

# Coach Mentor Program

## Who's Coaching the Coach?

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### Edmonton Sport Council



*April, 2000*

*Dave Myers, Technical Director*

# **Coach Mentor Program**

## **Who's Coaching the Coach?**

### **Preface**

Mentoring is not a new concept. Mentoring has probably been going on since the first young Neanderthals looked over their parents' shoulders. In the modern world, some of the more successful mentoring programs are operating in the business and education sectors. Even in sport, we see evidence of mentoring, however, formalized mentor programs are few and far between. In the case where a lone individual is acting as a mentor for a sport organization, the program often ceases to exist once the individual mentor decides to move on. Fortunately, there has been work done to formalize the mentoring of coaches.

Mr. Richard Ganon should be given credit for his work in establishing a Coach Mentor Program for the Calgary Minor Hockey Association. As part of his thesis for his Masters degree in Physical Education at the University of Calgary, Richard created a program that cut the turnover rate of coaches up to half in the pilot year of the Program. Much of the following information is based on Richard's work.

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## **Introduction**

Because coaches are the number one factor affecting athletes' skill development, beyond the athletes themselves, it only makes sense to place coaching development at or near the top of a sport organization's list of priorities and allocate resources accordingly. Most sport organizations never carry their coaches' development beyond the National Coaching Certification Program.

Unfortunately, the NCCP, although very well researched and prepared, does have its limitations. The greatest limitation being that there is no follow up with the coaches after the courses are complete. Inevitably, coaches find themselves in need of help with often no place to turn to get it.

Formalized coach mentor programs have been proven highly effective at improving the quality of coaching and by default, the quality of the experience had by the athletes.

## **Why a Coach Mentor Program?**

In many cases, good coaches quit "because of work commitments, family, child retirements..., conflicts within the team, lack of motivation for teaching, lack of (resource) materials and the difficulty of understanding children and their needs at various stages..." (Ganon, 1984). A study conducted by the International Hockey Centre of Excellence in 1994 showed that the turnover rate of coaches in the Minor Hockey Association of Calgary was "approximately 60% with a higher percentage at the lower (younger) levels". Formalized coach mentor programs have been highly effective at reversing this trend and should have similar effects in other sports.

Above all, a coach mentor program has a positive effect on the athlete. It is every sport organization's responsibility to provide the best possible environment in which to develop an athlete's social, psychological and physical 'skills'. The coach is the single largest influence on that environment. "It has been found that more than 96% of children have 'absolute trust' in their coaches, compared to 62% for teachers and 55% for parents. (Dickson, 1993). Given the overwhelming trust children place in their coaches, sport organizations must ensure coaches have all the support they need.

## **Benefits of the Coach Mentor Program**

- Reduced turn over in coaches from year to year - reduced training costs
- Coaches gain better understanding of the importance of practice
- More effective and efficient practices
- Coaches better equipped to assess skill performance
- Coaches gained skills in the area of teaching techniques and providing effective feedback
- More appropriate 'drill' selection and design
- Increased use of 'games' or fun components in practice
- Increased athlete satisfaction

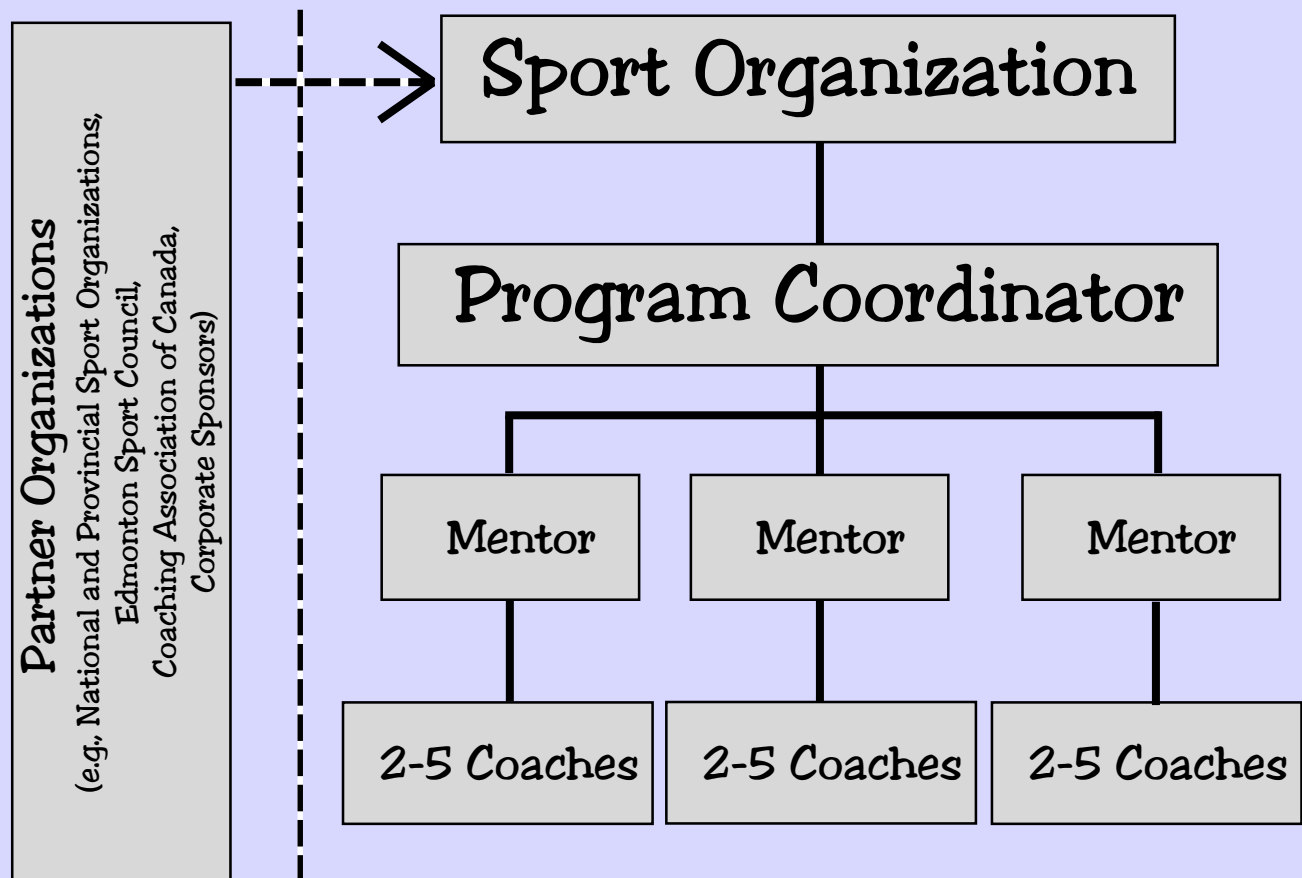
# How the Program Works

The following information is provided as a guide only. It is expected that each sport organization will have to adjust the program to fit its specific needs. The Edmonton Sport Council will provide resources and consultation to organizations wishing to establish a Coach Mentor Program.

## 1) Organizational Structure

It is recommended that the Coach Mentor Program ultimately operate on a municipal level, e.g., the Edmonton Whatzitsport Association. Initially, however, it may be necessary to implement the program in specific clubs or areas within the city that belong to the municipal level association. Each sport organization will have to determine the best approach according to the size of its membership.

The following organizational chart shows how the Program *may* be set up in your sport.



## **2) Communication**

Communication is a critical element in the Coach Mentor Program. As is shown in the organizational chart above, the 'hub' for the Program's communication is the Program Coordinator.

The Program Coordinator will have to connect with a number of key individuals within the Program. Depending on the structure your organization chooses, the Program Coordinator will have to connect the sport association on the municipal level and associations that may be members of the municipal association. In addition, there is an obvious need for the Program Coordinator to communicate with the Mentors.

The Mentors and the coaches assigned to them will be in contact throughout the season. Depending on the league schedules, number of games, number of practices and availability of the Mentor and assigned coaches, they will be in contact between 2-5 times each month. Again, your organization will have to adjust the program to meet its specific needs.

## **3) Training and Recruiting Mentors**

The quality of the Mentors is, obviously, of the utmost importance to the success of the Coach Mentor Program. Careful consideration must be given to the qualifications, recruitment, training and monitoring of the Mentors. The Edmonton Sport Council can assist your organization in identifying necessary qualifications, recruiting techniques, necessary training and monitoring practices.

Generally speaking, Mentors should have an appropriate level of certification in the National Coaching Certification Program plus demonstrated coaching experience. Mentors will be seen as role models so they should possess appropriate qualities. In other successful mentor programs, Mentors usually are veteran coaches that wish to continue their involvement in their sport but have chosen to discontinue coaching full time.

Training of the Mentors usually consists of a series of workshops for a total of approximately eight classroom hours. In the Calgary Minor Hockey Association example (Ganon, 1984), the purpose of the workshops was:

- to promote the philosophy of the (sport organization)
- to make mentors aware of their role with coaches
- to prepare mentors to help coaches plan efficient practices
- to introduce teaching (techniques) that maximize efficient practices
- to show how to evaluate drills and practices
- to set the proper approach that mentors would have to follow when (working with) a coach
- to review mentors' task descriptions.

Specifics for the workshops will need to be developed to reflect your sport and sport organization. The Edmonton Sport Council can act as a resource in the development of these workshops.

#### **4) Coach Workshops**

Coaches participating in the Mentor Program usually attend a minimum of two workshops.

- Workshops cover a variety of issues including:
- the role of the coach
- types and use of feedback
- evaluating athletes to identify ‘deficiencies’ in performance and designing ‘drills’ or practice sessions that address skill deficiencies
- practice planning to ensure efficient use of practice time and space
- growth and development – timing of skill introduction
- psychology of the athlete

#### **5) Coach Meetings**

Mentors arrange to attend at least one game and two practices per month for each coach the Mentor is working with. Mentors observe the coach with particular emphasis on the material covered in the Coach Workshops. Immediately following practices and games, the Mentor meets with the coach to offer suggestions for improvement and to reinforce strengths. Mentors attempt to use as many objective measurements as possible and makes these available to the coach to see. Coaches are given opportunities to ask questions and are also directed to resources that may help in the areas discussed.

#### **6) Program Monitoring**

Obviously ongoing monitoring of the program must be maintained. Inevitably, as your sport organization implements a Coach Mentor Program, there will be areas that need improvement. To ensure long term success, it is necessary to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the Program. Some feedback from the evaluation will need to be implemented immediately, while other information may be integrated over a longer period of time.

Monitoring needs to take place at all levels within the Program, including the Program Coordinator, the Mentors, the Coaches themselves and the required resources. Your organization will have to establish a monitoring process that reflects its needs.

#### **7) Resource Materials**

Depending on your sport, there will be various manuals, videos and other resources available. Most sport specific resources may be obtained from or through your provincial or national sport organization. In some instances, resources may need to be created from scratch. An example may include the tools your organization uses to evaluate the Program.

Resources may be required for the Program Coordinator, the Mentors, or the coaches themselves. Among other responsibilities, the Coach Mentor Program Coordinator is responsible for locating and securing resources for the program.

## **Justifying the Cost of a Coach Mentor Program**

As anyone with the responsibility of finding quality, dedicated volunteers will tell you, it's not easy. It takes a great deal of time and, in many cases, money. Prior to the implementation of the Mentor Program in the example cited previously, the Minor Hockey Association of Calgary would have to provide initial training for 60% of their coaches each year. After only the first year of the program, they saved themselves up to half of their training costs! This is obviously a significant cost saving. Monies saved by reducing training costs can then be reinvested in a Coach Mentorship Program.

Additional monies may be available through corporate sponsorship and grant programs. Within the sport delivery system in Canada there are natural partners that may be interested in supporting Coach Mentor Programs. The Edmonton Sport Council can provide direction to your organization on funding matters.

## **Getting Started**

**Why not host an information session to allow others in your organization an opportunity to learn how a Coach Mentor Program can be established for your organization?**

The Edmonton Sport Council is prepared to make a presentation on the Coach Mentor Program at a meeting of your organization's representatives. The ESC supports the implementation of formalized Coach Mentor Programs and, as such, we will partner with interested sport organizations to establish a Coach Mentor Program for their organization.

Because your Coach Mentor Program will be designed for your organization, your organization must be willing to take on a leadership role in its development. The Edmonton Sport Council does have limited resources and as such, the ESC will endeavour to assist your organization in any way it can so long as the ESC's role is to facilitate.

The ESC looks forward to advances in the development of our community's coaches. We welcome any questions you may have and the opportunity to speak to your organization in person.

## **CONTACT US**

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