

Using Self-Compassion for the Competitive Edge



Self-compassion means treating yourself with the same care and understanding you'd offer someone else who is struggling. It's not about making excuses, it's about staying focused, learning from mistakes, and moving forward with clarity and confidence.

Many athletes believe self-criticism will improve their performance. But often it does the opposite—it damages self-esteem, clouds judgment, and leads to self-doubt. Self-compassion helps athletes respond to challenges with focus, resilience, and strength.

How Self-Criticism Holds You Back

Self-critical thoughts often sound like:

- "I am not talented enough."
- "I am a failure."
- "There is no way I can win."
- "I'm an embarrassment to the team."
- "I let everyone down."
- "I can't believe I missed that."

It focuses on the idea of "I should have known better" which creates pressure and prevents athletes from seeing what actually needs improvement. When a pass is missed or a ball is fumbled, what matters most is how you respond in the next moment, not how harshly you judge yourself for the last.

What Self-Compassion Looks Like

1. Mindfulness

Help your players pay attention to what's happening right now—without judgment of themselves. Competitive athletes know what this is like because it's the literal experience of keeping your eye on the ball, instead of the unwanted thoughts and doubts.

- **Instead of:** "I blew it, I'm a loser."
Encourage them to try: "I missed the shot, and I don't like how that feels."

2. Common Humanity

Recognize that all athletes make mistakes. You are not alone.

- **Instead of:** "I'm a failure."
Suggest they say: "Missing a shot is frustrating when you're an athlete."

3. Self-Kindness

Simply answering the question, "What would be helpful now?"

- **Instead of:** "I shouldn't be on the team if I'm such a bad player."
Help them use: "I can review the play after the game and learn from it. In the meantime, let's get back out there and focus"

Self-compassion is a competitive advantage. It is a tough, fair, and honest inner coach that helps athletes respond to mistakes in ways that lead to learning, growth, and success. It's not about being soft, it's about staying strong, focused, and ready for what's next.