Developing Wheelchair Basketball: Necessary Elements for Training Coaches

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Sport development has long been associated with sport management and policy making (Green, 2005), as increasing overall participation in sport can lead to a greater pool of potential elite athletes that can enhance a nation’s performance in international competition. Green also notes that an athlete’s decision to remain involved in a sport can rely on the manner in which they were socialized into the sport and the commitment they have to their team. Competent coaching and a quality youth sport program are key factors influencing athletes’ commitment and subsequent skill development (Balyi, Way, & Higgs, 2013). Coaches are frequently the first contact athletes and their family have with a sport, which is crucial to the recruitment and retention of athletes in the sport (Higgs, Balyi, Norris, & Way, 2010). Despite their importance, sport clubs struggle to recruit enough coaches. Even in youth sport settings where the skill demands are low, new and potential coaches report low self-efficacy and concerns that they lack appropriate training (Sullivan, Paquette, Holt, & Bloom, 2012). Although research on parasport coaching is still in its fledgling stages, one can imagine that these issues and insecurities may be magnified in the parasport setting. The need for quality coaching is no different for parasport athletes than it is for able-bodied athletes (Patatas, De Bosscher, & Legg, 2018). Yet opportunities to gain quality, in-person coaching education in American parasport are scarce. This study sought to understand the training needs and experiences of parasport coaches, specifically, coaches of wheelchair basketball.

Ten of fifteen coaches attending a coaching clinic for wheelchair basketball agreed to be interviewed about their coaching experiences and needs. All coaches attending the clinic were male. Each coach also completed a brief survey about his coaching experience, and provided basic demographic information. Six of the coaches reported no prior experience with wheelchair basketball, and 5 of these 6 were coaching family members. The other 4 were former players.

Semi-structured interviews asked about coaching background, how they were recruited to coach, training, challenges faced as a coach of wheelchair basketball, and future goals. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim and are currently being analyzed using open coding searching for common emergent themes (Creswell, 2013). Early results highlight two distinct groups – those with no prior experience with wheelchair basketball, and those with playing experience. Both groups expressed a strong need for more and better coach training, but they differ somewhat in their needs. Inexperienced coaches wanted to improve their understanding of the distinctive issues in working with athletes with disabilities. Former players needed to structure practices to train players of all levels. Coaches also noted the challenge in coaching small settings with few players, and sought assistance to adapt drills and activities for inconsistent numbers of players below the 5v5 ideal. Ongoing analysis is expected to provide more insight into the distinctive training needs for experienced and inexperienced coaches of wheelchair basketball. Practical and conceptual implications will be discussed.