

CHALLENGES, CHANGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES IN NGB COACH EDUCATION FROM 2003 TO 2015

Anna Swisher¹ and Andy Dotterweich¹

¹East Tennessee State University, Department of Exercise and Sport Sciences, Johnson City, TN

INTRODUCTION: Many coaches in the USA obtain their coaching knowledge and education through programs run by individual sport National Governing Bodies (NGBs) such as USA Soccer or USA Swimming. The US Olympic Committee (USOC), which provides funding and oversight to Olympic sports, has a strong interest in developing elite athletes and coaches and NGB coach education programs have an integral role in this mission.

Recent commentary on the state of coach education in the USA suggests that existing coach education programs are inadequate, ineffective, and/or are not comprehensive enough to develop quality coaches (Gearity, Hudson, & Murray, 2014; Gilbert & Baldis, 2014; Grant & Dorgo, 2014; Judge & Craig, 2014; Massey & Maneval, 2014). “The viability of any profession is based on its ability to educate and socialize new members into the discipline” (Massey & Maneval, 2014). Therefore, it is critically important that coach education programs run by NGBs set the standard for excellence in coach education and that sufficient resources are allocated to coach education. Having knowledgeable and effective coaches is important to elite athlete development, which is a primary goal of all NGBs.

Coaching knowledge, beliefs, and practices are often the result of learning that has occurred outside of the formal coach education setting (Nelson & Cushion 2006). Coaches acquire knowledge through three main avenues: formal or mediated learning (e.g., NGB coach education programs), informal or unmediated learning (e.g., observing other coaches, talking with coaches), and self-reflection (Whertner & Trudel 2006). Coach education programs may not always consider the most effective means of learning (Nelson and Cushion 2006) and may be hampered by barriers such as lack of qualified instructors, lack of funding, or disagreement among decision makers within an organization. The purpose of this research is to better understand the challenges, changes, and trends in coach education. We compared the findings from a 2003 survey administered by the USOC examining the content, delivery, and development of coach education programs of the 45 existing NGBs with an updated version of the survey administered in 2015.

METHODS: An online, anonymous survey was sent to the individuals responsible for overseeing coach education at each of the 45 Olympic sport NGBs. The survey consisted of 32 multiple choice questions covering staffing, budget, content, and delivery of coach education programs as well as perceived challenges in coach education. Of the 45 NGBs contacted, 24 completed the survey.

RESULTS: Demographics: Of the 45 NGBs surveyed, 24 completed the survey, which is consistent with the 2003 survey (N=24). Of the NGBs responding, 70% had 5,000 or fewer coaching members in their organization while 10% had greater than 50,000 members. Ninety-five percent of the respondents had a coaching education program. Of the responding NGBs who had a coaching education program, 93.8% had a budget with 50.1% of those budgets being \$40,000 or less. About 44% had budgets over \$80,000, which may be skewed due to low response numbers to this question. Just over 70% have had a coach education program in place for 10 or more years but 52.9% of respondents have had 4,000 or less participants go through their coach education

programs. Respondents noted that the biggest challenges for NGBs concerning coach education are the budget (27.8%) and maintaining current, quality coach education courses (22.2%).

Table 1: A comparison of 2003 to 2015 educational content areas addressed in introductory and advanced courses.

Education Content Area	2003 USOC Findings	Current Findings: Introductory Level	Current Findings: Advanced Level
Sport Psychology	80%	41.2%	81.3%
Sport Specific Technique	80%	94.1%	87.5%
Sport Rules	80%	76.5%	68.8%
Communication Skills	71%	70.6%	75.0%
Training Theory	66%	64.7%	75.0%
S & C Instruction	66%	23.5%	81.3%
Coaching Ethics	62%	58.8%	50.0%
Nutrition	62%	47.1%	81.3%
Sport Physiology	58%	35.3%	81.3%
Sports Medicine	54%	11.8%	56.3%
Biomechanics	54%	29.4%	62.5%
Team Management	Not studied	35.3%	75.0%
Technology	Not studied	23.5%	68.8%
First Aid	Not studied	29.4%	31.3%

DISCUSSION: While 70% of NGBs have a system for identifying coaches, the majority (77.8% of NGBs) feel as if there are not enough qualified coaches in their sport. Whether this stems from an inadequate coach education system, limited appeal of the sport, or poor sport marketing, there is a clear need to enhance the education level of coaches. Tellingly, a full 100% of respondents stated that they believe youth sport coaches in their sport should be certified in order to work with athletes. In order for long-term athlete development (LTAD) models to become a reality, NGBs must invest in long-term coach development and put adequate emphasis and regulations surrounding coaching at the youth level. Arguably the most critical period in athlete development, youth sport is quite often the level at which most coaches are unequipped to handle proper skill and fitness development. Recognizing that cost and travel may be large barriers for youth coaches to pursue certification or educational programs, NGBs should work to create online, low-cost education delivery specifically for youth coaches.

Topics, in order of importance (average rating out of 5 in parentheses) for coach education as noted by the NGBs, were nutrition (4.67); physiology (4.06); psychology (4.00); strength and conditioning (3.75); pedagogy, communication, and coaching styles (2.06); and sport technique (1.75). The perception that more scientific areas (e.g., nutrition, physiology) are most important to include in education programs, stands in contrast to previous work examining coaches' beliefs about the most important skills needed to be a coach. In an examination of the career paths,

education, and beliefs of elite Canadian coaches, Carter and Bloom (2009) found that all coaches valued the ability to effectively communicate as a key skill. One coach interviewed said, "If I had to think of the number one priority in coaching I would say it is communication. If you cannot communicate with your athletes, I don't care what your knowledge is, you will fail" (Carter & Bloom, 2009). Another coach in the same study stated that, "...I wouldn't call myself a real X's and O's coach, because I think that's pretty rudimentary. Anybody can get a pretty decent grasp of [X's and O's]. The complicated part is teaching effectively and that's where I spend a lot of time trying to get better" (Carter & Bloom, 2009). Based on these comments and work suggesting that emotional intelligence, effective communication, and "soft-skills" contribute greatly to coach efficacy, NGBs might consider elevating the role of these topics in coach education programs (Chan & Mallett, 2011; Carter & Bloom, 2009).

One of the biggest changes noted from 2003 to 2015 was the increase in web-based delivery of coach education. In the original study, traditional lecture (75%), videos (75%), and written publications (50%) were the methods most used by the NGB coaching education programs with only 25% of NGBs using web-based delivery methods respectively. In the current study, emphasis was heavier on the use of learning technology (e.g., PowerPoint and online). Different delivery formats were given different priorities depending on audience (see Table 2).

Table 2: Coach education delivery formats by level as preferred by NGBs.

Delivery Format	Introductory	Advanced
Lecture/PowerPoint	58.8%	70.6%
Web-based/Online	76.5%	58.8%
Clinics/Workshops	47.1%	64.7%
Conferences	29.4%	47.1%

Advances in technology such as quality distance learning platforms and video conferencing make it possible to transform the scope, duration, and settings in which coaches learn from NGBs. There are many opportunities to innovate, update, and improve the formal coach education programs to incorporate more in-depth content, create more informal settings for coaches to exchange ideas (e.g., online discussion groups), and promote self-reflection. Distance learning may also help NGBs overcome the issue of cost to administer and staff various programs while at the same time reducing the cost to interested coaches and increasing the number of coaches interested in participating.

With very limited budgets, it is not surprising the number one challenge for NGBs in coach education is budget and the number two challenge is maintaining current, quality course content. Three strategies for maximizing impact with limited resources would be to partner with other organizations (e.g., National Alliance for Youth Sport) to develop youth sport coach education programs to be administered online, to pool resources between NGBs to create a unified foundation for a coach education program, and to create a mentorship program to allow coaches to learn in more informal settings. Mentoring is widely acknowledged as an important coach learning tool yet only 38.9% of NGBs reported having a mentoring program.

REFERENCES

- Carter, A. D; Bloom & Gordon A. Coaching Knowledge and Success: Going Beyond Athletic Experiences. *Journal of Sport Behavior* 32.4 (Dec 2009): 419-437.
- Gearity, B., Hudson, G., & Murray, M. (2014). Using Project Based Learning to Promote College Student Understanding of Strength and Conditioning Coaching. *Strength & Conditioning Journal*, 36(1), 70-81.
- Gilbert, W. D., & Baldis, M. W. (2014). Becoming an Effective Strength and Conditioning Coach. *Strength & Conditioning Journal*, 36(1), 28-34.
- Grant, M. A., & Dorgo, S. (2014). Developing Expertise in Strength and Conditioning Coaching. *Strength & Conditioning Journal*, 36(1), 9-15.
- Grant, M. A., Dorgo, S., & Griffin, M. (2014). Professional Development in Strength and Conditioning Coaching Through Informal Mentorship: A Practical Pedagogical Guide for Practitioners. *Strength & Conditioning Journal*, 36(1), 63-69.
- Judge, L. W., & Craig, B. (2014). The disconnect between research and current coaching practices *Strength and Conditioning Journal*, 36(1), 46-51.
- Massey, C. D., & Maneval, M. (2014). A Call to Improve Educational Programs in Strength and Conditioning. *Strength & Conditioning Journal*, 36(1), 23-27.
- Nelson, L. & Cushion, C. (2006). Reflection in Coach Education: The Case of the National Governing Body Coaching Certificate. *The Sport Psychologist*, 2006, 20, 174-183
- Nelson, L., Cushion, C., & Potrac, P. (2013). Enhancing the provision of coach education: the recommendations of UK coaching practitioners. *Physical Education & Sport Pedagogy*, 18(2), 204-218.
- Sellers, C. (2003). "Coach Education in the USA." Unpublished research presentation.
- Werthner, P., Trudel, P., 2006. A new theoretical perspective for understanding how coaches learn to coach. *The Sport Psychologist* 20,198-212.