

Coaching on the Run

"Just do it! You learn to talk by talking. You learn to walk by walking. You learn best by doing it!"

- University of the First Age

Coaching on the run is a key practical technique to ensure athletes are at the centre of the coaching process. When done effectively coaching on the run ensures that athletes get maximum opportunity to develop the necessary understanding and ability to achieve success in the game and most importantly have ownership of this process.

At core of 'coaching on the run' is ensuring there is optimum athlete activity for a maximum amount of the time. This ensures practice time is efficient and the person at the centre of the coaching process, the athlete, garners maximum benefit.

Key Principles

The key principles for coaching on the run are:

1. Athlete ownership of their development

Athletes are at the center of the coaching process and are given the opportunity to demonstrate and/or develop their understanding and ability.

2. Athletes learn by doing

First and foremost athletes learn through unaided activity and as a learning tool this is preferential for athletes than listening and/or watching activity.

3. Optimum learning for a maximum amount of time

The aim is to create an environment that promotes optimum athlete learning (through activity) for the maximum amount of time.

4. Each athlete is coached as an individual

One athlete's progression, or lack there of, should not inhibit the entire squad. Targeted individual and/or small group coaching with activities takes precedence over team instruction.

5. Coach intervention that best meets the needs of the individual athlete

The manner in which a coach intervenes during a session should best meet the needs of each individual athlete and facilitate athlete owned learning.

Key Steps*Prior to Activity***1. Identify Desired Athlete Outcomes**

Identify key athlete outcomes for each part of the session

**2. Establish Key Competency Indicators (K.C.I) and Coaching Vocabulary**

Establish indicators that will demonstrate athlete competency and relevant coaching vocabulary

**3. Select Activity**

Select activity/drill/game that will allow the athletes to achieve the outcomes for that part of the session.

*Activity Instruction***1. Set activity parameters with minimum instruction**

Outline parameters for the activity. This should involve minimal instruction but some communication of key competency indicators is required.

*During Activity***1. Evaluate K.C.I**

Evaluate K.C.I to determine athletes' competency.

**6a. K.C.I demonstrated**

Allow athletes to complete activity and provide a platform for self evaluation/awareness of learning

6a. K.C.I not demonstrated

Determine most effective intervention to facilitate athlete learning

Key Competency Indicators

Key competency indicators describe actions that demonstrate athletes have the key understanding and ability/skills to achieve the outcomes set by the coach in specific parts of practice.

Below are the key competency indicators for a section of practice that the coach has designated will be focused on scoring off screens:

1. Cutter sets-up defender to be run off the screen
2. Cutter wait for the screen to be set
3. Cutter rubs shoulders with the screener
4. Cutter uses a change of pace and direction to get open and sprint cuts
5. Both the screener and cutter present as receivers following the screening action
6. Following the screening action one player cuts to the ball, one player gets on the basketball

If the majority of athletes demonstrate these key indicators then the coach can be confident that the outcomes of that section of practice are being achieved. In this instance is constant coach intervention necessary?

Coaches can communicate these indicators in an implicit or explicit fashion. For the above example coaches can either run through the examples outlined above (explicit) or alternatively explain to the athletes the key indicator which is scoring off a screening action (implicit).

Coaching Vocabulary

It is important that coaches develop their coaching vocabulary so they are able to deliver instructions concisely and efficiently, use consistent language with athletes and utilise coaching cues to assist athletes with minimal intervention.

Coaching cues are a valuable tool for coaching on the run. These are words or phrases that summarise information and key teaching points. They can also be used to reinforce or to introduce to athletes to the key competency indicators (key teaching points or points of emphasis) during a part of practice.

An example of coaching vocabulary and coaching cues when working on scoring off screens is listed below:

Vocabulary	Coaching Cue
Set your player up	SET-UP , Stay, Shoulders or CATCH FAKE
Cutters wait for screen	Set-up, STAY , Shoulders
Rub shoulders	Set-up, Stay, SHOULDERS
Change or pace/direction to get open; sprint cuts	TWO PACES
Two receivers after a screen; one to ball & one to basket	ONE IN; ONE OUT

Activity Instruction

Activity instruction should be minimal but precise. Coaches should avoid giving the athletes a 'step by step' account of the activity, athletes learning and development will be more significant if they 'discover' their own learning. Coaches can either explain the action inherent to the activity/drill or more effectively briefly overview the parameters of that part of the practice.

For example if setting up a 3 v 3 screening drill:

Explaining Action (Not recommended)	Game like parameters (Recommended)
<p>"Wing player you must lead for the ball. Take their player in, V cut and lead out. If over played back cut or re-cut until you are open.</p> <p>Player with the ball must pass the ball to wing when they are open then start with a cut before screening for the weak side wing player.</p> <p>Weak side wing player you must set your player up, rub shoulders with the screener and cut off the screen to the top of the key for a shot."</p>	<p>" 3 v 3 no dribble. You cannot score until your team has made two passes and set a down screen. Play!"</p>

Coach Intervention

Coach intervention refers to the level of influence a coach has on athlete activity during practice. If the goal of coaching is to develop the athletes' competency in competitive game like situations which is the primary premise of athlete centered coaching then coaches goal should be minimal coach intervention.

Aiming for minimal coach intervention does not mean the coaches have no involvement in the athletes' development processes, or that coaches should ignore incorrect or poor technique; understanding; or performance. Rather it involves coaches making sure their level of intervention is appropriate for each individual athlete.

Designing activities, games and scrimmages and using appropriate intervention techniques will ensure the coach develops an environment that gives the athlete ownership of developing their ability and understanding of key technical or tactical areas of the sport. This is a coach driven, but athlete owned process.

Coach Intervention techniques

Ideally coaches should aim to use coaching practice that involves medium or low levels of intervention but coaches should also be aware that no intervention is ineffective as intervention that is too intensive.

Level of Intervention	Coaching Practice
Ineffective	Coach stops the entire practice because a small percentage of athletes are not demonstrating competency. Coach 'talks' the athlete through the game/activity/section of practice 'step by step' Coach conducts game/activity/section of practice that requires athletes to follow patterns
High	Coach stops the entire practice because a large percentage of athletes are not demonstrating competency Coach uses coaching cues to reinforce key emphasis and athlete indicators Coach conducts a timeout at the end of game/activity/section of practice to review key emphasis
Medium	Coach identifies individual athlete or small groups of athletes who are not demonstrating competency and intervenes with these athletes without stopping the entire practice Coach changes the parameters of the game/activity/section of practice to better achieve the desired outcomes Coach divides the group, utilising all available space/baskets to ensure more athletes are active
Low	Coach provides activities for athletes when they are not directly involved with the practice Coach facilitates 'athlete' timeouts where by they review/asses key emphasis of a game/activity/section of practice Coach facilitates athletes to self or peer coach The coach promotes optimum athlete activity for the maximum amount of time allocated within the session.
Ineffective	No provision for athletes to evaluate or assess their performance and key learning No intervention when athletes do not demonstrate competency with key athlete indicators

Effective coaching on the run involves appropriate levels of intervention for each individual athlete being coached. Within an athlete centered coaching processes this will encompass facilitating athlete's ownership of their own development.

The ultimate assessment of coaches' effectiveness in area is to ask the following:

How competent would the athlete be with no coaching intervention?

Ultimately in competitive game like environments and in the bastion of high level competition, there is no coach intervention. Does your coaching practice recognise this?