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EFFECTIVE COACHING



CHAPTER

Chapter 2

Effective Coaching

ROLE OF THE COACH

The coach of an Australian Football club holds a dynamic and vital position within that club. Coaches represent players, officials and supporters as the figurehead of the club. The coach must be a leader, continually analysing, studying, planning and assessing the game as it develops, while being aware of the capabilities of his/her team. The coach must strive to bring out the best result possible for the group of players under his/her direction and develop the team as both a group and as individuals.

The game's emphasis on running and possession football has developed to an extent that at every level players are aware of the need to be fit, skilled and versatile. Players are expected to be able to adopt attacking and defensive roles regardless of the positions they play. It is the coach's responsibility to ensure the development of these attributes to a level equivalent to the age and ability of members of the team. The increased importance of tactics to maintain possession and restrict the opposition has placed even greater emphasis on the coach's role in creating a successful team. The coach must be able to communicate well with his/her team and create the correct environment for players to perform at their optimum level.

Coaches have many diverse roles which can vary in importance according to the age group of the team. In simple terms, the role of the coach is to plan, act and review. This is an ongoing process aimed at improving the qualities of the coach and the performance of players. The basic roles of an effective coach are:

- **Manager** – dealing with a wide range of players, officials and supporters.
- **Leader** – assigned to organise training, match-day events and team morale.
- **Teacher** – instructing football skills and team tactics.
- **Mentor** – behind every successful person there is one elementary truth: somewhere, somehow, someone cared about their growth and development. This person was their mentor.
- **Selector** – involved in the planning and selection of the best team to represent the club.
- **Communicator** – providing clear instruction and feedback to the team and individual players.
- **Psychologist** – dealing with various individual personalities within the team.
- **Public relations** – representing the club at official functions and community activities.
- **Student** – continually seeking to upgrade knowledge of the game.
- **Sports trainer** – with a basic knowledge of injury prevention, care and management.
- **Planner** – annual integrated plan covering pre-season, competition, physical, technical, tactical, psychological, workload volumes and intensities etc.
- **Motivator** – including engendering players' acceptance of own responsibility.
- **Goal-setter** – making sure that goals are achievable, challenging and measurable.
- **Creating a successful learning environment** – focusing on what you can control; recognising individual and group needs.

The coach is the role model so it is important to set standards in everything you do. With this, mutual respect will be gained from all involved in the game. This not only refers to being knowledgeable about the game, but also has to do with coaching within the laws, having respect for the abilities of opponents and the umpires as well as abiding by the AFL Coaches' Code of Conduct. A coach who is punctual, organised and willing to provide positive feedback to players will improve the playing standard at a rapid rate.



COACHING STYLES

In a study of over 500 coaches, five distinct categories of coaching styles were identified. There is, however, no one perfect style that leads to success. Most coaches often possess certain characteristics of each coaching type, but should be aware of the advantages and disadvantages of the various coaching styles. If a coach is able to identify some of his/her shortcomings, they are in a position to improve.

Coaching style	Characteristics
Authoritarian coach	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Strong disciplinarian.• Well organised.• Good team spirit when winning.• Dissension when losing.• May be feared or disliked.
Business-like coach	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Intelligent, logical approach.• Well planned and organised.• Up to date with new techniques.• Expects 100 per cent effort all the time.• May set goals too high for some team members.
Nice guy coach	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Well liked.• Players sometimes take advantage of the coach's co-operative nature.• Gets on well with the players of similar temperament.
Intense coach	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Emphasises winning.• High anxiety often transmitted to players.
Easy-going coach	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Very casual.• Gives impression of not taking the game seriously.• May not be prepared to drive his/her team at training.• Well liked but may seem to be inadequate in some situations.

COACHING PHILOSOPHY

Coaches have a significant impact on both the quality of performance and the quality of enjoyment that players achieve in football. Coaches largely determine whether the experience in football is a positive or negative, and whether the players gain or lose self-esteem. It is important that coaches develop a general approach or philosophy towards coaching that will ensure a consistent, positive impact on their players.

It is imperative that a coaching style and philosophy takes into consideration the age and ability of players in the team. A coaching philosophy is individual and reflects both the coach's personality and coaching objectives. However, it should be reasonably constant over time and for different groups of players. The goals of each player or group may vary and the achievement strategies associated with those goals may also vary, but the underlying philosophy of coaching should remain constant.

It is unrealistic to expect someone who is starting coaching to have a clear philosophy to apply, however, developing a successful coaching philosophy should be based on:

- Knowing why you coach.
- Knowing why players participate.
- Considering the opinions of others.
- Developing a set of personal guidelines on how you will operate as a coach.

Developing a philosophy of coaching also centres on the concept of respect. Essentially:

- A coach must respect the players and provide all participants with equal opportunities.

A coach should also encourage players to:

- Respect the principles of fair play.
- Respect opponents.
- Respect officials and their decisions.

In developing a coaching philosophy, players must be the overriding consideration. The sport belongs to the players and coaches should therefore have a player-centred approach. It is the coach's responsibility to assist players to set and achieve goals. Coaching goals may be as simple as creating enjoyment or as demanding as striving to win. The coach should endeavour to ensure that the goals set by players are both achievable and in line with the overall coaching philosophy. It may help coaches to clarify their coaching philosophy by writing it down. The content will be based on the values and beliefs that come from your experience and direct your coaching.

It is not enough to merely have a coaching philosophy. As coach, you must also consider how the philosophy will be communicated to players, parents and administrators. It is also reasonable to consider how to ensure that the coaching philosophy is followed and what you will do if your coaching philosophy is challenged. That is, how will you deal with the different values of different people?

COACHING QUALITIES OF SUCCESSFUL COACHES

Coaching qualities	Examples
1. Professional preparation	
1.1 Knowledge	Knowledge of football and ability to use it in coaching. Knowledge of coaching technique.
1.2 Planning	Plans for each practice. No surprises, players know where they stand in the team. Establishes rules and regulations for players. Flexible – able to handle disruption to the coaching format, playing personnel, training venues, travel etc. Players lose respect for a rigid thinker unable to change with the times. Encourages players to set personal goals. Continually seeks ways to strengthen the program. Pre-plans the use of staff and facilities.
1.3 Mental and physical well-being of players	Shows concern for the physical and mental well-being of the players. Is a trouble shooter – keeps on the lookout for warning signs.
2. Control of emotional environment	
2.1 Self control	Maintains self control at all times. Is stable, honest and straight forward. Maintains some distance with players while encouraging a warm congenial atmosphere. Does not play the role of a dictator and run the squad like an army drill instructor. Does not succumb to apathy and start believing that other things in life are more important. Shows 'strength of character' e.g. When a key player or two is lost, the coach does not write off the season. Is not easily intimidated by disgruntled supporters. Does not become more irritable and short-tempered while coaching than at any other time. Does not give up when things go wrong during a contest. Does not hold grudges against certain players.

2.2 Personal characteristics	<p>Sense of humour and compassion.</p> <p>Good listening and motivational skills.</p> <p>Thinks clearly in pressure situations.</p> <p>Flexible personality – able to coach over a long period of time and cope with different individuals.</p> <p>A model of socially acceptable behaviour.</p> <p>Has enthusiasm to instil confidence in players.</p> <p>Assumes the role of a strong supporter of players and system.</p> <p>Seeks to improve. Attends coaching courses, seminars and supports accreditation.</p>
3. Communication	
3.1 Handling of discipline	<p>Keeps the team under control.</p> <p>Is fair and consistent at all times.</p> <p>Refrains from embarrassing players publicly.</p>
3.2 Public and player relations	<p>Leaves the door open for discussion.</p> <p>Holds frequent team meetings – listens to players.</p> <p>Keeps administration and maintenance staff informed and establishes lines of responsibility.</p> <p>Communicates regularly with coaches of the other clubs and the coaches association.</p>
4. Player preparation	
4.1 Training	<p>Plans well for each practice.</p> <p>Maintains variety and specificity in training.</p> <p>Urges players to assist each other and take responsibility during training.</p> <p>Provides immediate feedback following the completion of tasks.</p> <p>Understands the basic training routines and their relevance to team play.</p>
4.2 Game preparation	<p>Develops strategies to cope with a variety of opposition strategies, opposition strengths and weaknesses and game significance.</p> <p>Effectively uses and analyses statistics.</p> <p>Is versed in the most effective styles of play – prepared to listen to advisors and adopt suggestions of significant others.</p> <p>Has extensive experience of other team styles of play.</p> <p>Efficiently manages post-game discussions and analysis with players, media and supporters.</p>
4.3 Motivation	<p>Accurately assesses player anxiety, mood changes, stress levels and feelings of competence.</p> <p>Understands the principles of arousal as they relate to player performance.</p> <p>Avoids holding grudges with players.</p> <p>Can prevent the ‘stars’ from becoming egomaniacs by treating them like all other players.</p>
5. Recruitment	<p>Willing to devote time to rigorously pursue young talent.</p> <p>Establishes a criteria for player recruitment.</p>

COACHING AND THE LAW

The law touches all aspects of our lives and sport is no exception.

The issue of sports safety and the legal responsibility of the coach is an extremely important one. The following information outlines some of the legal issues as they relate to coaching. **Please note this information should not be regarded as legal advice.**

COACHING: A LEGAL RESPONSIBILITY

By accepting a coaching position, you have made a commitment to your players. You have:

- Indicated you possess coaching and other related skills.
- Indicated you will maintain your skills at a level equal to the skills of other competent coaches in your field.

Some injuries in football are inevitable. However the responsibility of your management of players should not assume such intimidating proportions that you give coaching away, or unduly restrict your programs to the point where players' needs are not being met.

Negligence

Negligence consists of falling below the standard of care required in the circumstances to protect others from the unreasonable risk of harm. In the coaching environment, negligence can be defined as a coach's breach of any duty of care owed to a player and where the breach results in actual damage to that player which should have been foreseen by a reasonable and prudent coach.

The court, in determining whether there is a duty of care owed by a coach and what that standard of care is, will ask: Has the coach failed to provide the standard of care to a player that a reasonable and prudent coach would? The court would look at what a competent coach could be expected to anticipate under the circumstance relevant to the case.

Care

A coach should, under all circumstances:

- Take all necessary precautions to prevent injuries from occurring.
- Treat injuries correctly.
- Ensure the treatment provided prevents further injury.
- Take no action that could cause injury.

A reasonable and prudent coach should provide care based on what should be known about the sport and/or the injury. Ignorance is no excuse.

Other Areas

In better understanding legal issues surrounding coaching, it is important to recognise that there are a number of areas of Commonwealth and State legislation that have an impact on the coaching environment. These include discrimination, harassment and child protection.

Discrimination

There are four main types of discrimination that may affect football clubs:

- Racial and religious discrimination
- Sex/gender discrimination
- Disability discrimination
- Infectious diseases discrimination

Harassment

Harassment consists of offensive, abusive, belittling or threatening behaviour that is directed at a person because of a particular characteristic, usually sex, disability or race.

Child protection

Greater attention has been given to young sports participants and their welfare recently and several states have passed Child Protection Acts. While these vary from state to state, they have common principles designed to protect the safety and well being of children. Generally, the key principles include awareness of the issues and procedures that are in place and open communication to increase awareness and manage the issue.



PROVIDING CARE

In addition to applying that careful parent test (i.e. the way you would act with your own child), carrying out the following steps should assist you to be a competent, reasonable and prudent coach:

The following table is a checklist for coaches to ensure appropriate care is provided to your players.

Provide a safe environment	Facilities and equipment must be safe for both the users and others involved in competition. Adverse weather conditions must also be taken into consideration during competition and training sessions.
Activities must be adequately planned	Impaired learning ability and injury may be the result of unplanned practice sessions. Using the appropriate progressions in teaching a new skill, especially potentially dangerous skills, is imperative.
Players must be evaluated for injury and capacity	Players with an injury or incapacity should not be expected to perform any potentially harmful activity. Players should never be forced to take part in any activity that they do not wish to. Individual differences must be taken into account.
Young players should not be mismatched	Young players should be matched not only according to age, but also height, weight and maturity. Skill levels and experience should also be considered.
Safe and proper equipment should be provided	Existing codes and standards for equipment should be met and all equipment should be kept in good order. It should always be adequately repaired so that it is safe to use at all times.
Players must be warned of the inherent risks of the sport	The inherent risks of any sport can only be accepted by the participants if they know, understand and appreciate those risks. In some situations, even such a warning may not be enough: for example, where young people are involved in a school supervised activity.
Activities must be closely supervised	Adequate supervision is necessary to ensure the practice environment is as safe as possible. Each sport will have its own specific requirements in this regard.
Coaches should know first aid	Coaches should have knowledge of basic emergency procedures and keep up to date on them. Coaches should know STOP (Stop, Talk, Observe, Prevent further injury) and RICER (Rest, Ice, Compression, Elevation and Referral) procedures for managing injuries. Coaches should have a written emergency plan and ensure that appropriate medical assistance is available. At the very least, coaches should ensure that nothing is done which could aggravate any injury.
Develop clear, written rules for training and general conduct	Many injuries are the result of fooling around in change rooms and training venues. Clear written rules should be developed for general conduct and behavior in such situations.
Coaches should keep adequate records	Adequate records are useful aids to planning and are essential in all cases of injury. Record cards should be kept on all players, including relevant general and medical information and progress reports. Accident reports (not diagnoses) should be made as soon as possible after each injury occurs.

MEASURING AND IMPROVING YOUR COACHING EFFECTIVENESS

Australian Football is continually changing; rules change, techniques change, equipment is refined and coaching methods, including the application of sport sciences, evolve. Coaches must keep abreast of these changes and adapt their coaching accordingly. All coaches have to know if they are effective or ineffective, independent of the ability of the playing group. The following techniques can assist coaches in measuring and improving their coaching effectiveness.

Coach self-reflection

Unless coaches can arrange for someone to observe and analyse them on a regular basis, the self-reflection method is the only method that can be used to confirm the effectiveness of their coaching. Self-reflection in coaching is a process where coaches compare their current practice against an ideal set of practices, using a systematic procedure to make comparisons between real and ideal.

Video analysis

Video analysis is another effective tool that assists in the self-reflection process because videotape provides permanent images that can help with in-depth analysis and evaluation. It can also help to identify areas in need of improvement and can also be used to plan for such improvement.

Video self-analysis is a six-step process:

1. Recording – videotape a coaching session.
2. Reflecting – review the tape to find a suitable segment, then analyse the segment against the ideal model.
3. Consulting – invite a mentor to ‘audit’ the analysis.
4. Planning – design a plan to improve.
5. Implementing – carry out the plan.
6. Follow-up recording – videotape a follow-up coaching session and check that the plan has worked.

Mentoring

Effective coaches have often had the good fortune to have been coached by a very good coach. On becoming coaches themselves they may have imitated many of the coaching behaviours and methods used by their previous coaches. This process can be carried on into a coach’s current development through a mentor.

A mentor is usually an experienced person who works individually with a less experienced coach. A good mentor is someone, chosen by a coach, whom the coach respects for their knowledge, attitudes and mentoring skills to assist them in their development. The mentor asks questions about the methods used and guides the coach toward a better understanding of his or her coaching.

In selecting a mentor, a coach can reflect on who are the people in their field (not necessarily restricted to other coaches) they admire most, why they admire these people, and what are the admirable qualities they possess. The answers to these questions will direct coaches to suitable mentors, with whom they can work formally or informally to develop their own unique skills and attributes.

BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION

It is sometimes just as difficult to modify coaching behaviour as it is to modify player behaviour. Coaches who are attempting to modify their own behaviour should try the following strategies:

- Identify the behaviour to be modified.
- Establish the characteristics of the new behaviour.
- Look at models of the new behaviour.
- Assess how important the change is – how will it affect the coach’s effectiveness?
- Obtain feedback about the behaviour.
- Reassess the effects of the change on all coaching tasks.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The role of the coach has broadened immensely in recent times and there are a number of ethical issues they have to deal with, e.g. drugs in sport, harassment, fair play, cheating, eating disorders, judging when a player should return from injury and respect for officials. The AFL has introduced a Coaches’ Code of Conduct which provides behavioural standards for coaches coaching Australian Football.



THE AFL COACHES' CODE OF CONDUCT

I understand that as an integral component of my accreditation, I must maintain a standard of behaviour and conduct in the best interests of the game and the players/staff in my care.

In representing myself in an honest manner, and without bringing the coaching profession or the game into disrepute, I will endeavour to uphold the following to the best of my ability:

1. I will respect the rights, dignity and worth of all individuals within the context of my involvement in Australian Football, including refraining from any discriminatory practices on the basis of race, religion, ethnic background, or special ability/disability.
2. I will abide by and teach the AFL Laws of the Game and the Rules of my Club and League/Association.
3. I will be reasonable in the demands I make on the time commitments of the players in my care, having due consideration for their health and well-being.
4. I will be supportive at all times and I will refrain from any form of personal abuse or unnecessary physical contact with the players in my care.
5. I will have due consideration for varying maturity and ability levels of my players when designing practice schedules, practice activities and involvement in competition.
6. I will avoid overplaying the talented players aiming to maximise participation and enjoyment for all players regardless of ability. Where I am responsible for players in the 5-12 age group, I will strive to ensure that all players gain equal playing time.
7. I will stress and monitor safety always.
8. In recognising the significance of injury and sickness, I will seek and follow the physician's advice concerning the return of injured or ill players to training.
9. I will endeavour to keep informed regarding sound principles of coaching and skill development, and of factors relating to the welfare of my players.
10. I will at all times display and teach appropriate sporting behaviour, ensuring that players understand and practise fair play.
11. I will display and foster respect for umpires, opponents, coaches, administrators, other officials, parents and spectators.
12. I will ensure that developing players are involved in a positive environment where skill learning and development as priorities are not overshadowed by a desire to win.
13. I reject the use of performance enhancing substances in sport and will abide by the guidelines set forth in the AFL DRUG POLICY.

I agree to the following terms:

1. I agree to abide by the AFL Coaches' code of Conduct.
2. I acknowledge that the AFL, or a body affiliated with the AFL, may take disciplinary action against me if I breach the code of conduct. I understand that the AFL, or a body affiliated with the AFL, is required to implement a complaints handling procedure in accordance with the principles of natural justice, in the event of an allegation against me.
3. I acknowledge that disciplinary action against me may include de-registration from the AFL National Coaching Accreditation Scheme.

Note. This Coaches' Code of Conduct is to be signed and conformed to as part of the accreditation requirements of the AFL. Coaches should be aware that, in addition to this Code, they may be obliged to sign a further Code of Conduct/Ethics with their Club and/or League.