

Coaching Me Effectively: An ADHD Athlete's Guide for Coaches

What Helps Me Perform at My Best

ADHD is not a lack of effort, discipline, or commitment. It affects attention, memory, emotional regulation, processing speed, organization, and motivation. When coaching works well for me, I can be highly driven, creative, resilient and capable of exceptional focus and performance. The most helpful thing you can do is ask me what works best as ADHD can look different in every athlete but here are some approaches that have been found to be really effective.

Communication: What Works Best

Please:

- Be clear, specific, and direct.
- Give one instruction at a time whenever possible.
- Tell me exactly what success looks like.
- Explain why you want to talk before starting a conversation.
- Check my understanding by asking me to repeat key instructions.
- Use visual reminders, demonstrations, videos, diagrams, or written notes.
- Slow down when giving important information.
- Tell me who information applies to during team briefings.
- Give clear timelines and deadlines.

Avoid:

- Long streams of instructions.
- Vague feedback such as “focus more” or “try harder.”
- Calling me out publicly for mistakes.
- Assuming I understood everything the first time.

If I Seem Disorganized: It is often an executive function challenge, not a lack of commitment.

You might notice:

- I forget equipment
- Miss messages
- Show up late
- Struggle with planning

What helps:

- Checklists for kit and equipment
- Calendar invites and reminders
- Clear deadlines
- Breaking large tasks into smaller steps
- Helping me connect actions today with future performance

If I Forget Instructions: ADHD often affects working memory.

What helps:

- One instruction at a time
- Written feedback after sessions
- Visual cues and reminders
- Demonstrations rather than repeated verbal correction
- Asking me to repeat instructions back

What doesn't help:

- Repeating multiple instructions louder or faster
- Assuming I am ignoring feedback

When My Emotions Run High: ADHD can create a highly sensitive threat response. When I feel unsafe, embarrassed, overwhelmed, or judged, performance often drops.

What helps:

- Calm, specific feedback
- Private conversations rather than public criticism
- A code word or signal when I'm struggling
- Positive reinforcement when I regulate well
- Helping me identify how stress shows up physically
- Understanding that emotional reactions are often signs of overwhelm

Remember:

When I am dysregulated, I need support and clarity—not punishment.

Attention and Focus: ADHD isn't an inability to pay attention. It is difficulty controlling attention.

What helps:

- Short, clear messages
- Breaking activities into smaller chunks
- Reducing distractions during instruction
- Precise coaching language
- Frequent movement and activity
- Small-group work
- Clear rewards and goals

Instead of: "Focus." Try: "Keep your eyes on the ball until it leaves your teammate's hands."

Building on My Strengths: Hyperfocus Can Be a Superpower. When I love something, I can become intensely committed.

Help me:

- Use imagery and visualization
- Channel my enthusiasm productively
- Build identity outside sport as well
- Prioritize recovery and rest

Motivation Works Differently: ADHD is often interest-driven rather than importance-driven.

What helps:

- Making training meaningful and engaging
- Novelty and variety
- Process goals rather than only outcome goals
- Immediate feedback
- Frequent recognition of progress

I respond best to:

- Purpose
- Interest
- Challenge
- Autonomy
- Positive reinforcement

Confidence Matters: Many athletes with ADHD have experienced years of being told they are:

- Not listening
- Too much
- Too emotional
- Disorganized
- Underachieving

As a result, confidence can be fragile.

What helps:

- Praise effort and progress
- Highlight strengths
- Give constructive feedback
- Help me identify my unique role and value
- Provide opportunities to succeed
- Allow autonomy and decision-making

If I Seem Restless or Hyperactive: Movement helps me regulate attention and emotions.

What helps:

- Keeping sessions moving
- Giving me active responsibilities
- Minimizing unstructured downtime
- Providing movement breaks
- Letting me use a discreet fidget during meetings

The best ADHD coaching feels like a conversation, not a power struggle. Please remember that ADHD doesn't reduce my potential. The right coaching environment allows me to access it consistently. Please don't lower your expectations of me. I want the right support so I can meet high expectations.