

# SENSE OF COMPETENCE VS PERFECTIONISM: FINDING THE RIGHT TO MAKE MISTAKES

## SENSE OF COMPETENCE

A sense of competence is the perception one has of their ability to successfully accomplish tasks. In other words, for a young athlete, it is the feeling of being good or useful to their team. In sport, as in school, a sense of competence has a direct influence on young people's engagement and motivation.

While perfectionism is often linked to a fear of failure and external judgment—and can lead to frustration—a sense of competence, on the other hand, nurtures self-esteem, promotes satisfaction, and allows room for mistakes, which are a source of learning.

## Student-athletes' experiences: insights from the field

- **Constant comparison:** In sports, young people are constantly evaluated—through performance, statistics, and feedback—which can lead them to believe that their value depends on perfection.
- **Loss of confidence:** When every mistake becomes “proof” of incompetence, adolescents may withdraw. They take fewer risks, show less initiative, and begin to doubt their place.
- **Revaluing effort:** Feeling competent does not mean being perfect. It means recognizing one's progress, learning, and ability to improve.



# CONCRETE ACTION

## Introduce the “positive error sequence.”

Une fois par semaine (ou à la suite d'un entraînement marquant), prendre un moment collectif pour transformer les erreurs en apprentissages. Cette séquence peut se dérouler en quatre temps simples :

- Once a week (or after a meaningful practice), take a moment as a group to transform mistakes into learning opportunities.

This sequence can follow four simple steps:

- One or two players (or even a coach) share a mistake made during the week: a poor reflex, a misunderstanding, an emotional reaction, etc. The goal is to normalize mistakes, not to point them out negatively.
- Each person reflects on a short question:
  - What did this mistake teach me?
  - What will I do differently next time?Responses can be shared out loud or written down.
- Teammates acknowledge the courage it takes to share and highlight a positive quality observed in that person (e.g., “You noticed it quickly,” “You had the courage to talk about it”).

*This positive reinforcement helps shift the team's mindset around mistakes.*
- End the sequence by sharing a mistake you have made yourself, either in your own experience or during the past week. This humanizes the coach's role and shows that competence is built through trying—not through perfection.

