

7. QUALITY COACHING

INSTRUCTIONAL SKILLS AND
STRATEGIES FOR
QUALITY OUTCOMES

Introduction

The overall aim of coaches is to help young people build a love of participating in sport for lifelong involvement.

This guideline deals with the coach as an instructor. Other aspects of coaching are dealt with in other guidelines, particularly Guideline 6.

Educating participants about sport is an important role of junior sport coaches who need to be able to

- plan sessions
- instruct in sports skills, rules and etiquette
- teach teamwork and cooperation
- give feedback to help improve skills
- evaluate the success of the teaching process.

To do this, coaches need to understand the developmental stages in how young people learn and how skills are developed.

Understanding Learning

Learning is an active process

Learning is an active process linked to the development of young people. There are

- identifiable phases to learning physical skills
- changes in learning over time as young people gain experience.

Strategies for helping young people learn include letting them

- watch, listen and then experiment for themselves
- try the activity first, and then refine the skills with the help of feedback
- watch other young people.

How young people like to learn differs with the particular skill, their experience and the way they learn best.

Learning is developmental

Learning changes as young people grow and mature with

- physical changes in their size and strength
- social, emotional and psychological development
- their experience as they progress from beginner to intermediate to advanced levels of skill.

With experience young people adapt to changing circumstances with greater speed and ease. Key characteristics of more experienced players are the ability to

- identify and sift relevant cues in the playing environment quickly and accurately
- decide what information is relevant to their performance.

Learning is multi-dimensional

People typically learn more than one thing at a time. In the process of building sport skills, young people are also learning

- what is expected of them as a player
- how to work with friends and team mates
- the skills they are best at.

This highlights the complexity of gaining skills and how the broader social aspects of life also affect young people as they learn sports.

Aims for Quality Coaching

Coaches aim to pass on to young people a sound understanding of the

- skills, tactics, strategies and rules
- etiquette and behaviour standards.

The aim of this is to help them build an ability to make decisions independently and to participate within the ethos of the sport.

Coaches aid learning outcomes best by being flexible and not overly directive. They need to plan

- what they will instruct
- how they will instruct
- how they will structure tasks.

Planning

In planning both individual sessions and seasonal programs, coaches need to consider

- maximising participation and enjoyment
- being inclusive of all young people, whether from other cultural backgrounds, or with special needs (eg a disability, or medical condition)
- learning goals for performance (movement skills, values and attitudes)
- the actual learning tasks and objectives for the session
- the objectives of the season
- overall management plan (use of space and time and what equipment and facilities are needed)
- evaluate after each session so improvements can be made.

Planning should also consider each participant's

- developmental stage with regard to abilities and capacities
- social background and language skills in case your communication style needs to take this into account
- motivations and what is expected from participation in sport
- other physical activities to prevent overload.

7.1 Strategies for Planning

- Consider the developmental stage of participants (eg skill level and experience).
- Consider participants' motivations and expectations.
- Consider the cultural background and particular special needs of participants
- Decide on learning goals related to movement skills, knowledge and understanding.
- Include a focus on etiquette and standards of behaviour.
- Write an overall management plan (use of space, time, safety, equipment and facilities).
- Select learning tasks to be taught at specific sessions.
- Analyse the tasks into components to be learned.
- Consider participants' activity levels to avoid overload.
- Make sure there are fun elements in all activities
- Evaluate outcomes after each session, and at the end of the season, and make changes if needed.

Approaches to Coaching

Planning and instruction are based on the level of the learners, how they prefer to learn, and seeing that every junior in the group is being catered for.

It is ideal to let young people experience as many different roles as possible (players, coaches, scorers) under supervision.

This might encourage some young people to take on these jobs later on, so they can pass the challenges and enjoyment of their sport onto others (see Guideline 6).

Coaches should also

- consider why young people want to participate
- provide safe, quality sport experiences
- share some responsibilities with participants (eg leading warm-ups, record-keeping)
- make sure everyone has an equal opportunity to participate (see Guideline 2 *Getting Young People Involved*)

Guideline 7 - Quality Coaching

- develop and maintain a fun atmosphere in all activities
- provide opportunities for young people to participate in interesting ways that simulate game performance conditions

Above all, young people should feel they are achieving their goals and having fun.

Coaching and the Learning Experience

Coaches have a major influence on the holistic development of young people in sport by educating them in

- sports skills such as physical and technical skills and strategies within the rules of the sport
- sports behaviours that influence their social skills.
- lifestyle skills (eg how to become fit, sun-smart)

Coaching Sports Skills

Key considerations in creating effective learning experiences for young people to develop sport skills include

- **Instructing**
 - keep instructions simple and clear
 - use language best suited to the level of the participants
 - have a positive manner when working with young people.
- **Increase time on task**
 - refine time spent on management so time engaged in the activity can be increased
 - keep instruction time for a specific skill to a minimum to allow more time for trying it.
- **Vary content**
 - sometimes teach the whole skill, and at other times break it into parts, depending on the complexity of the skill
 - playing a modified game first can help participants understand the context of skills

- change between individual, pair and group activities.

- **Increase the challenge**

- alter times, distances, heights etc as skills improve
- move sequentially from simple to more complex techniques over time
- change from static to dynamic (eg. standing long jump to run in and jump), increase the number of players, and introduce defenders.

- **Practice**

- practice each skill randomly through the session (eg 3 – 5 minute blocks of one skill at various times)
- plan to practice under similar conditions to competition as often as possible.

- **Giving feedback**

- successful coaches give immediate feedback that is very specific and offers ideas on correction
- feedback must always be given in a positive environment
- feedback can be verbal or nonverbal (eg thumbs up).

- **Questioning**

- consider the level of the question in terms of the breadth of response you want
- a good sequence is (a) plan the question (b) get the attention of the young person (c) ask the question and wait (d) respond, giving feedback or probing for a more extensive response
- good questions encourage young people to analyse why they chose a particular strategy, why they adjusted their technique, or how they would respond to a similar situation in the future.

7.2 Strategies for Coaching Sports Skills

- Keep instructions simple and clear.
- Keep a positive manner and use language appropriate to the participants
- Keep the time spent on management tasks (setting up equipment and organising various drills) to a minimum.
- Keep young people active as much as possible.
- Keep instruction time for a specific skill to a minimum before participants are allowed to practice.
- Break complex skills into manageable chunks.
- Increase times, distances, heights etc as skills improve.
- Make it more challenging by moving from static to dynamic, changing the number of players, and introducing defenders.
- Practice under similar conditions to competition whenever possible.
- Give immediate, specific, and constructive feedback.
- Question participants to ascertain whether instruction has been understood.

Coaching Sports Behaviours

Coaches also build young people's social skills such as getting along with team members and managing the co-operative and competitive requirements of sport.

Coaches help young people develop desirable sports behaviours by

- encouraging pro-social behaviours such as co-operation, responsibility, and self-control and
- discouraging antisocial behaviours, such as cheating and aggression
- leading by example (eg acknowledging opponents' good efforts).

Coaches, by their treatment of participants, affect such personal characteristics as self-esteem, and perceived competence. This can indirectly affect young people's sporting ability by building their confidence.

7.3 Strategies for Coaching Sports Behaviours

- Encourage fair play, self-control, cooperation, teamwork and team spirit.
- Develop respect for the ability of others and for the judgment of officials, selectors and opposing coaches.
- Discourage anti-social behaviours such as cheating, aggression or 'put-downs' and attitudes such as winning at all costs.
- Promote a healthy lifestyle.
- Help participants build self-confidence in their own abilities.
- Group participants so that everyone has the chance of success.
- Make sure the sport experience is fun for everyone.

Developing Effective Coaching Skills

Coaches learn to coach in two main ways – through formal learning such as coach education programs, and informal learning through experience.

Formal education

Coach education is generally structured around

- general coaching theory
- identifying the skills coaches need
- growth and development of young people
- sport specific technical and tactical skill development
- injury prevention and treatment
- communication and motivation techniques
- supervised field experience.

It is best for coaches to be taught *how* to learn as well as *what* to learn. This is done by providing cooperative learning opportunities for new recruits rather than a transfer of knowledge.

An ideal strategy is to use real coaching situations to create opportunities to share information.

Guideline 7 - Quality Coaching

Accreditation recognises formal education and its assessment. The National Coaching Accreditation Scheme (NCAS) provides a framework of quality control guidelines for sports.

As part of gaining accreditation coaches are made aware of the coaches code of ethics which addresses good coaching behaviours.

Informal learning

Learning as they coach is the more common way coaches develop coaching skills and knowledge.

Self-reflection is an important tool coaches use to learn. This involves

- thinking through strategies that could be used to solve a problem (eg athlete behaviour, parental influence)
- choosing a strategy, trying it and evaluating its success
- finding another strategy if not satisfied.

With experience, coaches rely less on outside sources and more on solving problems independently.

Educators need to nurture the self-directed learning skills coaches gain when coaching.

Effective coaches, like effective educators in any area, are lifelong learners committed to personal growth. Their development must, and does, extend far beyond any formal training program.

7.4 Strategies for Developing Coaching Skills

This is covered in Guideline 6: *People Making it Happen*.

Key Message

Quality coaching is an essential element for a positive experience for young people.

When coaches plan and provide sessions based on a good understanding of how young people learn and how skills are best developed, young people have the best chance of

- enjoying their sport

- becoming competent in skills and strategies
- building a good knowledge of the rules, etiquette and traditions of the sport
- being enthusiastic about life-time sport.

Above all, it is important that young people learn that sport is fun and safe.

Key Points - Quality Coaching

- From 8 to 15 years is the important learning time for sport. Coaches need special skills in facilitating the learning process during this developmental period.
- Coaches learn through formal training programs, but experience is crucial in the ongoing learning process.
- Comprehensive planning is needed by coaches in planning seasonal programs, program goals and strategies for the sequential development of basic skills, team strategies and level of challenge.
- Children should be introduced to a variety of roles within their sport for good understanding of the game, its rules and traditions.
- An effective coach has the ability to analyse movement quality, give constructive feedback, and use techniques such as questioning.
- Quality instruction is very valuable to supply the base for young people so they
 - ◇ want to participate long-term
 - ◇ may continue on to elite levels if their talent allows.

Further Reading

Briefing Papers

- 5 *Physical Activity Pedagogy for Junior Sport*
- 8 *Preparation of Personnel Responsible for Junior Sport Delivery*

Guidelines

- 2 *Getting Young People Involved*
- 6 *People Making It Happen*

Resources

- Beginning Coaching*** 2000 Australian Sports Commission
- Better Coaching*** 2001 Australian Sports Commission

Websites