



Purpose of Icebreakers

According to a study from *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*¹, coaching behaviors and attitudes are highly correlated with the feelings young players have towards the sport and season as a whole. Coaching behaviors have an impact on the way each player perceives and feels about the sport rather than self-esteem. Youth coaching has a critical part in the future perceptions of sports for the individual player. A key practice that can be done by coaches are proper warm-up activities and icebreakers that positively introduce the child to the sport and to their other teammates. Group development activities are crucial for running a successful team as well as making sure everyone feels welcome, appreciated, and cared for. The main benefits of team icebreakers are initially establishing a friendly and welcoming environment that will extend for the length of the season. These activities should help break up cliques and create a non-threatening space for all players. These should help all the players get to know each other early on and allow for open communication. The important question to ask before each icebreaker is where the team is at with familiarity already. Do the children know each other from school? Do they know each other from a previous team? The coach can decide certain aspects of activities based on the bond, or lack thereof, that already exists between the players. If some of these icebreakers do not start off with introductions of names in the description, this should always be the first step.

Icebreaker Examples

- Brain Name Game:

This game is a name learning game. Everyone on the team sits in a circle. Coach can go first and say their name and favorite food. The next person in the circle goes, says the name of the previous person (in this case the coach), their own name and then their favorite food. As each player goes, they have to say all the previous names before them. This game is tricky for whoever is sitting at the end but if the player forgot the names, just remind them and keep going through the circle!

- Hot Potato:

This game can be played best with sports that involve catching. It can also be played with passing (soccer) on the ground. Before going into separate teams, everyone introduces themselves to the larger group. Split into groups of whatever size makes sense for the team

¹ Smith, R. E., Zane, N. W., Smoll, F. L., & Cappel, D. B. (1983). Behavioral assessment in youth sports: Coaching behaviors and children's attitudes. *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise*, 15(3), 208-214.

(at least 2 groups). Introduce again with the smaller groups. Groups stand in a circle and throw/pass the ball to one another while calling out their name. Once every pass is completed the whole team may take a step back. As the circle gets bigger, the game should get harder. Play for a couple minutes, the biggest circle at the end wins.

- **Human Knot:**

This game is great for communication between teammates. Get the team to stand in a circle. Every player puts their hands out and grabs different players hands across from them. Once every hand has another hand, the team must try to work their way out of the knot without letting go.

- **Move it, Move it:**

This game is great for learning names. Have the team stand in a large circle. You stand in the middle. Have the players memorize the names of the person to their left and right. You go around the circle pointing at random players and saying either "left" or "right" and they must say the name that correlates. After a however long the coach sees fit, you may scream "move it" and all the players find a new spot and start over with introductions of the players to their left and right.

- **Three Things:**

Divide the team into smaller groups of 3 or 4 and have those groups each chat for about 5-10 minutes and have them come up with three things they all have in common. Once each group has those three things, have them share them to the whole team.

- **Twinning Teammates:**

This game is a great way for players to bond and find similarities between one another. Have the team get into a big circle. The coach can go first and stands in the middle of the circle. The person in the center will say a fun fact about themselves. This could be a physical characteristic (eye color, shoe color, hair color, etc.) or something they like (food, school subject, color). If anyone in the circle shares that quality or liking, they run around and switch standing positions in the circle with someone else that also shared that quality. All those that don't have that quality or liking, stay put for that round. Whoever didn't find a spot to stand in the circle is now in the middle and they state a new characteristic about themselves. This should continue until everyone gets a chance to be in the middle of the circle.

- **Rock, Paper Scissor Caterpillar:**

This game starts with everyone finding a partner (depending on how many players, the coach can join to make it even) and playing rock, paper, scissors. The loser of that match put their hands on the shoulders of the winner and now follows them to the next competitor. The winner moves on to play another winner and as the games go on the line of people behind each person grows until there are two final competitors. For the final game of rock,

paper, scissors, each player should have a whole line of teammates behind them cheering them on.

- **Scary Toes:**

This game is a good way for kids to get their wiggles out and learn to let loose with their teammates before a practice. Everyone gets in a circle and looks down at their feet. The coach will walk around and when the coach yells “up!” everyone looks up and stares at one person. If two people look up and are both staring at each other than they have to each start screaming. The person who screams the longest wins. The person who lost the screaming match now sits out and the circle gets smaller making it easier to make eye contact with the same person. This continues until the last two people. Coach will say “up” for the last two and they have a final screaming match. An alternative to this game would be having each player scream the players name that they are making eye contact with rather than just screaming loudly.

- **Shake and Pop:**

This next game calls for some level of comfortability from the coach and players. The coach should have access to their phone in order to play music. This game is a fun and silly way for players to practice names and have fun with team bonding moments. Coach will play the song “Shake & Pop”- Radio Edit by Green Velvet and Walter Phillips. The team will get into a circle and everyone should start dancing in place. The song will play and the coach will start with the beat. Every time the buzzer noise happens, the person with the beat will point to another person, in the circle, state their name and pass them the beat. The new person called will dance with the beat until the next time the buzzer noise happens, and then they will point and say the name of a new person. (The noises are frequent so the beat should get passed around to everyone in the circle for the duration of the song).