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# **QUALITY COACHING PRINCIPLES & STRUCTURE**

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## Acknowledgement

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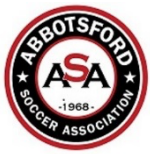
This document is inspired by the recently released “Quality Coaching Framework”, by the US Olympic Committee (USOC).

The structure and easy to understand terminology will offer all current (and future) coaches of the Abbotsford Soccer Association (ASA) with an excellent understanding and ready reference, with respect to the expectations of Quality Coaching.

The *ASA Quality Coaching - Principles & Structure*, is another example of how we can promote the positive attributes of our sport (soccer), while furthering the legacy of our Association.

*Yours in Soccer*

*Colin Miller  
Technical Director  
Abbotsford Soccer Association*



# Value of a Coaching Structure

The quality of an athlete's sport experience is directly dependent on the quality of the coaching received. The right kind of coaching can help athletes reach their full potential and inspire a lifelong love of sport and physical activity. The wrong type of coaching can have just the opposite effect: burnout, dropout, injury, loss of enthusiasm or worse. The right kind of coaching must therefore be standard practice in serving all ASA athletes. It is the type of coaching that the ASA membership expects from all ASA coaches.





## Advance the Coaching Profession

Sport coaching, as a profession, has advanced significantly as has the understanding of athlete development. The latest scientific breakthroughs and highly effective coaching practices are regularly shared through thousands of academic journals and coaching newsletters. In addition, social media and digital sports programming present a constant barrage of coaching advice, although some are more enlightened than others!

The Canadian Soccer Association (CSA) is currently working to integrate these lessons and principles into their coaching education programs by updating existing coaching curricula along with introducing several new licensing programs.

Despite these efforts, a visit to any sport venue in Canada or across the world, will reveal that there remains a considerable gap between what is known about quality coaching and what is practiced on a daily basis. To that end, the ASA has taken this initiative to outline core values and best principles, that we believe should guide and align collective coaching practices in our Club. We will provide a set of principles that will inform, not prescribe, how to coach most effectively. The *ASA Quality Coaching - Principles & Structure* is a carefully crafted and evidence-based resource that establishes a common language for all those working within ASA Team and/or Academy coaching situations.

## Strengthen Team ASA

We define the ASA coaching situations as any coach-led activity conducted under the umbrella of and endorsed by ASA, from Community Activities (After-School programs, Academies, Camps etc.) to Grassroots programming and competitive/performance coaching. The *ASA Quality Coaching - Principles & Structure* will serve multiple functions and offer a wide range of benefits to those working within the ASA coaching situations, including the following:

- Coach Education – providing structure and content of relevant coaching education programs
- Technical Staff/Administrators - who evaluate the quality of the coach & player education programming they provide to their constituents and who evaluate and recognize quality coaches
- Sports Science - working with organizations that partner with the ASA Technical Dept. in ensuring alignment of development efforts
- Program Leads – that need guiding resources to support quality coaching

The *ASA Quality Coaching - Principles & Structure* will also help all the ASA coaches make important progress toward achieving mandated goals and objectives:

- Advance the profession of coaching within the club through recognition and exposure
- Promote coaching certification and positive examples of coaching principles in action
- Close performance gaps by raising awareness of and supporting coaches at all levels

## Provide Principles for Success

The following six chapters, each focus on a different, but related, component of quality coaching. The chapters highlight the coaching principles associated with each subject. The ASA supports “**best principles**” instead of “best practices.” Prescribing best practices implies that there are specific strategies that will work well in any coaching setting. The phrase “**best principles**,” on the other hand, acknowledges that practices will always need to be adapted to meet the respective needs of the players. Regardless of the situation, though, the practices should always be firmly grounded in universal principles of quality coaching.

These principles are reinforced by key sources of information, such as the Age Group Training Plans, Club Playing Concept and the plethora of additional resources available under the ‘Coach’ tab of the ASA website ([www.abbotsfordsoccer.com](http://www.abbotsfordsoccer.com)).

Coaching is complex and can often be confusing and overwhelming. The ASA understands there is no single right way to coach that will fit for every unique coach & athlete. However, the *ASA Quality Coaching - Principles & Structure* provides for a common language & understanding for making evidence-based, informed decisions about how we collectively should think of, speak about and deliver quality coaching. We hope and trust you will find it helpful in your very important role.

# Chapter 1

## Quality Coaching

This chapter defines quality coaching in the ASA context as follows:

*The consistent application of integrated professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge, to improve player competence, confidence, connection and character in specific coaching situations.*

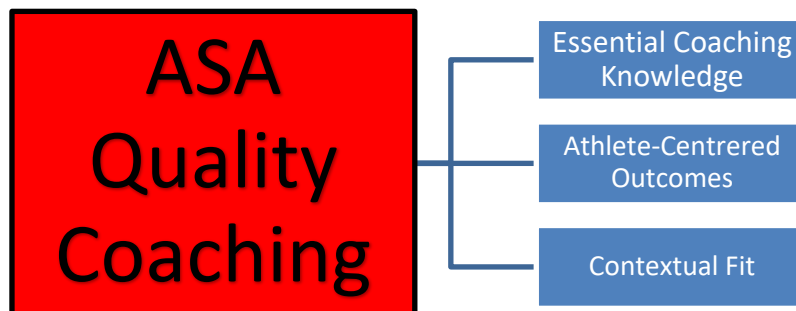
This integrative definition of coaching effectiveness has been adopted by leading sport and coaching organizations around the world.

It is based on decades of applied research and a comprehensive review of coaching, teaching, expertise, positive psychology and athlete development literature. In its development, the definition was vetted by coaches, coaching educators and major sport organizations around the world—including the USOC.

Quality coaching has three distinct components:

1. Coaching knowledge
2. Athlete outcomes
3. Coaching environment.

All three components are required to deliver quality coaching in any particular situation, as depicted in figure 1.1. (see below).



**FIGURE 1.1** ASA quality coaching components.

## Essential Coaching Knowledge

Coaches need knowledge in many areas because coaching is complex and coaches assume multiple roles. There are three broad types of coaching knowledge:

1. **Professional knowledge:** *Know your sport and how to teach it.*

Coaches should understand the sport culture, tradition, rules and history; be aware of the skills, tactics, training and safety requirements of the sport; perceive athletes' development and learning needs; and be able to apply their knowledge.

2. **Interpersonal knowledge:** *Know how to relate to and lead others.*

Coaches must have the ability to connect to and work effectively with athletes and others involved in the sport setting, including officials, administrators, parents and program stakeholders. They should also monitor and control their emotions and demonstrate leadership skills.

3. **Intrapersonal knowledge:** *Know yourself and how to sustain improvement efforts.* Coaches need a clear sense of purpose and core values, and they must strive to maintain perspective and balance. They should be aware of their coaching strengths and areas for improvement, and they should have the will and wherewithal to reflect and continually get better.

## Athlete-Centered Outcomes

The goals and measures of quality coaching are how well the athlete develops and performs—that is, athlete-centered outcomes. Quality coaching leads to more than just capable participants and competitors: Quality coaching is driven by a quest for holistic athlete development, making better people while also making better athletes. These desired athlete outcomes generally fit into four areas, referred to as the Four C's of athlete development:

1. **Competence:**

Sport-specific technical, tactical and performance skills; improved health and fitness; and healthy training habits

2. **Confidence:**

Self-belief, resilience, mental toughness and sense of positive self-worth

3. **Connection:**

Positive bonds and social relationships with people inside and outside of sport

4. **Character:**

Respect for the sport, ethical and morally responsible behavior, integrity and empathy

## Contextual Fit

With a quick search of the Internet, any coach can easily find and access countless training activities and recommended coaching strategies. Though such prescriptive coaching resources are readily available, they should not be implemented without attention to context. Quality coaching requires the ability to adapt one's coaching knowledge to the specific needs of the athletes and fit the distinctive features of the environment in which one coaches.

Although every coaching situation is unique in some way, it is helpful to consider what constitutes quality coaching in four defined environments that share many common characteristics. These coaching environments align closely with the 7 stages of athlete development identified in the Canadian Long-Term Athlete Development Model (LTAD), as shown in table 1.1.

Coaching Environment	Athlete Development Stage
<b>Participation sport for children</b> Playful early exposure to the sport experience, with an emphasis on mass participation and building physical literacy	Stage 1: Active Start Stage 2: Fundamentals Stage 3: Learn to train
<b>Participation sport for adolescents and adults</b> Opportunities to continue sport participation across the life span, with an emphasis on personal health, wellness and social connections	Stage 7: Active for Life
<b>Performance sport for young adolescents</b> Competitive sport experiences that increasingly emphasize deliberate practice in pursuit of advanced skill development and performance	Stage 4: Train to Train Stage 5: Train to Compete
<b>Performance sport for older adolescents and adults</b> Highly competitive sport experiences limited to a select few who are highly committed to achieving the highest possible level of expertise	Stage 6: Train to Win

**TABLE 1.1** Coaching Environment Alignment with LTAD Stages

### Chapter 1 - Takeaway

Quality coaching does not happen by accident. Teaching, learning and honing quality coaching skills requires a mindful and diligent effort to address each of its three components:

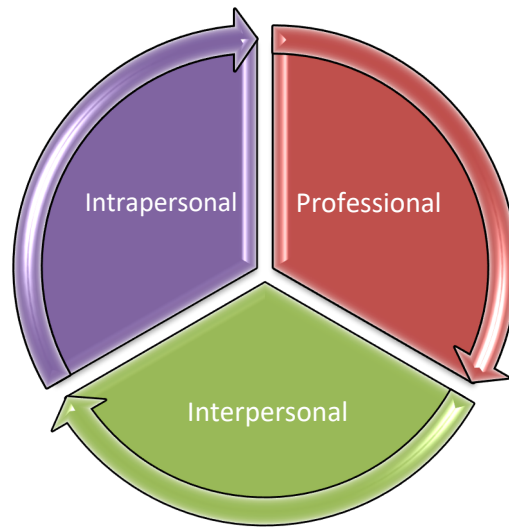
1. Essential coaching knowledge
2. Athlete-centered outcomes
3. Contextual fit

# Chapter 2

## Essential Coaching Knowledge

Becoming a quality coach requires a foundation of core knowledge that covers a wide range of subjects. Every coach enters the role with a unique foundation of education and experience. When first learning to coach, new knowledge is stored as isolated bits of information. With additional experience and careful reflection, coaches begin to see patterns and the knowledge becomes more organized and easy to retrieve. The use of this process, referred to as building mental representations, is a defining characteristic of quality coaches. Expert coaches differ from novices both in the quantity and quality of mental representations of their knowledge.

It is widely recognized that the foundation of essential coaching knowledge consists of professional knowledge, interpersonal knowledge and intrapersonal knowledge.



**FIGURE 2.1** Coaching knowledge components

Each type of coaching knowledge is associated with a set of core coaching competencies.

### Professional Knowledge

Professional knowledge relates to two main functions of coaching:

1. Designing quality training sessions
2. Guiding athletes to optimal performance in competitions.

The ability to effectively teach and guide athletes requires a deep understanding of the history, rules and unique demands of the sport. Therefore, a coach's professional knowledge is measured by their competency in these three areas:

- A. Sport experience and expertise
- B. Teaching and learning abilities
- C. Aptitude for competition coaching

### A. Sport Experience and Expertise

At a minimum, knowledge of sport-specific rules and safety issues are a must for coaches in any environment. Also beneficial is an understanding of the sport's unique tradition and culture, which can be learned in part by studying or observing the sport. However, much of the traditions and cultures inherent in a sport are only learned through direct participation in that sport itself. In the performance sport setting, therefore, some level of experience as an athlete in the sport is advantageous, although certainly not required. Direct experience as an athlete can help coaches to better relate to the challenges encountered by their athletes, and it has also been shown to build the athletes' trust and confidence in the coach. However, that does not mean that the best athletes in a sport will necessarily be the best coaches!

### B. Teaching and Learning Abilities

Coaches who conduct training sessions, that are most beneficial to athlete development

- ✓ set, or insist that athletes set, challenging and specific practice goals
- ✓ keep athletes physically and mentally active throughout practice
- ✓ give athletes choices and seek their input on practice design
- ✓ conduct competitive and game-like practice activities.

These features collectively constitute what is often referred to as deliberate practice. This type of practice is purposeful, intentional and designed to help athletes improve their skills. The ability to design deliberate practice training sessions requires an awareness of four basic principles of athlete learning...

Athlete Learning Principle	Sample Coaching Strategy
Prior knowledge can help or hinder athlete learning.	Have athletes explain or demonstrate a skill before attempting to teach it to gauge their readiness to learn the skill.
Athlete motivation directly influences the learning process.	Ask athletes for feedback on the difficulty of learning activities to help find the right challenge–skill balance.
Skill mastery requires athletes to learn component skills.	Try describing, and then walking through, the steps needed to perform a skill before teaching it to your athletes.
Combine deliberate practice with targeted specific feedback.	Identify in advance feedback cues and bandwidths to help athletes meet learning and performance standards.

**TABLE 2.1** Principles of Athlete Learning and Sample Coaching Strategies

Teaching is the heart of coaching. Knowledge of the four athlete learning principles provides a solid foundation to becoming a better teacher. Quality coaches take great pride in learning how to teach effectively.



### C. Aptitude for Competition Coaching

Optimal athlete performance *in competition* requires careful guidance before, during and *after competition*. Prior to competition, quality coaches strive to ensure their athletes are well rested and peaking at the right time. They also facilitate pre-competition routines that help athletes find their individual zones of peak psychological and emotional states. Immediately before the competition, they ensure their athletes are sufficiently fueled to meet the energy demands of their event.

During competition, quality coaches carefully monitor athlete performance and intervene when needed. The ability to directly coach athletes during competitions varies widely depending on the rules and characteristics of each sport. However, as a general rule of thumb, quality coaches emphasize the three E's of competition coaching to guide their athletes to optimal performance:

- Examine
- Encourage
- Educate

Competition coaching does not end with the athletes' performance. The moments following a competition are prime opportunities to start preparing athletes for the next competition or training session. Quality coaches encourage athletes to use post-competition time to rest, recover, reflect on their performance and process their emotions—whether the main emotion is joy from succeeding or frustration after falling short.

## Interpersonal Knowledge

Interpersonal knowledge is a coach's ability to build positive and productive relationships with others. Whereas professional knowledge provides a foundation for knowing what to coach, interpersonal knowledge equips coaches with an awareness of how to coach each unique athlete and to work with others in the sport environment.

Two core competencies most associated with interpersonal knowledge in coaching are;

- A. Emotional intelligence
- B. Transformational leadership

Developing these core competencies leads to positive and appropriate coach–athlete relationships. Athletes, and parents of young athletes, trust coaches to create safe environments. Quality coaches understand that abuse of that trust is never acceptable.

### Emotional Intelligence

Quality coaching requires keen observation skills since coaches spend much of their time observing their athletes and thinking about how to create the right conditions for athlete development. In addition to observing an athlete's skill development, the coach should also

be monitoring the athlete's feelings, emotions and motivation. Unlike technical or tactical skill deficiencies, which often are relatively easy to spot, the affective state of an athlete can be extremely difficult to gauge. Coaches with strong emotional intelligence are especially effective in;

- **Perceiving emotions** (*identifying their own feelings and the emotions of others*)
- **Using emotions** (*generating emotions to improve attentional focus, decision making and problem solving*)
- **Understanding emotions** (*recognizing the causes of emotions and how emotions influence the behaviors of others*)
- **Managing emotions** (*controlling their own emotions and teaching athletes how to identify and regulate their emotions*)

### Transformational Leadership

Leadership in sport is one of the most studied and complicated aspects of coaching. Athletes rely on coaches for leadership. However, quality coaches also teach their athletes how to become good leaders.

Current leadership models emphasize shared and transformational leadership. Coaches should therefore distribute leadership roles and responsibilities among their athletes and across their programs. When athletes and other members of the coaching environment are empowered to lead, it builds confidence and ownership in the sport experience. This leads to a greater sense of cohesion, sometimes referred to as collective efficacy.

Transformational coaches serve as positive role models, inspire others with a compelling vision, encourage and support athlete input and act in the best interest of their athletes. Transformational coaches serve athletes to help them achieve their goals. (This is in stark contrast with transactional leadership: Transactional coaches use athletes to meet their own needs.) Research shows that leadership that is shared and transformational enhances coach–athlete relationships and athlete enjoyment while contributing to improved performance.

## Intrapersonal Knowledge

The third type of knowledge that underpins quality coaching is intra-personal knowledge. Whereas, professional and interpersonal knowledge concern what to coach and how to coach, intrapersonal knowledge is all about understanding oneself. This is essential for helping a coach identify his or her core values, improve coaching abilities and sustain a coaching career. The key competencies associated with intrapersonal knowledge are

- A. Self-awareness
- B. Reflection
- C. Continuous improvement

## **Self-Awareness**

Coaches coach for many reasons: to give back to sport, to help others grow and reach their goals, to earn a living or to volunteer and so on. Quality coaches don't just have a rationale for coaching—they have a purpose. A strong sense of coaching purpose should act as both a pull and push for coaches. It should serve to inspire coaches (pull) toward their vision and goals. It should also motivate (push) coaches to hold themselves accountable to the same high standards they set for their athletes.

A coaching purpose might be considered a coach's "why." A coaching "why" may not be evident or well defined early in a coaching career, but for astute coaches it becomes increasingly obvious and easy to articulate through regular reflection.

## **Reflection**

Intrapersonal knowledge is improved when coaches engage in regular and systematic reflection, which is the process of thinking about coaching. Quality coaches use two types of reflection:

- Reflective practice
- Critical reflection

Both types of reflection are stimulated by coaching dilemmas.

Coaches engage in reflective practice when they try to solve coaching problems. Problem solving is a regular part of coaching and quality coaches seek out possible solutions from a wide range of sources. The best coaches often conduct experiments to test potential solutions. This might involve asking another coach or, an athlete for feedback on the strategy before implementing it.

However, quality coaches don't just aim to solve problems; they pause to analyze problems, referred to as critical reflection. With critical reflection, coaches first ask themselves probing questions—such as, why something is a problem? before they try to generate solutions.

Because coaches are often pressed to make quick decisions, reflective practice is much more common than critical reflection. However, periodically suspending the tendency to try to solve a problem quickly, and setting aside time for inquiry and reflection, is a valuable way for coaches to revisit and refine their coaching purpose, while also identifying areas for continuous improvement.

## **Continuous Improvement**

Quality coaches are confident, yet humble enough to recognize that there is always more to learn. Legendary college basketball coach John Wooden said it best when he stated;

*“It’s what you learn after you know it all that matters most.”*

Coaches typically wait until the end of a season to reflect on things they need to improve. Quality coaches, however, are constantly identifying aspects of their coaching that need improvement.

Although small learning gains may be possible during the season, the best opportunity to improve as a coach comes from self-guided study in the off-season. Learning efforts are most effective when coaches focus their studies on either a topic or a coach. High-impact topics can be identified by reflecting on athlete and coach performance from the past season. To select a coach to study, the coach could review popular coaching autobiographies or ask peers to identify their favorite coaches from among all sports.

The learning benefits that come from regular and rigorous self-guided study are magnified when connected to the learning networks of other coaches. Participating in social media networks frequented by other coaches and attending coaching clinics are valuable ways to build and sustain a learning network. Building strong learning and support networks is critical, both for continuous improvement and for maintaining perspective as a coach.

#### Chapter 2 - Takeaway

To coach effectively, it is not enough to have played or watched the sport, or to have merely read about how to coach. Quality coaching requires essential professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge used in coaching practice to meet the needs of athletes in that setting. Informed daily decisions and behaviors that serve the best interest of the athletes, the team and the program are the ultimate demonstration of quality coaching.

# Chapter 3

## Athlete-Centered Outcomes

All great journeys start with the end in mind. For coaches this means identifying what they hope their athletes will learn, become and achieve while in their guidance. Those desired outcomes serve as primary goals— meaningful and realistic targets that will keep the athletes' development on track. Those target outcomes, when appropriately selected and set, also serve to engage and motivate athletes and foster their continued participation in sport.

This chapter is used to explain the value of adopting an athlete-centered, coach-driven approach that emphasizes the holistic development and well-being of athletes. This approach is effective because target outcomes are determined according to athletes' needs, and the process is guided by ethical coaching decisions and actions.



## An Athlete-Centered, Coach-Driven Approach

An athlete-centered, coach-driven approach requires selflessness and unconditional dedication to helping athletes reach their goals. A defining characteristic of quality coaches is their focus on serving their athletes, not themselves.

This approach starts with the coach and athlete jointly identifying target outcomes. Although the coach should have some goals in mind, offering the athlete an opportunity for input in setting the targets will increase the athlete's motivation and commitment to the goals. The coach's role is to guide and shape the discussion with the athlete so that target outcomes are challenging yet realistic and attainable with support from the coach. This requires an accurate assessment of the athlete's current abilities, strengths and limitations.

The target outcomes should include both objective performance measures (e.g., times, distances, rankings and wins) and more subjective process measures (e.g., effort, attitude and work ethic). This approach is consistent with what is commonly referred to as a **SMART** way to write goals. Goals are SMART when they are;

**S**pecific (clearly written)

**M**easurable (progress can be observed and tracked)

**A**ttainable (appropriate training resources and coaching support are provided)

**R**ealistic (within reach of the athlete's current level of performance)

**T**ime bound (have a due date)

After establishing appropriate target outcomes, a quality coach will create the right conditions for the athlete to achieve the desired goals. In addition to designing training sessions and aiding the athlete during competition, it will be vital to provide feedback and support, as the athlete strives to achieve the goals. Strategic use of genuine, positive and constructive feedback keeps athletes focused on the targets and helps nourish their desire to sustain the effort required to achieve their aims.

Coaches should carefully monitor their athlete's progress and then work with them to adjust their goals as needed. Coaches must be diligent in tracking the results of training and competition and they should be alert to factors beyond sport participation that may influence the athletes' ability to achieve their goals.

By consistently showing interest in athletes' lives outside of sport and concern for their overall well-being, coaches encourage athletes to share information and insights that can help coaches make athlete-specific recommendations.



An athlete-centered, coach-driven approach that improves athletes' enjoyment, satisfaction, motivation and performance requires the coach to;

- jointly set challenging, yet realistic, goals in line with the athletes' age and ability
- encourage the athletes' input and initiative
- provide a rationale for coaching decisions
- recognize the athletes' goal progress as well as performance achievements
- provide supportive, positive and constructive feedback
- deliver coaching that meets each athlete's unique learning and development needs
- account for life factors outside of sport that may affect goal attainment

## Holistic Development and Well-Being of Athletes

A concern for developing the whole athlete should drive all coaching objectives and actions. Coaching with a concern for athletes' holistic development and well-being means taking into account the personal, emotional, cultural and social identity of each athlete and how this identity influences sport development and performance. This is true across the athlete development spectrum—from young children to masters athletes. As mentioned in the first chapter, a common framework for setting comprehensive athlete outcomes is the Four C's model...

### **1. Competence.**

The desire to help athletes improve their skills is often cited as a primary motive for becoming a coach. Similarly, athletes typically list development of new skills as one of their primary motives for sport participation. The ability to perform the techniques involved in a sport requires a solid foundation of overall health, fitness and physical well-being. Therefore, quality coaches seek the holistic skill development of their athletes, going beyond teaching sport-specific techniques and tactics to include informing athletes about healthy training and lifestyle habits related to areas such as nutrition, rest and recovery, and injury prevention. This allows athletes to fully develop their potential and take ownership of the skills needed for achievement.

### **2. Confidence.**

Knowing how to perform sport skills is not enough; reaching an athlete's development or performance potential is not possible without strong self-belief in his or her ability to execute techniques successfully when it matters. Athletes must learn to perform under pressure in competitions and endure repeated failures when learning complex sport skills. Teaching strategies, for conquering self-doubt and frustration, along with building their confidence through techniques, such as positive self-talk and imagery, is critical to holistic athlete development and the achievement of athlete-centered outcomes.



3. Connection.

Many great athletes are strong-willed and independent. Although these characteristics are valuable for developing a competitive spirit, an athlete’s development will be stunted unless they learn how to train and compete *with*, not just *against*, others. All sports, whether individual or team in nature, require some level of cooperation with and support from others. Teams learn and perform best when there is a high level of trust and commitment to common goals. Even when training and competing alone, athletes need to learn how to receive and use feedback from others and participate with other athletes. Part of an athlete’s development is gaining the trust and respect of others in his or her sport network.

4. Character.

The achievements of an entire sporting career can be destroyed by a single moment of unethical behavior. Holistic development and athlete well-being hinge on the coach’s systematic and deliberate efforts to build athlete character. Simply participating in sport does not build character; it is the coach who determines whether the sport experience builds character or *characters*. The first step in building athlete character is to establish core values and standards that clearly describe what is expected and what behaviors are acceptable. The best way to teach core values and standards is to model them as a coach.

Athlete Outcome	Description
Competence	Sport-specific technical, tactical and performance skills; overall health, fitness and physical well-being
Confidence	Self-belief, resilience, mental toughness and sense of positive self-worth
Connection	Interpersonal skills, ability to build and sustain meaningful and positive relationships
Character	Respect for the sport and others, integrity, self-discipline, and ethical and moral decision making

TABLE 3.1 The Four C’s Model of Comprehensive Athlete Outcomes

Ethical Coaching Decisions and Actions

*Coaches across Canada give athletes the benefit of their knowledge, enthusiasm and passion in sport. Coaches dedicate their time to helping youth build confidence, self-esteem, and foster positive body image development through participation in sport. (Responsible Coaching Movement)*

Make Ethical Decisions

By successfully completing the Make Ethical Decisions (MED) training, coaches will be fully equipped to handle ethical situations with confidence and surety. MED training helps coaches identify the legal, ethical, and moral implications of difficult situations that present themselves in the world of team and individual sport. MED training is a cornerstone of the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP), and leaves coaches with no doubt as to what to do when the going gets tough.

### **WHO NEEDS THIS TRAINING?**

Successful completion of the MED online evaluation is necessary for certification in any new NCCP program. MED training is not necessary to take the evaluation or to achieve certification, however, in certain programs it can lead to ‘trained’ status. Therefore, any coach wishing to attain ‘trained’ status should investigate taking MED training.

Once you have completed the MED training, and it appears on your transcript, you will have unlimited attempts at the MED evaluation. If you choose to proceed directly to the MED evaluation without taking any training, please note the following (as of April 1, 2014):

1. A fee of \$85 will apply.
2. You will have 2 attempts at passing the evaluation. If, after 2 attempts, you have not received a passing grade of 75%, you will need to sign up for MED training.

For more information on taking the MED online evaluation, please [click here](#).

### **HOW DO I COMPLETE MED?**

**1) TAKE A WORKSHOP:** Please contact your local [Provincial/Territorial Coaching Representative](#).

**2) I’VE FINISHED THE TRAINING, HOW DO I TAKE THE EVALUATION?** For more information on taking the MED online evaluation, please [click here](#).

#### **Chapter 3 - Takeaway**

A coach’s foremost duty is to serve athletes’ best interests, doing so in an ethical manner. The Four C’s provide a useful set of comprehensive athlete-centered outcomes around which coaches can both plan and assess their success. The NCCP’s Making Ethical Decisions course, offers coaches a sound, values-based reference to guide their actions.

# Chapter 4

## Contextual Fit

The Abbotsford Soccer Association supports around 100 coaches each year. The coaches share a similar mission: to provide local children and youth with the opportunity to experience sport (soccer), develop their skills and potentially have an opportunity to represent their local community and region at the competitive and advanced levels of play.

Athletes' passion for sport is often sparked when they are young, when they score their first goal or simply experience the thrill of sport competition for the first time. That passion is enhanced and channeled by talented and dedicated coaches.

Successful coaches adjust their approach to the athletes, settings and circumstances, because they know the most effective coaching is context specific.

Those same coaches also recognize that holistic athlete development requires the right kind of coaching at the right time in the athlete's journey. ASA coaches must strive to customize their actions, interactions and prescriptions to positively serve their young players and provide inspiration for every player to live their dreams.



## Types of Coaching Contexts

Coaching has been described as a process of guided improvement and development in a single sport and at identifiable stages of development.

The needs of a young child just beginning the sport experience journey are vastly different from the needs of a three-time Olympian at the apex of his or her career.

However, the principles of quality coaching remain the same but, the manner in which the coach translates those principles into coaching practice will help determine whether the athlete's will continue to develop and enjoy their sport experience.

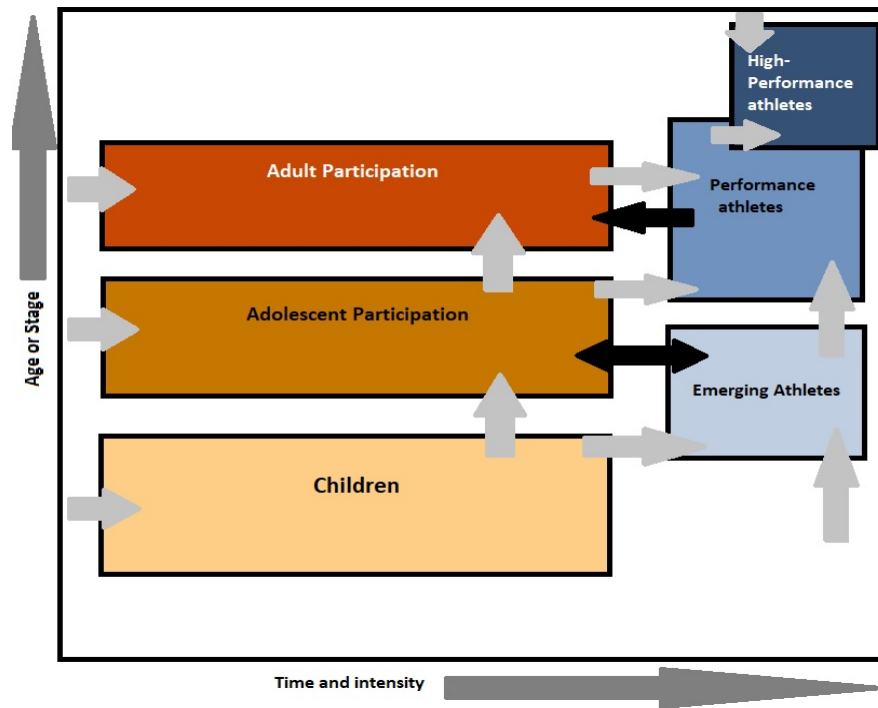
**Participation sport and performance sport** are the two globally accepted labels to categorize the way in which athletes engage in sport. Participation sport emphasizes involvement and enjoyment, while performance sport focuses more on competition and achievement. Within each of these two broad types of sport engagement there are three subdivisions:

Participation	Performance
Children	Emerging athletes
Adolescents	Performance athletes
Adults	High-performance athletes

**Table 4.1** Sport Participation & Athletic Performance

These two types of sport engagement and their three subdivisions can be found in figure 4.2. Note that the sectors in the map are interconnected.

Athlete development will vary across sports and will be unique to each individual. Individual athletes may enter or move through and between the various groups at different stages in their lives. For example, an adolescent performance athlete may decide to transfer to a different sport; that may move him or her into a different sport engagement group.



**Figure 4.2** Sport participation map.

Coaches are also likely to change from one season to the next. Although some athletes have the same coach accompany them throughout their sport journey, most athletes have to transition to a different coach when they move to a different season or stage of development.

Because there are so many variables, sporting pathways are individual, context specific and nonlinear. This is why it is so important for each coach to adjust based on the sport engagement group of the athletes and the unique circumstances and setting.

## Canadian Development Model

The CSA created the Long-Term Player Development (LTPD) model – Wellness to World Cup to assist all those involved with soccer to, in turn, guide all players to realize their full athletic potential and to utilize soccer as a path toward an active and healthy lifestyle.



The LTPD model was inspired and informed by the principles that underpin the long-term athlete development (LTAD) model, which proposes seven stages of athlete development intended to achieve three outcomes;

- Physical literacy
- Improved performance
- Lifelong participation

By tailoring training, competition and coaching to their needs at the appropriate stage of development, applying the LTPD model gives all players the best chance of success in soccer, whatever their level.

In other words, LTPD is designed to give players an optimal soccer experience at every stage by putting *their* needs front and centre.

When children learn the right skills at the right time, supported by a caring soccer community of parents, coaches, officials and volunteers, they become more confident in their abilities and have a lot more fun. This means more of them will grow into healthy, active adults with a lifelong love of the game.

The ASA's mandate is to create a model for development that not only improves the quality of our players but, also one that helps to influence the improved performance levels of the sport in Canada and gives our athletes a high probability of achieving success in domestic and international competitions.

There is much that is good about soccer within ASA but, we need to continue to work to create sustained success into the future. In full support of the LTPD Model, ASA has developed the ASA Long Term Player Development Plan - [ASA LTPD Plan](#), in which we advocate these four core principles:

- ✓ *Focus on supporting the complete athlete not just the athlete training and competition. In the formative years recommend other sports, cross training methods to get away from soccer and avoid burn out.*
- ✓ *Remove the focus of games and/or winning and replace with a focused application to training at all levels and ages.*
- ✓ *Remove geographic and cultural differences to develop a common directional, leadership and athlete development framework consistent in the philosophy of player development.*
- ✓ *Introduce Technical skills and physical literacy in a systematic and timely way.*



The ultimate vision for the ASA Long-Term Player Development Plan:

*Is to be a leading soccer organization in the Province of BC; recognized for providing exemplary programs, achieving performance excellence, upholding the Laws of the Game and shaping productive Canadians.*

## Developmental Model of Sport Participation

A complementary model to LTAD is the developmental model of sport participation (DMSP), a model that breaks athlete development into three stages. The DMSP is grounded in the belief that, due to the unique demands of each sport and wide variance in individual athlete development profiles, no specified ages or lengths of time can be associated with each of its three phases.

### 1. **Sampling phase**

Athletes take part in multiple sport activities and develop all-around foundational movement skills in an environment characterized by fun and enjoyment. Participation in this phase should not be restricted by skill level, because the goal is to maximize participation and expose athletes to the sport.

### 2. **Specializing phase.**

Athletes begin to focus on fewer sports, possibly favoring one in particular as training demands increase. Participation opportunities may decrease at this phase, and athletes are typically grouped by skill level.

### 3. **Investment phase.**

Athletes commit to achieving a high level of performance in a specific sport. This phase of athlete sport participation is typically limited to a small group of athletes who are identified as showing promise for high-level performance.

The DMSP phases are intended to provide a general framework for considering how athletes are developing and the type of coach they need as they move through the different phases.

Two points of emphasis in DMSP have important implications for coaching:

- *Unstructured play*
- *Sport diversification*

Although it is clear that a high amount of focused, deliberate practice is needed to become a skilled athlete, research shows that expert athletes grow up in environments that allow for frequent play.

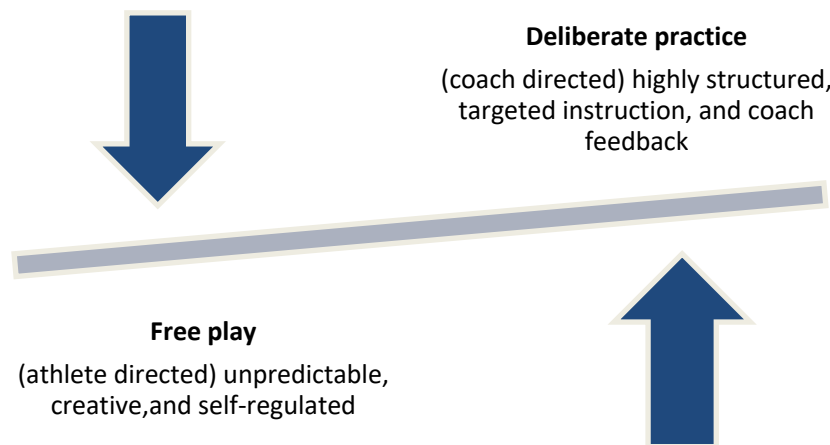
Deliberate practice is challenging and requires intense focus. If coaches fail to counterbalance such focused practice with opportunities for free play, they place their athletes at increased risk of emotional and physical burnout and overuse injuries.



Free play activities are organized and led by the athletes themselves to maximize enjoyment and intrinsic motivation.

The most beneficial balance between deliberate practice and informal, unstructured free play will vary based on performance level, the point in the competition season and the particular makeup of the team. Coaches who most adeptly provide the proper mix of deliberate practice and free play do the best job of fostering their athletes' talent development (see figure 4.3).

The DMSP also addresses the issue of early sport specialization by encouraging sport diversification, or sampling. Early sport diversification has proven to lead to longer, more successful involvement in sport.



**FIGURE 4.3** Balanced approach to developing athletic skill and talent.

Early sport specialization generally fails to help athletes achieve their best performances later in their career, which is the goal of LTAD.

Considerable evidence shows that high-performance athletes sample many different sports, as opposed to specializing in just one sport at an early age. Most college and professional athletes around the world played multiple sports until high school. Furthermore, college coaches typically prefer recruiting multisport athletes.

Due to the unique competition demands of each sport, there is no common age recommendation for when athletes may need to transition from sport sampling to sport specialization. In sports such as gymnastics, where elite-level performance is commonly achieved at a young age, LTAD timelines obviously require some modification.

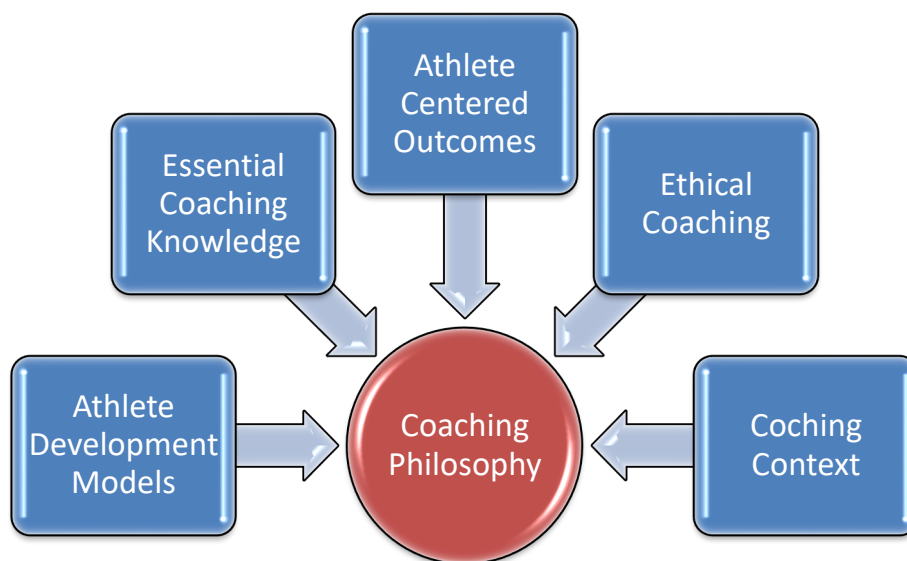
## Matching Coaching Philosophy to Coaching Context

Every coach has distinct strengths, personalities and views based on their own life experiences. These views help make up the coach's coaching philosophy. A coaching philosophy describes how a coach approaches his or her role and it guides everyday coaching decisions and actions.

When coaching for the ASA, coaches must ensure that their unique coaching philosophy is aligned with the principles and values of the ASA Quality Coaching Structure.

The information presented earlier in this chapter regarding athlete development models and their rationales should be considered when creating and or evaluating a general coaching philosophy. When coaches move across different stages and phases of the athlete development map, they need to make adjustments to their coaching philosophy. This will ensure they are staying true to an athlete-centered, coach-driven approach that provides athletes with developmentally appropriate instruction and performance support.

The many factors that should influence a coaching philosophy when coaching in the ASA context are depicted in figure 4.2



**FIGURE 4.2** Factors to consider in creating a coaching philosophy

### Chapter 4 - Takeaway

A key component of quality coaching is an understanding of athlete development principles. Quality coaches use knowledge of these principles to adapt their coaching philosophy to the coaching context. The best coaching approach is one that is suitable for the sport experience in which athletes are participating and the athletes' development needs.

# Chapter 5

## Evaluation & Recognition

How do we know whether we are doing a good job helping athletes progress in their development? Unfortunately, far too few coaches fail to consider that question. Even fewer establish the assessment criteria, tools and process to answer it objectively and accurately. This is because nearly the same small percentage of sport administrators conduct systematic and comprehensive coach and program evaluations.

Sports organizations cannot be successful for long if administrators and coaches fail to effectively monitor and evaluate performance. Coach and athlete development will be haphazard, based on intuition and hope, instead of credible evidence and careful planning that serve to close development gaps.

In short, what matters must get measured.

Effective, ongoing coach evaluation is essential, as is proper recognition of quality coaching. Coaches who demonstrate the desired behaviors should be praised and supported, or at least acknowledged. The ASA will be implementing a new initiative to recognize quality coaching and is outlined later in this chapter.



## Step-by-Step Evaluation

When evaluations are done poorly or are perceived to be an administrative mandate without any meaningful follow-up, the evaluation process will not be well received. At worst, it will be a source of stress and frustration for everyone involved. A quality evaluation system includes four steps.

### **Step 1: Determine What to Evaluate**

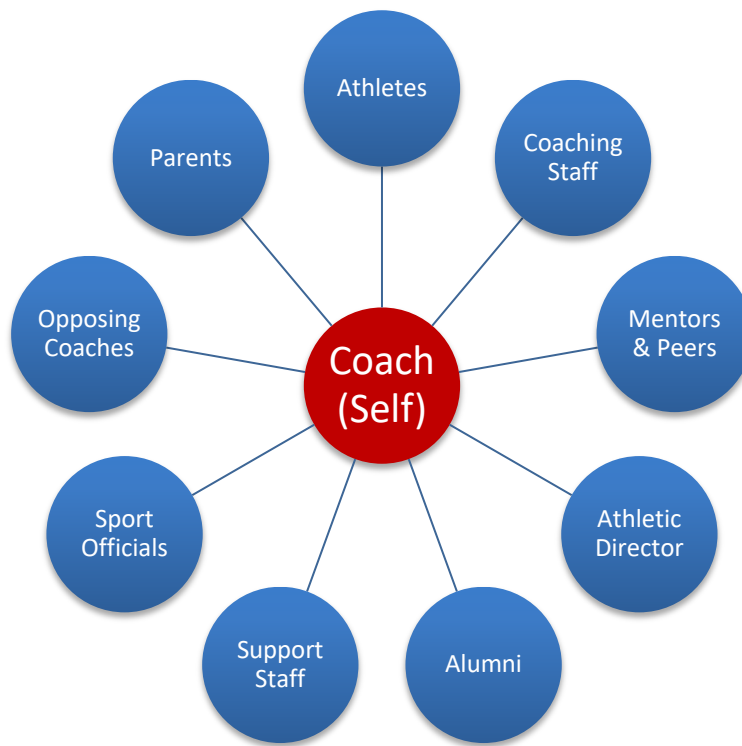
The evaluation process starts by deciding what to evaluate. All program evaluation systems should include tools for measuring athlete development. As discussed in previous chapters, athlete development should span the Four C's: *competence, confidence, connection and character*. Therefore, athletes' progress toward achieving target outcomes across each of the Four C's should be evaluated on a regular basis.

Although the primary role of the coach is to develop athletes, in many Team ASA coaching contexts, coaches also play an active role in administration, fundraising, athlete recruitment and event planning. The ability to create a quality sport experience that results in comprehensive athlete development often hinges on how well a coach fulfills such duties. Therefore, evaluation should encompass as many of the key responsibilities of a coach as possible. Practicality is also an important factor in program evaluation, meaning sport administrators should collect only the quality-related information that can be gathered and summarized efficiently.

### **Step 2: Specify Sources of Feedback**

Once evaluation items have been identified, decisions will need to be made about who should be asked to provide evaluation feedback. An effective evaluation system ensures that information is collected from all key program stakeholders. At a minimum, coach self-evaluations should always be supplemented with feedback from members of the coaching staff and athletes. This is the only way to ensure a balanced and comprehensive approach to making evaluation decisions. Program feedback from parents and athletes can provide particularly helpful insights on how to improve a program.

Program evaluation can be further enhanced by collecting feedback from others who have experience with the program or the coach. Just as professionals in fields such as business are encouraged to ask a wide range of people for feedback when conducting an evaluation—commonly referred to as a 360-degree evaluation—coaches also benefit from adopting this approach. Feedback might be solicited from athletic administrators, opposing coaches, game officials, formal or informal mentors, program alumni and trusted coaching colleagues (see figure 5.1).



**FIGURE 5.1** Potential sources for coach or program evaluation.

### **Step 3: Select Evaluation Methods and Collect Data**

After securing reliable and accurate information sources, the next concern is how to gather the data efficiently and in the most useful form possible. Options for evaluation tools are endless, with many examples available for coaches and administrators to either use or adapt to meet their specific needs. A combination of objective and subjective evaluation tools may be most useful. Examples of objective evaluation tools include knowledge tests and ratings of the coach's performance achievements, adherence to rules and policies, and observable behaviors. Subjective evaluation tools are often used to measure things that are not easily quantified, such as attitude, work ethic and motivation.

All evaluation efforts should include observation of the coach in action with her or his athletes. Regardless of how the observation is conducted (videotaped or live, self-evaluated or with others), the effort should be guided by examining how effective the coach is at developing athletes. A valuable way to approach observation is to watch the coach during a training session with the following three questions in mind:

1. How does the coaching facilitate or fail to facilitate athlete development?
2. What evidence is there that the athletes achieved the intended learning goals for the session?
3. How can the coaching be revised to provide stronger opportunities for athlete development and achievement of learning goals?

#### Step 4: Decide How to Use the Results

The final step in the evaluation process is determining how the results will be used. Coach and program evaluations typically are either formative or summative. Formative evaluations are used to provide feedback on what is working well and what needs to be improved. Summative evaluations are used to make judgments on coach or program quality, and they are often used to make decisions about whether to retain, reassign or remove a coach. An effective coach and program evaluation system is both formative and summative. The results should be used to help coaches improve while also providing evidence of coach and program growth.

A formal method for reporting evaluation results, such as writing an evaluation narrative or preparing an end-of-season statistical report with summary observations from selected feedback sources, is essential. Evaluation reports should be kept on file for formal debriefings and to spot trends across seasons, years and quadrennials.

Evaluation works best when it is done regularly and when results are used to make constant incremental improvements. Evaluation systems should be approached with an “evolution, not revolution” mindset. Unfortunately, many coaches and program administrators avoid conducting meaningful and regular evaluations as a matter of practice because;

1) they don't feel they have the time

or

2) they are content with the status quo.

This is a serious mistake, because neglecting to evaluate, typically results in having to invest a lot of time to fix exacerbated problems that were once minor issues when administrators and coaches realize that the status quo is no longer acceptable.

## Long-Term Program Development

Just as athlete development is optimized when coaches embrace a holistic, athlete-centered approach, coach development is optimized when a holistic, long-term program development approach is adopted. This approach is most effective when coaches and sport program administrators;

- have a clear sense of shared purpose
- are sensitive to the unique profile and characteristics of the context
- operate like a learning community

Table 5.1 (on page 31) summarizes the key differences between a traditional sport program approach and the Long-Term Program Development approach. The LTPD approach works because it keeps coaches and program administrators focused on continuous improvement aligned around a shared purpose and open communication. The goal is sustained development and achievement, not short-term wins.

## Close High-Impact Performance Gaps

Effective program evaluations conducted with a long-term development mindset constantly reveal areas for improvement. Indeed, the task of trying to address every exposed performance gap can be overwhelming.

A more efficient approach is to focus on a few key performance weaknesses that, if fixed, have the potential to lead to the greatest gains in development and performance. High-impact performance gaps are significant issues that directly affect other performance aspects of the system. Even a small improvement in these performance gaps can potentially produce big results.

Characteristic	Traditional sport program	LTPD-orientated sport program
Shared purpose	Poorly identified vision and values	Clearly articulated vision and values
Mindset	Short-term “win now”	Long-term continuous improvement
Methods	Sporadic improvements and setbacks with inconsistent or unclear processes for improvement	Plan, do, check and adjust cycles based upon current condition, target condition and performance gaps
Techniques	Metrics and rewards/punishments are extrinsic and top-down and often create fear	Mutually agreed upon targets and metrics that create alignment and intrinsic motivation
Collaboration	People operate in intellectual silos	Systems thinking tools employed to surface mental models and enhance communication and collaboration
Leadership	Charismatic hero-leader, characterized by excessive achievement orientation	Servant-leader, characterized by a humble yet focused mastery orientation
Decision making	Little consensus, with influence gained through politics and manipulation	Collaborative learning teams of problem solvers using shared power and collaboration
Communication	Limited and controlled	Open and shared
Processes	Inconsistent tools and programs with sporadic implementation and results; leads to resistance to change	Consistent tools and processes used to improve and standardize instruction, methods and relations
Results	Variable, based on capabilities of current athletes and coaches	Program excellence sustained over time across all sports

**TABLE 5.1** Characteristics of Traditional Versus LTPD-Oriented Sport Programs

In sports such as soccer, individual guarding or marking may be cited as an important performance issue, but poor fitness may be an underlying high-impact performance gap. Regardless of how skilled an athlete is at shooting, if he or she is not fit enough to gain the strategic advantage needed to get into an optimal position to shoot, then the shooting performance issue will never be adequately resolved.



Another high-impact performance issue might be team trust. If teammates don't trust each other enough to sacrifice personal glory for team success, then it is unlikely that they will do the work such as pressuring a defender, in order to put teammates in optimal scoring situations.

Once performance gaps have been identified, have multiple people familiar with the program review and rank the items on the list. Then sum the ratings and compare the rankings. This exercise will illuminate the high-impact performance gaps that should be addressed first. Such systematic addressing of high-impact performance gaps provides the greatest return on investment in seeking continuous program and coaching improvements.

## Build on Coaching Strengths

Although it is important to identify performance gaps, there is a growing recognition that identifying and building on strengths is a powerful way to stimulate continuous improvement. This is referred to as a strengths-based approach to evaluation, as opposed to a deficits-based approach. In simple terms, the strengths-based approach involves emphasizing the positive rather than the negative.

Coaching strengths are those instinctive coaching characteristics such as behaviors, feelings or ways of thinking that are authentic and energize optimal performance. By focusing on their strengths, coaches act in ways that are aligned with their purpose and core values. When people use their strengths, they are more engaged with their work and also report greater happiness, a surge in energy and performance and enhanced optimism. Also, focusing on strengths builds coaching confidence and resilience—both of which are essential for sustaining effort and energy as a coach.

The strengths-based approach is founded on five core principles:

1. Focus on what is right, what is working and what is strong.
2. Every person has strengths and deserves respect for their strengths.
3. Our areas of greatest potential are in the areas of our greatest strengths.
4. Weaknesses can best be fixed when we are making the most of our strengths.
5. Using our strengths is the smallest thing we can do to make the biggest difference.

Although perhaps not self-evident when starting a coaching career, the best coaches learn over time what aspects of coaching suit them best. A simple technique coaches can use to spot their natural strengths is to answer the following three questions at regular intervals (for example, at the end of each month of coaching).

- *What was my best day of coaching this past month, and why was this the best day?*
- *In what specific coaching situation was I at my best this past month?*
- *What aspects of coaching most energized me last month?*

## Recognize Quality Coaches and Their Impact

Recognition of quality coaching is something that the ASA takes very seriously. The majority of coaches in our club are volunteer coaches. They are pushing to help athletes achieve, while nurturing the sports they love. Ideally, all the coaches in an athlete's pathway of development will strive to be quality coaches and to maximize that athlete's potential, at all moments. For this reason, the ASA is seeking additional ways to recognize the impact coaches have on athlete development and performance.

Using an evaluation process, based on quality coaching factors, will help us to identify coaching growth and impact, beyond just the outcomes of the season. Many coaches are retained or celebrated based on wins or championships, but quality coaching happens at all levels and manifests itself in many ways. The ASA strives to recognize results and actions in ways that are meaningful to the coaches. Table 5.2 provides examples of coach recognition offered by the ASA and suggests some additional options that we might consider in acknowledging quality coaching.

Program	Description	Additional Suggestions
Coach of the Year awards	The ASA to award annual coaching recognition plaques in several categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Discoveries Coach</li><li>• Divisional Coach</li><li>• Staff Coach</li></ul>	An Annual coaching awards program for our organization will allow coaches to join a long list of previously recognized peers. An awards program can also incorporate criteria that are rooted in quality coaching principles, evaluation results along with athlete and organization feedback.
Newsletters and publications	The ASA to publish a regular newsletter, which frequently has articles from recognised quality coaches in the Club. A publication is a great way to give public recognition and notoriety for coaches who are innovative and serving as positive role models for ASA athletes.	Have our coaches, who exhibit quality principles, write an article or participate in a podcast or share a video, talking about best principles or concepts that would be of interest to the community. This gives the coach some recognition and visibility.
Speaking events	Each year the ASA holds several coaching workshops to develop all club coaches. The ASA consistently looks for coaches in the club system to highlight key areas where that coach is innovating the profession.	We can celebrate our coach's knowledge by having him/her speak at a town hall meeting, do a keynote address at a banquet or speak to our membership on what is involved in quality coaching.

**TABLE 5.2** ASA Coach Recognition Examples and Suggestions

Recognizing quality coaching in a variety of ways ensures that coaches feel valued and rewarded for their work. Bringing attention to those who are doing a truly quality job can help foster a culture of quality coaching and should therefore be a priority of every administration.

#### **Chapter 5 - Takeaway**

All coaches should have a process to formally evaluate the progress of both their athletes and their own coaching. By making systematic evaluation a habit, coaches can start to think about long-term program development and how they can close performance gaps for their athletes, themselves and the program. In addition to closing gaps, adopt a strength-focused approach to development. Lastly, it's important to publicly recognize quality coaching and its impact and to further engage coaches in the community who are making a difference, both on and off the field of play.

# Chapter 6

## Coach Well-Being

One of the saddest ironies in sport is that although coaches strive to provide an enjoyable and healthy experience for their athletes to develop and perform optimally, too often they approach their job in a manner that has the opposite effect on their own well-being. High tension, poor nutrition, sleep deprivation, family conflict and social alienation are common in coaching. Such self-destructive behaviors are neither desirable nor sustainable, and they must be discouraged.

Serving others, as coaches do their athletes, can be physically and emotionally exhausting. Few coaches make it through a competitive season or cycle without experiencing fatigue and anxiety. Left unchecked, these feelings can drain coaches' passion and motivation. In severe cases, these problems can lead to mental health issues and dropout.

The coach is not the only one who is negatively affected when his or her well-being is compromised. The athletes' development and performance suffer, as do relationships with family and friends, sometimes irreparably. Yet, inexplicably, coach well-being has largely been neglected by most sport organizations.

In making coach well-being a foundational component of our Quality Coaching Principles, the ASA seeks to promote an environment in which coach well-being is readily identified and properly addressed. Rather than passively letting coaches succumb to the consequences, the ASA is encouraging a set of proactive measures that will prevent coaches from incurring such a fate. After all, quality coaches are physically and emotionally healthy coaches.



## Stress Protection

Coaching can bring moments of great joy and fulfillment. It can also spawn serious stress... more than most coaches can handle. The first step in combatting coach stress is to identify its five primary sources (see table 6.1).

**TABLE 6.1** Five Major Sources of Coach Stress

Stressor	Description
1. Communication and conflict	Mis-match between coach and administrator philosophies, interference from parents, miscommunication and lack of trust among coaching staff, communication with officials
2. Pressure and expectations	Pressure from self and others to meet unrealistic performance targets, being evaluated as a coach based solely on athlete results, lack of job security
3. Athlete discipline and team dynamics	Lack of commitment, focus, effort and character by athletes; team cohesion issues related to role acceptance and playing time; recruiting, selecting or dropping athletes from the team
4. Program support and isolation	Inadequate support for the program (recognition, funding, facilities, equipment) or personal development as a coach (no formal opportunities to learn with and from other coaches)
5. Sacrificing personal time	Conflicting demands with family, strain on relationships, keeping pace with multiple roles and workload, health issues due to lack of sleep or regular physical activity

The second step in managing stress is for coaches and organization leaders to develop and develop a plan of effective strategies that help coaches cope. (See table 6.2).

**TABLE 6.2** Stress-Reducing and Coping Strategies

Stressor	Coach-level Strategy	Organization-level Strategy
1. Communication and conflict	Steps and methods for parents, athletes or other program stakeholders to share concerns	Clearly described expectations and job responsibilities shared with coaches
2. Pressure and expectations	Setting realistic athlete development and performance goals that are regularly adjusted as needed	Agreed-upon metrics for measuring coach and program success that are periodically reviewed and updated
3. Athlete discipline and team dynamics	Clear explanation of team values and athlete behavior standards; consequences for behaviors that do not align with values and standards	Efficient and quick response protocols for reporting and resolving coaching concerns with administrators
4. Program support and isolation	Regular interactions with coach mentors	Creation of coach learning and support networks—real and virtual
5. Sacrificing personal time	Daily physical activity built in to work schedule (e.g., walking or active meetings, joining athletes during physical training sessions)	Regular and frequent checks with coaches to ensure they have the tools needed to perform their best

Although this plan should be tailored to the specific coaching environment, all plans should have two key aspects:

- 1) providing coaches guidance on how to self-manage stress
- 2) having the organization focus on the infrastructure, systems and support personnel (e.g., coach developers) needed to help coaches deal with stress positively.

## Support Networks

Coaches tend to prefer to work independently and address personal and professional issues without assistance from others. But just as athletes require a support team to excel and sustain, so do coaches. Indeed, a strong coaching network can be a great source for emotional and social support.

The best coaching networks are filled with “energy givers.” These are action-oriented peers who are positive and enthusiastic and will boost the spirits and reduce the tension of those around them. Coaches, therefore, should fill their network with colleagues who have most of the qualities listed in figure 6.1.

- 
- ☐ Exude positive energy and enthusiasm
  - ☐ Display uncommon drive
  - ☐ Work with a clear sense of purpose
  - ☐ Are service- and other-oriented
  - ☐ Hold others accountable
  - ☐ Are trustworthy
  - ☐ Known for their relationship skills
  - ☐ Offer frequent and genuine praise
  - ☐ Show humility and gratitude
  - ☐ Are good listeners
  - ☐ Open to learning from others
  - ☐ Show positive body language
- 

**FIGURE 6.1** Checklist for identifying candidates for a coach support network.

Although a network of energy givers providing emotional and social support can help to lower stress and heighten spirits, peers who stimulate a coach intellectually can serve to enhance coaching skill and nourish personal wellness.

Coach developers and sport organizations can facilitate the creation and implementation of effective learning communities by;

- Scheduling time for regular ongoing discussions about coaching (in-person meetings at competitions, creating virtual meeting spaces, coordinating conference calls)
- Assigning a coach to serve as a peer facilitator (responsible for keeping the group focused and engaged in the network) and then training that person for the role
- Sharing the results of coach learning group discussions via social media updates, coach storytelling and reports of best principles in action in coaching newsletters and magazines.

## Self-Care

Support—on organization, group and individual levels—is vital to long-term coach wellness. But no factor is more critical to coach well-being than the coach's own commitment to self-care.

Coach well-being would be much higher if the coaching community subscribed to the notion that those who are helped most are those who help themselves.

Unfortunately, too few coaches take that approach. Instead, they neglect their own needs and place personal well-being at the bottom of their list of priorities, while they work intently and tirelessly to develop their athletes and programs. They deplete their energy tanks without pausing regularly to fill them.

Coaches must be convinced of the need to monitor their personal energy gauge as they do their vehicle's gas gauge—and to replenish it before it runs low. An incentive system that rewards coaches for conducting regular wellness checkups may be a good start. One tool that coaches can use to periodically check their health status is provided on page 39 (see figure 6.2).

Armed with a better awareness of the specific areas of coach wellness that need to be recalibrated, coaches—perhaps with some initial assistance from those who support them—can then focus on designing self-care strategies that address each coach's unique wellness needs.



## Work–Life Balance

Coaches are notorious for neglecting their own physical activity and sleep. The surest way to improve coach wellness is to build physical activity and good sleep habits into daily routines. Due to their experience as athletes, coaches often equate physical activity with intense physical training. For coach wellness, though, physical activity should be thought of much more broadly. Walking the dog, yard work and playing catch with family or friends are all examples of physical activity that help a coach stay fresh—physically and mentally.

**Instructions:** Circle the answer that best represents how you feel right now about coaching. The higher the score, the greater the risk that a coach will succumb to stress and burnout.

Question	Not at all how I feel	Somewhat how I feel	Exactly how I feel
1. I don't look forward to coaching as much as I used to.	1	2	3
2. I feel physically and emotionally worn out from coaching.	1	2	3
3. I don't feel that I can cope very well with the demands of coaching.	1	2	3
4. I don't feel like I'm accomplishing many worthwhile things as a coach.	1	2	3
5. Athletes and others, I work with don't show the same level of commitment that I do.	1	2	3
6. I don't feel supported in my coaching.	1	2	3
7. There is a lack of communication and trust where I coach.	1	2	3
8. I don't feel secure in my current coaching position.	1	2	3
9. I question if the amount of time and energy I spend on coaching is worth it.	1	2	3

**FIGURE 6.2** Coach wellness checkup.

Whether coaching young athletes in a volunteer capacity or leading a national team in an elite position, a coach never seems to have enough time for sleep. This is particularly challenging when coaches travel with their athletes for competitions, sleeping in unfamiliar surroundings and adjusting to different time zones or environments. Coaches can follow some simple tips for improving the quality of their sleep:

- ✓ Aim for six to eight hours of sleep each night.
- ✓ Sleep, and wake, at approximately the same time each day.
- ✓ Develop, and adhere to, a pre-sleep routine (how you prepare for bed each night).
- ✓ Avoid screen time in the hour before bedtime. At a minimum, dim the light on electronic devices to its lowest level.
- ✓ Ensure that the bedroom is as dark as possible. Wear an eye mask if needed.
- ✓ When possible, take a brief nap during the afternoon (no more than 30 minutes).
- ✓ When traveling, bring your own pillow.

The long workday of a coach often causes great strain on personal relationships. Sadly, coaches often realize too late that they have neglected to spend sufficient time with family and friends while pursuing their coaching goals. Quality coaching requires intentional efforts to prioritize family and life.

Obligations beyond regular coaching duties, such as coaching clinics and camps, can mean even more time away from family and friends. This can add tension to already-strained relationships. When possible, coaches should consider some way of fitting family time around such events. This can work if, prior to the coaching event, the coach clearly communicates the responsibilities and commitments he or she will have during the event. A simple and time-tested self-care strategy for coaches is to set aside time at the start of each day to do something for themselves. Time management experts often refer to this as “starting the day on offense.” Coaches spend most of each day playing “defense” - responding to other people’s needs and problems.

This can become exhausting, and it can also lead to frustration and feelings of resentment if coaches feel like they are never making progress toward their own goals.

Other proven strategies for improving coaches’ work–life balance include;

- making priority lists.
- delegating some responsibilities to others.

Successful coaches put first things first. The various things that we need to do and want to do—both in work and in personal life—are not equal in importance and urgency. Leadership guru Steven Covey has created a simple framework to organize tasks into one of four categories:

1. **Critical and urgent:** *things that are very important and that we must do now*
2. **Critical but not urgent:** *things that are important but can be done later without jeopardizing our ability to complete the task effectively*
3. **Not critical but urgent:** *things that are not that important but do need to be done soon (these are the types of things that coaches should try to delegate when possible)*
4. **Not critical and not urgent:** *things that we often do, or think we are expected to do, that add little or no value to our work or life (these are things we should try to eliminate or discontinue as much as possible)*

Delegating some less urgent, or less critical, coaching responsibilities is a valuable way for coaches to improve their work–life balance. This makes it even more important for coaches to surround themselves with trusted assistants and supportive colleagues and friends.

Finally, the best way to increase the likelihood that coaches will embrace and achieve a healthy work–life balance is for the organizations and programs that employ them to truly support them in that effort. That means not only explicitly stipulating the need for such balance in coaches’ job descriptions and expectations, but also monitoring that coaches are taking care of themselves.

#### Chapter 6 - Takeaway

Athlete development suffers when coach health and wellness are neglected. Quality coaching requires mental, emotional and physical conditioning. Coach wellness starts with an awareness of common sources of coaching stress. Armed with this knowledge, coaches can take regular steps to refresh and reload so they can be at their best more often. To stay fresh, coaches should make time each day to fill their own tanks, and they should surround themselves with others who are energy givers.

## Assurance of a Quality Experience

Much of sport's appeal comes from the opportunity to conquer the many challenges it presents to both athletes and coaches. Yet, try as they might, there are no guarantees that the results will be exactly what the athletes and coaches hope for.

Quality coaching may not guarantee championships and medals, but it can ensure that the quest for such outcomes will be well worth it. The ASA is fortunate to have many excellent coaches who provide their athletes with such positive experiences. The principles set forth in this document are based upon those which we can assure our athletes the coaching they need, to be the best they can be, while enjoying the journey on their sport pathway. By following these principles, the ASA coaches will also gain greater satisfaction from their role as mentors, both on and off the field of play.

