

# COACHING Excellence



**Frank Pyke**

Editor

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# COACHING EXCELLENCE

# PREFACE

This coaching text continues and builds upon a series of popular coaching manuals. The first, *Towards Better Coaching*, was published in 1980 followed by *Better Coaching* in 1991 and 2001. This book is titled *Coaching Excellence* to reflect the progress that has been made in the profession during the past thirty years and to indicate how expectations of coaches have increased during that time.

Our coaches must strive to become thoroughly informed and fully capable of addressing the significant challenges ahead of them. Surveys show that participation in sport is gradually declining as we succumb to a more sedentary life style, particularly among our children and adolescents. Additionally, more countries are now involved seriously in elite sport, which makes winning on the world stage increasingly difficult. So, whether coaches are involved in junior, recreational or high performance sport, meeting these challenges requires them to always aspire to be their best, both in their technical area and as people. These aspirations match the expectations coaches have for members of their squads.

*Coaching Excellence* is divided into three parts. Part I describes the ever-expanding role of the modern coach in delivering a high quality program. Emphasis is placed on the importance of social skills, self-awareness, knowledge, experience and a willingness to learn. The management, organisational and communication skills required to have a positive influence both on and off the field are detailed. The qualities of some of Australia's best coaches, past and present, are described, and this part includes valuable comments from some of these coaches and in some cases from those with whom they have had a close association.

Part II focuses on the principles underlying the conduct of a successful program. It

emphasises the coach's role in encouraging everyone to work together. This involves creating a team-oriented culture within the program and then managing relationships with all the parties likely to have some influence on it. This section offers advice on how to manage the risks and ethical issues that confront a coach, which is an area that creates continuing problems in modern sport. Careful planning and critical evaluation of the program are also included as an essential part of ensuring that the best possible outcomes are achieved.

Part III demonstrates the application of Australia's highly regarded scientific approach to athlete development. It includes evaluating the demands of a wide range of different sports as well as the attributes of the athletes involved and then developing a training program that meets the mental and physical requirements of each individual. The section presents the most recent information available on specific mental, technical and tactical skill and fitness training programs and does so in a manner that is practical and readily usable by coaches. Chapters on life skill development, nutrition and injuries and illnesses also provide current and valuable knowledge from within each of these important areas of athlete health and welfare.

The best coaches are always searching for a better way. In elite sport, coaches are invariably motivated by a desire to help athletes and teams succeed. In school and recreational programs, the motivation is to enable more participants to enjoy sport and enhance their health, well-being and self-confidence. This book, by sharing the latest knowledge, research and applications of our best sport coaches, scientists and professionals, can play a key role toward achieving those objectives.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I would also like to thank my wife, Janet, for her wonderful support throughout this project, as well as all the previous projects.

In particular I wish to acknowledge all the coaches and athletes I have had the privilege of working with and being inspired by during my career.

—*Frank Pyke*

# INTRODUCTION: THE MODERN COACHING LANDSCAPE

## OUR SPORT

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During the past 30 years, the sporting landscape in Australia has changed markedly. Our population has become more culturally diverse, potentially making more sports available to more people. Although this has not necessarily resulted in an increase in the number of people participating in sport, in international competition we have continued to outperform many other countries with larger populations.

Participation and performance are closely linked. If there are large numbers playing a particular sport, the chances of producing champions are greater. The performances of these champions then encourage others to participate. Conversely, low participation rates have an adverse effect on the chances of generating outstanding performances within the sport and the subsequent involvement of others.

Participation in sport is now being seriously challenged by time spent in sedentary pursuits, many of which involve sitting in front of screens: televisions, computers, gaming systems and mobile devices. The modern lifestyle discourages physical activity and is one of the most significant factors leading to an increase in the number of overweight and obese individuals, particularly children and adolescents.

The situation is quite different in high-performance sport, in which more countries are now involved in the pursuit of excellence.

Success on the international stage is seen as an important means of generating national pride and is accompanied by high public interest and expectation. This is fuelled by global television coverage and modern Internet communication that provide viewers with access to an ever-expanding range of major sporting events.

In the constant search for a winning formula, high-performance sport has become more commercial and professional. Consequently, many athletes, coaches and members of support services teams are now employed full-time in elite programs and are well remunerated to meet the commitments of hectic competition schedules. This has become possible as a result of the increased financial support provided by governments, the corporate sector and the public.

## OUR COACHES

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At the heart of our involvement in both recreational and high-performance sport are our coaches. There are substantial demands on them to ensure that, with the increased number of sports now available to our children and youth, a large enough talent pool is available and the people in that pool have a clear pathway through the sport and have the opportunity to maximise their potential. This process requires coaches, and their athletes and teams, to commit to a plan and be prepared to do the hard work necessary to fulfil

its objectives. Once people become involved in school, recreational and high-performance programs, it is imperative that coaches maintain their interest and involvement and minimise participant dropout.

Coaches have the responsibility for ensuring that athletes enjoy participating and improve their skill and fitness while doing so. To fulfil this responsibility, the coach must understand the sport, know the athlete and be able to implement a program that will bring about the improvements required to reach the established performance goals. The coach must also be able to work cooperatively with others connected in the program, including sporting clubs and associations, schools, parents and particularly in elite programs, the personnel who provide specific services to athletes.

In high-performance sport, one of the greatest challenges for the coach is to ensure that all members of the athlete support team are working in consort. For example, when an athlete receives mixed messages from the coaching, physical conditioning and physical therapy staff about the best way forward with a particular injury, it creates confusion and uncertainty. It is the coach's role to bring the support team together on a regular basis to establish a unified view and communicate this to the athlete. Another continuing problem for coaches and management in modern sport is ensuring that their athletes are not involved with performance-enhancing drugs and any other illegal or unethical behaviours both within and outside sport.

The time commitment of coaches can become excessive. This not only includes planning and supervising the training and competition program of the athlete or the team, but also coordinating support staff and dealing with administrators, sponsors and the media. Furthermore, the degree of stress experienced is heightened by the public pressure to achieve good results. Coaches must learn to cope by delegating some responsibilities to others, putting their health and family foremost on their list of priorities and ensuring that they have a life outside sport.

## OUR PROGRAMS

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Sports science has grown noticeably within the Australian university system. What were formerly known as physical education and recreation courses are now commonly labelled as sports and exercise science or human movement. Several universities also now offer coaching science courses and use the textbooks of the national coaching accreditation program.

Several scientific disciplines form the biological and behavioural basis of sport performance. These include physiology, functional anatomy, biomechanics, motor learning and control and psychology. Among them, they define the fitness, technical and tactical skill and mental qualities required to achieve success. They also provide the scientific basis of athlete development programs through a better understanding of the physical and mental demands of the sport, the attributes of individual athletes and the suitability and effectiveness of a prescribed training regime.

Sports medicine, physiotherapy and nutrition specialists are also now valuable members of the support staff for high-performance teams. The prevention and treatment of injury and illness is of paramount importance, particularly in sports in which explosive movements and body contact are commonplace and competition schedules are heavy. Healthy, performance-enhancing diets accompanied by sufficient replacement fluids are essential for all athletes.

Coaches are now better educated, but creativity and innovation are also important to producing winning and breakthrough performances. New methods employed with success should undergo scientific scrutiny to be validated or refuted by solid research. This approach has served Australia's sports institute and sports academy network very well through the years and established the country's favourable international reputation in the application of science and technology in sport.

Finally, coaches at all levels of sport should strive to develop their athletes' life skills. There are many social benefits of participating in sport, including establishing a social network



and having a sense of a community and, in the process, learning to be cooperative, disciplined and respectful of others. Ultimately, these are more important outcomes than a team or an individual winning a particular event. Coaches, with the help of parents, can encourage these growth opportunities for athletes and help instil in them a love for the spirit of sport that they can retain throughout their lives.

## THIS BOOK

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No single resource can contain or convey everything that a coach should know and do. So *Coaching Excellence* does the next best thing. It builds on the basics to provide serious and high-performance-level coaches a wealth of information to become more adept in their roles.

Expert contributors to this book were carefully selected to ensure the best knowledge, research and insights for coaches to take and apply in working with their athletes and teams. The content is divided into three interrelated parts that are important to coaches.

Part I examines the on- and off-field roles and responsibilities of a coach. This section provides examples of a number of successful coaches with very different personalities and skills. Reflective comments from athletes who have performed under their tutelage add an interesting perspective.

Part II covers planning and coordinating a high-quality program. In such programs, all those involved have agreed to a set of core values that are associated with success within the boundaries of fair play. As expected, this requires ongoing objective evaluations and a commitment to achieving long-term success regardless of any pitfalls encountered in the process.

Part III explores the applications of the sports sciences to enhance the fitness and the technical, tactical and mental skills of athletes. All the research findings in this book have very practical applications that coaches can use to take individual and team performances to new heights. Indeed, the contributors to this section show an equal appreciation of the health and well-being of both athletes and coaches. They also appreciate the challenges of coaching and advocate a balance between sport and life that will in turn benefit the athletes.

Clearly, the best coaches are those who know their sports, their athletes and themselves and are always searching for ways to improve their programs. In elite sport, this is invariably motivated by a desire to win. However, it never takes too long before any new method finds its way into school and recreational programs, enabling more participants to enjoy sport and thereby enhancing the health, fitness, well-being and confidence of the community.

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**PART I**  
**BEING A COACH**



# Roles and Responsibilities of the Coach

— Cliff Mallett

Sport has the potential to change people's lives. Specifically, sport can be a vehicle for positive development because it prompts participants to learn, achieve and develop. Engagement in sport can foster personal growth, enabling young participants to become fully functioning adult citizens and make a contribution to broader society. Sport can promote well-being and academic achievement and transform people's lives, including those in positions of disadvantage. Conversely, negative sporting experiences can hinder development.

Experiences participants gain from journeying through sport influence their subsequent views of sport, the world and their place in it—such is the potential power of the sporting experience. Nonetheless, sport is not inherently good and does not inevitably lead to positive outcomes; learning in and through sport is contingent on quality experiences. In many instances, quality coaching is the key to quality participant experiences.

The coach is central to the potential of sport to contribute towards participants' positive development. In the sporting context, coaches, teachers and peers are the most influential people on youth. Coaches in particular are in a position to promote the importance of health, human rights, inclusion and engagement in a productive lifestyle. This promotion doesn't happen without explicit and deliberate guidance and an understanding of the power of sport. Coaches should be equipped to deliver on these expectations and potential.

Most people acknowledge the central role of the coach in the coach-athlete-performance relationship. In recent times, the key roles and responsibilities of the coach have increased and necessitated a commensurate program of development to produce quality coaching and subsequently contribute to the holistic development of participants. In response to the significant growth of sport in Australian society, the vocation of coaching has evolved, especially over the past three decades.

The advent of the Australian National Coach Accreditation Scheme (NCAS) and many sports taking responsibility for coach education and development has contributed to the evolution of sport coaching in Australia. Many coaches seek these formal and less formal learning opportunities to develop their craft. National and state institutes of sport, as well as academies within national sporting organisations, have also contributed to the development of coaching. Furthermore, coaching science researchers and scholars and formal coach education programs in the university sector have also contributed significantly to the professionalisation of coaching as a vocation.

## COACHING AND THE COACHING PROCESS

Sport coach development programs designed to help coaches deliver positive sporting experiences are in their infancy compared with

such programs in more established vocations within the performing arts, such as music, art and ballet. These fields have long-established programs for directing their development and professionalisation.

Sport coaching is a social activity and consequently involves the interactions of many people such as coaches, athletes, parents, officials and support personnel. As a result, coaches must be sensitive and responsive to differences in ability, race, religion and gender to get the best from people. People engage in sport for many reasons, and coaches must recognise the range of needs, goals and aspirations that produce different physical and psychosocial responses (e.g., motor skills, emotions).

Sport coaching is considered a systematic and integrated process rather than a series of unrelated training sessions or learning experiences. The coaching process refers to the purposeful engagement of coach and athlete over time to improve skilled performance, and the coach is responsible for leading this process.

Coaches are charged with the responsibility to influence (i.e., lead) in all sporting contexts (recreational to elite). This notion of sport leadership highlights the power of coaches in the coach-athlete-performance relationship. In leading the coaching process, coaches need to be conscious of the athletes' goals as well as their own goals for coaching.

## PRIMARY AIM OF COACHING

Young people spend nearly half their time in leisure pursuits, and sport is a popular organised recreational activity with the potential to promote positive development. Although sport has been associated with positive experiences and outcomes, such as improved confidence and academic achievement, it has also been linked with negative experiences and outcomes, such as stress, burnout, dropout and low self-esteem.

As architects of the sporting environment, coaches are responsible for fostering participants' healthy development. Coaches are important role models for children and youth and, along with parents, are significant adult influences. How coaches interact with sport

participants determines the outcomes of participation. Hence, coaches play a pivotal role in the contribution of sport to physical and psychosocial development.

Positive athlete outcomes from sport can be summarised in the four Cs, which come from the positive youth development literature:

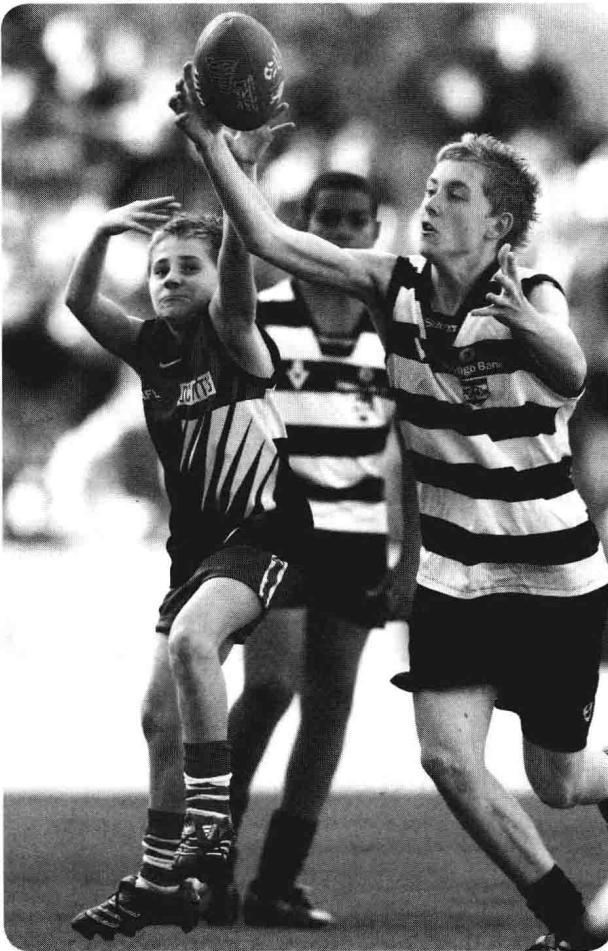
- Competence
- Confidence
- Connection
- Character and caring

*Competence* is associated with a positive view of oneself in specific contexts, such as sport, academic, work and social environments. To feel competent is a fundamental psychological need for humans in all cultures. Sport participants (at all levels) who feel competent are more likely to be internally motivated to work hard, persevere and subsequently pursue and achieve excellence.

The sense of accomplishment that occurs when an athlete achieves a goal is a powerful force for internal motivation. Hence, the sporting context should foster a sense of competence in all participants, including those whose abilities are less developed compared with others of the same age. Obviously, the role of the coach is central to promoting a sense of competence. Contexts that hinder the perception of competence are associated with lower motivation, performance and well-being.

*Confidence* has to do with a sense of positive self-worth and self-efficacy. This global view of oneself influences motivation, the capacity to learn and subsequent performance. Confidence is initially developed during childhood and can be fragile, especially throughout adolescence. Helping children and youth to be curious, to show initiative and to be independent and autonomous fosters a sense of self-worth. Coaches who focus on self-referenced improvement promote internal motivation, a willingness to work hard and resilience. Furthermore, they create athletes who view themselves positively.

*Connection* is associated with a sense of belonging. We all like to belong to particular



Coaches can help youth players develop competence in their sport and confidence in themselves.

groups, and a key reason for children's engagement in sport is to pursue friendships with their peers. It is also noteworthy that this need to belong continues throughout the human life span. Athletes at the elite level have the same need to belong that children do. Sport provides opportunities to develop a strong sense of belonging to teams and squads. These positive bonds among team members provide a warm and friendly environment in which to develop physical and social skills and to learn prosocial behaviours. Furthermore, positive connections with other adults (coaches) through constructive and encouraging feedback promote enjoyment and other positive outcomes, such as increased effort.

The development of *character* and *caring* has not always been associated with sport participation. Nonetheless, sport can contribute to the

development of character and a sense of caring for others (compassion) if explicitly taught by the coach and other significant adults such as parents. Moral development and integrity are associated with this fourth C. The respect for societal rules and the demonstration of appropriate behaviours both on and off the field are central to the development of good moral character. Moreover, sportspeople with good moral character are sensitive to issues such as access for all and tolerance of differences.

Developing competence, confidence, connection, character and caring in athletes should be the charter of sport coaches. Hence, coaches should be mindful of how they behave and how they go about contributing to the holistic development of their athletes. Consideration of the four Cs in coaching practice will foster positive sporting experiences for all. A focus on holistic development will encourage athletes' continued engagement in sport, which is necessary to enable them to develop their sporting abilities.

## FORMS OF COACHING

The term *coach* can mean different things to different people. In a broad sense, sport coaching is associated with helping others in the context of sport; however, not all coaches undertake the same type of work. The context in which coaches operate usually determines the form of coaching undertaken. Coaching scholars and educators have recognised four forms of coaching:

- Instructors or sport teachers (e.g., golf)
- Participation coaches (e.g., Little Athletics)
- Performance or development coaches (e.g., school, youth academies)
- High-performance coaches (e.g., institutes of sport and professional team coaches)

Instructors are sport leaders who provide basic instruction to beginners on how to play specific sports. Sport instructors or teachers are common in sports such as tennis, swimming and golf. Sport teachers introduce interested learners to the basics of how to play the sport, and generally the instructor and learner engage



in a limited period of interaction. The key focus is to improve the performance within a short time frame. Instructors work with both young people and adults. People who engage with sport instructors do not participate in formal competition.

Participation coaches generally provide opportunities for people to engage in sport as a productive leisure pursuit. These coaches generally work in community contexts in which there is low-level competition. In these contexts, participation is emphasised over performance enhancement, and the focus is on enjoyment and health. Participation coaching predominately occurs in junior sport contexts, although there are some sports in which adult participation coaching occurs.

Development or performance coaching occurs in formal competitive environments such as schools and club sports and typically involves a stable relationship between a coach and athletes during a competitive season. The focus is on preparation to enhance performance, which requires an increased level of commitment in coaches and athletes compared with recreational contexts. The identification and development of sporting talent is consistent with the work of development coaches. It is noteworthy that although the focus is on performance enhancement, enjoyment is necessary to develop internal motivation to sustain engagement.

High-performance coaches work in elite sporting environments. Their work is typically highly organised and systematic but necessarily fluid and dynamic. They develop sophisticated plans for training and competition; however, they must be flexible and adaptable to adjust to a changing environment such as injury or poor performance. High-performance coaches focus on successful performance, including winning.

To produce successful performances, these coaches engage in highly complex tasks involving the extensive collection and monitoring of data to inform and regulate training and competition plans. Moreover, high-performance coaching necessitates interactions with a range of paraprofessionals (e.g., specialist coaches and sports science and sports medicine experts) and

generally requires full-time employment (e.g., head coach in a professional national football league). Another form of high-performance coaching is representative team coaching (e.g., state or Olympic team coaching), which requires a slightly different skill set.

Importantly, all coaches should be valued for the individual and collective contributions they make in facilitating learning and development in and through sport for people of all ages. In recognition of the importance of all forms of coaching, coaches in all classifications have strong support in becoming more expert (e.g., higher levels of coach accreditation in participation coaching and youth coaching as well as high-performance coaching). Specialised accreditation opportunities reflect the various forms of sport leadership and the associated differences in the roles and responsibilities of the actors.

## DEVELOPING A COACHING PHILOSOPHY

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The development of a personal set of views on coaching (i.e., one's coaching philosophy) is an ongoing process derived from coaches' own life experiences, including their families and education experiences. Coaches' views on coaching are representative of their values—what they believe is important. These beliefs and principles are significant because they influence how and why coaches coach the way they do.

Coaching philosophies usually change over time. Initially, coaches might focus on performance enhancement and a win-at-all-cost attitude. However, over time coaches might shift their thinking about the purpose of their coaching to encompass a broader understanding of how sport participation contributes to the holistic development of participants. Articulating their coaching philosophies can be challenging for many coaches. Often, it is not until they take the time to reflect on their practice that they can have some clarity about their views on coaching.

Articulating a coaching philosophy requires coaches to be self-reflective and authentic. They should be true to themselves and be who they