

## Coaching - Special Edition STAPS

### Introduction – Dave Day

The coaching role has been evident in sports-related activities since Classical times and its evolution as a sporting practice can be traced throughout the subsequent 2,500 years. However, words like 'coaching' and 'coach' have contemporary connotations from which they cannot be divorced, since definitions are influenced by changing social, cultural, temporal and geographical parameters.<sup>1</sup> It has become clear, for example, over the past few months, and this was especially evident during the course of the Besancon conference, that the way in which these terms have been utilised in Britain and France are somewhat different and that the terms 'trainer' and 'coach' have evolved differently in these two European cultures, despite their geographical proximity. It makes sense, therefore, to begin this special issue by clarifying how 'coaching' has evolved and been interpreted in the British context since it cannot be assumed that researchers and practitioners on both sides of the Channel share a common vocabulary on the use of the word 'coach' or that the coaching role involves the same practical components in both cultures. Without clarification of these terms any cross-cultural discussion of 'coaching', both in its historical and contemporary sense, could be confusing.

Coaches are always influenced by social and sporting structures and the systems within which they operate so that, when societal relationships change and power balances shift, changes occur in the organization and meanings of the coaching role in all cultural contexts. However, the term 'coach' has been broadly interpreted in Britain as the individual responsible for training others for an athletic contest and 'coaching' as preparing an athlete for competition.

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<sup>1</sup> E.H. Carr, *What is History* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990), 24-25.

This preparation usually has a technical component, involving the acquisition and mastery of skills and techniques, together with the requisite muscular co-ordination. Any athlete needs an optimum level of fitness and the psychological tools to be able to compete effectively so, although specialists can be responsible for each component, a 'coach' often assumes the responsibilities of technician, trainer and psychologist.<sup>2</sup> Generally, while the range and extent of this coaching role differs according to circumstance and cultural context, the prime attributes of successful coaches have been identified as knowledge of an activity combined with an ability to communicate effectively.

This basic model of human interaction can be applied to numerous situations in which individuals impart experience and understanding to others and, in that sense, virtually any human activity in any era could be described as 'coaching'. The increasing use of the term in business and in 'life coaching' emphasizes that 'coaching' is being constantly reinterpreted, an evolution in etymology that is not a new phenomenon. 'Coach' first appeared in the English language in 1556 as 'coche', a large carriage, but it later became a colloquial expression for a private tutor who prepared candidates for examinations.<sup>3</sup> This educational interpretation appeared regularly in novels, where a distinction was made between 'pass' and 'honour' coaches,<sup>4</sup> and its importance to the English gentlemen was highlighted by one Oxford man in 1859 who, on finding that daily lectures interfered with his hunting, resorted to a coach at examination time for a daily hour of cramming.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Murray Phillips, *From Sidelines to CentreField: A History of Sports Coaching in Australia* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2000); Lawrie Woodman, 'The Development of Coach Education in Australia', *Sporting Traditions* 5/2 (1989), 204-224.

<sup>3</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary Online* (2007) Oxford University Press.

<sup>4</sup> Anthony Trollope, *The Way We Live Now* (1875, Oxford University Press World Classics Paperback, J. Sutherland, ed., 1992), 431, 434; William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair* (1877, Penguin Popular Classics, 1994), 41.

<sup>5</sup> *Baily's Monthly Magazine of Sports and Pastimes* (LXXIV/488 October 1900), 248.

The transfer of the term from education to sports during the nineteenth century was initiated and sustained by sportsmen applying the language of school and university in a different context. It is significant that when 'coaching' became associated with preparation for competitive events it should be in those sports most closely associated with the universities, rowing and cricket. Professional oarsman Robert Coombes was '*coaching* the Oxonian team' in 1841 and eights were being advised to practice 'under judicious coaching' in 1847. It was noted in 1852 that college crews could become 'so wedded to some peculiar fault that no amount of coaching afterwards can correct it'<sup>6</sup> and Walsh observed in 1857 that following individual practice with the stroke, or 'the waterman', crew members would not require 'coaching' to make them row well together.<sup>7</sup> Between the 1850s and the mid-1860s, this coaching terminology became commonplace enough for authors to dispense with speech marks. University Boat race reports in 1866 noted that Cambridge coaches had been 'profitably employed in electing and coaching uncertain candidates' while the Oxford crew had been coached by their President as he rode along the towing-path,<sup>8</sup> a common practice in this period.<sup>9</sup>

The association of 'coaching' with cricket was equally long-standing, partly because professional cricketers were employed in the public schools. James Lillywhite, professional at Winchester, was described in 1861 as 'one of the best "coaches" that boys could have', while, in 1864, the batting at Rugby 'was really good, and the "coaching" of Diver in that art does great credit to him.'<sup>10</sup> Again, speech marks were gradually dispensed with, one commentator

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<sup>6</sup> *Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle* (28 March 1841), 1; *Era* (14 November 1847), 6; (16 May 1852), 2.

<sup>7</sup> John Henry Walsh ('Stonehenge'), *Manual of British Rural Sports Comprising, Shooting, Hunting, Coursing, Fishing, Hawking, Racing, Boating, Pedestrianism and the Various Rural Games and Amusements of Great Britain 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (London: G. Routledge, 1857), 484.

<sup>8</sup> *Sporting Gazette* (3 February 1866), 83; *The Times* (3 February 1866), 12.

<sup>9</sup> John Bull, 9 February 1867 p. 89

<sup>10</sup> *Baily's Monthly Magazine* (III/17 July 1861), 149; *The Times* (2 July 1864), 7.

declaring in 1864 that, 'As long as cricket flourishes, and schools are provided with good coaches, there will be hope of some greatness.'<sup>11</sup> The word had become acceptable enough by 1908 to be used in the archetypal amateur sport of rugby union. The Richmond men had 'all the makings of a good side, but they want a leader, a coach....'<sup>12</sup>

Although 'coach' was not widely used in working class sports, where the nomenclature 'trainer' survived almost intact in pedestrianism, boxing, cycling, swimming and wrestling, it did begin to appear in reports from the late 1860s. When Ben Cort attempted ten miles in one hour and eight minutes in 1869 he failed 'despite the admirable coaching of Alf Barss',<sup>13</sup> while, in an 1884 outing of fourteen miles for Blackburn Harriers, 'Choppy' Warburton 'coached the hounds, who ran in grand style'.<sup>14</sup> Champion wrestler E. Bibby 'trained and coached' Owen McCarthy for a match in 1878 and a year later an advert issued by Professor Ned Donnelly, boxing instructor to London Athletic Club, declared he had 'coached 13 of the 31 winners of the Marquis of Queensberry's Cups'.<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, differences between sports remained. Sporting deaths chronicled in 1884 included Mr George Morrison, who had 'coached Oxford', Mr T.A. Mantle, who had been 'cricket *coach* at Westminster School', and Bob Rogers, who had been professional '*trainer* to the London Athletic Club and subsequently in America with the New York Athletic Club'.<sup>16</sup>

While there was a class component to this differentiation there was also a more practical distinction in that rowing in a crew required the subtle refinement of skills, as did batting in cricket. Style could not be displayed without attention to technique and, even today, sports

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<sup>11</sup> *Baily's Monthly Magazine* (VIII/54 August 1864), 226.

<sup>12</sup> *Daily Mirror* (7 October 1908), 14.

<sup>13</sup> *Bell's Life* (16 June 1869), 7.

<sup>14</sup> *Preston Guardian* (9 February 1884), 6.

<sup>15</sup> *Bell's Life* (23 March, 1878), 5; (15 February 1879), 12.

<sup>16</sup> *Bell's Life* (27 December 1884), 5.

that require high levels of technical ability are likely to be coached more than others. Plebeian sports focussed more on 'wind' and other tasks allotted to professional 'trainers', such as massage, would have been beyond the remit of a skills 'coach'. However, the terms 'trainer' and 'coach' have never been precise or mutually exclusive. In professional athletics, boxing, swimming and cycling, trainers have looked after skill development as well as the fitness of the athlete. In rowing, the coach refines technique but also plans physical training programmes. Given this blurring of the boundaries in the modern idiom it is impossible to be precise about any of the terms that have been historically used to describe individuals acting in coaching roles in Britain. Therefore, in contrast to their French colleagues, British contributors to these two special issues of STAPS are likely to use the words 'coach' and 'trainer' interchangeably wherever the role under discussion involves preparation for competitive performance and irrespective of which term was current among contemporaries in any sporting context. This should be borne in mind when reading the chapters in these volumes.