

# Scaffolding a Club Philosophy Among Coaches: Perspectives from a Spanish Club

## Short Title: a Club Philosophy Among Coaches

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### Abstract

Coaching philosophy is an important assumption for a coaching practice. The aim of this study was to describe one sport program and to understand how the transmission of the principles and values in a successful sport club, which was recognized as the best one in youth sport in state level. As results, we identified that coaches were the key element in sharing a sport program's main points within the club community, specially athletes; from this, we describe the best practices identified: *Básquetes* and basics program; coach portfolio; internal coaches' development and support for participation in courses; mentoring program.

**Keywords:** sport coach, basketball, professional development, sport pedagogy

### Introduction

Coaching philosophy is defined as a set of values and beliefs that support the actions and behaviors of sport coaches (Wilcox and Trudel, 1998; Lyle, 1999; Kidman and Hanrahan, 2004). According to Cassidy, Jones and Potrac (2009, p.57) philosophy can be viewed as a “pair of glasses, created by personal opinions, experiences and values, through a particular perception of reality that is filtered”. Therefore, coaching philosophy influences how coaches understand sport, contexts and athletes and determines the focus of their coaching practice (Kidman and Hanrahan, 2004). Hence, a well-defined philosophy allows both coaches and athletes to develop a way of thinking and acting consistently and coherently (Nunomura, Oliveira, Roble and Carbinatto, 2011).

However, Lyle (1999) claims attention that occasionally coaching philosophy does not fit in with coaching practice. Because coaching is influenced from external factors, such as the expectations of parents of athletes, or pressure for competitive results, inconsistencies can be viewed among what coaches say and what coaches do (Jenkins, 2010). As an example, McCallister, Blinde and Weiss (2000) investigated 22 coaches involved in youth softball and baseball programs and identified how coaches develop values and life skills in their coaching sessions. Although coaches showed a strong discourse about having fun and life skills in their practice, they demonstrated winning as being the

pivotal role in their practice. Similarly, Wilcox and Trudel (1998) studied a novice coach from the Canadian youth ice hockey league. Despite the coach understanding the ways of long-term athlete development, winning appeared as the core of their beliefs and behaviors in competition. Furthermore, as much as the coach stated that he was against rule infringements and violence in the game, his tactical strategies encouraged this practice among young athletes.

Given the different demands from sports scenario, Lyle (1999) argues that philosophy should be an individual feature of coaches as well as it needing to be flexible for the conditions of the contexts. Cassidy et al. (2009) state that development of coaching philosophy is a complex process that advances throughout coaches' careers. In addition, by gaining knowledge and experience along their journeys, coaches are better able to articulate their personal philosophies to the circumstances of their practice of coaching (Nash, Sproule and Horton, 2008). Therefore, the development of coaching philosophy is a process influenced by coaches' lifelong learning and coaches' self-awareness (Jenkins, 2010). The example of John Wooden, highly recognized for his coaching philosophy, in which he took over more than 15 years to build his “pyramid of success”, that supports several principles and values, and was designed by a humanistic approach (Wooden and Jamison, 2007).

Based on the assumption that the coach's experiences underpin coaching philosophy, the environments where the

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coach participates directly affect its constitution. Cassidy et al. (2009) point out that the particular nature of the sports organization or club that owns the coach has great influence on his philosophy. It is important to consider that the institutions and programs vary in their philosophical conception, values and in planning for the achievement of its goals (Numomura et al., 2011). For example, in Australia, some clubs from professional Rugby and Cricket Leagues demonstrate concerns not just about competitive results of the players, but also the development of their life, career, and employment after sport (Bennie and O'Connor, 2010). These principles are confirmed among coaches, assistants and athletes, who were very satisfied to work guided by this philosophy.

Considering the role of sports organizations on the development of coaches' philosophy, the aim of this study was to describe the philosophy and guiding principles of a highly successful basketball club and how the club transmits these to its coaches at varied levels of play, describe the sport program organization, and to understand how the transmission of the club philosophy occurs.

## Methods

This research was developed as a descriptive case study (Yin, 2003), which is used to describe an intervention or phenomenon and the real-life context where it occurred (Yin, 2003). Thus, the choice of a descriptive case study allows the understanding of how a basketball club shares principles and values with their coaches.

The basketball club is located in the north of Spain, in the Galicia region, in a city with a half century strong tradition in basketball. Galicia region has a total population of 2.7million people, and the city has around 250 thousand people. This tradition began in the 1960th, first with women, and in the end of the decade with men accessing to the National first league in the 1968-69 season – the ACB, that is recognized as the second best competition in the world, after the NBA. On the other hand, the implementation of participation basketball practice in the city was developed in a special way in private schools (Marists, Salesians, Dominicans, Jesuits, Company of Mary). In that time, a basketball tradition started in the city, but it never had a team in the first league again.

The club under investigation in this article originated in 1996, after the merger of two other clubs, coinciding with the period of maximum splendor of the soccer team of the city, (this soccer team used to show regular results, but surprise Spain and Europe with a spectacular performance and national and international titles since the middle of the decade of the 90 until the beginnings of the first decade of 2000). This coincidence has made difficult, probably, the other sports growth and the achievement of sports sponsorships that could allow the basketball club to compete in the ACB. The contribution of the club analyzed represents a growing value in the number of teams and athletes in Basketball and in the recognition it has received prizes

in various areas, such as the best club in the Autonomous Community of Galicia (1997/98), the best solidarity initiative (2010) and best sport base promotion entity (2010).

The first author integrated in this club as coach assistant for one complete season, working with two Under-13 teams. The Club had an adult team in LEB Plata and rose to LEB Oro the national professional league organized by the Spanish Basketball Federation (FEB). In this club, there were 432 athletes enrolled in the Galician Basketball Federation (FGB), beside other 120 children in the pre-sports development program. Moreover, the club totaled 32 basketball coaches across its teams.

The Club was selected for this case study by the success of its Sport Program that was focused on increasing the number of young athletes as much as the good results of its elite teams. In the first four years of the Sport Program, the club saw an increase of 374.5% in the number of athletes (from 110 athletes in the program's first season, to 432 in the studied season); following this continuous growth in the number of Club athletes, the competitive level has also increased. The club's elite team has continuously joined higher performing leagues progressing through four divisions, one each year, coming from a regional to the third of five national leagues. Furthermore, in the studied season the Council of Culture and Sports of the Autonomous Region of Galicia considered this basketball club as the best club for the promotion of youth sports.

The main researcher, who acted as a participant observer, was an U13 team coach during one complete season. The insertion of the researcher at the club took place with the permission of the sports manager, who understood the research in development and authorized his participation; no other coach or club employee knew about the research in development. This care was taken so that the other coaches had the researcher / coach as one of them, avoiding any change in the routine or behavior of other coaches or coordinators.

The researcher-coach worked as a volunteer assistant coach of a male under-13 team and as a coach of a second team at the same category throughout the entire season. Both teams competed in the men's U13 Championship (first and second local division, respectively) organized by the local Basketball federation. In addition to training these two teams, the researcher participated in other activities promoted by the club (training camps, sport and leisure camps, organizing short tournaments, monitoring of children from initiation schools in the elite team games, acting as referee in internal tournaments etc.).

## Participants

The sports club manager, the vice-president, and the president of the club were interviewed about the strategies to develop the club's coaching philosophy. The sport manager (SM) was 38 years old and graduated in Physical Education. He worked for the club since its foundation: he was organizer of leisure activities, coach of youth teams, assistant coach and coach of the senior team, and technical director.

The Vice President (VP) was 40 years old, a businesswoman, has a life history related to basketball as a player, coach and director. Although the basketball activities were parallel to her main occupation as a businesswoman, she always had active participation in the sport. The President (P) was a basketball player and his two sons were athletes of the club, which motivated him to take on this function. He was 48 years old, a marketing professional and politician, featuring a profile that added prestige to the club.

## Data collection

### Field Notes

In the field diary information was recorded about the club's daily routine, according to the implementation action of the sports program in the training routine, in the coaches' pedagogical meetings with the coordinators, in the official matches, and in the club's other activities, such as the sports camps.

### Interviews

The interview script was made in order to know so in detailing the wider culture of the club and, from this, the philosophy developed by the club with its coaches, the themes of the interview were organized in to three main aspects: (1) Club policies (2) Sport Program (3) Strategies for coaches' development. The interviews were previously scheduled and individually held in the clubhouse in a private room with, and recorded for their subsequent transcription.

## Data Analysis

The thematic analysis was the methodology used. This study is constructed under the essentialist / realistic approach of thematic analysis, allowing theorizing experiences and motivations robustly expressing meanings from the language (Braun and Clarke, 2006). To analyze the data, five steps were followed: data immersion; initial categorical definition; issues identification; matters review; topics definition and appointment; data description.

## Results

After following the methodological steps described above, the themes identified in the results are: sports club's program; club's principles; sports club's strategies. They will be described separately.

### The Sport Club's Program

The structure of the sport program of this club is divided into three sectors: professional adult team, youth teams, and extra-activities (such as sport campus, unofficial competitions, basketball days at city schools, social activities, etc.)

In this structure, the youth teams are those that involve the largest number of coaches because during the season of this study, the club held 432 licenses by the Basketball Galician Federation and 32 coaches. As P expands the youth ac-

cess to the club it is essential and requires the development of committed coaches with the training of youth athletes: "The youth teams are the engine of the first team in supporting children, parents are involved, they go to the stadium, and encourage children to constantly strive to want to go there. Together with that, there comes the necessity to develop good coaches [...] Secondly we have opened the club's doors to children who want that, they want basketball and because of that in four years there was an increase from 100 to 400 participants". SM reinforces: "I believe in the professionals [coaches] who I have put with the children, that is, I put good people [...] with young children" [...].

The youth teams, which are the youngest player in the club (from U10 to U13), has always been a priority for the club. Because of that, the professionalization of coaches was grouped, as stated by VP: "The directive came from the first day like that the most youth teams are important to improve the club and make more professional-level jobs". This perspective is the main club philosophy: "The club philosophy is now in the club, the guy who wants to play sports, basketball in our case, has a club where he can follow, with appropriate conditions, adequate tracks, with suitable coaches, with appropriate means, to make it as professional as possible – still being amateur. We hope the club can grow and in a few years be an entirely professional club" (VP).

### The Club's Principles

According to the interviewees, children and parents was mostly middle-class, not concerned in basketball as a profession for their kids. Thus, the focus is to provide an educational service through sports and, if possible, to form players: "The first goal at this time with the initial team is to provide the formation of personalities through sport. [...] I see focus in this direction to form a personality, to be educated, to listen to the coach, to respect a partner, to accommodate multiple views, multiple ways of being, not just thinking of being a professional player" (SM). For the president, there is belief in this philosophy and its alignment to the public need: "As time goes by, people realize what they need and the way that they need to follow because the club project is consolidating, expanding, the kids are happy, no sporting success, parents are happier [...]" (P).

### The Sport Club's Strategies

In addition to technical and tactical objectives, the club is concerned to strengthen its philosophy together with young athletes. Thus, coaches are encouraged to comply with the *básquets* system, a club educational and "token" economy program aimed at strengthening a set of values for healthy habits and positive attitudes. As the expected values and attitudes are being manifested through a proper behavior, children receive from their coach letters to complete the word *básquet* (basketball). The *básquets* system helps the club to show parents that the club's educational program and to guide the coaches decisions: "Every year the technical coordinator gives a speech to the new coaches

and youth coaches regarding how to apply the guidelines and why they are made and how they are made, it is an obligation of the club "(VP).

For the manager, is essential for the coaches to understand and share the club's philosophy: "Understanding the coach is the club's goal, it is not winning a game, [...] it is about preparing people "(SM). The president shares this view and points out a challenge: "This is very complicated because the coaches want to win this game [...]. They do not have the mentality that they are training athletes [...]"(P). An evidence of appreciation of the base and the *básquets* program is that the club prioritized coaches with better formation for the younger teams.

Moreover, internal strategies of continuing education are developed in the club, as explained by the Sports Manager: "In the club there are several working methods. One of them is the mentoring. When a person assists another one to learn what he/she likes and what he/she does not like, for two or three years. Second, the working meetings [...] as a guide for tactical and technical work [...]. From there a third element in all of this is the bonuses paid in cash. What we discussed, there is a certain quantity of money you can win or lose if you do what you are asked for..." (SM). To achieve the philosophical goals of the club, the president highlighted the needs of supervising people involved in the program. "The coaches are required to prepare a portfolio of actions, based on the common standards of the club" (P). The coach's portfolio is a document imposed by the club, a "coach's book", which should contain the season and month goals for the team and for each athlete, the tactical-technical goals of the period, the educational values and programs that will be applied, as well as the detailed and commented description of each training session. To encourage and to demonstrate professional gratitude, coaches to comply with their obligations, an additional 20% of their wages was offered to those who fulfilled their duties (SM). The coach portfolio was duly complied by all. However, the *básquets* program that is more closely related to values and behaviors and requires closer relationships with parents, demanding interpersonal knowledge of the coach. Coaches with Physical Education degrees commonly filled it out, but I observed that there was often neglect from coaches with other degrees or less education (field notes). According to the observation, it appears to be stimulating the financial recovery, but needs training and belief in the validity of the action promoted by the club so that the coach should endeavor to develop it.

Regarding formation courses, there were some internal clinics, usually a speech from a coach of the senior team in the begging of the season, and monthly meetings with category coordinators reinforcing the model that was expected in each category and communications on materials and uniforms, game dates, month of competitions; the values described in the curriculum are also being emphasized, regarding the *básquets* program, including the necessity to share the club's philosophy with the youth parents (field notes). Furthermore, there was training camps in summer

and winter, regional clinics (many promoted by this club) and coaches were encouraged to take courses outside.

Fulfilling the strategies, SM describes a mentoring program, in where new coaches of have appointed an experienced coach at the club who could appeal to doubts. For example, asking for help in setting up training schedules, preparing for competition, and others. The mentors were typically the coordinator of the coaches' categories.

## Discussion

Based on the findings of this study it is possible to realize a club organization that aims towards achieving its philosophy, having clear strategies to scaffold this with its coaches. The political development and the sports program of this club are the responsibility of the president and the sport manager (the stakeholders). These same subjects are often the major responsible for the changes in actions and the transmission of the club's philosophy. For these actions to be effective, the responsibilities for the achievement of success should be divided, as should the mistakes be tolerated, and work be performed with respect and reliability, which are the inspiring elements for an organization (Recep, Tuncol and Cengiz, 2010). Through these strategic actions, the club's managers strengthen their images, making their coaches and athletes trust in themselves and start to contribute more actively to the club's growth and development (Rocco Junior, 2014).

The person who makes the link between the sports club and the community is the sport coach. The coach is responsible to transmit the club's philosophy to his athletes in order to motivate, inspire, create perseverance, and desire for sports (Alin, Ismet, Denise and Iulian, 2012; Tozzetto, Galatti, Scaglia, Duarte and Milistetd, 2017). The philosophy transmitted to the club's members, strengthened with clear values and identity, contributes to the balance between sporting success and a particular club's interests. As highlighted by the interviewers, the club seeks for the human being's development in order to expand its culture in the life of athletes (Light and Nash, 2006; Donaldson, Leggett and Finch, 2011). Thus, the coach must be able to understand the different areas of education, needs to be in harmony with his athletes and club, and believe in his own philosophy (Sanchez, Bercial and Sanches, 2016). In the way to prepare coaches to transmit the club's ideas in different contexts of practice, the interviewers highlighted four strategies: Formation program; Regular Meetings; Mentoring; Coach's Portfolio, plus financial reward. The development of these strategies, demonstrates the managers recognition about the importance of the social learning process in the club

The advantage of offering sport coaches training courses in the club result in saving time for the improvement of youth professionals (Trudel, Culver and Werthner, 2013) and shares the club's philosophy between them. At the same time, regular meetings between coaches and mento-

ring promotes the professional development of the youngest coaches. Lave and Wenger (1991) explain that these strategies are characterized as learning methods situated where the coach learns through the interaction between individuals belonging to the same group, with common interests, and sharing practices, attitudes, values, beliefs, and knowledge. In this case, the coaches share experiences and knowledge with freedom and creativity, encouraging new approaches to the solution of the practical problems, regulating his own practices in accordance with conduct and proficiency standards, consenting for his group (Culver and Trudel, 2008; Tozetto et al., 2017).

The use of portfolios and the financial contribution for its filling shows concern with the systematization of the coaches' work and seen as a support tool that assists in the learning processes of sports coaches. The encouragement of coaches to reflect on their practice is proposed as the evolution of their actions, verify what they can be improved, and the development of new ideas for problem solving (Gilbert and Trudel 2001, 2005). In consequence, the reflective path if heavily developed can maximize the coaches' learning and improve the actions in the training

and competition environment (Knowles, Borrie and Telfer, 2005; Gilbert and Trudel, 2001).

## Final Considerations

By its results, this study offers practical actions that can strengthen the coaches' integration of working philosophy in a sports organization. To do this, it is necessary to institute a clear set of goals and missions, in a way to be understandable to all of the organization's members. In this case, we found that the stakeholders have built an up-down process so that the coaching philosophy could be established at the club.

We hope this research can bring new lights to one of the most discussed topics, but with few concrete and intentional actions in sports institutions: the philosophy consolidation of an organizational work. In this particular case, it is the club that combines participation in amateur sports and professional sports, showing that different intentions and coaches who work in these different areas can make part of a successful program in reaching its sporting and formative goals. Moreover, the institutional philosophy's implementation is an important element in this process.

## Construyendo una filosofía de trabajo entre entrenadores deportivos: perspectivas desde un club español

### Resumen

La filosofía de entrenamiento es un fundamento importante para ejercer como entrenador, compartiendo la identidad y cultura de su institución deportiva. El objetivo de este estudio es la descripción de un programa deportivo y comprender la transmisión de los principios y valores en un club reconocido en el desarrollo de jóvenes. Los resultados indican que el entrenador es el elemento clave en este proceso; además de identificar y describir las mejores prácticas para establecer y compartir la filosofía del club con sus entrenadores: programas "Básquet" y "Básicos"; portfolio del entrenador; clínicas internas para la formación de entrenadores y apoyo para la participación en cursos; programa de mentoría.

**Palabra-claves:** entrenador deportivo; baloncesto; desarrollo profesional; pedagogía del deporte.

## Construindo uma filosofia de trabalho entre treinadores esportivos: perspectivas a partir de um clube espanhol

### Resumo

A filosofia de treinamento é um fundamento importante para se exercer como treinador, compartilhando a identidade e cultura de sua instituição esportiva. O objetivo deste estudo é descrever um programa esportivo e compreender a transmissão de princípios e valores em um clube reconhecido no desenvolvimento de jovens atletas. Os resultados indicam que o treinador é o elemento chave nesse processo, sendo identificadas as melhores práticas estabelecidas para compartilhar a filosofia do clube com seus treinadores: programas "Básquet" e "Básicos"; portfolio do treinador; clínicas internas para a formação de treinadores e apoio para a participação em cursos; programa de mentoría.

**Palabra-claves:** treinador esportivo; basquetebol; desenvolvimento profissional; pedagogia do esporte.

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