

## Examining the Mentorship Effectiveness of Sports Coaches: An Exploratory Study

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### ABSTRACT

Sports coaching plays a pivotal role in shaping the destiny of the players. Present study was undertaken to examine the extent to which the sports players rate the mentoring functions performed by the sports coaches. Recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the mentoring functions have been suggested.

**Keywords--** sports coaches, mentoring, effectiveness, competencies

### I. INTRODUCTION

Mentoring in the sports arena can help sports persons increase their effectiveness, advance their careers, and create a more productive team. Thus, setting up and managing an effective mentoring relationship gains paramount importance for improving skills base, helping to build strong teams, and can form part of a well planned sports administration.

Mentoring is a paternalistic relationship between the coach and the players. As a mentor, coaches are necessary to pass on valuable skills, knowledge and insights to their mentee to help them develop their sports careers. Mentoring, thus, is a good way of efficiently transferring valuable competencies, making their mentee feel more confident and self-supporting. Mentees can also develop a clearer sense of what they want in their sporting careers and their personal lives. They will develop greater self-awareness and see the world, and themselves, as others do.

### II. MENTORING IN SPORTS

Coaching is centered on unlocking a sportperson's potential to maximise his or her own performance. A focus on improving performance and the development of skills is the key to an effective coaching relationship in the sporting arena. Coaching is a collaborative relationship which encourages people to know their values and live them while achieving their goals. Effective coaches challenge limiting beliefs and reinforce positive beliefs by providing

tasks followed by feedback. To provide for overall development of a sportsperson, coaches need to render following broad categories of mentoring:

- a) **Developmental mentoring** wherein the sporting coach helps the player develop new skills and abilities. The mentor is a guide and a resource for the mentee's growth.
- b) **Sponsorship mentoring** wherein the coach is more of a career influencer than a guide. In this situation, the coach takes a close interest in the progress of the mentee (or, more commonly, the protégé). The mentor "opens doors", influencing others to help the mentee or protégé's advancement.

To be an effective mentor, coaches need to possess:

- a) **An innate spirit of helping the wards and maintain positive frame of mind.**
- b) **Self motivation and ability to motivate his wards.** Mentoring helps coaches with their own personal development
- c) **Confidence on his wards abilities as well as** ability to critique and challenge mentees in a way that's non-threatening, and help them look at a situation from a new perspective.
- d) **Developing critical abilities among sports persons so that they develop life skills**
- e) **Need to Listen actively** including body language, maintain eye contact, and understand, difficulties encountered. This requires patience, and a willingness to provide help.
- f) **Providing feedback** accurately and objectively summarizing, thereby helping the mentee see a situation from another perspective.

When a youngster takes up a sport for serious pursuits, he needs help to understand what it means to be a professional sportsperson. Typically, a sports person embodies the environment, values of the profession and are self-initiating and self-regulating. Coaches are required to play strategic role in defining professional behavior and conduct. Mentoring helps sports persons plan, develop, and manage their careers. It also helps them become more resilient in times of change, more self-reliant in their careers and more responsible as self-directed learners;

There are generally two accepted forms of sports coaching: directive and non-directive. Directive is a form of coaching whereby the coach teaches and provides feedback and advice. In contrast, non-directive coaching requires the coach to listen, ask questions, explore and probe and allows the person coached to find solutions to problems. In practice, this means that some coaches merely assert their expertise, whereas effective coaches enable individuals to go beyond their previous boundaries. Coaching can be applied to a variety of areas, such as motivating sports persons, problem solving, relationship issues, teambuilding, and supporting staff development. It focuses on what sportspersons being mentored want, what their goal is and how they can achieve it.

### **III. A CRITIQUE ON EXISTING LITERATURE**

Good coaches need to develop systems and matching procedures that take into account the sports preferences of the young person, their family and the nation, and use his professional skills to determine which sport would work best with the young person. Mentors are, therefore, charged with passing on their knowledge and expertise. Importantly, the knowledge transmitted in this way will contain invaluable details about values, beliefs and culture that are hard to acquire through formal training.

In order to yield desired outcomes, it may be necessary for programs to establish mentoring relationships between youth and adults that involve patterns of regular contact over a significant period of time (DuBois & Neville, 1997)

The extent to which mentoring relationships with consistent and sustained patterns of interaction are actually formed in programs therefore represents a potentially important source of variation in outcomes. Grossman & Tierney, 1998).

Linney, (1999) described the characteristics and traits of a good mentor and gave accounts of actual mentoring relationships (formal and informal). The mentor's influence can be subtle, however, requiring the right blend of support, structure, and guidance. Morrow and Styles (1995) found that mentoring relationships tended to fall into two broad categories, labeled developmental and prescriptive. Satisfied pairs—defined by feelings of liking, attachment to, and Fostering Close and Effective Relationships commonality with the other member—were determined to be more developmental” or youth-focused.

Individuals need support and advice and the coaching relationship appears to provide mentees with the appropriate support they need in order to achieve their developmental aims (Whitmore, 2000)

Sosik and Lee (2002) developed a theory of mentoring that proposes effective mentorship fundamentally depends on the mentor's ability to help

solve various complex social problems that arise in the protégé's career.

Young and Perrew (2004) described the impact of perception and attitudes on participation (based on general beliefs and past experiences of participants) of a mentorship programme. Mentoring programs also have differed in their basic goals and philosophy. Thus, whereas some programs have pursued the general goal of promoting positive youth development, others have adopted more focused or instrumental goals relating to areas such as education or employment (Saito & Blyth, 1992)

Smith et al (2005) examined who mentors are as well as what mentors do in four types of organizations (i.e., academic, business, military-armed forces, and military academic organizations). They have identified desirable traits of a good mentor.

Berk et al (2005) have hypothesized a mentoring relationship as one that may vary along a continuum from informal/ short-term to formal/long-term in which faculty with useful experience, knowledge, skills, and/or wisdom offers advice, information, guidance, support, or opportunity to another faculty member or student for that individual's professional development

### **IV. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

Specific research objectives were to examine the extent to which sports coaches perform following responsibilities:

- a) To measure level of commitment to mentoring Provides resources, experts, and source materials in the field
- b) To identify extent of guidance and direction regarding professional issues offered to the sports persons
- c) To explore level of encouraging mentee's ideas and work so as to provide constructive and useful critiques of the mentee's work
- d) To measure the extent to which coaches Challenge their sports mentee to expand his or her abilities

### **V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The Mentorship Effectiveness Scale developed by the Ad Hoc Faculty Mentoring Committee, Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing (2002) was tested for its reliability and validity. The scale was suitably adapted to cater to the specific needs of the sports persons. The purpose of this adapted scale was to evaluate the mentoring characteristics of the sports coaches of team sports, who have developed a professional, mentor/mentee relationship with the school sports persons. The student respondents were asked to rate on Likert Scale of 1 to 7, with 1 representing strongly disagree to 7 strongly agree. The descriptive analysis was done to 114 valid responses.

Sports Mentor's Functions	Mean	Std. Dev
1. My mentor was accessible (on and off the sports field).	4.03	0.83
2. My mentor demonstrated professional integrity.	4.29	0.74
3. My mentor demonstrated content expertise in my area of need.	4.04	0.68
4. My mentor was approachable for personal matters.	3.26	0.73
5. My mentor was supportive and encouraging in academic related activities.	3.47	0.59
6. My mentor provided constructive and useful critiques of my sports performance.	4.03	0.97
7. My mentor motivated me to improve my sporting abilities.	4.81	0.92
8. My mentor was helpful in providing direction and guidance on sports related professional issues. (e.g., camps, tournament details, form filling).	4.11	0.76
9. My mentor answered my questions satisfactorily (timely response, clear, comprehensive).	4.13	0.85
10. My mentor acknowledged my contributions appropriately (public applause, contributions, recommendations, awards).	4.07	0.77
11. My mentor suggested/provided appropriate resources (e.g., experts, equipments, source materials).	4.07	0.74
12. My mentor challenged me to extend my abilities (risk taking, try a new Technique, method).	4.86	0.92

The findings reveal that the student pursuing sports as a mean for growth look towards their coaches as motivators (4.81) and for setting stiff targets. The coaches were found lacking in being easily available for consultation off the playing field. The coaches need to mentor students for not only sports related but also life related soft skills.

## VI. RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENHANCE EFFECTIVENESS OF MENTORSHIP

Emerging dynamics of the sporting arena mandates that the sports coaches understand:

1. The needs, interests and empowerment of young people being at the centre of thinking in the planning, development, implementation and evaluation of the sport training. A mentoring relationship is one of mutual trust and respect. Meet regularly, and lead by example. The mentoring conversation may be informal, but treat the overall arrangement with formality and professionalism. If possible, conduct mentoring meetings away from the sports field. A change of environment helps remove the conversation from everyday perspectives.
2. The input of key stakeholders, players, administrators, school principals, sports federations so as to ensure holistic development of the sport. Such approaches recognise that there are many layers, relationships and influences in a young player's life, mentoring being just one.
3. Establishing, developing and nurturing a relationship between the mentor and mentee where the mentor is an equal rather than a sports instructor. Use the mentoring session to exchange views and give the mentee guidance, and don't just give the mentee immediate answers to a problem. A simple answer to a problem is rarely as valuable as understanding how to approach such problems in the future.

4. Cultural, ability and gender sensitive content and processes through a well defined, effective structures of management and governance of training programmes.
5. Effective collaboration and partnering with other agencies and coaches, including psychologists, orthopaedicians, subject teachers etc. Establish some rules or a charter for the mentoring arrangement, with desired outcomes. This could be a set agenda for points to cover, or some performance goals for the mentee to pursue outside of their regular appraisal structure. (One of the key reasons that mentoring can fail is that there's a fundamental misunderstanding about what's expected from the mentor and mentee).
6. Adequate funds to run the sports program over an appropriate length of time, will ensure that the sports coaches also know the time frame within which to deliver results and do mental conditioning of his wards.
7. Monitoring, evaluation and review process must be integrated throughout the coaching programme. Training and development is an ongoing activity, wherein the mentor is the pivot.

## VII. CONCLUSIONS

Mentoring is about transferring information, competence, and experience to mentees, so that they can make good use of this, and build their confidence accordingly. As a mentor, purpose is to encourage, nurture, and provide support, because coaches have already passed through such stages.. The major function of mentoring within these sporting programs is to promote the protégé's development in specific areas and to facilitate successful completion of the program. While these mentoring relationships can produce positive developmental and organizational outcomes, both mentoring programs and relationships sometimes fail due to a variety of causes and problems (e.g., lack of participation, no leadership involvement, poor planning, unrealistic expectations, and "fuzzy" goals). Successful mentoring programs require proper understanding, planning, implementation and evaluation. mentoring enables experienced, highly competent staff to pass their expertise on to others who need to acquire specified skills

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