



CANOEKAYAK CANADA DEBRIEFING DOCUMENT

CANOEKAYAK CANADA: COACHES DEBRIEFING DOCUMENT

What is debriefing?

Great coaches and athletes *plan, execute, and debrief!* Debriefing is a critical learning opportunity for both athletes and coaches and is a crucial component for excelling at the highest level. The process of debriefing encourages continued improvement, fosters clear and honest communication, helps each athlete take responsibility for his or her performance, and allows him/her to close the chapter emotionally on past performances (good or bad) in order to move on to the next step. Debriefing is not designed to place blame but rather to promote accountability, objective discussion about progress and results and be an integral piece to learning and overall improvement.

Every race, and every practice provide exceptional opportunities to evaluate effectiveness and help your athlete increase their level of self-awareness and, in turn, define new actions for improvement. Following any major competition, athletes, coaches and selected support staff should critically reflect on the performance as well as the timeframe leading up to performance. Following a debriefing session, both you, as the coach, and the athlete should be clear on precisely how he/she is progressing, where he/she stands relative to identified performance goals, and what he/she needs to focus on next to improve.

Why is debriefing important?

Debriefing in high-performance sport is particularly important because it fosters collaborative relationships focused on excelling at the highest levels. It also ensures accountability for results. It allows meaningful discussion and constructive feedback relating to both the performance process and the outcome. A successful debrief has been shown to increase learning, motivation and confidence, cognitive and emotional recovery, and improved self-awareness (Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, Medbery, & Peterson, 1999; Hogg, 1998, 2002; McArdle, Martin, & Lennon, 2010).

Psychological recovery is also an essential byproduct of effective debriefing. Strong mental and emotional responses often occur after competition and it is important that the athlete release emotions, particularly in order to avoid “carrying” negative emotions (e.g., self-doubt, perceptions of incompetence, feelings of fear or failure) into the next competition. After a sub-optimal performance athletes will often suffer immense disappointment, however, they will rebound more quickly if they can express those emotions, reflect objectively on the whole performance (i.e., not just focus on a single mistake), and learn from those mistakes. Debriefing helps to mitigate the impact of the event and to accelerate the recovery process. It is also important to debrief good performances, celebrate, and analyze how to repeat/replicate such a performance. Knowing how a race was won will build confidence.

What do I need to know about myself before starting the debriefing process?

Just like athletes, coaches (and support staff) are also accountable for whether or not the athlete is able to perform to expectations. For National team coaches, performance is not only judged on improved personal bests but also on the outcome (i.e., medals won). This pressure has the potential to generate strong emotions in coaches and can lead to a very subjective evaluation of the athlete's performance. External feedback is "meaningless if it is regarded by athletes as biased and self-serving or if coaches are overly preoccupied with negative outcomes and impose guilty feelings" (Hogg, 2002, p. 183). The goal of debriefing is to look openly and objectively at a performance and to collaborate on how the performance can be enhanced. A key tenant of the debriefing process is the process of communication between the athlete, coach, and identified support staff. One-way performance evaluations that are autocratic in nature, limit the athlete's capacity to think and act. It may also promote fear of evaluation and judgment, and lead to avoidance of self-reflection and limited (or absent) psychological recovery.

Open and honest self-reflection by the coach and/or sport science support staff should be completed prior to engaging in the debriefing process with the athlete. Think about the following questions.

How to prepare your athlete(s) for the debrief process

Competencies required by the coach are

- an awareness of your personal values
- an ability to analyze the performance in an impartial and objective manner, based on facts, and to turn all problem-solving decisions into action
- a willingness to allow the athletes sufficient time to reflect, learn, and recover from the performance experience
- an ability to ask good questions in order to challenge
- a readiness to offer and provide direction for the immediate future, while encouraging responsibility in all athletes
- an ability to communicate in a nonjudgmental way in order to resolve any conflict and ensure purposeful change.

Adapted from Hogg 2002

Athletes do not always have the capacity to self-reflect effectively and therefore facilitating this skill is essential to the success of the debriefing process. Athletes should have the capacity to self-reflect objectively on performance and on daily training in order to make conscious self-directed improvements every day. Without guidelines, athletes risk being overly self-critical or not critical enough. If overly self-critical (i.e., intense focus on *imperfections*), the athlete risks becoming discouraged and anxious during practice and performance. It is also possible that if the athlete is simply striving to feel comfortable (not critical enough) they may never progress to the next level. The balance therefore is in becoming comfortable and open about the daily objective debriefing (see Daily Debrief Exercise) of practice and performances. The bare minimum that athletes should be reflecting on daily in order to improve is (1) what parts of the race/training went well and why, (2) what parts of the race/training could be improved, and (3) what are the necessary steps to take in order to improve performance/training.

Competencies required by the athlete are:

- an ability to mentally recall the actual performance and be honest about what happened, what they were thinking/feeling
- a willingness to openly acknowledge strengths and weaknesses and to be realistic about performance outcomes
- an ability to communicate thoughts, feelings, and actions with honesty
- a desire to reflect on all aspects of performance with the intention to make changes
- an attitude of responsibility and accountability for the quality and intensity of one's effort in preparation and in execution
- an ability to be self-aware, particularly to gain insights into self-perceptions and to release any feelings that will likely hinder complete mental and emotional recovery.

Adapted from Hogg 2002

How to guide the debriefing process effectively

Timing

When scheduling a post-performance debrief it is important to consider what timing will be most effective. Immediately post-competition, athletes and coaches may be emotionally charged and the process of debriefing may be strongly influenced by those emotions. It is important that debriefing occur soon after the event so that vivid detail of the competition can be retained, but the athlete and coach should determine the optimal time and place to debrief where they can both be in a productive self-reflective frame of mind.

Athlete Self-Reflection

High-performance athletes must develop the ability to objectively assess performance and determine whether or not they did what was required. A thorough self-reflection on all aspects of performance (technical, physical, tactical, and mental) will allow for the athlete to learn from each experience. Athletes must be able to openly acknowledge both strengths and weaknesses and to be aware of what they must do to ensure optimal recovery and improve future performances. Taking time for internal reflection allows the athlete to express their views about what happened and what they feel should be improved. Forms for daily debriefing, post-race debriefing, and post-season debriefing for athletes are available in the tools section of this document.

Significant others Performance Analysis

Coaches and other identified significant others (sport science staff) should also complete a full reflection on the performance before entering the debriefing meeting. Forms for post-race debriefing and post-season debriefing for coaches and significant others are available in the tools section of this document.

The Debrief Meeting

Attitude and approach are critical to a successful and productive debrief meeting. Positive communication requires all individuals involved to be open, honest, positive, sincere, precise, focused, forthright yet empathetic, and fair. Coaches can help create this positive debriefing environment by remaining calm and objective. Coaches should begin by asking the athlete to speak first. Then the coach can add to that dialogue with facts from the training or performance result. And the coach can encourage discussion to ensure that positive solutions come from each meeting by focusing on resetting goals and restructuring plans to move forward.

Evaluation of the debriefing process

For the debriefing process to be effective, it must be ongoing!! You can debrief on a regular basis with your athletes, and at the end of each season. After implementing a debriefing program with your athlete, reflect on (1) how was it helpful for the athletes? (2) was there an improvement in commitment to training, to performance? (3) did communication improve? and (4) was the athlete able to engage in the process and begin to take responsibility?

References

- Hogg, J. M. (2002). Debriefing: A means to increasing recovery and subsequent performance. *Enhancing recovery: Preventing underperformance in athletes*, 181-198.
- McArdle, S., Martin, D., Lennon, A., & Moore, P. (2010). Exploring debriefing in sports: A qualitative perspective. *Journal Of Applied Sport Psychology*, 22(3), 320-332.

TOOLS TO USE FOR DEBRIEFING WITH YOUR ATHLETE(S)

ATHLETE DAILY DEBRIEF

Week #

Day	Goal	What went well?	What could be better?	Actions for improvement
Mon				
Tues				
Wed				
Thurs				
Fri				
Sat				
Sun				

Race Debrief (in Action)

Post-Race Debrief: Athlete

Competition: _____
 Event: _____
 Date: _____
 Race Conditions: _____

Time/Placing/Splits (if possible)
 Heat _____
 Semi _____
 Final _____

Overall I am satisfied with my performance for this event. Yes No Partially

Psychological Debrief: Rate on a scale of 0-6 (0 = not at all and 6 = very much)

Pre-Race I felt

1. Physically warmed up	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	6. Feelings of anxiety	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
2. Healthy	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7. Worried about performance	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
3. Mentally prepared	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	8. Distracted	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
4. Eager to race	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	9. Focused	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
5. Confident	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	10. Technically prepared	0	1	2	3	4	5	6

During the Race

1. I found myself thinking of unrelated things	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	<i>Comments</i> _____
2. I was able to focus on my race plan	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	_____
3. I was able to use emotions to my advantage	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	_____
4. I felt overwhelmed and not confident	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	_____
5. I let my focus drift to others around me	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	_____

Technical Debrief: Rate on a scale of 0-6 (0 = extremely poor and 6 = excellent)

Start/Transition/First 5th of the race 0 1 2 3 4 5 6
 Comments:

Middle section (100-400, 200-800) 0 1 2 3 4 5 6
 Comments:

Last 100 m/200m/Finish 0 1 2 3 4 5 6
 Comments:

Post-Race Debrief: Athlete (cont.)

What parts of my performance/race went really well? Why?

What parts of my performance/race can be improved?

What could I improve about the way I approach my preparation or my race/performance (attitude, perspective, focus, consistency, level of intensity, or state of relaxation etc)?

Actions: Based on the above evaluation, list three steps that you will take in order to improve.

*Complete this form 1 to 2 hours after racing your main event(s).
Complete for both heats and finals.*

POST-RACE DEBRIEF: COACH

Competition: _____
Event: _____
Date: _____
Race Conditions: _____

Time/Placing/Splits (if possible)
Heat _____
Semi _____
Final _____

Overall I am satisfied with my athlete's performance for this event. Yes No Partially

Psychological Debrief: *Rate on a scale of 0-6 (0 = not at all and 6 = very much)*

Pre-race I felt

Comments

- | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------|
| 1. my athlete was prepared | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | _____ |
| 2. my athlete was focused | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | _____ |
| 3. my athlete was calm and ready | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | _____ |

During the race I felt

Comments

- | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|-------|
| 1. my athlete executed the race plan | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | _____ |
| 2. my athlete was focused | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | _____ |
| 3. my athlete was nervous | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | _____ |

Technical Debrief: *Rate on a scale of 0-6 (0 = extremely poor and 6 = excellent)*

Start/Transition/First 5th of the race 0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Comments:

Middle section (100-400, 200-800) 0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Comments:

Last 100 m/200m/Finish 0 1 2 3 4 5 6

Comments:

POST-RACE DEBRIEF: COACH (CONT.)

What parts of the performance/race went really well? Why?

What parts of the performance/race can be improved?

Actions: Based on the above evaluation, list three steps that you consider essential to improve race performance.



POST-SEASON DEBRIEF: ATHLETE

Summary of Season Performances

Event: _____	Result(s): _____
Event: _____	Result(s): _____
Event: _____	Result(s): _____
Event: _____	Result(s): _____
Event: _____	Result(s): _____
Event: _____	Result(s): _____
Event: _____	Result(s): _____
Event: _____	Result(s): _____
Event: _____	Result(s): _____
Event: _____	Result(s): _____

Overall I am satisfied with my performances for this season. Yes No Partially
 Please explain:

What are five things I need to work on to improve my performance for next season?

Overall I am satisfied with my technical preparation for this season. Yes No Partially
Please explain:

What are three things I need to do to improve my technical preparation for next season?

Overall I am satisfied with my psychological performance this season. Yes No Partially
Please explain:

What are three things I need to work on to improve my psychological preparation?

Overall I am satisfied with my physical preparation for this season. Yes No Partially
Please explain:

What are three things I need to work on to improve my physical preparation?

POST-SEASON DEBRIEF: COACH / IST

Overall I am satisfied with how I prepared my athlete (technically/psychologically/physically) for this season.

Yes No Partially

Please explain:

What are three-four things I need to do next season in order to improve my own technical preparation?

Overall I am satisfied with my athlete's performances for this season. Yes No Partially

Please explain:

What would I suggest to do next season in order to improve performance - three to four things?

Overall I am satisfied with my athlete's technical preparation for this season. Yes No Partially
Please explain:

What will I do to improve my athlete's technical preparation for the next season?

Overall I am satisfied with my athlete's psychological performance this season. Yes No Partially
Please explain:

What will I do to improve my athlete's psychological preparation for next season?

Overall I am satisfied with my athlete's physical preparation for this season. Yes No Partially
Please explain:

What are three-four things I will do to improve my athlete's physical preparation for next season?
