

EFFECTS OF A TRAINING PROGRAM IN COMMUNICATION STYLES OF BASKETBALL COACHES

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ABSTRACT: Based on a positive communication style approach, the purpose of this study was to analyze the effects of a training program on a sample of basketball coaches in practices and matches. Participants were 5 coaches with a mean age of 39.8 years (SD = 8, 6) and a mean experience of 9 years (SD = 5). Results show that after the training program coaches improved their supportive behaviors; and 4 of the 5 coaches decreased punitive behaviors; and increased technical instructions contingent to mistakes. The discussion is based on the effectiveness of a customized training program to improve the communication skills of the coaches and the importance of this improvement to promote the sports experience of their players.

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Introduction

The coach is considered a key figure in initiating sport and especially in school sports. The coach's behaviors and attitude are a model that many of his players imitate not only in the sport but also in other aspects of their lives (Smoll & Smith, 2009).

Coaches can use two different approaches to teaching technical and tactical skills of a sport: the positive approach (reward desired behavior so that it occurs more frequently in the future) and the negative approach (trying to eliminate errors and unwanted behaviors through criticism and punishment). The positive style is more effective to motivate players to achieve their goals and establish a more enjoyable relationship between the coach and the player (Smoll & Smith, 2009). Several studies reveal that in some cases the interactions of coaches with their athletes do not correspond with a positive approach to teaching sports skills (Martens, 1987; Martin & Hrycaiko, 1983; Smoll & Smith, 1980, 1987).

This paper attempts to analyze the effects of a customized training program to improve the style of communication in training and competition of basketball coaches, following the guidelines of the work of Ames (1992), Boixadós & Cruz (1999), Smoll & Smith (2009) and Sousa, Smith & Cruz (2008).

Method

Participants

The present study involved 5 coaches. The average age of the coaches at the start of the investigation was 39.8 years ($SD = 8, 6$), with an average of 9 years ($SD = 5$) of experience as coaches.

There were 56 male basketball players who participated in the study. Their ages ranged from 12 to 31.

Procedure

To analyze the effectiveness of the training program which focused on the communication skills of the coaches, 3 stages were structured: 1) setting the baseline, 2) psychological intervention with the individual coaches and 3) evaluation of the intervention.

In stages 1 and 3, to evaluate the behavior of coaches, we used the Coaching Behavior Assessment System (CBAS) Smith, Smoll & Hunt (1977) in 2 practices and 2 matches of each coach, both in the baseline phase, as in the evaluation phase of the intervention. Phase 2 included three training sessions for psychological skills: 1) tools to improve the teams' motivational climate using TARGET areas (Ames, 1992), 2) tools to improve communication skills of the coach from a positive approach (Smoll & Smith, 2009) and 3) Setting individual goals for each coach using the categories of CBAS (Sousa, Smith & Cruz, 2008).

Results

The results, from the observation of the coaches' behavior, which were obtained from the registration of 20 matches and 20 practices, were grouped into three behavioral dimensions: Support (covering CBAS categories: Reinforcement, Encouragement after mistakes, General Encouragement), Instruction (CBAS categories: mistake-contingent Technical Instruction and General Technical Instruction) and Punishment (CBAS categories: Punishment and Technical Punitive Instruction).

Table 1 shows the results of the 5 coaches before and after the training program in communication style. The table shows that all the coaches, after the psychological intervention increased their supportive behaviors, and 4 of them decreased punitive

		Coach 1		Coach 2		Coach 3		Coach 4		Coach 5	
		Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Behavior	R	6.22	6.95	7.32	21.56	18.93	22.30	22.25	23.43	3.96	18.87
	Support	AE	2.16	5.47	4.67	11.56	3.52	8.13	2.57	7.14	0.79
	AG	19.46	23.26	14.02	22.20	11.39	20.38	13.27	17.92	6.33	29.81
Instruction	ITE	7.16	6.84	7.52	7.98	6.20	8.60	6.70	6.77	4.48	4.90
	ITG	36.49	31.24	38.82	26.97	19.43	19.38	32.24	25.56	22.95	21.32
Punishment	P	4.59	5.81	0.20	0.09	10.72	2.65	3.42	2.00	1.58	0,00
	ITP	4.32	4.22	0,00	0,00	6.20	1.10	0.80	1.50	1.58	0,00

Table 1. - Percentage of coaches' behaviors evaluated with the CBAS, in phases 1 (pre) and 3 (post intervention).

behaviors. Regarding Instructions, the Mistake-Contingent Technical Instruction increased in 4 of 5 coaches, while General Technical Instruction, which was previously the highest level of appearance at baseline, decreased after intervention in communication style.

Discussion

The results show that the customized training program improves the communicative behavior of coaches, with the biggest increase in supportive behaviors. In this behavioural dimension improvements were higher than those obtained in studies by Boixadós and Cruz (1999) and Sousa and colleagues (2006). As for the behaviours included in the dimension of Punishment, there is a decrease in 4 of the 5 coaches at a rate similar to that observed in studies by Boixadós and Cruz (1999) and Sousa and colleagues (2006). These results highlight the importance of individualizing as much as possible the interventions with coaches and allowing them the goals they want to achieve.

The customized training program for coaches based on a positive style of communication not only improves the development of sporting skills but also promotes self-esteem, motivation, fun and commitment of young athletes, as seen in studies such as those of Alonso, Boixadós and

Cruz (1995); Coatsworth and Conroy (2006); Cruz (1994); Sousa, Cruz, Torregrosa, Vilches and Viladrich (2006), Smoll, Smith and Cumming (2007) and Torregrosa, Sousa, Viladrich, Villamarín and Cruz (2008).

These behavioral guidelines, based on a positive approach, help coaches to improve the confidence and enjoyment of their players (Boixadós, Cruz, Torregrosa & Valiente, 2004, Smoll & Smith, 1987; and Weiss, 1991) providing positive experiences for children and making to decrease anxiety (Smith, Smoll & Cumming, 2007) and reducing dropout rates of child and youth sports (Barnett, Smoll and Smith, 1992, Sousa 2006).

This work, based on a case study, also presents limitations for inferring causal relationships, as a pre-post design does not provide information on changes that may occur spontaneously throughout the season. However, to reduce these limitations, observable behaviors of 5 coaches were assessed, conducting 4 assessments (2 in matches and 2 in practices) not only in the baseline phase but also in the evaluation phase of the intervention of communicational styles. Thus, recognizing the limitations of the case studies, the individualized interventions with coaches who are allowed to establish their own goals, are a promising approach for further studies in other sports and other categories.

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