

Head Coaches' Perceptions on the Roles, Selection, and Development of the Assistant Coach

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The purpose of the study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the characteristics head coaches looked for when hiring their head assistant coach, the main roles and responsibilities assigned to assistants, and the techniques and behaviors used to develop them. Data were obtained through interviews with six accomplished Canadian University head football coaches. Results indicated head coaches hired loyal assistants who possessed extensive football knowledge that complimented their own skill sets. Once hired, head coaches had their assistant coaches help them with recruiting, managing a major team unit, and developing athletes. They helped advance their assistants' careers through personal mentorships which included exposure to external sources of knowledge such as football camps and coaching conferences. These results represent one of the first empirical accounts of head coaches' perceptions on hiring and developing head assistant coaches.

Keywords: coaching, leadership, mentoring

In North America, coaching university football is a full-time job that involves organizational tasks, preparing and training athletes for competition, scouting opponents, community work, fundraising, recruiting student-athletes, and working with several assistant coaches (Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria, & Russell, 1995; Davies, Bloom, & Salmela, 2005; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). Specific to the current study, the role of the assistant coach is to support the head coach in all parts of the job (Carter & Bloom, 2009; Côté & Salmela, 1996; Lemyre, Trudel, & Durand-Bush, 2007). For example, Côté and Salmela (1996) noted that head coaches worked closely with their coaching staff to plan practices and delegated responsibilities to their assistant coaches according to their strengths and weaknesses. Further, Carter and Bloom (2009) found that head coaches relied heavily on their assistants' expertise and knowledge for teaching various technical and tactical skills to their athletes. Finally, Lemyre and colleagues (2007) showed that head coaches

strategized with and sought advice from their assistant coaches. Taken together, this body of research has alluded to many of the roles and responsibilities of assistant coaches. However, the primary focus of these studies was to better understand the roles and responsibilities of the head coach, who in turn discussed the importance of their assistant coaches. Research specifically focusing on the roles and responsibilities of assistant coaches is largely underdeveloped.

Between 1970 and 2008, less than two percent of coaching science research specifically focused on assistant coaches (Gilbert, Rangeon, & Bruner, 2012; Gilbert & Trudel, 2004), and there has been no systematic line of research established on this topic. The studies that have been carried out addressed the impact of gender and race on assistant coaches' career opportunities (e.g., Cunningham, Doherty, & Gregg, 2007; Cunningham, Sagas, & Ashley, 2003; Sagas & Cunningham, 2005). Although there is limited empirical research on assistant coaches' roles and responsibilities, there is a wealth of anecdotal literature from well-known coaches on the importance of assistant coaches' (e.g., Billick, 2001; Gilbert, 2012; Parr, 2006). For example, National Football League head coach Bill Belichick provided a comprehensive account of his many years as an assistant football coach and the influential roles his mentor coaches had on his

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