

# 5

# STRATEGIES FOR RP IN SPORTS

Sports inherently include conflict. Often conflict is explicitly advertised and expected, yet there is no process for working through it and creating opportunities for healing. Here you will find resources for addressing conflict in the world of athletics, and tools for building a team with awareness as to how to move through the process effectively.



## Connecting Opposing Sides

Having teams mutually agree to a code of conduct prior to a game, and giving players opportunities to contribute as a shared and living document, allows players to foster a strong commitment to the expectations they will hold themselves to. Connecting opponents does not mean abandoning competition, but agreeing to how competition will play out; thus minimizing opportunity for physical, emotional, and mental harm.

## Setting the Tone for a Season

Physical training sets the tone for a successful season just as much as mental and emotional training. Alongside practice, athletes need the opportunity to connect with one another through informal gatherings, activities, and free play during practices. Creating opportunities for teams to grow together emotionally through informal and organic connection increases moral and accountability; setting up for a season focused on growing as individuals and a team.

## How to Rebound From Losses

In any sport, losses are to be expected, and how we handle them can shape our longterm relationship with it. Creating opportunities to actively reflect on losses with a strengths-based approach, allows for players and coaches to ground themselves in skill growth and teamwork as opposed to pitfalls and challenges. Asking yourself or others what went well, what felt great during this game, and what are your goals for the future can alter a negative perspective.

## Supporting a Team

Being a great coach means supporting athletes not only in their performance, but also in their personal growth and relationships with one another. Restorative approaches give us the chance to see mistakes or conflicts as moments for learning instead of setbacks. By encouraging open conversations, listening to each athlete's perspective, and guiding the team to take responsibility together, we strengthen trust and connection. When players feel heard and valued, they are more likely to hold themselves and each other accountable in positive ways. In this way, coaching becomes less about control and more about building a team culture grounded in respect, empathy, and shared goals.



## Building Better Athletes

Building better athletes means focusing on growth that extends beyond wins and losses. Encouraging reflection on skills like communication, leadership, resilience, and self-discipline helps players recognize the habits that make them stronger teammates and individuals. Highlighting moments where athletes supported one another, made healthy choices, or adapted under pressure turns everyday experiences into opportunities for development. This approach builds athletes who not only perform well, but also carry those skills into every part of their lives.

## HOW TO COOL DOWN IN THE MOMENT

- **Breathing Resets:** A few deep, intentional breaths can calm nerves and bring focus back to the task.
- **Positive Self-Talk:** Replacing frustration with short affirmations like “reset, next play” helps athletes shift perspective quickly.
- **Anchor Routines:** Small rituals (tying shoes, shaking hands, wiping hands) can create a mental cue to let go of mistakes and come back to focus.
- **Teammate Check-Ins:** A quick fist bump, pat on the back, or encouraging word can shift attention away from frustration and back to connection.
- **Skill Reflection:** Asking, “What can I do better next time?” redirects energy toward growth instead of dwelling on errors.
- **Movement Cool-Downs:** Light jogging, stretching, or shaking out tension between plays helps regulate both body and mind.



## CREATING COMMUNITY IN THE HUDDLE

- **Shared Focus Word/Phrase:** Begin or end with one word that captures the team’s mindset (ex. “together,” “power,” or “determination”).
- **Rotating Voice:** Let a different athlete lead the huddle each time to build leadership and ownership.
- **Gratitude Check-In:** Invite one or two players to share something they appreciated about a teammate that day.
- **Future Focus:** Ask the group, “What’s one thing we want to bring into the next play/half/game?”
- **Restorative Pause:** If tension is high, use the huddle to reset with a breath together before speaking.
- **Celebrate Small Wins:** Name something that went well, even if it’s just effort or communication.