Planning, Implementing and Evaluating in Sports Coaching

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Abstract
Achieving success in sports is strongly related to peaking at the right intervals. Peaking means that athletes are able to deliver their best performances at a certain given time of competition. This paper looks at the attributions of coaches in such a high standard preparation, arguing that, if reaching sporting success is the end goal, then the preparation of athletes needs to mean more than the simple training of motorical skills. The importance and necessity of adopting the managerial principles of planning, implementing and evaluating in sports coaching are being discussed. The research aim is to detail on how a managerial like-approach can be beneficial for coaching. Sports-specific characteristics of planning, implementing and evaluating are discussed in detail.

Keywords: coaching, sports training, management, peak performance

JEL classification: M10, M12, M50

1. Introduction

Achievement in elite sports means that athletes have reached some peaks in performance that have allowed them to be competitive at the highest possible levels (Cashmore, 2002: 192; Cohn, 1991; Harmison, 2006; Jackson, Roberts, 1992; Sicilia et al., 2017). Athletes at the peak are able to maintain control over their performances, and direct power and energy towards reaching certain goals (Gould et al., 1999). Peaking in sport, though, is not a haphazard, but a well planned process, conditioned by training cycles (Bompa, 2001: 269; Bompa, Carrera, 2005; Bompa, Haff, 2009; Coutts, Cormack, 2014: 71). Coaches develop strategies meant to lead their athletes at peaking at the optimal moment for obtaining success (Kuipers, 1996, 1998).

This article is designed as a brief comparative study between sports coaching and general management. The purpose of the research is to highlight the importance of using three strategic management tools (planning, implementation, evaluation) in coaching. Regarding the entire coaching process as a strategic plan is important because the physical, psychological, or technico-tactical skills of athletes do not occur by chance, but they accumulate over a long period of time, with every training unit (Pankhurst, 2007: 4). Coaching is a long-lasting process, in which close emotional ties are created between the coach and the athletes (Davis, Jowett, 2010; Forrest, 2008; Jowett, 2003; Jowett, Cockerill, 2003; Moen, 2014; Philippe, Seiler, 2006; Poczwardowski et al., 2002). The athletes perceive the coach as the disciplinarian, knowledgeable and motivated person able to help them reach success.

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(Becker, 2009; Ramzaninezhad, Hoseini Keshtan, 2009; Stirling, Kerr, 2009; Tomlinson, Yorganci, 1997), though changes in time have encouraged a more participative coaching approach as opposed to the patriarchal style sports have been used to (Martin et al., 1999). If working closely with athletes to help them improve their skills, the coach has to create a proper, supportive environment (Wales, 2002) for athletes to develop, which mainly occurs during training sessions. The creation of this supportive environment, that has to lead to success, is a result of how good a coach can plan, implement, monitor and evaluate success. In the first part, the article looks at what sports coaching could mean from a managerial point of view, and then it moves on to present a short theoretical framework of how planning, implementing and evaluating could be done in sports.

2. Coaching

Coaching can be described as the effort that a coach invests with the aim of obtaining certain physical and psychological abilities from the athletes he is preparing, while also considering an accumulation of these abilities to peak at a defined moment. While, at a basic level, coaching is strictly concerned with improving athletic skills, developments throughout history have risen the demands of coaches to be concerned with more than athletics, asking for pedagogical, mental or managerial training as well (Cassidy et al., 2008; Gould et al., 1990). Several authors, such as Côté et al. (2009), Light et al. (2014) and Potrac et al. (2000) thus call for a holistic approach to coaching.

The emergence of public schools during the English Regency and Victorian Eras saw the introduction of physical education classes as a new trend in education (Coghlan, Webb, 2003; Cox, 1991). It has not been long before teachers realized that sports can not only rejuvenate pupils and serve to leisure purposes, but also contribute to educating them at different levels: physically, morally, and spiritually (Cunningham, 1980; Horn, 2008: 188). These changes have materialized in the appearance of physical education and sports teachers, the forerunners of current coaches.

Coaches do not only deal with the physical training of athletes, but also with their psyche and their development as individuals (Stafford, 2005; Taylor, Wilson, 2005). In addition to physical improvement, coaching also involves teaching strategies, tactics, techniques, routines, and methods of conducting the game or the sport. It is the role of the coach to create an environment which to enable athletes to learn. Miles (2004: 1-2) believes that coaching involves creating a supportive environment for athletes to learn and to develop themselves in a context allowing sports to be practiced. That context would be the training sessions. While the official games are the exams that players need to pass in front of competing teams of athletes, the training sessions are the teaching and rehearsal units where coaches work closely with their players in order to prepare a game. The majority of the teaching that a coach does occurs during training. Training sessions imply that the coach conducts exercises and practice units to stimulate the learning skills of athletes, with the goal of transforming them in improved performances during on-game situations (Cabral, 2005).
3. The Coaching Process

Coaching is constantly under the pressure of change and adaptation, as sports themselves change (Fletcher, Scott, 2010; Olusoga et al., 2009, 2010, 2012; Thelwell et al., 2008). With games becoming more physical and the personality traits of athletes being shaped by the surrounding world, coaching styles have to adapt. Coaching has been traditionally associated with relations of power and subordination (Taylor, Garratt, 2013), with the coach taking in a patriarchal figure (Kellett, 2002; Zakrajsek et al., 2011), imposing high level demands on his athletes to perform. Lately, coaches have been encouraged to be more supportive towards emboldening athletes to take more initiative themselves, shifting the coaching to a more participative style (Denison et al., 2017). However, though, the coach wields a powerful influence both on the personalities of the athletes (Becker, 2009; Mageau, Vallierand, 2003; Vealey et al., 1998), on their behavior during practice and during games, as well as on the overall design and atmosphere of a team (Horn, 2008). It is the coach that the players look at as a leading figure whom they would be ready to follow if sporting success is promised (Dwyer, Fischer, 1990; Gardner et al., 1996; Garland, Barry, 1988; Serpa et al., 1991). A study by Reinboth et al. (2004) reveals that, the most important feature that athletes seek to see in their coach is competence. Athletes want to be coached by a person able to bring them closer to success, which is an intrinsic motivational factor for most sports people.

The whole coaching process has to be planned at high standards, as the coach is evaluated by the performances of the team he is leading. Performances, such as matches won, or, even more, tournaments won, are the indicators of coaching effectiveness. Motivated by the pursuit of success, coaches can base their training paradigm on steps similar to the managerial process. Making a parallel with general management theory, in training his athletes, the coach has to plan, act and evaluate (Bittel, 1998: 402-410; Curzon, 1989; Denhardt, Denhardt, 2009: 195; Emery, 2011; Misener, 2016: 270). He plans the training sessions, runs them, and at the end evaluates the performances of athletes (Bulger et al., 2007; Fuoss, Smith, 1981). All this has to be done by keeping in mind a reliable goal-setting. When planning training sessions, the main question that a coach has to ask is how the athletes can reach success. Improving performances for obtaining success should be the mission of the coach. After carrying out the training unit, the coach has to assess extent to which the goals of that particular unit have been met, identify where and how the quality of athletes can be further improved, and, last but not least, identify how they can implement the skills or ideas learned during training in official matches.

(i) Planning

Pankhurst (2007: 5) highlights the importance of planning for successful coaching, considering that this is what performance in sports starts with. Coaches have to understand the crucial role that planning plays, either for one single unit of training or for a longer development period that can span over several years. Planning sets the functions and goals of training (Gambetta, 2015: 48). The aim of planning in a coaching process directed towards excellence is to identify the work
that the athlete or the team needs to do in order to approach achieving success (Wrisberg, 2007: 129). Hence, why, planning training must be done according to the needs of athletes (Hughes et al., 2012). At the same time, planning helps the coach identify the right amount of training that needs to be delivered in order not to burn out his athletes and have them fail in reaching the peak when it is needed, or pose the risk of injury (Kuipers, 1996; Udry et al., 1997). In his decision-making, the coach has to visualise that, at the end of his tenure, he has to achieve success (Landsberg, 2015; Wikeley, Bullock, 2006: 15; Singer, 2010). Training sessions will be structured and planned in such a way that they integrate as a whole, which, under conditions of excellence, is equivalent to sporting success. If achieving success is the ultimate goal, planning will also take into account the intermediate goals, like for example the sporting performances during matches. The training program will be designed taking into account the contests in which the team is involved, the competition, team shape, rest periods, forced breaks, availability of athletes, past experience or training facilities. Each of the factors of influence has its specificity:

a) The contest (competition) in which the team is involved:
   - the calendar of meetings in that competition;
   - the number of teams competing (the higher the number of matches in the competition, the more training needed);
   - the structure of the competition;
   - major matches.

b) Competition (Blumenstein et al., 2005) - Competing teams or rival athletes:
   - the shape and fit of competing teams (the fitter the opponents, the more seriously the team will have to train to defeat it);
   - squad value (an opposing team with a lot of valuable players will be harder to beat, so training needs to be more serious);
   - opposition line-up (training might also be done depending on how the opponent will line up for the upcoming game. Given that success is a long-term process, the coach will consider not only the first next opponent, but all the opponents he knows the team is likely to meet during a certain period, analyzing their games, and planning a specific training strategy);
   - experience of opponents.

c) Shape of the team: In planning the training process, the coach must also take into account the shape of his own team. The answers of athletes to the requirements of the coach also depend on their shape (Lidor et al., 2007).

d) Rest periods: The coach must consider allowing players physical and mental regeneration days (Bangsbo et al., 2006; Hill-Haas et al., 2011; Smith, 2003).

e) Forced breaks: Forced breaks are intervals imposed by the competitive or by the international calendar. Many elite sports teams have got international players in their rosters; such players have to be available for international duties with the representative side of their home nation, so they will have to travel several times during the year and miss out training within their club team (Buchheit, 2017). Sports
coaches have to consider how they plan training so international players are impacted to a minimum possible, while also taking into account the workload to be carried out with athletes who are not away on international duty. For greater efficiency, forced pause periods can be coupled with rest periods for avoiding unnecessary time losses.

f) Availability of athletes: The coach will set the training schedule according to the players he has at his disposal. If, for example, some players are travelling on international duties or are injured, the coach will be planning the training without them. If some players come back after an injury, the coach might schedule separate training sessions for them.

g) Experience: the more experienced the athletes are, the easier the training, as athletes already know what they have to do and how they should behave.

h) Training facilities: the better the facilities, the better the coach can sketch a more varied workout that includes several training methods and techniques.

All these factors highlight why it is important that the coach also plays a managerial role in the team. He should be involved in developing the training camp or, as far as possible, in establishing the competition calendar so as to ensure the best conditions for his players to evolve. By investing managerially, the coach simplifies his work as a sports instructor.

(ii) Implementation

After planning the team's training process, the coach will also have to implement it. By transforming the training plan into reality, the coach brings more knowledge to his team, develops athletes and prepares them for success. In training, the coach teaches the athletes how to perform against opposition. In preparation, athletes are learning perceptual, cognitive and motor perceptual (Causer et al., 2012; Memmert, 2015: 35-38). Cognitive and perceptual learning occurs when athletes have to assimilate and analyze the information presented by the coach, while perceptual motor learning occurs when athletes use their muscular mass to physically practice the coach's requirement.

(iii) Evaluation

Through evaluation, the coach certifies the value of athletes. It is important for the coach to have a departure and an arrival time to use, so that he can compare the initial level of athletic skills and capacities, and the levels achieved after training (McGuigan, 2014). For comparison purposes, the coach should also use performance indicators (Hughes, Bartlett, 2002). These indicators help the coach to measure athlete's progress towards success. Whatever the indicators, they must meet the following characteristics:

• be consistent with the coach's vision and team goals;
• not to be abandoned until they are completed;
• be quantifiable.

In order to be able to use the performance indicators and to be able to evaluate, the coach must collect and record training data (Fuller et al., 2006). He has to monitor the work of athletes, gather information at different times, and then compare them to each other.
4. Conclusions

Figure 1 attempts a graphical résumée of the concept previously presented, trying to underline the importance that planning, implementing and evaluating play in sports coaching towards success.

![Figure 1: Planning, Implementing and Evaluating in Coaching for Success. Source: Own representation.](image)

Planning, implementing and evaluating are an integral part of a sports organization, being determinants of successful coaching (McLean, Mallett, 2012) and of sporting performance. Even though success implies more than only coaching – being situated at a higher level in Figure 1, meaning there are several factors other than coaching that ultimately can influence whether an athlete or a team is successful or not (Greenleaf et al., 2001; Lago-Ballesteros, Lago-Penas, 2010; Memmert et al., 2017; Ribeiro et al., 2017), i.e. match location (Taylor et al., 2008), home advantage (Aguilar, Paulis, 2017; Hoffmann et al., 2017; Legaz-Arrese et al., 2013), quality of opposition (Lago, 2009), match status (Aquino et al., 2017), time in play (Ryan et al., 2017) – probably some of the most important constituent of success is coaching, as this is the activity that implies the coach spend time with his athletes in order to develop them for reaching peaks in performances (Jowett, 2017; Jowett, Carpenter, 2015; Mallett, Côté, 2006; Myhre, Moen, 2017). In order to be carried out at a level as high as possible, coaching has to borrow managerial instruments of planning, implementing and evaluating. Coaching does not have to be limited to an on-the-field athletic preparation of sportsmen skills, but needs to be combined with management, as it needs a vision for success. A coach has to visualise what it would take to achieve success, and then translate this vision into a training module where he plans, implements and evaluates athletic performances building up for success.
References


