

# **6 Steps to Becoming a Better Coach**

Michael Young  
Louisiana State University

Coaches are often so focused on improving the performance of their athletes, that they neglect the fact that becoming a better coach is the best way to accomplish this. Better athletes, winning championships, and improved performance are the result of becoming a better coach. In spite of this, many take the viewpoint that these things make you a better coach rather than the other way around. The following is a brief list of suggestions to make you a better coach.

## **Educate Yourself in the Sports Sciences**

Many coaches get intimidated by the sports sciences and don't spend the time to learn what is really at the foundation of all sport. Whether it's biomechanics, sports psychology, exercise physiology, motor control, training theory or any of the other branches of the sports sciences, these subjects lay the groundwork for all aspects of coaching. A basic understanding of biomechanics can tell you whether a movement pattern is correct or incorrect, and provide you with ways to maximize the efficiency of a movement. Sports psychology is at the heart of athlete motivation, confidence, and anxiety management. Exercise physiology explains the physiological adaptations that occur as a result of a particular form of training, and gives you the knowledge to modify your training programs to get the results you want. Motor control teaches you how to best provide information to your athletes so that they will learn motor skills in the timeliest and most permanent manner. Training theory is what ties all of the other sports sciences together and allows a coach to put together training cycles that will best accomplish a particular goal.

## **Treat Each Athlete as an Individual**

Coaches often forget that each athlete is an individual with unique behavioral, physiological, and psychological characteristics. When dealing with athletes we need to take into account the maturity, training age, current physical condition, injury history,

mental toughness, goals, and many of the other characteristics that make each athlete different. Differences such as these should dictate what type of training the athlete should do, as well as influence your coaching style (authoritarian, democratic, etc). We need to realize that not every athlete should receive the same “cookie-cutter” workout or be treated in the same exact way. Each athlete has a different set of conditions under which they will achieve the most success. It is our job as coaches to not only find out what these conditions are, but to cater our coaching style and plan to each athlete. This doesn’t mean that you need to make up 5 separate workouts or become 5 completely different coaches, it just means that you should realize that not everyone is the same, and adjust your practices and attitude as you see fit. On the surface, this might seem like unequal treatment and be misconstrued as unfair. In truth, treating each athlete as an individual ensures that everyone is given the opportunity to reach his or her potential.

## **Think Critically**

Too often in the coaching community, we accept things that have no particular purpose or do things that may not be suited to our specific set of training conditions. We tend to follow this practice for one of the following reasons:

- 1) Our coaches did something with us, so we repeat it with our athletes;
- 2) We have heard, read or seen an “expert” coach doing something with his athletes so we figure it will work for ours; or just because,
- 3) “That’s the way it’s always been done.”

Instead of accepting any of these things as sacred or untouchable, we need to look, listen, and think more critically. Question everything. Make sure that there is a reason for everything you do; and if there isn’t, maybe you don’t need to be wasting your time doing it. Take the time to consider whether someone else’s suggestions will work for you and your athletes under your specific set of conditions. If something you think is great repeatedly produces failure.... maybe it’s not all that great. Never lose sight of the goal, and make sure everything you have your athletes do will bring them closer to that goal.

## **Be Creative**

To fully take advantage of your critical thinking, you have to balance it with creativity. Creativity helps you individualize workouts, and come up with alternative workouts when your critical thinking has resulted in the elimination of worthless training methods. Creativity will allow you to work around an injury, keep workouts interesting, handle inclement weather, or deal with any other kind of unexpected circumstance that may be thrown your way. If you can think outside the box the rewards will be great.

## **Be Flexible**

This suggestion isn't referring to dynamic, static, or any other kind of stretching. This refers to your attitude as a coach. To be a better coach, don't get regimented into a "one-way" approach. Being flexible means that you're comfortable thinking on the fly, you're comfortable adapting other's ideas to fit your needs, and you're not afraid to make changes whenever you feel necessary.

## **Don't get Complacent**

As coaches, our ultimate goal should be to help an athlete reach their potential. To do this, we should expect no less of ourselves than we expect of our athletes. This means never being satisfied with what you know, what athletes you've coached, or how many championships you've won. To do this, it means staying on top of recent findings in the field of sports science, improving your relationship with your athletes, and developing your critical and creative thinking skills. Never be satisfied and always strive to be a better coach, in doing this, you will inevitably achieve your goals.