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PERSPECTIVE

The Concept of Success in Youth Sport: The Role and Responsibility of the Trainer

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Perspective

The role and responsibility of a coach can be seen from many angles and different points of view. If we focus exclusively on its functional essence, we can say that training can be understood, in a simplistic way, as the act of making people learn and develop skills, i.e., as a set of organized actions, with the specific purpose of intentionally promoting learning and the development of something, by someone, to which we could also add, and with the appropriate means to the nature of that learning and development.

That is, the coach can be seen exclusively as the professional, whose specific purpose is to conduct this training process, and whose functions are defined, then, based on a set of competences resulting from the mobilization, production and use of various pertinent knowledge (scientific, pedagogical, organizational, technical-practical, etc.), properly organized and integrated according to the complexity of the concrete action to be developed in each situation of professional practice [1]. So far so good. But a coach is (or should be) more than that.

A coach is also, by definition, a trainer. And it is by looking at the etymology of the word that we truly understand its full meaning: forming is precisely molding, it is beginning from a starting point and evolving, building, adapting, giving shape in a certain sense. With a specific intention, with a goal. And this can be more or less easily achieved depending on the relationship of complicity established between the coach and the athlete, that is, it is especially important that this relationship be pleasant and that a climate of positive affectivity and mutual trust be established [2].

And if we look at the specific area of competitive sport, then we are literally entering another championship. One would say that it is natural to relate the relentless pursuit of high performance and overcoming individual limits with sports records, whether in national, international, and Olympic competitions. Yes, it's natural. But this is precisely where the trouble often begins. Perhaps this is precisely the motivation that stimulates athletes, but that also involves coaches and sometimes even managers and even doctors in the search for these new records, in the sense of obtaining glory, even if for that it is necessary to cross the limits

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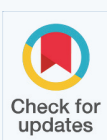
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of human capacity and subvert the sporting logic. This is where the “million-dollar question” arises: does the ultimate goal of sport end up in competition, in glory at any cost, in “success”? And after all, what is success? Is it just winning?

A few months before the Olympic Games in Seoul, in 1988, the head of the Canadian medical team, William Standish, assumed that the drug-free Olympic ideal was no longer possible, declaring: “we have solid information who confirms that drug usage to improve athletic performance is an epidemic.” And more: Standish also stated that “there is a growing use, among young athletes, of anabolic steroids and other substances to improve performance” [3].

Effectively, doping is an issue that represents one of the most prominent and worrying problems in sports reality, not only because it distorts the “truth” of it, but also because, despite boosting performance, it could jeopardize the athletes' health [4]. The fact is that, despite Portuguese Law n° 38/2012, of August 28th, approving anti-doping legislation in sport, in accordance with the rules established in the world anti-doping code, unfortunately, by itself, this rule is still not enough to dissuade many athletes of the consumption of illicit substances, as evidenced by the countless cases that we often see, read, and hear in the media.

And what is, or should be, then, the role of coaches in the midst of this scourge? In a study carried out by Gomes AR [5], whose objective was to evaluate the training program for coaches in Sweden, the athletes were asked about several subjects, among which, precisely, how they saw the importance of the coach's role. Interestingly (or perhaps not), the figure of the coach was considered the most important of the sports phenomenon, especially for young athletes, in particular those with leadership characteristics, such as charisma.

According to Gomes AR [5], the most surprising aspect of contact with charismatic leaders is the simple and clear way in which they present what they want from their work groups, a fact closely associated with the firmness with which the best paths to follow are communicated. This definition is in line with the writings of Conger JA, et al. [6] who describe charismatic leaders as people who seek to change the problems that hinder the exercise of their activities, seeming to be oriented to function as “agents of change”. This concept is fundamental since it implies the notion of influence capacity. As

stated by Howell JM, et al. [7], it is these leaders, these “transformational individuals”, who are concerned with guiding their behavior by acceptable ethical and moral standards, who often defend the need for all team members to assume a responsibility, honest attitude, both with teammates and with opponents and referees.

It is here that the so-called philosophy of a coach resides, which is nothing more than a set of standards by which the coach will influence, teach, and model his athletes. According to Jones RL, et al. [8] and Resende R [9], this philosophy must be built on four concepts, namely: axiology (what the coach values), ontology (the meaning he attributes to the training process), phenomenology (reflections on the experience of being a coach) and ethics (what the coach judges about what is moral and immoral). And talking about ethics in sport means reflecting on the guiding values of action, the ideals that rules sporting activity.

Along with its importance in sport, the true role of a coach should be, therefore, to lead by example, by commitment, by motivation and by striving to improve, but always with respect for all participants involved, and guiding its conduct by values, truth, and ethics. After all, as seen, a coach forms, molds, influences. Often children and young people, who are nothing less than the society we want to see and have tomorrow.

In the Manual “Sports Pedagogy” of the Course for Sports Coaches, Professor Olímpio C [10] reminds us that, especially with regard to training children and young people, the structuring axes are personal and social development, as well as educational and training concerns, obviously in close dependence on the quality of the technical and pedagogical intervention.

The coach role requires a focus and concern for the training and education of practitioners, not only sporting, but also social, civic and ethical. Sport should be seen, therefore, as an integration and socialization tool that allows for healthy, positive, and happy learning environments that foster enthusiasm and pleasure. It is therefore in this context that success must also be framed.

If we take into account that the majority of sports initiation is concentrated in the pre-pubertal periods, that is, somewhere between 6/7 and 12/13 years old and that development, whether physical or in terms of maturity, is still at an early stage, the coach's role

as an agent of integration, motivation, and even a bit of a psychologist is exalted, framing sports practice in a broader context of the practitioner's life, namely in its conjunction with school life, involving the parents in the activity, and managing their expectations, making them see sport in a logic of progression and continuity, but above all, so that they take advantage of the practice to have fun, evolve, and grow in a sustained and harmonious way.

So, the concept of success, especially at these younger ages, must always be seen from a perspective of focusing on the practitioner, on their needs, motivations, desires, expectations, and goals, and not on the coach, on his individual achievements, on his progression, or personal objectives.

Competition itself must be stimulated without recourse to decisive moments, without too much pressure, without traumatizing those who do not win. The objective must be the path and not the end.

Having said that, 2 measures/suggestions could be proposed to improve the dynamics of youth sport: one of a more punitive and sanctioning nature and the other of a more integrative nature.

On the one hand, and because adults and, in particular, coaches are true examples for younger ones, society should be absolutely intolerant with bad behavior, lack of respect, civic behavior and ethics. Rules should be created to severely punish coaches and other official participants (delegates, managers, etc.) whose conduct is not in line with the essential values of the sport. As much as it would cost in the beginning, as some bad examples began to be punished, that would serve and work as a deterrent to new deviant behavior.

On the other hand, it is also suggested to involve parents earlier, creating training actions for them as well, stimulating the permanent sharing of communication, values and objectives; fit them into this holistic logic of sport that is more cultural and less competitive, healthier, happier and more beautiful. That role undoubtedly belongs to coaches, but it also belongs to clubs, associations, organizers, and promoters of sporting events.

The well-known coach [11], in the book "Playing to win", published by Editora Sextante in the year following his disappearance, interconnects these 3 concepts, which he considers inseparable: leadership, values and success.

For him, the key to any learning is to observe and listen carefully. In a life story full of successes, Wooden refers to his own success as a consequence, not an end in itself. At a certain point in the book and referring to the example that his father was in his life, he confides that he ended up adopting much of his posture in his own life and leadership style, sometimes being firm, sometimes being flexible. Sometimes using the power of kindness and sometimes having the strength to impose yourself, but always with the main objective of the athletes' physical and emotional well-being. And that, can be seen as a motto of success.

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