

Association for Applied Sport Psychology Helps Coach the Coaches – *Offers Resources to Help Coaches Maximize Their Own Performances*

MADISON, Wis. – May 2009 – What does a coach do when he can't communicate effectively to his athletes? Who coaches the coach to get the most from an athlete's or team's performance or to comeback from a loss? The Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) offers assistance to coaches of all levels in maximizing their own performances, and ultimately the athletes they coach, including working with professionals in the field of sport psychology.

The Influence of Coaches

The AASP's Michael D. Zito, Ph.D., of Montclair State University and Watchung Psychological Associates has helped AASP members develop professional practice strategies for teaching core coaching skills during his workshops, in addition to working directly with coaches. Because coaches have a powerful psychological influence on their athletes, it is important for them to have the best possible tools for being effective.

A coach's relationship with players is important. "Parents' opinions are discounted by youth, but coaches' opinions are often accepted at face value. What a coach says also impacts the athlete's confidence, motivation and self-esteem." According to Dr. Zito the most common questions coaches ask him are how to motivate athletes and keep them consistent. **(See attached sidebar).**

"A coach may wonder why an athlete isn't doing what he has been told to do, but it may be a matter of miscommunication or the athlete isn't comfortable asking questions or giving feedback. I tell coaches they have to liken their coaching job to running a classroom," he explained, "where the goal is to teach and assess what was learned, then adjust your teaching accordingly."

"At the top level high school, collegiate and professional sports the elite athletes and their coaches are tuned in to the importance of mental skills and understand the value of consultants in the field of sport psychology," explained Dr. Zito. "The AASP offers excellent resources for coaches, parents and athletes, including a referral section to locate a Certified Consultant in your area."

Whether the coach is in professional or amateur sports, working with a team or individual athlete, or a parent coaching the pee-ewe league, the AASP offers numerous free articles and resources on their web site resource center. The coaches section includes articles on improving their own, or athletes' motivation, goal setting, reducing anxiety and stress management, improving public speaking, dealing with disordered eating, and tips for including athletes with disabilities. Visit www.appliedsportpsych.org/resource-center .

Tips for Coaches on Athlete Motivation

According to Dr. Michael Zito, one of the top areas of interest during his Effective Coaching workshops is how to motivate athletes. Dr. Zito offers these tips and elements to incorporate into your regular coaching routine:

- Develop high levels of intrinsic motivation (motivation from within/competing for the love of the sport)
- Promote high levels of perceived competence (personal excellence)
- Focus on an athlete's skill and improvement
- Win at all costs mentality reduces motivation
- Develop "excellence" language

Specific areas where you can incorporate these philosophies include:

- Feedback
 - Positively reinforce effort and performance
 - Provide encouragement following an error
 - Refrain from punitive approaches
- Leadership style
 - Emphasize training and instruction
 - Democratic decision making with the coach having the final say
 - Encourage independent thinking to promote autonomy (self determination)
- Motivational climate
 - Mastery learning
 - Focus on each athlete's improvement
 - Reward effort
 - Promote cooperation
- Relationship style
 - Support autonomy
 - Provide choice within specific limits and rules
 - Provide athletes with a meaningful rationale for activities, limits and rules
 - Ask about and acknowledge athlete's feelings
 - Communicate regularly with your athletes
 - Avoid guilt inducing criticism

The Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) promotes ethical practice, science and advocacy in the field of sport and exercise psychology. Founded in 1986, AASP is an international, multidisciplinary, professional organization that offers certification to qualified professionals in the field of sport and exercise psychology. With more than 1,200 members in 28 countries, AASP is a worldwide leader, sharing research and resources with the public via its website, www.appliedsportpsych.org.