

Social Media Guidelines for Athletes

Introduction

This guide contains suggestions, not hard and fast rules. We encourage you to use social media, and we have no desire to control what you do online. But we can help you think about the possible advantages and pitfalls offered by social media.

If you read nothing else in this guide, bear the following two questions in mind when you post anything online:

1. Would you say this in front of your parents or grandparents?
2. Would you say this to journalists at a press conference, sitting next to your coach?

If the answer to either question is no, think very carefully before posting. Just about everything you say online could eventually be read by anyone, including your grandmother or the editors of tomorrow morning's papers.

Why do I need guidelines?

We want to help you think about how you, your coaches and managers can work together to build a great reputation for you and for your sport, both online and in real life - but we don't want to stop you enjoying social media, or eliminate your individualism and personality.

If you're used to using social media freely, it might seem unfair that you now have to think a little more before you post.

No such thing as privacy

It's important to review your privacy settings regularly on any social network. But it's also important to remember that it's possible that everything you send or post – even to your friends – could potentially become public. Once that has happened, it could be seen by anyone and everyone, forever. Even if you are using Snapchat, or a private messaging service like Whats App, the people you are communicating with can take a screenshot of your message. Once that's done, the image/words/video you've sent are completely out of your control. It only takes your friend to send it to a friend of theirs, and your private message is in the hands of a stranger, who can post it anywhere they like. Once something starts to spread on the internet, it's impossible to control it, even once you've deleted the original. An ill-advised comment or photograph could still be popping up when someone searches for your name years from now – including potential sponsors, employers, etc. So check your privacy settings regularly, but also bear in the back of your mind that you can never be completely sure that what you post online will remain private.

Ask yourself:

- Am I happy for what I am about to post to be seen by anyone and everyone?
- Am I happy for this post to be attached to my name and easily-searchable forever?
- If my post was to appear somewhere I never intended it to go, would I be happy about it?

Respect yourself You have worked incredibly hard for many years to become who you are. This means that people will form their opinions based on your sporting performances, but also on other aspects of you that they see portrayed publically. Used well, social media has the potential to give you greater control of this than ever before.

Ask yourself....

- How do I wish to be portrayed?
- What messages do I want to get across?
- Will my post reflect negatively upon my status?
- What parts of my life do I want to keep private?
- Is what I am posting going to reflect negatively on my public profile?
- * Is what I am posting going to affect future opportunities?
- Remember....You can still be humorous and have a personality online – just think before you post.

When you post, bear in mind the overall effect of what you've put online over time, not just the effect of a single post. Your rivals may be reading!

Respect your sport In the same way that your actions while training and competing reflect on athletics in general, so do your actions online. As an athlete you have rightly earned the respect of many other athletes across the country. You can use social media to build on their pride in you and in their sport. Don't comment negatively on others' performance, of athletes, officials or coaches. When you post online, make sure your facts are accurate and don't swear or engage in insulting behaviour. Don't be afraid to be yourself, but do so respectfully.

Respect your Audience Social media offer a great way to connect with friends and family but the reality is that much of what you say to them on social media you also say to strangers. There may be many people out there who want to feel as though they know you and social media gives them the chance to engage with you on a new level. You may find yourself talking to strangers with a level of familiarity you would usually reserve for people who know you well. Remember that people who don't know you personally are less likely to pick up on the context of your comment, or to know when you're joking/being flippant. Never post anything that's rude, abusive or discriminatory.

Ask yourself... Could this comment be misunderstood by someone who doesn't know me, or know my sense of humour?

Social media and your performance Although using social media often feels like a relaxing thing to do, being very active on it can take up a lot of time and energy. Be aware of the effect it has on your mental state and your performance, particularly around the time of competitions. Many athletes step away from the internet completely in the approach to high profile events so they can focus. It can be tempting to find out what people are saying at times of excitement, and to check and see if

you have any good luck messages. But be aware that this might not help you make the most of all your training and turn in the best performance possible. If you have had a disappointment, it is a good idea to resist the temptation to go online straight afterwards. Wait until the strongest emotions have subsided so you can reflect, and post with a clear head.

When things go badly You can start by deleting your post and closing down your privacy settings as much as possible – bearing in mind that the damage may already be done if an image is already in the possession of others.

If you are receiving upsetting messages or replies, the best response is often no response. Tempting as it is to reply, that can add fuel on the fire and escalate the situation. Best to step away from your phone or computer and let off steam to a friend or family member instead. Block and report anyone who abuses you, and if you're genuinely concerned, ask advice on how to deal with the issue. If you're a member of an athletic club, your club will also have a designated welfare officer, who may be able to offer support and advice.