

## The Roots of Success: From Athletic Leaders To Expert Coaches

Patricia S. Miller, Gordon A. Bloom, and Dr. John H. Salmela of the School of Human Kinetics at the University of Ottawa are conducting research on coaching expertise. The present study is part of a larger research project examining the development, knowledge, and beliefs of expert Canadian coaches of team and individual sports.

**T**he three minimal conditions necessary for the existence of leadership are, one, involvement of a group of two or more persons, two, involvement of a common task, and three, existence of a differentiation of responsibility. (Gox 1994, p. 322)

Many athletes who went on in sport to become successful coaches were often exceptional leaders who possessed keen

perspectives and winning styles. Over the years, sport researchers and enthusiasts have speculated on which characteristics facilitate the transition from athlete to successful coach. The purpose of our research was to determine how Canada's top coaches of team sports developed leadership skills during their athletic careers.

There is evidence that athletes who later became leading coaches began to acquire the fundamentals of coaching during their early participation as athletes. Researchers at the University of Ottawa tracked the career progression of six expert Canadian basketball coaches (Schinke et al. 1995). They established seven career stages, beginning with the expert coaches' early participation in sport and ending with their elite coaching positions. The researchers concluded that the acquisition of coaching knowledge follows a fairly consistent developmental process which is rooted in early athletic experiences. They suggested that athletes acquired skills during their early athletic careers that may have prepared them for successful careers in coaching.

In a larger research project, these six expert basketball coaches and 15 others from the sports of volleyball, field hockey, and ice hockey were identified by their respective sport governing bodies as being the top amateur coaches in Canada. All were past or present national team coaches and some were very successful university coaches. All had impressive win/loss records, had produced a number of national and international athletes, and were respected as educators.

Field hockey coach Dru Marshall was one of 21 expert coaches who took part in the University of Ottawa study.

