

## **Tracing the Development Process and Needs of Irish Coaches**

Fiona Larkin, Pat Duffy and Declan O'Leary

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this research was to trace the development process and needs of Irish coaches. A questionnaire was administered to NCDP (National Coaching Development Programme) certified coaches representing novice to elite coaches and a variety of different sports. Coaches provided information on their athletic experiences; coaching experiences; knowledge and attributes needed for coaching; reasons for coaching; supports for coaches; and effectiveness of current coach education courses. Results revealed that the average Irish coach is male, in his late-40s ( $M = 47$  years,  $SD = 11$  years), has coached for the last 18 years ( $SD = 9$ ) and has reached third level education. Coaches have accumulated nearly 5,000 hours and 13 years of 'pre-coaching' experience when competing in sport as athletes. Coaches invest many hours in coach development activities with very little time spent in formal coach education. The results reveal the importance of non-formal methods of coach education

### **Introduction**

One of the best-known studies of talent development (Bloom, 1985) found that coaches are central to the development of the expert performer. An appreciation of coaches' athletic and coaching profiles, the reasons why they become involved in coaching, the influences on their coaching, the supports they need and the reasons why they stay or leave coaching is central to understanding the long-term development of coaches. Such an understanding, in turn, is essential to further inform the design and delivery of coach education and support programmes, which form an important part of the sports systems of many countries.

In Ireland, the National Coaching Development Programme (NCDP) is a negotiated programme for the education and development of coaches between the National Coaching and Training Centre (NCTC) and 52 National Governing Bodies. Since its inception in 1993, over 25,000 coaches and 500 tutors from 35 sports have been certified with the NCDP. As the Programme enters its third cycle, the need to more fully ground coach education and development in the needs of coaches has become apparent. Consequently, a study of Irish coaches was conducted to ascertain their development paths and activities and their perceived needs.

### **Background**

#### *Phases of Coaching Development*

McCullick et al. (1998) identified the stages of expertise in coaching and presented recommendations for developing coaching expertise. This article cites Berlin (1994) who contends that expertise is cultivated in four distinctive stages: beginner, competent, proficient and expert. These stages are defined by certain qualities exhibited by coaches and progress through these stages can be facilitated through experience and practice.

In a study involving six elite Canadian basketball coaches, Schinke, Bloom and Salmela (1995) have articulated seven chronological career stages in basketball coaching: (1) early sport participation, (2) national elite sport, (3) international elite sport, (4) novice coaching (coaching in a primary school or community setting), (5)

developmental coaching (coaching at the high school level), (6) national elite coaching (coaching university teams or regional teams at national competitions) and (7) international elite coaching (coaching the national team). The first three stages are related to the athletic careers of the basketball coaches. According to the authors, performing at international elite level as an athlete is not a prerequisite for future coaching success but “*the high level of commitment required at the international level apparently contributed to the progression of these coaches*” (p. 55).

According to Bloom (2002) the acquisition of coaching knowledge follows a fairly consistent developmental process that is rooted in the early athletic experiences of the participants. This is reinforced by Gilbert and colleagues (Gilbert & Côté, 2003; Gilbert, Kulikov, Niino, Trudel, & Côté, 2002; Gilbert, Niino, Wahl, & Conway, 2003) who examined the athletic and coaching experiences of successful coaches in three different coaching contexts. Successful coaches accumulated thousands of hours of ‘pre-coaching’ experience while competing in sport as athletes. Furthermore, the coaches played an average of four sports per year as athletes, thereby being exposed to many different coaching styles and coaching strategies. This ‘pre-coaching’ experience may provide coaches with tacit knowledge about the sport and coaching roles.

#### *Motivations and Needs*

Studies conducted for the Scottish Sports Council (1997) and for Sport Coach UK (2004) have examined the factors influencing the motivations of sports coaches. Principal motivators for attracting coaches into coaching included a wish to remain involved in competitive sport, a general interest in sport, helping young people and putting something back into the sport. The UK study found that adults would be encouraged to take up coaching if their children were involved; there was some sort of financial incentive and if courses were more easily available.

Reasons for remaining involved in coaching were a continued sense of enjoyment, maintaining competition involvement, putting something back and helping young people. The Scottish study (1997) found that improvements in National Governing Body (NGB) support, availability of facilities and standards of equipment were important in sustaining interest in coaching, as were coaches’ networks and local education courses.

The factors identified most strongly by coaches for disengaging from coaching were related to external considerations: pressure of work, development of other interests, family commitments and job changes. Lack of time, too few opportunities, the costs involved and the availability of local courses were identified as barriers among UK coaches. Factors that were likely to influence lapsed coaches to return to coaching were grants for coach education, the availability of local coach education and the opportunity to work with senior coaches.

Gould, Giannini, Krane and Hodge (1990) found that constant adaptation of coaches’ own coaching experience and the observation of other successful coaches are the most important knowledge sources that help elite coaches develop their coaching styles. Constant interaction with peers was one of the best sources of learning for expert coaches.

In a detailed case study, Jones et al. (2003) identified observing other coaches’ work as a key influence on a coach’s personal coaching philosophy. Learning from others extended from the practices and exercises used to the more significant issues of how to best deal with players. The coach’s perception of what players expected from him was also identified as a key influence. In addition, experiential knowledge and player empathy were considered to be important by the coach. The coach was

unafraid to experiment with new strategies and exercises and he believed that experience provided the basic material for constructing professional knowledge. Specifically, reflecting on experiences, evaluating them and considering alternatives were important.

Official coach certification programmes were considered to be of limited practical value by the coach. The authors concluded that coach education programmes should consider the influences on coaches fulfilling their roles and should be structured around the cues presented by real-life coaching problems. This is supported by Lemyre & Trudel (2004) who found learning to be a coach entails much more than simple participation in formal training. Structured mentoring programme and the opportunity to acquire hands-on experience should be incorporated into coach education programmes (Bloom et al., 1998; Jones et al., 2003).

This report will examine the development process and needs of Irish coaches. Results will be discussed in the context of previous studies on coach development.

## **Methodology**

### *Participants*

Six hundred and sixty-three postal questionnaires were administered to a wide range of NCDP certified coaches. These coaches ranged from novice (NCDP Level 1) to elite (NCDP Level 3) and represented a variety of different sports (both individual and team sports). Quota sampling was used to select coaches of varying expertise from the NCTC database. Four hundred NCDP Level 1, 200 NCDP Level 2 and 63 NCDP Level 3 coaches were systematically selected. The percentage of male and female coaches at each NCDP level was reflected in the sample. Of the 663 coaches who were sent questionnaires, 129 returned usable responses (20% return rate).

### *Questionnaire*

The questionnaire was developed by the authors with some of the questions derived and adapted from a questionnaire developed by Lyle et al (1997), which investigated the factors influencing the motivations of coaches in Scotland. The questionnaire was comprised of four parts: personal details, athletic profile, coaching profile and reasons for coaching. The questionnaire contained both open and closed questions and was designed to obtain the following kinds of information: demographics (sex, age, occupation, place of residence, educational status, sports-related qualifications), athletic profile (sports played, years playing the sport, highest level of involvement, time spent playing the sport), coaching experience, coaching qualifications, effectiveness of coaching courses; time spent coaching; reasons for coaching, influences, supports for coaches and reasons for ceasing coaching (if applicable).

### *Pilot Study*

The questionnaire was first piloted with the NCTC technical group and then twenty NCDP certified coaches in the Munster region ranging from Introduction to Level 3 coaches from both individual and team sports e.g. soccer, tennis, athletics, hockey, basketball, rugby and GAA. Some modifications were made following the pilot study.

### *Analysis*

Results were analysed using SPSS Version 12 for Windows. Mean, medians and standard deviations were calculated. Parametric tests (e.g. one way analysis of

variance) and non-parametric tests (e.g. chi-square and Wilcoxin signed ranks tests) for statistically significance were conducted, where appropriate.

## Results

### *Personal Details*

Descriptive statistics of the coaches' personal details revealed the following profile: the average coach is male (75%) and in his late-40s ( $M = 47$  years,  $SD = 11$  years). Sixty-four percent of coaches reached third level education and one in five coaches had a sports related qualification with the most common qualification being a physical education degree. Nearly half of Irish coaches are from Social Class 1 and 2 (Table 1). Thirty-nine percent of coaches work in managerial and technical roles with half of these roles involving teaching.

**Table 1: Social class of respondents**

Social Class	n(%)
1. Professional Workers	12(9)
2. Managerial and technical	50(39)
3. Non-manual	17(13)
4. Skilled manual	14(11)
5. Semi-skilled	2(2)
6. Unskilled	0(0)
7. All others gainfully occupied & unknown	6(5)
8. Coaches	10(8)
9. Student	1(1)
10. Housewives	3(2)
11. Retired	12(9)

### *Athletic Profile*

Ninety-three percent of coaches were involved in sport as a performer. Coaches accumulated nearly 5,000 hours ( $M = 4,927$  hours,  $SD = 4,140$ ) and 13 years ( $M = 12.6$  years,  $SD = 7.2$ ) of 'pre-coaching' experience while competing in sport as athletes. This pre-coaching experience may provide coaches with knowledge about the sport and coaching. This is in line with Gilbert, Côté and Mallett (2006) which found that U.S. high school, community and college coaches accumulated approximately 3,000-6,000 hours and 13-26 years of 'pre-coaching' experience as athletes. Irish coaches played an average of 2.4 sports ( $SD = 1.1$ ) as athletes suggesting that they were exposed to different coaching styles and strategies. However, this contrasts with Gilbert et al.'s (2006) study where U.S. coaches participated in 3-4 sports as athletes. This may suggest that U.S. athletes are exposed to a greater number of sports than Irish athletes and/or that there may be a greater variety of sports available to children in U.S. schools. The top three sports played by Irish coaches as athletes were athletics, soccer and Gaelic football. Only one individual sport was mentioned in the top eight sports. The majority of coaches reached county/provincial level (28%) or international level (27%) as an athlete with 21% reaching club level. Approximately 70% of coaches were captains/assistant captains.

### *Athletic Profile by Coaching Level*

A profile of coaches' athletic profile by coaching level is shown in Table 2. Level 3 coaches accumulated the greatest number of hours of 'pre-coaching' experience as athletes, although this was not significant. The Level 1 ( $M = 4049.6$ ) and Level 2 ( $M = 4271.3$ ) coaches reported similar total hours accumulated as

athletes. It is worth noting that there was a large standard deviation in the total hours accumulated as athletes across all coaching levels.

No significant difference was found between the number of sports played and coaching level and between the number of years of athletic involvement and coaching level. However, there was an escalating trend for years of athletic involvement across coaching levels.

Chi-square analyses revealed a relationship between leadership role and coaching level. Level 3 coaches were more likely to be leaders than Level 2 or Level 1 coaches. However, this relationship is very weak. A relationship was also found for highest level of involvement as an athlete and coaching level. However, this relationship was weak. More Level 3 coaches reached international level as an athlete than the other coaching levels.

**Table 2: Athletic profile by coaching level**

	Level 1 Coaches		Level 2 Coaches		Level 3 Coaches	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
<b>Total Hrs</b>	4049.6	3946.2	4271.3	3120.0	6229.8	5016.2
<b>Sports (#)</b>	2.2	1.2	2.6	1.2	2.4	1.0
<b>Years</b>	11.9	9.1	12.6	7.1	13.3	5.5
<b>Leaders</b>	55% yes		69% yes		83% yes	
<b>Highest Level of Involvement (%)</b>	Club	30	Club	25	Club	12.5
	County/prov	33	County/prov	31	County/prov	19
	National	12	National	20	National	9
	International	12	International	16	International	56

Based on these results, it appears that a minimum of several thousand hours of athletic involvement, across more than one sport, for an average of 13 years is characteristic of Irish coaches. It also appears that Level 3 coaches were highly skilled athletes as they were more likely to play a leadership role and to compete internationally as athletes.

### *Coaching Profile*

Of the 132 responses, 78% coaches were still coaching (i.e. current coaches) while the remaining 22% no longer coached (i.e. lapsed coaches). Thirty percent coaches were Level 1 coaches; 44% were Level 2 and 27% were Level 3. Coaches had, on average, 17 years (SD = 10) coaching experience with Level 3 coaches having significantly more coaching experience ( $F = 3.821$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) than Level 1 coaches (Table 3). Coaches were qualified to coach a variety of sports. Approximately 22 sports were mentioned. Athletics and soccer were by far the two most popular sports with 42% and 26% of coaches coaching these sports respectively. Some coaches (13%) had qualifications in more than one sport

**Table 3: Number of years coaching**

Coach Qualification Level	Mean (years)	SD (years)
Level 1	14	11
Level 2	18	9
Level 3	20	10

Coaches were 26 years of age (SD = 8 years) when they first started coaching. However, it was, on average, two years later (Mean age = 28 years, SD = 8 years) before they made the conscious decision to become a coach and later again before they attended their first coach education course (Mean age = 29 years, SD = 9

years). The Wilcoxin signed ranks test revealed significant differences between these three ages.

In relation to the sport(s) that coaches currently coach, coaches were asked to outline the average number of *hours* they spend *per week* during the *competitive season* on a range of coach developmental activities. Data is presented in Table 6 for coaching preparation; time spent travelling to training and competitions; time spent at training and competitions; coaching review; observing other coaches; administration and attending coach education courses or studying coaching materials. Lapsed coaches were asked to respond to the question in relation to the last sport they coached. In total, coaches spent 30 hours/week during the competitive season involved in coach developmental activities. Most of the time was spent in training (M = 7.9 hours) and at competitions (M = 6.1 hours) with a lot of time being spent travelling to training (M = 2.9 hours) and competition (M = 3.4 hours). Coaches spent the least amount of time observing other coaches (M = 1.2 hours), reviewing coaching (M = 1.4 hours) and attending coach courses or studying coach materials (M = 2.1 hours). However, this is still a considerable amount of time to spend per week reviewing, observing and studying coaching. There was a lot of variation in the responses given by coaches (as evident by the large values for standard deviation) so the results should be regarded with caution.

**Table 6: Coaching tasks during the competitive season**

Coaching tasks – Competitive Season	Mean (hr/week)	Std Deviation (hr/week)	Range (hr/week)
Coaching preparation	2.6	3.8	0-33
Travelling to training	2.9	4.2	0-21
Training	7.9	6.4	0.5-30
Travelling to competitions	3.4	4.6	0-37.5
Time at competitions	6.1	7.1	0-57
Coaching review	1.4	1.4	0-8
Observing other coaches	1.2	1.8	0-10
Administration	2.3	2.8	0-16
Attending coach courses or studying coach materials	2.1	2.4	0-10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30</b>		<b>0-57</b>

Level 3 coaches invested the greatest number of hours per week (M = 35.9 hours) during the competitive season in coach developmental activities (Table 7). This was significantly higher than the number of hours invested by Level 1 coaches (F = 3.84,  $p < 0.05$ ). In relation to each coaching activity, Level 3 coaches spent significantly more time reviewing coaching than Level 1 coaches (F=3.636,  $p < 0.05$ ). Level 3 coaches spent slightly less time observing other coaches than Level 2 coaches. However, this difference was not significant. No significant difference was found between any of the other coaching activities and coach qualification level. Again, it is worth noting the high standard deviations. There was a lot of variation in the results so they should be interpreted with caution.

**Table 7: Coaching tasks during the competitive season for coach qualification level**

Coaching tasks – Competitive Season (hr/wk)	Level 1 Coaches			Level 2 Coaches			Level 3 Coaches		
	M	SD	Min- Max	M	SD	Min- Max	M	SD	Min- Max
Coaching preparation	2.1	5.6	0-33	2.1	1.6	0.5-8	3.5	3.4	0.5-17.5
Travelling to training	3.2	5.3	0-20	2.1	2.6	0-13	3.9	4.9	0-21
Training	6.2	5.2	1-20	8.2	6.8	1.5-30	8.6	5.8	0.5-24.5
Travelling to competitions	2.1	2.3	0-8	2.7	2.7	0-14	5.4	7.2	0-37.5
Time at competitions	5.0	4.1	0-18	5.7	6.1	0-36	8.2	10.8	0.5-57
Coaching review*	0.9	0.7	0-2.5	1.4	1.5	0-6	1.9	1.8	0-8
Observing other coaches	0.8	0.9	0-3	1.6	2.3	0-10	1.0	1.6	0-7
Administration	1.7	2.3	0-10	2.4	3.0	0-16	2.9	3.3	0-13.5
Attending coach courses or studying coach materials	1.9	2.3	0-10	2.2	2.4	0-10	2.1	2.8	0-10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21.1</b>	<b>18.3</b>		<b>26.1</b>	<b>19.7</b>		<b>35.9</b>	<b>27.8</b>	

### Coaching Attributes

Coaches indicated the importance of a number of coaching attributes based on a 4-point Likert scale: 1 = of no importance, 4 = of very great importance, 0 = not relevant to me (Table 8). All coaching attributes listed were considered to be of great importance (Median = 3) or very great importance (Median = 4). No attribute scored lower than three.

**Table 8: Main attributes needed to become a coach**

Attributes	Median	Range
Ability to reflect on own coaching ability	4	0-4
Developing team work with players/athletes	4	0-4
Ability to reflect on and learn from sessions	4	2-4
Ability to reflect on individual player/athlete development	4	2-4
Constant adaptation of own coaching experience	4	2-4
Ability to identify the needs of the players/athletes you coach	4	2-4
Being able to plan a session	4	2-4
Being able to plan a series of sessions	4	2-4
Ability to observe, analyse and provide feedback at training	4	0-4
Ability to observe, analyse and provide feedback before, during and after competition	4	0-4
Communication with others – players/athletes, coaches, parents, NGBs etc.	3.5	2-4
Having a clearly defined role at competition	3	0-4
A player/athlete-centred approach	3	0-4
Being able to plan a competitive year	3	0-4
Ability to develop own personal coaching style	3	1-4
Having an official coaching qualification e.g. NCDP Level 1	3	0-4
Attending formal coach education programmes	3	1-4
Ability to reflect on player/athlete development in a team/squad	3	0-4

Coaches also identified any other attributes that they felt were needed to be a coach. In this case, patience was the most popular attribute mentioned by coaches (n=11) followed by good communication skills (n=5) and good listening skills (n=4).

### *Types of Knowledge Needed*

Coaches indicated the importance of different types of knowledge for coaching based on the same 4-point Likert scale: 1 = of no importance, 4 = of very great importance, 0 = not relevant to me (Table 9). All types of knowledge listed were considered to be of great importance or very great importance. No knowledge type scored lower than three.

**Table 9: Types of knowledge needed for coaching**

<b>Types of Knowledge</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Range</b>
Technical knowledge i.e. knowledge of the skills and techniques of the sport	4	2-4
Tactical knowledge of the sport e.g. tactics, competition strategies.	4	2-4
Physical knowledge of the sport e.g. strength, flexibility, speed, endurance.	4	2-4
Mental knowledge of the sport e.g. goal-setting, anxiety control, imagery.	4	0-4
Knowledge of lifestyle issues of players/athletes in the sport e.g. diet, planning, self-monitoring.	3	0-4
Knowledge of personal issues of players/athletes in the sport e.g. sport, career and life goals	3	1-4
Knowledge of the long-term development process as it applies to the sport	3	0-4
Knowledge of growth and development	3	0-4
Competitive experience as a player/athlete	3	0-4

Coaches also identified any other types of knowledge they felt were needed for coaching. These included knowledge about your athlete as a whole person (n=4); knowledge about dealing with young people (n=2) and knowledge of new trends/developments (n=2).

### *Experience*

Coaches indicated the importance of different types of experiences in becoming a coach based on a 4-point Likert scale: 1 = of no importance, 4 = of very great importance, 0 = not relevant to me (Table 10). All types of experience listed were considered to be of great importance or very great importance. No experiences listed scored lower than three.

**Table 10: Types of experiences needed for coaching**

<b>Types of Experiences</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Range</b>
Ability to reflect and learn from your experiences	4	2-4
Coaching experience during/just after a coach education course	3	0-4
Experience as a coach with the players/athletes you wish to work with	3	1-4
Developmental coaching experience with younger players/athletes	3	0-4
Working with more experienced coaches/mentor programmes	3	0-4
Experience in the selection process	3	0-4
Experience at training camps	3	0-4

When coaches were given the opportunity to list any other types of experience they felt were needed for coaching, they identified experience of major championships (initially shadowing a coach/manager); experience watching games and identifying coach and players strengths and weaknesses; experience of evaluating your own performance; experience at managing and officiating.

### *Coach Education Courses*

According to coaches, the most beneficial aspect of the coach education course they attended was meeting other coaches and sharing experiences and methods with other coaches (Table 11). In addition, coaches found that the information and knowledge gained at the coach education courses was also very beneficial. Other

beneficial aspects of the coaching courses included the practical sessions; learning how to plan and deliver sessions and the professionalism and feedback from the tutors who delivered the courses.

**Table 11: Most beneficial aspect of coach education courses**

<b>Most Beneficial Aspect</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Meeting other coaches and sharing experiences and methods of coaching with other coaches	60
Information and knowledge gained i.e. technical/tactical/physical/mental knowledge gained	43
Practical sessions	21
Planning and delivering sessions	11
Professionalism & feedback of tutors who delivered the course	10
Learning how to break down and teach skills	7
Study of periodisation	5
To see top coaches in action	5
Getting a qualification	3
Learning how to coach children	3
Gave me confidence	3
Learning how to communicate with players	3

Coaches also identified any items they would like to see included in coach education courses in the future (Table 12). Results conveyed that more practical work was needed in future coach education courses. More information on sport psychology and working with children and young adults was also needed. In addition, coaches would like to receive follow-up support following attendance at coach education courses. Examples of such follow-up support would be observation of coaches delivering a session or coaching at a match/competition. Coaches would also like to hear accounts from elite and/or other coaches of their experiences. In addition, First Aid, more sports science information (e.g. biomechanics, physiology) and more specialised coaching courses (e.g. shot putt) were needed in coach education courses in the future.

**Table 12: Extra items needed in future coach education courses**

<b>Extra Items</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
More practical work	10
Sport psychology	7
Education in relation to working with children and young adults	7
Follow-up after courses e.g. observation of session, evaluate match	6
Accounts from full time elite/other coaches	6
First Aid	6
Sports science e.g. biomechanics, physiology, psychology	5
More specialised coaching courses e.g. shot putt	4
Communication skills	4
Nutrition e.g. before and after training/competition	3
More input and active involvement from coaches at the course	3
New ideas in coaching	3

### *Reasons for Coaching*

Coaches were provided with a list of possible reasons why they would first become involved in coaching, which they rated in order of importance based on a 4-point Likert scale as before (1 = Of no importance, 4 = Of very great importance). Having a general interest in the sport; desire to help young people; to put something back into the sport and to maintain involvement in competitive sport were considered to be very important reasons for becoming involved in coaching. This supports the

findings of Lyle et al (1997). Having some free time and others asking for their help were considered to be only somewhat important.

Coaches also identified the important factors in either maintaining their involvement in coaching or, in the case of lapsed coaches, in encouraging them to return to coaching. Once again, coaches were provided with a list of possible answers and they were asked to indicate the importance of each factor based on a 4-point Likert scale. Improved availability of facilities and standard of equipment in facilities; improved support from their governing body; grants to attend coach education courses; more free time to coach; availability of coach education courses at the next coaching level; locally available NGB and NCTC coach development workshops and the opportunity to work with senior coaches and higher level performers were all considered to be very important factors in either maintaining coaches' involvement in coaching or in encouraging them to return to coaching. Better career opportunities for coaches; payment for coaching and coach associations/networks were only considered to be somewhat important. These findings support Lyle et al (1997) with the exception of coach association/networks, which was rated higher in the Lyle et al. study. This may simply be due to a lack of understanding among Irish coaches about what was meant by coach associations/networks. This terminology would not be familiar among Irish coaches.

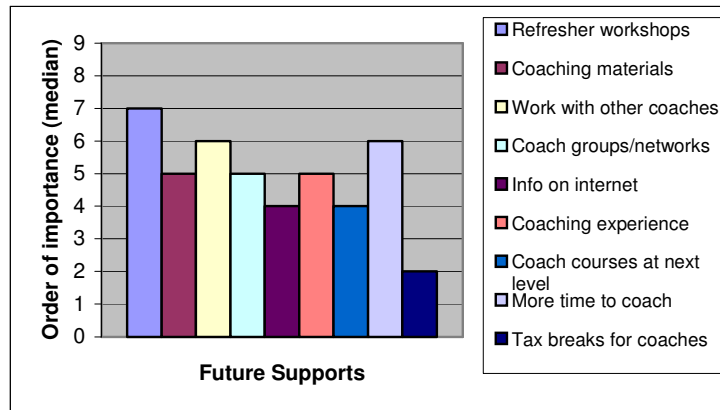
#### *Influences on Coaching*

Coaches identified what influences the way they coach(ed). They were provided with a list of possible answers and they were asked to indicate the importance of each statement based on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = no influence, 4 = big influence). Observing other successful coaches; practical coaching experience; experimentation and adaptation of own coaching experience; desire to construct and maintain positive working relationships with players/athletes; coaching materials e.g. manuals, books; coach education programmes/courses; the competitive level of the players/athletes and a desire to nurture the development of athletes/players in all aspects of their lives – sport, social and school were all considered to be very big influences on the way coaches coach(ed). The way coaches were coached themselves; what coaches thought players/athletes expected from them as a coach; sports science and the age and personal characteristics of the players/athletes were considered moderate influences while parents of players/athletes; level of NGB and community support and gender of the players/athletes were only slight influences.

#### *Supports for Coaches*

The current level of availability of supports for coaches was rated as poor or average. When asked what had helped/supported them in fulfilling their role as a coach, coaches believed that other coaches/senior coaches; the success and enthusiasm of their players/athletes; coaching courses; passion for sport; encouragement and praise from peers, athletes and family; their club and family/parental support had helped and supported them to fulfil their role. Factors that had hindered or prevented coaches from fulfilling their role as coach involved time commitments; lack of facilities and resources and lack of NGB and club support.

When asked what supports would assist them in their future coaching, coaches rated (based on a 9-point Likert scale in order of importance, 1 = the least important support, 9 = the most important support) refresher workshops to update coaching knowledge; opportunity to work with or observe other successful coaches and more time within their current work and family role to coach as very important supports for them (Figure 1).



**Figure 1: Future supports for coaches**

Coaching materials; more hands-on coaching experience; and coach discussion groups/coach networks where coaches discuss current and past coaching issues and how these issues were addressed were moderately important future supports for coaches. Of the list of nine possible supports that could assist coaches in their future coaching, the availability of tax breaks for coaches was considered to be the least important support.

#### *Lapsed Coaches*

By rating the importance of a list of possible reasons for ceasing coaching, lapsed coaches identified the reasons why they no longer coached. The majority of reasons listed were considered to be not important to coaches in their decision to stop coaching. Pressure of work and lack of time were the only two reasons to be considered of great importance in coaches' decision to stop coaching. When asked to identify the single most important factor in their decision to cease coaching, coaches cited work/other commitments and time. These findings support Lyle et al (1997) and sports coach UK (2004).

#### **Future Directions**

This study provides a general overview of Irish coaches' development paths, both in terms of their athletic and coach profiles; total amount of time invested in coaching; types of attributes, knowledge and experience needed for coaching and reasons for coaching. Future studies should consider comparing coaches of varying degrees of success. Do more successful coaches accumulate greater hours as athletes and invest more time in coach development activities than less successful coaches?

This study looked at NCDP qualified coaches. However, there are many coaches in Ireland who are not qualified and future studies should consider these. The majority of coaches in this study were athletics and soccer coaches. Future studies could examine coaches of other sports and/or look specifically at a particular sport.

#### **Conclusion**

Findings from the current study support the notion that coaches undergo many years of pre-coaching experience as athletes. Coaches highlighted the importance of non-formal methods of coach education and development e.g. observing other coaches; mentoring; coaching experience. This study also illustrates

the significant amount of time coaches invest in coach development activities, despite the fact that many of these coaches are volunteers. Supports need to be provided in light of coaches' time demands and family/work commitments.

### References

- Bloom BS. (Ed.) (1985) *Developing talent in young people*. New York: Ballantine.
- Bloom G. (2002) Coaching demands and responsibilities of expert coaches. In: Silva JM. & Stevens DE. (Eds.) *Psychological Foundations of Sport* 438-465. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Bloom GA, Durand-Bush N, Schinke RJ. & Salmela JH. (1998) The importance of mentoring in the development of coaches and athletes. *International Journal of Sport Psychology*, 29, 267-281
- Cote J, Salmela J, Trudel P, Baria A. & Russell S. (1995) The coaching model: a grounded assessment of expert gymnastic coaches' knowledge. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 17, 1-17.
- Gilbert, W., & Côté, J. (2003). Tracing the developmental process of successful coaches. Paper presented at the meeting of the Canadian Society for Psychomotor Learning and Sport Psychology, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.
- Gilbert, W., Côté, J. & Mallett, C. (2006) Developmental paths and activities of successful sport coaches. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching*, 1(1) 69-76
- Gilbert, W., Kulikov, N., Niino, A., Trudel, P., & Côté, J. (2002). Tracing the development of expertise in coaching. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance, San Diego, CA.
- Gilbert, W., Niino, A., Wahl, M-T., & Conway, M. (2003). Developmental activity profiles of successful coaches. Paper presented at the meeting of the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology, Philadelphia, PA.
- Gilbert WD. & Trudel, P. (2001). Learning to coach through experience: Reflection in model youth sport coaches. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 21, 16-34
- Gould D, Giannini J, Krane V & Hodge K. (1990) Educational needs of elite U.S. National Team, Pan American and Olympic coaches. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 9, 332-344.
- Lemyre, Francois & Trudel, Pierre (2004) The learning path in the role of volunteer coach. *Avante*, 10(3), 40-55
- Lyle J, Allison M. & Taylor J. (1997) *Factors influencing the motivations of sports coaches. A research study for the Scottish Sports Council*. Edinburgh: The Scottish Sports Council.
- McCullick B, Cumings R. & DeMarco GM. (1998) The road to expert coaching. *GAHPERD journal*, 32(1), 42-49.
- Schinke RJ, Bloom GA. & Salmela JH (1995) The career stages of elite Canadian basketball coaches. *Avante*, 1: 48-62
- Silva JM. & Stevens DE. (2002) *Psychological Foundations of Sport* (eds) Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Sports Coach UK (2004) *Report on Sports Coaching in the UK – Research study conducted for Sports Coach UK*