

# Does She Believe In Herself?



Does She Believe In Herself? - Written By **John Michael Kelly**

After coaching girls' softball for over a dozen years I have found the female athlete to be amazingly determined, wildly passionate, fiercely loyal yet emotionally fragile.

This emotional fragility is heightened by parents and coaches who don't understand the uniqueness of the female athlete.

A young woman's self-esteem, self-image and self-beliefs need to be nurtured and respected, particularly as athletes in a game as difficult emotionally as fastpitch softball can be.

For an adolescent female athlete her self-belief on the field is everything. I marvel at how many players I see, work with and coach have issues with their self-confidence. I have come to realize that it's just not easy being a young woman in a world obsessed with physical perfection and often expectations for flawless behavior.

In truth your athlete or team will only go as far in their skill development and on the field performance as they believe they will. These often limiting self-beliefs can greatly impact her motivation and desire, for if she really doesn't believe she is good enough why is all that extra work really worth it?

On the field I witness an epidemic of "self-doubt;" athletes afraid of making mistakes for fear of letting down parents, coaches, teammates and self. I see so many young ladies searching for their identity on the diamond and having to cope with the inevitable emotional roller coaster ride that fastpitch is.

Then I see parents, usually Dad's, and coaches berating an athlete or her entire team after a mistake or poor game and I cringe knowing the damaging they are doing to their athletes' self-esteem and self-confidence.

In the world of sports psychology it's called "self-efficacy;" one's belief in their ability to perform a task successfully. From psychologist Albert Bandura:

**People with a strong sense of self-efficacy:**

- View challenging problems as tasks to be mastered
- Develop deeper interest in the activities in which they participate
- Form a stronger sense of commitment to their interests and activities
- Recover quickly from setbacks and disappointments

**People with a weak sense of self-efficacy:**

- Avoid challenging tasks
- Believe that difficult tasks and situations are beyond their capabilities
- Focus on personal failings and negative outcomes
- Quickly lose confidence in personal abilities

**So how can you help your athlete or team to build up this self-efficacy, the self-belief that "she can" be successful?**

1. Support her and nurture her self-esteem, confidence and sense of self; particularly after a tough day on the field (or classroom).
2. Suspend your judgments, criticisms and need to be right around her. Step into her shoes and her world for a few minutes. I assure you that the amount of pressure she feels today in ALL areas of her life to excel is far greater than you experienced at her age.
3. Respect and honor her for her effort, her talent, her loyalty, her love for her teammates and the game.
4. Listen. As adults (yes I am often guilty of this with my daughter) we feel the need to talk too much when often all our daughters want us to do is put our arm around her and listen!
5. Continue to challenge her limiting self-beliefs and always encourage her to get better on the field (as in every area of her life). Start seeing her as having unlimited potential for greatness and watch her start to believe the same.

In truth the greatest gift we can give our daughters and those young ladies that we coach is the gift of confidence that propels their self-esteem, self-worth and their own belief that they can do anything they set their minds to in a sometimes difficult world!

Thanks for reading. -John Michael Kelly

Credit to Gary Leland, of Fastpitch.TV and link to <http://Fastpitch.TV>