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journal or publication title	教育情報学研究
number	1
page range	99-103
year	2003-03
URL	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10097/40944">http://hdl.handle.net/10097/40944</a>

# The Coaching View of Expert Conditioning Coaches in Japan

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This study focused on the coaching view of expert conditioning coaches. This study was conducted with a qualitative research methodology. In-depth interview was used to collect the data. The interview transcripts were divided into 117 meaning units. Then, the meaning units were regrouped to eight categories and three factors which were crucial for the conditioning coaching. Three factors emerging from the analysis consisted of (1) motivation, (2) mental resource, and (3) individual characteristics. As a result, the coaching view of conditioning coaches is based on the support of athletes' psychological condition.

**Key Words:** Coaching concept, Conditioning coach

## Introduction

Côté, J (1995) revealed the coaching model of expert gymnastic coach consisted of six component: (A) competition, (B) training, (C) organization, (D) coach's personal characteristics, (E) gymnast's personal characteristics and level of development, and (F) contextual factors.

The existing research on coaching in sport has not extended to the coaching concept of a conditioning coach. The focus has been instead on what concept coach has on the development of athletes. These are certainly important research questions, yet we still know little about the nature of coaching concept of conditioning coach in sport setting. The purpose of this study was to investigate the coaching view of expert conditioning coaches in Japan.

## Method

### *Participants*

The participants in this study were three

expert conditioning coaches:

- (A) conditioning coach of a professional baseball team
- (B) conditioning coach of a professional football player
- (C) conditioning coach of Kyokushin Karate.

The selection of participants in this study as an expert conditioning coach was based on two criteria: 1) each of the expert conditioning coach was required a coaching experience that coached at least one national level athlete, and 2) each expert conditioning coach had to be recognized by other professional coaches as one of the expert for developing elite athletes.

### *Data Collection*

In-depth interviews with each coach were conducted. Interviews were focused on the psychological aspects for conditioning coach's roles. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, lasted on average between thirty to ninety minutes, and were transcribed verbatim in preparation for data analysis. After the transcripts were

completed, each interview was read carefully, and salient themes were noted on the transcripts.

*Data Analyses*

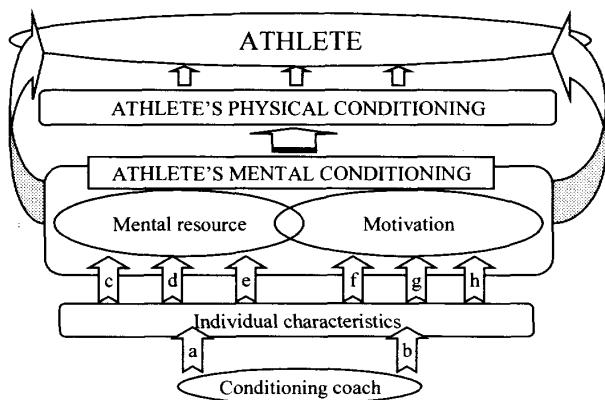
The data analyses were outlined by *Organization and Interpreting Unstructured Qualitative Data* (Côté et al., 1993). First, the three interview transcripts were divided into 117 meaning unit. Second, common features between meaning units were identified. Finally, three factors which were crucial for the conditioning coaching were identified.

**Results and Discussion**

Three factors which were crucial for the conditioning coaching were identified:

- (1) motivation, (2) mental resource, and
- (3) individual characteristics.

Some examples of meaning units are provided to account for the type of data underlying each factor. But they only account for a fraction of the large set of data. As a result, three factors of the coaching view and their relationships are identified Figure 1.



Note: This figure account for the relationships of three factors: (1) motivation, (2) mental resource, and (3) individual characteristics. And three factors consist of eight lower factors: (a) observing individual level, (b) observing athlete's mental condition, (c) providing pleasant surroundings, (d) relaxation, (e) confidence, (f) explanation of conditioning trainings, (g) device for training, and (h) to encourage athlete's will.

**Figure 1:** The coaching view of expert conditioning coaches

*(1). Motivation*

- Explanation of conditioning training(f)

Conditioning coaches regard the explanation of the purpose of conditioning training as important for athletes to understand the significance of conditioning training and to commit to daily hard training.

It is the principle of training to clarify the reason for conditioning training. If an athlete understands the effect and importance of the conditioning training, he/she will do conditioning training hard (coach C).

- Device for training(g)

It is important for conditioning trainer to come up with various ideas to make athletes commit to hard training, partly because the conditioning training is not fun in comparison with skill trainings.

I often say "When playing a toss-up with me and winning, you should just run so far. However, if you lose the toss-up, you have to run more. If I lose 3 times in succession, I will run." Thereby, the athlete can enjoy the training (coach A).

- To encourage athlete's will(h)

Sometimes conditioning coaches join training with athletes to stir athletes' competitiveness.

I always do weight training with athletes. I have never lost the bench press with athletes (coach A).

*(2). Mental Resource*

- Providing pleasant surroundings(c)

Conditioning coaches always pay attention to athletes' surroundings to make athletes concentrate their training.

It is my work to provide surroundings that athlete can do conditioning training pleasantly (coach C).

- Relaxation(d)

Conditioning coaches always try to keep athletes in good condition both mentally and physically.

When an athlete sprained his / her ankle, I told the athlete that his / her injury became minor because of regular training. So the athlete became relaxed and could understand the importance of conditioning training (coach A).

- Confidence(e)

It is important for Japanese conditioning coaches to keep a relationship of mutual trust, partly because conditioning training is generally unappreciated in Japan.

When I joined a practice for the first time, athletes didn't follow my advice. I did chores everyday to gain athletes' confidence on me (coach C).

*(3). Individual Characteristics*

- Observing individual level(a)

Conditioning coaches coach athletes according to the individual level of athlete's understanding.

It isn't efficient to advise athletes by using professional terms. I always use common language proper for the level of athlete's understanding (coach A).

- Observing athlete's mental condition(b)

Conditioning coaches coach athletes following the athlete's mental condition.

I decide a menu of training everyday

following the athlete's mental condition (coach B).

It is important for athletes to practice the skills for their performance development. Also it is necessary to do conditioning training to raise the efficiency of skill trainings. However, Japanese athletes tend to treat conditioning training lightly.

Japanese conditioning coaches play many roles by one person, such as a nutrition, massage, athletic rehabilitation, weight training and mental support. It is necessary in Japan to improve the human resources which support a player.

### **Conclusion**

It is the first task of conditioning coaches to observe athletes' mental condition. Then, they support athletes' mental condition including motivation, and mental resource. After athletes' mental condition is prepared for training, they practice physical conditioning training. In short, the coaching view of conditioning coaches is based on the support of athletes' psychological condition.

### **Acknowledgements**

This article is based on a presentation at the annual conference of the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology, Tucson, U.S.A., November 2002. We wish to thank Dr. Eiji Muraki for his support and feedback of this manuscript.

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## エキスパート・コンディショニング・コーチのコーチング観

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本研究の目的は、エキスパート・コンディショニング・コーチのコーチング観を分析することである。本研究は、半構造的インタビューによる定性的データ収集・分析により進められた。インタビューデータは、117のミーニングユニットに分類された。さらに、類似するミーニングユニットをグループ化することによって8つのサブカテゴリーが形成された。最終的に、(1) モーティベーション、(2) 心的環境、(3) 個人特性の3つの大カテゴリーが形成された。本研究により次の3点が明らかにされた。第1に、選手のモチベーションを高めるためには、選手が楽しくトレーニングできるように練習方法を工夫し、時には選手と同じ練習メニューをこなして選手の競争意識を刺激している。また、トレーニングの効果を選手に確認させ、トレーニングの意義を説明することにより、選手自身がコンディショニング・トレーニングの必要性を認識できるように指導している。第2に、トレーニング、及び試合に対する選手の精神的なコンディションを高め、維持するために、選手と信頼関係を築き、選手が最善のパフォーマンスを発揮できる環境を用意し、選手をリラックスさせることに、エキスパート・コンディショニング・コーチは努力を費やしている。第3に、技術レベル、理解力、及び身心のコンディションは、個々の選手により大きく異なる。そのため、エキスパート・コンディショニング・コーチは、選手のコンディションとレベルの変化に臨機応変に対応しながら選手に携わっている。こうしたコンディショニング・コーチの取り組みの中で選手は技術ばかりでなく、コンディショニング・トレーニングにも集中して取り組むことになる。エキスパート・コンディショニング・コーチは、上記のような方法で選手の心理的コンディションを高め維持した上で指導を行っている。コンディショニング・コーチは、コンディショニング・トレーニングの指導だけでなく、むしろ、選手の心理面への支援・ケアという面で大きな役割を果たしている点が明らかにされた。