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CHAPTER 7

The Assistant Coach

An assistant coach can be both a big asset and a liability for a program. Assistant coaches vary in their experience, knowledge, motives, and aspirations. Head coaches must balance each of these components and the assistant coach's overall working conditions with the overall good of the program. A good head coach hires and trains quality assistants and then delegates the proper authority to them. A head coach must decide what duties he or she is comfortable delegating to assistants. Head coaches must then properly communicate these responsibilities and be willing to let their assistants learn through experience.

This chapter describes the ideal characteristics of an assistant coach, components of an assistant coach's evaluation, and considerations when hiring volunteer coaches. The discussion questions investigate the assistant coach's multiple roles and the several different potential interactions he or she has with head coaches and the team. The discussion questions also provide insight into how destructive a poor assistant coach can be.

Six scenarios are presented. They cover situations where your assistant coaches have demonstrated disrespect toward you or a student-athlete and where an assistant coach encounters a student-athlete violating team rules.

The chapter concludes with two practice exercises. The first allows coaches to decide what tasks they are comfortable delegating to an assistant coach. The second practice exercise forces coaches to self-reflect on their ability to delegate authority.

Warm-Up

This chapter offers coaches authors' opinions on the characteristics of a good assistant coach. Good assistant coaches can become a huge advantage to a program and to a head coach. We also offer suggestions to coaches for hiring volunteers as assistant coaches.

1. Characteristics of a good assistant coach (Sabock & Sabock, 2005):
- **a.** Loyalty
- **b.** Teacher and technician
- **c.** Knowledge of the sport
- **d.** Enthusiasm
- **e.** Initiative
- **f.** Dependability
- **g.** Sound philosophy
- **h.** Desire to be a head coach
- **i.** Playing experience
- **j.** Willingness to attend clinics
- **k.** Rapport with athletes

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   l. Ability to serve as liaison between the players and head coach
   m. Willingness to work
   n. Willingness to contribute ideas
   o. Motivation
   p. Flexibility

2. Additional characteristics of a good assistant coach:
   a. A complement to the head coach's style and personality
   b. Ability to specialize on a facet of the game (e.g., pitching, goal keeping)
   c. Capable of doing anything in the head coach's absence
   d. A "yes" person in front of the team but willing to appropriately challenge the head coach in private
   e. Ability to have their suggestions rejected without inhibiting their ability to continue making them
   f. A comprehension of the program's direction
3. Considerations for hiring volunteer coaches (Cardone, 2000):
   a. Conduct the same background checks as you would a paid assistant.
   b. Have the aspiring volunteer interview with the athletic director.
   c. Thoroughly discuss their role on the coaching staff.
   d. Have the aspiring volunteer attend the pre-season coaches meeting.
   e. Examine their motives for wishing to be on the staff. Be leery of parents, hometown heroes, or individuals who may truly want to be the head coach.
4. Components of an assistant coach's evaluation (Cardone, 2006):
   a. Relationship with coaching staff
   b. Relationship with players
   c. Loyalty to the program
   d. Professional growth

http://health.jbpub.com/book/prepare

Go to the web component of *Preparing the Successful Coach* at http://health.jbpub.com/book/prepare for web exercises and a suggested reading list.

Discussion Questions

1. What are the responsibilities of an assistant coach? Which of these are the primary responsibilities?

2. What are the head coach's responsibilities in training and evaluating an assistant coach?

3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a formal job description for assistant coaches?

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4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of having an assistant coach have complete control of a group of players who play one position? Complete control over the offense or defense?

5. Is having a weak assistant coach better or worse than having no assistant coach?

6. a. Describe the fine line an assistant has to walk between being an advocate for the players and an employee of the head coach.

b. How can this line get crossed?

c. What is a head coach's responsibility when it does?

7. a. Sabock and Sabock describe loyalty as a good characteristic of an assistant coach. What are the components of loyalty?

b. How should a head coach expect his or her assistant coach to balance loyalty to the program and the assistant's own professional aspirations?

8. a. How should an assistant coach handle a situation where a student-athlete comes to him or her complaining about playing time?

b. What if the assistant believes the student-athlete should be playing more?

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c. What if the assistant knows the head coach has little confidence in this student-athlete?

9. a. Are there situations an assistant coach should be empowered to discipline?

b. Should a head coach expect to be informed of every discipline scenario his or her assistants encounter, or can assistants handle some things without the head coach's knowledge? What may be some examples of such things an assistant coach can handle by him- or herself?

10. a. Should a hierarchy exist when a team has more than one assistant coach? Why or why not?

b. What components should be included when determining a hierarchy? Should the assistant coach with the longest tenure automatically be the top assistant? Why or why not?

11. What is better to have—an assistant with desire or no desire to be a head coach? Does this impact how he or she is utilized?

12. a. How much freedom should a coach give the junior varsity coach to incorporate his or her own offensive and defensive strategies?

b. What is the balance between running a program and allowing for the professional development of assistant coaches?

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13. a. When should a head coach allow an assistant coach to make a mistake and learn from it, and when should he or she intervene to prevent the mistake?

b. What is the appropriate way for the head coach to handle a situation when an assistant coach has made a mistake?

14. What expectations should a coach have of assistant coaches in the summer? How might the conditions of their contract matter?

15. a. Should a coach give the assistant coach who stabbed him or her in the back a second chance?

b. Can an assistant coach be a bigger cancer to a team than a disgruntled player? Why or why not?

16. How should a coach handle the situation where an assistant coach becomes disgruntled with his or her role?

17. How should a coach handle a situation where an assistant coach disrespects him or her in front of the team?

18. a. What say should each of the following constituents have on the hiring of an assistant coach/faculty member: the head coach, the athletic director, or the principal?

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b. How about the hiring of an assistant coach who will not be on the faculty?

19. What say should each of the following constituents have on the disciplining or termination of an assistant coach: the head coach, the athletic director, or the principal?

20. What are the potential opportunities and threats for a young and relatively inexperienced head coach to have a more experienced and older assistant or someone similar in age and experience?

21. What special considerations exist for a volunteer coach? A coach who is a student-teacher? A coach who is a student in the school?

Scenarios

1. An assistant coach witnesses a student-athlete out after team curfew. Alcohol, obnoxious behavior, or vandalism is not involved. How should the assistant handle this violation?

2. Three student-athletes, all starters, approach the assistant coach with a complaint. They disagree with the significant amount of playing time the head coach is giving a teammate and believe other teammates should have increased roles. The assistant agrees with the players' assessment but knows the head coach strongly disagrees. How should the assistant handle this situation?

3. You are a head football coach and are primarily involved with the offense. Last season you promoted one of your assistants to the title of defensive coordinator; this individual already had primary duties with the defense and you wished to reward his effort. Unfortunately, you did not effectively communicate your expectations and guidelines for a defensive coordinator and conflicts, sometimes visible to players, ensued concerning alignments and personnel. You also be-

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lieve this coach made the defense "his team" and overall team chemistry suffered as a result. How do you approach this next season with this individual?

4. You are a head softball coach and also serve as the third base coach. You wave in the tying home run and the player is thrown out at the plate to end the inning, leaving your best hitter on deck. Your assistant coach, who also serves as the first base coach, is staring at you in disbelief. She continues to shake her head and mutter under her breath while returning to the dugout. She is clearly demonstrating disrespect. How, and when, do you approach this situation?

5. A long-time friend and coaching colleague contacts you. She informs you that she attended a coaching clinic last weekend where your assistant coach was being overly critical of your ability as a head coach. You have no reason to distrust your friend. How do you handle this situation?

6. Your team is practicing drills. You have a group of players on one side of the playing area and your assistant coach has another group of student-athletes. Suddenly your assistant coach is yelling and screaming at one of your players. He is not swearing or physically accosting the student-athlete, but the situation is getting out of control and has become a distraction. You do not want to undermine your assistant coach in front of the players, but you also believe he needs to get control of himself. You do not yet know what caused the outburst. How do you handle this situation—both now and later?

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Practice Exercises

1. Identify all the tasks you would like your top assistant coach to complete for you throughout a season. Include practice, game, and administrative duties and be specific. Share these with a colleague and ask each other questions, including whether you would want to work as an assistant coach in this role.

2. Review the roles you have assumed in the various group efforts you have encountered. This could include class projects, work duties, athletic responsibilities, and so on. Assess your personality in relation to your recollections. Are you someone who has problems delegating responsibility? Trusting colleagues or teammates to do their share? Confronting individuals who have not done their fair share? Based on your answers, are you someone you would want to work for as an assistant coach? Share your thoughts with a colleague and have a conversation surrounding your analysis.

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