

Role of the Coach

In this section, the main objectives will be to attain success, to enjoy the process of what you are setting out to do and finally how to truly develop your athletes. Many coaches start out by simply getting a group of people together and working them a little harder and longer than normal. This is not the most effective way to develop athletes and thus, will not be the mission of this coaching program. This coaching program will be well planned and organized instead of simply evolving. As in most plans, we will make adjustments to the plan as needed. This is the way to ensure success in developing as a coach.

The role of a coach is more than just the X's and O's. The coach is the vital component for athletes who succeed and attain their goals. A great coach will serve many roles: technical supporter, motivator, leader, psychologist, and maybe most importantly, as a role model for the athlete to follow in the competition arena as well as out. Well developed coaches will understand their various roles as it pertains to their overall program.

As coaches begin their quest for the development of an athlete, they must establish a philosophy of behavior. By understanding our own goals and expectations, we will serve our athletes much more efficiently. In addition, our athletes and their families will understand what direction we are coming from. As Associate Coaches, we will focus our efforts on: **Athlete first - coaches second**, **Athlete first – winning second**, **Performance vs. Results**.

A common thought among coaches in the sport of Taekwondo is that they are “masters” or “instructors” when they sit in the coaching chair. With this mentality, they will often put their own egos first and believe that if an athlete doesn't follow directions or loses that it is a direct reflection on them. To the untrained coach this seems to be the situation, but educated coaches understand that at the end of the day it is about what the athlete learned, gained or experienced. Normally the mentality is to demand that the athlete “respect” the “coach”. With this mentality, coaches put themselves first. As a coach, it is crucial to focus on how the athlete perceives the process. It is important that the athlete believes the coach is focused on developing a better athlete.



Steven Lopez being coached by his brother Jean Lopez at the 2008 U.S. Olympic Team Trials.

There are many factors that enter into wins and losses. As knowledgeable coaches, we need to instill in our athletes that of all of the factors involved in success, the only one that they can directly control is their effort or output, in effect, their performance. Officiating, getting sick, hurting their ankles are what can be described as “thunderbolts”; sometimes they just happen and we literally have no control over these factors. So if a premium is set on only the end result, we will set the athletes up for a false sense of reality. How many times have your athletes fought poorly and gotten lucky and won the gold medal? Does this define success? Or how many times have your athletes done everything you asked of them and competed over their heads, and lost? Does this define defeat? Probably, most importantly, we risk burning out our athletes at the very initial stage of their competition lives. As a coach you want to promote longevity within the sport.

Another important concept is that sport Taekwondo is in an infant stage of development as it relates to coaching. Most coaches are beginning their coaching lives, just as the athletes are entering a formal competition environment. This being said, coaches are more than likely experiencing some of the same anxieties as their athletes. To make the point even stronger, a majority of Taekwondo coaches have never competed in other sports or even competed in the modern sport Taekwondo era. This does not mean that a coach, as a prerequisite, needs to have these experiences, on the contrary. With a structured training program, even a beginning coach can take athletes to the highest levels. Finally, the question is this: If we ask our athletes to learn, develop and take risks...why shouldn't we as coaches do the same? This is called Leadership, which will be addressed in detail at a later time.

Coaching philosophy goes further than simply having a mission statement. Your athletes are going to react to some of the same things you react to. The way that a coach reacts to winning, losing, risk taking, mistakes and challenges is important in the overall development of your athletes. It is human nature for people to feed off the emotional responses around us. This is very apparent in athletes. When their leader, motivator and mentor is angry, frustrated, or happy, they often will have the same feelings. While this may be what is desired by a coach in training, it often serves the wrong purpose in the competition arena. So, before you explode, jump for joy or just sit there stunned, go back to rule number one as it relates to the role of a coach: Athlete first! This is difficult to do given the emotional attachment to your athlete but remember it is not about your ego, but the athlete's development.

Finally, by simply addressing the stated philosophies and knowing how to implement them, you will provide an enjoyable environment, which will teach your athletes the proper way to conduct themselves as competitors. It will also reinforce the importance of commitment and responsibility. Let's face it, we all want to be proud of the product that we produce. Jay Warwick a former U.S. Olympian and an early pioneer in American Taekwondo, once stated: “People first. Develop their character, their work ethic and everything else will fall into place, both in the ring and out of the ring.” This statement represents what Taekwondo as an art and as a sport can do for our athletes. This truly separates Taekwondo from other sports.

There are many ways to become a coach, but first you must realize what type of person you are or what type of coaching style suits your abilities and personalities. One of the things you do not want to “happen” is that you are just evolving into a coach by default. Coaches that just let things happen without a plan or a mission statement have little or no success. Knowing yourself is just as important as knowing your athletes. Although there are many coaching styles, one is not more dominant than the next. Three NBA coaches who have been very successful are Phil Jackson, Pat Riley, and Larry Brown. Coach Jackson has won three championships with the Chicago Bulls and three with the Los Angeles Lakers. Pat Riley has won three with the Lakers and has taken the New York Knicks to the NBA finals. Lastly, Coach Brown is credited for winning with 10 different teams in the NBA and becoming the first coach to win an NCAA and NBA championship. There could not be three more different coaching styles. One is laid back, letting the men figure their own problems out, yet implementing a designed style of offense in a very passive manner. The next is a demanding, “Do it my way or no way” commanding style. He often is seen as rigid and unwilling to compromise with the athletes. Finally, the last coach that seems like the best friend, always coming to defend and support the team. Often times, he will be cooperative with the athletes to develop a cohesive unit that gets the job done, even if it is out of his character. Very few coaches can pull off all of these styles at once. Even if they adopt a different style, it is often impossible, because you are who you are. The end result, however, can be the same because ultimately the objective is the same: preparing our athletes for their best performance. And the better they perform, the better results they tend to have. So assess yourself. Where do you come from? What environment do you teach in? And what motivates you? The answers to these questions will help you determine your coaching style.

In all levels of coaching, the responsibilities of a coach and qualities of a leader are crucial. These are the characteristics that will shape your athletes. Simple ideals of fair play, keeping the athletes well-being first and balancing participation and fair play are the permanent codes that a coach must live by. By establishing these qualities, our athletes will respect and believe in what you are helping them achieve. It is the substance behind all of the talk. Enhancing your personal knowledge of the sport and being a role model will only enhance your standing with your current and future athletes. As much as one can respect former NBA all-star Charles Barkley’s abilities on the court, his statement that he is not a role model may be true in his eyes. But when a million future young basketball players watch him every night, whether he likes it or not, he is a role model. These young athletes will model their play and actions based on someone that they see as successful. As coaches we must accept that same responsibility.

Leading is simple; do the right thing. Paying attention to your details is a fine way to set that example. Listening to your athletes, being reliable, persistent, and demonstrating self-control in even the toughest situations are all qualities of a great leader. Pressure will challenge all of your morals and ethics and none of us are perfect, but if you can become mindful that you are now a coach, you will always be a leader.

Finally, there are the components of a coach. When push comes to shove, the five main areas of teaching that you will spend most of your time on are: technical, psychological, tactical, physical, and communication (please refer to figure 1 below). They are all equally important at different stages, but in reality they will all revolve around the communication that you have with your athletes. As it was stated earlier, “it isn’t all about the X”s and O”s’. The ability to show or explain proper technique is important in that it will keep your athlete current with modern skill development. Addressing the psychological aspect of the sport will teach athletes that it is much more than just going through the motions that makes a champion. Knowing how to develop tactical strategies will keep your athletes winning those tough, close matches. In addition, it will help you develop drills to enhance their performances. Being a combative sport, physical fitness development makes a Taekwondo student become a Taekwondo athlete. Of course none of this can be accomplished without good lines of communication, yet this is probably the most difficult component to accomplish with our history and busy lifestyles in this day and age.

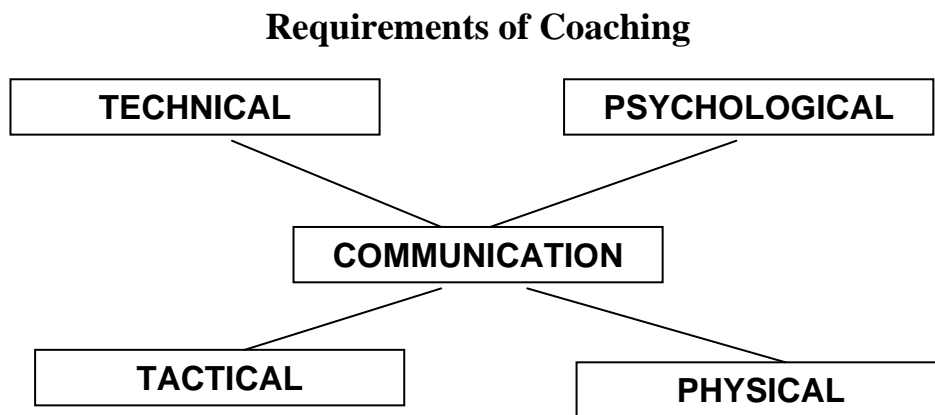


Figure 1. The five main areas of teaching that a coach will be involved with.

In conclusion, the role of the coach is much more than leading training or sitting in a chair at a competition. A study on Olympians stated that their coach was the number one factor for them achieving success. Coaching is a crucial role that we must accept with compassion, commitment and honor. We will be forced to wear many hats, but to not acknowledge our responsibility to educate and develop our abilities as coaches will ultimately be to the detriment of our athletes. You owe it to them.

SUMMARY:

- **Think before you adopt your philosophy on the game.**
- **Respect the ideals and laws of the game.**
- **Always strive to improve your technical knowledge of the game.**
- **Identify why players play the game and reflect it in your coaching.**
- **Do not encourage winning at all costs.**
- **Be respectful of players and officials both on and off the field.**
- **Plan all training sessions well in advance.**
- **Regularly evaluate your communication techniques.**