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**Research article**

**CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN COACH EDUCATION AND LEARNING**  
**Coaching in Modern Society – A review**

<sup>1</sup>Oleksandr Krasilshchikov, Phd,

<sup>1</sup>School of Health Sciences, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Health Campus, 16150 Kubang Kerian, Kelantan, Malaysia

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**Abstract**

*Journal of Sports Science and Physical Education* 3(1): 71–77, 2015 - Sports coaching and especially high performance coaching has long existed in some sort of duality. On one hand, sport coaching has been regarded by many as a prestigious and rewarding job, whereas on the other, sport coaching still lacks a reputation as a career opportunity mostly due to the fact that coaching is yet to receive its full professional recognition in the society. Given the vast variety of coaching qualifications, coaching roles and coaching occupations available within sport infrastructure in the society, the situation has got progressively complicated with the recognition of coaching qualifications. In addition, the growing popularity of high performance and participation sports in the society started drawing more attention from the public to the issues of coach education, competence and qualifications. Malaysian scenario on the issue is quite complicated as well, and growing demand to uplift the country's performance in SEA, Asian, Commonwealth and Olympic Games requires interference from the higher education institutions and NGOs.

**Keywords:** *coach, coach qualifications, coaching roles.*

**Introduction**

High performance sport in many developed countries (and increasingly in developing ones) is becoming a significant and respected activity that attracts the attention of the public and mass media. Coaches who work with high-profile athletes (and quite often even the ones who have 'discovered' them initially) are held responsible for producing winning performances; hence their role in modern highly professionalized society gets progressively recognized.

Apart from being considered as a vehicle to enhanced levels of performance in the international competitions (Houlihan & Green, 2008), coaching began to be regarded as an important element in the drive to increase levels of participation in sport within society as a whole. With this increased attention placed on coaching, critical questions are raised about the quality of coaches and their practices across different coaching fields, as well as the ability of coaching support structures to meet new demands and competitive aspirations (Mallett, 2010).

## **Coaching profession and coaching workforce profile**

Government and public vision for coaches is one in which they are implicated as key figures in delivering a broad range of social purposes: increasing physical activity participation rates; contributing to sustained international medal success; enhancing the role of physical activities and sport as a tool of social welfare (Taylor & Garratt, 2010).

### ***Coaching profession***

Lyle (2002) distinguished between different forms of coaching (participation, sport teacher, performance, representative team) highlighting the context-specific nature of coaches' work.

Trudel and Gilbert (2006) looking from another angle, categorized coaching into three major forms - recreational, developmental, and elite sport coaching. Profession wise, Lyle (2002) stated that sport coaching can be classified as an associated professional group.

A more recent view refers to the recognition of coaching competence and qualification. Four main coaching roles have been identified in the development of coaching expertise:

- Apprentice Coach
- Coach
- Senior Coach
- Master Coach

The key competences associated with these roles have been identified as well (Review of the EU 5-Level Structure for the Recognition of Coaching Qualifications, 2007).

Two standard occupations have been identified: Coach of participation-oriented sportspeople and Coach of performance-oriented athletes. These two standard occupations may be further sub-divided into sub-components as follows:

- Coach of beginner (child, junior, adult)

- Coach of participation-oriented sportspeople (child, junior, adult)
- Coach of talent identified/performance athletes (child, junior, adult)
- Coach of full-time/high performance athletes (Review of the EU 5-Level Structure for the Recognition of Coaching Qualifications, 2007).

### ***Coaching workforce profile***

It is a well-established fact that the existing coaching workforce is largely represented by ex-athletes who continue their sporting career after retiring as athletes.

Trudel and Gilbert (2006) reported that over 90% of 'elite sport' coaches were competitive athletes in the sport they coach. A background in playing the sport they now coach seems likely to contribute to understanding the technical and tactical aspects, as well as the 'culture' of the sport (Jones et al., 2003; Mallett et al., 2007).

Specifically, several Australian studies have shown that, typically, high-performance coaches averaged between 10 and 20 years of playing the sport they now coach (Lynch & Mallett, 2006; Rynne, 2008). Individual and team high-performance sport coaches from Canada were found to have played on average for five and eight years, respectively (Erickson et al., 2007). All studies reported that coaches had a minimum of five years playing experience in the sport they now coach, which might suggest that this engagement is a prerequisite for high-performance coaching in that sport.

Mallett et al., (2007) found that high-performance Australian Football League (AFL) coaches reported an extensive playing background in Australian football. However, not all coaches in the AFL had playing experience at the highest

competition level. This finding indicates that playing at the highest level was not necessarily essential to a coaching career in the AFL. The majority of high-performance coaches report that they were generally above-average players among their peers (Gilbert et al., 2006; Mallett et al., 2007; Rynne, 2008). A playing background in the sport they coach probably assists in their coaching endeavors, and possibly has more significant impact in the early stages of a career (Mallett, 2010).

The evidence suggests that experience in playing the sport they coach could be advantageous in becoming high-performance coaches, but success at the highest levels may not be an essential prerequisite (Irwin et al., 2004; Lynch & Mallett, 2006; Erickson et al., 2007; Mallett et al., 2007; Rynne, 2008).

Trudel and Gilbert (2006) reported that most elite sport coaches in North America are tertiary educated and around two-thirds of elite developmental coaches completed postgraduate study. Notably, most tertiary-educated coaches majored in physical education. The same authors also quoted research that showed that 56-84% of elite coaches in Europe, Asia, and South Africa held undergraduate degrees. In Australia, research has shown (Lynch & Mallett, 2006; Rynne, 2008) that around 65% of coaches surveyed were tertiary-educated predominantly in physical education and/or sports science.

In the quest for improving their coaching knowledge and practice elite coaches in many Western countries have completed accredited coach education courses. Although coaches may initially complete these courses with a motive of self-improvement and personal satisfaction, the higher levels of coach accreditation are often seen as a 'ticket' to the big stage (Dickson, 2001; Rynne, 2008). That is, the highest level of coach accreditation is

perceived as a prerequisite for elite coaching positions and credibility within the sporting community (Mallett, 2010).

In Australia coach accreditation is synonymous with coach education. Dickson, (2001) in reviewing coach accreditation programs in Australia, reported that successful completion of courses was valued because they provided improved vocational opportunities and advancement. However, these coach accreditation programs did not afford authentic context-specific information necessary for learning to become a high-performance coach. Coach accreditation was accordingly viewed as a low-impact activity, in terms of allocated time, in the development of elite coaches (e.g. Dickson, 2001; Lyle, 2002; Cushion et al., 2003; Rynne, 2008). Nevertheless, coach accreditation programs can serve to affirm coaching knowledge and practices as well as providing a catalyst for challenging the thinking of coaches. Therefore, caution is warranted in thinking that coach accreditation is not useful for some coaches in their development.

Much of the data collected from high-performance coaches (e.g. Erickson et al., 2007; Rynne, 2008) on formal education (coach accreditation and tertiary education) shows the significantly lower amounts of time invested compared with coaching itself, which is not surprising. The extensive time involved in coaching practice far exceeds what is possible in formal coach education activities. Of greater importance to developing coaching expertise is the quality of the experience and its subsequent contribution to coach development. High-performance coaches appear to make up for perceived limitations in knowledge by accessing and aggregating other sources (Mallett et al., 2007; Rynne, 2008). Importantly, it is the complementary nature of these varied experiences that contributes

to individual high-performance coach development (Mallett, 2010).

### **Attaining Coaches' Knowledge, Experience and Expertise**

The development of some base knowledge and understanding of the sport from early sport participation is reasonably well documented. Experience as an athlete has been extensively reported as an important source of coaching knowledge and practice (Sage, 1989; Bloom et al., 1998; Cushion et al., 2003; Irwin et al., 2004).

In addition, communicating with other coaches has been most often identified as important sources of knowledge while books, workshops, certification programs, journals and magazines, athletic experiences and athletes have been identified as additional sources for coaches' knowledge (Fincher & Schempp, 1994; Schempp et al., 1999; Schempp & McCullick, 2010).

Most of the coaches interviewed in the Mallett et al., (2007) study reported a background in observing and analyzing matches (live, video replays), which seemed to lay some foundation in analytical skills for coaches. Studies by Bloom et al., (1998) and Cushion et al., (2003) suggested that coaches develop some of their initial conceptions of coaching from when they were athletes. These pre-mediate experiences as an athlete can assist knowledge foundation that can be implemented in later years of coaching career (Mallett, 2010).

Strategic knowledge is stated to allow expert coaches to distinguish the important from the unimportant when observing an athlete's performance (Chi et al., 1988, Ericsson et al., 2006). Acquisition of this strategic coaching knowledge requires a combination of coaching experience and knowledge of athletes, sport, and coaching itself (Schempp et al., 1999; Schempp, 2003). While knowledge provides the

foundation for the expert coach's decisions, second factor that sets them apart from those with less expertise is the skill set they employ in their coaching practices (DeMarco & McCullick, 1997; Schempp et al., 2006). Expert coaching is thus comprised of experience, knowledge and skill (Dodds, 1994; DeMarco & McCullick, 1997; Martens, 2004).

Experiential learning (coaching work in our context) has been identified as the primary source of coaching knowledge in the development of expertise (Salmela, 1996; Saury & Durand, 1998; Gilbert & Trudel, 2001; Lyle, 2002; Jones et al., 2003; Mallett et al., 2008; Rynne, 2008). Simon and Chase (1973) proposed a '10-year rule' for developing expertise. Extensive coaching experience in developing expert knowledge is consistent with Ericsson et al., (1993) notion of 'deliberate practice' - focused effort on improving performance through structured practice. Ericsson et al., (1993) concluded from their research that to achieve an expert level of performance in any field, requires approximately 10 000 hours of deliberate practice.

Some coaches have limited experience coaching prior to engagement in elite sport coaching whereas others had extensive experience at the developmental level. Some former elite athletes in Australia commenced their high performance coaching careers almost immediately post retirement. Trudel and Gilbert (2006) reported research that suggested most elite coaches have five or more years of assistant coaching experience before being promoted to a head coach position. High-performance coaches are most likely to develop their coaching skills from early experience as developmental coaches (Lynch & Mallett, 2006; Rynne, 2008). This finding was supported by Canadian research (Erickson et al., 2007).

However, extensive work experience alone is mentioned as insufficient to develop high-performance coaching expertise (Eraut, 2004; Lynch & Mallett, 2006). The importance of self-reflection in making one's experiences meaningful and subsequently developing one's coaching knowledge and refining coaching practices has been extensively reported (Gilbert & Trudel, 2001; Cushion et al., 2003; Irwin et al., 2004; Mallett, 2004; Trudel & Gilbert, 2006).

### ***Major forms of coaches' learning and learning situations***

Although expressions such as formal learning, non-formal learning, and informal learning are used by many authors, (Lohman, 2006; Nelson et al., 2006; Merriam et al., 2007) some (Jarvis, 2006; Trudel et al., 2010) suggest that it is also appropriate to talk about learning in situations that are formal, non-formal or informal.

A formal situation refers to a situation that is supervised by an institution where the teaching is curriculum-driven and the learning recognized with grades or certifications. In the coaching field, it would be the coach education training programs that provide a certification.

To complement their compulsory program for certification, coaching organizations or institutions will often organize conferences or workshops. In this case, learning opportunities can be seen as continuing coach education and tend to be short-term, voluntary, and have few if any prerequisites. They form the category called non-formal situations. Coaching organizations can encourage coaches to attend these conferences or workshops or can impose a minimum attendance at such events as a proof of their on-going learning to maintain/renew certification or to obtain the next, higher certification level.

Finally, informal situations refer to the learning opportunities outside of those provided under the coach education system (Trudel et al., 2010).

Within these types of learning situations, Merriam et al., (2007) and Jarvis (2006) also recommended differentiating the intentional learning from the incidental learning. A coach calling a colleague or surfing on the internet to find information is an example of intentional learning. The incidental learning is often unconscious and could include learning about the sport sub-culture. For example, only when individuals are in a coaching position will they realize that through their experience as an athlete they have unconsciously developed some coaching knowledge, or that some of the knowledge acquired during their schooling can now be applied to their role as a coach (Trudel et al., 2010).

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✉ Oleksandr Krasilshchikov  
 Exercise and Sports Science Programme,  
 School of Health Sciences,  
 Universiti Sains Malaysia  
 Health Campus, 16150  
 Kubang Kerian, Kelantan  
 Malaysia  
 Tel: +6097677585  
 Email: olek@usm.my