Coaching Effectiveness and Coach Education Programmes: Perceptions of Scottish and US Coaches

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Abstract
The effectiveness of coach education programmes has been identified as a key factor in the development of coaches (Gilbert & Trudel, 1999a). There are a number of elements that constitute a measurement of effectiveness, not least of all, how useful the coaches find the information presented to them during coach education courses, if they utilise the content during their execution of the coaching process and whether they feel that it enhances their coaching effectiveness (Haslam, 1990). The purpose of this study is to examine whether the variety of coach education programmes fulfils the needs of a group of soccer coaches. It compares the views of coaches from the USA with coaches from Scotland. The coach education structure for soccer in both countries is reviewed and a profile of the coaching environment of the soccer coaches is developed. This profile identifies and characterises the type of coaching programme in which the coaches are involved. It also examines the emphasis of coach education courses, especially the skills that coaches expect to have compared to their perceptions of their respective coach education courses. Interest in soccer is currently high, especially since the 2002 World Cup Finals. The USA, in qualifying for the finals, beat one of the top European teams, and reached the quarterfinals, whereas Scotland failed to reach the finals, pre-empting a re-examination of the development of soccer throughout the country.

Background
As the numbers participating in soccer increase there is a corresponding increase in the number of coaches, particularly at the age group levels (SFA, 2002c; USSF, 2002). These coaches are generally exposed to coach education programmes, designed and administered by various bodies with the most influential being the Scottish Football Association (SFA) in Scotland and the United States Soccer Federation (USSF) in the USA (SFA, 2002c; USSF, 2001; Campbell, 1993). Much attention has been given to the positive benefits associated with participation in these types of programmes, but these benefits will only occur if the coaches are aware of current best practice in their sport and the more generic components, for example, instructional techniques, motivational skills and organisation of practices and drills.

The climate within the United States encourages, and in many organisations mandates, the certification of coaches to ensure a safe environment for participants (Freeland, 2000). It could be argued that if the primary intention of a coaching course is to promote the safety of the participants it can detract from the integrity of the sport. There is, however, no overarching coach education system in place throughout the USA, which is extremely unusual, especially in a country so active in the sporting world.
In contrast, the SFA organises, administers and assesses all sport-specific soccer courses within Scotland as well as disseminating soccer-related coaching modules, which are based upon United Kingdom (UK) wide generic courses (SFA, 2002a; SFA, 2002b; NCF, 2001).

The effectiveness of generic coach education, although fulfilling many aims, has been questioned (Gilbert & Trudel, 1999b; Woodman, 1993). Undoubtedly it has been utilised in many countries, by differing organisations for a number of sports (Campbell, 1993), but is this method of delivery the most appropriate to meet the needs of the coaches and coaching or to cope more effectively with the increasing demand in a cost-effective manner? Within the UK, SportCoachUK is responsible for the majority of the generic coach education programmes and many national governing bodies of sport incorporate these courses into their provision (Bryant, 2002). There are a number of agencies in the US with a remit for generic coach education, but these tend to be aimed at youth sport coaches rather than those working within educational establishments or professional clubs, e.g. American Coaching Effectiveness Program (ACEP) (Freeland, 2000; ASEP, 2002).

Coaching effectiveness is a term that is used on a regular basis but is difficult to define and in many cases harder to assess. Many coaches are judged based on a win-loss ratio that does not consider any other relevant factors (Lyle, 1997). There is some debate as to what constitutes appropriate criteria by which to evaluate coaches due to a lack of clarity within organisations as to the definition of coaching effectiveness (Cross, 1999). The measure of output over input or the concept of 'value added' have been considered along with many other variables, but in many organisations may be too complex to be used in the present climate (Lyle, 1999; Cross, 1999). As performance becomes more serious, the process of coaching should become more systematic, involving planning, setting goals, competition strategies and a monitoring and evaluation system (Lyle, 1992; Woodman, 1993). This should require the coach to spend more time on the various components of coaching beyond the immediate coaching session. It should therefore follow that as coaches work with more skilled soccer players they should consider more variables in order to meet the complex and demanding aims of their programme. The methods they utilise and their success in meeting their goals will determine their effectiveness in coaching soccer. The more effective coaches adopt a professional approach to their coaching, constantly striving to educate themselves (Dick, 2000). This process is difficult to define and cannot merely be demonstrated by the amount of time coaches spend working on various themes or components, but is a complex mix of knowledge, experience and application.

There are obvious implications concerning the relationship between effectiveness of coach education programmes and coaching effectiveness. It would stand to reason that if coaches do not see the advantage of furthering their coaching qualifications they will be less willing to enrol on courses unless they are compulsory or affect their coaching status (Douge & Hastie, 1993). The current situation within both countries is that the qualification of
coaches at the appropriate level is being encouraged but not yet mandatory in all coaching programmes.

**Method**

**Participants**
The participants in this study were soccer coaches from both the United States of America (n = 71) and Scotland (n = 73). The selection of these coaches was based on three criteria:

1. Each participant had recently completed a coach education course;
2. They already possessed a basic level award from their respective governing body;
3. All of the coaches were currently working within a structured coaching environment

**Data Collection**
The data collection procedures for this study were divided into two parts.

**Part 1**
A questionnaire was developed and distributed to both groups of coaches. It was designed to obtain similar information but with slight modifications to account for structural/organisational differences between countries. The questionnaire was administered in person to coaches who had completed a coach education course in the previous two months. The questionnaire was divided into relevant sections; biographical information, current coaching environment, views on recently attended coach education course, skills necessary for coaching and coaching effectiveness. The coaches were asked to respond using a variety of methods; yes/no, Likert scale, rank order and short answer. Those questions requiring a short answer response were open-ended questions. There was the opportunity for the coaches to add more information and expand their answers should they so wish.

**Part 2**
Six coaches from each country were randomly selected for a follow up interview (n=12). Each interview lasted approximately 1.5 hours. The interview approach adopted was that of open-ended, semi-structured questions. The aim of the interviews was to elicit more detailed information on issues raised in the questionnaires. The coaches discussed their views on coaching, coach education courses, skills involved in coaching and effective coaching.

**Data Analysis**
The completed questionnaires were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 8.0).

**Soccer Environment in the USA and Scotland**
The Scottish coaches viewed the SFA coach education structure as emphasising participation at levels one and two. Again at this level, working with children, often in large, mixed groups, was the most common type of coaching environment. The emphasis of coaching sessions was the improvement of technique and elements of enjoyment and fun. The coaches found that this was the emphasis of the coaching courses and helped to build the appropriate foundation to allow young players to progress. The SFA highlights the use of small sided games and as many touches as possible for each participant during coaching sessions which is supported by the majority of the coaches (SFA, 1997), though some suggested their environment made achieving these goals difficult.

The coaching environment of the majority of coaches in the USA differed significantly in a variety of ways, most importantly; the programmes were based around competition no matter what the age group. Traditionally the groups are single-sex, with soccer being a very popular sport for females, particularly within educational institutions. Many of the soccer coaches are also employed in the education sector, a common trait in other sports in the USA (Laios, 1995).

Although both these groups considered themselves coaches, there were many differences evident within their role. The coaches from the USA tended to be working within a highly structured environment, generally employed in a coaching role and demonstrating a long-term commitment. This commitment was also portrayed by the athletes/teams for which they were responsible and the longer-term goals, which were identified within a competitive structure. The coaches displayed a greater recognition of the extent of the coaching task rather than limiting themselves to the direct intervention approach, as defined by Lyle (1996), evident within the Scottish coaches in this study. The majority of the Scottish coaches appeared to emphasise this episodic approach with little mention or acknowledgement of other roles, responsibilities or tasks.

There is much discussion concerning the emphasis on competition, and by inference, on winning within sport. The SFA is actively discouraging traditional competition for youngsters, instead promoting small-sided games, reflecting the Dutch approach to development (SFA, 1997). Lombardo (1999) has suggested that ‘traditional coaching behaviour, characterised by an emphasis on winning is not appropriate for the 21st century’. Many coaches from both countries feel that winning is an important goal, however, the Scottish coaches who expressed this opinion tended to be coaching older, more experienced participants whereas this view was expressed by US coaches throughout the age and experience range. This view perhaps reflects differences in approach between the two countries where Americans expect to win but Scots have come to accept being the gallant loser (McKibben, 2002; Hannan, 2000).

Skills of Coaching

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The top five skills identified by all of the coaches were ranked as follows:

1. Communication
2. Knowledge
3. Organisation
4. Motivation
5. Playing/Performance Level

There were significant differences between the coaches from the two countries, especially when looking down the ranking order as US coaches detailed a wider range of skills than Scottish coaches. Communication skills are perceived to be the most important across the spectrum of coaches, which is supported by several coaching studies (De Marco & McCullick, 1999; Douge, 1987; Houseworth, Davis & Dobbs, 1990). The three skills coaches felt most necessary were the same in both countries and, although the rank order of knowledge and organisation is different, this suggests a similarity of views amongst this cohort of coaches.

Table 1: Top 5 Ranked Skills by Country

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Scotland</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Organisation</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Playing/Performance Level</td>
<td>Approachable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
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</table>

Teaching is ranked highly by the US coaches as a considerable percentage of the number involved in the study work in programmes within educational establishments. Interestingly, none of the Scottish coaches mentioned teaching as an important skill, which could be explained by the coaching environment and the part-time nature of soccer coaching amongst those questioned but more significantly, it could reflect the nature of the coaching awards undertaken. US coaches also ranked administrative skills and recruitment skills highly, which again were not rated at all by the Scottish coaches but may point to the demands placed upon the American coaches by their particular environment.

The mentor role within coaching was also recognised as more significant within the United States. This role was perceived to be important within the particular coaching environment and perhaps highlights the team approach to coaching which is more prevalent in the States as opposed to the single-coach approach to which the Scottish coaches were more accustomed. The involvement within mentoring programmes, whether formal or informal, was more widespread in Scotland, with many coaches becoming involved as
The Scottish coaches generally viewed the skills of patience, friendship and understanding as more important than their American counterparts. A number of US coaches stated that character was an essential skill but did not elaborate on the particular aspects of character to which they were referring.

Content of Coaching Courses

Although coach education strategies should reflect the tradition and structures that exist in a country, the majority of coach education courses cover three specific aspects: sport-specific knowledge, core or generic knowledge and practical coaching experience (Campbell, 1993). Many of the coaches who attended the same courses had difficulties stating the format of the course and which of the above elements that it covered, especially whether or not it involved any assessment of competence. All of the coaches acknowledged that the courses were sport-specific but were not able to be as definite as to whether they involved any degree of theory or whether any practical coaching was required.

When asked if the content of the coach education course most recently attended had addressed what the coaches felt were the skills of coaching, the overwhelming response from both groups was negative. A USSF coach, attending the 'A' License, feels that 'No, they aren't – the technical and tactical aspects are covered but there is no emphasis put on personal improvement in the sense of leadership etc'.

This could demonstrate that the sport-specific aspects of the course are contained within the coach education courses that this coach has experienced but that other aspects, such as generic knowledge and practical coaching experience are not included. This is supported by a USSF 'B' License coach who acknowledges that 'people skills could be covered better, but that would involve more time and money in an already cramped schedule'. A Scottish soccer coach with a level two qualification agrees with the US coaches but also adds that 'in terms of social skills, i.e. how to "deal with" certain situations, nothing is taught here, because you are coaching other coaches usually and there are no real situations but they do encourage active listening'.

Many of the practice situations within the coaching courses in both countries involve the coaches working with their peers, which do not adequately reflect the behaviour and skills of the particular participant group. This failure to reflect the real-life coaching situation within the course does not give the coaches complete confidence in their ability to cope with the demands of coaching when back in their own coaching environment.

This viewpoint is reinforced by two coaches who highlight the difficulties of taking the information presented and making it individual to their participants' needs. A US coach, working within high school and club soccer coaching feels the programmes should reflect that coaches 'need more work on how to identify problems with an individual's technique and tactics'. A
qualified Scottish youth coach feels that ‘not all aspects are covered but then
to make someone understand is difficult, a lot comes down to individual
coaches and their willingness to improve and their personality and attitude
towards coaching and who they are in it for’.

Studies into the educational needs of coaches concluded that the two
most important knowledge sources that helped coaches to develop their own
coaching style were their own experience and other successful coaches
(Gould, Giannini, Krane & Hodge, 1990) although there is still debate as to
how experience can be transformed into knowledge (Gilbert & Trudel, 1999b).
This perspective does not appear to be considered in the design of the
coaching courses discussed above, unless there are constraints on time and
resources and the gaining of experience was considered necessary prior to
continuing to the next level of award.

The format of many coach education courses, traditionally sport-
specific in presentation, are often considered synonymous with the passing of
coaching awards but many of these certificated courses do not deal with
education in the accepted sense (Lyle, 1992). Much of the information
presented is concerned with behavioural learning and very little attention is
paid to cognitive development.

Usefulness of Information
Overall both groups of coaches found the information contained on the coach
education courses of interest to them, however, not all of the coaches agreed
that they were able to utilise the information in their practical coaching
environment. A Scottish youth coach stated: ‘with the coaching courses,
some of the points given are really helpful, but other ideas I have tried and
they sometimes don’t work, especially in a group of 18 children’. The
American coaches generally backed up this view, saying that they ‘picked up
many new ideas’ and that ‘the longer you coach the more you realize how
much more there is to know’ but also added that many of the drills and
practices did not immediately transfer to every coaching situation.

Table 2: Coaches Perceptions of Outcomes of Coach Education Courses (%)

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>United States</th>
<th>Scotland</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquire New Knowledge</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquire New Skills</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confirm Existing Knowledge</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The coaches, when questioned, accentuated the differences between
the acquisition of knowledge and skill, which perhaps reflects the ability of the
coach to apply information from coach education courses into their immediate
environment. There is a significant difference between the perceptions of the
American coaches and the Scottish coaches regarding their perceptions of knowledge and skills although there is an overwhelming consensus (100%) in both countries that coach education courses validate the existing practice of the coach. This has the advantage of encouraging the coaches to feel good about their existing practice, whether it is justified or not,

Enhancement of Coaching Effectiveness
There are a number of key factors that research has identified as determinants of effective practice, including feedback, instruction, questioning skills, organisation and practice management (Cross, 1997; Douge & Hastie, 1993). Both groups of coaches identified communication skills as the most important in the enhancement of coaching skills (see Table 1) which is confirmed in a study carried out by Bloom, Schinke and Salmela (1997: 3) who concluded 'as coaches developed and refined their skills for better communication with their athletes, they were better equipped to move up the coaching ladder'.

The coaches have identified the skills that they feel are necessary and it is surprising that there is such consensus, considering the different backgrounds, educational qualifications and coaching awards of these participants. Schinke, Bloom and Samela (1995) suggested that differing stages of development require different skills, but this group of coaches does not confirm this. These skills although judged essential are not perceived to be included within the coach education courses. This should be a view that the appropriate national governing bodies consider in the development and evaluation of their existing awards.

A Scottish soccer coach stated that his observation of his most recent coach education experience was 'it's basically – here are the skills, try them out, here's your qualification. Thanks for coming, we'll never see you again!!!' This experience would not encourage coaches to attend further courses or consider the input of the SFA in the development of his coaching skills and effectiveness. It is, perhaps, reflective of the influence of SFA within soccer coaching programmes or the experience of the particular coach.

Andy Abraham and Dave Collins (1998), in their seminal work, have concluded that effective coach education must explicitly challenge candidates to rationalise, and critically reflect on, the particular blend of coaching tools that have been used. This would infer that the coach education courses should include many of the proficiencies identified by the coaches. This would have implications on both the content and timescale of existing courses, and by definition the cost. Many of the existing courses, particularly at the lower levels, are designed to be easily accessible, in terms of both cost and time. If this was to be altered, it could affect the numbers of coaches who would avail themselves of the coach education opportunities.
Conclusion
Similarities in the coaching profile between the two groups of coaches have been demonstrated despite differences in the perceived status of coaching and the sport of soccer in the USA and Scotland. The availability of full-time coaching opportunities is much more prevalent in the USA, especially within educational establishments. This could be indicative of the relative world rankings of both countries, despite the popularity of soccer in Scotland.

It appeared that both groups of coaches found the coach education courses to be both informative and enjoyable with the presentation formats generally appropriate to the situation. The courses were, in the main, sports specific and practical, with some related theory, dependent upon the award undertaken. Coaches reported that the emphases of these courses were on the scientific aspects of coaching, new training methods, and recent innovations in tactics and techniques.

The coaches found the content interesting but not always able to be utilised within their coaching environment as the courses tended to focus on the ideal situation, which some coaches felt had little basis in reality. The perception also was that the coaching awards tended to concentrate on the 'what' of coaching rather than the 'how' of coaching.

When asked to identify the skills necessary for effective coaching the majority of coaches were in agreement however it is interesting to note that the skills the coaches identified as necessary were not felt to be included within the coach education courses that had been attended. None of the coaches interviewed could distinguish how they acquired the skills identified as necessary.

NOTES

1. The author would like to acknowledge the contribution of the Carnegie Trust for Scotland, which made this research possible.

2. The Dutch Approach is accepted to be skill development by encouraging many touches of the ball during practice using reduced numbers and small playing areas.
REFERENCES
Bryant, J. (2002). The coaching task force recommendations: Transforming coach development. FHS, 17, 4-5.


