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## Contemporary Issues in Coach Education and Learning: Coach Education: A Review

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### Abstract

The fact, that the existing coaching workforce is largely represented by ex-athletes who continue their sporting career after retiring as athletes opens an extra channel in coach development, namely – experiential learning by gaining expertise through experience from their athletic career, and also through their coaching practice.

With various forms of learning situations available, coaches are encouraged to get educated through formal learning, non-formal learning, and informal learning. Major Coach Education pathways on the offer include higher education based education, federation based education and recognized coaching education agencies based education.

Cooperation between the agencies involved is a priority issue in order to maximize the quality of coach education and the available combined resources. Parties should recognize each other, so that coaches could utilize their knowledge and expertise transparently and for the mutual benefit of all parties involved regardless if employed by a sports authority, a higher education institution or a federation.

**Keywords:** *coach educational pathways, experiential learning, high performance sport.*

### 1. Introduction

Although population of coaches of various professional and educational levels grew up significantly through the past decades, coaching profession doesn't look fully legitimate to everyone. Movement towards a professional work force that could commit full-time to the development of expert knowledge, that might value and seek professional development and regard coaching as a sustainable career choice, would be crucial in the process of coaches' development and education [1]. Many maintain the stand that community coaches are doing well without formal education and formal pay and that junior coaches can still deliver the goods after attending few brief courses; while others think that coaching at any level requires properly educated professionals.

Therefore the ideas of coaches' learning and education aren't always straightforward and unanimously agreed upon.

### 2. Problem Statement

Generally, and especially among academicians, coach education is discussed from a curriculum design perspective, meaning that 'experts' (researchers or program designers) are in charge of selecting and delivering a specific content and, at the end of the program, participants complete some form of evaluation [2].

What is presumably missing in the roadmap of coach education is the learner's perspective. Three main factors lend support for the inclusion of the learner's perspective when addressing the structure and the evaluation of coach education programs:

1. Coach education programs often play a marginal role in coach development in comparison to learning from experience. This should not be a surprise considering that most coaches accumulate many years of experience as athletes and time spent in a coach education program is minimal compared with the number of hours spent actually coaching [3, 4, 5]. Jarvis [6] mentions that any short coach education program could actually qualify as an 'episodic learning experience'.
2. In a contemporary society with constant technological developments and intense information exchange formal education programs cannot be considered as the sole providers of professional knowledge. Jarvis [2] claimed that many of the traditional

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educative organizations were not able to keep abreast with the new demands, forcing individuals to learn outside of the education system.

3. Taking into consideration the two previous factors, one has to realize that today practitioners acquire their knowledge and develop their competencies while participating in formal education programs as well as outside of them. Therefore, it is important to find ways to recognize the learning that occurs in informal situations. In fact, there is notion in many countries on how to design/redesign and manage qualifications systems to promote lifelong learning [7].

### **3. Educational Pathways**

Educational pathways in coach education include two major streams: academic/degree and postgraduate studies through universities and colleges; and educational/certification programs provided by national and international sport governing bodies, i.e. national and international sports associations.

#### **3.1 Academic/Degree Programs**

In the early 1960s Eastern Bloc countries have developed the uniformed and comprehensive approach to coaches' education and have introduced common curriculums throughout broad based network of institutes/universities of physical culture (equivalent of physical education in many countries). With some minor to major modifications it is still in existence and is being taught till day in Eastern (and sometimes in Western) Europe.

Traditionally, such curricula included social, pedagogical, medical, biological and sports specific disciplines grouped into several major clusters including:

*Social Sciences* - History (of a Country or a Party), History of Sports, Philosophy, History of Religion/Atheism, Scientific Communism (not anymore);

*Pedagogical Sciences* - Pedagogy, Basic Psychology, Sport Psychology;

*Medical and Biological Sciences* - Human Anatomy, Human Physiology, Sports Physiology, Basic Biochemistry, Sports Biochemistry, Biomechanics, Hygiene, Sports Medicine, Massage & Physiotherapy;

*Basic Sports Disciplines* - Theory and Methodology of Physical Education, Theory and Methodology of Sports Training;

*Sport Specific Disciplines* - Theory and Methodology of the Sport chosen as Specialization. Those included all Olympic sports, since those were on any Government priority list as delivering medals at the Olympics Games was always among major objectives of Sport Developing policies. Notably all listed disciplines were compulsory with no electives as such on offer. Graduates were offered coaching jobs in the wide network of government sponsored sport schools and Trade Unions run sport clubs.

In the early 1980s, a number of countries (Canada, Australia, France and Great Britain) were beginning to establish generic forms of coach education that would go some way to support the development of coaching as professional practice [8].

The direct engagement of universities in the education of coaches and coaching in the UK has also been marginal. In fact, until the mid-1990s there were very few higher-education degrees explicitly dealing with the pedagogical fundamentals of coaching. Those that covered the subject did so under the dominance and facade of the biophysical sports sciences, where the skills required for successful coaching were often

confused and conflated with notions of practical achievement and/or the distant application of psychology and physiology, as well as other biomedical approaches. In recent years, however, named coaching degrees have emerged across the higher-education sector [1].

Bush [9] reported that in 2006 there were 192 undergraduate degree courses in the UK concentrating on coaching, representing 11 % of all sports-related degrees.

In 2012, 706 Colleges and Universities were found with Athletics/Coaching Major in US [10].

A review of university-based coach education programs in the United States showed a traditional, and uniform, curriculum [11]. All programs included a mix of coaching theory, sport science sub-disciplines (i.e., biomechanics, sport psychology) and some form of coaching practicum.

Sports coaching bachelor's degree programs are often structured as a set of sports science core courses and coaching electives. Some programs may offer units for specific team and individual sports. Possible courses include: Sports psychology, Conditioning and fitness training, coaching technology, Coaching theory and methods, Officiating sports.

Some United Kingdom universities offer Sport Coaching programs with such core units as: Principles of coaching, Fitness for sport, Research methods for sports and exercise, Coaching children and young performers, Application of fitness testing and training, Applied techniques in sports psychology, Applied principles of biomechanics, High-performance coaching.

Optional courses offered within such programs could include: Sports massage, Strength and conditioning, Diet and nutrition, Applied Principles of performance analysis, Sports coaching and development, Practices in physiology, psychology and biomechanics, Sports science support, Injury Prevention and Management, Complementary Therapies for Sport.

Coaching students can typically benefit from access to wide range of sporting facilities, including multiple sports halls and outdoor resources. They also utilize well-equipped sport science laboratories.

Universities strive to establish the links with local and national sports organizations, schools and clubs which provide relevant part-time work, internship opportunities and mentoring. They also contribute to the content and delivery of the programme. The courses typically provide opportunities allowing students to work with and alongside community and elite coaches and athletes.

Typical core units for Sport, Coaching and Physical Education programs include Sport and Physical Education pedagogies, Health related physical activity, Sports psychology, developing training programs, Developing movement skills, Research methods in sport, Coaching and Physical Education placement, Sports development.

The courses usually combine theory with practice related to a range of disciplines. These may include applied practical coaching, performance analysis, sports development, physical education and sports media. A key feature of such courses is integration with applied professional practice. This could include working alongside professional coaches or examining issues linked to sport and physical education provision in school. Similarly it could be designing and implementing development plans with sports organizations.

Programs typically include the requirement to run independent research and to submit the dissertation.

Graduate-level online certificate programs are also available for aspiring coaches. These programs focus on techniques, strategies, leadership and organization for coaching a number

of sports. In addition to general coaching certificate programs, there are also programs available that tailor the curriculum to a specific sport of the student's choosing. The basic coaching principles are established and participants gain an understanding of nutrition, health issues in sports and physical conditioning.

Many who enter into this type of programs are already established coaches who desire to further develop their knowledge and coaching techniques. Upon completion of this certificate program participants are usually eligible to coach recreation leagues, interscholastic sports, collegiate sports, youth leagues and at the professional level.

Continuing the coaches' education to further heights, many universities offer Master of Science Programs in Coaching.

Sports coaching master's degree programs enhance existing professional expertise in leading a team or individual athletes through a competitive event and administering an athletic program.

Course work usually addresses issues, including game day tactics, coaching philosophy development and external economic, legal and political factors shaping the contemporary sports industry. Students are encouraged to build a network of colleagues with whom they can solve common problems and communicate research findings of common interest to their sport. Some schools even offer their programs in an online format. Such sports coaching master's degrees may be earned in two years and the masters programs usually favour applicants with degrees in sports science or physical education. Some sports coaching programs at the master's degree level have a standard list of required courses, while others have a core of 4-5 required courses and a set of electives. The following are possible sports coaching courses:

- Research methods
- Coaching and leadership principles
- Sports administration
- Sports medicine and injury prevention
- Sports law

Further up the educational ladder, research mode doctoral programs are available in sports coaching as well in leading universities around the world.

### **3.2. Coaches Education through National & International Associations' Educational Programs**

Various national and international sports ruling bodies offered their own views on coaches' education and development and versions of implementing both as well.

Football and athletics, being among the most popular world's sports give us examples of highly professional systems of coach education.

The football Association of Ireland (FAI), for instance, runs the Coach Education Unit of the FAI Technical Department which oversees all stages of the coaching ladder, from the introductory Kick-Start 1 course up to the UEFA Pro Licence, the highest point of the coaching ladder. One of the features of the system is well planned and adjusted list of aims and objectives which gradually and systematically disseminates layers of knowledge and skills required by coaches while upgrading their professional qualifications.

Following is the level to level progression of aims of FAI coaches' education program<sup>[12]</sup>:

#### ***Kick Start 1***

Aim: To assist parents and coaches, to introduce children (aged 6-9 years) to fun soccer games and FUNdamental movement skills in a well-structured, stimulating and safe

environment.

#### ***Kick Start 2***

Aim: To assist coaches in the development of the player's (aged 9-12 years) soccer specific and FUNdamental movement skills in game related functions, progressing into small sided games.

#### ***Youth Certificate***

Aim: To assist coaches in the development and consolidation of the player's (aged 13-18 years) basic soccer skills with an emphasis on individual and positional specific skills, tactical and physical development, as well as performance.

#### ***Senior Intro***

Aim: To introduce coaches/managers to their role in coaching adult players (17 years plus), and to assist them to prepare, plan and implement functional practices and conditioned games for the 11 aside game.

#### ***UEFA B Licence***

Aim: To assist coaches in the preparation, development and consolidation of the player's/team's technical, tactical, mental and physical development as well as maximising their performance.

#### ***UEFA A Licence***

Aim: To assist coaches in the preparation, development and consolidation of the player's/ team's technical, tactical, mental and physical development as well as maximising their performance.

The International Association of Athletic Federations (IAAF) suggests its own vision of coaches' education with an assumption that the resources and effort involved in developing an education program may be beyond capabilities on a national level, thus offering to unite the resources and facilities of National and International bodies.

The IAAF operates a Coaches Education and Certification System (CECS) which is available as a service to member federations which would like to make use of it. For each course level the IAAF provides a standard syllabus, qualified lecturers and the necessary learning support materials<sup>[13]</sup>:

#### ***Level I – Youth Coach.***

The Level I course develops the educational aspects of Kids' Athletics and Teens' Athletics. The objective is to produce qualified *Youth Coaches* able to train and prepare young children for *Kids' Athletics* competitions (7-12 years old) and to provide the 'bridge' to 'real' athletics. *Youth Coaches* should be competent and able to take the kids through to the youth programs of training and competition relevant to Teens' Athletics (13-15 years of age). To make the most efficient use of resources and ensure the optimum application and activity, Level I courses are conducted at locations in the countries of member federations, using IAAF accredited Level I lecturers and standardized course materials.

#### ***Level II – Assistant Coach.***

The Level II course is intended to train coaches for effective work with youth and beginner athletes. The Level II syllabus covers all event groups and emphasizes the practical skills of coaching. At the same time, the Level II course provides a theoretical base which is sufficient to allow coaches to continue learning. Entry for the Level II is granted to successful and active Level I coaches. Level II courses too, as

Level I, are conducted at locations in the countries of the member federations, using IAAF accredited Level II Lecturers and standard course materials. The norm is for a 14 day residential course.

### **Level III – Coach.**

The Level III course is designed to be an introduction to performance coaching for coaches who have performed well at Level II and have gained a level of coaching specialization in one of the following six event groups: Sprints and hurdles; Middle and long distance running; Race walks; Jumps; Throws; Combined events.

With this specialization individuals can begin to meet their country's need for high level coaches. It is anticipated that the majority of Level III participants will continue to Level IV. In addition to elements specific to the events group, the Level III syllabus contains core elements which are common to all events.

On completion of a Level III course a coach is expected to be able to identify and coach the basic competition model for each event within an event group. The coach is also expected to be able to plan and implement a series of appropriate training sessions within the context of an annual training plan.

### **Level IV – Senior Coach.**

The Level IV course builds on the experiences of Level III and can be thought of as the development of performance coaching, providing coaches with advanced level instruction in their chosen event group. As with Level III, the Level IV syllabus includes event specific elements but more of the common core elements are now studied with a specific application to the event group context.

On completion of the Level IV course coaches should be able to identify and coach high level and advanced competition models for their specific event or events. They are also expected to be able to plan and implement macro-cycles of training for high level athletes within the context of a multi-year plan. These plans should lead to the achievement of potential, elite performance and competitive results. Level III and Level IV course are conducted at the Regional Developmental Centers (RDC). Entry to Level IV is open to coaches who pass the Level III assessment procedures, have completed a minimum of one further year of practical coaching experience and have been recommended by their national federation.

### **Level V –Academy Coach.**

The IAAF Academy currently offers the following courses: Chief Coach; Youth Chief Coach; Elite Coach (head coach for events group); Coaching Development Director.

The IAAF Academy aims to provide the coach with the relevant professional knowledge, understanding and practical experience to create an environment capable of delivering high levels of individual and team performance at specific events, or the development of innovative coaching development environments, over multiple seasons<sup>[13]</sup>.

## **4. Cooperation and synchronization between the pathways**

For a long time, qualifications offered and awarded through various educational pathways were not standardized and mutually adjusted. That quite often led to overrating of some qualifications while undermining other professional qualifications, resulting in certain degree of tension and sometimes misunderstandings between various education/certification agencies.

The pioneering initiative to eradicate the existing discrepancies was taken in 2007 by the European Coaching Council, a sub-committee of the European Network of Sport Science, Education & Employment which has initiated a 'Review of the EU 5-Level Structure for the Recognition of Coaching Qualifications'.

The need for this Review was identified by the members of the European Coaching Council, given that the initial structure for the recognition of coaching qualifications was first developed in 1999. It was also felt that there was a need to more fully engage with the International Federations on the issue of coach education, competence and qualifications.

In addition, there have been several wider developments within vocational education and training in the European Union that have significant implications for the way in which coaches are educated and their competence and qualifications recognized.

The Review proposed major initiatives in relation to coach education through various pathways including the one regarding educational levels of the coaches. It was suggested that the direct equation of educational levels with coaching roles was to be replaced with recognition of the *Federation, Vocational and University* coach education streams.

These educational streams were recommended to demonstrate a clear link with the coaching roles, the standard occupations and the associated coaching competences. As a result a new Framework for the Recognition of Coaching Competence and Qualifications is required: with vocational education agencies, national and international federations determining the number of levels of education appropriate for their country/sport and demonstrate the relationship between these educational levels and the coaching roles/standard occupations.

University qualifications in coaching should be recognized in line with the Bologna process and demonstrate the relationship between these qualifications and the coaching roles/standard occupations. A system for the recognition of coaching qualifications between vocational and higher education sectors within each country is proposed.

An important step has been suggested on the recognition of prior learning and current competence pointing out that coaches carrying out their role should have either completed a formal and recognized course of learning and/or had their prior learning and current competence formally assessed.

As part of the process of moving coaching towards the status of a regulated profession it is recommended that all coaches should hold a sport-specific coaching license. The coaching license should act as a registration and recognition system overseen and validated by the sports federations and, if needed, by the national competent authority. The coaching license should be the primary criterion for the recognition of the coaches' mastery of the practical demands and competencies of sports coaching<sup>[14]</sup>.

The document expressed recommendations that all national competent authorities in coach education should oversee, recognize and, if needed, conduct the sports coaching education programs. These authorities may identify various public or private organizations or agencies to deliver these programs, as recognized coaching education agencies.

These recognized coach education agencies can be federations, universities-higher education institutions or public/private institutions/agencies as identified by the national competent authorities that will follow the guidelines set by the authorities. Given the sport specific nature of coaching, the unique position of national federations in the conduct of coach education programs should be recognized.

## 5. Conclusions

It has been proposed that the revised structure for the recognition of sport coach qualifications should consist of three primary strands:

1. Federation-based education
2. Higher education-based education
3. Other recognized coaching education agencies -based education

Federation-based education: This strand has to be delivered, recognized and/or validated by federations at various levels of responsibility be it local, regional, national, continental or international.

Higher education-based education: This strand has to be delivered, recognized and/or validated by institutions of higher education and/or other post second cycle institutions (e.g. sports academies).

Other recognized coaching education agencies-based education: This strand has to be delivered, recognized and/or validated by national competent authorities or by public or private organizations recognized by them. These organizations can be public or private institutions/agencies recognized by the national competent authorities. It was also recognized that other agencies (e.g. private sector) might be involved in the delivery of the coach education.

Cooperation between these strands was recommended with a view of maximizing the quality of coach education and the available combined resources. It was recommended that where joint-working occurs the parties cooperate in all aspects of the education process, regardless of the agency involved in delivery.

It was also recommended that all strands should be recognized by the rest of the parties involved in the process, so that coaches could utilize their knowledge and expertise transparently and for the mutual benefit of all parties involved regardless if employed by a sports authority, a higher education institution or a federation.

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