ROLE OF THE COACH:
PARAMETERS, CHARACTERISTICS, PECULIARITIES, EXPECTATIONS

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Abstract

The paper deals with some important parameters, concerning the role of the sport coach. Special attention is paid to the following topics: mental and physical abilities, transfer of the knowledge, ability to manage different age groups, pedagogy, supporting the athletes, appearance, behaviour, readiness to help, motivation. Two themes will also be briefly analysed: the main requirement (charismatic personality) and the main aim of the coach (to make healthy, happy human beings).

Key words: abilities, behaviour, coach, knowledge, pedagogy

Introduction

Coaching is not easy to define. Coaching develops people through improving their performance (Criesfield et al., 2005). According to The role of the sport coach can be the following: to create the right conditions for learning to happen and to find ways of motivating the athletes (www.topendsports.com/coaching/role.htm). Although the general coaching philosophy is based on several generally valid positive human values, the philosophy of the coach is always individual and depends on his/her own personality (Feher, 2006). Coaches are different, and the character traits of the dominant types determine the behaviour and attitude of a coach. The major types of the coaches are the following:
  - democratic
  - liberal
  - autocratic

Conducting a lot of IOC coaching courses in Olympic weightlifting, I tried to provide the participants with rather detailed information about the role of the coach. This was because of the fact, that the coaches were really interested in this topic, had a lot of questions and comments concerning this important field of training management.

Let me give a short survey about it, trying to fulfil the demand of Iranian coaches, who asked me last time (2010 May, coaching course in Tehran) to have this material not only as an oral lecture but in written form, as well. This written material is based of course mainly (but not solely) on my own experience. In addition, I tried to take into consideration a lot of published and available scientific material and the conclusions and results of earlier discussions with many leading specialists and coaches (e.g. I. Abadjiev, L. Baroga, D. Cioroslan, G. Hiskia, L. Jones, Yu. V. Masloboyev, A.S. Medvedev, L. Nadori, H. Roewer, G. Schodl, A. Spassov) in weightlifting and in other sports as well.

Of course we should take into consideration that the role of the coach changes over the time an athlete is with the coach (Pensgaard & Roberts, 2002, www.brianmac.co.uk/coachsr.htm):
  - when an athlete first starts a sport (cognitive stage), the role is telling or showing coaching style
  - as the athlete develops (associative stage) the coach and athlete discuss appropriate training requirements (involving coaching style)
  - as the athletes matures (autonomous stage) the role of the coach is a mentor, providing advice and support
In the present paper the requirements concerning the characteristics of excellent coaches are to be discussed. Of course we do not have ideal coaches (only positive parameters); coaches are always real human beings, having a combination of positive and negative peculiarities. Nevertheless, the goal is to be closer and closer to the ideal one. Finally, it is important to mention that this paper is written not only for weightlifting coaches, but hopefully the general establishments and conclusions can be valid for other coaches in other sport disciplines, too.

**Main requirements**

In the following, ten different parameters will be analysed shortly, which are important if we would like to characterise the role of the coach in the process of teaching and education. But there is, to my mind, one really important, highly dominant factor, which is absolutely essential for the good coach. This is the ability to have a strong impact on the audience. In other words, the coach has to have a charismatic personality. If the coach does not have this peculiarity, he/she will be never really accepted and acknowledged by the athletes.

So, let us see the chosen ten parameters!

1. **Knowledge (mental abilities)**

   The knowledge of the coach has to have 3 fundaments:

   - special knowledge (detailed information e.g. about weightlifting sport)
   - general sport knowledge (e.g. sport physiology, sport psychology, biomechanics)
   - general knowledge about human culture (history, geography, arts etc.)

   Of course nobody is perfect, but a good coach has a necessary level of knowledge in all these fundaments.

2. **Ability to transfer the knowledge**

   A good coach has the ability to transfer his/her knowledge to the pupils, to the competitors. It means the coach has to have the communication skills, sense of humour, enthusiasm. The explanations should always be true and useful, but also interesting.

3. **Physical abilities**

   The good coach is sometimes a demonstrator as well. If necessary, the coach should be able to show how to make e.g. a nice deep snatch or a dynamic shotput. If the coach is fit and was a former competitor (it is not necessary to be a former top athlete) it is not too difficult to fulfil this requirement. But coaching without own experience as a competitor – it is really difficult, almost impossible. How to speak about the technique of swimming if the coach cannot swim? How to speak about the biomechanics of lifting if the coach cannot perform a clean and jerk exercise?

4. **Ability to manage different age groups**

   There are coaches who are specialized for young athletes and others who work with adults, for a rather long period. But sometimes they have to change, and coaches of the national teams (e.g. adult top lifters) will work later with beginners. completely different context, different management, different requirements!

   A good coach is at the same time a good psychologist, having the ability to understand the athletes belonging to different age groups. Of course they do not only have to understand but
also to manage the competitors of different ages. And not only during the training, but under stressful circumstances (e.g. competition situation) as well. The coach should be a homo sapiens and a homo faber, but sometimes a homo ludens, as well. He/she has to have a high level of individualization as a function of age of the competitors.

5. Pedagogy

The coach is a teacher, the coach is an educator, he/she has to be a good specialist in pedagogy. He/she has to show a good pattern for the lifters, having discussions sometimes not only about sport, but real life, problems, social situations, etc. In other words, the coach has to be a good pedagogue, having also the capability to handle conflicts.

6. Supporting the athletes

The coach is a supporter, helper, partner of the athletes. As a function of the age-difference between the competitor and the coach, he/she can be for the athlete a secondary grandfather /grandmother, a secondary father/mother or secondary brother/sister.

The good coach is always a partner and a friend. In industrial processing from the point of view of quality and safety, we often use the abbreviation CCP, which means critical control point. In sport CCP is also very important, but it means coach and competitor partnership. Indeed, the coaches and athletes are partners, sharing happiness in case of success, but being partners and having common responsibility in case of failure, too.

Everybody knows the saying: a friend in need is a friend indeed. This is of course valid for the coach, as well: a coach in need is a coach indeed.

7. Behaviour

This peculiarity is one of the most important ones. This parameter, this pattern will definitely exert a strong influence on the competitors from the beginning on. Is the coach angry or patient, kind or rigid, polite or impolite, pleasant or unpleasant, quiet or loud, what is the level of assertiveness and aggression, self-confidence and self-knowledge, etc? These are really important effects on the athletes from the part of the coach. The emotional background is dominant.

It is well known that Hippocrates (a Greek physician of ancient times) differentiated four groups of human beings, based on their emotions:

- choleric type (active, aggressive, sensitive, impulsive, optimistic, strong emotions)
- sanguine type (friendly, communicative, changeable, easy behaviour, weak emotions)
- phlegmatic type (passive, not changeable, peaceful, well controlled, balanced, cold, low level of emotions)
- melancholic type (pessimistic, closed, quiet, stabile, serious, realistic, strong emotions)

Real human beings are always combination of these four types, but in general one of these types is the dominant one. Certainly, this is valid in case of coaches and in case of athletes as well. The problem is that the coaches should be able to manage competitors of types other than theirs. People are different, but a good coach is able to manage different people, because he/she has the competence to do so.

Regardless of the emotional type the coach belongs to, he/she always has to be frank, objective, disciplined, having true evaluation of the situations. And a good coach has the necessary sensitivity to the problems of the athletes; he/she never rejects them. The coach has to work with responsibility. Knowledge and right behaviour together mean intelligence.
8. **Appearance**

This parameter is not negligible, either. He coach should be good-looking, nice, charming, having tidy appearance and a necessary level of personal hygiene. An uncared-for coach is a very bad role model for the young athletes. Good health, a healthy lifestyle and the refusal of harmful habits are also important expectations. Smoking, alcohol-dependence, drug-dependence or obesity are for example not the pattern to follow for the competitors.

9. **Readiness to help**

The activity of the coach is mainly performed during the training time, but not exclusively. He/she should always be ready to help the athletes, if necessary. Being a good coach means he/she is always ready to help; 24-hour readiness/day and 365 days readiness/year.

10. **Motivation**

A good coach is motivated. Motivation can be based on moral and material acknowledgement. Both are necessary. Without stable (acceptable) financial background the coach is not in the position to do his/her best as a coach.

Some additional remarks

In this article an attempt was made to analyse briefly some important parameters of a good coach. It is possible that other coaches, other specialists have other views or they would be able to mention other important peculiarities, as well. E.g. D. Cioroslan (2007), having an excellent lecture at the 2007 IWF Symposium in Rome, Italy mentioned that in our days, in the market-oriented society the coaches should also be able to bring money to the clubs, have contacts with sponsors, actively participate in the fulfilment of invitations for tenders, etc.

Nevertheless, the role of the coach is important and the work of the coach is rather difficult. We can say that a good coach is for the present, but a great coach is also for the future. A really good coach is able to answer the question not only how, but why, as well. (KNOW HOW and KNOW WHY). To answer the question how (e.g. how to teach the technique for snatch in weightlifting, the technique of butterfly in swimming or the technique of flop in athletics) is the task for normal coaches. But the excellent coach can answer the question why as well. E.g. why to make just 80% intensity exercises and not 70% at a certain training, why to make two repetitions instead of three, why to lift 15 tons volume and not 20 tons, why to swim 10x100 m and not 15x100 m, why to run 4x400 m and not 8x200 m, etc. A professional coach is a good lecturer, a professional teacher, and clever athletes need professional answers to questions why as well.

The main aim

Finally we should focus shortly on the following topic: what is the main goal, the ultimate aim of the coach?

To make champions? To make world record holders?

Perhaps a coach cannot achieve this level in elite sport, but he/she can make strong, healthy and happy human beings, good competitors. And this is the most important task of the sport coach.

To make champions, world record holders? Yes, of course, one should try, but not by all means. I emphasize again, not by all means! We need healthy athletes; we need drug-free athletes!
To finish this paper let me mention the opinion of two specialists. To Guman (1993) the coach has to have above all a professional knowledge and the ability to co-operate with the competitors. On the other hand, during our personal conversation in Tehran, Iran in 2010 Afsharzadeh said that the coach must never forget that he/she is a pattern for the athletes. I fully agree with both statements.

Conclusion

A really good coach has a great, charismatic personality, demonstrating positive examples for the athletes. There are only a few coaches, belonging to this category. Not every outstanding sportsman becomes a successful coach; in general, the best coaches were not necessarily top competitors during their own active sport career.

The role of the coach will be manifold and varied, from instructor, demonstrator and friend to mentor, advisor, motivator, organizer, planner and the fountain of all knowledge. The coach will need to be able to: assist athletes to prepare different training programs, assist athletes to develop new skills, communicate effectively with athletes, use and create evaluation tests to monitor the training progress and process and predict sport performance as well. Clearly, it is a really difficult task and requires a very special person. Therefore, the role of the coach does not merely constitute coaching. We must state that the coach is not simply a professional sport educator. His/her role and tasks have to have a much wider field of influence.

References

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