



The scope, development and the characteristics of expertise in sports coaching context

İhsan Sari¹

Fikret Soyer²

Abstract

The aim of this study is to explain the scope, development and the characteristic of expertise in sport coaching context. We also aimed to put forward some features that coaches should have. Relevant literature was reviewed for the purposes of this study. Expertise in sport coaching context is crucial for effectiveness of sports coaches therefore it is necessary to address all aspects of expertise and features of expert coaches in order to contribute to development of sports coaching. The results of our review showed that expertise includes years of experience and numerous qualities that expert coaches have. Expert sports coaches have some essential characteristics and these characteristics develop by experience and knowledge. We also listed some useful suggestions and key points for coaches as the part of the results.

Keywords: Expertise; sports coaching; experience

¹Lecturer, Sakarya University, School of Physical Education and Sports. isari@sakarya.edu.tr

²Assistant Prof. Dr, Sakarya University, School of Physical Education and Sports. fikretsoyer@sakarya.edu.tr

Antrenörlükte uzmanlığın kapsamı, gelişimi ve karakteristik özellikleri

İhsan Sarı¹

Fikret Soyer²

Özet

Bu çalışmanın amacı antrenörlükte uzmanlığın kapsamını, gelişimini ve karakteristik özelliklerini ortaya koymaktır. Ayrıca, antrenörlerin sahip olması gereken önemli özelliklerede değinilmiştir. Bu çalışma, araştırmanın amaçları doğrultusunda ilgili literatür taranarak hazırlanmıştır. Antrenörlükte uzmanlık, etkili bir antrenörlük yapmak için hayati önem ihtiva etmektedir. Bu sebeple, antrenörlük alanına katkıda bulunmak amacı ile antrenörlükte uzmanlığı ve uzman antrenörlerin özelliklerini her yönü ile ele almak gerekmektedir. Bu çalışmanın sonuçları, antrenörlükte uzmanlığın, uzun yıllar sonucu elde edilen tecrübeleri ve uzman antrenörlerin sahip olduğu önemli nitelikleri içerdiğini göstermiştir. Uzman antrenörler çeşitli önemli özelliklere sahiptir ve bu özellikler tecrübe ve bilgi ile gelişmektedir. Ayrıca, bu çalışmanın sonuçları doğrultusunda antrenörler için çeşitli öneriler ve anahtar noktalar sıralanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Uzmanlık; antrenörlük; tecrübe.

Introduction

It is a challenging task to answer what expert coaches do, how they become experts, what they need to do, what is important to them and what is not. It is important to know these points in order to develop expertise in sports coaching. That is why previous research has focused on how experts behave (see Bloom, Crumpton, Anderson, 1999; Côté & Sedgwick, 2003; Schempp et al., 2004; Debanne & Fontayne, 2009)

Expertise brings success along with it, novice coaches are unable to produce successful and competitive athletes (Schinke, Bloom, and Salmela 1995). Therefore, defining expertise clearly and explaining all aspects of it in sports coaching context will help new coaches to see certain “do”s and “don’t”s and these will also guide people shaping coach education systems. Studies on this topic will ensure the quality of sports coaching as a profession. The better expertise in sports coaching context is known, the easier it is to set certain routes to it.

The aim of this research was to contribute to the literature on expertise for sports coaching profession by clearly outlining the topic and giving some important explanations. We also aimed to offer some simple applications for coaches.

What Is Expertise in Sports Coaching Context

There is not any universally set test that measures expertise, but there are some benchmarks to determine expertise such as performance times, world rankings, experience and some certain behavior that are shown by experts (Horton & Deakin, 2008). Considering the relevant literature we define expertise in sport coaching context, as “expertise is the process in which excellence develops by experience and knowledge, a clear insight for the crucial elements of coaching process is gained and application of these elements is masterly carried out”. For example, an expert coach can make effective decisions very quickly in highly tensed match situations and they know that nonverbal communication might sometimes cause some problems between the coach and the player due to some misunderstandings, which is why experts are always ready to prevent misunderstandings.

The Stages and Developing of Expertise

Miller et al. (1996) interviewed 21 Canadian coaches. The results showed that expert coaches were successful leaders and developed certain leadership skills during their athletic career. Their unique personal characteristics and their role as team leaders and as youth coaches in their athletic career contributed a lot to their coaching expertise. These experts were committed and enthusiastic players and were different than their teammates when they were playing for their teams. They acquired important leadership skills as assistants or team captains and often had responsibilities in their teams. While they get experienced in their athletic career, they helped their previous coaches in the young teams as youth coaches. This research suggests that expertise develops by experience and has its roots in early athletic career. Moreover, Schinke et al. (1995) found similar results; expert coaches in their study had initial love and dedication for their sports when they were playing as athletes. Experience as an athlete contributes to expertise significantly but an outstanding ability in athletic career does not seem to be a pre-requisite in order to develop coaching expertise (Lynch & Mallett 2006).

Being an expert coach is a tough challenge to meet and has some stages to go through. Schempp, McCullick and Mason (2006) specified the developmental stages for becoming an expert (similar to the stages of Bell (1997) and originally Berliner's work in 1994). The stages are: Beginning, competence, proficiency and expert. In the beginning stage, coaches do not have enough experience and do not have control over coaching, for example they can easily give up when they are struggling with an athlete's technique or they might forget some routines due to focusing on the rules and worrying about them. As they move up to the expert stage they get experienced and more flexible, they also get capable of realizing the similarities across situations. For example, if expert coaches see a problem, they can find the solution from their past experiences or they might flex the rules for learning of the athletes (for instance; sometimes an expert coach does not need to stop some whispering players when the coach himself is talking whereas novice coaches might stick the rule of "athletes cannot talk while the coach is talking"). Learning fresh information from outside resources (conferences, books etc.), making quick decisions and using intuition that stem from their vast experiences and knowledge are also some of experts' features. In expert stage, experience is converted into usable decision-making tools (Lyle, 2002) and coaches' behaviors get automatic, problem solving mechanism gets quicker.

In expert stage, coaches never stop learning and developing themselves. Monitoring themselves is the one of the key elements that experts practice. They monitor themselves, find their strengths and weaknesses and then use some strategies to improve the weaknesses and maintain the strengths, such as; seeking help from others, adapting teaching practice, reading, videotaping themselves, using internet etc. (Schempp, Webster, McCullick, Busch, Mason, 2007).

Planning is also one of the substances of experts; they always have high regards for planning, and are always prepared. Even “if/then” planning that called contingency planning is taken into account by expert sports coaches. These mentioned stages might help coaches to understand the concept of expertise.

As a coach go through from beginning stage to higher stages, expertise develops by experience and knowledge which enable experts to operate effectively (Nash & Collins 2006). Schempp (2000) stated that experience is fundamental for expertise. For becoming an expert, roughly 10 years must be spent in a particular area of sports as an athlete, as a sport teacher or as a coach. By using their experience they can predict the next events in most situations. Memory of expert coaches is different and superior (McCullick et al. 2006), this could explain how they can link past events they experienced to the situations they are in and how they act in a perfect way. However, experience alone is not enough, knowledge should be together with it and experts distinctively utilize knowledge. They observe, perceive lots of information and analyze it. Expert coaches perfectly analyze problems and relying on their extensive knowledge they easily resolve the problems.

In order to be respected, experts’ knowledge should be extensive. An expert football coach who had coached professionally for over 20 years perfectly expresses the importance of knowledge by the following lines: “...They’ll say they’ve never done that before, and if I can’t say why I want it done that way, if I can’t give a good reason, then I’ve got trouble. You can’t afford to lose players. If they have no respect for your coaching ability then you’ve had it, you’ve lost respect and coaching sessions become very difficult...” (Potrac, Jones, & Armour 2002, p:192).

Characteristics of Expert Coaches

Characteristics of expert coaches’ are important for their success. In order to understand expertise better these characteristics should be deeply looked at. The

most important sources of coaching knowledge were identified as “by doing”, “interaction with others”, “formal coach education” and “mentors” (Erickson, Bruner, MacDonald, and Côté 2008). Bloom and Salmela (2000) interviewed 16 Canadian team sports coaches who were chosen by their national sport organization as the most knowledgeable coaches in the country, had certain amount of wins, produced certain amount of national and international elite athletes and had more than 10 years of experience (This criteria is generally acceptable when choosing samples for a research on expertise). The result of this research showed that these experts have 3 common personal characteristics: Desire to learn, their ways of acquiring knowledge and finally their approaches to coaching. Namely, they read, have lots of books and also enjoy learning new things from other coaches. Their primary knowledge sources were their mentors, seminars, clinics and symposias as well as journals and magazines. However, it does not mean that all expert coaches participate seminars, clinics and symposias. In some developing countries where coach education is not well-structured or where because of some geographical reasons people live quite far away from each other, it is hard to attend such get-togethers. Therefore, experts, living in such areas might read articles online, follow magazines or talk to their colleagues etc. instead of participating in such meetings with their colleagues. But the similarities for all expert coaches are that experts have years of experience and many wins and they know the importance of keeping themselves up to date. They also ask their clients for feedback that shows experts interaction with people for their coaching success (Schempp et al. 2006).

Experts enjoy working and making effort for previously set goals. Their communication with their players and other people involved in sports is effective and it is important to them to understand their players` feelings (see Bloom and Salmela, 2000). Moreover, developing a coaching style is crucial to them, they believe that coaches cannot just copy another coach, other coaches` styles do not necessarily have to be fit them (see Jones, Armour, Potrac (2003, p:223-224).

Schempp and Clark (1999) conducted a research to find characteristics of expert golf instructors and found out that these experts value education and are highly educated. They hold required certificates, received formal recognition and won several awards for the quality of their teaching. Moreover, student-centered approach is important to them which is why they try to set their training sessions according the diversity of the players` needs and the experts in this study enjoy when they see their players develop themselves.

They had extensive experiences including playing as young, amateurs and professionals. These experts were also psychologically noticeable; they are easily able to translate their intentions into actions and believed that players can learn skills. Rather than seeing people problematic, they believed people's ability, which is important for a coach to be able to teach a new technique.

Research also showed that expert coaches help athletes achieve their potential. They set outcome and process goals. Since they are expert coaches, their careers depend on success and they should aim winning. However, they also set individual performance goals instead of focusing purely on winning (Abraham, Collins, and Martindale, 2006). Common points of these researches are that there are certain characteristics which make experts coaches successful and help them to create an ideal learning and training environment.

Experts in Action

As it has been mentioned before, experts know the coaching process very well and they perfectly apply most of the elements of coaching process in practice. Bloom (2002) states that having vision is very important and experts know the significance of planning always have short and long term plans which show that they also have desired goals. Because, plans are made according to the goals, experts always make the goals clear (Schempp 2000). Planning and goal setting are very important parts of coaching process. Additionally, Bloom (2002) stated that experts give effective instructions in training and training sessions of experts are learner-friendly.

Before matches, experts think of the game and make a lot of preparation. An expert stated in a research; "When I am engaged in a competition, I don't stop thinking of it. I close my eyes and I can see our opponents playing..." and also said "I spent a lot of time observing the opposing teams, the way they reacted in the difficult moments, what their group relations were, who was the leader." (Debanne & Fontayne, 2009, p:7,8).

Competition sessions are also very important for coaches hence it is helpful to clearly state what experts do in competition periods. Many of the experts valued mental-training and preferred to have a psychologist. According to Bloom et al (1997), experts try to get physically and mentally ready in the competition day. According to the experts, they should get ready as athletes. There are different ways for them to do this such as jogging alone in the morning or staying away from distractions for a while in the day of the

competition. This might be for rehearsing the plans or just to relax. However, they never forgot preparation of the team or the preparation of the players individually. When they arrive to the place of the match, pregame-talks are made but are not too long, include a few main points. Experts know that coaches who talk too long loses the athletes' attention (see Potrac, et al., 2002) Experts also emphasize the importance of mental preparation for the players during their warm-up.

After matches experts' behaviors depend on the result of the game. If the team wins, they congratulate the players and emphasize their performance. When the team loose, they do not say a lot so that they can evaluate the game deeply and understand every reasons of the result from videos, statistics or from the other trainers in the team. These are the components that experts consider.

Experts also pay particular attention to the emotional context. They don't want stress of the match negatively affect the athletes. An expert handball coach says "In highly important matches, as it is the case here, I always try to take the drama out of the situation by trying to make them laugh a little "(Debanne & Fontayne, 2009, p:8). In another study, an expert coach was found to be giving a lot of importance to identifying their athletes' individualities and being approachable enough for players to come to him for anything they have problem with. He believed that this helps coaches gain respect, confidence and loyalty from the athletes (Potrac et al., 2002).

Automaticity is also a distinctive feature of an expert and allows coaches to act quicker, even without thinking. For example; defining problems quickly and finding appropriate solution for a player's poor technique in a short time could be some of the benefits of automaticity. Additionally, experts are aware of their mistakes. They can see and correct them quickly by finding the solutions themselves or getting feedback from other people. In order to describe more how an experts is, Schempp's (2000) research is a good example. According to the study, experts used lots of verbal instruction towards stated goals. They made their language rich and descriptive by using simple metaphors and gave immediate positive feedbacks. During demonstrations in the exercises experts stood in a good place where the all students can easily observe them, which is an example of these coaches' awareness for the importance of positioning in trainings. Expert coaches have lots of features that make them different than novice coaches. Bian et al. (2004) compared 4 expert and 4 novice volleyball teachers to find out the differences in their

diagnostic ability and the results showed that expert coaches knowledge of volleyball spike was richer than novice coaches. Experts identified more components in the techniques, used more body parts to describe the skill and demonstrated technically specific knowledge while explaining spike. This study indicates that experts differ from their colleagues also in terms of their diagnostic ability.

Bloom et al. (1995) interviewed expert Canadian team coaches to elicit the experts' recommendations for a better coaching training. The results revealed that experts emphasize on clinics, seminars and symposiums to interact with other coaches. They also stated the importance of hands-on experience, namely, participating to the coaching process, working with a more experienced coach and also passively observing other coaches were stated as important factors in coaching training. Moreover, the most important part that should be given importance according to these experts is mentoring process which has also been found to be important for other expert coaches (see Nash & Sproule 2009). Most of them still have contact with their mentors and refer to them for advice when it is necessary. Not only does mentoring help coaches to gain experience, but also mentors benefit from it (Nash 2003). Its contribution to sports coaching and expertise is incontestable. The study of Bloom et al. (1995) showed how mentoring is important for becoming an expert coach. Supporting the results reported about mentoring, Bloom, Bush, Schinke, and Salmela (1998) stated that expert coaches believe in the success of a formalized mentoring program. All the coaches in this study derived benefit from their mentors. Bloom et al. (1998) conclude in their study that the importance of hands-on experience through a structured educational program should be recognized by sport governing bodies.

Similarly, Irish coaches reported that workshops, more time to coach and work with other coaches are the most important factors that would assist them in their future coaching (Larkin, Duffy, & Leary, 2007). Also, there are other factors in coach education. After coaches finish their schools or courses and start working as a coach, they are not contacted or controlled by the authority. It is not ensured that coaches are staying up to date or going up to the stairs to the expert level of coaching, this is a problem for coaching and expertise, which needs attention.

Conclusion

Expertise in sport coaching context is very important for effective coaching, therefore previous research has focused on it to explore this topic for coaches and sports scientists. Our aim was to contribute to the literature on expertise by clearly outlining the topic and giving some important explanations. We also aimed to offer some applications for coaches. Findings show that expertise develops through years of experience and from numerous ways. We also conclude in this review that experts have some essential characteristics and these characteristics develop by experience and knowledge.

Following key points can be listed as the results of this study. These results can help sports coaches who want to move up, to reach the expert stage of coaching. The following key points are extracted from the studies that have been reviewed so far. Followings are also important for coach education systems. If they are taken into account, coach education systems will be focusing on expertise which is crucial for optimum development of sports coaching.

- Coaches should give responsibilities to the players to develop the players' leadership skills. Young coaches and players who want to be a coach in their future should try to develop their leadership skills in their early careers.
- Experience is important for expertise.
- Athletes can work as youth coaches to get experience.
- Experts see similarities across situations and make decisions quickly.
- Have desire to learn. Get knowledge from outside sources and value continuous learning. Get knowledge from your mentors, seminars, clinics, symposia's, other people and reading materials. National sports associations or national sports authorities can regularly publish reading lists for coaches.
- Evaluate yourself.
- Make plans and control them.
- Ask feedback from other people.
- Understand your players' feelings.
- Have your own coaching style.
- Set enjoyable, learner-friendly training sessions
- Consider the diversity of the players' needs in your training session.
- Believe in your players' ability to achieve.

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