

#STIGMAOUT

● SPORT AS A SAFE SPACE FOR YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH ●

BOXING AND FOOTBALL TRAINING SHEETS



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INTRODUCTION

Sport as a setting to support young people's mental health

The following training sheets have been developed within the framework of the SO project, whose general objective is to provide sports organisations with practical tools to strengthen their competences in the field of youth and mental health.

Sports organisations play an important role in the lives of many young people. Coaches, trainers and sports educators often meet participants on a regular basis, observe them in situations involving cooperation, competition, pressure, frustration and achievement, and can contribute to creating environments in which young people feel safe, respected and supported.

For this reason, sport can represent an important setting for promoting young people's mental well-being.

The purpose of these activities is not to transform coaches into psychologists or mental health professionals. Their role remains educational and sporting.

Instead, the activities aim to help sports organisations and their operators become more aware of the connection between **sport, emotions, relationships and mental well-being**, and to provide practical methods that can be integrated into ordinary training sessions.

The methodology directly contributes to the three specific objectives of the SO project.

Increasing awareness of youth mental health and the connection between sport and mental health

The first objective of the project is to increase awareness of the mental health situation of young people in Europe and of the connection between sport and mental health.

The activities proposed in this document contribute to this objective by encouraging coaches and participants to recognise that mental well-being is connected to everyday experiences such as:

- managing pressure;
- dealing with mistakes and failure;
- recognising emotions;
- controlling impulsive reactions;
- communicating with others;
- developing trust;
- managing frustration;
- feeling respected and included within a group.

These elements naturally appear during sports activities.

The training sessions therefore help coaches use situations that already occur on the field or in the gym as opportunities to increase awareness of emotional and relational processes.

Participants are encouraged to recognise what they feel, how they react and which strategies help them regain concentration, communicate effectively or manage challenging situations.

In this way, mental health is not presented as something distant from everyday sporting practice, but as an aspect of young

people's overall well-being that can also be supported through positive sporting experiences.

Reducing the stigma associated with mental health problems

The second specific objective of the project is to reduce the stigma associated with mental health problems.

One important way to contribute to this objective is to make conversations about emotions, difficulties and mental well-being more normal within sporting environments.

Throughout the activities, participants are encouraged to talk about experiences such as:

- frustration;
- nervousness;
- fear;
- anger;
- tiredness;
- pressure;
- lack of confidence;
- difficulty concentrating.

These experiences are not presented as signs of weakness.

They are treated as normal human responses that can be recognised, discussed and managed.

By integrating short moments of reflection into regular sports activities, coaches can help create a culture in which talking about emotions or difficulties becomes more acceptable.

This is particularly important for young people, who may sometimes avoid expressing difficulties because they fear being judged, excluded or perceived as weak.

The activities therefore contribute to reducing stigma by promoting a simple but important message:

mental well-being is part of everyone's experience and talking about difficulties should be as normal as talking about physical well-being.

Providing practical educational methods for sports organisations

The third specific objective of the SO project is to develop educational methods and practical tools that sports organisations and their operators can use to support the mental health of young people in their communities.

The training sheets respond directly to this objective.

They have been designed as practical tools that coaches can implement within regular boxing and football sessions without requiring specialist equipment or extensive theoretical preparation.

Each activity combines three elements:

Sporting experience

Participants take part in a concrete physical activity.

Awareness and reflection

The coach helps participants recognise emotions, reactions and behaviours that emerge during the activity.

Connection with everyday life

Participants are encouraged to consider whether similar experiences occur outside sport and which strategies could also be useful in other situations.

This approach allows sports organisations to incorporate attention to mental well-being into their existing activities rather than treating mental health as a completely separate topic.

Why use experiential activities?

The methodology is based on experiential learning.

Rather than explaining concepts only through theoretical discussion, participants experience situations directly.

A player may experience pressure during a football exercise.

A boxer may recognise impulsivity when reacting too quickly.

A participant may experience frustration during a difficult circuit.

Another may discover how difficult it is to rely completely on a teammate.

These experiences create opportunities for reflection.

The coach can then ask simple questions:

- What happened?
- How did you feel?
- What did you notice?
- How did you react?
- What helped you?
- What could you try differently next time?

These questions help participants develop greater awareness of their emotional responses.

The objective is not to diagnose mental health problems or provide therapeutic interventions.

The objective is to help young people recognise emotions, identify useful strategies and experience sport as an environment in which difficulties can be discussed without judgement.

The role of the coach

Within this approach, the coach has an educational role.

Coaches are not expected to provide psychological treatment.

They can, however, contribute significantly to creating a positive environment by:

- listening;
- avoiding judgement;
- recognising changes in behaviour;
- encouraging respectful communication;
- making space for emotions;
- supporting cooperation;
- responding constructively to mistakes;

- normalising conversations about well-being;
- encouraging participants to ask for support when necessary.

The activities included in this document are therefore also tools for the coaches themselves.

They help sports operators observe not only physical or technical performance, but also how young people react emotionally and socially during training.

This contributes to the broader objective of strengthening the capacity of sports organisations to promote healthier and more supportive environments for young people.

BOXING TRAINING SHEETS

SHEET 1 – “CONTROL AND CONCENTRATION”

Mental objective

Develop body awareness, concentration and the ability to manage impulsive reactions.

Duration

45 minutes.

Materials

Open training space, boxing gloves, skipping ropes, timer.

Activity description

This session introduces participants to the idea that boxing is not only about speed, strength or reaction, but also about **being able to control the body before acting**.

The coach begins with a short introduction explaining that every movement in boxing starts with awareness: awareness of breathing, posture, balance, distance and emotional state.

Phase 1 – Breathing and body awareness

Participants stand individually in the training space and begin with simple breathing exercises.

The coach asks them to pay attention to:

- how quickly they are breathing;
- where they feel tension in the body;
- whether their shoulders are relaxed;
- how their feet are positioned;
- how their body weight is distributed.

Participants then begin moving slowly around the space while maintaining controlled breathing.

The objective is not speed. The challenge is to move without losing awareness of the body.

Phase 2 – Controlled shadow boxing

Participants perform a series of basic shadow-boxing movements at a deliberately slow pace.

They practise simple combinations such as:

jab – return to guard;

jab – cross – return to guard;

step forward – jab – step backward;

defensive movement – return to position.

The coach regularly asks participants to slow down.

Every movement should have a clear beginning and end.

Participants should notice when they start accelerating automatically and consciously bring themselves back to a controlled rhythm.

Phase 3 – Movement and breathing

The coach introduces short rounds of approximately 60–90 seconds.

During each round, participants must maintain continuous movement while coordinating punches with breathing.

The focus is on maintaining the same rhythm from the beginning to the end of the round.

If someone loses control or becomes too fast, they are encouraged to stop for a few seconds, breathe, reset their position and start again.

This reinforces the idea that **stopping and regaining control is part of the exercise rather than a failure.**

Phase 4 – Partner awareness

Participants work in pairs.

One participant performs very slow and controlled attacking movements without making contact.

The second participant practises simple dodging and defensive movements.

The purpose is not to “beat” the partner or react as quickly as possible.

Instead, participants should observe:

- the partner’s shoulders;
- direction of movement;
- distance;
- rhythm;
- breathing;
- changes in body position.

After several minutes, the roles are reversed.

Coach focus

During the activity, the coach should reinforce the difference between **automatic reaction and conscious response**.

Participants should understand that self-control does not mean remaining completely still or passive. It means recognising what is happening and choosing how to respond.

Why this activity supports mental health

This activity supports mental well-being by helping participants recognise the connection between **body signals, emotions and behaviour**. Focusing on breathing, posture and controlled movement can help young people become more aware of moments in which tension or impulsivity are increasing.

The activity also gives coaches a practical way to introduce self-regulation without presenting it as a clinical concept.

Participants experience directly that stopping, breathing and regaining control can be useful strategies when they feel overwhelmed or distracted.

By discussing these reactions openly, the exercise also helps normalise conversations about emotional control and personal difficulties.

Final reflection

Bring the group together for a short debrief.

Suggested questions:

- What did you notice when you concentrated only on your breathing and movements?
 - At what moment did you start moving faster without noticing?
 - Did you ever feel that you were losing control?
 - What helped you regain concentration?
 - Was it easier to control yourself when working alone or with another person?
 - Can you think of situations outside sport where stopping, breathing and resetting could help you?
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SHEET 2 – “THE RIGHT PUNCH AT THE RIGHT TIME”

Mental objective

Train patience, timing, decision-making and self-control.

Duration

60 minutes.

Materials

Boxing gloves, headgear, mats, timer.

Activity description

This training session focuses on a fundamental principle of boxing: **being able to wait before acting**.

Participants learn that responding immediately is not always the best response. Sometimes the most effective action comes from observing, waiting and choosing the correct moment.

Phase 1 – Recognising the right moment

Participants work in pairs.

One participant acts as the attacker and performs simple, slow and predictable attacks.

The defender is instructed not to react immediately.

Instead, they must observe the movement and respond only when they identify a clear opportunity.

The coach can initially use verbal instructions such as:

“Wait.”

“Observe.”

“Choose.”

“Now.”

Gradually the verbal support is removed and participants must make their own decision.

Phase 2 – Impulse versus decision

The same exercise continues, but the attacker sometimes makes a false movement or begins an attack and stops.

The defender must learn not to react automatically to every signal.

This creates a practical distinction between:

Impulse: reacting immediately because something happened.

Decision: observing what is happening and choosing the most appropriate response.

After several rounds, participants exchange roles.

Phase 3 – Introducing pressure

The coach gradually introduces distractions.

These may include:

- changes in rhythm;
- unexpected pauses;
- sounds;
- verbal countdowns;
- movement around the pair;
- changes in the attacker's speed.

The objective is not to confuse participants unnecessarily but to reproduce the feeling of having to make decisions while several things are happening at the same time.

Participants must continue to breathe, maintain their guard and wait for the appropriate moment.

Phase 4 – Controlled decision round

Pairs complete short controlled rounds.

The attacking participant can move freely but continues to work at low intensity.

The defending participant receives one specific task:

Do not respond to every action. Choose when it is actually useful to respond.

After each round, the pair discusses one moment in which they reacted too quickly and one moment in which waiting helped them make a better decision.

Coach focus

The coach should avoid presenting hesitation as weakness.

The central message is that **patience can be an active skill**.

Waiting does not mean doing nothing. It means observing, processing information and choosing.

Why this activity supports mental health

This activity helps participants explore the difference between **impulsive reaction and conscious decision-making**.

Young people may experience situations in sport, school or everyday relationships in which they react quickly because they feel pressure, frustration or anger. Practising the ability to wait, observe and choose a response can strengthen awareness and emotional self-regulation.

The exercise also gives coaches an opportunity to talk about impulsivity without judgement, helping participants understand that strong emotional reactions are common and that strategies can be developed to manage them more effectively.

Final reflection

Suggested questions:

- How difficult was it not to react immediately?
- Did you ever respond even when you knew it was not the right moment?
- What made you react impulsively?

- What helped you wait?
 - Did pressure or distractions change your decisions?
 - Outside sport, are there situations where taking a few seconds before reacting could change the outcome?
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SHEET 3 – “GETTING BACK UP”

Mental objective

Strengthen resilience, perseverance and frustration management.

Duration

50 minutes.

Materials

Punching bag, skipping ropes, mats, timer.

Activity description

The activity uses physical fatigue and controlled difficulty to explore how participants react when things become harder.

The key message is that resilience does not mean never struggling. It means **being able to recognise difficulty, reorganise yourself and continue.**

Phase 1 – Introduction

The coach introduces the session by asking:

“What normally happens when you make a mistake or feel tired?”

Participants do not need to answer immediately.

The question remains in the background during the training.

Phase 2 – Physical circuit

Participants complete a circuit combining several short exercises.

For example:

1. skipping rope;
2. punching-bag combinations;
3. footwork;
4. bodyweight exercise;
5. shadow boxing.

Each station lasts approximately 45–60 seconds.

Intensity should be challenging but appropriate to the participants' level.

Phase 3 – Emotional check-in

After each round, participants stop briefly.

Instead of immediately starting the next exercise, the coach asks them to identify one word describing how they feel.

Examples:

“Tired.”

“Frustrated.”

“Strong.”

“Angry.”

“Motivated.”

“Confused.”

“Focused.”

There is no correct answer.

The objective is to practise recognising an emotional state without immediately judging it.

Phase 4 – Reset strategy

Before restarting, participants choose one simple strategy:

- take three controlled breaths;
- shake out the arms and shoulders;
- correct the stance;
- repeat a motivating word;
- focus on one technical objective.

Participants then begin the next round.

The purpose is to demonstrate that recovering does not happen automatically: sometimes we need a deliberate strategy.

Phase 5 – Fall and restart

The final exercise symbolically represents the idea of “getting back up”.

Participants begin on the mat.

At the coach's signal, they stand up safely, regain their boxing stance and immediately complete a simple combination or short movement sequence.

The exercise is repeated several times.

The coach may vary the instructions so that participants have to reorganise themselves each time.

The emphasis should remain on **recovering composure**, not speed.

Coach focus

The coach should reinforce that experiencing tiredness, frustration or mistakes is normal.

The learning objective is not to eliminate these experiences but to develop strategies for what happens next.

Why this activity supports mental health

This activity focuses on resilience and on the way participants respond to fatigue, frustration and difficulty.

Rather than avoiding uncomfortable emotions, young people are encouraged to recognise them, name them and identify a strategy that helps them continue or recover.

This contributes to mental well-being because it reinforces the idea that experiencing difficulty is normal and does not represent personal failure.

The exercise can also help reduce stigma by making it acceptable to talk about feeling tired, discouraged, frustrated or overwhelmed within the sporting environment.

Final reflection

Suggested questions:

- At what point did you feel most tired or frustrated?
 - What was your first reaction?
 - What helped you continue?
 - Which reset strategy worked best for you?
 - Was there a moment when you wanted to stop?
 - What does “getting back up” mean outside the boxing gym?
 - Can asking for help also be a form of resilience?
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SHEET 4 – “TRAINING IN SILENCE”

Mental objective

Encourage inner listening, concentration and awareness of physical sensations.

Duration

40 minutes.

Materials

Mats, skipping ropes, quiet training space.

Activity description

The entire central part of this training session takes place without verbal communication or music.

Participants are invited to pay attention to information that is often ignored during a normal training session: breathing, heartbeat, footsteps, tension and internal dialogue.

Phase 1 – Preparing for silence

Before beginning, the coach briefly explains the rules.

For the next part of the activity:

- nobody speaks;
- there is no music;
- the coach communicates using gestures;

- participants should avoid unnecessary noises;
- the objective is observation rather than perfect performance.

Participants remain still for approximately one minute.

They simply observe their breathing.

Phase 2 – Silent warm-up

The coach leads a simple warm-up entirely through visual demonstration.

Participants copy movements such as:

- shoulder rotations;
- footwork;
- basic defensive movements;
- stretching;
- controlled shadow boxing.

Because no verbal instructions are provided, participants must watch carefully.

Phase 3 – Individual movement

Participants begin moving independently around the space.

The coach indicates different exercises through visual cues.

Participants should notice:

- the sound of their feet;

- breathing rhythm;
- heartbeat;
- muscle tension;
- changes in concentration;
- thoughts appearing during the exercise.

Phase 4 – Silent skipping or shadow boxing

Participants complete short rounds of skipping or shadow boxing without music.

Normally external rhythm can guide movement.

Here participants must find their own internal rhythm.

The coach encourages them to maintain a sustainable pace rather than copying the speed of others.

Phase 5 – Silent recovery

The group sits or lies on the mats for approximately two minutes.

No instructions are given.

Participants simply notice how their body changes as they recover.

Coach focus

The purpose is not meditation or total mental silence.

Participants may discover that their mind becomes even more active when external noise disappears.

That experience itself is useful.

The coach should emphasise **noticing rather than controlling everything**.

Why this activity supports mental health

This activity develops greater awareness of internal signals such as breathing, heartbeat, tension and concentration.

Young people are often exposed to constant external stimulation. Creating a short period of silence allows participants to notice what is happening in their body and mind without immediately reacting to it.

This type of awareness can help participants recognise early signs of stress or tension.

For coaches, the activity offers a simple and non-clinical way to introduce the importance of listening to one's own body and recognising emotional states.

Final reflection

Suggested questions:

- What did you notice when the room became silent?
- What sounds did you become more aware of?
- Did your concentration improve or become more difficult?
- What happened to your thoughts?
- Did you notice tension somewhere in your body?

- How often do you normally notice your breathing during training?
 - Could silence help you recognise when you are becoming stressed?
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SHEET 5 – “THE RING AS A SPACE OF RESPECT”

Mental objective

Promote empathy, mutual trust, respect and self-control.

Duration

60 minutes.

Materials

Boxing ring or marked training space, gloves, headgear.

Activity description

This activity challenges the idea that an opponent must be treated as an enemy.

Participants explore how boxing can involve competition while still being based on rules, responsibility and mutual respect.

Phase 1 – Entering the shared space

Before every exercise, participants enter the ring or marked area in pairs.

They make eye contact and shake hands.

The coach explains that this small ritual communicates:

“I recognise you.”

"I respect you."

"We are responsible for each other's safety."

Phase 2 – Cooperative technical exercise

Pairs practise controlled combinations.

One participant attacks while the other defends.

The intensity remains low.

After each short round, both participants identify one thing their partner did well.

Examples:

"Good distance."

"Good control."

"Nice movement."

"You helped me practise."

Participants then exchange roles.

Phase 3 – Controlled challenge

Intensity gradually increases while remaining appropriate and safe.

The objective becomes maintaining respect even when the exercise becomes more competitive.

Participants must continue to:

- control power;
- respect the rules;
- listen to the coach;
- stop immediately when required;
- recognise their partner after every round.

Phase 4 – Recognition ritual

After each round, participants touch gloves or shake hands.

Each person gives the other one short piece of positive recognition.

The objective is not artificial praise but acknowledgement of the shared training process.

Phase 5 – Changing perspective

Participants change partners several times.

The coach asks them to notice how each partner moves differently.

Instead of thinking:

“How can I defeat this person?”

participants are encouraged to think:

“What can I learn by training with this person?”

Coach focus

The coach should emphasise that strength and respect are not opposites.

Technical ability includes controlling intensity and protecting the person you are training with.

Without trust, meaningful partner training becomes impossible.

Why this activity supports mental health

Positive relationships and a sense of safety are important components of mental well-being.

This activity helps participants experience competition within a framework of **respect, trust and shared responsibility**.

By recognising the partner before and after each exercise, participants learn that strength and competition do not require hostility or humiliation.

The activity can contribute to creating a safer sporting environment in which young people feel respected by peers and coaches, which is particularly important for reducing exclusion, fear of judgement and stigma.

Final reflection

Suggested questions:

- Did making eye contact change the way you approached your partner?

- Did thanking or recognising the other person feel natural or strange?
- When did the exercise feel competitive?
- Was it possible to remain competitive and respectful at the same time?
- What responsibilities do you have toward someone you train with?
- How can respect change the way we deal with conflict outside sport?

FOOTBALL TRAINING SHEETS

SHEET 1 – “THE PASS THAT CONNECTS”

Mental objective

Strengthen communication, cooperation and mutual trust within the group.

Duration

60 minutes.

Materials

Balls, cones, coloured bibs.

Activity description

This session uses passing exercises to demonstrate that effective teamwork requires more than technical ability.

A successful pass depends on both players: the person giving the ball and the person receiving it.

Participants therefore work on communication, visual attention and shared responsibility.

Phase 1 – Passing and visual connection

Players work in pairs.

Before passing the ball, the player must establish visual contact with their teammate.

Players are encouraged not simply to shout a name but to ensure that the receiving player is ready.

After several minutes, players change partners.

Phase 2 – Passing while moving

Groups of three or four players pass continuously while moving through a marked area.

Players are asked to communicate through:

- eye contact;
- body position;
- movement;
- simple verbal information.

The coach gradually increases the complexity by reducing the available space or adding additional players.

Phase 3 – Solving mistakes together

Whenever the group makes repeated mistakes, the coach does not immediately provide the solution.

Instead, the activity stops for approximately 30 seconds.

Players must discuss:

“What happened?”

“What could we change?”

“What information was missing?”

They then restart and test their solution.

This gives players responsibility for solving collective problems.

Phase 4 – Two-touch mini-match

Players complete a small-sided game in which they are allowed a maximum of two touches.

The restriction encourages quick communication and awareness of teammates before receiving the ball.

Players should constantly scan the field and anticipate where support is available.

Phase 5 – Team challenge

During the final minutes, the team receives a collective objective, for example completing a certain number of consecutive passes.

The objective cannot be reached by one strong player alone.

Success depends on the whole group.

Coach focus

The coach should observe not only technical mistakes but also communication patterns.

Who communicates?

Who becomes silent after making a mistake?

Who encourages others?

Who asks for the ball?

Who helps teammates recover after losing possession?

Why this activity supports mental health

This activity reinforces communication, cooperation and social connection.

Feeling part of a group and being able to rely on teammates can positively influence a young person's experience within sport.

The exercise encourages participants to communicate openly, solve mistakes together and recognise that responsibility for success or failure is shared.

For coaches, it provides an opportunity to observe group dynamics and identify whether some participants are isolated, blamed or excluded.

Promoting supportive communication can therefore contribute to creating a more inclusive environment where young people feel safer expressing difficulties.

Final reflection

Suggested questions:

- What makes a pass successful besides technical accuracy?
 - How did eye contact change the exercise?
 - What happened when communication disappeared?
 - How did the group respond after mistakes?
 - Was it easier when the coach gave the solution or when the team found it?
 - What does trust look like on a football pitch?
 - How can good communication change the result for a group outside sport?
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SHEET 2 – “HANDLING PRESSURE”

Mental objective

Develop calmness, focus, emotional regulation and decision-making under pressure.

Duration

50 minutes.

Materials

Balls, poles, cones, stopwatch.

Activity description

This activity gradually increases the difficulty of technical exercises so players can notice how pressure affects their movements and decisions.

Instead of avoiding pressure, players learn to recognise their reaction and develop strategies to remain effective.

Phase 1 – Technical control without pressure

Players begin with a simple dribbling course.

There is no time limit and no opponent.

They focus on:

- close ball control;

- body position;
- scanning;
- breathing;
- accuracy.

Phase 2 – Introducing time pressure

The same exercise is repeated with a time objective.

Players should notice whether the presence of the stopwatch changes their technique.

After several rounds, the coach briefly asks:

“What changed when you knew you were being timed?”

Phase 3 – Reduced space

The course becomes smaller and players have less space to move.

The objective is to maintain control while having less time to make decisions.

Phase 4 – Introducing opponents

Defenders are added.

Initially they apply light pressure.

Gradually they become more active.

The player with the ball must now process several pieces of information simultaneously:

Where is the ball?

Where is the defender?

Where is the free space?

Where is the teammate?

How much time do I have?

Phase 5 – Pressure game

Players complete a small-sided match with reduced space.

The coach may occasionally introduce short countdowns for specific actions.

The objective is not necessarily to play faster.

Players are encouraged to **think clearly even when the environment feels fast.**

Reset strategy

Whenever a player becomes visibly frustrated, the coach may encourage a quick reset:

one breath;

look up;

identify space;

make the next simple decision.

The idea is to prevent one mistake from automatically creating another.

Coach focus

Players should understand that pressure often changes both emotions and behaviour.

Some players accelerate.

Others freeze.

Some stop communicating.

Others become frustrated.

Recognising the personal reaction is the first step toward managing it.

Why this activity supports mental health

This activity helps young people recognise their personal response to pressure.

Some participants may rush, others may freeze, lose concentration or become frustrated.

By experiencing increasing pressure in a controlled environment, participants can identify these reactions and experiment with

simple strategies such as breathing, slowing down or focusing on the next action.

This contributes to mental health awareness by showing that stress can influence both emotions and behaviour.

It also helps normalise the fact that different people react differently to pressure.

Final reflection

Suggested questions:

- What changed when pressure increased?
 - Did you move faster or think faster?
 - Did the quality of your decisions change?
 - Did you freeze, rush or remain calm?
 - Which type of pressure affected you most: time, space or opponents?
 - What helped you recover after a mistake?
 - Where outside sport do you experience similar pressure?
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SHEET 3 – “CONSTRUCTIVE DEFEAT”

Mental objective

Turn mistakes and defeat into opportunities for learning and strengthen resilience.

Duration

70 minutes.

Materials

Balls, bibs, cones, notebooks or sheets for feedback.

Activity description

This activity uses a mini-tournament to explore how players respond emotionally and behaviourally to winning and losing.

The main objective is to shift attention away from the final score and toward learning, progress and team behaviour.

Phase 1 – Setting the challenge

Before starting, the coach explains that matches will be played normally but there will be **no traditional tournament ranking**.

Instead, the group will observe different aspects of performance:

- teamwork;
- communication;
- improvement;

- attitude;
- resilience;
- fair play.

Phase 2 – Short matches

Teams play short matches of approximately 6–8 minutes.

Teams should be mixed and, where possible, balanced.

The coach observes behaviour as much as technical performance.

Phase 3 – Reflection after each game

Immediately after each match, teams separate for a short discussion.

The team that lost discusses:

- What worked despite the result?
- What could we change?
- What can we try differently in the next match?

The winning team discusses:

- What helped us succeed?
- What should we continue doing?
- What could still improve?

This is important because learning should not only happen after defeat.

Phase 4 – One change

Before their next game, every team chooses **one specific thing to change or improve**.

Examples:

communicate more;

keep better positions;

support the player with the ball;

remain calm after losing possession.

The coach then observes whether the team actually applies its chosen strategy.

Phase 5 – Recognition

At the end of the tournament, recognition is given for behaviours rather than simply for winning.

Possible recognitions include:

- best teamwork;
- biggest improvement;
- strongest communication;
- most positive attitude;
- best recovery after difficulty.

Coach focus

The coach should avoid turning the exercise into “winning does not matter”.

Competition can still matter.

The key point is that the score gives only part of the information.

A defeat can contain progress, while a victory can still contain important mistakes.

Why this activity supports mental health

The activity helps participants develop a healthier relationship with mistakes and failure.

Young people can sometimes associate defeat with personal inadequacy or fear negative judgement from others.

By analysing both wins and losses as learning experiences, the activity encourages participants to separate their personal value from the final result.

It also promotes a sporting culture in which mistakes can be discussed without humiliation.

This can strengthen resilience and contribute to reducing the pressure often associated with performance.

Final reflection

Suggested questions:

- How did you feel immediately after losing?
- Did that emotion change after discussing the match?
- Was it easy to identify something positive after a defeat?
- What did your team change in the next match?

- Did the change work?
 - What can a defeat teach us that a victory sometimes cannot?
 - How do you normally respond when something does not go as planned?
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SHEET 4 – “EYES CLOSED, TRUST OPEN”

Mental objective

Build mutual trust, responsibility and empathetic communication.

Duration

45 minutes.

Materials

Blindfolds, cones, balls, small goals.

Activity description

This paired activity places one participant temporarily in a situation where they must depend on another person for information.

The exercise helps participants understand that trust involves two different responsibilities:

being willing to rely on someone and being reliable when someone depends on you.

Phase 1 – Preparing the pairs

Players form pairs.

One player wears a blindfold.

The other becomes the guide.

Before beginning, the coach explains that safety is the priority.

The guide must communicate clearly and calmly.

Phase 2 – Simple orientation

The blindfolded player begins with very simple movements.

The guide gives verbal instructions such as:

“Two steps forward.”

“Stop.”

“Turn slightly right.”

“One step left.”

The guide cannot physically move the partner.

Phase 3 – Obstacle course

Once the pair feels comfortable, they move through a simple course created with cones.

The guide must communicate:

- direction;
- distance;
- speed;
- obstacles;
- when to stop.

The blindfolded participant must listen carefully rather than guessing.

Phase 4 – Ball and goal

A stationary ball is introduced near the end of the course.

The guide helps the blindfolded participant approach the ball and direct it toward a small goal.

The objective is not technical accuracy.

The challenge is communication.

Phase 5 – Role reversal

Participants switch roles.

This is essential because the two positions create very different experiences.

One requires trust.

The other requires responsibility.

Phase 6 – Communication improvement

Pairs repeat a short section of the activity after briefly discussing:

“What information helped?”

“What information was confusing?”

“How can we communicate better?”

They then test their improved communication strategy.

Coach focus

The coach should pay particular attention to the language used by guides.

Instructions such as “over there” or “move a bit” may be meaningless to someone who cannot see.

Participants therefore learn that effective communication depends on the needs of the person receiving the information.

Why this activity supports mental health

Trust, communication and feeling supported by others are important elements of psychological well-being.

This activity allows participants to experience both the vulnerability of depending on another person and the responsibility of supporting someone else.

The exercise can help young people reflect on what makes them feel safe, listened to and respected.

It also reinforces the idea that asking for guidance or relying on another person is not a sign of weakness.

This message is particularly relevant to the SO project's objective of reducing stigma and encouraging more supportive attitudes toward help-seeking.

Final reflection

Suggested questions:

- How did it feel when you could not see?
 - Did you trust your partner immediately?
 - What made you feel safer?
 - Which instructions were useful?
 - Which instructions were confusing?
 - Was it harder to trust or to be responsible for someone else?
 - What makes a person trustworthy?
 - How can we communicate differently when another person needs more support?
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SHEET 5 – “THE LISTENING TEAM”

Mental objective

Train active listening, emotional awareness and the ability to recognise how emotions influence play.

Duration

60 minutes.

Materials

Balls, cones, bibs, whiteboard or poster for keywords.

Activity description

This session combines football with short emotional check-ins.

Players learn to identify what they are feeling while playing and explore how different emotions can influence communication, decision-making and behaviour.

Phase 1 – Emotional vocabulary

Before starting the game, the coach asks players to suggest words describing emotions or states they may experience during sport.

Examples might include:

excited;

nervous;

angry;

confident;

frustrated;

tired;

focused;

happy;

afraid;

motivated.

The words are written on a board or poster.

The purpose is to demonstrate that many different feelings can exist during the same match.

Phase 2 – Normal play

Players begin a small-sided match.

There are no special rules initially.

The coach simply observes.

Phase 3 – Freeze and identify

At different moments, the coach blows the whistle.

Everybody stops immediately.

Without discussing it first, each player says **one word describing how they feel at that moment**.

There is no debate about whether the feeling is correct.

Each person is describing their own experience.

Phase 4 – Listen to the team

After several rounds, the coach asks the team to listen to all the words.

The group may discover that teammates are experiencing the same moment very differently.

For example, after conceding a goal one person may feel angry, another motivated, another nervous and another calm.

Phase 5 – From emotion to action

The group now discusses briefly:

“What can we do with this emotion?”

For example:

Frustration → slow down and focus on the next action.

Nervousness → communicate more.

Anger → breathe and avoid impulsive decisions.

Tiredness → ask for support and simplify play.

Excitement → maintain concentration.

Players then restart the match and attempt to apply the chosen strategy.

Phase 6 – Observe the effect

After several minutes, the coach stops the game again.

Players identify how they feel now and whether their emotional state has changed.

The objective is to recognise that emotions are not necessarily fixed and that behaviour can influence what happens next.

Coach focus

The coach should avoid labelling emotions as simply “good” or “bad”.

Anger, fear, nervousness or frustration can provide useful information.

The goal is to recognise the emotion and decide **how to respond to it constructively**.

The activity should also emphasise active listening.

When another participant describes an emotion, teammates do not need to correct, judge or solve it.

They first listen.

Why this activity supports mental health

This activity has the most direct connection with mental health awareness because it explicitly encourages participants to recognise and express emotions during sport.

By naming emotions such as frustration, anxiety, happiness, anger or tiredness, young people practise emotional awareness and learn that different reactions can coexist within the same team.

The activity also encourages active listening: participants are not required to solve or judge another person's emotion, but first to recognise and respect it.

Repeated activities of this kind can help make conversations about emotions more normal within sports organisations and contribute directly to reducing the stigma associated with mental health difficulties.

Final reflection

Suggested questions:

- How often do you normally notice what you are feeling during a match?
- Which emotion appeared most often today?
- Did your feelings influence your decisions?
- Did you communicate differently when frustrated or nervous?
- Did hearing how your teammates felt change your understanding of them?
- Was it difficult to say how you felt in front of the group?

- Which strategy helped you return to the game with more focus?
- How could recognising emotions help a team work better?
- Could the same process be useful outside sport?

CONCLUSION

Supporting mental health through everyday sports practice

The training activities presented in this document demonstrate how sports organisations can contribute to young people's mental well-being through simple educational practices integrated into regular training.

The objective is not to turn sport into therapy.

Instead, the methodology recognises that sports environments already contain many situations that are closely connected to mental well-being.

During sport, young people experience:

pressure;

success and failure;

frustration;

competition;

cooperation;

fear of making mistakes;

trust;

responsibility;

conflict;

belonging.

The way these experiences are managed can influence whether sport becomes a positive and supportive environment or a source of additional pressure.

For this reason, the quality of the educational environment created by coaches and sports organisations is particularly important.

Contribution to the SO project objectives

The proposed methodology directly supports the overall objective of the SO project by providing sports organisations with **concrete tools to improve their competences in the field of youth and mental health.**

The activities also contribute to each of the project's specific objectives.

1. Increasing awareness

The activities help coaches and participants recognise the connection between sport, emotions and mental well-being.

Through practical experiences, mental health becomes part of the everyday conversation within the sporting environment rather than an abstract or exclusively clinical topic.

Young people are encouraged to recognise how they respond to pressure, frustration, mistakes, relationships and difficult emotions.

At the same time, coaches become more attentive to the emotional and relational dimensions of training.

2. Reducing stigma

The activities create structured opportunities to talk about emotions and difficulties without presenting them as signs of weakness.

When a participant can say:

“I was frustrated.”

“I felt under pressure.”

“I was nervous.”

“I lost concentration.”

without being judged, an important cultural change begins to take place.

These simple interactions can contribute to creating sports environments where conversations about mental health are more normal and where young people may feel more comfortable asking for support when they need it.

Reducing stigma does not necessarily begin with large awareness campaigns.

It can also begin with everyday interactions in which emotions and difficulties are treated with respect.

3. Providing practical tools to sports organisations

The strongest contribution of these training sheets is their practical character.

They provide coaches with activities that can be directly integrated into football and boxing sessions.

They do not require coaches to become mental health specialists.

Instead, they provide simple educational methods based on:

- physical activity;
- observation;
- communication;
- emotional awareness;
- guided reflection;
- cooperation;
- peer interaction.

In this way, sports organisations can begin incorporating greater attention to young people's mental well-being into their existing programmes.

Creating supportive sporting environments

The ultimate value of the methodology does not lie only in the individual exercises.

It lies in helping sports organisations gradually develop a different culture around training.

A supportive sporting environment is one where young people can:

make mistakes without being humiliated;

express emotions without being ridiculed;

experience competition without losing respect for others;

recognise difficulty without feeling weak;

ask for help when needed;

support teammates;

learn how to manage pressure and frustration.

Coaches have an important role in creating this environment.

Even small practices can make a difference.

A short question after a difficult exercise.

A moment to discuss frustration after a defeat.

Encouraging teammates to listen to each other.

Normalising the fact that different people react differently to pressure.

These actions can become part of everyday coaching practice.

a preventive and educational approach

The SO methodology should therefore be understood primarily as an educational and preventive approach.

The project does not suggest that sport alone can solve mental health problems.

Nor does it replace professional psychological or medical support when this is necessary.

Instead, it recognises that sports organisations can play an important complementary role.

They can contribute to creating environments that promote:

- emotional awareness;
- positive relationships;
- inclusion;
- communication;
- resilience;
- trust;
- help-seeking behaviours.

They can also contribute to reducing the silence and stigma that sometimes surround mental health difficulties.

This is particularly relevant because sports organisations are often among the community spaces where young people spend significant amounts of time and develop meaningful relationships with peers and adults.

From individual activities to an organisational approach

The training sheets can therefore be seen as a starting point rather than as isolated exercises.

Sports organisations can use them to begin asking broader questions:

How do we respond when a young participant is struggling?

Do young people feel comfortable expressing difficulties?

How do our coaches respond to frustration or emotional reactions?

Do we create unnecessary pressure?

How do we talk about failure?

How do we promote respect and inclusion?

Do participants know that asking for support is acceptable?

By integrating these questions into everyday sporting practice, organisations can gradually strengthen their capacity to support the mental well-being of young people.

This reflects the central ambition of the SO project:

to make sports organisations more aware, better equipped and more capable of contributing positively to the mental health of the young people in their communities.

The proposed activities therefore represent more than a collection of training exercises.

They are practical examples of how sport can become a space where mental well-being is recognised, discussed and supported, and where young people can develop strategies that help them both inside and outside the sporting environment.