



## Champion Coach Note: Coaching Athletes with ASD

This week's coach note continues with a discussion of how coaches can be more effective in working with athletes diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). An understanding of the symptoms and specific coaching strategies is necessary to help these athletes and the associated team thrive.

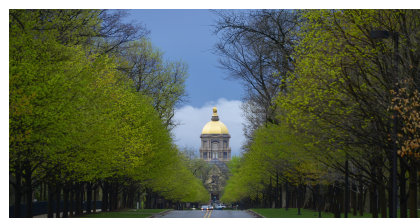
### Autism Spectrum Disorder

*Note: The previous diagnoses of Autistic Disorder, Asperger's Disorder, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder have been eliminated as of 2013. ASD is now the catch-all diagnosis for individuals meeting the criteria for any of the aforementioned conditions.*

An ASD diagnosis typically signifies persistent deficits in social communication and interaction across multiple settings. The disorder often manifests as restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities, and sometimes includes intellectual or language impairment. There also tends to be deficits in developing, sustaining, and understanding relationships, and symptoms may be accompanied by sensory integration difficulties. Symptoms are typically identified around 12-24 months of age.

**Severity Levels:** *Level 1, "Requiring support"; Level 2, "Requiring substantial support"; Level 3, "Requiring very substantial support"*

### How ASD Symptoms Can Interfere with Sport Participation



**"Never let the fear of striking out get  
in your way of playing the game."**

**~Babe Ruth**

Coaches and Administrators, join us at Notre Dame this June for our Annual [Sports Leadership](#) Conference with tremendous speakers, networking opportunities with current Play Like a Champion partners across the country and several presentations directly focused on "Effectively Coaching Athletes with Exceptionalities" including a full advanced coach workshop that is now available to Play Like a Champion partners.

Also...

Visit our newly designed [WEB PAGE](#) loaded with resources on Coaching Athletes with ADHD and ASD.

View this [video](#) on Clay Marzo to understand an athlete with ASD and how he thrives through sport.

Are you a coach with a question about a particular situation on your team. We have a confidential email answered by Developmental Psychologist and Play Like a Champion trainer, Dr. Carrie Hastings.

Email Dr. Carrie with questions:

<mailto:askdoctorcarrie@nd.edu?subject=Exceptionality>

An individual with ASD often faces significant challenges with planning and organization. One may experience difficulty coping with changes to structure or routine and dealing with the unexpected (e.g., overtime; substitutions). Those with ASD may also have trouble processing unfair or incorrect calls made by the official. Though motor skills are often less well-developed in individuals with ASD, these athletes can get hung up on the “mechanics” of a particular skill (e.g., curve ball; 3-point shot) and have difficulty moving on. Athletes with ASD may have difficulty building cohesive relationships and may experience an altered sense of pain. Coaches should be sure to inquire with parents whether or not their child with ASD has ever displayed self-injurious behavior.

### **Coaching Strategies – ASD**

\*Please view the resources on our [website](#) for detailed explanations of each strategy.

- Establish concrete goals and use lots of praise. Build upon the unique strengths of each athlete and go one-on-one when necessary.
- Chaining involves developing a sequence of steps that gradually leads to a desired outcome. Research shows that individuals with ASD often learn more easily (and with less frustration) when instructed one small step at a time. Chaining involves verbal and visual prompting, modeling, physical guidance, and shaping (i.e., praise with each step).
- Help athletes with ASD anticipate change by giving advance notice of transitions.
- The **SODA** technique encourages self-talk & planning
  - **STOP**
    - *Where should I go to stretch?*
    - *What is today's routine/schedule?*
  - **OBSERVE**
    - *What are the coaches saying?*

- *What are my teammates doing?*
- **DELIBERATE**
  - *What do I want to do/say?*
  - *How will \_\_\_\_\_ feel when I do and say these things?*
- **ACT**
  - *When I go to practice: I enter the game; get the ball, etc., throw the ball, I plan to: a)... b)... c)..*

The team's inclusion of every athlete is key to the Play Like a Champion approach – have a discussion with your team on why everyone should be included and how to involve each and every athlete.