

A COACH'S DECISION TREE

WHEN AN ATHLETE IS STRUGGLING

BEFORE ASSUMING AN ATHLETE DOESN'T CARE, **ASK YOURSELF A FEW QUESTIONS**

ATHLETE IS STRUGGLING

01 DID THEY UNDERSTAND THE INSTRUCTION?

Not sure? Try one of the checks below before assuming they weren't listening.

- ☒ Ask them to explain it back to you
- ☒ Demonstrate it again
- ☒ Use a visual
- ☒ Give one coaching point instead of five

NO
Teach it differently. Then try again.

YES
Move to the next question.

02 CAN THEY ACCESS THE INSTRUCTION?

Some athletes understand what you're asking, but can't access the information the way you're presenting it. **Ask yourself:**

- ☐ Did I give too many directions?
- ☐ Did I only explain it verbally?
- ☐ Did they have enough processing time?
- ☐ Would a demonstration help?

NO
Try an accommodation. Then reassess.

YES
Move to the next question.

03 IS SOMETHING ELSE GETTING IN THE WAY?

Look for signs of:

- Anxiety
- Frustration
- Sensory overload
- Fatigue
- Emotional dysregulation
- Distraction
- Pain or injury
- Conflict with teammates

Sometimes the problem isn't the drill. It's everything happening around the drill.

IF NEEDED Take a short break. Have a conversation. Reset. Then return.

04 HAVE I COMMUNICATED WITH THE ATHLETE?

Instead of assuming, **ask**.

- "What part is confusing?"
- "What would help?"
- "What are you thinking?"

Sometimes the athlete has the answer.

IF THE PROBLEM CONTINUES, TALK WITH:

- PARENTS
- TEACHERS
- STUDENT SERVICES
- ATHLETIC TRAINER
- COACHING STAFF

The goal is to **gather information**, not assign blame.

REMEMBER

“GOOD COACHES DON'T IMMEDIATELY ASSUME LAZINESS. GREAT COACHES INVESTIGATE.”

Athletes generally want to succeed. If they're struggling, there's usually a reason. The better you understand the obstacle, the better you can remove it.

▲ AVOID THESE ASSUMPTIONS

● DON'T ASSUME

- “They're lazy.”
- “They're not listening.”
- “They don't care.”
- “They're just being difficult.”

● INSTEAD ASK

- “Did I teach this clearly?”
- “Do they need more processing time?”
- “Would another approach work better?”
- “What barrier am I missing?”