

MY ATHLETE GETS OVERWHELMED DURING GAMES

How to help an athlete manage a high-information environment without lowering expectations.

WHAT TO DO

A game can turn a simple skill into a complicated decision. The easy conclusion is "they aren't prepared," but the game may simply be creating more information than the athlete can process at once.

1 GIVE THEM ONE JOB

When everything feels important, nothing feels manageable.

INSTEAD OF "Watch the motion, communicate the coverage, stay outside, read the quarterback, and stay aligned."

TRY "Your job this play: stay outside."

Coaching principle: give the athlete the most important piece of information, not every piece.

2 CREATE A GAME-DAY ANCHOR

Give the athlete something simple to return to when the game speeds up: a phrase, a visual cue, or a pre-play routine.

TRY "Alignment. Assignment. Go." Or "Find your landmark." Or "See the ball."

The anchor gives the athlete something predictable in an unpredictable environment.

3 USE SHORT, CONSISTENT COMMUNICATION

A game isn't the time for a long explanation. Keep it short, specific, and consistent, then let the athlete play.

INSTEAD OF "You have to pay attention because we talked about this all week and you're getting caught."

TRY "Eyes here. Your job: outside."

Coaching principle: the faster the environment, the more important clear communication becomes.

4 DON'T OVER-CORRECT IN THE MOMENT

If an athlete is already overloaded, adding more information can make things worse. Save the deeper teaching for practice.

TRY Pick one correction. One next action. Nothing more.

You don't need to eliminate the mistake. You need to prevent one mistake from becoming three.

5 PREPARE FOR THE GAME BEFORE THE GAME

Don't wait until the athlete is overwhelmed to teach them how to respond. Before competition, identify what might overwhelm them, what helps them reset, and their first job when they enter the game.

Practice the response during practice. Prepare it before you need it.

BUILD A RESET ROUTINE

STOP Take a breath and recognize the mistake.

RESET Let the previous play go.

FOCUS Identify the next assignment.

PLAY Execute the next rep.

ASK THE 3 QUESTIONS

When an athlete struggles during games, ask:

Can they do it?

SKILL ISSUE

Do they understand it?

INSTRUCTION ISSUE

Can they access it?

ACCOMMODATION ISSUE

The game didn't necessarily reveal a lack of ability. It revealed a difference in access.

QUICK COACH CHECKLIST

- ☐ What specifically is overwhelming them?
- ☐ Can I give them one clear job?
- ☐ Am I using consistent language?
- ☐ Do they have a reset routine?
- ☐ Can I save the detailed correction for practice?

When the game speeds up, communication should slow down. **Give the athlete a clear path through the pressure.**