



## SOFTBALL EXCELLENCE

with **Cindy Bristow**

# 4 Keys For Successful Post Game Talks

It's the fourth inning, you were up by two and suddenly you find yourself down by three! As the game implodes around you you're already planning for your post-game tirade. If this sounds familiar then read on to discover a more successful way to handle those post-game talks.

Addressing your team after a loss is never easy but make sure you don't fall into the traps that can start to make losing a habit.

The best advice I can give you for your Post-Game talks is simple: get in and get out! You're a softball coach, not a professional speaker. Your role is to help teach your players the skills needed to succeed and then to strategize during the game to beat your opponent – not to give a grand and glorious speech when it's all over and everyone's a genius!

After the game isn't the time to start re-hashing things play-by-play. The team either won or lost based on lots of factors so starting down a long and usually horrible list of every single terrible play will not improve your team's chances for their next game: in fact, quite the opposite. The only person that feels good after one of the blistering post-game rants is you! There isn't one player on your team who is improved from your words and isn't that your main role, to help improve your players?

Oh trust me, I know what I'm talking about since I was that coach! I've giving some absolutely horrible post-game tirades that would make General Patton himself proud. Of course they did NOTHING to help my team. I used to take notes on the back of my lineup card about things I wanted to address following the game, and none of them were positive so I know the temptation to rant and rave.

But then I had a brain transformation. A combination of forces hit me that made me suddenly realize my players weren't trying to screw up – in fact quite the opposite. They were trying their hardest to play good, and this horrible game we all just played was the best they could do. So I finally realized that what my players really needed from me wasn't a negative play-by-play but instead, was some form of hope that they wouldn't perform this horribly the next time they showed up.

So my brain transformation was one of the parts that led to my post-game talk change, but there was another part as well, and that was hearing a clinic topic by my good friend Sharon Drysdale. Sharon, at the time was the Head Coach at Northwestern and still is one of the most forward thinking people I know. Well Sharon gets up there and tells everyone that she eliminated all post-game talks. That she couldn't find anything positive about them so she decided to just get rid of them. Now to me, that made a TON of sense, but it was also like saying that we could never bunt anymore – it was a very un-softball like at the same time!

Well thanks to Sharon I tried it with the professional team I was coaching at the time and it worked! It didn't just kind of work, it worked great! Now before we look at the Keys to Your Post-Game Talks and how you should handle the end of the game if

you decide like I did to eliminate your talks, let's discuss a few details about these talks.

Most of us are coaching girls or women, although there are a few of you out there who are fortunate enough to be coaching boy's fastpitch, but the majority of this reading audience is coaching women. So, let's look at a few keys about coaching girls and women:

### WOMEN ARE SENSITIVE:

- Something as simple as trying to be motivational and pump up a team can suddenly go very wrong if you aren't aware of the pitfalls that lie ahead.
- Men aren't too sensitive so it takes them awhile to figure out somebody's upset. If the coach is really mad then tone of voice isn't enough with guys. There will need to be some yelling and screaming thrown in along with a trash can or two kicked, all in an effort to really drive home the fact that the coach is upset. Guys won't take any of it personally but will simply say, "wow, coach is mad, we better play better."
- Women on the other hand...try kicking a trash can in front of them and they'll think you're nuts!

### VOICE MATTERS:

Tone of Voice is everything with women so as soon as you even look mad women already know you're mad - you don't have to start yelling. How you say something can matter far more to women than what you say, so be careful of your Tone of Voice.

### WOMEN BLAME THEMSELVES FOR THINGS:

So when you're really only mad at one or two players but decide to yell at the entire team, chances are every single player on that team thinks you're mad at them and now you've got a real problem on your hands.

### NOBODY LIKES TO BE EMBARRASSED:

The players already played bad once, you don't have to embarrass them again by yelling at them or making them run in front of everyone. Nobody likes to be embarrassed, male or female so avoid doing it to them yourself.

I mention these things because most of us use our post-game talk to break everyone of these little keys. If you already know how your audience will receive your information and that it won't be helpful in the slightest (other than making you feel better), than why go ahead and do it?

Instead, let's look at some things you can do following a game to really help ensure that your players leave feeling ready to show up next time and play good.

### REMEMBER TO GET IN AND GET OUT – FAST:

1. If They Played GOOD! – Simply tell them great job, I'm proud of you! Point out anyone that played exceptionally good (be sure to include bench players who might have had a small role but a big contribution!)
2. If They Played BAD! – tell them don't hang your heads, nobody tried to play this way. Point out anyone who might have had a good game, then let them know we'll work on some things

at our next practice that will help improve our play. Remind them that everyone has bad games so leave it here on this field and don't take it home with you!

**3. Give Them What Happens Next:**

- a. If they have another game – then give them the time and location and uniform
- b. If they are leaving the field – tell them how long they have before they leave, what they can or can't do in the meantime, where they need to be when it's time to leave, and what time you are leaving
- c. If they have practice next – tell them when it is, where it is, what time and what to wear.

**4. Finish With a Positive Comment –** Find something positive to say, that is real, and end on that. I just heard Joe Madden, the manager of the Tampa Bay Rays talk about his team's performance following a 12-2 loss. He said, I thought our guys played well, they (meaning the other team) just hit more home runs than us – by a lot! OK. Point made. Our pitchers gave up too many home runs but our hitters could have produced more runs at the same time. We don't need to outline how bloody the battle was when we all know we lost the war, that day! If you can't bear to think of life without your wonderful Post-Game Talks then at least consider these suggestions before opening your mouth next time:

**Calm Down First:**

If you're really mad take a second to calm yourself and your voice down before addressing your team. Too many times we talk while we're mad and once the words come out you can't take them back. Your personal frustration with how they played is nothing compared to theirs. They played it and now you want to blast them for it, again? Calm down first!

**One Is Enough:**

Get rid of the concept of every single member of the coaching staff having to stand there and give their opinion about how you just played. Enough already!! The team got it while they were playing it they didn't even need your comments so for sure they don't need the 3rd assistant's observations.

**Take It Away From the Crowd –** quit holding your talks in front of everyone. The game itself was bad enough and now the team has to sit there in front of their parents, friends and fans and get yelled at by you? Stop. Be kind and if you feel you must yell at them then do it in a location where nobody else can see it.

**THE PUNISHMENT QUICKSAND:**

Be VERY careful if you make them run immediately after a game. If the team played bad they know they did, and they know they deserve some kind of punishment for it but they don't deserve to do it in front of everyone! I asked a 12 year old girl the other day how she felt about her coach making their team run 19 poles (19 poles!) following a horrible game. She said they knew they deserved to be punished since they played so bad, but do it at practice and not in front of everyone. She also said that killed the whole team spirit and they all want to quit. It wasn't the punishment but where it was doled out.

**ADDRESS IT AT PRACTICE:**

Instead of losing your mind right after the game, wait until your next practice and then calmly ask your team, "so, what do you guys think about how we played?" They'll all start tearing themselves apart - you won't have to. They'll point out all the things they individually and collectively need to work on so then you get to say, "great! Now let's get started on fixing all that!" which is a much more positive situation for everyone.

**HAVE A SOLUTION:**

Instead of just pointing out the problems be a high level coach and have a solution. Give them something specific to focus on to turn things around and try to reconstruct & support them. They need to know you support them and are giving them a strategy to change things. If you blame them for how things are then they'll give up on themselves and it's all over!

And finally, remember that no matter how important softball is to you it's still just softball. We aren't talking open heart surgery. As coaches we are the leaders and if you want your team to bounce back from a tough loss with confidence, energy and fire then YOU be the change you want to see. YOU have that same confidence and energy and fire!

For more help on this topic check out the following:  
**Book – A Coach's Guide to Creating Team Chemistry:**  
<http://www.softballexcellence.com/Detail.bok?no=7>



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