QUALITIES OF AN EFFECTIVE TEACHER-COACH FOR THE SUCCESSFUL DEVELOPMENT OF ATHLETES

by:

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Teaching and coaching in various sports at various levels has always been one of the most fulfilling human endeavors. It is not just only a job or a profession. More importantly, it is a calling, a passion, and advocacy. It is more so when the athletes are young. Coaching in professional sports has its rewards; being the pinnacle of excellence and professionalism. All coaches in all sports, training student-athletes has always been feeling as if it is the most challenging and rewarding job. It also comes with the greatest responsibility of molding the youth – physically, athletically, emotionally, socially, and morally – as athletes, and indirectly but importantly as decent and responsible human beings, and productive members of society. In other words, a coach has immense power over athletes, especially student-athletes. He/she can do much good with this power and can do much harm. That is why the quality of teacher-coach is the number one concern in school sports programs. Great teacher-coaches set the highest personal standards, striving towards the ideals of "the teaching skills of an educator, the training expertise of a physiologist, the administrative leadership of a business executive, and the counseling wisdom of a psychologist," not to mention the company, encouragement, advise, help and discipline of a surrogate father, mother, big brother or big sister.

The coaching goals show the qualities of a successful teacher-coach in terms of coaching, behavior, teaching, physical training, and managing the team and the individual athletes. In general, all teachers-coaches of varying qualities have a basic knowledge of the technical and tactical skills of the sport(s) he/they would teach and coach, but successful
teachers-coaches have mastery of the technical and tactical skills and possess other qualities.

The first of these is teacher-coach with qualities in successfully training athletes who have well-formulated and defined coaching philosophies. This philosophy guides the teacher-coach in how he/she fundamentally views education, the school, teaching, sports, coaching, and student-athletes, and how he/she goes about his/her tasks. There are two ingredients in a teacher-coaching philosophy: you own it and you use it. Secondly, they have coaching objectives. At the level of school sports, the objectives have always been for the team to have fun; to win for the team, school, and the community; and, to assist in the athletes' physical, psychological, and social development. However, the priority among the three varies, and the quality of teacher-coach is shown in his/her capability to choose the priority in a given time. Most of all, the best teachers-coaches are the ones who achieve all objectives at the same time.

Third, they have leadership. Leaders provide direction and they set goals by having a vision of the future. Leaders build a psychological and social environment that is conducive to achieving the team’s goals. Leaders instill values, in part by sharing their philosophy of life. Leaders confront members of the organization when problems arise, and they resolve conflicts together. Fourth, they have their brand of the cooperative coaching style. Compared to the traditional command style (the coach that gives all the instructions, and is demanding or authoritarian) and submissive style (also known as a babysitter coach style, the type that gives minimal instructions or guidance, and allows their athletes to play with their strategy and tactics), the teacher-coach with the cooperative style discuss analyses and tactics and share decision making with their athletes. Most importantly, they know the right balance of directing athletes and allowing athletes to direct themselves. This style teaches athletes decision-making, emotional maturity, and in-game tactical decisions.
Fifth, quality teachers-coaches build the character of their athletes. Aside from teaching and coaching athletes how to prepare, train, play, and win; they also teach them how to be kind, honest, respectful, responsible, caring, and have sportsmanship. Sixth, teacher-coaches can coach diverse athletes. These include star athletes to ordinary athletes to slow learners, introverts to extrovert athletes, athletes from various social backgrounds, and from normal to disabled athletes, and most importantly, athletes of varying maturity. Seventh is the quality of building a team culture, which consists of a winning attitude, commitment, pride, and team spirit. Successful team culture is created and led by the teacher-coach but deepened and promoted by the athletes.

Eight, quality teachers-coaches can effectively communicate with their athletes. Most of the successful teacher-coaches are master communicators. In sports, teamwork starts and ends with good communication. It is also 70% non-verbal, which means that the movements and attitudes of teachers-coaches during an interaction, directly or indirectly, are even more important. Finally, it consists of content and emotion, which a good teacher-coach can balance in any situation. Ninth, quality teachers-coaches effectively motivate athletes. Motivation, especially regular basis, is one of the most complicated and difficult tasks to undertake. In essence, successful motivators go beyond the usual pep talks and rewards. But they use extrinsic rewards to build the environment for the athletes deriving their intrinsic rewards – most especially having fun (in competition, friendly games, or practices) and boosting self-worth.

Finally, quality teachers-coaches have empathy. It is the ability to understand the thoughts, feelings, and emotions of their athletes and to convey that sensitivity to them. They understand athletes' joy, frustration, anxiety, shame, and anger. Coaches who have empathy can listen to their athletes and express their understanding of what was said. They do not belittle, chastise, or diminish the self-worth of their athletes because they know how it feels to experience the loss of self-worth. Coaches with empathy more
readily communicate respect for their athletes, and in turn, they receive more trust and respect.

All of these qualities can be developed over time. But it will be gradual, incremental, experience-generated, and comes with continuous validations through self-assessment and by others. Unlike teachers in other fields, teachers-coaches have their teaching skills evaluated by others each time their teams compete. This can have both positive and negative effects. This means a teacher-coach's development is enriched by direct and indirect feedbacks. However, it also results in a tendency to some over-coaching during competition. Over-coaching can only be prevented with more teaching during practice, and it is here where the qualities of successful teacher-coaches are vital. After all, teaching-coaching is a helping profession that is highly demanding, and these qualities allow teachers-coaches to help athletes and the team better.

References: