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ATHLETICS

**2025 CMS
COACHES SYMPOSIUM**


**THE POWER OF COACHING
WITHIN COACHING:**
**Coaching Smarter,
Not Harder**

**THE
COACHING
SEAT**

Toyinda L. Smith

Mallard Creek High School
July 29, 2025

EMPOWERING COACHES FOR EXCELLENCE




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About Toyinda L. Smith
With over 25 years of experience in higher education and business, Toyinda L. Smith is a respected leadership coach, speaker, educator, and self-development author known for developing champions in every arena.
As the Principal of The Coaching Seat® and visionary behind the International Champion Influence® Coach & Facilitator Certification Program, Toyinda has trained and certified countless professionals and people leaders to coach, facilitate and lead with clarity, confidence, and purpose.

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More About Toyinda

Her roots run deep in athletics—Toyinda has coached track and field at the junior high, high school, and NCAA Division I & II levels in Indiana and South Carolina. A decorated athlete herself, she is a 5-time Big Ten Champion, 2-time runner-up, NCAA Indoor Champion, and a proud inductee of both the Indiana Track & Field and Purdue University Athletics Halls of Fame.

Toyinda is also a certified John Maxwell Coach, TEDx and DisruptHR speaker, and the creator of The Champion Influence® SEATS Process™ Coaching Model. She is an active member of the International Coaching Federation (ICF) and combines championship-level discipline with practical leadership strategies—helping organizations and individuals succeed beyond the game, the boardroom, and the classroom.

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Learning Objectives

- ✓ Shift from directive to developmental
- ✓ Use reflective questions to build ownership
- ✓ Establish structures that reinforce responsibility

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Have you ever left a game or practice feeling more exhausted than your athletes?

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**RESPONSIBILITY is
not taught—it's
TRANSFERRED.**

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**SHIFTING THE DYNAMIC
DIRECTIVE *vs* DEVELOPMENTAL**

Traditional Athletic Coaching
"Run harder."

Professional Coaching Approach
"What do you think happened?"

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**Athletes don't build
decision-making skills
when we make every
decision for them.**

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Coaching Begins with a Question

Open Ended Questions

- ✔ **Lead In:** Who, What, Where, When, How
- ✔ Do Not Use, **WHY!**
- ✔ Empower Ownership & Encourage Self-Led Solutions

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Try swapping **telling** for **asking**.

Use:

- ✔ What's your take on that?
- ✔ How did that feel compared to what we planned?
- ✔ If you were coaching you, what would you say?

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ACTIVITY:

Turn to the person next to you and replace this directive statement with an open-ended coaching question:

"You need to get your head in the game."

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REFLECTIVE DIALOGUE

Open-ended questions build **reflection**, which leads to **internal ownership**.

Athletes can't change what they don't reflect on.



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THE ARC OF REFLECTIVE COACHING QUESTIONS:

Awareness	Responsibility	Choice
What's happening?	What's my role in it?	What will I do differently next time?

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EXAMPLE FROM PRACTICE:

Situation: A player misses practice due to lack of time management.

COACH'S APPROACH:

A. "What got in the way of you being here today?"	R. "What part of that could you have planned differently?"	C. "What's your plan to make sure this doesn't happen again?"
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SOFTBALL EXAMPLE

Situation: A player repeatedly swings at pitches outside the strike zone.

A. Awareness What did you notice about the pitches you swung at that inning?	R. Responsibility What influenced your decision to swing at those pitches?	C. Choice What's your plan to adjust your pitch selection in your next at-bat?
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FOOTBALL EXAMPLE

Situation: A running back missed a key block that led to a sack.

A. Awareness What happened on that play from your perspective?	R. Responsibility What was your assignment, and how did your choice impact the play?	C. Choice What will you do differently next time to make sure the block is executed?
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ACTIVITY: THE ARC OF REFLECTIVE COACHING QUESTIONS:

Awareness What's happening?	Responsibility What's my role in it?	Choice What will I do differently next time?
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CREATING STRUCTURES THAT PROMOTE OWNERSHIP

Coaches can build responsibility into team culture by setting up **repeatable structures**.



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Structure 1: ACCOUNTABILITY CIRCLES

Once a week, 5-minute peer circles.

Athletes answer:

- ☒ "What did I do well this week?"
- ☒ "Where did I let the team or myself down?"
- ☒ "What's one thing I will work on this week?"

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Structure 2: MINDSET CHECK-INS

Daily or weekly journal prompts or verbal check-ins:

- ☒ "Where's your mindset today?"
- ☒ "What's one way you'll stay focused under pressure?"

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Structure 3: BEHAVIOR AGREEMENTS

Co-created expectations for:


- ✓ Practice behavior
- ✓ Locker room language
- ✓ Team communication



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When athletes *write it*, they *own it*.

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Bonus Strategy: THE ATHLETE-LED TIMEOUT

Give captains/players control over a timeout.

Ask afterward:

- ✓ "What did you choose to focus on?"
- ✓ "How did the team respond?"



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WHY COACHES WIN TOO

When athletes own their behavior, coaches gain:

- ✓ Less emotional burnout
- ✓ More trust and buy-in
- ✓ Deeper coach-athlete relationships
- ✓ Athletes who can self-correct in-game



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You don't want to be the voice in their head forever—you want them to *hear their own*.





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What's the *big deal*, concerning asking questions.



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We are *being intentional* about brain usage.

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**COGNITIVE BRAIN:
(LEFT HEMISPHERE)**

- ✓ Located in the **prefrontal cortex**.
- ✓ Handles **logic, planning, decision-making, problem-solving, reasoning**.
- ✓ Works best when **calm and focused**.

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COGNITIVE BRAIN
Coaching Impact:

When coaches ask **reflective, open-ended questions**, it activates the cognitive brain, helping athletes think strategically, evaluate options, and make better decisions.

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CREATIVE BRAIN: (Right Hemisphere)

- ✓ Engages during **imagination, visualization, and innovative thinking.**
- ✓ Fuels **possibility thinking**—"What if...?".
- ✓ Needs a **safe, low-pressure environment** to function well.

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CREATIVE BRAIN: Coaching Impact:

When coaches use techniques like **visualization, powerful metaphors, or brainstorming**, they activate the creative brain. This helps athletes see new approaches, stay flexible, and adapt to challenges.

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HOW THEY WORK TOGETHER IN COACHING

The **cognitive brain** analyzes the situation; the **creative brain** explores new solutions.

"What happened on that play?" (**Cognitive - analysis**)

"If you could replay that moment, what would it look like?" (**Creative - envisioning**)

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WHAT DISRUPTS BOTH?

Fear and **stress** trigger the **amygdala**, which shuts down both the cognitive and creative functions.

This is why creating psychological safety in coaching conversations is essential.



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PRACTICAL EXAMPLE FOR ATHLETICS:

- ✗ Instead of saying, "You need to run faster in the last 50 meters," try:
- ✓ **Cognitive Question:** "What did you notice about your pace in the final stretch?"
- ✓ **Creative Question:** "What would it look like if you attacked the finish as if it were your strongest moment?"

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REVIEW

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REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

What's one area you're over-functioning as a coach?

What's one question you'll ask differently this week?



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You are *not* just coaching a sport. You're coaching *character, clarity, and confidence.*





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Get this resource to
further the development
of your continuous
improvement.





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**PLEASE
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