Creating An Effective Coaching Evaluation Instrument

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The methods used to evaluate coaches range from organized and scientific to unplanned and biased; some evaluate coaching behavior while others make assessments based upon the way coaches dress. Some people sit in the stands thinking things like, “That coach should be using a full court press,” while others consider thoughts of, “Look how nice that coach’s suit looks.” Each thought is a form of evaluation; yet, can the evaluation of coaches be more meaningful to the sport educators in the profession? Other typical methods of evaluation include things like:

• Win/Loss Record - Does a win/loss record truly reflect a coach’s performance? It is possible that a coach with a 14-1 record had players with strong talent, while another coach with a 2-17 record had no business winning two games, but somehow led the team to two opportunities to win?

• Administrator Visit - Some administrators make a yearly visit to the gym to “observe” practice. Does this once per year visit for thirty minutes provide adequate support for an annual evaluation?

• Appearance - Like it or not, this is how many fans evaluate the coach. Do thoughts of “Doesn’t she look nice?” or “He sure yells a lot” overshadow the vision of what the coach actually does regarding the development of players?

It is clear that evaluation is critical to improved coaching. Yet, with a variety of evaluation methods being used, it is important that coaching evaluation instruments reflect the needs of all involved in the sport experience.

This brief article provides an opportunity for readers to create a coaching assessment instrument that can be used by athletic directors and coaches. ADs can use the instrument to evaluate coaches, while coaches can use it for the purpose of self-evaluation. Although this article creates a new instrument that can be implemented in various coaching situations, it hopefully serves as a springboard to future thoughts on the topic of coaching evaluation.

When creating a formal evaluation instrument, it is important to accept input from all the constituents that are a part of the sport experience. Input can come from coaches, administrators, athletes, parents and community, as well as research on teaching effectiveness and existing coaching standards. Clearly, it is improbable that any instrument includes everything for everybody, but the development of a new coaching assessment instrument might include some views from all the groups listed above.

So, what is important to coaches when assessing coaching performance? Some items might include:

• Knowledge of the sport

• Relationships with students/athletes

• Improvement of players

• Contest performance

• Ethical behavior/role modeling

• Positive impact on an entire school environment

What do administrators consider when assessing coaching performance?

• Discipline

• Supervision

• Sideline behavior

• Role modeling

• Win/loss record

• Media relations

What kinds of coaching qualities are important to athletes?

• A chance to improve

• An opportunity to play in the contest

• Coach’s knowledge of the sport

• Fair treatment for all

• Having fun at practice

• A feeling that “the coach cares about me”

What elements of coaching performance are important to parents?

• Safety of their children

• Coach cares about kids

• Ethical behavior

• Athlete improvement

• Communication with parents

• Winning?

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) has developed national standards for coaches. NASPE recognizes eight domains for the coaching standards, and the use of these coaching domains is vital when evaluating coaches. These domains include:

• Philosophy & Ethics

• Safety and Injury Prevention

• Physical Conditioning

• Growth & Development

• Teaching & Communication

• Sport Skills & Tactics

• Organization & Administration

• Evaluation

Finally, what does research on teaching effectiveness suggest about coaching performance? It is often said that “coaching is teaching;” therefore, it makes sense to utilize educational research when assessing the performance of coaches. Based upon a multitude of common educational findings, effective teachers:

• Provide specific, performance feedback

• Create high levels of engaged skill learning time

• Are effective managers

• Demonstrate high levels of enthusiasm

• Have a strong knowledge of content

• Plan effective lessons

• Study their teaching method

It is the use of an evaluation instrument that determines its effectiveness. One of the keys to effective evaluation is the “buy in” of those most involved in the activity. Obtaining input from coaches and administrators creates a stronger acceptance of the instrument. If personnel accept the evaluation instrument, they are more likely to use it effectively. If coaches and ADs accept the merits of an assessment instrument, coaches can assess themselves or other coaches, while administrators can assess head coaches and assistants.

Developing an instrument includes selecting the items that are “most meaningful” to each group involved in the sporting activity. By selecting topics from the groups discussed above (or from lists developed by each group) and placing those items in document form, it is easy to construct a new coaching assessment instrument. (See sample that follows.)

1.1 2 3 4 demonstrates a strong knowledge of the sport

2.1 2 3 4 develops positive relationships with students/athletes

3.1 2 3 4 fosters improvement of players

4.1 2 3 4 exhibits appropriate contest performance

5.1 2 3 4 maintains ethical behavior and provides a positive role model

6.1 2 3 4 creates a positive impact on the entire school

7.1 2 3 4 maintains discipline with athletes

8.1 2 3 4 provides adequate supervision of players at all times

9.1 2 3 4 demonstrates appropriate sideline behavior

10.1 2 3 4 acquires an acceptable win/loss record

11.1 2 3 4 maintains positive relations with the media

12.1 2 3 4 provides all athletes with a chance to improve

13.1 2 3 4 provides a chance for athletes to earn a chance to play in the contest

14.1 2 3 4 offers fair treatment of all athletes

15.1 2 3 4 creates an atmosphere of fun at practice

16.1 2 3 4 creates a feeling of genuine concern for athletes

17.1 2 3 4 maintains a safe environment for athletes

18.1 2 3 4 cares about athletes

19.1 2 3 4 provides adequate care for injury prevention and rehabilitation

20.1 2 3 4 communicates a positive philosophy and ethical approach to sport

21.1 2 3 4 uses acceptable practices when conditioning athletes

22.1 2 3 4 is aware of and uses techniques that match growth and development of athletes

23.1 2 3 4 utilizes strong teaching and communication skills

24.1 2 3 4 employs effective sport strategies and tactics

25.1 2 3 4 demonstrates strong sport skills

26.1 2 3 4 is organized and completes administrative duties

27.1 2 3 4 performs adequate evaluation of self and players

28.1 2 3 4 provides specific, performance-related feedback

29.1 2 3 4 creates high levels of engaged skill-learning time

30.1 2 3 4 effectively manages players

31.1 2 3 4 demonstrates a high levels of enthusiasm

32.1 2 3 4 creates effective proactive plans

33.1 2 3 4 studies his/her teaching method

34. 1 2 3 4 communicates with parents

35. 1 2 3 4 overall coaching performance

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Download the above sample.

The items included in this sample may not reflect all issues important to a specific athletic department or school district, but the point is to show how local athletic departments can create their own evaluation instrument that meets the needs of the local constituents.

There is no magic number regarding how many items should be included. One athletic department may decide to create a brief 12-item instrument that best reflects the most important factors for their coaches, while another school creates a comprehensive instrument containing fifty specific coaching behaviors. The result depends upon the needs and wants of each group developing the instrument.

It is not recommended that the instrument be changed year after year. Assessment instruments may be modified from time to time in order to maintain a current perspective on coaching, but there should be some stability to the instrument. Developing a strong instrument and then maintaining that instrument over time adds to the credibility and usefulness of the instrument. Once the instrument is developed, its use determines its effectiveness. Does the instrument provide information about coaching behavior? Is the instrument easy to complete? Do the coaches accept the items included in the instrument? These and other questions may be used to consider the usefulness of the instrument.

The evaluation of coaches can be seen in two lights - formative assessment or summative evaluation. The same instrument can be used in both. Formative assessment provides an on-going look at coaching performance, with an attempt to nurture and improve technique along the way. Summative evaluation of coaches typically occurs at the end of a season, when a final judgment about the coaching performance is made. Summative evaluation is often used in determining whether to maintain the service of the coach or to release the coach from his/her coaching duties.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to provide insight into the development of a coaching assessment instrument that might be useful at a local athletic department. A sample assessment form was provided. When developing a meaningful coaching assessment, items of interest from all people involved in the sport program, ranging from coaches and administrators to parents and players, may be included. In addition to input from each group, national coaching standards and teaching research can be used when developing a coaching assessment instrument. Hopefully, athletic coaches take a positive stance in the assessment of their performance. Forward-thinking coaches want evaluation to occur; with a little work, evaluation can occur on their own terms.

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Dennis Docheff has been an educator for over thirty years. Dennis’ experience includes teaching, coaching, and administration at the elementary, middle school, high school, and collegiate levels. Currently, Docheff is a Professor at the University of Central Missouri. Docheff has published over 100 articles and given over 150 professional presentations in physical education and sport. Dennis is married to Keri and they have three children; Dodge (20), Payton (17), and Emily (13).