

# Effective Coaching

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## Resource: Effective Coaching Strategies: (Applies to All Coaching Communities)

Any time coaches meet their athletes in a training session, there is a basic need to organise and manage the training session to ensure a positive learning environment. Siedentop, Mand and Taggart's (1986) eight effective learning strategies characterise effective coaching. They are practical tips to enhance athlete learning. These strategies do not relate to coaching approaches. They are merely strategies to ensure a smooth training session that enables learning to occur. These effective strategies are not age specific and are relevant to every coaching community.

These are Siedentop, Mand and Taggart's (1986) Effective Teaching Strategies adapted to suit coaching:

1. Devote a large percentage of time within a training session to learning key requirements for that sport (e.g. sport specific skills, psychological knowledge and understandings).
2. Devote a high percentage of time during the training session to meaningful practice.
3. Maximise opportunities athletes have to practise.
4. Keep athletes on task.
5. Assign tasks that are meaningful and matched to athletes' abilities.
6. Set high but realistic expectations.
7. Give training sessions smoothness and momentum.
8. Hold athletes accountable.

### What does this all mean?

The **first** strategy, *devote a large percentage of time to learning key requirements for that sport* suggests that athletes will learn more if provided with quality learning activities and the skills, knowledge and understandings they need for a quality performance in their sport. Therefore, it is important for coaches to plan and consistently provide training sessions that provide this. It is also important that athletes are engaged in appropriate learning for that sport for a high proportion of time. For example, if an athlete is trying to practise throwing a ball at a target, there is no point in spending a large amount of time if the athlete cannot throw. In other words, the learning activity should aim for each athlete to have success in performing that activity through practising it appropriately. To enable learning, the coach is therefore responsible to have an understanding of the athletes' physical, social, cognitive and emotional levels.

The **second** strategy, *devote a high percentage of time to meaningful practice* links closely with the first, third and fourth strategies. This means coaches should ensure small groups, have plenty of equipment, or have game like

situations where as many athletes are involved in a game or activity as much as possible. Teaching Games for Understanding (TGfU) is a model that ensures coaches meet this strategy successfully (see module 2 of the Coaching Process learning area of the Coach Development Framework). TGfU provides numerous opportunities to practise because of the nature of the games. The motivation for athletes in TGfU is high because they are all involved and therefore more apt to spend a larger amount of time on learning.

The following are strategies that will assist in maximising practice time within a training session to avoid unnecessary management time that is not related to the purpose of the training session.

### ***Routines***

One of the ways to increase time to practise is to establish organisational routines for the training sessions. For example, do you provide a signal for the athletes to come in for an explanation or demonstration, or do you just call and wait for them to come in? How can you be more efficient in gathering the athletes in quickly? Establish a signal for gathering and dispersing. If such a signal is established, athletes will understand your expectations. For example, when you blow the whistle, athletes are to come to where you are within five seconds.

Another important routine to create is 'how to' distribute and retrieve equipment.

A potential list of tasks for which routines can be established to minimise time away from quality training (routines) includes:

- Entry
- Warm-up
- Attention/quiet
- Moving between activities (transition)
- Home base (meeting place)
- Gain attention
- Disperse
- Collect equipment
- Put equipment away
- Establish boundaries
- End of training
- Leaving the venue
- Housekeeping (e.g. collecting uniforms, organising game times)

Such routines should be established and practised in the first few training sessions of the season so that athletes know what to do and what the group expects of each other. For example, in the first training session the team is practising a dribbling skill. In the middle of the drill, use your gathering signal to see how the athletes respond. Blow your whistle so the athletes can practise coming in quickly. Praise those athletes who do come in quickly to help communicate your expectations.

### ***Prompts and Hustles***

Prompts and hustles are cue words to remind athletes what should be done. If these are used when establishing the routines, it will remind them to quickly complete the managerial task. An example would be 'Huddle', or 'Come in, quickly'. The cue words should encourage quick action. The comments should avoid sarcasm that creates a judging environment.

### ***Positive Reinforcement***

Positive reinforcement is essential to establish appropriate behaviours and a positive environment for the athletes. When directing or prompting athletes, coaches should use positive comments to reinforce what was done appropriately, for example, 'Way to go Sarah, you came in quickly', or 'Thank you for picking up the equipment Jason'. The more you positively reinforce those who are doing constructive things, the smoother the sessions will be.

### ***Management Games***

As most sports are competitive in nature, athletes can be encouraged to compete to decrease managerial time. Management tasks can also be fun and somewhat competitive. An example of a management game is:

*Coach:* Let's play a game to see how quickly you can be ready. When I call you to come in, if you come in within five seconds, you get a point. If you come in after five seconds, I get a point. If you have the most points near the end of the training session, you can choose the last activity. If I have the most points near the end of the training session, I choose what we do.

### ***Organising Athletes into Groups***

The organisation of athletes into groups creates several issues. Remember the athlete that for one reason or another always gets left out? How can we ensure that all athletes are included? How do we decrease the amount of time needed to get athletes into groups? There is a multitude of ways to organise athletes into groups. We have to be careful, however, not to hurt athletes' feelings or decrease their self-esteem when organising these groups.

One of the quickest ways to select groups or partners is to say 'Get a partner', or 'get into groups of four'. This method generally works quite well with athletes, but can result in the same people always working together. Alternative methods are to have a numbering off system or have the teams listed on your plan. When athletes choose teams, there is invariably someone who usually gets chosen last. This is best avoided.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The second strategy's information was largely adapted from Kidman, L. and Hanrahan, S. (2004), *The coaching process: A practical guide to improve your effectiveness*, Palmerston North, NZ: Dunmore.

The **third** strategy is *maximise opportunities that athletes have to practise*. To reach a high level of skill, an athlete may need to perform a skill or game situation thousands of times. It is important to organise drills/games so that the athletes have multiple opportunities to practise and perform the skills. This can be done in a range of different contexts that present progressive levels of challenge, to avoid complacency or boredom.

The **fourth** strategy, *keep athletes on task*, refers to ensuring athletes are practising and not sitting out, wasting time or waiting their turn in the queue. For learning to take place, athletes must be involved in the learning process. If athletes enjoy the activities or subject matter, they are more likely to be involved. Also, athletes who are on task are less disruptive. To achieve this strategy, coaches need to ensure that they are monitoring athletes' activities and learning levels. If athletes are not involved, coaches can change the activity to ensure all athletes are involved. Elimination games, such as 21 in basketball, are in direct contradiction to ensuring all athletes are involved.

The **fifth** strategy, *assign tasks that are meaningful and matched to athletes' abilities*, refers to the ability of coaches to understand their athletes' ability (stage of development) levels (cognitively, physically, emotionally and socially). Coaches then must ensure that activities are at the athletes' level, not too difficult or too easy. Again, TGfU meets this strategy if coaches design purposeful games, where athletes need to solve relevant problems or experience relevant learning at their own level.

The **sixth** strategy, *set high but realistic expectations*, refers to creating expectations and then supporting the athletes to meet these expectations within a positive, caring and motivating learning environment where athletes succeed. An example of a non-supportive environment is the 'tough' approach where coaches feel that yelling is motivating and punishment is the way to force athletes to do what they are supposed to. There is no research that supports that this approach is productive. In fact, research suggests that the more supportive the environment, the more athletes achieve.

The **seventh** strategy, *give sessions smoothness and momentum*, refers to the ability of the coach to ensure that the training session flows, that interruptions are minimised and the maximum time is devoted to athletes' learning. Sometimes coaches interrupt activities just as athletes are beginning to solve problems, or at a key 'coachable moment'. It is the responsibility of the coach to be able to read when the situation needs further elaboration, or when to let athletes continue with the activity.

The **last** strategy mentioned by Siedentop, Mand and Taggart (1986) is *hold athletes accountable for their learning*. This strategy refers to enabling athletes to try their best, to practise intensely, concentrate on the task and demonstrate an interest in and take ownership for their learning. To hold athletes accountable, coaches should encourage athlete and team goal setting, show an interest overtly in what athletes are learning and doing, have 'with-it-ness' and be 'involved' in the training session, facilitate a clear direction for each task and encourage athletes' performance. This does not

mean explicitly providing information, but more of a 'setting things up and keeping an eye on things' approach, encouraging the athletes to continue, asking questions to help solve problems, and providing activities to extend athletes' abilities. Setting goals, monitoring and reinforcing the team culture, listening to athletes and valuing their opinions all encourage athlete accountability.

For further reading on this subject see:

Kidman, L. and Hanrahan, S. (2004), *The coaching process: A practical guide to improve your effectiveness (Chapter 4, pgs 63-86)*, Palmerston North, NZ: Dunmore.

Siedentop, Mand and Taggart (1986), *Teaching and curriculum strategies for grades 5-12 (Chapter on Effective Teaching Strategies)*, Mountain View, CA: Mayfield.