

## TO EXCEL IN SPORT, TAKE CARE OF YOUR 5CS!

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### YOUNG REVIEWERS:



GRACE

AGE: 15



JACOB

AGE: 11

Youth sport offers an important opportunity for young people to develop their technical and physical skills. However, these are not the only important elements of performance. A young athlete's mental and social skills are vital for coping with some of the challenges that sport brings. In this article, we introduce you to the 5Cs—a new method used by coaches to help develop mental and social skills in their athletes. We describe the behaviors that we see in athletes who show high levels of the 5Cs: commitment, communication, concentration, control, and confidence. We discuss how recent research with youth football coaches has helped them to apply coaching strategies and techniques to aid the development of these important qualities in young athletes and their teammates.

### THE 5CS

When coaches work with young athletes, it is not only the athletes' technical, physical, or tactical skills that the coaches are trying to develop. Every sport has its own unique set of mental demands, and these demands are different for team sports vs. individual sports.

In individual sports such as tennis, you go head-to-head with a single opponent and you are entirely responsible for every decision and tennis stroke that you make (about every 1.5 s!) You have to make hundreds of decisions in a match, but there is no coaching from the side lines, and no substitutes to help you out if you are underperforming. There are no draws or ties, no time limits in a match, and no personal best scores at the end. There is simply a winner and a loser. In team sports such as football, you must be equally as focused when you do not have possession of the ball as when you do—through looking for teammates and anticipating movements. You have the pressure of performing well and consistently to secure your place on the team. You are challenged to recover quickly after mistakes, and your support, encouragement, and leadership skills are tested, particularly if your teammates are not playing well and frustrating the team's chances of success.

All types of sport impose various mental and emotional pressures on young athletes because of the way each sport is structured and played. This means that mental and social skills are very important for young athletes to master. Sport psychologists have long been interested in helping athletes to improve their performance [1, 2]. Mental skills can help with the mental and emotional demands of a sport, and sport psychologists have come up with some of the most important mental skills and qualities that young athletes can develop and practice [3, 4]. In this article, we present the 5Cs as an emerging approach that coaches can take to help athletes develop the mental and social skills required for their sport [5]. We will define each C, discuss recent research, and give examples of the most important behaviors that young people can practice to develop their 5Cs.

## THE 5CS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR SPORT

Young athletes and players can demonstrate a great variety of behaviors in sport—some of which are helpful to their performance and some of which are harmful. Imagine the coach of football team—let us call her Coach Jessica. She is watching a match and looking at the way her team is performing. Take a look at Figure 1 to see some of the words she uses to describe what she sees in her players.

Coach Jessica sees many players demonstrating high levels of effort, determination, and persistence, but a few players seem to be giving up and not getting involved in the match. These players are also showing frustration and arguing with their teammates for making mistakes. One of the players encourages those uninvolved teammates to refocus and gives out instructions to support them. The uninvolved players switch back on and get their heads up. They start to get more involved and help out their teammates. Coach Jessica sees players competing with a higher energy and a more positive attitude, and the team starts to perform better.



## COMMITMENT

The quality or strength of your motivation to improve and persevere in the learning and performance of skills.

## COMMUNICATION

How well you send and receive information to and from others through behaviours such as encouragement, praise and acknowledging feedback.

## CONCENTRATION

Your ability to consistently focus and refocus effectively on what is required for the task in hand.

## CONTROL

Your ability to recognise, understand and manage thoughts and feelings so that you create an emotional state that helps your performance.

positive behaviors associated with that C and, in lowercase letters, you can see the negative behaviors that represent the lack of that C.

### Commitment

**Commitment** reflects the strength of your motivation to improve, persevere, and learn new skills. Commitment drives you forward and is demonstrated by athletes who show consistent effort from start to finish, high-quality preparation, and a desire for taking on new challenges. Athletes with great commitment focus on making improvements and learning from their mistakes. They take pride in how their efforts lead to progress, regardless of whether they win or lose.

### Communication

**Communication** involves the social skills shown when building relationships with teammates, coaches, and parents. The quality of your communication skills are demonstrated in the ways that you send and receive information. Asking questions; sharing your thoughts; and giving encouragement, praise, and positive instructions are all ways of sending information to your teammates. Acknowledging a teammate or your coach with a thumbs up or a clap is a non-verbal way to send a positive message. Listening respectfully to a coach, accepting feedback, and taking advice or instructions from teammates are great ways of receiving information that can help your performance. Good communication is an essential social skill that acts like superglue for teamwork!

### Concentration

**Concentration** is an athlete's ability to focus on the right thing at the right time. Athletes with great concentration stay focused on the key components of a task during many potential distractions that compete for their attention. If they lose focus, they are good at recognizing it quickly and often say a positive phrase to themselves or pick a key object (like the ball or a teammate) on which to refocus.

### Control

Sport inevitably brings feelings of nervousness because it is exciting and physical, and no one knows how the competition or match will end. With such uncertainty, a dose of nerves is completely normal, but it is important to stay in **control** of your feelings. Keeping calm, positive, and composed while also being alert and ready are some of the features of good emotional control. The ability to take care of your thoughts, feelings, and emotions is vital. Using slow, steady breathing techniques, listening to your favorite music, and showing positive, helpful reactions after making mistakes are some of the strategies that can make you a master of control.

## CONFIDENCE

The belief in your ability to perform well through making positive decisions and being fully present, assertive and engaged in your role.

### Confidence

**Confidence** is often what athletes experience and feel when their other 4Cs are going well. Because of their high commitment, communication, concentration, and control skills, an athlete with high confidence is likely to test out new skills, take calculated risks, show strong body language, and be a leader who supports others. These athletes will consistently fight to the end, regardless of whether they are winning or losing.

### WHAT DOES RESEARCH TELL US ABOUT THE VALUE OF THE 5CS?

Sport psychologists believe that it is important for young athletes to practice their 5Cs just like they practice physical and technical skills [1, 2, 6]. However, not all sport clubs employ sport psychologists, so researchers have examined whether educating coaches about these concepts can help young people to master the 5Cs. In one study, researchers taught coaches about one C at a time and told them how they could help players to improve on that C [1]. Coaches were instructed to follow this procedure:

- The coach started the training session by asking players to talk about what behaviors and qualities they felt were important in terms of that C. The players provided examples of things they could demonstrate on the field.
- The coach then challenged the players to show some of these behaviors and work together on the field.
- When a player demonstrated an example of a C, such as positive encouragement to a teammate (communication), the coach praised the player and gave positive feedback.
- Players were encouraged to praise each other when they noticed a teammate demonstrating a particular C. For example, Jack said "that is such great determination, Chris, keep working hard" when Chris persevered (commitment) after making a mistake.
- The coach praised all the players when he saw them encouraging each other, which resulted in a positive and energized training environment.
- At the end of the session, the coach asked the players to share what they had learned, which C behaviors had been demonstrated well, and how they could improve next time.

The coaches practiced each individual C for 3 weeks before being taught the next C, until they had spent 15 weeks coaching all of the 5Cs. The players improved their levels of commitment, communication, concentration, control, and confidence in their practice sessions as the 15 weeks progressed [3], and the coaches reported greater confidence levels too, which made a difference in their players' mental and social skills.



In a second research study at a football academy, the parents of the players were also involved in offering perceptions of their children's 5Cs on the field, without knowing that, in secret, the coach was being educated on the 5Cs one at a time [2]. In this case, the players not only improved in their 5Cs over time, but parents also reported the same views on the progress of their children. Parents also noticed that their children were using some of the same skills at school. For example, one parent noted how their child had improved his English communication skills and was more confident at reading in public [4].

In both studies, coaches encouraged the players to support their teammates in showing 5Cs behaviors—both coaches and teammates have the power to support and influence young athletes. Although these initial results are promising, more research on the 5Cs is needed to verify the results and make sure this method is reliable. Future research should examine different sports and settings (for example, music or schoolwork). Research is currently in progress to determine how parents can reinforce the 5Cs in their young athletes, and several football academies in the UK are now using the 5Cs programme to create a positive and caring culture for players, coaches, parents, and other support staff [7].

## CONCLUSION

Sport can place lots of demands on young people, but with the help of coaches, parents, and teammates, you can overcome these demands by developing positive mental and social behaviors. The 5Cs is an emerging approach that focuses attention on some of the most important qualities young people can show in sport, to help them have positive experiences [6]. Although results are promising, more research across different sports is needed to determine the wider benefits and effectiveness of the 5Cs approach.

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## YOUNG REVIEWERS

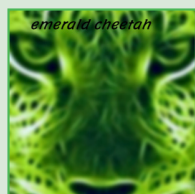
### GRACE, AGE: 15

I was born in Brisbane but moved to the Sunshine Coast when I was 2 years old. I am 15 years old and in grade 10. I am passionate about psychology and mental health and am looking to become a clinical psychologist when I am older. I love cats and have 3 at home. I also have a younger sister called Lilly. My hobbies include reading books, with my favorite genres being young adult and dystopian, as well as singing. I also like French and will be studying it in years 11 and 12.



### JACOB, AGE: 11

Hi! My name is Jacob, I have interests in math, coding in Python and Scratch, Minecraft, Roblox, and science. I have a Youtube channel called Emerald Cheetah Plays that is about Minecraft. I like playing chess, four in a row, backgammon, Monopoly, and card games. I live in Toronto with my parents and little sister, Noya. I also know how to brew Kombucha and regularly do so with my dad. I look forward to gaining experience as a peer reviewer.



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Chris Harwood, Ph.D., is a professor of sport psychology at Nottingham Trent University in the UK. His research interests and expertise lie in the psychosocial aspects of youth sport and athlete development, with a particular focus on the influence of parents and coaches. He has particularly focused his research in the fields of achievement motivation, sport parenting, and the 5Cs approach to athlete development ([www.the5Cs.co.uk](http://www.the5Cs.co.uk)). As a registered sport psychologist and practicing consultant, he has worked extensively with the Lawn Tennis Association, the Football Association, the International Tennis Federation, and several professional youth sporting clubs and academies. \*[chris.harwood@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:chris.harwood@ntu.ac.uk)



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