

# **AN INTRODUCTION TO SPORTS COACHING**

**From science and theory to  
practice**

**EDITED BY ROBYN L. JONES, MIKE  
HUGHES AND KIERAN KINGSTON**



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# AN INTRODUCTION TO SPORTS COACHING

*An Introduction to Sports Coaching* provides students with an accessible, informative guide to the theory underlying the practice of quality sports coaching.

This unique, readable text explains the practice of coaching from a variety of sports science perspectives, showing how such various knowledge strands underpin effective sports coaching.

Real-life coaching examples are used in every chapter to demonstrate theory in practice, and to show how athletes can benefit from a coach's broad understanding of sport.

The text provides full coverage of how Sport Psychology, Motor Learning, Physiology, Sports Medicine, Biomechanics, Notational Analysis, Sociology, History, Philosophy, Pedagogy and Sports Development can and should inform sports coaching.

*An Introduction to Sports Coaching* is edited by a team of senior sports coaching academics, all of whom are also experienced sports coaches. The text contains:

- Insights from practising international and club coaches
- Clear definitions of important themes and key concepts relating to the sports science knowledge that underpins coaching
- Seminar and self-test questions to help confirm your understanding.

*An Introduction to Sports Coaching* offers an ideal support text for today's student of sports coaching.

**Robyn L. Jones** is a Professor of Sports Coaching, **Mike Hughes** is Professor of Performance Analysis and **Kieran Kingston** is a Senior Lecturer in Sport Psychology. All are based at the Cardiff School of Sport, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC), South Wales, UK.



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# CONTENTS

<i>List of tables and figures</i>	vii
<i>List of contributors</i>	ix
<i>Preface</i>	xiii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xvii
<b>Part 1</b>	<b>1</b>
1 Pedagogy for coaches Dr Kevin Morgan	3
2 Skill acquisition for coaches Dr Gavin Lawrence and Dr Kieran Kingston	16
3 Psychology for coaches Dr Kieran Kingston, Dr Owen Thomas and Ian Mitchell	28
<b>Part 2</b>	<b>41</b>
4 Sociology for coaches Professor Scott Fleming and Professor Robyn L. Jones	43
5 History for coaches Dr Malcolm MacLean and Dr Ian Pritchard	52
6 Philosophy for coaches Dr Alun Hardman and Dr Carwyn Jones	64
7 Sport development for coaches Dr Nicola Bolton and Bev Smith	73



<b>Part 3</b>	<b>85</b>
8 Biomechanics for coaches Professor David G. Kerwin and Dr Gareth Irwin	87
9 Notational analysis for coaches Professor Mike Hughes	101
10 Sports medicine for coaches Dr Andrew Miles and Dr Richard Tong	114
11 Physiology for coaches Dr Michael G. Hughes	126
12 Tying it all together Professor Robyn L. Jones, Dr Kieran Kingston and Professor Mike Hughes	138
<i>References</i>	144
<i>Index</i>	163

# LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

## TABLES

1.1 Teaching styles adapted from Mosston and Ashworth (2002)	10
1.2 Multiple intelligences adapted from Gardner (1993)	12
1.3 TARGET behaviours that influence motivational climate (Epstein 1989; Ames 1992b)	14
11.1 Sporting events and the physiological factors that limit their performance	128
11.2 Suitable procedures for the assessment of fitness in football players	133
11.3 Mean fitness test results from age-group to senior, national squad female badminton players (unpublished data from author, with permission from Badminton England)	133
11.4 Interval (running) training sessions to enhance anaerobic fitness	135
11.5 A selection of (running) training sessions to enhance aerobic fitness	136

## FIGURES

7.1 The traditional sports development continuum	76
7.2 The modified model of the sports development continuum (Houlihan and White 2002)	76
7.3 The house of sport	76
8.1 A conceptual model depicting how coaches develop skills in athletes (adapted from Irwin <i>et al.</i> 2005)	89
8.2 The functional phases of the gymnastic longswing (Irwin and Kerwin 2005)	91

8.3 Darren Campbell performing the sprint start showing extension into the 'thrust position': a key discrete performance indicator used by coaches as a measure of successful execution of the skill	92
8.4 The Tkachev move: the original Smolevski drawing (1969). Cited in Nissinen, M.A., Preiss, R. and Brüggeman, P. (1985) 'Simulation of human airborne movements on the horizontal bar', in D.A. Winter and R. Norman (eds) <i>Biomechanics IX-B</i> . Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics	94
8.5 A graphical reconstruction of a triple backward somersault by Valeri Lukien (#149) and another gymnast (#120) at the 1988 Seoul Olympics	95
9.1 A schema of the coaching process (amended from Franks <i>et al.</i> 1983)	103
9.2 A hierarchically structured model for representing events that take place in an invasion team game such as field hockey, soccer, basketball or water polo	105
9.3 A simple schematic flow-chart of soccer	107
9.4 A simple flow-chart for squash	108
9.5 A summary of data used as feedback in a storyboard format to accompany edited video	109
9.6 A modified flow-diagram illustrating the use of video feedback within the coaching process	111
10.1 Summary of the categories of the most common sports injuries	119
11.1 Power output during five seconds of sprint running (unpublished measurements from the author)	129
11.2 The heart rate response to a very high-intensity, short-duration training session (mean heart rate 103 beats per minute)	131
11.3 Heart rate response to a continuous, prolonged endurance training session	131

## LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

**Dr Nicola Bolton** is a Principal Lecturer at the Cardiff School of Sport, the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC). Her research interests lie in sport development and management, public policy, strategy and evaluation. She is a board member of the Sports Council for Wales and the Institute of Sport, Parks and Leisure (ISPAL).

**Scott Fleming** is a Professor at the Cardiff School of Sport, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC). His teaching and research interests are mainly in the sociology of sport and leisure, as well as in research methodology and research ethics. He is currently the Chair of the Leisure Studies Association (LSA).

**Dr Alun Hardman** is a Senior Lecturer at the Cardiff School of Sport, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC). His research is conducted in the area of applied philosophy and ethics of sport, and is focused on understanding how sporting organisations from grass-roots to elite level can improve their ethical climate.

**Dr Michael G. Hughes** is a Senior Lecturer and Discipline Director in Sport and Exercise Physiology at the Cardiff School of Sport, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC). His experience in the physiology of elite sports performance is partly based on previous employment as an exercise physiologist with both the British Olympic Medical Centre and Badminton England. He is accredited as a provider of sport science support work by the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES). His current research interests include the physiology of repeated-sprint sports, fitness assessment and training.

**Mike Hughes** is a Professor of Performance Analysis and Director of the Centre for Performance Analysis at the Cardiff School of Sport, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC). He is also Director of UWIC Academy of Squash (Level IV coach) and a Fellow of the Royal Statistical Society. He is a Visiting Professor at the Universities of Zagreb, Ljubljana and Magdeburg. His principal research areas are: analysis of sports performance, the effect of fluid dynamics in sport, and developing methodologies in notational analysis. He has published in many leading journals, whilst founding and serving as initial General Editor of the *International Journal of Performance Analysis of Sport*. He is on the editing boards of the *Journal of Sports Science*, the *International Journal of Kinesiology* (Zagreb), the *International Journal of Computers in Sports Science* and the *International Journal of Sports Science and Engineering*.

**Dr Gareth Irwin** is a Principal Lecturer and Head of Biomechanics at the Cardiff School of Sport, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC). He is a British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (BASES) accredited Sport Biomechanist. His research addresses theoretical issues associated with the development of skill, combining biomechanics, coaching science and the principles of training in a multiple paradigm approach. His applied research is facilitated by his background in international-level sport, previously as a competitor and currently as an international-level coach.

**Dr Carwyn Jones** is a Senior Lecturer in Sports Ethics at the Cardiff School of Sport, UWIC. He was the first person in the UK to gain a PhD in the subject. He teaches sports ethics, research ethics and professional ethics. His main research interests are role models, moral development, cheating, racism and other ethical issues in sport. He has published recently in the *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, the *Sociology of Sport Journal* and the *European Physical Education Review*.

**Robyn L. Jones** is a Professor at the Cardiff School of Sport, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC), and a Visiting Professor at the Norwegian School of Sport Sciences, University of Oslo. His research area comprises a critical sociology of coaching in respect of examining the complexity of the interactive coaching context and how practitioners manage the inevitable dilemmas that arise. He has published in many leading journals including *Quest*, *Sport*, *Education and Society*, *The Sport Psychologist* and the *Sociology of Sport Journal*, whilst also serving on the editorial boards of *Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy* and the *International Journal of Sports Science and Coaching*.

**David G. Kerwin** is a Professor at the Cardiff School of Sport, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC). His research focuses on the development and application of new technologies in the analysis of technique in sport. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine (FRSM) and of the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences (FBASES), a College Member of the EPSRC and a member of the Science Commission of the Fédération Internationale de Gymnastique (FIG). David is also Principal Investigator for an Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) project investigating wireless sensor technologies in the training of elite athletes.

**Dr Kieran Kingston** is a Senior Lecturer and Discipline Director of Sport Psychology at the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC). He received his PhD in 1999 from the University of Wales, Bangor. His research interests are focused primarily on the motivational aspects of sport, including goals, self-determination, burn-out and confidence, whilst also pursuing inquiry into the psychology of golf. Kieran has been a BASES accredited sport psychologist since 1997, and has acted as a consultant in a variety of individual and team sports.

**Dr Gavin Lawrence** is a Lecturer in Motor Control and Learning at the School of Sport, Health and Exercise Sciences, University of Wales, Bangor. His research interests include visuo-motor control with a focus on feedback processing, motor programming and the attainment of expertise.



**Dr Malcolm MacLean** teaches history in the Faculty of Sport, Health and Social Care, and is Deputy Dean of Modular Schemes in the Academic Development Unit at the University of Gloucestershire. His research focuses on sport in colonial and post-colonial settings with a particular focus on the relationship between sport as a cultural practice and social and political movements. He is Vice Chair of the British Society of Sports History, President of the International Society of Football Scholars and a member of the editorial boards for *Football Studies* and *Sport in History*.

**Dr Andy Miles** is a Principal Lecturer and Director of Enterprise at the Cardiff School of Sport at the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC). His areas of interest and professional involvement include sports science support to elite athletes and the development and delivery of coach education materials. He is currently a member of the UKCC External Reviewers Group.

**Ian Mitchell** is a Senior Lecturer in Sport Psychology and Director of Football at the Cardiff School of Sport, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC). As a former professional footballer, Ian's applied work has mainly been in performance enhancement and coaching behaviour within professional football. He is a UEFA qualified coach and regularly delivers on the UEFA 'A' and 'Pro' licence education courses for elite football coaches.

**Dr Kevin Morgan** is Senior Lecturer and Programme Director of the MSc Coaching Science at the Cardiff School of Sport, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC). His research interests lie in pedagogy and motivational climate in physical education and sports coaching. He is a member of the association for Physical Education (afPE) and the British Educational Research Association (BERA) PE special interest group.

**Dr Ian Pritchard** is a Senior Lecturer and Programme Director of the BSc Sport and Physical Education at the Cardiff School of Sport, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC). His principal research interests include sport and Neo-Marxist perspectives; sport, leisure and nationalism; and nineteenth-century sport and leisure history.

**Bev Smith** is a Senior Lecturer and Programme Director for the MA Sport Development and Coaching degree at the Cardiff School of Sport, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC). She is a former national gymnastics coach and international judge, and is currently a board member of Sports Coach UK and the Institute of Sport, Parks and Leisure (ISPL).

**Dr Owen Thomas** is a Senior Lecturer in Sport Psychology at the Cardiff School of Sport, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC). His main research interests include stress in sport and sport confidence. He is a British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences accredited sports psychologist.

**Dr Richard Tong** is the Director of Learning and Teaching at the Cardiff School of Sport, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC). He is a sports physiologist and also the Academic Co-ordinator for the MSc Sport and Exercise Medicine at UWIC. He has been accredited by the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences to provide physiological support to elite performers for over a decade.



# PREFACE

## BACKGROUND AND AIM

Although scholars agree that coaching is a complex, multi-faceted activity involving many different forms of knowledge, the literature that has informed it, particularly at the beginner or introductory level, has been roundly criticised (e.g. Jones *et al.* 2006). The disapproval has centred on the portrayal of coaching as a knowable sequential course of action to be delivered unproblematically and accepted by the athlete; a picture that grossly oversimplifies the process involved. Such a portrayal has also been fragmented or splintered in nature; presenting coaching as a series of isolated, discrete and largely unrelated components. The problem with such compartmentalisation is that those parts being analysed have been decontextualised, giving a very artificial account of events. As everyone who has coached or been coached can attest, coaching is just not that clear-cut. What has exacerbated the situation is that coaches and students of coaching have been left to make the links between the different theoretical strands and the thorny reality of practice for themselves, which they have consistently failed to do. Unsurprisingly, it has left the relevancy of such work open to question. The result is that much of coaches' knowledge remains rooted in implicit assumptions as opposed to explicit research and theory. No doubt authors of such introductory texts would rightly protest that there is a need to present coaching in a way that is both accessible and understandable for students and novice coaches. We couldn't agree more. Consequently, those wishing to write a foundational book in coaching are left with a dilemma; how to pen a clear, readable text suitable for undergraduate students and beginner coaches without dumbing down the activity so that it lacks any perceived application to the real world.

This book, written principally by academics from the Cardiff School of Sport at the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff (UWIC), is a response to that challenge. Subsequently, it has three principal goals: to introduce students to the multifaceted nature of coaching and the predominant knowledges that inform it; to highlight how they can and should be related to coaching practice; and, finally, to emphasise them as part of an integrated entirety that comprises the holistic nature of the activity. Although an introductory text, this is not a simple 'how to' book of coaching comprising a list of handy hints and quick

fixes; indeed, this is where it differs from much of what has gone before. Rather, the significance of the book lies in better defining coaching's content knowledges and how they contribute to a collective body of understanding for beginner coaches and students of coaching. Clarifying in this way holds the potential to increase the perceived relevancy of explicit knowledge sources for readers, consequently reducing the gap between theory and practice.

## CONTENT

Although not claiming to cover all the possible knowledge sources available to coaches, the chapters included in this book examine coaching from a number of sport science related perspectives. We are aware that presenting the book in such a format can be seen as going against the argument just given in respect of fragmenting knowledge. However, taking account of the complexity of the subject and the introductory nature of the book, for the purposes of clarity and to counter fear and frustration among readers it was decided to bracket coaches' knowledge along the lines defined by sports science. This is not to say that we have sacrificed the multifaceted and knotty nature of coaching for an easy ride, as, although delivered as separate, each chapter discusses appropriate evidence and concepts directly related to coaching's messy and interpretive character. Additionally, in line with the complexity of the subject matter examined, an inescapable element of overlap exists between the notions discussed in many of the chapters. Far from being a bad thing, however, we see this emergent conceptual blending as allowing readers to clearly identify and grasp the most illuminating and consistent ideas that underpin coaching (Jones *et al.* 2007). For example, the chapters relating to psychology (Chapter 3) and philosophy (Chapter 6) both highlight the relative importance of developing intrinsic motivation in athletes, that is, an appreciation of the game for the game's sake, to maximise performance. The same could be said of deciding what comprises appropriate interaction with athletes, which is discussed (albeit in different ways) both in Chapter 1 ('Pedagogy for coaches') and Chapter 4 ('Sociology for coaches').

Furthermore, to encourage readers to make the required connections between the different chapters for themselves, we have deliberately clustered them so that each chapter is followed by another that relates to it. For example, 'Skill acquisition for coaches' (Chapter 2) is preceded by 'Pedagogy for coaches' (Chapter 1) and followed by 'Psychology for coaches' (Chapter 3). The chapters relating to 'Sociology for coaches' (Chapter 4), 'History for coaches' (Chapter 5), 'Philosophy for coaches' (Chapter 6) and 'Sport development for coaches' (Chapter 7) are similarly grouped, as are those related to 'Biomechanics for coaches' (Chapter 8), 'Notational analysis for coaches' (Chapter 9), 'Sports medicine for coaches' (Chapter 10) and 'Physiology for coaches' (Chapter 11). Grouping in this way, however, does not imply that cross-cluster connections cannot and should not be made, as the boundaries between the clusters are inevitably flexible and permeable. Indeed, the content of the chapter groups was very much our subjective decision around which there

was plenty of enthusiastic debate. The point to be made, however, is that each chapter is inherently linked (in various degrees) to every other and should be read as such.

Each of these discipline-specific chapters is based on a similar format. This comprises a clear definition of the area in question followed by a discussion of a number of important constructs or sub-areas that inform it. For example, within the ‘Sociology for coaches’ chapter (Chapter 4), issues concerned with both micro (i.e. face-to-face interaction) and macro sociology (i.e. how wider social forces like race or gender affect behaviour) are discussed. Far from isolating the knowledge presented, however, we have tried to take account of its nature by contextualising it within coaching. Hence, as mentioned earlier, an attempt is made to illustrate how the knowledge presented in each chapter informs coaching both generally and uniquely. Each chapter, then, explicitly identifies insights within a particular strand of coaching knowledge and highlights how these insights can be used to understand the real world of coaching better. Each chapter also concludes with a series of discussion questions related to the information presented within it, which can also serve to check understanding. To close the book, the final chapter (Chapter 12: ‘Tying it all together’) outlines a means through which a more holistic and personal approach to coaching, incorporating all the differing knowledge strands previously discussed, can be considered. The aim here is to illustrate how the various information and knowledges presented in the earlier chapters need to be brought together, analysed and applied at an individual level to address unique, contextual coaching problems.

## **WHO IS THE BOOK FOR?**

*An Introduction to Sports Coaching* is a book true to its title in that it provides an introduction to the sport science knowledge behind coaching for undergraduate students. By design it is clear and manageable. For some students it will provide their only formal study of coaching, while for others it will serve as a foundation for further investigation. For all, however, it should enhance their general awareness of the various knowledges that underpin coaching and how each can be related to practice. A further valuable aspect of the book is that, whilst conveying to some extent the complex nature of coaching, it consolidates its principal knowledges into coherent sections, whilst, hopefully, conveying to students a little of what it means to be a coach. Our intention, then, is to introduce an element of reflection into the thoughts and practices of those beginning their study of coaching as an academic field of inquiry. This is specifically so regarding a heightened appreciation of what kinds of knowledges comprise coaching and how they can be better understood and developed to inform practice.

*Robyn L. Jones,  
Kieran Kingston  
and Mike Hughes*



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