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Quality Coaching

This chapter defines quality coaching in the Team USA context as follows:

The consistent application of integrated professional, interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge to improve athletes' competence, confidence, connection and character in specific coaching contexts.¹

This integrative definition of coaching effectiveness that serves as the foundation for the *USOC QCF* has been adopted by leading sport and coaching organizations around the world.^{2,3} It is based on decades of applied research and a comprehensive review of coaching, teaching,



expertise, positive psychology and athlete development literature. In its development, the definition was vetted by coaches, coaching educators and major sport organizations around the world—including the USOC.

Quality coaching, the definition says, has three distinct components: coaching knowledge, athlete outcomes and coaching environment. All three components are required to deliver quality coaching in any particular situation, as depicted in figure 1.1. So important are these components that a chapter is devoted to each in the forthcoming pages of the *USOC QCF*.

Essential Coaching Knowledge

Coaches need knowledge in many areas because coaching is complex and coaches assume multiple roles. There are three broad types of coaching knowledge:

1. **Professional knowledge: Know your sport and how to teach it.** Coaches should understand the sport culture, tradition, rules and history; be aware of the skills, tactics, training and safety requirements of the sport; perceive athletes’ development and learning needs; and be able to apply their knowledge.
2. **Interpersonal knowledge: Know how to relate to and lead others.** Coaches must have the ability to connect to and work effectively with athletes and others involved in the sport setting, including officials, administrators, parents and program stakeholders. They should also monitor and control their emotions and demonstrate leadership skills.

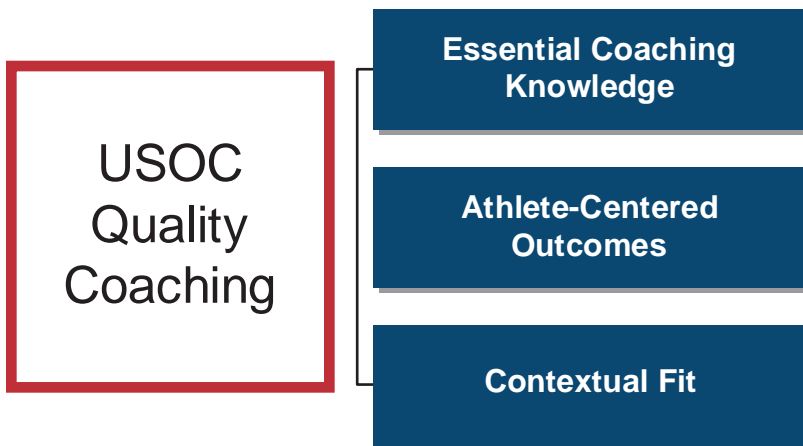


FIGURE 1.1 USOC quality coaching components.

3. **Intrapersonal knowledge: Know yourself and how to sustain improvement efforts.** Coaches need a clear sense of purpose and core values, and they must strive to maintain perspective and balance. They should be aware of their coaching strengths and areas for improvement, and they should have the will and wherewithal to reflect and continually get better.

Athlete-Centered Outcomes

The goals and measures of quality coaching are how well the athlete develops and performs—that is, athlete-centered outcomes. Quality coaching leads to more than just capable participants and competitors: Quality coaching is driven by a quest for holistic athlete development, making better people while also making better athletes. These desired athlete outcomes generally fit into four areas, referred to as the Four C's of athlete development:

1. **Competence:** sport-specific technical, tactical and performance skills; improved health and fitness; and healthy training habits
2. **Confidence:** self-belief, resilience, mental toughness and sense of positive self-worth
3. **Connection:** positive bonds and social relationships with people inside and outside of sport
4. **Character:** respect for the sport, ethical and morally responsible behavior, integrity and empathy

Contextual Fit

With a quick search of the Internet, any coach can easily find and access countless training activities and recommended coaching strategies. Though such prescriptive coaching resources are readily available, they should not be implemented without attention to context. Quality coaching requires the ability to adapt one's coaching knowledge to the specific needs of the athletes and fit the distinctive features of the environment in which one coaches.

Although every coaching situation is unique in some way, it is helpful to consider what constitutes quality coaching in four defined environments that share many common characteristics. These coaching environments align closely with the stages of athlete development identified in the American Development Model (ADM),⁴ as shown in table 1.1. More details on the ADM are provided later in the *USOC QCF*, starting on page 29.

TABLE 1.1 Coaching Environment Alignment With Athlete Development Stages

Coaching environment	ADM athlete development stage
<p>Participation sport for children</p> <p>Playful early exposure to the sport experience, with an emphasis on mass participation and building physical literacy</p>	<p>Stage 1: Discover, Learn and Play</p>
<p>Participation sport for adolescents and adults</p> <p>Opportunities to continue sport participation across the life span, with an emphasis on personal health, wellness and social connections</p>	<p>Stage 2: Develop and Challenge Stage 4a: Participate and Succeed Stage 5: Thrive and Mentor</p>
<p>Performance sport for young adolescents</p> <p>Competitive sport experiences that increasingly emphasize deliberate practice in pursuit of advanced skill development and performance</p>	<p>Stage 3: Train and Compete</p>
<p>Performance sport for older adolescents and adults</p> <p>Highly competitive sport experiences limited to a select few who are highly committed to achieving the highest possible level of expertise</p>	<p>Stage 4b: Excel for High Performance</p>

CHAPTER 1 | Takeaway

Quality coaching does not happen by accident. Teaching, learning and honing quality coaching skills requires a mindful and diligent effort to address each of its three components:

1. Essential coaching knowledge
2. Athlete-centered outcomes
3. Contextual fit

