

What Does It Take To Be A Bowling Coach

For those who aspire to one day become a Team USA assistant coach, be advised no specified criteria currently exist. After contacting several of our leaders dealing with coaching and Team USA, I have come to learn the selection of assistant coaches is still subjective to the head coach. Well that's fine and dandy, but what if you do not know the head coach and consider yourself qualified. There lies the problem. I am happy to report though, once the Gold Level Certification is completely initiated, USA Bowling will require all current and future Team USA coaches, including the head coach, to be gold level certified. So, my fellow coaches, if you want to reach that special podium, go for the gold.

Sticking with the coaching model, I have recently investigated various sports, athletic, and pedagogy literature databases to uncover anything remotely related to general or sport specific coaching. Much to my surprise, a great deal of academic and practical literature exists geared toward coaching and its many components. An abundance of the information is psychologically oriented, though other portions provide quality materials on successful tactics and techniques employed by current and former coaches. Beyond the multitude of literature, several organizations such as the Coaching Effectiveness Program (CEP), United States Sports Academy (USSA), American Sport Education Program (ASEP), Program for Athletic Coaches Education (PACE), and the Canadian Coaching Program all offer certification or degree programs in sport coaching. I see our responsibility as coaches to seek various means to enhance, not only our bowling-specific knowledge base, but also the often more important skills that enable a coach to coach. These organizations may be one way we can achieve a greater appreciation and understanding for overall coaching.

When addressing the qualifications of a bowling coach, or any coach for that matter, the credentials should meet not only the current needs of the athlete, but also future developments of the sport. Is it sufficient to have been a former professional bowler, a pro shop operator, or even a proprietor? Of course not. Just because someone was an outstanding athlete, an equipment technician, or even a successful business person does not make that someone the least bit qualified to become a coach, or guarantee effectiveness. Let us shed the idea of personal performance directly relating to coaching ability. In fact, I can name literally dozens of extremely successful past and current sport coaches who have not excelled much beyond the average participant level. Has Dean Smith ever won an NBA Championship, Bobby Bowden a Super Bowl, or even Fred Borden a PBA National Championship? No, yet all are highly effective and successful coaches. The secret, it's quite simple - **a coach studies sport, examines teaching methods, unearths technical advances, implements psychological and physiological training techniques, and investigates every other imaginable aspect to fully comprehend the vast expanse of the sport.** A participant, on the other hand, merely participates. Though some may pursue the sport from one or two perspectives, not the depth or breadth as a true coach.

Consider for a moment the complex responsibilities of a coach: communicate and listen, analyze and configure, lead and direct, inquire and respond, calculate and interpret, teach and learn, write, speak, administrate, coordinate, demonstrate, counsel, recruit, interpret, and model. Given these many intrinsic and extrinsic responsibilities, it is no surprise that developing a comprehensive preparatory curriculum would be difficult. Fortunately for us, USA Bowling and the Dick Ritger Instructional Academy provide many sport specific aspects. Conversely and unfortunately, acquiring the many intrinsic, human resource, and pedagogically oriented skills have yet to be appropriately acknowledged.

Let's look at what one organization has done to develop and promote comprehensive coaching. In 1992 the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) appointed a special task force to consider ways to improve the quality of coaching. Using the help from the Youth Sport Institute at Michigan State University, NASPE critiqued various coaching information including material from: National Sport Governing Bodies (NGBs), college university programs, American Sport Education Program (ASEP), Program for Athletic Coaches Education (PACE), Canadian Coaching Program, research on coaching, etcetera. They drafted a document outlining a coach's competencies and skills for expanding discussion among interested groups such as ours. The end result was the **National Standards for Athletic Coaches**, a list of 37 coaching standards grouped into eight domains intended to direct administrators, coaches, athletes and the public regarding the knowledge and skills a coach should possess.

As coaches, our roles are duly divided between a teacher and a mentor. We should aspire to achieve the NASPE standards that are viewed as part of a dynamic conglomeration of the knowledge, skills, and values essential to our profession. NASPE categorized the 37 standards into the following eight domains that I have somewhat applied to bowling. Review each asking yourself the question provided.

- **Injuries: Prevention, Care and Management** - a nearly untapped area in bowling. What would you do if you were coaching a student who incurred a bowling injury?
- **Risk Management** - reducing risk is essential to a safe environment. Do you know the scope of your coaching responsibilities?

- **Growth, Development and Learning** - understanding developmental processes of people. Can you recognize, evaluate, and refer appropriate care for a bowler with an emotional or social problem?
- **Training, Conditioning and Nutrition** - BTM has enhanced our awareness of this unscathed animal. Do you possess a basic knowledge why bowlers should implement a physical training program?
- **Social/Psychological Aspects of Coaching** - The inner person we deal with. Can you motivate, teach ethical values, and set both sport and non-sport specific goals with you students?
- **Skills, Tactics and Strategies** - sport specific training and practice. Have you even organized and executed an effective team practice?
- **Teaching and Administration** - basic pedagogy or instruction techniques. Can you objectively and effectively evaluate talent (last issue)?
- **Professional Preparation and Development** - planning, administration, and organization separate the coach from the professional instructor. There is a big difference between a generic coach and a professional coach, which are you?

In conclusion, it is important to realize that being a bowling coach is much more than knowing bowling or balls. If we aspire to rationally legitimize our profession, we must begin to recognize the scope and depth of the coaching profession. Using NASPE's eight coaching standards and the questions I presented with them determine which you are deficient and find a way to enhance your competence and qualifications. Finally, be advised, just because someone gives bowling lessons does not mean that individual is a qualified coach.

Happy Holidays.