

Should You Learn More About Your Sport?

With the increased attention being focused on technique, many athletes are now becoming more interested in learning how they can become more knowledgeable about what is involved in their particular sport. However, there is also a large contingent of athletes and coaches who believe that more knowledge about the sport does not equate to better performances.

I have always been a firm believer that the more knowledgeable you are about a particular subject the more this knowledge can influence what you do and experience. The Russians were especially strong believers in this concept as many, if not most of their top athletes who desired to become coaches, spent many hours at the institutes learning more about their sport. As a result, their coaches became true experts in the sport.

This is in direct contrast to what typically occurs in this country. Almost all of the coaches who are considered to be experts are former participants. This seems to be the main criterion for expertise. While experiences received as a former player are important, these experiences are mainly in the area of strategy and nuances pertinent to what is involved in playing, not in the biomechanics or kinesiology of sports technique.

Thus they can become good coaches but only if they have well performing players. Coaches fail however, when it comes to improving skill execution of the players. As is obvious, any strategy that the coach may use is based on how well the players can execute the skills. This is why most coaches must rely on recruiting and buying players that they consider to be the best in their position. They are not capable of developing any potential skill talent that the athletes have. They often failed to realize that the success of any athlete is determined by how well he can execute the skills involved in his sport. All other factors are secondary!

Thus learning more about the sport specific skills and how they can be improved, will be an asset to these coaches and especially to young up-and-coming coaches. The more knowledgeable they become the more information they will be able to impart to the players to make timely and worthwhile changes in technique. This will enable them to become better players at the same time, help prevent injuries.

Keep in mind that most, if not all non-contact injuries are due to improper technique and insufficient development of the physical qualities as they relate specifically to the technique. Thus teaching the athletes more about technique (skill) and helping make effective changes in technique, will go a long way to improving player performance.

Teaching more about the sport and sport skills can start from the very earliest ages. For example, I know of several sports families who home teach their children. Part of their study is devoted to nutrition, the muscles involved in the sport, and a little on the techniques (skills) involved in the sport.

Youngsters love this type of information especially when it comes to learning about the muscles of their bodies. They even master muscles such as gastrocnemius, latissimus dorsi and others that most people think are beyond the capabilities of children. Why physical education instructors do not do this always puzzles me since this should be their main responsibility.

Learning more about your sport and the skills involved should be foremost for athletes, teams and schools. This learning should then become the base for what the athlete must put into action. This is a critical step that must be taken. If it isn't, all the knowledge in the world will not make a better athlete. The knowledge must be applied!

This is often the most difficult task in the coaching profession. And it is one that requires considerable skill and expertise. Ideally, this should be the task of university professors but it appears that they do not even consider this to be important. Not only do they not teach about sports skills and sports training, but most that do not even know what constitutes good skill execution. This can be verified by simply glancing at some of the textbooks used to teach sports.

The information is available. It may take a little research to find it but it is well worth the effort involved. In this way not only can the coach become more effective but most importantly, the players will be able to develop their full potential and become as good as they can be in their specific sport. The bottom line is so evident that it is easy to overlook: The success of any athlete is determined by how well he can execute the skills involved in his position or event.