

# A tough loss – what is next

After a tough loss:

1. Stress hormones are often through the roof.
2. Our sense of competency, self-worth, and confidence plummet.

We are in threat mode.

**To the Coach** – Your job is to get people out of threat & protect mode so that they can recover & be open to learning and growing.

A few tips:

## 1. Establish Trust

1. Handling setbacks starts well before you actually face a loss.
2. A player needs to know that a coach wants to help that individual.
3. The coach may be their boss, but if the relationship is built on mutual trust, support, and purpose, it lays the foundation.
4. In rugby players, debriefing and watching game tape with large strangers led to an increase in cortisol.
5. Watching that same film with a friend decreases cortisol
6. Why? Watching where you screwed up with a large stranger is threatening!

## 2. Social Recovery

1. Being around friends helps bring stress back down. Friends = non-threatening. We don't have to put on a facade, worry about showing emotions, etc.
2. Socializing after a tough loss is step one. It's why I love sending athletes off on a cool down jog

or routine with their teammates right after a race. That gives them the time and space to destress and informally process & debrief. By the time they get back, they are ready to talk about it more objectively.

3. A great way to enhance this effect is through meals. Meals invite socialization and interaction. It's ingrained in us as humans.
4. Create the right gathering soon after a competition.
5. LEAVE PHONES OUT OF THIS

### **3. Bolster competency**

1. The more intertwined a sport is with your sense of worth, status, or competency, the more threatening a loss feels.
2. Two things help here:
  1. Diversify your sources of meaning & competency
  2. Have ways to bolster that in times when competency is low
3. We are illogical after a tough defeat. We remember the bad times, the missed plays, the things that tell us that we suck.
4. We need to have ways to turn that down, and remember that we are actually good at this thing.
5. We need to work hard to bolster the good parts & turn the 'bad' into information, instead of emotion-laden threats.

### **4. Turn down the alarm**

1. When we are in threat & protect mode, we start seeing threats everywhere. We have a hyperactive alarm.
2. Everything is a sign that we suck and that this loss = the end of the world.
3. Our brain narrows in on disaster
4. One way to deal with this is to zoom out  
*Bring perspective:*

1. Will this loss change the opinions of your family & friends?
2. Does anyone really care if you lose this game?
3. How will you view this in 5 years?
4. Who & what truly matters in your life?
5. Figure out ways to zoom out to turn down the alarm. This isn't life or death

#### **5. Get back to the work**

1. Big wins and tough losses share at least one thing in common: it is admittedly hard to get back to work after them.
2. Have ways to overcome this resistance – I use the 24-hour rule which says:
  1. wallow
  2. feel sad
  3. BRIEFLY
  4. get back to work.
3. It gets you back to taking action, instead of being stuck in inaction.
4. Use the WIN acronym – **W**hat is **I**mportant **N**ow

#### **6. Move from emotion to information**

1. Move from the emotion of a loss, to using it as information to absorb and utilize to get better.
2. Part of this is understanding emotions, instead of avoiding or pushing them away. When we avoid, our brain sees them as threats. The more we get comfortable with the myriad of emotions we'll experience; the less they become these foreign threats
3. See the pain or anxiety of a loss no different than the pain you experience with working out. You use that pain as information to decide if it's fatigue or injury
4. Every time we watch our mistakes or losses in our game film, we have an opportunity to turn down the alarm.

5. Do you cringe & avoid, or do you accept & sit with the mistake?
6. See mistakes as information.
7. **Don't ingrain avoidance.**
  1. The final step is for coaches: If you frequently yell, scream, and punish after a tough loss...what are you ingraining?
  2. Avoidance. You amplified and confirmed the threat. And that athletes' brain learns the appropriate response is protect mode.  
The next time an athlete is in a similar spot, they'll default to avoidance.
  3. You've just ingrained fear as a motivator...
  4. Fear is a short-term survival motivator that is horrible over the long haul

Remember, do not only focus on results

1. You can be the better team and lose
2. You can see player development and lose
3. You can see tactical outcomes from the training ground on the pitch and lose

Development is key so losing can also be winning