

Coaching Evaluation, Coaching Environment and Environmental Criteria that Influence Coaching Performance: An Overview

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Abstract: The evaluation of coaching performance is attempted through the description of ideal behaviours and characteristics, observation tools, theoretical models and structured interviews. While coaching evaluation is considered to be inefficient and the description of coaching procedure unexplored, the effect of the social environment on the coaching process and the coaching performance is underpinned. The coach is recognised as part of a social and sports environment which affect, shape and force the coach to readjust theoretical, technical and tactical decisions and practices. Thirty one environmental criteria, internal or external to the team, which seem to have a direct or indirect effect on the coaching process have been recorded in the literature review. Further research could develop an environmental factors' model and explore the possible relation, moderation or mediation of the environmental factors with the existing evaluation models of coaching performance.

Keywords: coaching evaluation, coaching environment, evaluation criteria, coaching performance, environmental criteria

INTRODUCTION

The evaluation of coaching performance is one of the most important issues in sports literature [1-5]. It is a feedback mechanism in order for coaches to recognise weaknesses or successful practices [40], a valuable tool for administrators when called upon to decide about hiring or firing a coach [21], and an important chapter in training programmes for coaches [6]. Coaching evaluation has gone through many stages, but despite the important effort made so far, it is still considered vast and unexplored [2]. Basic theoretical questions remain unanswered: (a) which practices lead to successful results; (b) which results are considered successful; (c) when should coaches be evaluated and what should be evaluated and d) which factors affect and have an influence on the coaching process [7, 2, 8, 9, 4].

METHODS OF COACHING EVALUATION

In the past, many efforts have been made in order to locate and agree upon the evaluation criteria for coaching performance. To this end, the characteristics of the ideal coach have been described [10, 8, 11, 12, 13], observation tools have been constructed [12, 2, 13] working models [16, 4] and structured interviews [4] have been developed. Triangulation calls for the employment of more than one method [17] and it is

recommended as a solution to the problems of objectivity and reliability of evaluation methods [1, 14-15].

Descriptions of ideal coaching characteristics and behaviours usually include the characteristics, duties, skills, obligations, behaviours and the general conduct that renders a coach effective. The suggestions are either experiences of top coaches or the results from observing top coaches. Nevertheless, the complexity of the issue and the polysemy of the terms have rendered coaching evaluation a difficult and vast procedure [9, 4].

It should also be noted that the employment of observation systems is a substantial tool that records team activity, the interaction between coach and players and coach behaviour. Recently, Cushion *et al.* [2] have exploited technology in developing the Coach Analysis and Interaction System (CAIS). This system has the ability to record up to 5 different behaviours simultaneously during both the training sessions and the game. The system has been controlled as to its reliability and validity. It also overcomes related restrictions, such as sensitivity [18], simplicity [19], lack of computerisation in collecting and analysing data as well as the possibility of expanding the results [2].

However, training its users remains a sensitive issue [18], while interviewing the coaches is rather substantial in order to enhance the depth and causes of coaching behaviours [14].

A different way to describe the characteristics of a successful coach is the development of theoretical models of the coaching process. There are models that gather data from the observation of coaching behaviours, the interviews with coaches and the distribution of questionnaires to athletes, team administrators and coaches. There are others that attempt to describe the ideal theoretical situation which is then recommended to coaches [4]. One of the most widespread models of the coaching process is the SCP (Scale of Coaching Performance) [16]. This model was developed in Canada and is referred to by several researchers since then [20-24]. Similarly, one of the most comprehensive theoretical models of coaching process is the one developed by Lyle [4]. It is a circular model that revolves around team goals. The coaching process is described as consecutive and continuous, with no specific beginning and end. Lyle [4] admits that the model approximates the 'ideal model' and it may not be so applicable.

Undoubtedly, during the last 20 years a great deal of importance has been placed on the coaching process, the description of ideal coaching behaviours and the construction of observation systems and behaviour models. However, in the relevant literature, the view that gradually prevails is the one in which the coach is considered as part of a society. The coach changes, evolves, is influenced by and adapts to this society [1, 25].

The coach as a member of the coaching environment

The evolution of research in coaching has pinpointed the holistic evaluation of a coach who is not isolated, but rather part of a social web that can influence and shape the coach. Therefore, scheduling, coaching and the game itself are not a cut-off procedure but are included in a social environment [3, 26]. Actually, the coach does not work isolated in a field or gym; on the contrary the coach interacts with athletes of different cultures, colour or race, age, philosophy and experiences [14]. Moreover, the reactions of coaches and players are not linear and absolute; they are subjective and negotiable [25]. Consequently, the relationship between the coach, the players and the environment is dynamic, interdependent and the coaching process is shaped on a common basis and not one-sidedly [41]. Finally, the roles are not strictly defined; rather they are redefined within the team [27] and are unique. To this end, Mathers [28] has stated that two coaching situations are never similar.

Today, despite the importance of the social environment, the design and orientation of coaching is

mainly psychological, physiological, technical and tactical [3, 29]. Moreover, the athlete is familiarised with practices and theories, but does not learn how to react and adjust to the complex socio-athletic environment [14]. Finally, even though the environment's effect is now unquestionable, sports bibliography has not concluded to what extent the coach should administer the environment.

Controlling the coaching environment: the role of the coach

In the relevant literature there is a wide debate on the control the coach should exercise on the environment. On the one hand, there is the absolute view that the coach is fully responsible for the coaching environment and any effect it may have on the team and the athletes. More particularly, high level coaches, and perhaps not just them, are considered exclusively responsible for the results [30]; they should be in control of everything [31] and they should have foreseen a solution to every problem [32]. On the contrary, some coaches are not prepared for an "unexpected" event which they employ as an excuse for failure [3]. The fear for the "unexpected" event is also used by several coaches in order to defend coaching habits, routines and established practices against new ideas and innovative practices [33]. A more compromising view claims that the coach is affected by the environment but should also adjust to it and administer it [34] since the coaching design is not independent to the environment that created it [3, 26]. Based on the aforementioned, although on the one hand the coach's job becomes more difficult, since the environment should be handled in an effective way, on the other hand it becomes easier, since there is no need to discover the one and only method that will lead to the absolute result [3].

An important weakness observed in the literature is that the factors that surround and affect the coaching process are not mentioned and neither are the specific criteria that have an effect on the coaching performance. The present overview underlines the specific gap in the literature, highlights the most important environmental criteria and presents suggestions for future research.

Criteria of the coaching environment that influence coaching performance. Suggestions for future research

The coaching environment includes the internal and external to the team or athlete [35], social, working, sports or environmental influences. In particular, Papailiou, Strigas, Travlos, & Kipreos [36] defined coaching environment as the "direct or indirect, internal or external to the team/athlete, situational, social, sport or physical conditions that influence the coaching process, the coaching performance and results" (p.1117). The coaching environment is

described in the sports literature and many criteria that affect the coach, the coaching process and the coaching results are presented [7, 20, 37, 38, 3, 30, 34, 36, 5,39]:

- The financial state of the team
- The financial state of the players
- Unexpected financial cuts/charges (fines)
- The availability of support services
- The quality of facilities and services
- Injuries and illnesses
- Having support from sports professionals
- The skills of the coaching auxiliary staff
- The history/philosophy/culture/fame of the team
- Expectations of employers
- Support by the team managers and administrators
- Local society support
- The players' level of ability
- The players' level of experience
- The players' mean of age
- The players' ambitions
- Social factors of the players/the coach
- Employment status of the players
- The opponent's history/fame
- The opponent's power
- The level of competition
- Wrong referee decisions
- Luck
- The consequences of negative results
- The power of the opponent's home ground
- The location of the opponent's home ground
- Weather conditions
- Problems due to moving around
- Positive/negative tradition/previous history
- External influence (fans, Media, Public opinion)
- The legal framework the team is based on

Further research could cover the gap observed in the literature, record the environmental criteria be direct or indirect, internal or external to the team, and enrich the list above. Moreover, researchers could attempt to construct an environmental factors' model. Finally, it would be extremely interesting to examine the possible relation, moderation or mediation of environmental factors with the existing evaluation models of coaching performance.

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