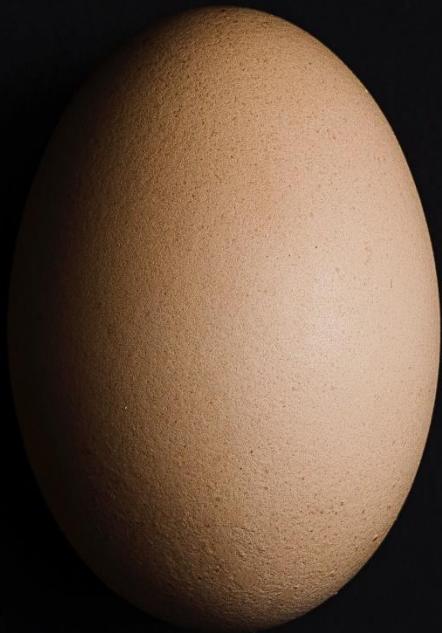


Unscrambling the Egg



Re-Thinking and Re-Shaping Coach Education and Development in Australia



In the 1980s, we thought that Sony Walkman portable, personal audio cassette players were pretty cool.



We were saving and transferring data on floppy discs from one large, bulky expensive home personal computer to another bulky expensive home personal computer.

We could record stuff on television, using this new thing called a VCR – a video cassette recorder and play back our favourite TV shows such as "Cheers," "M.A.S.H," "The Cosby Show," "Family Ties," "Who's The Boss?", "Roseanne" and "Knight Rider," and watch them at our leisure.

And when we got a few spare coins, we could go to a local video arcade and play Pac-Man and Space Invaders – marvelling at this incredible, new gaming technology we were lucky to have lived long enough to see.



The '80s were a special time as well for coach education in Australia.

We saw the formation and growth of the Australian Coaching Council (the A.C.C.). The A.C.C. and many of the national sporting organisations drove the development of the N.C.A.S. (the National Coaching Accreditation Scheme), and coaches all over Australia rushed to become level-1, level-2 and level-3 coaches.

The difference between coach education and development in Australia (and many other places around the world) and these 1980s' cultural icons, is that while we've ditched the floppy discs, the Walkman and the VCR, we're still more or less doing the same things we were doing 30 years ago to develop coaches.

And it's time to change.

Look to the past...to understand the present and forge the future.

Before the 1980s, coach education and development in Australia was pretty haphazard. It was mostly informal, anecdotal and unstructured, with senior coaches passing on their "secrets" to the next generation of coaches.

Rugby coaches taught rugby coaches, who taught rugby coaches, who had played rugby and had learnt coaching from their coach who learnt from his coach and so on and so on.

Following a political commitment to improve Australian sport in the 1980s, the Australian Coaching Council and the Australian Sports Commission invested in the formation of the N.C.A.S. to help improve coaching standards.

It was largely based on the models used in parts of Europe and Canada, and it was primarily based on sports science and periodisation and planning methodologies.

It was believed at the time that the key to coaching more effectively was to be more scientific, more structured and less anecdotal – and that by developing coach accreditation systems that were based on science...and through coaches learning the fundamentals of physiology, biomechanics, psychology, skill-acquisition and nutrition, they would become "better" coaches.

As a result, for the next 30 years, national sporting organisations built overly complex systems to educate coaches about the science of sport. Systems were typified by long text-heavy courses, countless power-point presentations and large coaching manuals containing a lot of superfluous and mostly unnecessary content.

Tudor Bompa's book on periodization became the gospel to a generation of coach educators – who like all true believers spread the "word" throughout the length and breadth of the nation.

It was **coaching coaches by content**.

Real-Life Experience

Recently I was asked to facilitate a workshop with the national coach development managers from many of the national sporting organisations in a particular nation.

I asked them to bring their entry-level coach education resource or level-1 coaching manual to the workshop.

At the commencement of the workshop, I asked them to open their coach education manuals to the first page and to put a red line through anything that could be accessed on the internet for free and immediately.

Over the next 20 minutes, the national coach development managers would effectively "red-line" more than 90% of the content of their manuals.

"Now ask yourself. Why would I – as a coach wanting to learn about coaching and get better at coaching – pay for and attend your course when 90% of what you're going to teach me is available free and conveniently on the net?"

However, the question is:

What is coaching?



WHAT IS COACHING?

The working definition of coaching that I've used for the majority of my professional life is: ***Coaching is the art of inspiring change through emotional connection.***

It is an art form. It is the art of coaching, which – when combined with science of sport and delivered through a strong connection with the individual athlete – creates success.

Coaching is change

You go to a life coach to change your life.

You employ a business coach to change your business.

And athletes work with a coach to change something – usually many things – about their sports preparation and performance.

Coaching is change.

Knowing an athlete's VO₂ max is one thing – but how that knowledge is relevant to a "soccer mum" who wants to coach the local under-9 footy team is in practical terms questionable...almost ludicrous.

Yet...for more than 30 years, this "coach-development-through-science" philosophy has dominated the Australian coach development industry.

Coaching is so much more than lactates, protein bars, Yerkes-Dodson curves and A.T.P. generation equations.

We have many accredited coaches who can measure heart rate, write a program and use an iPad – but in terms of people who practice the "art" of coaching...there's very, very few.



Real-Life Story:

During another recent engagement with a national sporting organisation, I asked a group of coach developers, "What are the key qualities a successful coach must have?" A group brainstorm produced concepts such as "commitment," "dedication," "vision," "passion," "empathy," "creativity," "compassion," "connection" and a long, long list of similar, values, virtues and character traits.

I then asked them to open their training manuals and coach-development resources, and underline anywhere in the manuals where these words – where these values – are mentioned, and where there's a clear way to develop them in the coaches attending their training courses.

My comment was, "If you guys know what coaching is all about, and you know what it takes to be a successful coach – and you're not teaching any of these critical concepts in your coach development programs – what the hell are you actually doing?"

COACHING COACHES TO COACH

THE SHIFT FROM INFORMATION DELIVERY TO CONTEXTUAL DEVELOPMENT

Knowledge – by itself – is now worthless.

Mobile phones, iPads and other tablets and laptops have made knowledge...worthless. Why?

Because things only have value when they're difficult to get.

Today, coaches in most places in the world can access anything, anytime, anywhere and usually for free in the palm of their hands.

There is no need for coaches at any age or stage of learning to attend coaching courses – except in sports where accreditation is forced and where compliance to become accredited is demanded by the national or state sporting organisation for risk management and insurance purposes.

We need to look at coach development differently.

WHAT DO WE NEED TO DO DIFFERENTLY – AND BETTER?

There's a sameness throughout the sporting world – almost a “rule book” when it comes to coach education: the four C's:

- Courses (i.e., levels and licenses)
- Conferences
- Computers (i.e., online learning)
- Coaching coaches (i.e., mentoring)

Yet, many sports are reporting that they are experiencing three distinct challenges when it comes to their coaching workforce:

1. There's a decline in the number people enrolling in coaching courses;

2. The percentage of people who complete all their accreditation requirements is relatively low;
3. The percentage of coaches who commit to ongoing learning through reaccreditation or upgrading to the next level of accreditation is generally poor.

In addition, funding agencies and sporting organisations measure the success of coach education programs on primarily quantitative measures, e.g. how many courses were conducted in the past year, how many coaches completed their accreditation this year compared to last year.

Yet, coaching is – like teaching, nursing and so many other “human-to-human” vocations – largely qualitative in nature – striving to achieve effectiveness more than efficiency.

“**More**” coaches doesn't mean better sport. Coaching is not a numbers game.

It's having more coaches who are better at what they do that makes the difference.

The messages are clear – what we're doing is not working.

THE BOTTOM LINE?

Australia is failing to develop sports coaches with the skills required for our current and future national sporting needs.

We are still delivering coach development programs that are inappropriate for the vast majority of coaches, and we're delivering these programs through outdated and anachronistic information delivery mechanisms. We want sport to change – we're investing heavily in developing, modifying, piloting and marketing “new” sports, but we're neglecting coaches...who are the driving force of effective change in every sport.



Wayne Goldsmith has been a thought leader in coach training, education and development for more than 20 years. He has written more than 500 articles and blog posts on coaching, sports science, learning, creativity and sports performance.

He has worked directly with coaches in Australia in the A.F.L., Super Rugby, the Wallabies, the N.R.L., Tennis Australia, Swimming Australia, Triathlon Australia and Diving Australia and internationally with numerous respected sporting organisations including USA Swimming, the NZ Rugby Union and Sport N.Z.

He has won the Eunice Gill Prize for Outstanding Contribution to Coach Education in Australia.