

THE NEED TO ESTABLISH CORDIAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COACHES AND SPORT PSYCHOLOGISTS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The paper x-rays the functions of the coach and those of the sport psychologist in the enhancement of athletes' performance. The various functions of the coach who is the leader, mentor, role model, teacher etc. The functions of the sports psychologist are also enumerated in the article such as psyching of athletes, motivation, optimizer etc. The article further examined the areas of seeming friction or misunderstanding of the roles of sports psychologists by most Nigerian coaches, suggestions are made to strike an understanding between the two sets of professionals to enhance the performance of Nigerian athletes.

Key Words: Coach, Sport psychologist, Leadership, Coaching roles, Optimizer.

Introduction

To attain peak performance in sport competitions there is a great need for collaboration between all the institutions or groups involved in the training of athletes.

The world has gone beyond isolated physical exertion of athletes and turn to scientific training. Various groups involved in the process of training of athletes such as coaches, sport psychologists, exercise physiologists, medical doctors, physiotherapists, sport sociologists. etc must cooperate among themselves. Of these groups sport psychologists and coaches are two outstanding groups that assist the athlete to attain optimal performance in the sport of choice. These two sets of professionals have various roles to play in bringing out the best out of the athletes.

It then becomes necessary to examine in this paper the various roles played by these two professionals and see why there is need for greater collaboration between them for the good of the athletes in particular and our dear country Nigeria in general.

a. Definition of Sport Coach

In sports, a coach is a person involved in the direction, instruction and training of operations of a sports team or of individual sports people. A coach may also be a teacher according to (Wikipedia2017).

b. Three common skills of a coach:

1. *Communication:* This plays a main part in any sport because it's the way the coach and players get points across to each other. A coach should have good communication skills which involve talking clearly to others, also listening to the things players have to say, this could be both on and off the Pitch. For example if a coach wants to tell a player something during a session he will need to explain what he wants to do clearly so he understands his role. Whereas off the pitch it could be about a player's personal life and you need to listen to take what he's saying. The coach will also have to give a team talk so he will have to be confident and get across to the player's what he wants from them.
2. *Organization:* This is another common skill for a coach to be well organized; they will have to do this both on and off the field of play. On the pitch they will need to set out sessions for the team to help them improve, this will also include planning sessions before hand to make sure that it runs correctly. Also off the field they need to ensure the players are safe at all times.
3. *Time Management:* As a coach you need to be good at managing yours and the player's time this also may include organization like where the players need to be at what certain time. Time management of a session can vary depending on the amount of intensity and the coach needs to know when enough is enough. The coach should also consider the time it will take to get involved in an away match. He should then consider getting enough time for warm up so that the players will be ready for the game. This is as outlined by (achiesgiveadvice2009)

The Roles of Coaches

What roles do coaches play in training of athletes for peak performance

"A coach's primary responsibility is to motivate the student or client to achieve their potential in any area or areas that need improvement. They also develop specific skill sets and goals important to the job or type of recreation. Athletic coaches prepare athletes of all types and skill levels for competition." (Sokanu 2017)

The roles of the coach is not just coaching, sport coaches assist athletes in developing to their full potential. They are responsible for training athletes in a sport by analyzing their performances instructing in relevant skills and by providing encouragement. They are also responsible for the guidance of the athlete in life and their chosen sport. (topendsport2017).

The roles of the coach are many which include the following amongst so many others; instructor, assessor, friend, mentor, facilitator, chauffeur, demonstrator, adviser, supporter, fact finder, planner and leader.

Let's examine these roles one by one

- i. *Instructor:* The coach as an instructor teaches the athletes techniques and skills of the sport. He plans the strategy to be applied in various structures during competition and off season.
- ii. *Assessor:* The coach assesses the individual as well as the general team performance. This assessment enables him to device means of improving on both individual and team performance to achieve optimal performance.
- iii. *Friend:* The coach must thrive in every situation to be friendly with the athletes he is handling. Performance improves by the friendly disposition of the coach towards individual athletes as well as the team. The coach is a friend of the athletes.
- iv. *Mentor:* The coach must mentor the athletes under his control. As a mentor he sees to the progress of his athletes in the sport he is coaching. He supervises them to achieve greater height in their sporting career and possible future endeavour.
- v. *Facilitator:* The coach acts as a facilitator to the athletes. He acts as the catalyst to make things happen between management and the athletes
- vi. *Chauffer:* Most times the coach becomes the athletes' driver. In cases where the athletes are not mobile, the coach does that job of driving the athlete to and from training sessions and even to and from competition venues.
- vii. *Demonstrator:* In teaching skills you demonstrate how such skills should be executed. The coach does the demonstration of such skill.
- viii. *Adviser:* The coach is the chief adviser to the athlete in most situations. The athlete sees the coach as a father figure as such he is in a better position to advice the athlete on issues that need advice.
- ix. *Supporter:* The coach does the job of supporting his athletes when he needs such support. Encouraging him when it seems the going is not going as planned. The coach should provide the atmosphere that the athlete will see him as his supporter always when the need arises.
- x. *Fact Finder:* The coach is the fact finder in his sport. He should be able to find out the latest development about his sport. Rule changes available, competitions/championships etc.
- xi. *Motivator:* The coach acts as a motivator to his athletes if his attitude in training and outside training. His training programme is meant to motivate the athletes to forge ahead for optimal performance.
- xii. *Organizer:* The coach should be a good organizer. He programmes the athletes; provide activities out routine training for his athletes.
- xiii. *Planner:* One of the duties of a coach is to be a good planner. He plans programmes for the athletes to be sure that they are properly trained with well planned out programmes. These are some of the duties the coach carries out to bring the best out of the athletes.

Most athletes are highly motivated and therefore the task is to maintain that motivation and to generate excitement and enthusiasm.

The coach will need to be able to assist athletes to prepare training programs, communicate effectively with athletes, assist athletes to develop new skills, use evaluation tests to monitor training progress and predict performance. There, you can see that it is a very difficult task and requires a very special person.

However, since leadership is the key to coaching, it is necessary to critically examine the concept.

Leadership

Leadership is a very powerful concept that has about 150 definitions. However, over the years definitions of leadership seem to be changing reflecting the prevailing conditions. According to Straub (1990) in the 1950s coaching leadership was defined as a form of dominance sort of in which players gave up their individual ability and placed their trust in the coach. Today, leadership is seen to be more of an influence process in which the leader helps guide athletes to achieve individual and team goals. Straub (1990) further said although leaders perform many managerial functions such as planning, recruiting and rescheduling effective leadership is much more than management. Whereas management is the process of interpersonal influence. It should be noted that some leaders i.e coaches either over manage or underlead teams. This stems from the fact that some coaches are much disciplined, organized, authoritative, punctual etc, while others appear to be what can be termed free spirits who let their reactions dictate their actions. The coach's personality plays a very significant role in his leadership of a team. Straub (1990) furthermore said effective leaders try to blend general leadership qualities with their own unique leadership style. They tend to possess the following characteristics:- self-confident, flexible, self-reliant, good oriented, realistic, good at resolving conflicts, persuasive, optimistic, good communicators, and in tune to the needs and motivations of their team and staff.

One of the greatest qualities of a good coach is to be an empathic leader.

This quality enables a coach to understand how his/her athletes think and feel and leads the athletes to their goals. Most often, athletes expect the coach to tell them what they have to do to succeed but they are turned off by most coaches who insult, scream and shout at them.

Definition of Sport Psychology

Various definitions of sport psychology abound by various authors.

For instance Ikulayo (1990) defines it as an attempt to study individuals in sport situations, analyze and explain or describe in order to modify, alter or predict behavior through various psychological means.

Anshel (1990) defined sport psychology as a science that deals with the psychological and emotional aspects of physical performance. In the context of sport, it is the ability to

describe, explain, and predict behavior in the environment of competitive athletics. This is carried out by applying principles of psychology in a sport setting. He further defined sport psychology as a science that studies human behavior in the context of competitive sport. How behavior (performance) is usually affected by three major factors namely, the athlete, the team leader i.e. (the coach) and the environment in which these individuals interact. Similarly, Straub (1978) defines sport psychology as an applied psychology that is the science of psychology applied to athletes and athletic situation.

Sport psychology is a proficiency that uses psychological knowledge and skill to address optional performance and well being of athletes, developmental and social aspects of sports, participation, and systematic issues associated with sports settings and organizations.(American Psychological Association 2017).

Skills and procedures utilized: this proficiency helps protect the public by ensuring that those who seek services receive them from qualified individuals. The proficiency provides a recognized set of standards to guide appropriate training of psychologists who wish to practice sport psychology. Many strategies and procedures are used by sport psychology proficiency to address problems faced by athletes and sports participants. Some of principal areas include:

- ❖ Cognitive and behavioural skills training for performance enhancement. Goal setting imagery and performance planning: concentration and attention control strategies: development of self confidence, self esteem and competence in sports, cognitive behavioural self-regulation techniques: emotion management, sportsmanship and leadership skills.
- ❖ Counseling and clinical interventions: Athletic motivation, eating disorders and weight management, substance abuse, grief, depression, loss and suicide, overtraining and burn out, sexual identity issues: aggression and violence, athletic injury and rehabilitation: Career transitions and identity crises.
- ❖ Consultation and training: Team building, sports organization consultation: systems interventions with parents and families involved in youth sports participation, education of coaches regarding motivation, interpersonal and leadership skills and talent development, education of coaches and administrators regarding early identification and prevention of psychological difficulties.

The Roles of Sport Psychologists

Vipene and Amasiatu (2007) identified the following as the roles of the sport psychologist.

1. *Motivation of athletes:* One of the foremost duties of the sports psychologist is to motivate athletes in order to spur them up to peak performance in sport. The sports psychologist should be able to identify levels of performance of the individual by knowing the arousal levels of the participants so as to maximally utilize it to enhance peak performance.

2. *Psyche athletes:* This can be done through various means, such as through pep-talks. Though all athletes may not need it but it is necessary to study them individually and identify those who will need it.
3. *Mental training of athletes:* Athletes can be trained mentally through mental rehearsals, concentration, and use of self statements to encourage one's self.
4. *Stress management:* Management of stress through various means such as the use of progressive relaxation, use of music, etc are taught by the sport psychologist to the athlete. The sports psychologist also assist in training the athlete to acquire some specialized skills for coping with all sorts of stress associated with competitions.
5. *Welfare:* The general welfare and benefit accruable to participants in sports are duties of the sport psychologist. The sports psychologist also serves as a welfare officer in terms of suggesting to both management and trainers what will be good for participants such as adequate medical care, improved sanitary conditions, proper feeding, etc. the sport psychologist also serves as athlete's confidant.

Singer (1984) said the following are the potential roles and functions of the sports psychologist:

6. *Scientists and Scholars:* These roles are indirect to both athletes and coaches. The scientist contributes what the applied sport psychologist uses to directly influence athletes and coaches. Sports psychology draws from scientific activity in psychology. This, enables the sport psychologist provide information and guidelines that would be useful to coaches and athletes.
7. *Intermediaries:* There are a lot of persons involved in bringing up an athlete. These are coaches, teachers, medical doctors, nutritionist etc. the sport psychologist can assist in serving as a liaison between these groups for proper team cohesion. This role is necessary and tasking. It requires that all the parties involved must have confidence in the sport psychologist. When there is a breakdown in communication between these various persons the sports psychologist is there to put a bridge. This breakdown happens more between female athletes than within male athletes.
8. *Psycho diagnostician:* It is assumed that psychological factors associated with achievement in sport are usually more difficult to identify and to measure. The psycho-diagnostic sport psychologist is prepared to analyze sport situations to increase chances of success.
9. *Analyst:* The analyst does assessment of the demands imposed on athletes training in particular sport, and to determine whether the practice sessions are preparing the athlete adequately for competition. It should also be noted that at some time practice could be stimulated as if it was the actual competition. The analyst should be able to evaluate to determine special requirements of the athletes. The sports psychologist as an analyst can assist immensely in this regard.
10. *Optimizer:* It is usually said that each sport makes particular demands on an athlete, with regard to such processes as concentration, selective attention, anticipation, etc. in all, from team to individual sports, the mind and the body must be perfectly regulated. The sport psychologist, as a performance optimizer, could assess the

nature of sport and those mental requirements imposed on the individual. He may recommend special programmes such as relaxation, imagery, coping with frustration, etc.

11. *Counselors*: Crisis intervention is one major role of the sport psychologist. Learning how to cope with expected and unexpected situations (problems) frees an individual to concentrate on his training and performance in sports. To find time to train in sport and handle other responsibilities requires planning. The sport psychologist as a counselor can assist an athlete, especially female athletes, in handling and planning; a counselor's role will be very supportive to the athletes. Both individual and team morale can be boosted, performance can improve and life can become more fulfilled for the athlete.
12. *Consultants*: The sport psychologist, being a consultant, can make suggestions to consider the psychological aspects of sports men and women. The role of sport in the lives of athletes, and the necessity to win, need to be placed in proper perspective.
13. *Spokespersons*: The sport psychologist can be a spokesperson for morality and decency in sport. The essence is to improve performance. He can discourage use of ergogenic aids (i.e doping) in sport and can talk to them about patriotism in sports as well.

Relationship between Coaches and Sports Psychologist in Nigeria

Having identified the various roles of the sport psychologist and those of coaches. There seems to be no area of conflict in carrying out their duties ordinarily but in the Nigerian set up there is more to it that meets the eye.

The world over, there is this realization that there should be a synergy between coaches and sport psychologists to bring out the best in the athlete.

Sports psychology specifically has suffered an identity crisis in many countries, much more so than the other sport sciences (Singer, 1984). Sports psychology plays significant roles but because of this set back and ignorance on the part of coaches in this country that services provided by this specialized field of sports studies are not being utilized.

Some nations of the World have employed sports psychologists to take care of the mental, emotional and social welfare of athletes in order to psyche them up for higher performance. It is believed that involvement of sport psychologists has paid off for enhanced sport performance (Ikulayo, 2003; Suin, 1980; Singer, 1986).

The Nigerian situation is quite different. Most times coaches see sport psychologist as their antagonist. The sport psychologist is not treated as part and parcel of the team. The coaches do not see the need for a psychologist in the team because of fear that things not properly done may be corrected.

This situation adversely affects Nigerian athletes because scientific training is not giving to them. Training of athletes has passed the level of physical training alone because the mind controls most of what the human being does. Unless the mind frontier is involved in the training of Nigerian athletes it will be very difficult to achieve any reasonable result in our general performance. For instance, in the past few years it has not been rosy for our country Nigeria in the sporting scene. Let me just draw example from the last International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF), World Championship held in London. The Nigerian flag was not raised even once. i.e the country was not placed on the medal table. That was very humiliating for the giant of Africa.

Recommendations

There is a great need for establishing a cordial work atmosphere between Nigerian coaches and sport psychologist as their functions complement each other.

There is need to sensitize coaches to the fact that only physical training will not be the ultimate needed by athletes that should be complimented with psychological training as it is done in developed countries because the mind has been identified as the last frontier to break, in order to optimize performance in competitive sports.

In this country provision should be made for sports psychologists to be part of training tour for teams is made for government officials who have no technical contribution to make to the team than for sports psychologist is suppose to play prominent role in training the athletes. Yet coaches who are supposed to benefit most from the services provided by the sport psychologist seem not to care about this.

Coaches need to be properly trained in psychological skills as well as motor skills to assist in the absence of a properly trained psychologist to do an intervention job since they cannot replace the sport psychologist.

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