

ADHD in Athletes

ADHD is a psychological disorder that many parents, coaches, and athletes have heard of, and perhaps have experience with. There are more and more children being diagnosed with this disorder each year, resulting in more and more information floating around about how to “deal” with ADHD in the school. However, specific information about how to work most effectively with athletes who have ADHD is hard to find. In order to help coaches deal with ADHD in the athletic domain, the following suggestions may help:

Signs that you may have an athlete with ADHD:

- **Consistently missing information**
- **Trouble following directions**
- **Not able to focus on the task at hand**
- **Inability to memorize plays**
- **Being disruptive**

If an athlete is diagnosed with ADHD, there are certain approaches that may be more successful for coaching him/her. When working with an ADHD athlete, a coach may want to consider alternate methods of instruction for these athletes. In particular, technical information (such as drawing up plays on the board) may be difficult for an ADHD athlete to follow. Instead, a coach may want to rely on more kinesthetic methods of teaching, such as physically putting players into the required positions, and then walking them through the plays. Active, kinesthetic approaches may help an ADHD athlete stay focused and learn the material.

It also will be helpful for a coach to remember that there may be a disconnect between what the athlete says and what they do. An ADHD athlete may say “I get it” when asked if they understand a play or instruction, then proceed to do the exact opposite. During these times, it is important for a coach to recognize that this disconnect is not a sign of disrespect or ignoring what has been said, but rather the result of an athlete not wanting to say “I don’t get it”. Difficulty with learning is often experienced in multiple areas of an ADHD athlete’s life. A coach can have success by rewarding enthusiasm, and correcting mistakes, as opposed to punishing mistakes and ignoring enthusiasm.

(Some information taken from Rhodius, Bernstein, Carlson, & Sugarman, 2006 AAASP Conference, Miami, FL)

At the Center for Sport Psychology and Performance Excellence at the University of North Texas, we have a dedicated staff of sport consultants who can help athletes, teams, and

coaches learn to work more effectively with symptoms of ADHD. For more information please call us at 940-369-7767 or visit our website at www.sportpsych.unt.edu or email us at sportpsych@unt.edu. As always, we leave you with our sport quote of the week:

“Success is the ability to go from one failure to another with no loss of enthusiasm”

-Sir Winston Churchill