



COACHING NEWS

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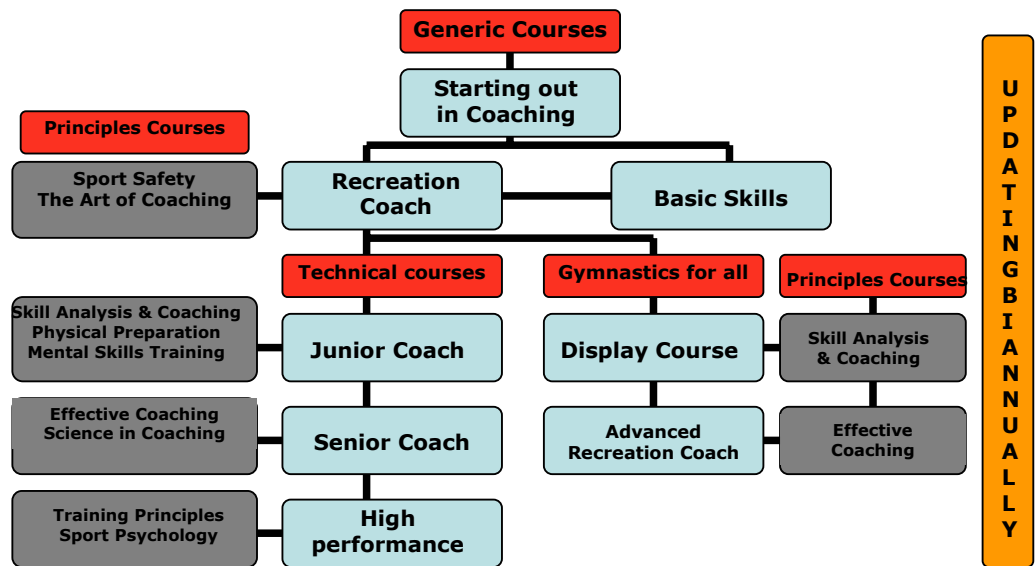
Coaching Pathways

Providing clear pathways for all coaches was one of the aims of the new Coach Education Framework. This diagram shows the pathways available.

Competitive coaches will progress from the Generic courses to the Sport Specific Technical courses. These courses include Junior Coach, Senior Coach and High Performance.

Recreation Coaches progress from the Generic courses to the Display Course and Advanced Recreation course.

The Principles courses are modules which can be downloaded and completed in your own time. These courses provide the science that underpins coaching.



Coaching and Learning Implicitly

To learn implicitly means to remove the verbal or analytical systems from the learning process. In other words, implicit motor learning attempts to minimise the use of the working memory

Working memory can be thought of as a kind of 'active workspace' in the mind. Among other things it plays a prominent role in manipulating instructions and in building a body of knowledge about the characteristics of movement. This body of knowledge is stored, consciously retrievable information about how to perform a task. This knowledge can come about not only from instructions received, but also from learners' own trial and error attempts to find successful ways to complete a task.

Over time a skill becomes automatic and it is no longer necessary to think about how to perform the skill. Problems arise when a performer who has achieved a high level of automaticity re-engages working memory to intervene in a process the motor system was previously controlling automatically. In effect, by doing this, the performer is attempting to fix something that wasn't broken. This is termed 'reinvestment' and individuals with a propensity for reinvestment also have a higher tendency to break down under stressful performance circumstances.

Implicit versus Explicit Motor Learning

Implicit Motor Learning	Explicit Motor Learning
Limited dependence on working memory	Increased dependence on working memory
Limited declarative knowledge accrual	Increased declarative knowledge accrual
Stable performance under psychological stress	Deteriorated performance under psychological stress
Stable performance under secondary task conditions	Deteriorated performance under secondary task conditions

There are a number of effective techniques coaches can use to impart the benefits of implicit motor learning to their athletes. These methods include – errorless learning, external attentional focus strategy, and analogy learning.



Errorless learning

Errorless learning attempts to constrain the learners environment so that errors are prevented if not altogether, then at least for the most part. With a reduction of errors comes a reduced propensity to form and test hypotheses that would lead to a build up of declarative knowledge. In other words start easy and gradually build up difficulty. For example a rhythmic gymnast practices throwing apparatus to attain height, catching is not required at this time.

External focus of attention

This technique involves giving learners instructions that induce an external focus of attention. What this means in simple terms is concentrating one's attention on the aspects of movement which relate to its outcome, rather than on the movement itself. This external focus is thought to prevent the learner from becoming too engaged in the step-by-step mechanics of a skill and allows more automated performance to occur eg. When holding a balance skill the gymnast focuses on a secondary task such as reacting to a music beat etc...

Analogy learning

Analogy learning is a kind of 'biomechanical metaphor' for movement. A clear example of this type of learning was seen in The karate Kid movie when the student was taught how to deflect a punch with the 'wax on wax off' analogy. An analogy such as this takes the individual components of a skill and incorporates them into a simple and easy-to-remember rule.

Implementation

The techniques outlined here can easily be used together to promote implicit learning. An analogy could be used to induce an external focus of attention; external focus instructions could be

given to a learner after an initial period of errorless practice; or, perhaps at its best, a combination of all three methods could be used.

Research has shown Implicit learning to be more stable over time and more robust under pressure and secondary task loading. It also gives the learner a phenomenal sense of intuition. All of the above will result in better and more consistent performances from our athletes.

Source: Poolton, J.M. & Zachry, T.L. (2007) So you want to learn implicitly? Coaching and learning through implicit motor learning techniques. International Journal of Sports Science and Coaching. Volume 2, Number 1, 2007.

Planning & Periodisation

Annual planning is a vital tool to ensure athletes are effectively and appropriately developed to peak for major events. The year should be broken into four annual training periods or macrocycles of three months each. Each macrocycle would be broken down further into 2 six week or 3 four week microcycles. Skill, strength and routine goals should be set for each macrocycle.

Annual Planning –

Cycle	Content
Off-season macrocycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Work new skills■ Aerobic endurance■ Encyclopedia of skills / High element counts■ Maintain old routines■ Heavy conditioning and weight training
Pre-season macrocycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Peak requirement skills■ Heavy conditioning and weight training■ Speed training■ High element counts■ Maintain old routines / Incorporate new skills into old routines■ New partial routines / Choreography■ Amplitude and consistency
Early season macrocycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Competition goals■ Routine consistency■ Speed training■ Heavy conditioning and weight training■ Routine amplitude and execution / High routine counts
Peak season macrocycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Quality routines■ Pressure performance■ Maintain strength■ Aerobic maintenance

Effective Strength Training

Why is it that in gymsports where strength is obviously a basic essential and a key to gaining a competitive advantage is not weight training more common? The science of strength training deals almost exclusively with weight training because of its efficiency, measurability, and smooth progressive nature. In spite of the science, gymsports for the large part have ignored weight training as a part of traditional athlete development.

Athletes throughout the entire range of strength development, abilities and capacities can show progress with weight training.

One of the major problems with strength training in gymsports is the lack of ability to be progressive with normal conditioning methods.

First is the problem of how to condition gymnasts to do skills such as press handstands when they can not practice press handstands. While there are some drills - reverse presses, presses against a wall, spotted presses, jump presses, press headstands, etc. that are possible, there is certainly no smooth, progressive transition for the weaker gymnast in training.



The second problem is a time problem. Without the ability to increase weight in strength training,

the only option is to increase the number of repetitions performed. Performing more repetitions, of course, takes more time and time is a valuable commodity in gymsports. For example, climbing a rope is a common gym sport conditioning exercise. To continue to increase strength, a gymnast would have to climb more each day - one time, ten times, thirty times. Where would it end?

Time is needed to develop the hundreds of gym sport skills and progressions required and for repetition of skills and routines to develop the consistency of execution required for competition. There is not enough time in practice to be taken over by the ever-increasing need to do more strength repetitions.

Gym sport coaches attempt to solve this problem by having gymnasts do a set number of each conditioning skill - e.g. 25 presses, 2 rope climbs, 25 chin-ups, 50 V-ups... The problem with this has been shown over and over again with scientific research into the building of strength. Increasing strength absolutely requires increasing weight, increasing repetitions and/or increasing intensity.

Lack of increase in these factors can lead to strength loss after only six weeks. Repetition of the same exercises day in and day out without increasing weight, repetitions or intensity will show initial rapid gains for two weeks, two weeks of declining gains, a fifth plateau week and in the sixth week, strength actually declines. So much for same old daily conditioning theory.

Some improvement in this cycle can be achieved by introducing variety into the conditioning programme by alternating the order of exercises, using an alternating series of different exercises or

introducing competition into the conditioning training to increase the intensity of performance. In the long run the problem remains, improvement cannot be achieved without some type of progressive increase.

Other coaches attempt to weave the conditioning in with increasingly hard sessions of skill training using the skill training itself as a type of conditioning. This also requires balancing the repetition needs of training with the need to learn new higher level skills, which cannot be repeated enough to get a conditioning effect.

All of these attempts to use traditional gym sports conditioning as the sole means of strength training are difficult if not impossible to track on an individual basis. This makes the development of strength in gym sports a very inexact science.

Some coaches, systems and countries just select those already strong enough for the sport and just try to use traditional conditioning to just maintain that strength. This may be possible using variety and competition to increase and vary intensity, but it certainly wastes those athletes who just are not yet currently strong enough, but who have the capacity for development.



Source: Strength zone. www.gymnasticszone.com

Athlete Centered Coaching

Cowardice asks the question is it safe? Expediency asks the question, is it politic? Vanity asks the question, is it popular? But conscience asks the question, is it right? And there comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must take it because his conscience tells him it is right.

Martin Luther

The role of the coach is to enable the athlete to learn. Like other learners athletes develop understanding and learn more effectively when they are involved in solving problems for themselves. Important tools in the learning process are to develop new ideas, knowledge and the ability to make decisions. When coaches use an athlete-centered or empowering coaching style, the athletes gain and take ownership of the knowledge, development and decision making that will help them to maximise performance.

Becoming a skilled practitioner in athlete-centered coaching takes a commitment from coaches similar to that required from the athletes. While some coaches employ athlete-centered methods to some extent most could become more athlete centered with a little effort. Take a look at your current coaching style, ask yourself – how am I coaching now? Is my programme centered around the athletes' goals? Are the athletes actively involved in the coaching process? How could I become more athlete-centered?



Source: Volleyball USA

Building gymnasts self-esteem, self-image and self-confidence

Self-esteem is how gymnasts feel about themselves. It is shaped by both their successes in life and competitions and positive interactions with others including coaches, teammates and parents.

Coaching to build gymnasts self-esteem, self image and self confidence:

- To a great extent a gymnast's image of themselves is moulded by the responses of others around them including their teammates, parents and coaches. A gymnast's experiences in life are a primary factor. There is no possibility for escaping all of the effects of heredity, talent levels, body type and just plain good or bad luck. But coaches and parents can and do have a strong effect on self-image, self-esteem, and therefore, the self-confidence of their gymnasts.
- How a gymnast feels about themselves strongly affects their learning, motivation and competition performances. A coach can help their gymnast develop a positive self-image by caring about them, pointing out to them their abilities and talents and help them to celebrate their successes.
- Gymnasts have a life outside of the gym, which primarily revolves around their family and school. The smart coach will ask gymnasts about their family, their friends and their other interests and activities. Even more importantly, coaches will listen carefully and show gymnasts that they care enough to remember what gymnasts have talked about and said is important to them.
- You can build gymnasts' self-esteem and confidence by doing them the honour of paying them personal and individual attention before, during and after practice.
- Coaching in a positive manner and building up gymnasts by praising what they do well, recognizing when they make a good effort, reward their good behavior and compliment their good performances. If you spend more time catching and acknowledging what they do right - all their "goods" - you will find they make even faster progress and have more confidence.
- Gymnasts need to know from their coaches that they are allowed to make mistakes. Encouraging them after a mistake will make the learning process go more quickly and lets gymnasts know they don't have to be perfect all the time during the learning process.
- Feeling accepted by the coach and on the team should never depend only on a gymnast's performance or competition results.
- When coaches expect that their gymnasts will perform to a high level, gymnasts rise to that level of expectation. The opposite is also true. When gymnasts perceive by even small actions and mannerisms of their coach that they are not expected to do well, they do not do well.

Source: Howard, J. (2006) Top 10 steps to building gymnasts' self-esteem, self-image and self confidence. Ezine articles

