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Evaluation and Recognition

How do we know whether we are doing a good job helping athletes progress in their development? Unfortunately, far too few coaches fail to consider that question. Even fewer establish the assessment criteria, tools



and process to answer it objectively and accurately. This is because nearly the same small percentage of sport administrators conduct systematic and comprehensive coach and program evaluations.

Sports organizations cannot be successful for long if administrators and coaches fail to effectively monitor and evaluate performance. Coach and athlete development will be haphazard, based on intuition and hope instead of credible evidence and careful planning that serve to close development gaps. In short, what matters must get measured.

Effective, ongoing coach evaluation is essential, as is proper recognition of quality coaching. Coaches who demonstrate the desired behaviors should be praised and supported, or at least acknowledged. The U.S. Olympic Committee's approach to quality coaching recognition is outlined later in this chapter.

Step-by-Step Evaluation

When evaluations are done poorly or are perceived to be an administrative mandate without any meaningful follow-up, the evaluation process will not be well received. At worst, it will be a source of stress and frustration for everyone involved. A quality evaluation system includes four steps.

Step 1: Determine What to Evaluate

The evaluation process starts by deciding what to evaluate. All program evaluation systems should include tools for measuring athlete development. As discussed in previous chapters, athlete development should span the Four C's: competence, confidence, connection and character. Therefore, athletes' progress toward achieving target outcomes across each of the Four C's should be evaluated on a regular basis.

Although the primary role of the coach is to develop athletes, in many Team USA coaching contexts coaches also play an active role in administration, fundraising, athlete recruitment and event planning. The ability to create a quality sport experience that results in comprehensive athlete development often hinges on how well a coach fulfills such duties. Therefore, evaluation should encompass as many of the key responsibilities of a coach as possible. Practicality is also an important factor in program evaluation, meaning sport administrators should collect only the quality-related information that can be gathered and summarized efficiently.

Step 2: Specify Sources of Feedback

Once evaluation items have been identified, decisions will need to be made about who should be asked to provide evaluation feedback. An

effective evaluation system ensures that information is collected from all key program stakeholders. At a minimum, coach self-evaluations should always be supplemented with feedback from members of the coaching staff and athletes. This is the only way to ensure a balanced and comprehensive approach to making evaluation decisions. Program feedback from athletes on leadership councils and from senior or departing athletes can provide particularly helpful insights on how to improve a program.

Program evaluation can be further enhanced by collecting feedback from others who have experience with the program or the coach. Just as professionals in fields such as business are encouraged to ask a wide range of people for feedback when conducting an evaluation—commonly referred to as a 360-degree evaluation—coaches also benefit from adopting this approach.¹ Feedback might be solicited from athletic administrators, opposing coaches, game officials, formal or informal mentors, program alumni and trusted coaching colleagues (see figure 5.1).

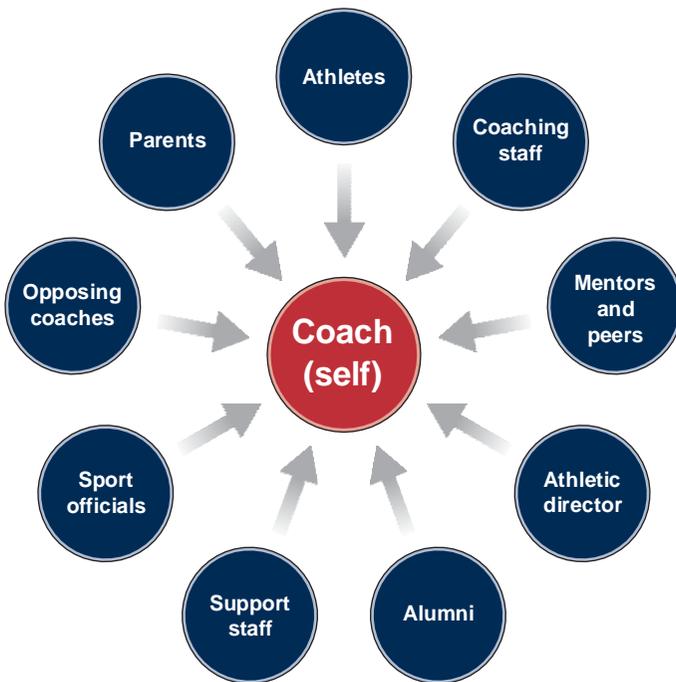


FIGURE 5.1 Potential sources for coach or program evaluation.

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Step 3: Select Evaluation Methods and Collect Data

After securing reliable and accurate information sources, the next concern is how to gather the data efficiently and in the most useful form possible. Options for evaluation tools are endless, with many examples available for coaches and administrators to either use or adapt to meet their specific needs.² A combination of objective and subjective evaluation tools may be most useful. Examples of objective evaluation tools include knowledge tests and ratings of the coach's performance achievements, adherence to rules and policies, and observable behaviors. Subjective evaluation tools are often used to measure things that are not easily quantified, such as attitude, work ethic and motivation.

All evaluation efforts should include observation of the coach in action with her or his athletes. Regardless of how the observation is conducted (videotaped or live, self-evaluated or with others), the effort should be guided by examining how effective the coach is at developing athletes. A valuable way to approach observation is to watch the coach during a training session with the following three questions in mind:^{3,4}

1. How does the coaching facilitate or fail to facilitate athlete development?
2. What evidence is there that the athletes achieved the intended learning goals for the session?
3. How can the coaching be revised to provide stronger opportunities for athlete development and achievement of learning goals?

Step 4: Decide How to Use the Results

The final step in the evaluation process is determining how the results will be used. Coach and program evaluations typically are either formative or summative. Formative evaluations are used to provide feedback on what is working well and what needs to be improved. Summative evaluations are used to make judgments on coach or program quality, and they are often used to make decisions about whether to retain, reassign or remove a coach. An effective coach and program evaluation system is both formative and summative. The results should be used to help coaches improve while also providing evidence of coach and program growth.

A formal method for reporting evaluation results, such as writing an evaluation narrative or preparing an end-of-season statistical report with summary observations from selected feedback sources, is essential. Evaluation reports should be kept on file for formal debriefings and to spot trends across seasons, years and quadrennials.

Evaluation works best when it is done regularly and when results are used to make constant incremental improvements. Evaluation systems should be approached with an “evolution, not revolution” mindset. Unfortunately, many coaches and program administrators avoid conducting meaningful and regular evaluations as a matter of practice because (1) they don’t feel they have the time or (2) they are content with the status quo. This is a serious mistake, because neglecting to evaluate typically results in having to invest a lot of time to fix exacerbated problems that were once minor issues when administrators and coaches realize that the status quo is no longer acceptable.

Long-Term Program Development

Just as athlete development is optimized when coaches embrace a holistic, athlete-centered approach, coach development is optimized when a holistic, long-term program development (LTPD) approach is adopted.⁵ The LTPD approach is most effective when coaches and sport program administrators

- have a clear sense of shared purpose,
- are sensitive to the unique profile and characteristics of the context and
- operate like a learning community.

Table 5.1 on page 40 summarizes the key differences between a traditional sport program approach and the LTPD approach. The LTPD approach works because it keeps coaches and program administrators focused on continuous improvement aligned around a shared purpose and open communication. The goal is sustained development and achievement, not short-term wins.

Close High-Impact Performance Gaps

Effective program evaluations conducted with a long-term development mindset constantly reveal areas for improvement. Indeed, the task of trying to address every exposed performance gap can be overwhelming.

A more efficient approach is to focus on a few key performance weaknesses that, if fixed, have the potential to lead to the greatest gains in development and performance. High-impact performance gaps are significant issues that directly affect other performance aspects of the system. Even a small improvement in these performance gaps can potentially produce big results.

TABLE 5.1 Characteristics of Traditional Versus LTPD-Oriented Sport Programs

Characteristic	Traditional sport program	LTPD-oriented sport program
Shared purpose	Poorly identified vision and values	Clearly articulated vision and values
Mindset	Short-term “win now”	Long-term continuous improvement
Methods	Sporadic improvements and setbacks with inconsistent or unclear processes for improvement	Plan, do, check and adjust cycles based upon current condition, target condition and performance gaps
Techniques	Metrics and rewards/punishments are extrinsic and top-down and often create fear	Mutually agreed upon targets and metrics that create alignment and intrinsic motivation
Collaboration	People operate in intellectual silos	Systems thinking tools employed to surface mental models and enhance communication and collaboration
Leadership	Charismatic hero-leader, characterized by excessive achievement orientation	Servant-leader, characterized by a humble yet focused mastery orientation
Decision making	Little consensus, with influence gained through politics and manipulation	Collaborative learning teams of problem solvers using shared power and collaboration
Communication	Limited and controlled	Open and shared
Processes	Inconsistent tools and programs with sporadic implementation and results; leads to resistance to change	Consistent tools and processes used to improve and standardize instruction, methods and relations
Results	Variable, based on capabilities of current athletes and coaches	Program excellence sustained over time across all sports

Reprinted, by permission, from M. Siwik, A. Lambert, D. Saylor, R. Bertram, C. Cocchiarella, and W. Gilbert, 2015. “Long term program development (LTPD): An interdisciplinary framework for developing athletes, coaches, and sport programs,” *International Sport Coaching Journal* 2(3): 305-316.

In sports such as field hockey or soccer, individual guarding or marking may be cited as an important performance issue, but poor fitness may be an underlying high-impact performance gap. Regardless of how skilled an athlete is at shooting, if he or she is not fit enough to gain the strategic advantage needed to get into an optimal position to shoot, then the shooting performance issue will never be adequately resolved. Another high-impact performance issue might be team trust. If teammates don't trust each other enough to sacrifice personal glory for team success, then it is unlikely that they will do the work such as pressuring a defender in order to put teammates in optimal scoring situations.

Once performance gaps have been identified, have multiple people familiar with the program review and rank the items on the list. Then sum the ratings and compare the rankings. This exercise will illuminate the high-impact performance gaps that should be addressed first. Such systematic addressing of high-impact performance gaps provides the greatest return on investment in seeking continuous program and coaching improvements.

Build on Coaching Strengths

Although it is important to identify performance gaps, there is a growing recognition that identifying and building on strengths is a powerful way to stimulate continuous improvement. This is referred to as a strengths-based approach to evaluation, as opposed to a deficits-based approach. In simple terms, the strengths-based approach involves emphasizing the positive rather than the negative.

Coaching strengths are those instinctive coaching characteristics such as behaviors, feelings or ways of thinking that are authentic and energize optimal performance. By focusing on their strengths, coaches act in ways that are aligned with their purpose and core values. When people use their strengths, they are more engaged with their work and also report greater happiness, a surge in energy and performance and enhanced optimism.⁶ Also, focusing on strengths builds coaching confidence and resilience—both of which are essential for sustaining effort and energy as a coach.⁷

The strengths-based approach is founded on five core principles:⁸

1. Focus on what is right, what is working and what is strong.
2. Every person has strengths and deserves respect for their strengths.
3. Our areas of greatest potential are in the areas of our greatest strengths.

4. Weaknesses can best be fixed when we are making the most of our strengths.
5. Using our strengths is the smallest thing we can do to make the biggest difference.

Although perhaps not self-evident when starting a coaching career, the best coaches learn over time what aspects of coaching suit them best. A simple technique coaches can use to spot their natural strengths is to answer the following three questions at regular intervals (for example, at the end of each month of coaching).

- *What was my best day of coaching this past month, and why was this the best day?*
- *In what specific coaching situation was I at my best this past month?*
- *What aspects of coaching most energized me last month?*

Recognize Quality Coaches and Their Impact

At the Olympic and Paralympic Games, it is only athletes who receive medals. Coaches do not receive medals and do not get to stand on the podium to be celebrated by their peers, family or country at the Games. It is up to the athletes and the National Olympic Committee to honor the coaches and staff who contributed to the team's success.

Recognition of quality coaching is something that the U.S. Olympic Committee takes very seriously at each Olympic and Paralympic Games. Coaches in the U.S. system are not all receiving full-time wages and operating under professional contracts. The majority of coaches in the United States are volunteer coaches at the youth level or part-time coaches in the scholastic or club systems. They are pushing to help athletes achieve while nurturing the sports they love. Ideally, all the coaches in an athlete's pathway of development will strive to be quality coaches and to maximize that athlete's potential at all moments. For this reason, the USOC is seeking additional ways to recognize the impact coaches have on athlete development and performance.

Using an evaluation process based on quality coaching factors helps identify coaching growth and impact beyond just the outcomes of the season. Many coaches are retained or celebrated based on wins or championships, but quality coaching happens at all levels and manifests itself in many ways. Each organization should recognize results and actions in ways that are meaningful to the coaches. Table 5.2 provides examples of coach recognition offered by the USOC and suggests other options an organization might consider to acknowledge quality coaching.

TABLE 5.2 USOC Coach Recognition Examples and Suggestions

Program	Description	Additional suggestions
Order of Ikkos	<p>Program conducted during the Olympic and Paralympic Games in which U.S. medalists may award a coach of their choice the Order of Ikkos Medal. The medal is produced by the USOC, and the recipient coach is listed in the Honor Roll of Coaches for that Games.</p>	<p>Have athletes award a coach some token of appreciation that celebrates the athlete–coach connection. Creating an award or ceremony to celebrate this will build memories for a lifetime.</p>
Coach of the Year awards	<p>The USOC allows NGBs to award annual coaching recognition plaques in five categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Olympic Coach • Paralympic Coach • Developmental Coach • Volunteer Coach • Sport Science Coach (Doc Counsilman Award) <p>Once the NGBs select their winners, the USOC then determines a national winner from the NGB honorees.</p>	<p>Annual coaching awards for your organization or program allow coaches to join a long list of previously recognized peers. An awards program can also incorporate criteria that are rooted in quality coaching principles, evaluation results and athlete and organization feedback.</p>
Newsletters and publications	<p>The USOC publishes newsletters and the <i>Olympic Coach</i> magazine, which frequently have articles from top-quality coaches in the U.S. These publications are great ways to give public recognition and notoriety for coaches who are innovative and serving as positive role models for Team USA. These publications also offer a platform for coaches to be recognized as experts in their field.</p>	<p>Does your program have a website or blog? Have your coaches who exhibit quality principles write an article, participate in a podcast or share a video talking about best principles or concepts that would be of interest to the community. This gives the coach some recognition and visibility.</p>

(continued)

TABLE 5.2 (continued)

Program	Description	Additional suggestions
Speaking events	Each year the USOC holds coaching programming to develop top-level Team USA coaches. The USOC consistently looks for coaches in the Team USA system to present to up-and-coming coaches, while also looking for ways to highlight key areas where that coach is innovating the profession.	You can celebrate your coach's knowledge by having him or her speak at a town hall meeting, do a keynote address at a banquet or speak to your school board on what is involved in quality coaching.

Recognizing quality coaching in a variety of ways ensures that coaches feel valued and rewarded for their work. Bringing attention to those who are doing a truly quality job can help foster a culture of quality coaching and should therefore be a priority of every administration.

CHAPTER 5 | Takeaway

All coaches should have a process to formally evaluate the progress of both their athletes and their own coaching. By making systematic evaluation a habit, coaches can start to think about long-term program development and how they can close performance gaps for their athletes, themselves and the program. In addition to closing gaps, adopt a strength-focused approach to development. Lastly, it's important to publicly recognize quality coaching and its impact and to further engage coaches in the community who are making a difference, both on and off the field of play.