

College Volleyball Team Uses MBTI® Tool to Build Self Awareness, Camaraderie and Respect Between Players

Serve, Set, Type!

What would personality type have to do with sports performance? Lots, says Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT) Ooks volleyball Head Coach, Keith Lundgren. “You can coach a team to win, or you can coach a team to be a team,” says Lundgren. He prefers the later. That said, he is paid to win games, so make no bones about it, his hope is that using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI®) for team building helps his team to a championship season.

The ultimate goal of any coach is to win. A big challenge on the way to this goal is to focus players on their strengths, and teach them to be supportive of each other, because, as Lundgren says, “what happens off-court tends to play itself out on-court.” Building self-awareness, camaraderie and respect between players has to happen inside and outside the sports arena.



“Winning is the result of a process,” says Lundgren. His process is working from strengths, and building a solid sense of on and off-court team connections. “What you fear, you create,” says Lundgren. A lack of confidence in your own ability, or the abilities of others, and barriers to communication are deadly

for sports teams who rely on being able to connect and respond to one-another. Using the MBTI® tool is one way for players to build self-confidence, good relationships and a sense of empowerment in their own skills and attributes, and in each other.

Building relationships between players who are full-time students, not full-time athletes and who come from different programs can be difficult. NAIT is one of Canada’s largest institutes of technology. Their volleyball team, the NAIT Ooks, is made up of young women, between 17 and 22 years of age, recruited from NAIT’s wide range of programs in business, culinary arts, health-sciences, and personal fitness training. HR specialist Clayton Davis and his colleague, Glenna Hayes, spent time with the volleyball team before the start of the school year to embed the MBTI instrument early in the relationship-building stage. Davis stresses that it is best to do the MBTI assessment sooner rather than later, so that the learning and positive dynamics could be affected from the get-go.

Players come to the team with pre-conceived concepts of what a stereotypical athlete might be. Take an Introverted player who is not loud and assertive on the sidelines. This may be misinterpreted as not supportive, when they are simply taking information in and processing it differently than an extroverted type. The MBTI assessment is affirming, and allows players to see the differences among themselves as valuable. “My players were totally open to the process,” says Lundgren.

Just like being able to apply and leverage game-skills learned in on-court practice to a game situation, players learn to use their preferences to relate to and benefit each other. It helps them find ways to use behaviors they may not normally access, as well as see ways to leverage the type preferences of others. “Making others better—that’s what it’s all about,” says Lundgren. The best athletes, no matter how strong their individual strengths, are focused on using their own skills to complement the strengths of others. HR specialist Davis confirms the thought, “if we understand each other, then we can be a better teammate for that person.”

The result? “I get a better athlete,” says Lundgren.

In day-to-day application, Lundgren has found the MBTI tool to be most useful in adding depth and perspective to his teaching style. “I know that the extroverts on the team will question me,” he says. To make sure he is understood, he can find ways to reach all of his team-members, such as finding a moment for one-on-one time with an introverted player.

Davis notes that it is always challenging to keep the initial enthusiasm and learning from the MBTI assessment alive and meaningful over time. Lundgren is finding creative ways to embed the MBTI tool in the team’s traditions. For example, the only poster in the team locker room is an MBTI type table, displaying each player’s name, type code and the positive attributes of their type. “That way everyone can see it all the time,” says Lundgren. Also, this season each player will have a chance to take their type—the strengths that they bring to the team—and relate that to the pride of being part of the NAIT Ooks tradition in a pre-game “Pride Speech.”

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is available from
Psychometrics Canada at www.psychometrics.com