

## **Smith et al (1979)**

Sport psychologists can make significant contributions to youth sports, especially in the promotion of the psychological welfare of those involved. Cognitive-behavioural frameworks can be used to make coaches more aware of their behaviours, to create expectancies concerning the likely consequences of various coaching behaviours, to increase their desire to generate certain consequences rather than others, and to develop or enhance their ability to perform desirable behaviours effectively.

The behavioural guidelines communicated to coaches in the training programme used in this study were empirically derived from a preliminary investigation involving 51 Little League coaches and 542 of their players (Smith, Smoll and Curtis, 1978). In this study, a behavioural assessment system was used to categorise the behaviours of the coaches during an average of nearly four complete games. At the conclusion of the season, the children were interviewed individually, in their homes to obtain measures of the perception and recall of their coaches' behaviours and of their evaluative reactions to the coach, team-mates, and other aspects of their athletic experience.

Previous research by Smith et al (1978) showed that children who played for highly reinforcing and encouraging coaches had significantly higher levels of post season self-esteem than those who were exposed to coaches who did not behave in this manner.

This study was a field experiment, as the IV was manipulated and it took place in the real world. The independent variable (IV) was whether the coach was assigned to the group who underwent the evening training session or whether the coach was assigned to the no-treatment (control) group. The dependent variables (DVs) were the observed behaviours of the coaches during games, players' perceptions of the coaches' behaviours and, player attitudes towards themselves, the coaches, team-mates and the sport.

Data was gathered through observation (leading to the completion of the CBAS) and self-reports (via the self-monitoring forms, post season interviews and the Self-Esteem Inventory).

The initial sample consisted of 34 Seattle-area, male, Little League Baseball coaches. All of the coaches were involved at the major (10-12-year-olds) and senior (13-15-year-olds) levels of the programme. 18 coaches were randomly assigned to the experimental group and 16 were assigned to a no-treatment, control condition. Three coaches in the control condition were lost during the course of the season due to team mergers or changes in residence.

The final sample therefore consisted of 18 coaches in the experimental group and 13 coached in the no-treatment, control group. The mean age of these coaches was 36.10 years (SD = 9.99). They had an average of 8.37 years of coaching experience (SD = 6.11).

In addition, a total of 325 male players (82% of those who played for the experimental and control coaches) were individually interviewed to gather data about their perceptions of the coaches' behaviours and their attitudes towards themselves, the coaches, team-mates and the sport.

The training package involved a number of techniques. As well as verbal and written presentation of the devised behavioural guidelines, modelling, behavioural feedback and self-monitoring were employed.

Coaches in the experimental group were contacted by telephone and invited to participate in an evening training session. They were told that the results of the previous study conducted within their leagues would be described and guidelines would be presented and discussed. The training session lasted about 2 hours and was conducted by the researchers. The verbal presentation was supplemented by the modelling by the experimenters of both desirable and undesirable methods of responding to specific situations (e.g. player mistakes). In addition to the guidelines, coaches were also given a written brochure which contained concrete suggestions for communicating effectively with players, gaining their respect, and relating to parents.

In addition to the information-modelling portion of the training programme, behavioural feedback (12-category the Coaching Behaviour Assessment System (CBAS)) and self-monitoring procedures (the coaches completing a brief self-monitoring form immediately after each of their first 10 games of the season) were employed to increase self-awareness and to encourage compliance with the coaching guidelines.

In order to assess the effects of the training programme on coaches and their players, the experimental and control coaches were compared in terms of observed behaviours during games, players' perceptions of the behaviours and, player attitudes towards themselves, the coaches, team-mates and the sport.

Player perceptions and attitudes were recorded and assessed through the use of a structured interview conducted at the end of the season.

Following the recall section of the interview, the boys indicated reactions to their participation and ability-related perceptions. This was done by giving the child a clipboard and asking them to record their own responses on a series of 7-point scales in such a way that the interviewer could not see them. Two examples of the questions asked are: 'How much do you like playing baseball?'; 'How good a baseball teacher is your coach?' The scales ranged, for example, from 'dislike a lot' to 'like a lot' / 'very poor' to 'excellent'.

In addition an assessment of self-esteem as part of the post season interview was conducted where players were asked to complete an adaptation of Coopermith's (1967) Self Esteem Inventory as a measure of general (global) self-esteem. This consisted of 14 descriptive statements, each of which was rated on a 5-point scale ranging from 'not at all' to very 'much like me'.

Analysis of the observational results showed that reinforcement was the significant major discriminator between the two groups.

The trained coaches had a mean winning percentage of 54%, whereas for the untrained coaches this was 44.7%. These findings were however not statistically significant.

It was concluded that training programmes exert a significant and positive influence on overt coaching behaviours and have positive influence on player-perceived behaviours.

Children who play for trained coaches develop positive self-esteem / develop more positive self-esteem than children who play for untrained coaches. They also evaluate their coach / the interpersonal climate of their teams more positively than children who play for untrained coaches.

