

Three Strategies for Successful Coach Development

By Bob Barcelona, Ph.D.

“As a youth sports coach, the #1 goal should be player development. Not winning.”

The quote above was recently posted to the Facebook site of the Positive Coaching Alliance. Almost immediately it received over 3,000 likes, almost 100 comments, and more than 2,500 shares. The post certainly hit a chord.

Most of us agree that youth sports should be about player development. However, successful player development depends, in large part, on the quality of the coach. Athletes who receive quality coaching are more likely to have positive sport experiences, higher levels of intrinsic motivation, and higher levels of sport commitment.

The first step in developing players is developing quality coaches. Yet research shows that between 70 and 90 percent of youth sport coaches receive no formal training prior to coaching, and it is safe to say that most get little in the way of on-going education or development as they progress.



There are many good training programs in the marketplace that offer foundational information that can be helpful in providing a baseline for many coaches. However, relying on an out-of-the-box online or video-driven training program is a minimalist approach, and often doesn't meet the needs of adult learners. A



successful coach development program should consider supplementing basic training with some of the following ideas:

1. Incorporate hands-on experiences.

This could consist of on-field or on-court opportunities for coaches to lead drills, work on giving feedback or answering questions, or practice making adjustments. If this isn't possible, think about including classroom experiences where coaches work through problems, engage in simulations or role playing, or complete key coaching tasks like practice or game planning.

2. Provide opportunities to share and reflect.

Coaches value facilitated reflection. Clicking through an online training program or passively watching a lecture without having an opportunity to discuss the ideas presented misses an opportunity. Consider providing opportunities for coaches to discuss what they are learning, to reflect on their experiences, and to discuss challenges and problems to help arrive at helpful solutions.

3. Give ample feedback.

Learning diminishes quickly without continual feedback. Yet most volunteer coaches receive little or no formal feedback on how they are performing their roles. Consider implementing a formal evaluation system

for your coaches. If this isn't possible, then consider using experienced coaches as mentors, and training the mentors to provide feedback on your behalf.

Developing quality coaches is the first step in developing quality athletes. There are many good, free resources available as you begin to build a coach development program in your community. The CoachSmart Program at UNH is one such resource. The key is to make a commitment to developing your volunteer coaches so they can do the important work of developing your young athletes.

Bob Barcelona, Ph.D., is an associate professor in the Department of Recreation Management and Policy at UNH and the Program Director for the CoachSmart Program. He can be reached at bob.barcelona@unh.edu. Like CoachSmart on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/coachsmarth>.

Dr. Barcelona will be one of the speakers at the 2016 Vermont Conference on Recreation scheduled for September 21-22, 2016. Mark your calendar to be there and hear more of his ideas on developing youth sport coaches.