Criteria For evaluating High School Coaches

By Grant M. Hill and Michael Pluschke

E valuation of coaches is an important responsibility of high school athletic directors. Since high school athletic events are highly visible activities in school communities, they have a significant effect on both public relations and overall school climate. In addition, coaches have a strong influence on young athletes in terms of the values they communicate and the behavior they model. Consequently, it is essential that athletic directors regularly provide coaches with both supervision and evaluation in order to monitor whether they are conducting themselves in a competent, professional and caring manner.

Comprehensive evaluation of high school coaches prevents the utilization of win-loss records as the primary basis for retention and dismissal. Evaluating coaches primarily on wins and losses puts pressure on coaches to excessively drive their athletes to win. When that is the case, the athletes may become a means to an end (job security) for coaches, rather than an opportunity to nurture their personal development. Furthermore, since there are inequities in terms of talent in different schools, not all coaches have an equal chance to achieve competitive excellence. Finally, comprehensive evaluation helps coaches to formulate strategies that will help them to improve the various parts of their program that are considered to be weak. Hopefully, as these areas improve, more competitive team play will be a natural byproduct.

Designing and Validating a Coaching Evaluation Form

In order to identify specific criteria to include in a coaching evaluation form, a questionnaire was designed by a panel of three retired and two current athletic directors, and 10 high school coaches. In addition to considering coaching evaluation forms currently used in high schools, published sources of coaching evaluation criteria were reviewed for additional evaluative criteria (Belinko, R. [1999]; Duncan, S. [2000]; Figone, A. G. [1999]; Gratto, J. [1983]; Kuga, D. [1993]; Leland, T. [1988]). The questionnaire was field-tested with a group of 10 other athletic directors who offered suggestions regarding content and clarity. The survey was then mailed to all athletic directors at public schools with more than 500 students in the following Southern California counties: Imperial (7), Los Angeles (159), Orange (60), Riverside (36), San Bernardino (38), San Diego (56), Ventura (18). Initially, 376 surveys were mailed, but two of the mailings were returned indicating that the schools were no longer in existence. Consequently, the sample size was 374. The number of completed questionnaires was 210 for a return rate of just more than 56 percent. For each of the 17 criteria, a Likert scale was used to allow respondents to rate each in terms of importance.

More than 88 percent of the respondents rated all 17 of the coaching evaluation criteria as either somewhat or very important. The coaching criteria included:

1. Holds current CPR/First Aid Card
2. Exemplifies high moral and ethical qualities
3. Maintains appropriate discipline and control of athletes
4. Follows correct procedures in regard to safety, injury prevention, care of injuries and injury reporting
5. Complies with administrative directives
6. Properly supervises facilities
7. Makes decisions that are in compliance with established policies and procedures
8. Systematically plans for practices and games
9. Demonstrates support for entire athletic program
10. Works efficiently within the adopted school budget process
11. Clearly defines expectations of assistant coaches
12. Provides proper care of equipment
13. Utilizes appropriate and effective motivational strategies for players
14. Provides accurate inventories of equipment and supplies
15. Communicates appropriately with the media to promote their sport, athletic department and school
16. Is able to articulate a philosophy that is consistent with athletic department goals
17. Attends clinics and seminars to increase knowledge of current coaching practices
This finding served to validate the questionnaire items and provided strong evidence that athletic directors perceive that coaching evaluation should be comprehensive and multifaceted. Given the number of factors that should be included in coaching evaluation, athletic directors, particularly those in large high schools, will need to devote significant time to provide accurate, yearly, formal evaluations for each coach.

The coaching evaluation form illustrates that coaching is an extremely complex endeavor. That is, coaches must provide a positive role model to athletes, communicate effectively with athletes, parents and school personnel, keep accurate records, operate within a prescribed budget, provide a safe environment, and demonstrate technical and tactical expertise in their sport. All of these behaviors must be exhibited within the pressure of a public forum in which they are also under pressure to demonstrate competitive excellence.

**Using the Form as Part of the Evaluation Process**

Athletic directors should distribute copies of their evaluation form to coaches at the beginning of the year or season, along with an athletic handbook that specifies policies, expectations and the steps that are to be followed in the evaluation process. While athletic directors should be held accountable for providing written evaluations of all head coaches, head coaches should, in turn, evaluate their assistant coaches.

Prior to a coach's evaluation, written feedback may be solicited from players, parents and other community members. This process will allow any disgruntled individuals to vent in a private venue and provide athletic directors with additional information to address in the formal evaluation.

In addition to providing a formal evaluation of coaches, athletic directors should have coaches evaluate themselves. Areas on the evaluation form where there are low scores or discrepancies between the ratings of coaches and athletic directors may become the focus of action plans. Formulating an action plan is a much more elaborate process than goal-setting, because it should include concrete steps to be taken to improve a particular area. Some examples of how action plans may be utilized include: 1) developing a better system to file injury reports; 2) establishing safeguards to ensure better compliance to athletic budgetary procedures; 3) creating a better security and inventory system to keep track of all equipment; and 4) identifying specific coaching clinics to attend. For coaches who have been evaluated the previous year, it should be possible to determine the extent to which their action plans were successful over a 12-month period.

**Final Thoughts**

Athletic directors should view evaluation as a process that helps coaches to be more successful with their teams. Athletic directors should support coaches in their efforts to achieve higher evaluation scores by helping them secure important resources, such as videotapes, journal subscriptions, conference funds, fitness equipment and adequate practice facilities. While formal evaluation provides documentation of coaching performance, athletic directors should also provide ongoing informal evaluation to both encourage coaches and to help them make timely corrections.

Athletic directors who conduct coaching evaluations in a kind, supportive and professional manner will find that the process will become more meaningful and appreciated by everyone involved. **IAA**

**Sources**


Gratto, J. (1993). Competencies used to evaluate high school coaches. JOPERD (May), 59.


Coach photos provided by 20/20 Photographic, Mt. Pleasant, Michigan.

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