

Women in sport

What coaching style do female athletes tend to prefer?

Emma Ross:

Research suggests that female athletes tend to prefer a more democratic approach to the coaching process. Now what that means is they want to co-create parts of the coaching process.

They want to explore the reasons behind some of the decisions that a coach is making versus males who might tend to value a more autocratic approach. That is, the coach will tell them what to do and they will follow those instructions.

So understanding what female and male athletes really appreciate in terms of your coaching style can be really helpful in you getting the best out of them. There is really no such thing as a male and a female brain.

And we are all shaped by our genetics and our biology, that's the nature part. And our environment our upbringing, our education and society, that's the nurture part. And so we are all beautifully unique. But what the research helps us to understand is where women and men tend on average to differ in how they think and behave.

For a coach to get the best out of their female athletes, the research suggests and the evidence really spans from high performing Olympic level athletes right through to girls participating in sport, that the quality of the relationship between the coach and the athlete is really important to females.

And what that means is that coaches need to invest in that relationship because it means a lot to their athletes and they get confidence and motivation from that. So being interested in their life, in things that are happening outside of the sport, what that athlete has done today or been on holiday.

Really investing in the quality of that personal relationship between coach and athlete is something that will really help support the performance of that female athlete. In male athletes, there tends to be more value placed upon the quality of the coach. So how well has that coach done in the past? How many really good performers has he or her supported?

And the quality of the relationship is of less value but actually for female athletes, the emphasis is placed upon the quality of that relationship between coach and athlete.