



COACHING COURSES HELP CHANGE CULTURE OF ATHLETICS

PHOENIX, AZ (April 8, 2009) – There is no disputing that winning is an important objective in high school athletics. But there are numerous other ways to enhance a student’s overall school experience by learning life skills.

It could not happen without the knowledge of and input from coaches.

The Arizona Interscholastic Association, along with nearly all of the country’s high school athletics governing bodies, has instituted a series of courses designed to assist the coaches help their young people achieve as much success as possible.

In many states such as Arizona, one course, Fundamentals of Coaching, is mandatory. Other state associations are continuing to evolve and have recommended, not mandated, the course that was the touchstone of the Coach Education Program by the National Federation of High School Associations in 2007.

There are other courses offered, some sport-specific, with the list expected to grow.

The AIA has determined that all of the state’s coaches, head coach or assistant, paid or volunteer, must successfully complete the Fundamentals of Coaching course by the start of the 2009-10 school year. The course is available through a classroom format or online at www.NFHSLearn.com.

The AIA has had a Pursuing Victory with Honor initiative in place for many years, and the institution of the coaching course is an extension of that.

“The courses offer a uniform approach to the high school philosophy of athletics, with an emphasis on sportsmanship and building good relationships between kids and coaches,” said AIA Executive Director Dr. Harold Slemmer.

A former coach in Arizona, Slemmer has taken the Fundamentals of Coaching course and found it beneficial.

“There were many things that I found that would be very helpful to the coaches,” he said. “I took it online, in one-hour increments over about the space of a week, took my time to read the material and watched the videos.

“You have the option to begin in the classroom with other coaches and finish online, or you can take it all online. I had heard about the convenience of online education, but I was somewhat skeptical at first. Taking this made me a believer. It is thought-provoking, makes you think about the impact you can have as a coach.”

Videos include a number of “teachable moments,” examples of situations that can help students. In one video, a basketball team suffers a difficult loss in a big playoff game. Afterward, the coach takes the time to dedicate the season to a pair of seniors who have been good examples through their work ethic and leadership.

The coaching curriculum was written by Dr. Darren Treasure, Director of the AIA Academy and a former tenured professor at Arizona State University with an appointment in the Department of Kinesiology and an adjunct position in the Department of Psychology.

Treasure was invited to author the NFHS's Fundamentals of Coaching in 2006 and began by visiting states across the country researching what interscholastic coaches really needed to know.

"It was very important that the content was developed with and for the interscholastic coach," Treasure said.

"I found that there were about only 16,000 out of an estimated 1 million coaches nationwide who had actually received any specific coach education. Of those, many were not educators and had little understanding of the educational mission of interscholastic athletics."

The role of athletics in our nation's schools therefore is a dominant theme throughout the course.

"The pendulum has swung so far away from the issues that need to be addressed," Treasure said.

"Many high schools are caught up in trying to be a 'mini-college.' What we need is to have our athletics system serve as a 'mini-classroom' to help young people learn to become functioning members of society.

"We prefer to call the young people 'students' and not 'student-athletes.' They are students who happen to participate in athletics. They should be participating to support the educational mission of the classroom."

Treasure said that 44 of the nation's high school athletic associations are on board with the program. He estimated that 38,000 coaches took the course in 2008, with an estimated 60,000 becoming involved this year. He estimated that there are 10,000 coaches in Arizona, with about one-third already taking the course.

What about the future?

"Our goal is to get 100,000 coaches involved per year (nationally). We want to change the culture of interscholastic athletics," Treasure said.

The NFHS would like to make the courses part of a coaching certification program, similar to what teachers go through.

"The bottom line is to help kids have a positive experience, and training is the first step in ensuring that a positive learning experience comes from athletics," said Tim Flannery, Assistant Executive Director of the NFHS and longtime administrator in the Ohio schools system.

"Folks in many professions – teachers, doctors, lawyers, car mechanics – all are required to be certified because what they do is important. Why don't we train and certify coaches? We should. We're seeing more and more lawsuits and school districts are being brought in to help when negligence is being claimed."

Longtime Arizona coach and administrator Bill Gahn, now the athletic director for the Deer Valley Unified School District in the northwest Valley, facilitated one of the initial focus groups during the development of Fundamentals of Coaching and is now a state instructor for the course.

“I think the feedback has been really good in our district,” Gahn said. “Initially, I think there might have been some resistance on the part of some of the older coaches, but after they took the course, most of them found it worthwhile. I’ve talked to about 400 people about it, and most of the responses have been positive.”

Scott Brown, athletic director for the Paradise Valley Unified School District and the AIA Academy’s Coach Education Specialist and Lead Trainer, has worked with Treasure in delivering content at the youth level in Arizona and said it is only a natural progression to implement coach education at the high school level.

“It is something we really need,” he said. “For some coaches, it might reaffirm a lot of what they already do. For others, it might cause them to reassess some of what they do. It helps give the coaches some structure.”

Coaches should consult their school district administrator for additional information or contact the AIA Academy at (602) 385-3820.

Have a Story Idea:

The AIA is looking for story ideas on member high schools, including its student-athlete, coaches and administrators. Have a story that you think should be shared with the AIA community? Email your idea to Don Ketchum at dketchum@aiaonline.org.