click here to view a portion of a [Video](#) featuring Dr. David Baron and Dr. Carrie Hastings discussing some of the challenges of ADHD and how coaches can respond.