

Coaching Skills & Roles

The United Kingdom Coaching Strategy describes the role of the coach as one which "*enables the athlete to achieve levels of performance to a degree that may not have been possible if left to his/her own endeavors*". Dyson speaking to the 19th session of the International Olympic Academy, Greece 1979, widened the horizon when he said that "*the wise coach develops not only the fullest physical potential in his charges, but also those capacities and habits of mind and body which will enrich and ennoble their later years*". The role of the coach could be quite daunting since the above implies what could be construed as quite awesome responsibility, especially for the part-time non-professional.

I believe the role of the coach is to create the right conditions for learning to happen and to find ways of motivating the athletes. Most athletes are highly motivated and therefore the task is to maintain that motivation and to generate excitement and enthusiasm. The roles that you will find you undertake as a coach will be many and varied and you will find at some stage in your coaching career that you will be: instructor, assessor, friend, mentor, facilitator, chauffeur, demonstrator, advisor, supporter, fact finder, motivator, counsellor, organiser, planner and the Fountain of all Knowledge.

Coaching Process

The coaching process divides into three main areas: Planning, conducting and evaluating.

Planning the Training

The purpose of a Training Plan is to identify the work to be carried out to achieve agreed objectives. Training Plans should be drawn up to identify long term (4 years) objectives as well as short term plans for the forth coming season

Skill Development

When we choose to move, the action is controlled by the conscious brain using a collection of learned movements.

Types of skill

There are a number of different types of skills:

- Cognitive - or intellectual skills that require thought processes
- Perceptual - interpretation of presented information
- Motor - movement and muscle control
- Perceptual motor - involve the thought, interpretation and movement skills

How do we teach a new skill?

The teaching of a new skill can be achieved by various methods:

- Verbal instructions
- Demonstration

- Video
- Diagrams
- Photo sequences

The Learning Phases - Fitts & Posner

Fitts and Posner (1967) suggested that the learning process is sequential and that we move through specific phases as we learn. There are three stages to learning a new skill and these are:

- Cognitive phase - Identification and development of the component parts of the skill - involves formation of a mental picture of the skill
- Associative phase - Linking the component parts into a smooth action - involves practicing the skill and using feedback to perfect the skill
- Autonomous phase - Developing the learned skill so that it becomes automatic - involves little or no conscious thought or attention whilst performing the skill - not all performers reach this stage

The learning of physical skills requires the relevant movements to be assembled, component by component, using feedback to shape and polish them into a smooth action. Rehearsal of the skill must be done regularly and correctly.

Performance Evaluation Tests

The success of the training program is largely dependent upon satisfying the performance aims associated with it.

How can performance be monitored?

Testing and measurement are the means of collecting information upon which subsequent performance evaluations and decisions are made.

What is the evaluation process?

The whole measurement/evaluation process is a six stage, cyclic affair, involving:

- The selection of characteristics to be measured
- The selection of a suitable method of measuring
- The collection of that data
- The analysis of the collected data
- The making of decisions
- The implementation of those decisions

All of the above stages should be completed with the athlete - especially the analysis and making decision of appropriate corrective action

What are the requirements of a test?

In constructing tests it is important to make sure that they really measure the factors required to be tested. In doing so all tests should therefore be specific (designed to assess an athlete's

fitness for the activity in question), valid (test what they purpose to test), reliable (capable of consistent repetition) and objective (produce a consistent result irrespective of the tester).

In conducting tests the following points should be considered:

- Each test should measure ONE factor only
- The test should not require any technical competence on the part of the athlete (unless it is being used to assess technique)
- Care should be taken to make sure that the athlete understands exactly what is required of him/her, what is being measured and why
- The test procedure should be strictly standardised in terms of administration, organisation and environmental conditions

What are the benefits of testing?

The results from tests can be used to:

- predict future performance
- indicate weaknesses
- measure improvement
- enable the coach to assess the success of his training program
- place the athlete in appropriate training group
- motivate the athlete

Tests additionally break up, and add variety to, the training program. They can be used to satisfy the athlete's competitive urge out of season. Since they demand maximum effort of the athlete, they are useful at times as a training unit in their own right.

What should be recorded?

The information to be recorded falls into two broad categories: -

- The day-to-day information from training, e.g.
 - State of the athlete (health, composure)
 - Physiological data (body weight, resting heart rate, etc.)
 - The training unit (speed, speed endurance, strength, technique)
 - The training load (the number of miles, the number of sets and repetitions, the number of attempts)
 - The training intensity (kilograms, percentage of maximum, percentage of VO₂)
 - The prevailing conditions (wet, windy, hot etc.)
 - The response to training (the assignments completed, the resultant heart rate recovery, felt tired, etc.)
- Information that measures status. This can take the form of a test. If the test is repeated throughout the program, it can then be used as a measure of progress within the training discipline. Examples of such tests are:
 - Time trials - speed, speed endurance, endurance
 - Muscular endurance - chins, push ups, dips

- Strength maximum - single repetitions, maximum repetitions
- Explosive strength - power bounding, vertical jump, overhead shot putt
- Mobility - objective measurements of the range of movement
- Event specific

Coaching Skills

As a coach you will find that you need to develop many skills. These include:

- know how to communicate effectively with your athletes
- understand the learning process and training principles
- understand and implement appropriate teaching methods
- understand the various coaching styles
- understand the capabilities of growing children
- advise athletes on track safety
- understand the causes and recognise the symptoms of over-training
- understand how to reduce the risk of injury to your athletes
- prepare training programs to meet the needs of each athlete
- assist athletes to develop new skills
- use evaluation tests to monitor training progress and predicting performance
- advise athletes on their nutritional needs
- understand and know how to develop the athlete's energy systems
- advise athletes on relaxation and mental imagery skills
- advise athletes on the use of legal supplements
- evaluate the athlete's competition performance
- evaluate athlete/training and athlete/coach performance

Primary coaching skills

In a coaching role you will initially need to develop the skills of: providing instruction and explanation, demonstrating, observing, analysing and providing feedback.

In providing Instruction and Explanation you should think about and plan what you are going to say, gain the athlete's attention, keep it simple and to the point and check they understand.

In providing demonstration make sure you are in a position where the athletes can clearly see you, focus on only 1 or 2 key points, repeat the demonstration 2 or 3 times (side, back and front view), ask if they have any questions and then let them practice the skill.

In observing and analysing break the action down into phases, focus on one phase at a time, observe the action several times from various angles, compare the action with your technical model and if appropriate determine what corrective action is required.

In providing feedback encourage the athlete to self analyse by asking appropriate questions, provide specific and simple advice, limit the advice to 1 or 2 points and make the whole process a positive experience for the athlete.

Coaching Roles

- **Advisor** - Advising athletes on the training to be conducted and suitable kit and equipment.
- **Assessor** - Assessing athletes performance in training and in competition
- **Chauffeur** - Transporting them to sporting events if parents or family are unavailable to take them.
- **Counsellor** - Resolving emotional problems on the basis that sharing anxieties can be both relieving and reassuring.
- **Demonstrator** - Demonstrate to the athletes the skill you require them to perform. To achieve this it is important that you also keep fit.
- **Friend** - Over the years of working with an athlete a personal relationship is built up where as well as providing coaching advice you also become someone, a friend, who they can discuss their problems or share their success with. It is important to keep personal information confidential because if you do not then all respect the athlete had for you as a friend and coach will be lost.
- **Facilitator** - Identify suitable competitions for them to compete in to help them achieve their overall objectives for the year.
- **Fact finder** - Gathering data of national and international results and to keep abreast of current training techniques.
- **Fountain of knowledge** - This may be part of the advisor role in that you will often be asked questions on any sporting event, events that were on the television, diet, sports injuries and topics unrelated to their sport.
- **Instructor** - Instructing athletes in the skills of their sport.
- **Mentor** - When athletes attend training sessions you are responsible, to their parents and family, for ensuring that they are safe and secure. You have to monitor their health and safety whilst training and support them should they have any problems or sustain any injuries.
- **Motivator** - Maintain the motivation of all the athletes the whole year round.
- **Organiser and planner** - Preparation of training plans for each athlete and organise attendance at meetings and coaching clinics.
- **Supporter** - Competition can be a very nerve racking experience for some athletes and often they like you to be around to help support them through the pressures. Role of a 'Friend' and perhaps 'Counsellor' come in here to.