

An Assessment of the Changes in YMCA Basketball Coaches' Behaviors and Attitudes  
Towards Youth Development Principles Associated with Youth Sports

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## ABSTRACT

### AN ASSESSMENT OF THE CHANGES IN YMCA BASKETBALL COACHES' BEHAVIORS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS PRINCIPLES ASSOCIATED WITH YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

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Youth sport administrators and coaches strive to create a positive atmosphere to help young athletes develop as individuals. Yet, many youth sport organizations are challenged with few resources or expertise in developing training models for coaches. The YMCA of San Luis Obispo is a progressive organization committed to developing an effective training model for coaches. The purpose of this study was to assess the changes in YMCA basketball coaches' behaviors and attitudes towards youth development principles associated with youth sports. This study was conducted through follow-up surveys with YMCA youth basketball coaches. Through the follow-up surveys it was found that coaches were able to develop new styles of coaching and strategies for interacting with their players based on training skits viewed at the pre-season meeting. Two major findings were the changes in the coaches' feelings towards running for punishment and punishing all players for individual's actions. Recommendations include expanding the training skits and developing a more comprehensive training program for coaches so they know what is expected, understand what athletes should be receiving, and have ongoing resources to call upon throughout the season.

Keywords: youth sports, coaching, attitude, behavior, youth development

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### Background of Study

Every year millions of girls and boys participate in youth sport programs offered through private, public, and non-profit organizations that strive to create a positive atmosphere to help young athletes develop. Youth athletes are given the opportunity to work with coaches who help them to develop an overall positive character and enhance their skills (Albrecht & Strand, 2010). However, coaching youth sports must be done in a specific manner. Most children, ages five to twelve, participating in youth sports are doing so to have fun, learn new skills, improve existing skills, to become more physically fit, and to interact with friends. Yet many youth sports coaches have overemphasized the outcome of the game and create an environment similar to what they know or have seen before (Lockwood & Perlman, 2008).

The motivations and attitudes of youth sport coaches are intended to aid young athletes in their development as an individual. Yet according to Coakley (2007), youth sport coaches coach the way they were coached, and mimic what they have seen in the realm of traditional competitive athletics, both professionally and recreationally. Youth sport coaches are volunteers, and though organizations are grateful for their time and energy, there must be consistency between the ideals of the organization and those of the coaches. That consistency can be enhanced through effective training, so this study is focused on assessing a model for youth sport coach training. By working to understand and improve coaches' behaviors and attitudes, the positive change that results may help

organizations create a more positive experience for all youth and subsequently retain more participants annually. The purpose of this study is to assess the changes in YMCA basketball coaches' behaviors and attitudes towards youth development principles associated with youth sports.

### Review of Literature

Research for this review of literature was conducted at Robert E. Kennedy Library on the campus of California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. In addition to books and other resources, the following online databases were utilized: Academic Search Elite, Expanded Academic ASAP, SPORTDiscus, and Proquest. This review of literature is organized into the following topic areas: coaches' training in youth development and youth retention in sports.

Coaches' training in youth development. Annually, over 7 million adults are associated with youth sports, and of these approximately 2.4 million serve as youth sport coaches, volunteering their time and energy in to coaching youth sports for children (National Council of Youth Sport, 2008). These coaches are pivotal to organizations that conduct and run youth sports programs, as without their dedication to the programs many may not be in existence. Coaching is considered a true profession, and national standards are in place to make sure coaches take the initiative and responsibility to help generate positive youth development (Bodey, Schaumleffel, Zakrajsek, & Joesph, 2009). Those individuals who advocate for youth sports say it builds character (Bodey et al.), yet it also helps youth participants to improve educational feats, including higher grade point

averages, increased learning at school, and reduced dropout rates (Barber, Eccles, & Stone, 2001).

There is a concern in today's organizations about recruiting and retaining their volunteer youth sport coaches. These organizations recruit volunteers by reaching out to the community (Bouchet & Lehe, 2010). Many coaches are motivated to coach because a certain psychological meaning is satisfied by their participation. They feel needed and important, which makes them feel better about themselves. However, the main reason youth coaches say they volunteer could be credited to their values, to make a positive change in youth. (Busser & Carruthers, 2010). Many other adult coaches often attribute their learned lessons to the experiences which they had when they participated in youth sports (Conroy & Coatsworth, 2006).

Youth sports coaches often receive little training. The training they do receive often leaves them with questions and a gap between what is expected of them and what skills they actually possess (Gilbert & Trudel, 2001). According to Conroy and Coatsworth (2006), "Coach training programs represent one model for structuring youth sports settings to provide optimal psychological benefits for participating youths" (p.130). By requiring coaches to only take an introductory training, they are equipped with only a basic knowledge of coaching. Thereby, some large youth sport organizations supplement with their own training programs to allow for coaches to have an increased basis for knowledge and offer youth a better youth sports experience (Kim, 2009). The coaches' trainings often only give background information on the organization, rather than stating the goals of the program and the benefits it had for the youth athlete participants (Bouchet & Lehe, 2010). Coaches have expressed the need for additional



training in order to better coach athletes at the appropriate level (Wiersma & Sherman, 2005).

Coaches play a significant role in the development of youth; this can be both positive and negative, and attributed to a variety of factors within youth sports. According to the National Standards for Sports Coaches (National Association for Sports and Physical Education, 2006), “Parents across the country send their children to practices and events with the expectation that adult supervision will bring about positive sport outcomes and maximal learning and development” (p. 6). Growing numbers of youth are developing life-skills and values as they play sports. Fraser-Thomas and Côté (2009) concluded these positive and negative experiences in sport can be attributed to: challenging athletes, creating meaningful adult and peer relationships, experiencing a sense of community, poor relationships with coaches, negative influences of peers, and carrying the burden of parent pressures (p.3).

The positive experiences youth gain from their participation in sports are often brought about from their coaches helping them to positively develop as an individual. The coaches’ beliefs in their athlete’s capabilities help to increase their confidence and motivation, while coaches’ constructive feedback gives athletes a sense of individualized attention (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009). Coaches, who help athletes with goal setting, were able to monitor an athlete’s process in achieving both long and short term goals. Athletes who develop relationships with coaches beyond only an athletic focus have a tendency to maintain a strong connection with their coach through communication. These athletes often see coaches as role models; thereby they look up to them for advice and knowledge (Fraser-Thomas & Côté).

However, many athletes attribute having poor relationships with coaches to poor communication, coaches playing favorites, intimidation, poor work ethic, and inappropriate behavior by their coaches (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009). In order to combat the negative experiences that occur in youth sports, the Search Institute's 40 developmental assets serve to assist organization to effectively help children develop. The external assets, grouped into categories, are support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time. The internal assets, grouped in categories, are commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity (Search Institute, 2006, p.1). These developmental assets are the foundation for youth participation in sports, as it allows children to grow as individuals.

Coaches volunteer their time to help individuals participating in sports foster positive youth development and create a positive outlook about themselves. However, in part to only basic levels of training, many coaches are unable to help athletes reach their full potential and encourage them to grow as a strong individual. In some instances coaches are seen in a negative light when they play favorites or have a lack of communication, yet most of this can be attributed to lack of adequate training. By increasing the amount of training which coaches receive, there could be an increase in the positive youth development among participants and an increased interest for youth to remain active participants in youth sports.

Youth retention in sports. Youth retention in sports is a constant concern of organizations. In the United States there are over 180 organizations serving approximately 44 million girls and boys who participate in organized youth sports (National Council of Youth Sports, 2010). In order for organizations to continue to offer

youth sports, there is a need for qualified coaches. These coaches must strive to help create a positive youth development atmosphere for the children (Albrecht & Strand, 2010). The history of youth sports identifies a variety of factors, which have affected the number of participants both positively and negatively.

Youth sports participation has increased since the 1950s, which has contributed to the boost in organized youth sport programs (Coakley, 2007). An increase in organized sports is due in part to the number of families in which both parents work. This increase in parental working hours has created a new sense of what it means to be a “good parent” in accounting for children twenty-four hours a day. Adults have seen organized sports as ideal activities for keeping youth out of trouble and as safe alternative to activities performed away from home (Coakley).

Parents have a considerable influence over their children’s priorities in sports. Coaches have pointed out that children participate in sports because parents want or force them to participate (Bengoechea, Stren, & William, 2004). Youth athletes prioritize participation and having fun over winning as their primary motivation in sports (Meisterjahn & Dieffenbach, 2008). Children are also motivated to participate in sports to be with friends, learn new skills, and to be active (Coakley, 2007). However, the motivations for boys and girls differ. Boys are motivated to participate in youth sports because of their competitive nature and personal physical skills assessment; whereas girls are motivated to participate to formulate friendships and for their overall fitness (Webb, 2008). An athlete’s motivation reflects the effort in which they put forth during practice, games, and team activities (Webb, 2008). When individuals are not motivated, either

through personal means or their coaches, these athletes may experience burnout from sports, or drop out of sport completely (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005).

The motivations of youth athletes should be considered by coaches, and taken into account when athletic environments are established (Webb, 2008). According to Fraser-Thomas et al. (2005), “Positive youth development proposes that if policy-makers, sport organizations, coaches, and parents are successful in developing and implementing youth sport programs and are conducted in appropriate settings, and foster developmental assets, youth will subsequently have positive sports experiences.” The most cited reason for youth to continue sports occurred when coaches placed an emphasis on fun and enjoyment, which increased the desire to continue sport participation (Bengoechea, et al., 2004).

To keep youth interested in playing sports (especially between the ages of 7 and 12), there should be a low frequency of practice and a high frequency of play or fun (Bengoechea et al.). As the children grow, an equal amount of play and practice will occur. The amount of fun in youth sports is positively correlated to increase athlete’s personal skill, feelings of control, and quality of feedback received (Bengoechea et al.). Athletes thrive off positive feedback from coaches (Lockwood & Perlman, 2008). This positive performance feedback gives specific information to athletes about what they have done correctly, thus boosting confidence through positive statements (Lockwood & Perlman). As long as these athletes consider themselves competent (Webb, 2008), through positive feedback and fun, they will remain interested in sports.

Though positive feedback is preferred, coaches often feel they must give constructive or negative feedback (Lockwood & Perlman, 2008). Examples of such

negative feedback are “Don’t drop your elbow” or “Don’t cross your feet during the drill.” Coaches use these phrases to communicate unsatisfactory performance, but should be followed up with a reason, or a way to fix the issue (Lockwood & Perlman). Often, these negative statements are not backed up with reason or a constructive way to correct what the athlete did incorrectly. This creates conflict between the athlete and coach adding to both individual’s frustration and the athlete’s motivation to continue to participate. Prescriptive feedback provides information that will help the athlete improve their performance; statements such as “next time keep your eye on the ball,” give the athlete direction without creating a negative atmosphere (Lockwood & Perlman). Overall, giving feedback allows coaches to offer praise, criticism, or information. However, limiting the use of feedback in any instance can hurt the athlete and have them perceive the coach does not care about how they may be progressing in ability.

Individuals who participate in youth sports are able to do so through many different organizations. They have the opportunity to become a well-rounded athlete, and they all deserve the same attention and benefits as other members of their team. Winning has become the main goal of many athletes, which can lead them to burn out, and eventually drop out of sports all together. It is important for coaches to remember that youth sports should be fun, and that constructive positive criticism and prescriptive feedback are important for youth athletes to feel that coaches care about their development and improving ability.

Summary. Youth retention in sports, as well as coaches’ training in youth development is closely linked together. Without the retention of children in youth sports, there would be no need for coaches’ to participate in trainings and to learn the positive

developmental aspects that athletes should learn from participating in youth sports. Coaches are an integral part of youth sports, taking the lead to establish a positive environment for the athletes by drawing from their own training, personal experiences, as well as making sure the athletes are having fun and enjoying themselves. Coaches should be given the proper trainings and background information on the organization in order to correctly work with youth in a positive atmosphere, which allows children to become better athletes while developing life-long friends and having fun.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to assess the changes in YMCA basketball coaches' behaviors and attitudes towards youth development principles associated with youth sports.

### Research Questions

This study attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What impact do the skits performed at the pre-season meeting have on the YMCA basketball coaches?
2. What are the differences between those who attended and did not attend the pre-season meeting?
3. Does length of service impact the changes in YMCA basketball coaches' behaviors and attitudes towards youth development principles?

### Delimitations

This study was delimited to the following parameters:

1. Information on coach's attitudes and behaviors was gathered from the coaches of youth basketball at the YMCA of San Luis Obispo County.
2. Behaviors and attitudes of coaches were analyzed.
3. The data were collected during the winter of 2010.
4. Information for this study was gathered using an online survey method.

### Limitations

This study was limited by the following factors:

1. The instrument used in this study was not tested for validity or reliability.
2. The instrument was dispersed via an online survey; thereby not all participants were mandated to complete the follow up questionnaire.
3. The survey link was emailed to participants and may have been sent to individual's junk mail or SPAM folders, unsuccessfully reaching participants.

### Assumptions

This study was based on the following assumptions:

1. It was assumed that YMCA coaches would respond honestly and to the best of their knowledge.
2. It was assumed that email addresses garnered for subjects, were the coaches true email addresses.

## Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined as used in this study:

Attitude. The views coaches have on their skills and the way they coach athletes.

Behavior. Actions and decision of individuals based on different situations they are confronted with.

Coach. Any adult over the age of 18 who has been cleared by the YMCA of San Luis Obispo to participate in the youth basketball program.

Youth. A child between the ages of 9 and 11 years of age.



## Chapter 2

### METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to assess the changes in YMCA basketball coaches' motivations and attitudes towards youth development principles associated with youth sports. This chapter is organized into the following sections: description of subjects, description of instrument, description of procedures, and method of data analysis.

#### Description of Subjects

The subjects of this study were YMCA youth basketball coaches who volunteer for the YMCA in San Luis Obispo. The season ran from December to March, with approximately 400 youth athletes participating and being coached by 120 volunteers. Participants were selected based on their involvement with the YMCA as coaches. Although attendance at the pre-season coaches meeting was the catalyst for the study, participants were not required to have attended in order to participate in this portion of the study. Participants were selected using convenience sampling. Not all coaches participated in this study.

#### Description of Instrument

The researcher developed the instrument in consultation with the YMCA of San Luis Obispo and input from a faculty researcher. The instrument for this study was a questionnaire distributed online and in person to YMCA youth basketball coaches who volunteered their time with the San Luis Obispo YMCA youth basketball program. The questionnaire consisted of a series of 10 Likert scale questions, which asked the coaches

to respond to questions based on their level of agreement with youth development-oriented statements and scenarios provided. The following two questions asked respondents about the length of time they have coached youth sports, both in general terms and number of years with the YMCA. The last question asked respondents their age categorized into different brackets in order to see differences in opinions based on age groupings. The difference between the follow-up questionnaire and the pre- and post-questionnaires was the addition of a question, which asked coaches if their overall behaviors and attitudes changed based on the skits performed at the coaches' training.

An informed consent letter preceded the questionnaire, and can be found in Appendix A. A copy of the questionnaire is included as Appendix B. The consent letter indicated the participants' rights for participating in the study by completing the questionnaire. It stated how long it would take, that there were no risks associated with completing the questionnaire and the potential benefits associated with the study.

The instrument and procedures for implementation were submitted and approved by Cal Poly's Human Subjects Committee. The Human Subjects Committee reviewed the instrument to ensure that all potential risks were addressed and noted.

### Description of Procedures

Contact was made with the YMCA of San Luis Obispo County's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) on September 23, 2010 to obtain permission to conduct the study. On September 28, 2010 a meeting with the CEO, and two YMCA staff, concluded with the general parameters of the study established and a research partnership developed between the YMCA and Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo.

Testimonials of both negative and positive youth sports experiences were gathered from 6<sup>th</sup> grade students at Los Ranchos Elementary School and developed into skits. These skits were performed at the coaches training session for the winter basketball season on Tuesday, November 16, 2010. The skits were performed by student volunteers from the Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Administration, Department at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo.

Pre- and post-tests were conducted using self-administered questionnaires developed and distributed to the coaches to take before and after viewing the three skits. The purpose of a pre- and post-test design was to determine whether a change occurred in their perceptions of youth development principles after witnessing the training skits. All participants were given an informed consent letter which they received once inside the training meeting and the study was explained to the participants. They were instructed to complete the first questionnaire. Then the coaches were instructed to watch the skits and complete the post-test questionnaire. The questionnaires were collected as participants completed them, both pre- and post-test, in order for participants to focus on each individual part of the study at a time.

In January a follow up online questionnaire was distributed to the YMCA basketball coaches through an online survey system, zoomerang.com. In addition, the researcher attended the team photos day to allow for additional coaches not accessing email the opportunity to complete the follow up questionnaire. This follow up questionnaire allowed for a comparison of coaches' responses from before the season began to assess their perceptions after the season was already underway. Similarly, an

informed consent form was attached to the email and also included at the beginning of the online questionnaire.

### Method of Data Analysis

After all questionnaires were collected from respondents, the raw data were downloaded from zoomerang.com, and entered into Microsoft Excel. Each item included on the questionnaire was designed to answer one of the three research questions developed for this study.

The first 10 questions asked on the questionnaire were designed to determine the changes of YMCA basketball coaches' behaviors and attitudes towards youth development principles associated with youth sports. To answer the research questions pertaining to changes in YMCA basketball coaches' behaviors and attitudes, Likert scale data were collected and analyzed using measures of central tendencies (i.e., mean and standard deviation). A five-point Likert scale for agreement was utilized. These 10 questions were structured to gauge level of agreement coaches have with different scenarios, training techniques, and statements associated with youth sports coaching.

Demographic variables (i.e., age and gender) were collected and then analyzed using frequency and percentage to answer the research questions pertaining to the coaches length of service with the YMCA. To answer the research question coaches' were asked to answer questions regarding the number of years spent coaching youth sports, and the number of years spent coaching youth sports with the YMCA of San Luis Obispo. The last question asked coaches based on their viewing of the skits, if they had

since adjusted their style of coaching and/or developed any new strategies for teaching/interacting with their athletes.

## Chapter 3

### PRESENTATION OF THE RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to assess the changes in YMCA basketball coaches' behaviors and attitudes towards youth development principles associated with youth sports. This study was conducted through Zoomerang, an online survey database, from January 14, 2011 through January 31, 2011. In addition to the online survey, the study was also conducted on January 29, 2011 at the Sinsheimer Elementary School gymnasium, where the YMCA Basketball team photos took place. From the online survey 20 coaches completed the survey, and during the team photos an additional 32 coaches completed the survey. A sample size of 52 coaches was collected from a population of approximately 100 coaches, for a response rate of 52%. Of those 52 coaches, 32 coaches (61.54%) attended the training, while 20 coaches (38.46%) did not attend the pre-season coaches' training.

#### Demographics

Limited demographic data (i.e., gender, age, and years coaching youth sports) were collected from the participating coaches. Of the subjects who completed the survey, 44 were male (84.62%) and 8 were female (15.38%). The age groups of the participants included the following: 18-24 ( $n = 5$ , 9.62%), 25-31 ( $n = 1$ , 1.92%), 32-40 ( $n = 14$ , 26.92%), 41-50 ( $n = 26$ , 50.00%), and 50 and over ( $n = 6$ , 11.54%). Coaches were asked to attend at pre-season coaches training prior to the start of the basketball season.

### Coaching Behaviors and Attitudes Towards Youth Development

Coaches were asked to state their level of agreement with set of youth development and coaching-related statements utilizing a five-point Likert scale. Results indicated the strongest agreement from coaches was with praise and encouragement of athletes rather than strict discipline and punishment. They also indicated strong disagreement to having an athlete push through pain or injury to participate in a game or practice in order to teach commitment to the sport and teammates. For a complete presentation of results, see Table 1 below.

Table 1  
Coaches' Agreement with Statements and Scenarios According to Mean and Standard

Deviation

Statement or Scenario	Mean	Standard Deviation
I believe that continually reinforcing athlete's skills will make them better athletes. (Reinforcement)	4.37	0.89
I believe that running for punishment is an effective coaching technique. (Running)	2.33	1.13
Raising your voice during practices and games is effective at getting your point across to athletes. (Raising Voice)	2.69	0.92
Constantly reminding an athlete of a mistake they have made will help other athletes to not make the same mistake. (Reminding)	1.77	0.90
I believe that pointing out what an athlete did wrong will make them better. (Pointing Out)	3.31	1.00
Having an athlete push through pain or injury to participate in a game or practice teaches commitment to the sport and their teammates. (Pain or Injury)	1.40	0.60
I believe praise and encouragement are more effective than strict discipline and punishment. (Praise)	4.50	0.75
An effective way to teach teamwork and cohesion is to punish all players with additional cardiovascular drills equally for mistakes made by an individual teammate. (Additional Drills)	1.79	1.04
Athletes who do not put effort into all practices do not deserve to participate in games. (Effort)	2.40	1.05
I believe that pushing athletes to their maximum physical capability is an effective way to promote achievement. (Maximum Capability)	2.50	1.08



Based on attendance at the pre-season meeting, all coaches were asked to rate their level of agreement with a set of statements utilizing a five-point Likert scale. Comparing the coaches' levels of agreement to each statement or scenario based on attendance at the pre-season coaches meeting illustrated a difference in the agreement levels between who attended the pre-season training meeting and those who were unable to attend. Subjects were asked to rate their level of agreement using the Likert scale. The results indicated when comparing coaches' agreement levels, those who attended the pre-season coaches meeting had stronger feelings towards the youth development and/or positive coaching elements exhibited in the statements. When comparing the mean level of agreement for the statements, the two groups were significantly different for two of the statements at an alpha level of 0.05. For a complete presentation of results, see Table 2 below.

Table 2  
Coaches' Agreement with Statements and Scenarios According to Mean and Statistical

Significance

Statement or Scenario	Mean Attended	Mean Not Attended	P-Value
I believe that continually reinforcing athlete's skills will make them better athletes.	4.50	4.15	0.1681
I believe that running for punishment is an effective coaching technique.	2.03	2.80	0.0157*
Raising your voice during practices and games is effective at getting your point across to athletes.	2.69	2.70	0.9625
Constantly reminding an athlete of a mistake they have made will help other athletes to not make the same mistake.	1.59	2.05	0.0747
I believe that pointing out what an athlete did wrong will make them better.	3.22	3.45	0.4229
Having an athlete push through pain or injury to participate in a game or practice teaches commitment to the sport and their teammates.	1.28	1.60	0.0628
I believe praise and encouragement are more effective than strict discipline and punishment	4.47	4.55	0.7093
An effective way to teach teamwork and cohesion is to punish all players with additional cardiovascular drills equally for mistakes made by an individual teammate.	1.41	2.40	0.0004*
Athletes who do not put effort into all practices do not deserve to participate in games.	2.25	2.65	0.1851
I believe that pushing athletes to their maximum physical capability is an effective way to promote achievement.	2.34	2.75	0.1878

\*Significant at an alpha level of less than 0.05

### Adjustment to Coaching Based on Training

Subjects were asked based on their viewing of the skits, if they have since adjusted their style of coaching and/or developed new strategies for interacting with their players. Based on the data collected 32 coaches who attended the pre-season training meeting also completed the follow-up questionnaire. Of these respondents one individual responded that they were unable to view the skits or that any change was not applicable. Based on the remaining 31 respondents, 17 (54.84%) reported that they adjusted their style of coaching and/or developed new strategies for interacting with their players based on the pre-season training. The remaining 14 (45.16%) reported that viewing the skits had no effect on their style of coaching or strategies for interaction.

### Years Coaching and Adjustment in Coaching Style

Based on the information gathered on the number of years spent coaching youth sports, coaches were grouped into ranges in order to analyze the number of years coaching by data received and gauge experience levels. Coaches with one to two years in youth sports coaching were most likely to adjust their coaching styles, whereas coaches with three to five years coaching experience were least likely to adjust their coaching style. For a complete presentation of these results, see Table 3 below.

Table 3  
Years Coaching and Adjustment of Coaching Style Based on Frequency and Percentage

Years in Youth Sports	Adjustment of Coaching Style			
	Yes		No	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
1-2	7	70.00	3	30.00
3-5	5	38.46	8	61.54
6-10	4	80.00	1	20.00
Over 10	1	33.33	2	66.67

Note. Due to rounding of numbers, percentages may not equal 100% in each row

### Summary

Results from this study show that YMCA basketball coaches have differing agreement based on attendance at the pre-season training meeting. Participants in the study had varying views when it came to ranking their agreement on statements and scenarios based on the skits presented at the pre-season coaches' meeting. Findings indicated that coaches had the strongest agreement with praise and encouragement of athletes rather than strict discipline and punishment. Coaches also indicated a disagreement with having athletes push through pain and injuries.

Coaches also indicated that based on attendance at the pre-season training meeting, their agreement with several youth development-related statements were significantly different from those individuals who did not view the skits. Coaches with only one to two years experience were more likely to change their coaching style, whereas coaches with three to five years experience were least likely. The results

presented in this chapter indicate that changes are necessary to enhance the youth sports experience that children obtain from YMCA youth basketball coaches. A detailed summary and a discussion of the findings will follow in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to assess the changes in YMCA basketball coaches' behaviors and attitudes towards youth development principles associated with youth sports. This chapter is divided into the following sections: summary, discussion, conclusions, and recommendations.

#### Summary

Youth sports are offered by a variety of organizations to help create a positive atmosphere to help young athletes develop. Youth athletes are given the opportunity to work with dedicated coaches, build positive character, and enhance their skills; all while participating in a sport they enjoy. However, this is the ideal, and unfortunately that ideal does not always materialize. Some coaches overemphasize the competitive aspects, often creating an atmosphere that is not conducive to the growth of these youth athletes.

Coaches sometimes mimic what they have seen and what they have previously experienced. Yet, it is the responsibility of league administrators to increase the retention of youth participating in sports and improve how coaches interact with athletes.

Coaches often receive little training in youth development, which creates a gap between what is expected and what skills they possess to coach youth athletes. However, organizations are concerned with the retention of the coaches, as most are volunteers who have a lasting impact on their athletes. Youth retention in sports shows that youth athletes are motivated to remain in sports to have fun, be with friends, and to learn new skills. Coaches must strive to work with the youth athletes to create a positive atmosphere so

they remain motivated, and to increase their desire to participate in sports. The purpose of this study was to assess the changes in YMCA basketball coaches' behaviors and attitudes towards youth development principles associated with youth sports.

Subjects of this study were YMCA youth basketball coaches who volunteered with the YMCA of San Luis Obispo. Participants were selected based on their involvement with the YMCA, attendance at the pre-season coaches meeting, and by distributing a follow-up online and self-administered questionnaire. This study utilized convenience sampling, and questionnaires were distributed using an online questionnaire and the collection of questionnaires while coaches were attending team photos. The coaches were asked to complete the questionnaire based on their opinions with the statements and the scenarios given, along with demographic questions. The data were analyzed by organizing responses and comparing them based on selected demographics and how respondents attending and not attending the pre-season training answered the questions.

After the data were analyzed, it was found that the subjects had varying degrees of agreement on the given statements. Those attending the pre-season training were more forthcoming towards youth development and altering their attitudes and behaviors than their counterparts which did not attend the training. Subjects also expressed that certain statements were more significant than others, which reflected change in coaching styles based on the skills. Subjects change in attitude and behavior was also seen to change based on the years which they have spent coaching youth sports. These results will be discussed further in this chapter.

## Discussion

The major findings of this study have led to conclusions related to the research questions. This section will discuss what the findings revealed, how the findings relate to previous research, the implications which impacted the study, and the implications of the findings.

The study addressed the impact of training skits performed at the pre-season coaches meeting and the impact those skits had on the YMCA basketball coaches in attendance. Subjects responded by either stating they had attended the pre-season meeting or they had not attended the pre-season coaches meeting. Coaches attending the pre-season training meeting outnumbered those coaches who did not attend the pre-season training meeting. The overall results were positive in aligning with youth development principles. Each statement/scenario called for agreement, neutrality, or disagreement in order to align with positive youth development, and the overall findings did reflect the anticipated orientation. For example, most coaches agreed strongly with the philosophy of praise and encouragement over strict discipline and punishment. Conversely, most coaches disagreed strongly with the concept of pushing athletes through pain or injury to participate in a game or practice in order to teach commitment. This alignment points to several positive factors related to the organization of the youth basketball leagues sponsored by the YMCA of San Luis Obispo County. One, the YMCA has a long history of positive youth development that is consistently delivered through its programming. Two, San Luis Obispo is a relatively progressive area of the country drawing upon a volunteer base that includes college students and well-educated professionals who may already possess an orientation aligned with youth development. Finally, the findings



suggest that the training skits were successful in helping to boost the coaches' orientation towards positive youth development. When the results are examined more closely and segmented by those who attended the training and viewed the skits versus those who did not, this relative success becomes clearer.

Through an examination of mean differences in responses, several significant differences emerged between the two groups of coaches who attended and did not attend the pre-season training session. Coaches who attended training were more likely to disagree with the concept of running for punishment as an effective coaching technique when compared to those who did not attend the training. Similarly, coaches who participated in the training expressed significantly stronger disagreement towards the concept of punishing all players (to teach teamwork and cohesion) through cardiovascular exercise for mistakes made by a single individual than those not attending. Since cardiovascular exercise as a form of punishment was a focal point of one of the training skits, this finding was particularly relevant in pointing to the success of the training skits. If training skits can have an impact in this area of forced exertion, there is a potential for impact across the board.

Running for punishment has a long history in sports at all levels, but many are beginning to question the efficacy of such a practice for several reasons. One, psychologists have long pointed out that punishment or negative reinforcement is an ineffective form of motivation. Two, with the recent focus on combating obesity, some have questioned whether running for punishment places a subconscious disdain towards exercise and lifelong fitness in the minds of youth sport participants. And finally, safety concerns have arisen in extreme cases where coaches have forced adolescents to run

beyond their physical capabilities and resulted in injuries or even death in some isolated cases. Through examining coaches' responses on the youth development statements and scenarios, the evidence points to a change in behavior for those who were trained versus those who were not. To further examine this element, coaches were asked specifically if the training had an impact on their behavior.

For those coaches attending the training, over half indicated that they adjusted their style of coaching and/or developed new strategies for interacting with their players. This finding further boosts the relative success of the training skits at the preseason meeting, as the ideal goal was for coaches to adjust their coaching techniques and styles to create a better program for youth to participate and remain involved in. Yet, some of those attending the training did not change. Several explanations come to mind when considering this finding. Coaches are often set in their ways, mimicking coaches they view on television, or coaches they themselves have had. The findings relative to number of years coaching reflected this aspect, as those coaches with 3-5 years of coaching experience were more likely to not change when compared to coaches who had only been coaching 1-2 years. On a more positive note, the lack of change may have been a reflection of the overall strong alignment of the sample of coaches towards youth development. If they were already engaging in positive behaviors, change was not necessary.

This study was affected by multiple limitations. Subject selection and sample size was limited to those individuals who volunteered as basketball coaches with the YMCA of San Luis Obispo and with those willing to complete a follow-up questionnaire. While not likely, it is possible that the 50 coaches who did not participate in this survey research

hold vastly different views towards youth development than those who participated. This study may have also been limited by social desirability bias. Although the researchers assured subjects of the anonymity of their responses, coaches may have felt pressured to answer a certain way in knowing that the YMCA is a youth development-oriented organization.

When looking at prior research, youth participate in sports for fun, to meet new friends, and to participate in the sport, yet some coaches push children unnecessarily and overemphasize competition. That aspect appears muted in this sample of coaches from the YMCA of San Luis Obispo county, and the training skits enacted at the preseason meeting seemed to further boost an emphasis on positive youth development. By implementing more training throughout the season and expanding the training skits, these positive results will likely continue and become even more pronounced. Other areas of the country may not be as progressive as San Luis Obispo and may have an enhanced need for this type of training for coaches, so an extension of this model is recommended. If further refined and developed, the impact nationally could be profound.

### Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. Coaches attending a pre-season meeting with youth development training skits adjusted their coaching style and developed new strategies for interacting with the athletes.
2. Coaches who attended training were more likely to disagree with the concept of running for punishment as an effective coaching technique when compared

to those who did not attend the training. Similarly, coaches who participated in the training expressed significantly stronger disagreement towards the concept of punishing all players (to teach teamwork and cohesion) through cardiovascular exercise for mistakes made by a single individual than those not attending.

3. Although results were mixed with no patterns emerging relative to number of years coaching and willingness to change, those coaches with 3-5 years of coaching experience were more likely to not change when compared to coaches who had only been coaching 1-2 years.

### Recommendations

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Have all coaches who attended the pre-season meeting complete a follow-up questionnaire.
2. In future research, consider using a multiple methods approach, utilizing interviews and focus group in addition to a questionnaire.
3. Ask coaches directly whether they feel they receive enough training to support them in their coaching endeavors.
4. Expand the pre-season training skits and include age-appropriate actors.
5. Develop a more comprehensive training program for coaches so they know what is expected, understand what athletes should be receiving, and have ongoing resources to call upon throughout the season.
6. Refine the training skits and training program for national delivery.

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## REFERENCES

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## APPENDIXES



Appendix A  
Informed Consent Letter

## INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN ASSESSMENT OF YMCA BASKETBALL COACHES

A research project on youth sports coaching is being conducted by Stephany L. Ganeles as a senior project in Recreation, Parks and Tourism Administration under the direct supervision of Dr. Brian Greenwood. The purpose of this research is to assess the changes in YMCA basketball coaches' perceptions towards youth development principles.

You are being asked to take part in this study by completing the attached questionnaire, and by completing an online survey in January. Your participation will take approximately 30 minutes today and another 5 minutes to complete the online survey. Please be aware that you are not required to participate in this research, and you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. You may also omit any items you prefer not to answer.

There are no risks anticipated with participation in this study.

Your confidentiality will be protected through anonymous questionnaires. Please ensure anonymity by not writing your name on the questionnaire. Potential benefits associated with the study include the potential to help YMCA volunteer coaches' perceptions of youth sports and providing additional information for the YMCA.

If you have questions regarding this study or would like to be informed of the results when the study is completed, please feel free to contact Stephany Ganeles at (408) 705-5166 or [sganeles@calpoly.edu](mailto:sganeles@calpoly.edu). If you have questions or concerns regarding the manner in which the study is conducted, you may contact Dr. Steve Davis, Chair of the Cal Poly Human Subjects Committee, at 756-2754, [sdavis@calpoly.edu](mailto:sdavis@calpoly.edu), or Dr. Susan Opava, Dean of Research and Graduate Programs, at 756-1508, [sopava@calpoly.edu](mailto:sopava@calpoly.edu).

If you agree to voluntarily participate in this research project as described, please indicate your agreement by completing the attached questionnaire. Thank you for your participation in this research.

Appendix B  
Questionnaire



## YMCA Basketball Coaches and Youth Sports

Did you attend the pre-season coaches meeting and view the youth development skits by Cal Poly students? Note. Whether you attended or did not attend this meeting, please continue and complete the entire survey.

- Yes  
 No

Based on the following statements or scenarios, rate your level of agreement with the attitude toward coaching and/or behaviors exhibited in that statement or scenario.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I believe that continually reinforcing athlete's skills will make them better athletes.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that running for punishment is an effective coaching technique.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Raising your voice during practices and games is effective at getting your point across to athletes.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Constantly reminding an athlete of a mistake they have made will help other athletes to not make that same mistake.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that pointing out what an athlete did wrong will make them better.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Having an athlete push through pain or injury to participate in a game or practice teaches commitment to the sport and their teammates.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe praise and encouragement are more effective than strict discipline and punishment.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An effective way to teach teamwork and cohesion is to punish all players with additional cardiovascular drills (e.g., suicide sprints) equally for mistakes made by an individual teammate.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Athletes who do not put full effort into all practices do not deserve to participate in games.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe that pushing athletes to their maximum physical capability is an effective way to promote achievement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

How many years have you coached youth sports?

\_\_\_\_\_

How many years have you coached youth sports with the YMCA of San Luis Obispo?

\_\_\_\_\_

Gender:

- Male
- Female

What is your current age?

- 18-24
- 25-31
- 32-40
- 41-50
- Over 50+

Based on viewing the skits, have you adjusted your style of coaching and/or developed any new strategies for teaching/interacting with your players?

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable, did not attend meeting or view skits

We will be following up with one-on-one interviews with coaches in the league. These interviews will take approximately 30 minutes and will be conducted in February or March of 2011. They are voluntary in nature and will be arranged at your convenience and take place at a location of your convenience.

**If you are willing to sit down and talk coaching/youth development with Dr. Brian Greenwood, assistant professor of Recreation, Parks, & Tourism Administration at Cal Poly, please include your email address here** *(Note. your survey answers will be separated and remain anonymous, and interview responses will be kept strictly confidential):*

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Thank You for participating!