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Integrating laboratory and fields studies

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EXPERT COACHES VIEWS ON THE TRAINING OF DEVELOPING COACHES
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coaching, expertise, development, mentorship

INTRODUCTION

Sport psychology initially examined the distinct knowledge and skill of expert athletes and coaches. While early research mainly focused on issues relating to athletes, the literature has recently considered the knowledge of expert coaches (Côté, Salmela, & Russell, 1995; Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, & Russell, 1995; Gould, Giannini, Krane, & Hodge, 1996; Salmela, 1994; Walton, 1992). Despite the growing interest in coaching, very little research permits expert coaches the opportunity of expressing their own views, specifically on the training and development of aspiring coaches.

While there exists a vast quantity of general information on coaching, there is surprisingly little systematized conceptual views on the coaching process. One exception was the recent work of Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, & Russell (1995), which contributed a sport specific conceptual model for the process of expert gymnastic coaching (Figure 1). The coaching model's three central components of competition, organization, and training provided aspiring coaches with a heuristic model for acquiring coaching knowledge.

Fig. 1. Côté et al.'s Coaching Model for Expert Gymnastic Coaches
Salmela (1994) also studied expert coaches, specifically looking at the career markers of expert team sport coaches. This research was unique because it considered both the coaching practices and the athletic evolution of the expert coaches. Of importance, was the significance of mentors in both the athletic and coaching careers of these coaches. This study, like the one by Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Bara, & Russell (1995), contributed to the entire process of expert coaching, but did not elicit information on the development and career progression of expert coaches.

Gould, Giannini, Krane, and Hodge (1989) also examined the educational needs of 130 expert American coaches, looking at the benefits of academic education, coaching clinics and coaching science courses. They affirmed the need for a more structured coaching education program that would extend beyond coaching manuals and incorporate practicable mentoring programs and the value of experiential knowledge.

The purpose of the present study in relation to Gould et al.'s is twofold: to determine whether similar views about coaching development exist in Canada and the U.S.A.; and to look at a similar phenomenon using a different methodological approach.

**METHOD AND PROCEDURE**

Twenty-one expert Canadian team coaches were selected based on their national and international coaching results, the number of years of coaching experience and the recommendations of their coaching peers. The professional positions of the coaches varied from the intercollegiate level to current and former national team coaches. The average age of these coaches was 45.5 years and they had coached at the elite level for an average of 18.1 years.

Patton's (1980) interview approach was employed in the current study. This included a combination of structured and unstructured questions on athletic and coaching development, current coaching practices and the future direction of coaching. An examination of the interview transcripts found that approximately 8% of the text included information considered to be within the boundaries of the future training of coaches. In total, 440 pages of single spaced interview manuscript was selected, 34 of which related to this topic. All data were transcribed verbatim from their transcript to a typed format immediately after the completion of each interview. The interview procedures provided
by Coté, Salmela, Baria, and Russell (1993) were followed, whereby the data was transcribed and analyzed in a customized version of Borland’s Paradox for Windows, designed specifically for qualitative data.

RESULTS

The purpose of the current research was to elicit from expert coaches their recommendations regarding the best methods for acquiring coaching training. The results of this analysis revealed that expert coaches believed that more emphasis was needed in the following four areas: clinics, seminars and symposiums, hands-on experience, passive observation of other coaches, and, most importantly, a structured mentoring program. The first three areas received equal attention, and are not listed in any order of importance. However, the fourth area had the most support from the coaches; it is listed last, primarily because it included elements of the other three areas. This section of the paper will now discuss these four areas.

Clinics, Seminars and Symposiums

Coaches stressed the benefit of attending seminars, clinics and symposiums where they interacted and exchanged ideas with both expert and novice coaches. Although these clinics did not always teach coaches new ideas, they were beneficial in affirming their coaching methods, both in content and process.

Clinics have been a fantastic thing for me. I think it is beneficial if you can expose yourself to a clinic with people who are talking about things that interest you. I have never come away from a clinic where I haven’t learned something - not necessarily something brand new, but a new twist on something that I may have done for years. (IH)

I think in our sport we need more symposiums. What is being done internationally, is not even in our books. You have to expose coaches to as many different influences and ideas and then the coach has to develop his or her own style of what they think is going to be important and how they think it all fits together. We have got to deliver that kind of information to our coaches all the way across. (VB)
Although coaches acquired much knowledge through clinics, seminars and symposiums, they also stressed that there was more to learning than straight theoretical knowledge. One such means was observing more experienced coaches in their natural settings.

**Hands-on Experience**

The coaches stated the benefit of learning through hands-on experience. This meant that they were on the ice or in the gym with more experienced coaches. Although they were not mentored by the more experienced coaches, they were able to observe and extract relevant information, just by participating in the process. The coaches also believed that this was part of “paying their dues” and they encouraged others to follow the same path.

I would say that you need young coaches to be in the gym with experienced coaches. They can work with an ask questions about the physical, psychological, technical and tacical components. (VB)

I read a book by the football coach at Notre Dame, and I really enjoyed the book. However, it didn’t give me a feeling of how thorough he was, and some of those things. Obviously, there are some ingredients to this man that you can feel from the book, but you have to meet him and see him in action to be able to get it. (IH)

So far, it has been shown that information has been acquired proactively. Despite this, there were times when passive observation was equally valuable.

**Passive Observation**

Observing coaches in practice, games and through audio-visuals were three examples of acquiring coaching knowledge that was recommended by the expert coaches. Whereas in the previous method of learning, coaches actively participated with the athletes and coaches, in this instance, the coaches observed unobtrusively. This process was carried out in many ways, some of which included observing from the bleachers, standing on the sidelines, or sitting within hearing distance of the coach. Of note, while
most coaches were acquiring positive knowledge, some also recognized that there was
information that they knew they would never use.

I just stole everything I could. I always sat behind the other coaches' benches,
and I stole whatever I liked. The other part of it was that I found things I did
not like and would never use. (BB)

One of the things that I think coaches don't do enough of, and I've always
tried to do quite a bit of, is observing other coaches in action. Sometimes
when I'm out at practices, every once in a while I see some guy up there
in the stands, just taking a look at drills. It always surprises me why more
coaches don't do that, and I always remind them about this sort of thing when
I'm talking to them at clinics. (IH)

Three areas of coach education have been mentioned so far, all of which have
equally contributed to coaching education. The last, and most important
recommendation, termed the mentoring process, incorporated a combination of the three
previous areas.

The Mentoring Process

The main feature with this process was that it involved more of a personalized
approach than the others. In fact, many of the coaches stated that a life-long relationship
has developed with their coaching mentor, with many still referring to them for advice.
In this area, the mentor shared more knowledge with the developing coach, allowing him
or her access to a multitude of resources including colleagues, team meetings and
functions, exposure to higher level competitions and athletes. It is also interesting, that
although most coaches were fortunate to have worked with expert coaches in their field,
much of this occurred by chance, luck or personnel persistence.

I took an advanced basketball course with a university coach. I did
pretty well and he asked me if I wanted to assist him. I worked with
him and found that he opened up a whole new area of coaching for me;
both his management style and organization really caught my interest. (BB)
I think a Level 1 coach should have a mentor coach with them during a game or season. The problem is that it is very time consuming for the mentor to do that, and you also have to find someone who is committed to it. I don't know how practical it is, but I do know that it is important for the growth of young coaches. (FH)

You have to get a coach and be with that coach all the time. The mentor coach has to be a teacher, someone who can communicate information, not someone who can just relay a system and has you pick up balls and stand and watch a drill. It has to be someone who challenges you to learn stuff about coaching, kids, and all of the other components. As mentor coaches, we have to take this responsibility seriously and care about the developing coaches. (BB)

I would like to see a person as an apprenticeship coach, and they'd have to do it for a month. With the geography of Canada it is difficult because people live so far apart and it would cost money. I think it would be money well spent because people go to clinics and say I have watched your team play and I don't think you do that; but their interpretation is completely different. (VB)

In sum, it has become apparent that developing coaches should aim for experience in both the practical and theoretical areas. The culmination of this training should be delivered by an experienced and well-respected mentor coach, despite the fact that there are still many barriers to overcome to improve this area of coach training.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Many of the conclusions reached by Gould, Giannini, Krane, and Hodge (1990) in their survey of elite American coaches were also confirmed in the present study. The one exception of note, was the present emphasis in regard to the importance of a structured and formalized mentoring program. However, this may have more to do with the methodology used, rather than the differences in coaching beliefs. Whereas Gould and colleagues used the more traditional survey questionnaire for data accumulation, the current study employed an in-depth, detailed qualitative analysis using probe questioning.
Coaching Development

(Patton, 1980). This may have provided a more thorough understanding on the knowledge and viewpoints of expert coaches. This may also lend support to Martens’ (1979) assumption regarding the limitations of orthodox science, specially when dealing with such a complex domain as expert coaching.

Other research that has incorporated the use of qualitative data gathering on expert coaches will also benefit from the study (Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, & Russell, 1995; Salmela, 1994). Although these studies were most beneficial for their methodological and theoretical components, they did not examine information related to the recommendations on future training for aspiring coaches. Thus, the present research has extended the initial research by providing coaches with the opportunity to offer developing coaches some recommendations to follow if they wish to progress up the coaching ladder.

In sum, the results of this study suggest that standardized procedures should be implemented in coaching development programs. Like other areas of expertise, it is the experts themselves who must be given the opportunity of expressing their views and opinions in their own words. In this case, it was the recommendations for training future coaches that was examined, and four areas in particular were suggested which should prove useful for coaches at all levels.

REFERENCES


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