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Role of coaches in improving the performance of players

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Abstract

As the primary individuals tasked with developing athletes and helping them achieve their goals, coaches should acquire a working knowledge of all areas affiliated with performance enhancement. Specifically, the disciplines of sports administration, sports medicine, strength and conditioning, and sports psychology can assist coaches while physically and mentally training their athletes. This article illustrates six primary components of these disciplines: risk management, injury prevention, communication, nutrition, goal setting, and athlete development. It is imperative coaches gain a familiarity with these aforementioned components in order to teach athletes about skill development and prepare them to achieve peak performance.

Keywords: Athlete development, coaching, peak performance, training, sport

Introduction

Since the beginning of sport competition, athletes have sought to acquire the skills and knowledge of sport in order to become “champions.” As sport evolved into organized activity, coaches began working more closely with athletes on sport skill development. Education and training programs have been created, over the past 30 years, in an effort to assist coaches and athletes with the development of methods and strategies for achieving peak performance.

Several risk management measures can be employed by coaches in order to minimize external risks. Examples include reviewing sport participants’ insurance coverage twice per year, reporting sport-related incidents in a timely manner to proper authorities (e.g., insurance companies, medical personnel), identifying potential hazards to the proper authorities (e.g., facility management), and confirming sport participants have obtained medical examinations and authorization to play. Even though peak athletic performance (e.g., wins and losses) can become a focal point for coaches, attention to detail and organization are primary responsibilities when attempting to decrease the potential negative impact of external risks on an athletic program.

Therefore, coaches should be aware of the factors associated with risk management. Coaches can limit the amount of risk involved with their programs by implementing effective management processes and staying up-to-date on changes occurring in the external environment. It is important for coaches to have a positive outlook concerning the future of their programs. In order to gain additional knowledge and remain current with issues concerning risk management, coaches should review literature published by their school or university, athletic associations, or national sport governing bodies regularly. This will help coaches minimize external risks while preparing their athletes for competition which is critical for the development of a successful program.

Coaches should gain knowledge concerning first aid care and the prevention of injury. When coaches teach their athletes sport skills, these athletes must develop precise technical movements in order to produce peak athletic performance. Such movements, along with the demands placed on athletes’ muscles when accelerating, decelerating, or changing direction, increase the risk of injury. These performance demands create internal forces on athletes’ bodies and when combined with external forces (e.g., body contact), injury risk can significantly increase. Coaches need to be aware of these potential risks when developing training regimens for participants competing at any level of sport.

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No relationship, whether on the playing field or off, can blossom without communication and the relationship between players and coaches is no different. Players need to feel that their coach cares about them as a person; not just as an athlete who can help them win games and establish a successful athletic program. Players are people first and great coaches make time for the person as well as the player.

Being available to athletes and other team personnel is only as effective as the communication that takes place. Coaches must remember that communication is a two-way street; it requires listening as well as talking because it involves both inputs and outputs. If managed effectively and by making an effort to develop positive relationships with their players, coaches can increase the chances of team success.

Role of Coaches In Improving The Performance Of Players

The six courses focus on sports administration, coaching methods, sports medicine, strength and conditioning, sports psychology, and athlete development. With the addition of these new disciplines, training athletes has become a holistic activity focusing on the entire athlete (i.e., mental and physical aspects).

Risk Management

Coaches have some level of responsibility for all aspects of their athletic program. For example, coaches need to be concerned about the welfare of their players and the maintenance of athletic equipment and facilities. These responsibilities fall under the umbrella of risk management and the controlled evaluation of the athletic environment. Evaluating risk management in the athletic environment is a significant administrative element for coaches. While risk can never be fully eliminated, these individuals must be aware of, and must seek to limit the chances liability exposure. Hence, coaches must exert significant effort to monitor all components of their athletic programs.

Coaches must realize they will encounter facility and/or equipment risk on a constant basis. A substantial amount of time is required to assess sport facilities and equipment in order to prevent injury to sport participants during competition. Numerous sport facilities continue to be built in order to house athletic competitions making facility risk management a top priority of coaches.

Injury Prevention

Today, young athletes train like elite professional athletes. Specifically, many adolescents are undertaking physical and mental conditioning regimens for several hours a day in order to produce peak athletic performance. Additionally, some individuals are specializing in one sport at an early age and participating on several teams during a single athletic season. While others participate in several different sports year-round without allowing the body and mind enough time to sufficiently recover from the rigors of athletic competition.

Thus, sport participation and demanding athletic training regimens can produce significant sport injuries for athletes. Experiencing a sport injury may affect an athlete physically and psychologically once the individual returns to athletic competition. Without question, coaches should realize athletes need athletic healthcare. In addition, this healthcare should be considered an investment toward individuals maintaining a physically active lifestyle in the future.

Communication

Besides interacting with medical personnel, coaches must be exceptional communicators with their athletes in order to be effective teachers. The ability to communicate is a critical component in becoming a successful coach and developing elite athletes. "Communication is a process through which two entities exchange formal messages in a common code by using one or more transmission channels ...". It is the foundation upon which coaches build their team. Coaching without effective communication is like trying to play basketball without a ball; it just is not a successful endeavor. "In fact, effective communication is often cited as a critical element in the success of athletic teams,". Team members must learn how to communicate with each other both in and out of the playing arena so that they can become one cohesive unit and ultimately increase their level of success.

Coaches have the opportunity to teach their players many life skills and effective communication may be the most valuable one, yet time is not always in the coach's favor. From limits on practice time or set times for half-time and timeouts during athletic competition, coaches encounter several constraints which can limit the time allowed to convey messages to their players. Therefore, coaches should organize their messages efficiently in hopes of developing positive relationships with players. Without question, establishing a positive athlete-coach relationship is a critical component to achieving effective communication between these individuals. Communicating effectively will allow coaches to teach their athletes the necessary sport skills to produce peak performance and increase the possibility of having a successful athletic program.

Nutrition

As coaches establish a positive relationship with their athletes, many athletes begin to realize the importance of training the body physically in order to produce peak performances. Hence, every coach should consider performance enhancement to be the number one priority when developing a strength and conditioning program. However, without adequate nutrition, training results may be suboptimal due to a lack of recovery and reduced ability to perform due to depleted energy. Therefore, nutrition is the foundation of performance enhancement. Without optimal nutrition, athletes cannot compete to their full potential.

Over the last few decades the nutritional requirements of athletes have been researched extensively. Sports nutrition has come a long way from the "take a salt tablet" days. We now understand the importance of specific nutrients and when and how they need to be ingested, as well as how much should be consumed. A good place to start is the standard food guide pyramid. While the pyramid as we know it has been modified over the last decade, the principles of a well-balanced diet remain the same. For an athlete, these principles still apply; however, they need to be modified based on the sport and type of athlete and the intensity of his training.

Goal Setting

When completing a strength and conditioning program, a coach may instruct an athlete to complete "another repetition." Coaches have a responsibility to prepare their athletes physically and mentally for athletic competition. Thus, many athletes develop a desire to produce successful performance and gain mastery of any task completed. For example, an athlete may not only want to win the contest but may also aspire to perform sport skills exceptionally well in

order to produce peak performance. Without question, coaches have an opportunity to assist athletes with performance enhancement.

Training Stages

Athletes progress through several training stages as they get older and become more accomplished in their sport. For the most part training stages are age related. Each stage's curriculum should help athletes transition to the next stage by providing what they will need at their present training stage as well as preparing them for the proceeding one.

Most countries use an athlete development system that focuses on performance outcomes. This involves getting as many young athletes as possible into training programs and then focusing on the elite performers. The problem with this method is that sport governing bodies rely on early maturing youngsters—those who are simply bigger and stronger than their peers and who, almost inevitably, perform better in sport. However, only an estimated 25% of youngsters identified as 'elite athletes' at an early age were identified the same way at a later date; indicating late maturers can also become 'elite athletes' if given enough time to develop.

Discussion

Nutrients that need to be increased for all athletes include carbohydrates (e.g., bread, oats, and grains) and proteins (e.g., meat, nuts, and dairy). Intense exercise significantly depletes the body of stored carbohydrates and causes significant muscle damage. Coaches need to ensure athletes consume extra carbohydrates and protein after completing intense physical activity. Extra carbohydrates replace the lost carbohydrates stored in the body and drive cellular activity for repair. Protein helps muscles repair and grow. Increasing protein intake to between 1.4 and 2.0 g/kg of body weight per day is suggested for both endurance and strength athletes, while carbohydrates should be increased to as much as eight to 10 g/kg of body weight per day.

Using grams per kilogram of body weight to develop a nutritional plan for an athlete is ideal. Athletes need to eat well-balanced meals and to supplement with additional proteins (i.e., powders/drinks) and carbohydrates (i.e., sugary drink such as Gatorade/Powerade) only when they are not reaching the minimum requirements in their regular diet. Supplementing with vitamins and minerals may be needed for some athletes with specific nutritional needs, such as vegans. Nutrient timing also plays an important role during training and should be practiced by coaches wishing to optimize training results and promote recovery.

Understanding nutrition is a start towards reaching optimal performance. Multiple factors can influence overall performance; however, starting with the basics, such as nutrition, can lead to greater improvements in performance regardless of the training program. Utilizing an ideal training program while implementing a proper nutritional program will enable athletes to realize optimal enhancements in performance.

As a positive athlete-coach relationship develops, many athletes begin considering their coaches to be role models. Hence, coaches should communicate with their athletes in order to assist them with the development of personal goals. An athlete's personal goals can lead to skill development and ultimately peak performance. In a professional manner, a coach may provide an athlete with constructive feedback concerning skill development, safety, nutrition, or injury prevention.

The outcome model tends to quickly discard those who do not measure up, and while this may not be by design it happens often enough to be considered a characteristic of the model itself. In the outcome model young athletes are treated as small adults, following the same training and competition patterns as older athletes. Late maturers are discouraged from continued sport participation since the outcome model rewards early maturers with more coach contact, encouragement, and social recognition due to their early ability (i.e., athletic-talent).

A better model might focus on the process of developing an athlete. This model is more inclusive because the path from instruction, to training, and finally, to competition is paved with intentionally stage-appropriate activities and training. Early maturing or physically precocious youngsters do not affect this model. In a process model, stages of physical and athletic development are paired so that athletes are receiving the instruction and training they need at times when it is most beneficial. By deliberately focusing on process rather than outcome providers of youth sport will be able to keep youngsters involved in programs for longer periods.

By making a conscious effort to keep all athletes involved through stage-appropriate modifications in training and competition, sport governing bodies will provide a better sport experience for everyone and increase the likelihood of developing elite athletes from those who might otherwise have dropped out from participating in sport. Not only will this enlarge the pool of talent available to national sport governing bodies but it will also increase the likelihood that athletes will continue to be physically active throughout life. Specifically, as youths progress into adulthood, these individuals will have the competence to use skills and knowledge they acquired in organized sports to remain healthy and physically fit.

Conclusion

Ultimately, coaches should be passionate about teaching sport skills to their athletes. Coaches must be life-long learners of sport in order to properly train their athletes for peak performance. As the profession of sport coaching has evolved and sport has become a multi-billion dollar industry, many coaches have discovered sport incorporates both physical and mental training. Therefore, in today's sports world, several disciplines have been integrated into the science and art of training athletes.

This article presented information which coaches should utilize when training their athletes. These six courses, which comprise the coaching patterns, emphasize sports administration, coaching methods, sports medicine, strength and conditioning, sports psychology, and athlete development. Training athletes to become "champions" in sport, and more importantly life, can provide many individuals with opportunities to produce peak performance.

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