THE TALKING SPLIT LIBRARY · FULL GUIDE

COACHING CONVERSATIONS: THE FULL Q&A

The whole mailbag in one place, across four sections: managing your players, managing parents, selection and balance, and the coaching craft, with the source season for every answer. The overview has the short version.

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WHY THIS DOCUMENT EXISTS

The Talking Split mailbag was one of the most popular recurring segments in the series. Coaches from across Victoria and Australia sent in questions they couldn't find answers to, and the hosts answered them with the same directness they brought to every episode.

This document compiles the best of those questions, along with questions that naturally emerged from the podcast's discussions, presenting them in a format you can search by situation.

SECTION 1: MANAGING YOUR PLAYERS

Q: WHY ARE SOME PLAYERS SO DIFFICULT TO COACH, AND WHAT CAN I ACTUALLY DO ABOUT IT?

Difficult-to-coach athletes usually fall into one of three categories: athletes who don't understand what you're asking (a communication problem), athletes who don't trust that what you're asking is in their interest (a relationship problem), or athletes who genuinely don't want to be there (a motivation problem).

The fix for each is different. Communication problems: pull before push. Ask what they see before telling them what to do. Relationship problems: invest individual time; athletes who know you care about them receive instruction differently. Motivation problems: ask the joy-ownership-mastery question. Do they have fun, do they have agency in their development, do they see themselves improving?

One practical test: if the same athlete was given a reward for improving their drill score on the next attempt, would they? If yes, the capability is there. What's missing is the right environment to bring it out.

Source: Seasons 4, 5, 6

Q: HOW DO I KEEP AN INJURED PLAYER INVOLVED AND MOTIVATED AT TRAINING?

Two phases to think about: while they're out, and when they come back.

While they're out: don't let them become a spectator. Give them a specific role, tracking missed box-outs, charting opponent tendencies, timing drills, or providing verbal encouragement from the bench. An injured athlete who contributes stays connected.

When they return: through the bench, not the starting lineup. Even if they were a starter, game fitness is different from training fitness. A measured return through the bench sets them up for success. Communicate the plan to them, to their parents, and to the team.

Source: Season 2

Q: HOW DO I DEAL WITH A PLAYER WHO KEEPS MISSING SHOTS MID-TOURNAMENT AND IS LOSING CONFIDENCE?

Shift the question from make-or-miss to decision quality. When an athlete is in a shooting slump, the worst thing a coach can do is remove their permission to shoot. That compounds the confidence problem. Instead, reframe the standard: 'I'm not watching whether the ball goes in. I'm watching whether you're taking the right shots. Keep taking them.'

Also: find a moment in practice to give them a high-volume, low-pressure shooting opportunity before the next game. Not a technical correction session, just reps in a forgiving environment to rebuild the feel of the ball going in.

The coach who chases shots with a player during a slump teaches them to fear slumps. The coach who stays consistent with the process teaches them that slumps are temporary.

Source: Season 1

Q: A PLAYER IS ALWAYS LATE TO TRAINING. HOW DO I HANDLE IT?

First question before any response: do you know why they're late? Not assumed. Actually asked. A player whose parent finishes work late and relies on public transport is not disrespecting the program. The context changes everything.

Second: be solution-focused rather than punishment-focused. 'How can we help you get here on time?' produces different outcomes than 'you're benched until you fix this.' A player who arrives 15 minutes late learns more basketball than a player who doesn't come at all.

Third: examine your training time. Is the scheduled time realistic for the athletes in your program? Sometimes the lateness is telling you something about the session structure, not the athlete's attitude.

Source: Season 3

Q: HOW DO I DEAL WITH A PLAYER WHO ONLY WANTS TO PLAY AND NOT SIT ON THE BENCH?

> Start before the season: set explicit playing time expectations in writing so no athlete is surprised when they're not in for a period.
>
> When the moment arrives mid-game: give the player coming off a specific role while they're on the bench. Watch for a specific thing, track something, give one piece of feedback to the next player who comes off. Athletes with a job on the bench are less resentful than athletes who are just waiting.
>
> The deeper principle: athletes who only want to play haven't yet understood that what happens on the bench is part of their development.
>
> *Source: Seasons 1, 2*

Q: MULTI-SPORT ATHLETES. WHEN DO THEY NEED TO CHOOSE?

> At junior domestic level (under-16 and below), multi-sport participation is actively beneficial: different movement patterns, different competitive experiences. The evidence strongly supports specialisation coming later, not earlier.
>
> At state level and above, the answer shifts: the training load required for genuine high-performance development is incompatible with meaningful participation in another sport.
>
> For domestic junior coaches: encourage multi-sport. Don't treat basketball as competing with other sports. Athletes who play multiple sports into their mid-teens are more resilient, more adaptable, and more likely to still be playing basketball at 25.
>
> *Source: Season 2*

SECTION 2: MANAGING PARENTS

Q: A PARENT CHASED ME DOWN AFTER A GAME ABOUT PLAYING TIME. WHAT DO I DO?

> In the moment: absorb it calmly, tell them you hear their concern, and tell them you would like to discuss it properly, not right now, but at a scheduled time. Offer a specific time: 'Can we talk before next training?' Then leave.
>
> Before that conversation: review your playing time records. If you can show that their athlete received roughly equal time, the conversation changes. If the athlete was genuinely under-used: own it, explain why, and tell them what changes.
>
> The permanent solution: a written playing time philosophy distributed before the season. When a parent has agreed to this document, the post-game ambush conversation almost never happens.
>
> *Source: Seasons 1, 2, 4*

Q: HOW DO I GET PARENTS TO STOP COACHING FROM THE SIDELINE?

> Address it before it happens, not after. At your pre-season parent meeting, name it directly: 'Our athletes hear from their coach during the game. If they're also hearing from the sideline, they're getting conflicting instructions in the middle of a play. What I ask from you is cheering for effort: encouragement only.'
>
> If it happens during a game: don't confront the parent in the moment. After the game, in private, reiterate the ask calmly and directly.
>
> Most parents respond well to a direct, non-confrontational explanation of why it matters. Very few are trying to undermine the coach: they're just invested, and they don't know the damage they're causing.
>
> *Source: Seasons 1, 5, 8*

SECTION 3: TEAM SELECTION AND BALANCE

Q: DO I TAKE A BALANCED TEAM OR JUST THE BEST PLAYERS?

> Both approaches have merit depending on context. At development tournaments, the goal is exposing as many athletes as possible to competitive environments. A balanced team serves this better.
>
> At championships, the goal shifts toward competitive performance. Taking the players who have earned their spot through consistent training performance is more defensible.
>
> The principle that holds across both: never take an injured or physically underprepared athlete just because they're talented. And never take an athlete who has not put in the work across the preparation period, regardless of talent. Consistency of effort is a selection criterion, not an afterthought.
>
> *Source: Season 4*

Q: HOW DO I SELECT AN OFFENSIVE SYSTEM FOR MY TEAM?

> Start with your athletes, not with what you want to run. The system that gets your best players into their best positions, creating the shots they can make, is more valuable than the system you love conceptually but your players can't execute.
>
> At under-14 and under-16 domestic level: pass-cut-replace motion principles, dribble penetration, receiver spot spacing. Keep it simple enough that every athlete understands why they're in a specific spot, not just where they're supposed to be.
>
> Any system that allows athletes to be multidimensional (to play to their strength while developing the skills they need at the next level) is the right system.
>
> *Source: Season 1*

SECTION 4: THE COACHING CRAFT

Q: HOW DO I KEEP MY TEAM MOTIVATED MID-SEASON WHEN RESULTS ARE AVERAGE?

> First: make sure motivation isn't result-driven, because you can't always control results. If the only thing driving your athletes' motivation is the win-loss record, you've built a fragile culture. Build motivation around process: 'Are we getting better? Are we doing the things we said we'd do?'
>
> Second: change the stimulus. Mix up the session: different drills, different formats, music in warm-up, an off-court social activity. The predictability of a training session is the enemy of engagement mid-season.
>
> Third: be motivated yourself. If you walk into training depleted and going through the motions, your athletes will reflect that.
>
> *Source: Season 3*

Q: MY TEAM WON'T BOX OUT. WHAT DO I DO?

> The podcast's answer was consistent: if you value it, they value it. If rebounding is not being practised, tracked, and addressed in training (with consequences for missed box-outs and recognition for good ones) you cannot expect it to appear in games.
>
> Specific tools: run a possession-based scrimmage where a missed box-out is an immediate turnover. Make the missed box-out visible and immediate.
>
> Rebounding is a habit and a culture, not a skill. Athletes who box out in every practice eventually do it automatically. Athletes who only box out when it's emphasised that week don't.
>
> *Source: Seasons 1, 3, 9*

Q: HOW DO I ACTUALLY USE VIDEO WITH MY JUNIOR TEAM? WHERE DO I START?

> Start with the question, not the footage. Before you film anything, decide what you want to learn: where are we breaking down defensively? Are we taking the right shots? The question determines what you watch for.
>
> Equipment: a phone propped up behind one end is sufficient to start. Find three clips that illustrate your point: three, not eleven. Send athletes a specific question before they watch: 'In this clip, where should the weakside defender be?' Athletes who watch with a question learn. Athletes who watch without a cue watch themselves.
>
> Tools by budget: YouTube and iMovie (free), Huddle (affordable sharing platform), MotionClip (shot location maps, around $300), SportsCode (professional standard). Start where you are.
>
> *Source: Season 2*

Q: A COACH IN THE COMPETITION IS RUNNING ZONE AGAINST UNDER-12S AND BEATING US. WHAT DO I DO?

> Don't run zone back. The zone ban in under-12s exists for good developmental reasons, and circumventing it (even in response to an opponent doing so) costs your athletes development time.
>
> What you can do: work on your spacing so the zone has fewer places to hide. Teach athletes to find the gaps in a 2-3 (the elbow, the short corner, the high post) rather than running a specific zone offence. Keep athletes moving: the zone is most effective against stationary offences.
>
> Report it to your association if zone is banned at that level. And remind yourself that the teams running zone in under-12s are winning now and will be weaker at 16 because they didn't build the right defensive habits when they should have.
>
> *Source: Seasons 2, 7, 9*

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