

Coaching Gaelic Games in Ulster - 2002

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Introduction

The importance being placed on quality coaching is now emerging. Investment in facilities has been excellent and now the time has arrived to invest in people to deliver within those facilities. To be an effective organisation the GAA needs seven key areas that interlink and operate in harmony. It needs a Strategy, Structure, Systems, Staff, Style, Shared Values and Skills. We have several of these well established but here I want to focus on staff and skills in relation to coaching.

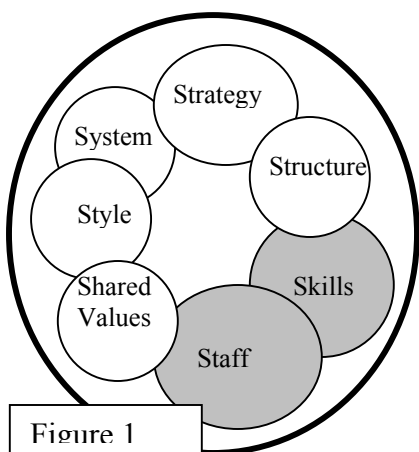


Figure 1

Achieving Coaching Excellence is a lifetime commitment for those who are dedicated to this aspect of the game. If a team under performs often the coach gets the wrap. A coaching course gets you out of the blocks, but continuing coach development leads to quality. The old Northern Ireland Institute of Coaching (now Coach Northern Ireland) kept Ulster coaches abreast of different generic courses.

We all have a need to continually update. Quality coaching is a prerequisite to quality players. To achieve this we the Coaches need to be prepared to step outside the comfort zone, think outside the box, continually challenge our ways and means and look to do it better each time.

The Stakeholders

PE and Games in Primary schools is fundamental to incorporating good body management and skills development. The lack of full-time coaches in counties and the geographical spread of schools make it impossible for coaching officers to have a regular input into each school where required. School / Club links are key in this respect with the latter being proactive seeking ways of getting regular access to the primary schools to deliver quality coaching to our youth. Complacency can lead to 'dry rot' and while other sports are marketing and selling their 'product' to our youth in schools GAA must follow suit.

The secondary, grammar schools and further and higher education have supported player development in a positive way in Ulster. This parallels underage developments at club level. Although some teachers give freely of their time, more need to be encouraged to make a contribution to after schools sport. I was alarmed when I found out a first year at a local Grammar school was not being offered any sort of after school sport! School Principals should value the input that success in Gaelic Games gives to the life of the school. 'After all they are keen to use sporting success and sports facilities to market the school and recruit young people'.

The Coaches – Investing in People

Much unfounded criticism has been levelled at the quality of coaching in clubs. This ignores the many hours that volunteers put into the promotion of the sport within their parishes. Criticism should be levied at the County Boards for not providing more opportunities for coach education at club level. This would provide an opportunity for club coaches to develop their skills and ability through one-day coaching seminars. Coaches and club representatives on County Boards need to be proactive and encourage or demand such programmes to be made available. It is happening in on or two counties and club football is reaping the benefit.

Support & Services

Specialized Coaching
Sports Science
Sports medicine
Sports Injury
Sports Psychology
Nutrition
Indoor / outdoor facilities
Resource centre
Education Life skills
Scholarship programme
Video analysis

Figure 2

The Changing Environment- Elitism and Excellence

In a previous edition of Ulster Gaelic (November 1999) I alluded to what coaching would be like in the next millennium. Suffice to say that Elite county squads have arrived and with them the disciplines outline in figure 2. We have always had elite squads in GAA through our Minor and Under 21 competitions. The question is where do we start? Under 12 County development squads are in my opinion too soon. Schools of Excellence feed into the Under 16 squads where young players can receive additional sessions and advice on strength and conditioning and lifestyle management. These squads

provide a more comprehensive base upon which young players can emerge on the County stage. Despite an excellent season in Ulster with an array of trophies the time has come to launch and attack on the All Ireland Senior Title each year and not once a decade. The core basic skills of senior county players need to be strengthened? This can happen with development squads that have the support of clubs. Strength and conditioning is all too often missing! Introduce good technique with weights using a brush shaft! Key elements for developing quality young players, including the latter, needs to be addressed within clubs and counties.

Ulster has now qualified over 900 level 1 coaches. How many of you are active coaches? The Level 2 programme has had a successful launch in October. The Level 3 programme is also evolving along side a diploma, foundation degree and degree programme in coaching. One hundred and forty coaches attended a one-day coaching conference at the University of Ulster in October. A high performance-coaching programme is in place at provincial level that underpins the areas in figure 2. The interest in these programmes reflects the desire for more in-depth knowledge. The same is needed within the counties with a focus on club coaching. It is evident since the last edition of Ulster Gaelic that many coaches read the coaching articles. I am delighted to use this medium to introduce ideas and revisit old ones. In addition there will be a coaching page on the Sports Institute web site, when it is launched in late January. In the meantime I hope you are looking forward to reading articles that focus on coaching and I hope that you can generate ideas about what you would want in this column. Finally I would like to wish Ulster Gaelic every success with the re launch of this wonderful resource for coaching.

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