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Original article

ASPECTS OF COACHING IN ELITE SPORTS

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Abstract

Aim. The aim of this study was to analyze the characteristics of coaching strategies on the performance of elite athletes.

In elite sport, coaches are fully responsible for the performance outcomes of athletes. Throughout the sport career athletes develop many significant and interdependent relationships, but it is the relationship that they form with their coach that is perceived to be central in determining their skill development, physical performance, and psychosocial growth and development (Jowett, 2007). In recent years, the coach-athlete relationship has been perceived as a social situation in which coaches' and athletes' interpersonal feelings of closeness, thoughts of commitment, and behaviours of complementarity or cooperation are mutually and causally inter-connected (Jowett & Felton, 2014).

Methods. We searched the following computerized databases: Web of Knowledge, Google Scholar and profile websites to collect recent data on the influence of coaching in elite sport.

Results. The results of this study contribute to a better understanding of how coaching strategies influences the performances of elite athletes. Additionally, they provide practical recommendations for coaches, helping them optimize their approaches and improve their relationship with athletes, thus leading to more effective talent development and superior results in competitions.

Conclusions. Mental coaching in different sports can include focus and attention, managing stress and pressure, motivation and self-confidence, mental preparation for competition, mental resilience, teamwork.

Keywords: coaching, athletes, teamwork, training, mental preparation

Introduction

In elite sport, coaches are fully responsible for the performance outcomes of athletes. The available literature defines the term coach and the role of the coach in many ways. The forms of coach are as diverse as the sports and contexts in which they work, in some sports such as handball we meet the term coach, while in elite football in Europe the term manager.

Throughout the sport career athletes develop many significant and interdependent relationships, but it is the relationship that they form with their coach that is perceived to be central in determining their skill development, physical performance, and psychosocial growth and development (Jowett, 2007). In recent years, the coach-athlete relationship has been perceived as a social situation in which coaches' and athletes' interpersonal feelings of closeness, thoughts of commitment, and behaviours of complementarity or cooperation are mutually and causally inter-connected (Jowett & Felton, 2014).

A positive coach-athlete relationship is acknowledged to promote participation, athlete satisfaction, self-esteem, and improved performance (Jowett S., Poczwadowski A. 2007).

The level of reciprocity determines the quality of the coach-athlete relationship. Sport training likely existed in primitive forms since the birth of sport itself. For centuries, world-renowned athletes have turned to coaches to improve and develop their performance. Historically, the word "coaching" was first used in the academic world in 1830, when Oxford University used the term as slang for a tutor who "carried" a student. In 1860, the term "sports coach" was used in athletics in England.

Coaches are considered central actors in the coach-athlete-performance relationship (Mallett, 2010; Mallett & Lara-Bercial, 2016).

Coaches must understand the technical, tactical and physical demands of their sport (Bompa, 2009) and be capable of ensuring a balance between performance, high pressure and well-being (Côté & Gilbert, 2009; Hardman & Jones, 2011).

The coach unlocks the potential of athletes with the goal of maximizing their performance. Interaction processes between athletes and coaches have always been considered to be determinant factors for sports performance, for its repercussion at the behavioural, cognitive and emotional aspects of the actors. This influence is specially important for the athlete, because of the meaning given by competitive results to the whole investment in the process, by athletes, coaches, and sports organisations. Research has shown that coach reputation can influence behaviours such as athletes' attention to coach instruction, effort, and persistence in football. The same author claims that coaches with a high

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reputation and experience benefited from significantly more attention from the players and greater resistance during training than coaches with an inexperienced reputation (Manley, Greenlees, Smith, Batten, & Birch, 2014).

Methods

We searched the following computerized databases: Web of Knowledge, Google Scholar and profile websites to collect recent data on the influence of coaching in elite sport.

Athletes preferred coaches who have a positive outlook and an athlete-centered mindset (Foulds SJ et al., 2019).

Mental coaching in different sports can include:

- focus and attention: football is a team sport that requires intense concentration throughout the match, both in defense and attack. The players need to focus on specific tasks and maintain attention even in conditions of fatigue or intense pressure. Mental coaching helps players train this kind of focus.
- managing stress and pressure: mental training techniques, such as controlled breathing, meditation, or positive visualization, help players manage stress and emotions in crucial moments, such as penalty kicks or tense match endings.
- motivation and self-confidence: by setting realistic and personalized goals, mental coaching motivates players to reach their full potential.
- mental preparation for competition: a central component of mental coaching is specific mental preparation for matches, and includes creating detailed mental scenarios of how the game will unfold, mentally training for difficult situations and preparing to manage mistakes or failures on the pitch.
- mental resilience: in sports (tenis, sports team) moments of failure or defeat are inevitable. Mental coaching helps players develop mental resilience, enabling them to recover quickly from setbacks and continue improving their performance.
- teamwork: a 'team' can be defined as a group of individuals with specified roles and responsibilities interacting adaptively, interdependently, and dynamically towards a valued common outcome and who are together embedded in an encompassing organisational system, with boundaries and linkages to the broader system context and task environment (Salas E, Sims DE, Burke CS, 2005).

According to Carron, A. V. (1988), three conditions are necessary in order for there to be a link between individual roles and team effectiveness:

- *Role clarity* - This concerns the extent to which players are clear what their formal role is on the team. A lack of clarity can lead to confusion, reduced confidence and increased conflict among other players or coaches.
- *Role acceptance* - This is the extent to which players are satisfied with their assigned role. It is possible to be clear about your role, yet be unhappy with it.
- *Perceived role performance* - This concerns how well players are performing their specific roles. He believes that even if someone is clear and accepting about their specific role, without adequate performance, the entire team cohesion can be influenced.

In modern football, coaching plays an important role and is expressed through the way coaches interact with players. Examples of football coach good practice:

- *Pep Guardiola* - Manchester City coach is renowned for his focus on psychology and its impact on the game. He uses visualization techniques to help players mentally prepare for games and has a strong emphasis on positive reinforcement to build confidence and trust in his team.

- *Jurgen Klopp* - F.C. Liverpool coach is known for his focus on team dynamics and mental toughness. Klopp believes that football is a physical battle, emphasizes the importance of players understanding their role within the team and how their actions can affect others.

- *Gareth Southgate* - England is recognized with revolutionizing the culture of England's football team. He implemented a holistic psychological approach that focuses on mindfulness and meditation to help players cope with pressure and stay focused.

- *Carlo Ancelotti* - Real Madrid manager is a coach who uses a combination of traditional coaching techniques with psychology. He believes the importance of player communication and creating a positive team environment and is also a strong advocate for using technology to track player progress and improve performance

(https://www.thefootballcoach.net/blogs/thecoachesnotepad/how-football-coaches-are-empowering-players-through-psychology?srsId=AfmBOoqOAJoz8ghupuRVQCLAY_FQqXkIjBh0Cv0VEeRofvvx2P8311m).

Arsenal FC manager Mikel Arteta highlighted the role of psychology in the game when he once said, "...the most important thing is to get out there with the mentality you're going to win... you can't control the pressure, you can only control yourself and what's going to happen in the game...if you have belief in yourself, you know your talent will come through..." (<https://www.isspf.com/the-power-of-soccer-psychology-developing-the-power-of-the-coaching-mind/>).

The team manager must understand not only the tactical and technical aspects of the game, but also the psychological factors that affect the performance of players. Using psychological techniques, the coaches can influence the development of players to reach their full potential.

The best football coaches require skills to identify players' strengths and weaknesses, formulate appropriate corrective and informational feedback and praise, as well as communicating in an accessible language (Januário, Rosado, & Mesquita, 2013).

Results

The coach must be a good manager who has:

- Observation skills – to watch the players during training and competition and note both individual and team strengths and weaknesses.
- Evaluation skills – to pinpoint the key strengths and weaknesses and understand what is causing these to happen.
- Communication skills – once the coach has observed and evaluated both individual and team performance, they need to provide feedback. Providing meaningful feedback in a way that can be understood and acted upon can be dependent upon the coach's knowledge of both individual players and context (Nash, C. & Mallett, C. 2019).

Loehr (1993) suggests the following definition for toughness: "Toughness is the ability to consistently perform toward the upper range of your talent and skill regardless of competitive circumstances". He describes four emotional markers of mental toughness:

- Emotional flexibility - the ability to control different situations in a balanced or nondefensive manner;
- Emotional flexibility also speaks to the skill of drawing on a wide range of positive emotions - humor, fighting spirit, pleasure;
- Emotional responsiveness - emotionally engaged in the competitive situation, not withdrawn;
- Emotional strength - the ability to handle great emotional force and sustain your fighting spirit no matter what the circumstances;
- Emotional resiliency - Being able to handle setbacks and recovering quickly from them (Loehr, 1993).

Coaches are always real human beings with different types of character, having a combination of positive and negative particularities (Szabo, 2012), but the goal is for them to be as close to the ideal as possible and to develop the athletes and the team at the highest level. He must have physical skills, mental skills, the ability to transfer knowledge, ability to manage different age groups, knowledge of pedagogy and good motivation. The same author sustains that a good coach is a teacher, an educator, a good specialist in pedagogy, having also the capability to handle conflicts.

Conclusions

Mental coaching in different sports can include focus and attention, managing stress and pressure, motivation and self-confidence, mental preparation for competition, mental resilience, teamwork. Research on caring in elite sport has described a conflict between the need to care for athletes and the need to win and perform (Fisher et al., 2017).

Coaches in elite sport must ensure a balance between performance, high pressure and well-being, caring approach, based on a coach's commitment to caring for athletes, has the potential to create such a balance and sustainability (Dohsten, J., 2018).

Salas E, Sims DE, Burke CS (2005) argue that mental coaching in different sports can include focus and attention, managing stress and pressure, motivation and self-confidence, mental preparation for competition, mental resilience and teamwork.

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