

Should Line Drills Be Called “Suicides”?

Athletes are more likely to learn, grow, and enjoy themselves within a positive sport environment created by the coach. Part of doing so is being intentional about language used and how it could affect athletes.

If it were ever appropriate to call running drills “suicides,” it is no longer. Too many adolescents have taken their own lives and your players may know someone who has. Use of that term should be eliminated immediately from every coach’s vocabulary.

Some alternatives to calling sprinting drills ‘suicides’ are:

- ‘Line Drills’
- ‘Wind Sprints’
- ‘Out and backs’
- ‘All-Outs’
- Coaches can also introduce the fitness drill and ask the team to come up with their own name.

Here are some additional reasons not to label conditioning with such a negative name nor use it as punishment:

- Being mindful of the lived experience of athletes and acknowledging that using the word “suicide” may resurface previous trauma
- Using this language can create a negative association with physical fitness
- In limited practice time, conditioning should be multi-purpose in nature and done with a ball as often as possible
- A coach’s words matter. How you present an activity, both in name and design, goes a long way toward placing players in a proper mindset
- Players are more likely to practice hard and focus when they feel supported to do so and not when they fear having to run if they make a mistake
- If the last thing players do before leaving practice is something that they dislike, the coach is developing a negative atmosphere. It is better to end practice on a positive note and have everyone looking forward to getting back to work at the next practice

When a coach takes the time to develop supportive relationships with athletes, they can address challenges using their connection. What could that look like?

- Instead of making a player who shows up late to practice run laps as punishment, ask them to warm up on the side and join the team when they are ready. Set aside time either after practice or during a break to find out what happened and confirm expectations.
- If a team loses a scrimmage, instead of making them run sprints, huddle them in and ask them how they can improve next time out. Appreciate their efforts and provide specific examples of how they can improve.

A positive coach should aim to inspire athletes to give their best effort through connection and support, rather than by instilling fear through the use of physical activity as punishment.

This resource was developed with PCA Trainer Ray Lokar

