

# Male Coaches Guide to Female Athletes

Written By **Renee Ferguson**

Yesterday, I asked my friends on Facebook to help me pick the next article that I would write. I had a lot of ideas but they were all swirling together in my head; so with their help I have decided to write an article titled “The Male Coaches Guide to Female Athletes”. Everyone knows men and women are different but sometimes it is forgotten that it applies to boys and girls as well. So guys, I hope this gives you some insight into the minds of your female athletes.

## **Rule #1 Be a Servant Leader**

Have you ever worked for someone or known someone where you just wanted to perform the best you could for them—simply because they asked you to? That person you would go to hell and back for if they asked you to because you know they would do it for you? That my friend, is what servant leadership is all about. The ability to show your team that you love them and care for them, not only as athletes, but as human beings. This will garner you greater success on the field because the females are not only playing for themselves—they are playing FOR you. The last thing any female athlete would want to do is let you down.

## **Rule #2 Don’t Take Yourself Too Seriously**

Have you ever heard the song, “Girls Just Wanna Have Fun”? Well it’s true. If you are one of those super serious coaches who thinks you can’t have fun and win at the same time you are in trouble. Now I’m not saying don’t make practices challenging or not to expect results from your players, but I am suggesting to be sure to let your guard down every now and again—especially as the female athlete gets older. Do you remember when they were little girls and they would be cheering their little hearts out in the dugout? And inevitably every time you went out there to coach at first or third, they would start that cheer where they try and get the coach at first to “wobble, wobble, wobble”? Well, when was the last time you wobbled? I have danced with the girls in the dugout, sang lyrics from songs they listen to, and I try to lighten the mood randomly and let them know I get THEM. Those moments are more than worth their weight in gold.

## **Rule #3 Tell us Why**

Girls are not boys, we will NOT just follow you blindly wherever you go or do what you tell us to, just because you told us to do it. Sorry but it’s a fact of life. Take time to explain things to us and help us understand why it is important to do things the way you want us to. If you cannot verbalize what you want them to do and why, you should go back to the drawing board (or YouTube video) until you fully understand what is you’re teaching and why it’s important. Sorry fellas but the response, “Jenny Finch does it that way” is not good enough.

## **Rule #4 Give them a Voice**

Encourage some back talk. Females are very communicative creatures and need to feel like they have a voice and are being heard. If we don’t understand what you are asking us to do right away, we need to talk it through out loud to figure it out. Encourage them to ask questions about drills, coverage situations, etc. I realize that by encouraging questions you may not get to cover the 20 things you need to cover in the 2 hours you have for practices, but honestly what’s the difference? Either you spend 20 minutes covering a topic where the female athletes asked questions or spend 10 minutes on it for the next 6 practices. The difference is that the female

athletes will end up with a much deeper understanding of the game and can then execute those plays quicker than they would if you had to wait 6 practices for everyone to get it.

#### **Rule #5 Think before you speak**

Females have very long memories and once you hurt our feelings or make us upset, you have earned yourself a lifelong voice loop in our memory. I'll tell you the story of when my husband and I took team sports together in high school. He was team captain for the 1st sport of the year which was you guessed it, softball. So, I was obviously thinking he would pick me first- I mean I ONLY played about 100 games a year. Well what does he do? He picks someone else, and then someone else, and then someone else and then he picked me. That's right he picked me 4th! I thought to myself, "Unfreakin' believable, he must be trippin' to pick me 4th". To this day, when I talk about it, I still get just as fired up as I did when it first happened 20 years ago. That's right people- it happened TWENTY YEARS AGO and I have never forgotten it. Of course I am able to laugh about it now, but at the moment it made me so mad I couldn't see straight. Sometimes I think it would have been better to be a boy because then I could have just punched him and never gave another thought about the situation again.

To make a long story short, try to be an up lifting coach who focuses on the positive in order to build confidence and work them up to the more difficult drills instead of starting them there. Always be thinking, what type of lifelong voice recording am I leaving in my player's minds?

#### **Rule #6 Be Patient**

In my days as an individual pitching coach, I have encountered some really un-athletic girls. And while it's my knee jerk reaction to think: "Why in the world are these parents paying all this money for lessons when the kid can barely walk and chew gum?" But, then I remember that a lot of little girls are often given baby dolls and Barbie's to play with- while growing up boys are given any every type of ball you can think of. So, maybe these particular girls just haven't had as much "practice" as some of the other athletes. It's usually at this point when I remember that it's my job to be patient with them and to give them small victories along the way to help them build confidence and get them to be the pitcher they want to be. P.S. Patience is HARD! You can learn it, but expect a few hundred grey hairs along the way.

#### **Rule #7 There's no crying in Baseball" ~ Jimmy Dugan**

Well I'm here to tell you there IS crying in softball, so get yourself prepared now. You won't always know why they are crying, and honestly, sometimes they won't even know why they are crying. It could be that their boyfriend broke up with them yesterday, they got into an argument with their parent on the way to the game, they are upset that they "lost" the game in the bottom of the 7th, or it could just be that they are on their period and uber-emotional. (If that's the case just give the girl a chocolate bar and back away slowly!) In all seriousness, girls are emotional. It's just a part of our way of life, and now it's a part of yours. So be sure you are strapped in tightly, because it's going to be a bumpy ride.

#### **Rule #8 Overestimate their abilities**

Just because we are females does not mean we don't like to be challenged to do better and, just because we wear dresses doesn't mean we can't be a great ball player. Invest in us the way you would a boy who dreams of going the majors- set expectations high and help them reach them. Honestly, in the beginning, some girls will think you're mean. But, as the season or the years progress, they will appreciate that you treated them like the real athletes they are.

### **Rule #9 Squash the drama**

Girls are catty and mean- particularly to members of the same sex. We talk about each other, to each other, whenever we have the opportunity. They have a secret code that they live by and that code basically states: if I don't like you than my friend doesn't like you either. Everyone is on a side, even the ones who think they aren't, because if you are not with me you are against me.

For girls, there is no time where it's ok to be "friends" with the girl you don't like. If we are not speaking it, we are almost always thinking about how much we dislike them. This causes TONS of problems on softball teams especially when the girls get older because boys enter the picture. It is your job as the coach to set the tone and teach them that just because you play ball with someone does not mean you have to "like" them or be friends with them. It just means each teammate needs to respect each other for the value each of them bring to the team.

In order to do that, you MUST communicate everyone's value to all of the members of the team. You can do this by speaking about an individual players strengths to one another, or in a group setting, that way everyone begins to see the contributions that each player makes to the team. It also means that you have to tell them that being friendly- and actually being friends- are 2 totally different things.

In a girls mind, the easiest way to handle a girl she doesn't like on her team is to avoid interaction with that girl all together. The problem is that teammates HAVE to talk to each other on the field and in the dugout- because the first team that stops talking, loses. There were plenty of girls I played ball with who honestly were not my cup of tea. But as a pitcher, I still had to figure out how to work with them so they would work for me while I was on the mound. Team hopping happens way too often these days. A life lesson for them is to teach these girls how to work through their problems or how to put them aside for the betterment of the team. Otherwise, they will not be able to handle the same situation later in life.

### **Rule #10 Toughen them up**

Girls can be drama queens, the collapsing into a huge pile of helplessness after being hit by a pitch is all a little bit overwhelming to me, and I'm sure to you as well. Be sure they are ok, but do not play into the hysterics. Teach them the difference between being hurt and being injured. If they are hurt they can, and should, be expected to play through the pain. However, if they are injured, they should go immediately to seek medical treatment.

Girls are often babied, so it's the coaches responsibility to stay calm and to try and help them decide that they are ok to get up and get back on the field. I remember I was coaching a 14&U team and my pitcher got hit in the shin with a line drive up the middle- and BOOM!, she went down like a ton of bricks. I waited for the play to end and took my time walking out to the mound while the girl is rolling around thriving in "pain". I finally got to the mound and said, "You done yet?" (Keep in mind I was very familiar with this player.) Startled, she looked at me and said, "Yes." I said, "OK, well let's get up then." I held out my hand to help pull her up. She got up and was still a little hesitant to put weight on her leg but after some encouragement, she was walking around and decided on her own to stay in the game.

Girls and just kids in general need to learn that injuries like scrapes, scratches, and big bruises are not as bad as they seem-and in fact should be treated as a battle wound. I actually encourage my girls to take pictures if the

wound is what they would consider “Facebook worthy”. That way when they grow up and look back at those photos, they will remember that game and not only if we won or lost, but how they got hurt and pushed through it. Overall, understanding that they are important members of a team and that their teammates are counting on them is an extremely important lesson for them to learn.

### **Rule #11 Let them be sassy!**

I’m not talking about being rude or back talking; I’m talking about being sassy. You know, like having an attitude on the field. Some girls are born with it, yet some girls take a while to find their sass, But each and every one of them need to be able to embrace it and express it on the field without feeling bad about it. Sass is how you know you have taught them the game. It’s shown by their soaring confidence levels. They have a little bit of swagger when walking up to bat or after making an awesome play. Yes, that’s the sass I’m talking about.

I want to be sure that I am clear: sass does NOT come from a player’s mouth- it is what they exude on the field. I’m sure all of you can remember that one team who was just plain cocky. And even though they never trash talked your team you knew, they knew, they were good. Sass breeds confidence and competitiveness on your team. Just make sure you put them in their place when it starts coming out of their mouths, because being confident is something you ARE, not something you tell people you are. My rule is we never walk around saying we are better than any other team out there but if a team says they are better than us we answer back with our play and our bats. Remember, it doesn’t matter how good you can talk- it matters how good you can play.

All in all, it’s important to give girls a voice, let them feel respected, and teach them when to run their mouth and when not to. You will not, nor will you ever, be able to control absolutely everything on the field or on your team. The big thing is to teach the girls in a loving, understanding, yet firm way. They need to know that you care about them as a person- not only as a player. Remember to handle any player vs player issues upfront in a non-confrontational way. Most of the time issues are blown out proportion because girls spend A LOT of time thinking things in circles. You have to teach them that families have problems but the best families don’t just let them fester, they deal with them head on and 9 out of 10 times they come out of it as a more cohesive unit than before.

Here’s to some awesome, and hopefully, tear free years of coaching female athletes!

Credit to Gary Leland, of Fastpitch.TV and link to [\*\*http://Fastpitch.TV\*\*](http://Fastpitch.TV)