

# Reversing Losing Streaks

A competitive coach hates losing – it is not a pleasant experience. Here's what coaches can do to turn a losing side into a winning side.

## Hammer in the message

A “losing streak” is an invidious and destructive term. In professional sport, the media will seek to destroy the confidence of the team by reminding managers and players of their relative decline. The best managers and coaches will create a bubble around their team so they can mentally ignore this.

At Manchester United in England, the manager Alex Ferguson fiercely protects the players and the team as a whole by consistently “hammering home” a positive team message. Your task is to be unwaveringly positive and upbeat in your message, however bad things are.

## Success and winning

Winning does not always equal success. The manner of a win can sometimes be as frustrating as the manner of losing. Success undoubtedly breeds success, so change the targets, and set short term objectives that can be achieved. Take the focus away from losing and concentrate on positive aspects.

## Hammer in the message



## Typical game time targets

- No points conceded in the first five minutes (and then the next and so on).
- Count the number of tackles “made” by players, not the number missed.
- The “BOSH” badge, a sew-on patch given at the end of each match to the player who made the best tackle, became a symbol of pride on the shorts of the player who received the award.

What not to say! American Football team the Tampa Bay Buccaneers suffered one of their worst seasons in 1976 (won 0 lost 14). When reporters asked coach John McKay what he thought of his team's execution, he said: “I'm in favour of it.”

Hammer home your positive team message. Be unwaveringly positive and upbeat in your message.

## Reversing Losing Streaks (cont.)

### Winning and losing

Outwardly it seems that most players want to win – “that’s why they turn up” has been said by many a coach. However, some studies point to a different view. They say all players want to play more often. For less able players, if this means playing in a losing side, then they would rather do so.

Research confirms that the focus should not be on losing, but on positives. Mood measures were administered pre and post game at four games (2 won, 2 lost) to Dutch male rugby players. Winning produced a range of pleasant emotional outcomes and reductions in arousal and stress, while losing produced strong unpleasant emotional changes need a reduction in arousal, but no reduction in stress.

To alleviate the negative aspects of losing, a coping procedure that reduces the emphasis on losing and focuses on future activities that could raise the probability of winning in the next contest, should be constructed.

### Strategy

Digging a team out of a losing streak is not just the task of the coach, but everyone involved. And involvement is the key. Everyone must be involved in formulating the way out. Small groups come up with solutions. The coach’s job is to shape the answers into sessions, probe into the problems arising. Even if you do not win the next game, the improvements can be fantastic. 🍷

### Three-Step Turnaround

Reverse the fortunes of a losing team with these three rules from Bill Parcells, one of American football’s most successful coaches.

#### **Rule one – “Make it clear from day one that you’re in charge”**

Parcells has found that holding frank one-on-one conversations with every member of the team is essential to success. Leaders can do everything right with their teams and still fail if they aren’t able to reach each member as an individual.

#### **Rule two – “Confrontation is healthy”**

Parcells relishes confrontation because it provides an opportunity to get things straight with people. Confrontation does not mean putting someone down. When criticizing members of the team, he puts it in a positive context. Once he sets that context, he’s not afraid to be blunt about players’ failings.

#### **Rule three – “Identify small goals and hit them”**

He believes that success breeds success. Once a team gets in the habit of losing, confidence dips and success seems unreachable. To break the habit of losing, Parcells focuses on achieving goals within immediate reach.

Parcells is convinced that if you get people on your team who share the same goals and the same passion, and if you push them to achieve at the highest level, you’re going to come out on top.