



Coaching 101 – Social Media

It is no secret that many view social media as an unwelcome distraction. In today's society, a single thoughtless tweet could spill a training secret or expose your team to negative media attention. Is it possible to use social media to enhance your coaching career? ABSOLUTELY

With a little planning and thought, social media can become another tool in your coaching tool kit.

Scenario 1

You are checking your email and suddenly a friend request pops up on your Facebook from a bowler. On one hand you have friended a few other athletes to make it easier to coordinate travel to tournaments, on the other hand however, this bowler is a minor. Do you accept the friend request from this bowler, or do you leave the request in your friend queue and make up some excuse about how you don't go on Facebook anymore?

Setting boundaries with your bowlers on social media can be awkward. To avoid hurt feelings, it is important to address the issue head on long before the first request. The decision of whether to interact with your bowlers on social media is a personal one, but it depends on a number of factors

- How old are your bowlers? Most experts in risk management highly recommend that as a coach you do not interact with any minors on social media. If you do make sure to keep all communications public and only use group chats (as opposed to one on one messages).
- What is your coaching pedagogy (method and practice of teaching)? Do you want to be seen as your bowler's friend? How does social media impact your ability to be seen as an authority figure? Is it important to you keep your coaching persona active in all interactions with your bowlers?
- What are your reasons for interacting with your bowlers via social media? Do you want to check up on your bowlers or coordinate logistics through messenger?

As a coach you have 4 options when it comes to interacting with your bowlers online:

1. Do not friend or follow your bowlers on social media.
2. Create distinct social media profiles for your professional career.
3. Friend your bowlers on your personal account with very restricted settings.
4. Friend all bowlers on personal accounts.

Of the 4 options, the least used is creating distinct social media profiles for your professional career. Doing so however, is often an elegant solution, since it allows you to extend your coaching persona to the virtual space and creates a strong distinction between your private and personal life. Which option you choose is entirely a personal choice. As long as you are consistent and communicate with your bowlers, you will avoid hurt feelings or accusations of favoritism.

How do I encourage my bowlers to use social media properly?

Often, when coaches talk to their teams about social media, they treat it as a new entity requiring a different set of rules. Studies show, however, that this approach can actually worsen online behaviour, since it encourages your bowlers to see social media as fundamentally different than the real-world communication. One of the reasons online bullying is so prevalent is that people don't see the person they're interacting with as real and may feel they're "playing a game where the rules of the real world don't apply". This dissociation can be a problem.

Instead, have a conversation with bowlers about proper team conduct that encompasses all forms of communications, including social media. By involving your bowlers in creating the team conduct policy, you will help them feel ownership over the rules, increasing the likelihood that they will follow them.

Here are some questions to get the conversation started:

- How should we treat each other as teammates?
- What principles should our team be guided by? Fairness, respect
- How will we deal with conflict within our team?
- How will we deal with winning and losing?
- How do we want to see outsiders see our team?
- Is there information that we would like to keep private as a team? (injuries, new training techniques)

Use your bowlers' information to draft a team conduct policy. When issues do occur, you will have a reference point for enforcing proper behaviour. It's up to you whether you want to include disciplinary actions for those who break the rules, or if you want to deal with infractions on a case by case basis.

Should I monitor my bowlers' social media profiles?

The question of whether you as a coach should be able to monitor a bowlers' social media presence is a hot button topic and a legal grey area. Many legal experts believe this violates your bowlers right to free speech and is unconstitutional. Instead of monitoring your bowlers' social media use, it's probably better to take a proactive approach and educate them on the proper social media conduct.

How do I use social media to further my coaching career?

When done well, social media can help you connect with other coaches, learn about advancements in sport science and discover grants, coaching clinics and seminars. How invested you want to be in social media depends on a number of factors including:

- How much time do I have to devote to social media?
- What are my social media goals?
- What sites will help me achieve my goals?
- Do I want to create professional social media accounts?

Remember, social media works best as a conversation, not a monologue, so please make sure that you follow the 80/20 rule. Only 20% of your content should be self-promoting, while 80% should be meaningful interaction with other people.

How do I use social media for team building?

Social media can help you stay connected to your team outside of practices, manage team logistics and even encourage your bowlers to maintain healthy habits that perhaps can give them an edge at your next tournament. Before you decide to integrate social media into team building strategy, you must ensure that everyone on your team can be included. If some bowlers don't have access to (or aren't permitted to use social media or computer, you should avoid it completely.

When using Facebook groups, make sure to note the following:

- They can be set as private so only your team has access to the group.
- They allow you to upload files, like weekly workouts and practice tips.
- They have a question function that is perfect for organizing your team logistics like meals, hotel accommodations.
- Have similar features, such as a wall where your bowlers can invite friends and family or upcoming tournaments.