

Successful High-Performance Ice Hockey Coaches' Intermission Routines and Situational Factors That Guide Implementation

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Competitions in many team sports include short breaks (e.g., intermissions, halftime) where coaches have a unique opportunity to make tactical adjustments and communicate with athletes as a group. Although these breaks are significant coaching moments, very little is known about what successful coaches do during this time. The purpose of this study was to examine intermission routines and knowledge of highly experienced and successful National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) ice hockey coaches. A thematic analysis was used to analyze semistructured and stimulated-recall interview data. Results revealed that coaching during intermissions was a continuous process influenced by the coaches' history and personal characteristics. Drawing on these factors, the coaches created an intermission routine that guided them as they analyzed unpredictable situational factors such as their team's performance and the athletes' emotional state. Overall, the results offer a rare glimpse into the intermission strategies of successful coaches in a high-performance setting.

Keywords: coaching, NCAA, qualitative research, stimulated recall

Inspired by true stories, Hollywood films have recounted some of the most memorable sports moments, which highlighted the role of the coach during the intermissions of competition. For instance, *Friday Night Lights* shared the story of an American high school football team. In this movie, Coach Gary Gaines delivered an inspirational speech to his team during halftime of the championship game. Another example came from the movie *Miracle*, which followed the improbable success of the 1980 U.S. men's Olympic ice hockey team. Coach Herb Brooks was shown flipping over a table as a way to inspire and motivate his players during the intermission of an important game. Both of these locker-room speeches appeared to elevate the team's performance. In an academic setting, the influence of coaching behaviors on athlete performance has been one of the most investigated topics in coaching science (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004). Although research has shown that coaches are influential in helping athletes achieve a high level of success (Bloom, Falcão, & Caron, 2014), coaching behaviors during competitions have received limited empirical attention.

To date, research on coaching behaviors both before and during competitions has primarily been conducted from an athlete's perspective (e.g., Breakey, Jones, Cunningham, & Holt, 2009; Vargas & Short, 2011). Before the game starts, athletes look to their coach to help them prepare physically and mentally. For instance, a coach's pregame speech can affect the athletes' efficacy and performance (Vargas & Short, 2011; Vargas-Tonsing & Guan, 2007) through the use of both informational content (Vargas-Tonsing, 2009) and an emotionally persuasive speech (Vargas-Tonsing & Bartholomew, 2006). During the game, research on athletes has reported that coaches help them succeed by providing effective forms of instruction and feedback (Becker,

2009). Good feedback from the coach has shown to increase an athlete's motivation, self-esteem, and performance (Carpentier & Mageau, 2013). In addition, athletes have highlighted the importance of a coach's staying calm during competition (Becker, 2009; Gould & Maynard, 2009).

According to coaches, maintaining routines throughout competition has helped them succeed under extreme amounts of pressure (Bloom, Durand-Bush, & Salmela, 1997; Olusoga, Maynard, Hays, & Butt, 2012). For instance, as a part of their pregame routine coaches arrive at the competition site early to mentally review game plans and rehearse potential scenarios (Bloom et al., 1997). These routines are not just limited to before the game, as research has shown coaches' behaviors were guided by predetermined procedures throughout the game, as well (Debanne & Fontayne, 2009; Debanne, Fontayne, & Bourbousson, 2014; Mouchet, Harvey, & Light, 2014). The routines are an important aspect of coaching in competition because coaches' interactions with athletes suffer when they are unable to cope with stress and focus more on results (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003; Olusoga et al., 2012).

Coaches interact continuously with their athletes throughout competition by providing feedback (Becker, 2009), implementing strategies taught in practice (Bloom, 1996), and making key tactical decisions and adjustments (Debanne & Fontayne, 2009; Gould, Guinan, Greenleaf, & Chung, 2002). Research has shown that when making in-game decisions, successful coaches analyze and consider both the game situation and player performance (Smith & Cushion, 2006), in addition to their athletes' physical and psychological readiness (Gould & Maynard, 2009). While research on coaching in competition has primarily focused on interactions with athletes during the game (e.g., Debanne & Fontayne, 2009; Mouchet et al., 2014; Smith & Cushion, 2006), intermissions are also a crucial time in competition when coaches interact with their team.

In the sport of ice hockey, for example, where every game includes two regularly scheduled intermissions, research shows that interactive decision-making strategies are influenced by a

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