

# Coaching Excellence

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by Frank Pyke (Ed.)

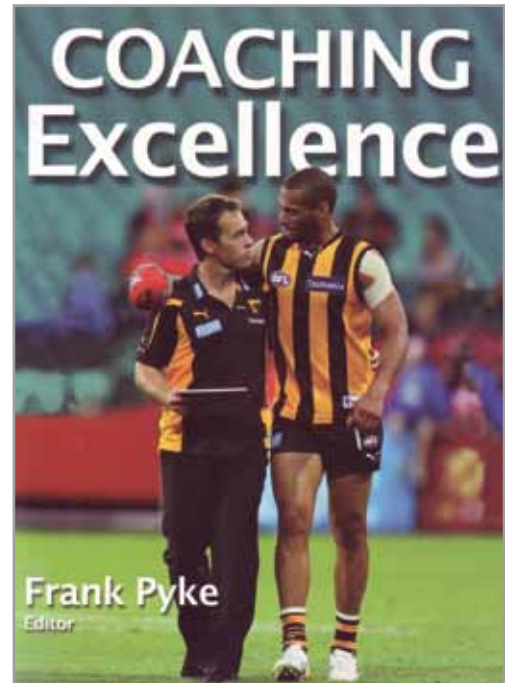
Champaign, Ill.: Human Kinetics, 2013, 272 pp., ISBN: 978-1-4504-2337-3

According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Sports Science and Medicine* by Michael Kent (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., 2005), a coach is a “motivator and teacher of athletes. Ideally, a coach is a moulder of theoretical and practical training, and translator of technical information.” In the same dictionary, coaching is defined as “the organized provision of assistance to an individual athlete or group of athletes to help them develop and improve the performance of their chosen sport.”

This is also roughly the understanding of coach and coaching underlying the texts presented in the compendium *Coaching Excellence* edited by Frank Pike. Eighteen Australian experts<sup>1</sup> were carefully selected to ensure the best knowledge, research and insights for coaches to take and apply in working with their athletes and teams.

This coaching text continues and builds upon a series of popular coaching manuals. The first, *Towards Better Coaching*, was published in 1980 followed by *Better Coaching* in 1991 and 2001. The title *Coaching Excellence* has been chosen for this new manual to reflect the progress that has been made in the profession during the past thirty years and to indicate how expectations of coaches have increased during that time.

The editor of the book, Frank Pyke (deceased November 2011), played a leadership role in sport science, coach education and sport administration in Australia for more than 30 years. From 1972 to 1990 he taught at the University of Western Australia, the Canberra



College of Advanced Education and the Universities of Wollongong and Queensland, the latter as professor and head of the department of human movement studies. After that, he became the first Executive Director of the Victorian Institute of Sport (VIS), a position he held until his retirement from full-time work in 2006. Pyke was also the editor of all three editions of the textbooks used in the National Coaching Education Programme in Australia in 1980, 1991 and 2001. He was awarded an Australian Sports Medal in 2000 and a Life Membership of the Australian Council for Health, Physical

Education and Recreation in 2002. Pyke was inducted into the Sport Australia Hall of Fame in 2003 and received the Mobley International Distinguished Alumni Award from Indiana University in 2010.

It is the basic tenet of this manual that the coaches are at the heart of the involvement in both recreational and high-performance sport. There are substantial demands on them to ensure that, with the increased number of sports now available, a large enough talent pool is available and the people in that pool have a clear pathway through the sport and have the opportunity to maximise their potential. This process requires coaches, and their athletes and teams, to commit to a plan and be prepared to do the hard work necessary to fulfil its objectives. Once people become involved in school, recreational and high-performance programmes, it is imperative that coaches maintain their interest and involvement and minimise participant dropout.

Coaches have the responsibility for ensuring that athletes enjoy participating and improve their skill and fitness while doing so. To fulfil this responsibility, the coach must understand the sport, know the athlete and be able to implement a program that will bring about the improvements required to reach the established performance goals. The coach must also be able to work cooperatively with others connected in the programme, including sporting clubs and associations, schools, parents and particularly in elite programs, the personnel who provide specific services to athletes.

In high-performance sport, one of the greatest challenges for the coach is to ensure that all members of the athlete support team are working in concert. For example, when an athlete receives mixed messages from the coaching, physical conditioning and physical therapy staff about the best way forward with a particular injury, it creates confusion and uncertainty. It is the coach's role to bring the support team together on a regular basis to establish a unified view and communicate this to the athlete. Another continuing problem

for coaches and management in modern sport is ensuring that their athletes are not involved with performance-enhancing drugs and any other illegal or unethical behaviours both within and outside sport.

The time commitment of coaches does not only include planning and supervising the training and competition programme of the athlete or the team, but also coordinating support staff and dealing with administrators, sponsors and the media. Furthermore, the degree of stress experienced is heightened by the public pressure to achieve good results. Coaches must learn to cope by delegating some responsibilities to others, putting their health and family foremost on their list of priorities and ensuring that they have a life outside sport.

In *Coaching Excellence*, the complex field of coaching is dealt with in three parts. Part I ("Being a Coach") describes the ever-expanding role of the modern coach in delivering a high quality program. Emphasis is placed on the importance of social skills, self-awareness, knowledge, experience and a willingness to learn. The management, organisational and communication skills required to have a positive influence both on and off the field are detailed. The qualities of some of Australia's best coaches, past and present, are described, and this part includes valuable comments from some of these coaches and in some cases from athletes who have performed under their tutelage.

Part II ("Managing the Programme") focuses on the principles underlying the planning and coordination of a successful programme. It emphasises the coach's role in encouraging everyone to work together. This involves creating a team-oriented culture within the programme and then managing relationships with all the parties likely to have some influence on it. This section offers advice on how to manage the risks and ethical issues that confront a coach, which is an area that creates continuing problems in modern sport. Not only careful planning, but also critical evaluation of the programme is required as an essential part of ensuring that the best possible outcomes are achieved.

Part III (“Developing the Athlete”) demonstrates the application of Australia’s highly regarded scientific approach to athlete development. It includes evaluating the demands of a wide range of different sports as well as the attributes of the athletes involved and then developing a training programme that meets the mental and physical requirements of each individual. The section presents the most recent information available on specific mental, technical and tactical skill and fitness training programs and does so in a manner that is practical and readily usable by coaches.

The sixteen chapters included in these three parts are entitled as follows:

- Chapter 1: Roles and Responsibilities of a Coach
- Chapter 2: Coaching Styles and Skills
- Chapter 3: Qualities of Respected Coaches
- Chapter 4: Planning and Evaluating the Program
- Chapter 5: Creating a Positive Team Culture
- Chapter 6: Relating to Others
- Chapter 7: Managing Risk
- Chapter 8: Evaluating the Athlete
- Chapter 9: Designing a Training Program
- Chapter 10: Implementing Training Methods
- Chapter 11: Analysing Technique
- Chapter 12: Teaching Sport Skills
- Chapter 13: Sharpening Mental Skills
- Chapter 14: Advocating Appropriate Nutrition
- Chapter 15: Addressing Injuries and Illnesses
- Chapter 16: Nurturing Life Skills

No single resource can contain or convey everything that a coach should know and do. So *Coaching Excellence* does the next best thing. It builds on the basics to provide serious and high-performance-level coaches a wealth of information to become more adept in their central role within the coach-athlete-performance relationship. It is shown how coaches can help youth players develop competence in their sport and confidence in themselves; that they should be mindful of how they behave and how they go about contributing to the holistic development of their athletes.

The book emphasises the following guidelines produced by the Australian Sports Commission for appropriate behaviour for coaches, officials, parents and athletes:

- Operate within the rules and spirit of your sport, promoting fair play over winning at any cost.
- Encourage and support opportunities for people to learn appropriate behaviours and skills.
- Support opportunities for participation in all aspects of the sport.
- Treat each person as an individual.
- Act with integrity and objectivity, and accept responsibility for your decisions and actions.
- Respect the rights and worth of every person regardless of their gender, ability, cultural background or religion.

These guidelines highlight the fact that coaches should accept responsibility for their actions and demonstrate trust, competence, respect, safety consciousness, honesty, professionalism, a belief in equity and good sporting behaviour. This is also the main message of this book the reading of which can be beneficial for coaches at all levels of athletics, no matter whether they work within the Australian sport system or anywhere else.

*Reviewed by Jürgen Schiffer*



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