

## *Introduction Sport Coaching and its Cultural and Historical Perspectives: An International Comparative Study*

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Working a few years ago with Dave Day, sport historian at Crewe (Manchester Metropolitan University), we questioned ourselves many times about the notion of sport coaching and, particularly, on the meanings that the term can have. Indeed, as my British colleague specifies in his introduction, coaching can be interpreted differently according to the cultures, countries and periods within which the term is used. As a result, although the notion of “coaching” is not obviously a problem in the United Kingdom or in Germany and in Spain, in contrast to the way in which it is used in the world of sport science (STAPS) in France, it is often the subject of multiple and controversial debates.

The International seminar organized on April 28, 2016, in Besançon gave an opportunity for scholars to explore this problem. It appears that, according to Dave Day, the notion of coaching has existed for a long time and this perspective allows the Anglo-Saxon historian to arrive at a greater understanding of social and political differences between cultures about categories of coaching. In a different way, French sport historians dealing with the item of coaching, most of whom have a background of PE teaching, which frames their identity, prefer to highlight the issue of the specificity of the coach compared with that of trainers and sport teachers. This approach leads to a questioning of the relationship between the athlete and these coaches, trainers, teachers or instructors. Undoubtedly, the function of “trainer” existed in Classical Greece but, did the athlete exist for himself or for what he represents, and in this particular instance, was this predominantly a representation of the Gods? In which case, a third person must ensure that natural and healthy laws, considered to be quasi-sacred, are developed within this civilization (Veyne, 1985). This question also arises, in a more political sense, for Tom Crib preparing his fight against the black Molyneaux on September 29-1811, in Ury (Scotland) with the help of Captain Barclay (Walter, 1813) or for Mohamed Ali when he went to Kinshasa to prepare for his famous match against George Foreman in 1974. Therefore, what functions do persons who accompany or prepare the athlete, the politician, the pupil or the layman actually perform? Similar issues continually transcend time and space. Whatever the perspective adopted, however, studies of coaching histories and scenarios can be mutually enriching.

Nevertheless, in France, there is some reluctance to use the notion of coaching and think about it, particularly in the field of school sport, because it is often associated with liberal and commercial representations. Despite that, this term has become more and more used by researchers in the field of sport science (particularly of the specialists of so called “sciences of intervention” in France) and by physical education teachers. So, according to Didier Delignières, “the notion of coaching should even engage a new professional position on the part of these actors. The teacher has above all a role of companion, of guide, of assistance, of advisor or to use a more current term, of coach.” (<https://didierdelignieresblog.wordpress.com/2016/04/17/les-postures-professionnelles-de-len-seignant-deps-le-scientifique-ledidacticien-lecoach>). This professional attitude should be added to

the roles of scientist and “didactician” that the PE teacher should adopt in his daily work and in different degrees according to the situation, if we can agree with the author who highlights the originality of this question in this field and its need to be addressed. However, it is imperative that any analysis begins with a degree of historical and cultural reflection in order to be able to identify the disparate elements and their evolution. We can certainly say, for example, that “coaching is not limited to the sports field” (*ibid.*) and, therefore, other reflections seemingly foreign to the field can be included in these reflections to help explain the evolution of professional positions. On the other hand, it could also confirm that the notion that this term finds its origin in sport is a mistake and has led to defining it in an unjustifiably closed manner.

The articles published in the two issues of STAPS revue show very well the difficulty of identifying this notion, and that “coach” cannot have only one definitive definition. If a sport teacher must be also a coach, in addition to having a professional position as “didactician” and scientist, to what extent do notions of coaching intrude upon practice? Conversely, if the coaching notion is as extensive as some suggest, can it claim to dominate all other interactions in the light of historical and cultural antecedents? Where are the actual limits of this term? This is something to be addressed in more detail in articles that will appear in the second issue.

If a theoretical resolution is possible, it is because the different spatial and temporal studies included in these volumes give a broader breadth of knowledge about “coaching” interpretations. In this first issue, we decided to present a Spanish and French socio-historical study (Garcia-Marti) concerning trainers/coaches of professional football in the second part of the twentieth century. It shows the many difficulties involved in the resolution of disparate terms, despite the efficient results obtained by some teams that used new types of strategies. Clearly, other conditions are necessary and different factors like media involvement and/or generation effects need to be considered. However, it is also true that if scientific knowledge related to sports training emerges, it is thanks to the specific political and ideological context surrounding coaching practice. This is masterfully demonstrated by the German (Krüger) and English studies (Bourne) presented here on the notion of periodization created by Matwejew. Furthermore, historical cultures are fully engaged in the way coaching is received and the constraints surrounding coaching practice are inevitably situated within the legal framework of the host nation as demonstrated by the analysis of four Anglo-Saxon countries presented here (Greenfield). This paper calls for some comparative studies particularly between France and New Zealand which have developed a similar system in the field of coaching.

The second volume will address how coaching and coaches are linked in national representations in France after the Second World War (Claverie; Vaucelle) and in England (Adams) at the turn of the twentieth century. It is an interesting way of helping to understand the different ways this notion has developed in diverse cultures. Indeed, if we add the comparison of representation of the coach in England and in the USA at the beginning of the twentieth century (Day), then we have at our disposal some research with which to explore comparative studies, particularly in how notions of “coaching” and coaching practice have evolved historically and how, culturally, coaches have assumed their current forms (Loudcher). It is a good starting point in helping to understand many current issues.

Listening to Hubert Ripoll at the JORRESCAM (Combat sport conference) in Lyon (December 13-14, 2016) communicating his difficulties, mainly due to misunderstandings of the system and its political representations, in proposing in France a form of coaching (one which is necessarily psychological) adapted to high level sport, we are convinced that historical and cultural studies combining comparison and differentiation are indispensable. These can help to consolidate

attitudes towards coaching on the one hand and, on the other hand, in influencing attitudes to allow it to be more “efficient” (in the sense of a pragmatic philosophy<sup>1</sup> and not only according to a liberal ideology) in the field of sport and physical education.

Finally, the notion of coaching seems to be fundamental for sport sciences since it poses questions about multiple fields (management, pedagogy sciences and training). So, can exploration of «coaching» suggest some original ways to think about sport sciences? This is the question that, most certainly, is highlighted by a historical and cultural study of the notion of coaching!

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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1 I refer to the conference delivered by Dave Day in Rennes' High school for students in PE, 1rst December 2016, on John Dewey.