

MENTORING FOR SPORT COACHES

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Introduction

There is little doubt that sport coaches spend a great deal of their effort mentoring their young athletes. For example, Walton's (1992) book on the lives and philosophies of six expert coaches found that these coaches were more than just teachers of sport skills. They taught athletes life skills that remained ingrained throughout the lives of their protégés. One coach was the legendary American swim tutor, James 'Doc' Counsilman. Walton outlined how Counsilman mentored his swimmers using an adapted version of Maslow's hierarchy of human needs. The following is an example of how he mentored them: 'He took a deep personal interest in them [his swimmers]. He knew their studies and pinned to memory their grade point averages, best swimming times, and best workouts; he knew their goals and aspirations, their girlfriends and their problems' (Walton 1992: 84). There is likely to be little debate that coaches spend a great deal of their career mentoring their athletes. However, the topic of coaches being mentored is not as clear and straightforward.

Despite the efforts of the International Council for Coach Education (ICCE) and various coach education programs in different countries, there has historically been a lack of scientific research on optimal ways of developing coaches. The majority of work that exists has focused on the impact of factors such as past athletic experiences, coach education, and informally observing and interacting with other coaches (Bloom *et al.* 1998; Jimenez *et al.* 2009; Schinke *et al.* 1995). Intuitively, one might have expected mentoring to be at the top of that list. To date, literature on mentoring in coaching is limited, although research from around the world has identified the positive elements of coach mentoring. For example, work from Canada (Bloom *et al.* 1998), the United States (Gould *et al.* 1990), Spain (Jimenez *et al.* 2009), Ireland (Bertz and Purdy 2011), Australia (Dickson 2001), and the United Kingdom (Cushion 2006; Jones *et al.* 2003) has professed the value of mentoring for sport coaches. Moreover, these studies have all called for the development of structured mentoring programs in their countries. Despite this, there does not seem to be the same level of support and urgency that appears to exist in other professions. For example, pilots, doctors, and police officers were known to spend years refining their skills under the guidance and supervision of experienced and knowledgeable colleagues who ensured they were allowed to grow and develop in an environment designed to minimize errors and build knowledge and