

The retention of youth sport coaches

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The aim of this article is to review selected literature pertaining to the reasons why youth sport coaches continue or discontinue with coaching. This review will elucidate initial motives for coach participation and outline some of the main reasons for coach withdrawal. In addition, insight into what action must be taken to retain more coaches at youth level will be provided. Consequently, strategies and recommendations regarding how coach participation can be maximised at youth level also will be outlined.

INTRODUCTION

COACHING is potentially a very gratifying pursuit as a result of working with aspiring young athletes, the challenge of constructing an effective programme, the fulfilment derived from teaching sport skills, and the opportunity to facilitate athletes' psychosocial development (Raedeke, 2004). In particular, the youth sport coach can have a significant impact on young athletes' development and enjoyment of sport (Hedstrom & Gould, 2004). As a result of the enormous participation rates of youths in sport in Australia and worldwide, millions of dollars are being spent on athlete development at a young age. Furthermore, the contemporary epidemic of inactivity and obesity in Australian children means there is potential for youth sports and their coaches to have a significant impact in this area in the future (Hedstrom & Gould, 2004). Paradoxically, little educational, social, financial and psychological support exists for the retention of youth sport coaches given their importance to the overall development of young athletes. The relatively high rate of coach turnover in athletic settings has been a cause for concern in Australasia in recent years, particularly at

the youth sport level. Considering the importance of the coach in determining the quality and success of an athlete's sport experience, the existence of information that specifically relates to the retention of youth coaches is surprisingly negligible.

WHO ARE THE YOUTH SPORT COACHES?

Youth (10-18 years) sport coaches range from inexperienced parent-volunteers to highly skilled and paid coaches of elite youth programmes. Unfortunately, the distinction between coaches of varying abilities has not been made and ultimately, there has been limited research regarding lucid definitions of the 'youth sport coach' (Hedstrom & Gould, 2004). Lyle (2002) described two types of coaches, and although not specifically linked to youth sports, the definitions provided are relevant to this area. He characterised 'participation coaching' as sports leadership and teaching, with the purpose of providing initial experiences in sport for athletes. Competition and performance elements are not emphasised and participants are less intensively engaged. Alternatively, 'performance coaching' involves effective management, intensive commitment, a focus on competition goals and improving sport performance (Lyle, 2002).

Sport volunteers most often fall into the 'participation' category outlined by Lyle and are an important source of youth coaches around the world. Similar descriptions of volunteer coaches can be found in Japanese (Yamaguchi & Takahashi, 2000), British (Coleman, 2002) and Australian (Cuskelly & Auld, 2000a) studies where they have been described as people who contribute their time, skills and experience to an organisation for which they receive no payment beyond expenses incurred. Recently, with increased sports participation in private, non-scholastic and agency-sponsored programmes (e. g. private schools), there has been a tendency to pay coaches for their work in these settings. As a result, performance criteria often become relevant, despite the potential existence of a school ethos that may emphasise maximum participation in sport teams. It is in these cases that the balance between 'performance' and 'participation' coaching delivery remains unclear.

Coaching in a youth sport setting may be divided into three potential categories, which reflect the distinction between 'performance' and 'participation' coaches:

1. Volunteer coaches who:
 - a. Coach in a 'participation' environment (e. g. a parent who volunteers to coach at a local youth sports club)
 - b. Coach in a 'performance' environment (e. g. a coach who volunteers to coach a representative youth sport team)
2. People who work or study in some capacity and are paid to coach (e. g. a student who is paid to coach by a school or a teacher at a school who is paid to also coach a sport team):
 - a. Coach in a 'participation' environment (e. g. junior school level coach or 7-10 where the focus is on all-round development and maximum participation for all athletes)
 - b. Coach in a 'performance' environment (e. g. senior school sport where focus on winning becomes greater and potential for post-school sport participation becomes relevant)
3. People who coach full time or where coaching is their primary income/role (e. g. some private schools in Sydney or high schools in the USA)

- a. Coach in a 'participation' environment (e. g. coaches who work in after school youth sport programmes such as the Active After-school Communities Programme developed by the Australian Sports Commission)
- b. Coach in a 'performance' environment (e. g. institute of sport gymnastics coach who works with potential national representatives)

To fully explore the issue of the retention of youth sport coaches, where possible, we have attempted to differentiate between 'performance' and 'participation' youth sport coaches when critiquing the literature. However, the task of including all the information regarding both 'participation' and 'performance' coaching was beyond the scope of this article. As a result, this review will focus only on the context of 'performance' coaches in youth sport. The reason for this is that the majority of research selected for this review is based on performance coaching overseas that will be explored within the Australasian context.

MOTIVES FOR COACHING

There has been useful research describing motives for coaching in North American (Sage, 1989; Schinke, Bloom, & Salmela, 1995; Salmela, 1995), English (Coleman, 2002; Eley & Kirk, 2002; English Sports Council, 1997) and Australian (Walsh, 2004) contexts. An awareness of such motives may assist sports organisations in developing strategies to retain youth sport coaches. Similar motives were identified among these groups, despite the varied sample of professional, expert youth, high school and volunteer coaches. In North America, the desire to coach was derived from personal characteristics and experiences within the sport, interest in working with young people and wanting to remain involved in sport in some capacity (Sage, 1989; Schinke et al. , 1995; Salmela, 1995). Similarly, Walsh (2004) noted that participation in sport, as an athlete and desire to maintain involvement in the sport were the primary reasons for beginning coaching in Australia. Additionally, family involvement in the sport; wanting to offer something back to the sport and an academic background relating to sport had a strong influence on a coach's decision to begin coaching (Walsh, 2004).

In England, it was found that fun, enjoyment and a natural progression from competition were the most popular reasons for embarking on a career in coaching (English Sports Council, 1997, Lyle, Allison, & Taylor, 1997). Additional explanations for commencing coaching included: a general interest in sport; pride, achievement and success; skill in teaching; and being an interested parent/relative. The English Sports Council study also identified the following four reasons for continuing to coach: helping others to improve (39 per cent), enjoyment (29 per cent), making a contribution to sport (19 per cent) and achievement/success (8 per cent). Despite these opportunistic examples, the pathway into coaching may have changed over time. More recently there has been a tendency in Australasia for former elite athletes to be accelerated into the coaching system at a high performance level thereby limiting the number of coaches with elite playing experience 'giving back' to the sport at the youth level.

COACH WITHDRAWAL

Despite the important role of coaches in youth sport, participation rates have been decreasing

throughout the world (Coleman, 2002; Yamaguchi & Takahashi, 2000). USA Swimming noted that approximately 35 per cent of their coaches discontinue membership each year (Raedeke, 2004). Ultimately, high rates of turnover may hamper the ability of organisations to provide eminent and varied services that sport team affiliates expect (Cuskelly & Auld, 2000b). Even with the apparent wealth of opportunity and depth of involvement in youth sport settings, a burgeoning number of new commitments, being physically and/or mentally burnt out, the additional pressures of primary employment, and the culmination of a variety of new social experiences (e.g. family commitments) often begin to outweigh the endeavours of youth sports coaching.

The reasons for leaving a coaching position in youth sport can be classified as voluntary or involuntary, and personal or organisational (Cuskelly & Auld, 2000b; Scantling & Lackey, 2005). For example, Coleman (2002) reported that the overwhelming need to satisfy family and other commitments, the excessive time demands, poor administration (or lack of administrative support) and a lack of financial remuneration contributed to withdrawal from managing a county cricket team in England. Linder, Johns & Butcher (1991) claimed that the non-sport influences such as work, study and family commitments were often stronger motives for sport disassociation than dissatisfaction with elements within the sport itself at a non-elite level. In youth sport, parents commonly become involved in coaching and in particular, coaching their own children. Parents are a valuable source for sports organisations to recruit coaches however; there are inherent difficulties in retaining their services for extended periods. In particular, parents may seek a coaching term only for the duration of their child's involvement in a certain team (Struhar, 2003).

Burnout is another significant issue for coaches at any level of sport. Most of the literature on coach retention actually explores 'burnout' or disengagement from coaching in North America at either the collegiate or professional levels (Kelley, Eklund, & Ritter-Taylor, 1999; Raedeke, Granzky & Warren, 2000; Scanlan, Carpenter, Schmidt, Simons, & Keeler, 1993; Vealey, Udry, Zimmerman, & Soliday, 1992). Given that the majority of research in this area has been based on college coaching samples, it would be interesting to determine how significant an issue this syndrome is for the youth coach. When you consider the work, family and coaching commitments that must be balanced, it is perhaps possible that the youth sport coach does experience burnout from the following stressors: increased work demands, excessive workloads, conflicting roles, high expectations, and striving to satisfy everyone's needs.

Burnout is a multidimensional syndrome that may result in 'performance' coaches remaining in their jobs but being dysfunctional or ineffective, seeking another coaching position, or leaving the profession entirely (Kelley, 1994). Research in the area of coach burnout has utilised questionnaires such as the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI); Perceived Stress Scale; Coaching Issues Survey; Leadership Behaviour Description Questionnaire and the SCAT-Coach inventory. In addition, some studies have utilised Commitment Models such as Scanlan's Sport Commitment Model and Rustbult's Investment Model as a framework for their research. Overall, researchers have attributed burnout to:

- Role conflict and ambiguity such as being overloaded with teaching and coaching responsibilities (Capel, Sisley & Desertrain, 1987; Kelley, 1994; Kelley et al. , 1999; Kelley & Gill, 1993);

- Intrapersonal dimensions such as anxiety (Robinson & Carron, 1982; Skard & Valgum, 1989; Vealey et al. , 1992); and
- Social pressures such as poor administration, lack of social support, parental pressures and 'entrapment' (Capel et al. , 1987; Kelley, 1994; Raedeke, 2004; Raedeke et al. , 2000; Raedeke, Warren & Granzyk, 2002)

Previous research (Kelley and her colleagues, Vealey et al. , 1992) suggested that there were few differences between high school, small college and large university coaches in relation to burnout predictors despite the common acknowledgement that both the pressure to succeed and stress levels have been known to increase at higher levels of sport coaching. However, Lyle (2002) pointed out that certain factors may vary according to the intensity and level at which one coaches, along with the characteristics and nature of the sporting organisation. Raedeke et al. (2000) supported Lyle's claim, having discovered that the full-time teacher-coaches may experience higher levels of burnout than the part-time age-group coaches involved in their study. As a result it seems imprudent to assume that the pressures associated with 'performance' coaching would be totally reflected in a 'participation' youth sport setting.

Psychological, social, economic, educational and political issues evidently contribute to the phenomenon of coach withdrawal. A coach of the local youth sports team is in a position of considerable responsibility and under pressure to achieve results. They often have to juggle time constraints from work, family and coaching. Additionally, they may have to deal with issues such as parent harassment, drugs, and racial or sexual vilification. Overall, the prevailing situation seems to be that youth sport coaches are being asked to do more and more.

RETENTION FACTORS

There has been some previous research that recognises continuity in coaching roles as integral for sustaining quality sport programmes and maintaining athlete participation (Raedeke et al. , 2002). Yet it is difficult to assess how much is actually being done to maintain coach participation in youth sport programmes. Current evidence highlights the immense pressure to sustain coach involvement in youth sport programmes over an extended period of time. Maximising adherence to sports coaching programmes is imperative at all levels of sport as it may increase the breadth from which to choose future coaches. Furthermore, Pastore, Inglis & Danylchuk (1996, p. 433) contend that "the identification of retention factors ... may be useful for creating a work environment that encourages coaches and athletic managers to remain in their positions". Therefore, it is essential that sport programmes understand the reasons why people choose to continue with participation in sports coaching.

Previous research (Côté, 2005; Smith and Smoll, 2002) claimed that sport programmes which focus on fun, social activity, maximum participation and skill development, encourage people to stay involved and achieve success at all levels of sport. Therefore, it could be said that enjoyment is an integral part of commitment to sport. Rustbult's (1980) investment model of commitment hypothesised that greater commitment to sport was associated with higher satisfaction, less attractive alternatives and greater investment in an activity (Carpenter & Coleman,

1998; Schmidt & Stein, 1991). In the 1990s, the Sport Commitment model (Scanlan et al. , 1993) was developed. If adapted to coaching, this model speculates that coaches at any level would display a greater commitment to sport if they perceived benefits to be high and cost low, had invested a great deal of time and money in that sport, were constrained to continue as a result of social expectations, or the opportunity to work in other positions was less attractive (Raedeke et al. , 2000). If research attempts to find out what coaches derive enjoyment from, administrators may then be able to direct programmes to make coaching youth sports more attractive in order to boost retention rates across the board.

Previous research established that self-esteem was a primary construct in determining motivation to participate and sustain involvement in sport over time (Gill, 2000; Weigand & Broadhurst, 1998; Weiss, 1993). Raedeke et al. (2002) and Vealey et al. (2002) discovered that current and former coaches rated intrinsic factors such as enjoyment, the challenge of building a successful programme and feelings of self-satisfactions as the most notable indicators of commitment to coaching. Hence, coaches who feel that their work is rewarding, exciting and valued by others are likely to remain committed to their work. Consequently, it could be said that positive self-esteem presents an increased chance of continued participation in athletics and other sports. Therefore, it is important to understand the motivations which underpin coaches' involvement in a given sport in order to ensure that sporting organisations can attract and ensure the success of volunteers within their given roles (Coleman, 2002). However, the question remains as to how sports organisations go about developing these views in youth sport coaches.

In the study by Pastore et al. (1996), 359 college coaches and athletic administrators responded to a questionnaire developed to investigate the reasons for staying in one's present position. This study identified a conceptual framework of retention factors, namely:

- work balance and conditions (time demands at work and home; feelings of comfort, stress levels);
- recognition and collegial support (relates to prestige, support and colleagues' understanding of your role); and
- inclusivity (relates to an environment free of discrimination and harassment; respect for individual differences).

Results indicated that more needed to be done by organisations to provide adequate conditions in which to work. In addition, the findings revealed that the respondents valued a work environment that fosters inclusivity, collegiality and acknowledges an individual's achievements. Although not in the youth sport context, these results provide potential strategies to retain individuals in 'performance' coaching and management positions in supportive work environments. In support of this Raedeke et al. , (2002, p. 85) recommended that coaches need to aim for a 'life balance' between coaching, social and employment commitments while also including proper exercise, nutrition and adequate rest (Pastore & Judd, 1992) in order to minimise additional stress.

RETENTION STRATEGIES

Despite the literature identifying several reasons concerning coach commitment and withdrawal, few recommendations were identified as to what can be done to retain more

coaches in youth sport. Most coaches have had experiences with athletes and parents who are difficult to handle. Smith and Smoll (2002) looked extensively at youth sport and have identified a number of strategies to deal with challenging situations that may deter continued participation as a youth sport coach. Some examples include the uncoachable child, the spoilt brat, overcritical parents and sideline coaches (see Smith and Smoll, 2002, p141-176). Kelley and Gill (1993) suggested that teacher-coaches should seek out social support during times of high stress in their professional lives in order to experience a relatively less stressful environment. If coaches are given assistance in dealing with these situations it may decrease stress and increase enjoyment thereby encouraging them to continue coaching.

Pendle (1997) suggested that support networks for coaches be established in the form of athletes, officials and administrators who can assist coaches with maintaining self-esteem in difficult times. Other support mechanisms include organising meetings where club coaches or networks of coaches within similar age groups could share ideas. Networking between coaches may assist in maintaining interests in youth sport coaching. For example, perhaps 'coach camps' can be established. The social opportunities presented in a 'base camp' situation may potentially assist in the development of social networks thereby increasing interest in future functions, serving as an incentive to continue with participation. Careful consideration is required in relation to how the proposed base camps would be funded, where they could be located, and who would attend.

It has also been suggested that mentoring or e-mentoring may assist coaches with coping with the demands of coaching and enjoying a rewarding experience (Edwards, 2003). Mentoring, regarded as the educational and developmental relationship between a trusted supervisor and a less experienced individual (Malasarn, Bloom, & Crumpton, 2002; Miller, Salmela & Kerr, 2002), has been widely acknowledged as being the most important source of knowledge for developing coaches from youth to professional levels (Bloom, 1996; Jones, Armour & Potrac, 2004; Gould, Giannini, Krane, & Hodge, 1990; Irwin, Hanton & Kerwin, 2004; Launder, 1993; Moraes, 1996; Pritchard, 2005; Salmela 1995; Schinke et al., 1995; Siegel & Brantle, 2001). According to Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke and Salmela (1998), some youth sport coaches who remain involved for numerous years found that being an assistant coach or having a mentor was vital to their longevity. Kelley and Gill (1993) recommended that additional support in the form of mentoring from more experienced staff or allowing 'release' time away from teaching during the season may assist coaches so that they are not overwhelmed by stress and the possibility of burning out.

There have been the occasional strategies regarding coach education that have been suggested to assist 'performance' coach retention (see Gilbert & Trudel, 2001; Pastore & Judd, 1992; Pastore & Judd, 1993; Pastore & Meacci, 1990; Pendle, 1997). The results suggest that 'performance' coaches (in some cases) are unable to control their own destiny where a lack of human interaction skills, as opposed to coaching skills, often leads to their downfall. Hence, it is integral that coach education courses focus on developing appropriate communication skills, human interaction techniques and strategies that recognise the tenuous nature of coaching. In addition, Gilbert and Trudel (2001) suggested that coach education should use an issue-based approach for youth sport coaches in bridging the gap between theory and practice. Ultimately, the implementation of professional development programmes and other forms of coach education may help develop both skills and confidence levels

among coaches (Cuskelly & Auld, 2000b).

Is financial remuneration an influencing factor when considering continuing as a youth sport coach? According to Mulholland (2005) coaches are now questioning whether the results that one's athletes achieve are reward enough for the hours put into coaching or the expenses incurred. With private schools now paying coaches an hourly rate, we suggest it would be helpful to know if this has any impact on coaching retention. Interestingly, Kim and Cunningham (2005) identified that when the coaching experience was poor, college coaches needed to have high financial support to have job satisfaction whereas when coaching experiences were positive, financial support did not influence job satisfaction.

Coaches who feel valued, supported, recognised and rewarded for their efforts are more likely to be retained by their sporting organisation. Cuskelly and Auld (2000b) wrote that volunteers may be more likely to be retained by sport and recreation organisations which provide adequate support, openly address concerns about legal responsibilities and find ways to reduce or be more flexible about the time required from each volunteer. Overall, the goal should be to develop a sense of organisational commitment among coaches by providing psychological, social, legal and financial support for coaches.

PROGRAMMES ADDRESSING THE ISSUES

In England, the Community Sports Coach Scheme (CSCS) was recently developed as a result of the limited opportunities for coaches to develop coaching as a career as well as the low number of active professional coaches; and a lack of professional development for coaches. Community Sports Coaches (CSC) focus on work in schools, clubs and local authorities in order to develop core movement and sport skills across a number of sports. Although the overall objective of the CSCS relates to the goals of 'participation' coaching as identified by Lyle (2002), this type of scheme may be of great benefit to coaches who work in a performance environment. This is because the CSCS provided an ideal opportunity for coaches to develop a more formalised career pathway, heightened their commitment to participation as well as improved the quality of coaching (<http://www.sportengland.org/gymnastics-4.pdf>).

Although not widely employed, the National Coaching Accreditation Scheme (NCAS) in Australia has highlighted the benefits of introducing mentor arrangements. The Coaching Association of Canada recently developed 'Coaching Internship Programmes' in order to provide career-related work experience in the field of coaching (<http://www.coach.ca/e/grants/internships.htm>). Perhaps this type of mentorship commitment will increase interest and dedication to youth sport coaching. However, the complex nature of establishing such a system as well as the time-consuming and expensive nature of such a project may serve as deterrents for propagating such a relationship. Additionally, a lack of incentive for experienced coaches to assist newly qualified coaches may exist. Overall, the implementation of mentoring schemes is an important consideration for our sports governing bodies.

CONCLUSION

It appears that some sources of stress across different levels of coaching (e. g. from club to elite levels) share some similarities. However, dealing with these issues in the same manner

across each level may not be plausible due to the contextual differences of each coaching position (i. e. different strategies may have to be considered when implementing interventions to decrease stress and burnout at the different levels). Despite the extensive focus on research into coach burnout, little has been done in relation to coach retention or how to address the issues associated with burnout and other reasons for withdrawal. It seems that research is desperately needed in the area of coach retention, at a variety of coaching levels. There is also a need to identify what interventions may be best suited for assisting coaches who are suffering from feelings associated with burnout.

It is evident that to ensure the continued success of youth sports, the reasoning behind youth coach withdrawal needs to be further understood. Quality coaching is critical for ensuring the beneficial effects of youth sports participation (Hedstrom & Gould, 2004). As a result, it is imperative that each individual's motives for participating or withdrawing are considered, and that substantial effort is made to cater for their needs in order to maintain youth sport coaches' interest and active participation at both the 'participation' and 'performance' level. It may also be important for coaches to appropriate their philosophy of coaching to the form of coaching in which they participate. This will assist with their understanding of the associated issues and expectations related to their coaching position.

The limited research available on youth sport coaches means that it is difficult to judge if the results would be the same as indicated in the previous studies on college, high school and age-group coaches. Nevertheless, previous research ascertained that a variety of sport and non-sport influences challenge the continued interest of individuals in sport participation. Based on evidence from Raedeke's research on coach commitment, we suggest that future research should focus on identifying what coaches enjoy most about their coaching roles in order to direct future coach education and policy for youth sport. In addition it may be fruitful to discover more about what leads to burnout for the same reasons – to direct future policy and practice in coaching. Thus, it would be interesting to determine whether it is commonly the sport or non-sport influences, or a combination of both elements that determine the reasons for coaches dropping out of sport participation.

Previous research has been clear in 'what' to do when addressing the issue of burnout in 'performance' coaching with particular focus on intervention strategies. However, these studies have not suggested how to implement such strategies or who should take responsibility for their operation. As there has been minimal research with youth sport coaches, there is no certainty that such intervention strategies would be plausible for 'participation' coaches. Further research in this area is necessary to determine how such recommended programmes will be developed and managed in the youth sport setting.

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