

Olympism in Sports Coaching

A contribution to current ethical discussion

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Abstract

In current ethical discussions in sports the roles of coaches, and in particular their actions, conduct and influence are coming more and more under scrutiny and are widely discussed with regards to ethical standpoints. A central point of debate nowadays are the coaches and their roles. What is desired, expected, permitted or tolerated in modern sports coaching? This article shall serve as contribution to current ethical discussions by describing what modern sports coaching requires in terms of ethical aspects to master today's complex challenges faced by coaches. The purpose of the article is to critically look at integral parts of the often-cited coaching philosophy from an ethical perspective. The focus is on the important foundations of philosophical orientation and pedagogical footing coaches need. Through identifying fundamental pillars, the article shows how a contemporary interpretation of Olympism can serve as an intellectual and practical guideline. Further, how Olympism as a philosophical idea by Pierre de Coubertin and a state of mind can provide education and answers for coaches. How to master the ambiguity of effort and sporting excellence versus moderation and well-being, all without losing the ethical perspective, are shown. Current discussions need to address the coaches' uncertainty in terms of acting with ethical responsibility, resulting in morally correct behavior. Hence, Olympism as an ethical- philosophical foundation, and with its pedagogical principles, can support on one hand its own critical reflection and personal development as a coach, and on the other hand, progress an entire system towards the necessary cultural change.

Keywords

Sports coaching; Olympism; coaching philosophy; philosophical orientation; pedagogical footing; ethical coaching

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Introduction

Ethics and Sports, or more specifically ethical behavior in and around sports has already been a topic since the ancient Greek Olympic movement. Ancient ethical goals focused on social and individual values, moral character of braveness, faith, excellence and fair play. A religious setting, oaths, laws and rules were supervised by vigilant officials to ensure fair and 'clean' competitions. Participants had to swear that they respected the rules and that they abstain from unethical strategies. Disobedience to the oath, cheating or moral shortcomings were punished with heavy fines, whipping or exclusion (Bertling and Wassong 2016). In Hellenic ethics the overarching goal was areté (excellence, virtue). This striving for excellence explicitly included the cultivation of a kind of moral and personal excellence along with athletic achievement (Reid, 2020). Since such holistic understanding of excellence incorporated a wide range of desirable virtues for humans, the ethical dimension was part – or omnipresent of the philosophy, and did not need separate definition in order to control sporting performance. Since the world of sports is changing rapidly and profoundly, the moral foundations of sport are also affected. These changes raise many questions that reinforce the need for ethics. (Grupe and Mieth 1998). In particular, there is a need for reflection and discussion to provide solid foundations to address current issues. Unfortunately, today's ethical discussions are mostly not about ethics in sport – which would be the reflection about ethics in sport itself, if respecting the definition about ethics (Pawlenka 2004). Nowadays discussions are usually about actions, conduct and behavior – or more often misconduct - of individuals and how they are regarded in terms of moral standards and how coaches

adhere to rules, regulations and policies put in place securing ethical standards while striving for performance, results and wins. Whereas athletes' fair play in competition has always been a topic, more and more sport systems have come under criticism during the last decades and lately more coaches are under public scrutiny, in a wider ethical context. Depending on the case, ethical discussions about both sport systems and structures, within which coaches function are part of a critical observation and discussion, and their role in general becomes the center of attention and blame if ethical issues arise. Thanks to (or despite of) professionalization ethical coaching becomes more frequently a topic in current discussions. Unfortunately, the catalyst is often a misconduct or a similar reason (e.g. reporting by victims) to bring up such topics. Subsequently, they often do not only target guilty coaches as individuals, but blame and condemn an entire group of professionals, namely elite or high-performance coaches as a whole. As a positive outcome all coaches and stakeholders are reminded about their pivotal role. They are held responsible for success and performance, but as well in their respective role and coaching context for the athletes' safety, physical and psychological well-being (ICCE, ASOIF and LBU, 2013). As a result, many sport coaches are concerned about their additional roles and today's expectations from society. Especially the close connection between coaches and athletes needs increased awareness, as athlete – coach relationships often being emotionally close, trusting, caring and effective, but also critical in terms of influence, safety, trust and fulfillment of needs (Stirling and Kerr 2013). Unfortunately, many coaches worry about becoming a target of suspicion and more sadly, many even face adversities,

mistrust, and definitely uncertainty because of the increased scrutiny by the wider public. One might argue that the 'good coaches' have nothing to fear, but if it results in reluctance, withholding of efficient coaching or even quitting, it will be the athletes' development which suffers most. How can we overcome this uncertainty and empower coaches to master those ethical challenges? The importance of such a role (among many others) and how to act as a positive, healthy, trustful and successful pillar while working with athletes is a complex challenge. To fulfill this role as a coach it needs guidelines and frameworks, but also a philosophical and pedagogical foundation, which allows ethically excellent conduct in various situations. Along with good governance initiatives within the sport system's new regulations, ethics charts and practical code of conduct guidelines were established for various stakeholders, including coaches. This was done, not least to avoid non-desired actions and behaviors, and if necessary to have the possibility to sanction misconduct. However, to simply comply with a system is not enough and definitely not sustainable. To avoid potentially harmful behavior and to protect others it is necessary to have the right environment with committed coaches who embrace and live by ethical standards. Such a foundation will allow them to handle challenging situations better and find the right balance between demanding and developing to help athletes to excel. Coaches, which possess the qualities of trustworthiness, along with top-expertise and demonstrate excellent conduct overall, are needed.

As outlined, it is not enough to adhere to a charter or be compliant with a certain code of conduct. Therefore, I call for a strong virtue ethics for coaches as an integral part of their

coaching philosophy. Virtue ethics for coaches, in the original Hellenic sense as described by Reid with areté being the highest social good that sport can bring and "...coaches putting character first to find creative ways to fight that good fight and to become a coach of virtue." (Reid, 2020, 130); Further, it needs a strong coaching ethos and coaching ethics as developed and described by Meinberg. In addition, he emphasizes the prerequisite of a certain ethical awareness and foundation (I would add as a result of a philosophical orientation), an integrated (various sources) and rational application in the practical field, all together conducted by coaches using pedagogical principles (Meinberg 2001). Both adopt a philosophical perspective to begin with and focus on the practical application of ethical conduct in respective roles and actions. In order to get there as a coach, current ethical discussions about issues in sports coaching need to reflect more on the ethical principles in sports. Coaches need to possess the necessary foundations, which can guide them along ethical values and beliefs, which underpin and support the mastery of today's various and complex roles. Fundamental parts of such a foundation are of philosophical and pedagogical origin. I will show with this article how Olympism can be part of such a philosophical-pedagogical foundation. By Olympism being an inspirational source and through its contemporary, but critical interpretation, it can serve modern coaching education and be a pillar of any coach's philosophy and values.

Coaching Philosophy from an Ethical Perspective

If looking at sports coaching from an ethical perspective we have to look behind

frameworks, charters, rules, regulations and code of conducts. Presumably today's coaches possess the necessary knowledge and competencies, including a vast skill-set, allowing them to act more holistically than ever before. In today's coaching education one of the non-sport specific main pillars, is the so-called coaching philosophy, which is either prominently placed in the center of all knowledge areas, or located inside the intrapersonal knowledge area. Supposedly "coaches should...develop an ethically grounded coaching philosophy over time" (Lara-Bercial et al., 2017, p. 20). However, that alone does neither secure, nor contribute enough to today's ethical discussions about coaches, in my opinion. The International Council for Coaching Excellence (ICCE), as a reference worldwide, goes further by including the coaches' professional environment:

"Coaches have a responsibility to improve and expand their capabilities on an ongoing basis to fully meet the needs of the athletes they serve. The organizations that employ them owe it to coaches to ensure they have sufficient educational footing, philosophical orientation and resources to fulfill the duties expected of them." (ICCE, ASOIF and LBU, 2013, p. 8)

In my opinion, the above definition still lacks clear principles and explanation of the sufficient educational footing and how philosophical orientation is defined, for the demands coaches face. If we expect from coaches the right coaching philosophy with a human and respectful behavior with excellent conduct - how do we empower them to be and act like that? What is sufficient educational footing and how does such philosophical

orientation look like, in relation to the demands and challenges coaches face today? Which benefits and incentives to adhere ethically can we create and from where should they get their visions and ideas, in order to develop an ethically grounded coaching philosophy for themselves?

If a coaching philosophy has to foster morally correct behavior and shall finally lead to ethically grounded and excellent conduct the following is needed, in my opinion: A coaching ethics and coaching ethos, which guides coaches in their actions. Further, the capability to critically reflect and map their own actions against existing moral norms, regulations and standards. Coaches must also be able to place their actions within a wider philosophical and pedagogical context. This will allow them to anchor their philosophical orientation and shape their coaching philosophy accordingly. Earlier I called for a virtue ethics for coaches, as I believe it should start at the basics, being character focused, and developed through practice. It requires a philosophical and pedagogical idea (or several) which allows it to serve as points of reference for orientation, beyond norms and charters.

How should we understand coaching philosophy in this ethical context, and what could be a contemporary interpretation of it? The coaching philosophy is considered as a key element for any coach working with athletes, as it reflects a coach's values and beliefs which influence their practice. However, the definition of coaching philosophy varies. The most recent from the ICCE is by Karren Collins stating that a sound coaching philosophy provides the foundation for coaching success, but is only as good as the underlying ethical mindset. A coaching philosophy consists of personal beliefs, values and principles which

reflect their ways of thinking about coaching and influence their roles as coach. (Collins 2020). Most important in this understanding is that modern coaching philosophy is highly individual, as it encourages coaches to understand and then determine and prioritize their personal values and what is important to them. Lyle describes that coaching philosophy is based in and around reflection of coaches' practice; resulting in a kind of framework with the key concept that "a coaching philosophy underpins practice and is made up of a collective of values, beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, principles and priorities" (Lyle, 2002, p. 235). In his comprehensive capacity and performance model (Lyle and Cushion, 2017, p. 107, Figure 5.3) he does not only list (coaching) philosophy, but personal qualities and pedagogical knowledge as one of the six pillars – besides others such as sport-specific, technical knowledge, experience, intellectual skills and other functional requirements - which enable coaches in their role to effectively coach performance. Today's practical interpretation and application of coaching philosophy gives it the necessary importance, but I would argue that it allows a lot of liberty and even risks to ask too much of the coaches to develop it individually, without the necessary philosophical foundation and orientation. Such liberty and uncertainty can easily result in different expectations of what is 'right or wrong' or what is 'good coaching'. Lyle as well criticizes it when stating that coaching philosophy is often shortcoming and not clear, because coaching philosophy is often defined in different ways without clear explanation or interpretation leading to definitional and conceptual incoherence. According to him, it often reflects only a selection of values, a kind of values

framework, which is frequently based on self-reference perceptions, anecdotes, resulting in pseudo principles. (Lyle and Cushion, 2017). What I rate as important and see as a possible solution is Lyle's argument that coaching philosophy needs to address questions, which are central to philosophical inquiry: metaphysical (ontology), nature of knowledge (epistemology) and values (axiology), subdivided into ethics and aesthetics. For me the sources and roots from what feeds and develops a coaching philosophy in a coherent and proven philosophical, pedagogical and sociological way are missing in today's ethical discussions about contemporary sports coaching. In my opinion, the current discussions target too much on ready-made answers by providing regulations and the definition of what is accepted in terms of conduct and behavior by coaches. If we want a modern coaching philosophy to not only reflect personal beliefs, values and views, but also addresses philosophical, pedagogical and current sociological questions; it must reach further and needs to be coherent and include proven principles. I suggest that a coaching philosophy must rely on solid pillars of:

- **Ethical Coaching** in the sense of coaching to be understood as an inherently ethical enterprise, which uses the academic discipline of ethics as other disciplines (e.g. sport science) on the road to success. As described by Hardman and Jones (Hardman and Jones, 2011) in the attempt to further understand sport as moral enterprise, many ethicists have drawn on ideas from ancient Greek philosophy. Such Aristotelian-inspired interpretation of moral virtue and modern social practices can help to understand the

character and scope of ethical conduct in challenging and complex interpersonal activities such as sports coaching.

- A **coaching ethos** based on ethical-philosophical principles. Like this, today's sports coaching can be understood as an ethical enterprise. As a result coaching is not only dominated by the ethos of winning and competitive success, but by an ethos which allows dealing with current ethical issues. Meinberg's approach and call for an integrated ethics, using several ethical domains and principles as a base, but most importantly focuses on practical application and uses a common-sense ethics. (Meinberg, 2001). An ethos, which can serve as a moral – ethical compass for the individual coaching philosophy, independent of the environment.
- **Pedagogical-philosophical aspects**, which allow the coach to associate pedagogical development with philosophical aspects and to put in practice the right balance of coaching performance and fostering development, as an educator. Further, it will include constructivist pedagogy to foster an athletes' development with deeper understanding, activation, sustainable motivation and critical reflection. Re-conceptualizing sports coaching with the goal to have more pedagogical theory and practice contributing to the goal of the coach being an educator, as it has been demanded by various experts in the field of sports coaching and education (Bennett and Culpán 2014; Jones 2006). This approach facilitates teaching skills for sport and life in general.

- **Reflective capability**, which allows the coach to develop professionally and personally. Such reflective practice must be all-encompassing, purposeful, consider the complexity of the context and focus on transforming experience into learning, as described by Cropley et al. (Cropley, Miles and Nichols 2016). A better conceptual understanding will allow a more holistic view and include ethical aspects for intrapersonal development and practical activity. I believe it helps a lot to make 'better coaches', avoid certain issues and bring in positive force in many ways, if this reflection includes from the very beginning an ethical perspective as part of the intrapersonal knowledge, and is not limited to professional and interpersonal actions as a coach. Critical (Self-) reflection must include all other pillars and is the personal key to life-long learning and development as a coach.

The ultimate test of a coaching philosophy comes during 'crunch time'. In those situations, a winning ethos is often predominant and decisions for ultimate performance are favored. Such a context often results in a difference between belief systems and the coach's actual behavior, lacking integrity. It can be either because coaches try to fit into an ethos of a particular coaching setting and habitus or because of an environment, which defines and influences the coach's role. In such cases, the predominant ethos does not always seem to be the right one – or is not anchored enough – allowing coaches to act authentically in a contemporary ethical manner in various challenging situations they are exposed to. Although it seems widely acknowledged that coaching philosophy

needs to support reflection of one's own coaching style and give guidance to handle complexity and ambiguity; I would argue that coaches are very often not yet fully competent to deal appropriately with such coaching dilemmas, conflict of beliefs and values with stakeholders. At least there seems to be more consensus nowadays that improvement of athletes' performances and effective coaching has to meet certain standards of behavior and conduct. Coaches have to reflect upon their actions, consider and address moral issues and further support even the moral development of their athletes - and not just their athletic, technical, tactical development (Theodoulides 2016). Some modern coach education systems have now included more reflective practice and the definition of own values & beliefs, goals and actions as an integral part of their coach diploma curricula; in some systems it even became a part of exams. Those modern curricula focus strongly on personality development, in addition to traditional technical and methodical competence (Müller 2022) Linz and Finck, 2022). In my opinion, this is crucial for a modern and more holistic coach education. But how can we define and adjust its own ethical compass, which fosters excellent moral actions as a coach? How are coaches to position and protect themselves in current ethical discussions? To reflect on it is a very important (first) step; however, we learnt earlier that it needs sufficient educational footing and philosophical orientation. This can only be achieved by being familiar with the needed reference points of philosophical sources for orientation and being acquainted with the respective pedagogical frames and models to anchor and strengthen the individual coaching ethos. A general theoretical approach and practical access to those seem yet rare for

many coaches.

A quest for excellence – not only performance wise – of all involved is crucial; here Olympism can serve as a common base of guidance and bring in the often-missing philosophical aspect of coaching to make it (more) ethical.

Olympism as an Important Key Element for Sports Coaching

A mutual quest for excellence from athletes and their entourage is very common in elite sports. As a result, athletes, coaches and other stakeholders often have very high goals and are prepared to sacrifice a lot. But more than ever before the external expectations regarding ethical standards and conduct of the involved, namely the coaches, are very high and have become a moral imperative nowadays. In order to meet such expectations, the necessary intrinsic motivation to deal with it and acquire the necessary skills through education and practical work are important. I will show how Olympism can serve as a common base of guidance and how to bring expectations, including the often-missing philosophical aspect of coaching, together to make it (more) ethical. I limit myself and focus on the philosophical and educational dimensions of Olympism, acknowledging many other dimensions existing and being of great appreciation for today's sport worldwide. The concept of Olympism was created more than 125 years ago by Pierre de Coubertin. He was not only passionate about making the world a better place through sport, but he also strongly believed and promoted peace and excellent ethical behavior when he started to promote his ideas as a humanist and educationalist. To strive for excellence in an outstanding way to attain the first place, but being protected from any unethical strategies

and respecting fair play was fundamental (Bertling and Wassong 2016); the motto 'citius-altius-fortius' underlines those ambitions for excellence. Coubertin highlighted Olympism as an idea for a long time, but formulated it concisely in August 1935 (Coubertin 1935). Until today his legacy is most prominently reflected in the Olympic Charter, as former IOC president Samaranch honors by stating: "The Olympism of today is faithful to Pierre de Coubertin's conception, building upon the foundations he laid down." (Müller 2000, p. 15). The Olympic Charter's first paragraph defines Olympism as following:

"Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example, social responsibility and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles." (IOC 2021a, p. 8)

If we bring this definition together with the three values of Olympism EXCELLENCE - FRIENDSHIP - RESPECT (IOC 2022) we have an already existing contemporary guiding principle and frame work with a state of mind for sports coaches, that includes performance orientation, ethical aspects and being a role model. How important a bigger dimension, including philosophical aspects in Olympism is, was already mentioned by Coubertin back then. He expressed it clearly when giving his famous speech in 1894 at the closing banquet of the founding Congress for the reestablishment of the Olympic Games in Paris when asking the audience not only to

look at things that dominate this world, but "...to reflect for a moment on a profoundly and strangely philosophical sight." (Coubertin 1894, p. 531). Further, on another occasion, during his "Parnassus-speech" in Athens on November 16 the same year, when he expressed his regret at the lack of a philosophical basis in modern sports. (Coubertin 1894). These historical extracts emphasize the combination of body, mind and spirit and how sport at any level is a great way to strive for excellence in a holistic, athletic way. Or, as Coubertin defined it, man is made of three parts: body, mind and character. (Coubertin 1894). I would argue that if we want to address current ethical issues sustainably, we need a cultural change. To achieve this, I believe it needs taking into consideration the additional philosophical aspects, with the spiritual dimension and more practical focusing on excellent character. Such a focus can lead us to a contemporary interpretation of Coubertin's ideas; resulting in a modern virtue ethics for coaches, which allows them to act as strong role models with ethically excellent conduct in various situations. However, to achieve this it is fundamental to understand Olympism as a state of mind – accessible to all, and not as a system (Coubertin 1918); or in other words as a guideline throughout practice. With the intrapersonal knowledge for coaches, and with it the promotion of lifelong learning and development becoming more and more important in international coaching (education), requiring different competences and skills. Fundamental are, for example, critical-thinking, self-reflection, autonomy, an open mind-set in interrelation at personal traits that are part of an identity and character, going along with desirable values, beliefs and ethical conduct, all together

leading to coaching virtue with integrity and authenticity. Martinkova states that we can find numerous desirable values, which are worth committing to within Olympism. Especially 'added values' which derive from humanistic values, e.g. honesty, harmony, conscientiousness, but also others like striving for excellence, the ability to show respect and friendships (all three being strongly promoted Olympic values). Martinkova shows the necessity of those added humanistic values in addition to inherent competition values (Martinkova 2012); this coexistence supports a contemporary interpretation. Since antiquity, it has been recognized that the value of sport can serve as a vehicle for personal development (Gould, Carson and Blanton 2013). Coubertin believed as well in this transfer, as stated by Bertling and Wassong: "according to him, these character traits, developed in competitive sport, could easily be transferred to life beyond that of sport." (Bertling and Wassong 2016, p. 436). In a contemporary context, such desirable life skills are multifaceted. According to Gould and Carson, they can be behavioral, cognitive, interpersonal or intrapersonal, and transferred for use to non-sporting settings – if taught under the right conditions (Gould and Carson 2008). Still today, character development is an often-cited benefit of practicing sport. Focus, perseverance, courage, learning to lose, acceptance etc. are just a few common examples. Of course, character is not per se for the better, but definitely is, if favorable sporting virtues emerge from it thanks to a solid foundation. According to Shields and Bredemeier character is described in terms of four virtues: Compassion, Fairness, Sportsmanship and Integrity. Those personal qualities/ virtues facilitate the consistent display of moral action (Shields and

Bredemeier, 1995). This links back to ancient virtues, such as respect (eusebia), courage (andreia), moderation (sophrosyné), justice (dikaiosyné) and wisdom (sophia) (Reid 2020, p. 135). All of those become once again very important for today's ethical conduct in sport, with the addition of responsibility, authenticity and integrity. Coubertin showed us, by creating Olympism as a syncretic philosophy, a way from ancient Greek philosophy to modern application. It is now upon us to adopt and draw a contemporary interpretation of his legacy by including the thinking of recent scholars in order to apply it in a cosmopolitan and competitive sporting environment.

When it comes to pedagogical principles, again Olympism can be both an intellectual and practical source for coaches, supporting modern application in the field. The Olympic pedagogy as designed by Coubertin bases on the 'cult of effort and the cult of eurythmy' equally; in other words, it favors strong (maybe even excessive) effort as much as moderation and harmony. When Coubertin advocates for physical culture and strength, he explicitly praises ambitions, but relativizes it by putting participation at the forefront, as not everyone can be champion. Already the Ancient Olympic Games were aware of the possible conflict of striving for excellence and aiming for outstanding performance (first place) on one hand; but on the other hand, that this endeavor had to be protected from the application of unethical strategies and behavior. This ambiguity has been reflected in an oath, which interestingly was already spoken by the coaches (and other officials) back then. (Bertling and Wassong 2016). In a contemporary context this ambiguity of effort and striving for sporting excellence, without losing the balance and sense for moderation,

is what coaches need to master today. To cope with current challenges and situations and neither getting frustrated, nor being trapped by these contradicting challenges in elite sports is a must. To strive for excellent performance without passing over ethical boundaries is and will remain a constant challenge and topic of discussion. Already Coubertin seemed to be well aware of those risks, but convinced that only individuals for whom self-concern is strong enough can resist to excess. Therefore, he already mentioned the relation between sport and ethics when designing Olympism. Although Coubertin remained (from today's perspective) vague about sport and ethics he emphasized the importance of being a role model with ethical desirable behavior. For him this has always been part of his Olympic athlete role model description: "in Coubertin's opinion the acting as role model was based on displaying an honourable attitude and ethically responsible behaviour towards elite level performance." (Wassong 2013, p. 289). The French naval officer Hébert later filled the gap, by defining basic rules for physical development: "...use all means necessary to develop your physical abilities, and maintain those abilities by abstaining from anything that could debase them." (Müller 2000 p. 167). Of course, this is a wide interpretation, but the reflection about such pure ethical principles of athlete's development, taking on the responsibility to link it to own coaching actions and using them as a foundation to underpin modern rules and regulations are fundamental. If we use Olympism pedagogy, as described by Culpan (Culpan 2017), and use the suggested critical constructivism, it will help to question unethical practices and encourage action to rectify inappropriate conduct. This brings us closer towards

the desired 'sufficient educational footing, philosophical orientation and expected duties' of today's coaches, I believe.

Interestingly, at the Olympic Games, where, for the athletes and the coaches, the performance and result are predominant, nevertheless Olympic values and the fundamental principles of Olympism are more present than on any other occasion. Every Olympic athlete and coach is aware of - and permanently confronted with - the ideals and principles, through symbols, emblems, protocols, ceremonies and signed conventions. Coming especially to the forefront with the oaths during the opening ceremony. Since the 2012 London Olympic Games the coaches' oath is an integral part of the Games protocol. The oath for all groups (athletes, judges, coaches and officials) has been significantly adapted and was recently changed to:

"We promise to take part in these Olympic Games, respecting and abiding by the rules and in the spirit of fair play, inclusion and equality. Together we stand in solidarity and commit ourselves to sport without doping, without cheating, without any form of discrimination. We do this for the honour of our teams, in respect for the Fundamental Principles of Olympism, and to make the world a better place through sport."(IOC 2021b).

The coaches' oath was not least integrated because the IOC recognised that younger athletes, in particular, are strongly influenced by their coaches. Such promise and commitment to fundamental coaching principles shall not only be validated in the spotlight of the Olympic Games, but incorporated in daily practice during any regular coaching, I expect.

Often present and respected at the grass roots level, schools and on occasion at the highest level, it seems more frequently omitted in ambitious in-between levels where the correct coaching ethos gets too often put aside while delivering success in certain environments and moving up the ranks seem more important.

Olympism with its principles and values, its strong focus on forming character and personal responsibility deserves to be more included in education and embraced in philosophical questions, helping to form a coaching ethos that can withstand current ethical discussions. A contemporary interpretation calls for personality development of sports coaches, focusing on personal qualities (inherent or acquired), virtues, values and beliefs – besides other competencies (e.g. technical knowledge, sport-specific expertise and other functional competencies).

Conclusions

Over time, the Olympic Games became a triumph of sportive success, diversity for men and women everywhere, uniting nations in friendship and peace through sport in the world's greatest celebration of humanity. Being an incredible success story and impacting sports globally, I believe it is worthwhile and time to promote other dimensions of Olympism, besides the Olympic Games as part of the Olympic Movement, strongly in order to find answers to current ethical issues in sport, starting with coaching. Can we go as far and demand Olympism as an integral part of contemporary sports coaching? I believe yes, when using Olympism as a syncretic philosophy, combining excellence and ethical-moral standards in equal measures being part of a virtue ethics for coaches. Its principles as a philosophical- pedagogical frame and

to derive a practical virtue ethics for coaches from it can be a modern approach. Coubertin, as the reform educationalist he was, designed with his analysis and ideas Olympism with principles that can serve as educational footing and philosophical orientation for coaches. For today's coaches, Olympism can definitely serve not only as an inspirational source, but also as an anchor to study, reflect on and put in relation to one's own actions and contemporary circumstances. Clear ethical-philosophical foundations and pedagogical principles shall serve as references for one's own critical reflections. It can not only be a big support, especially in challenging situations, but might also mitigate the risk of becoming a docile body as a coach in a system – if critical constructivist pedagogies are used with Olympism context (Culpan 2017). A frame that fosters excellence and performance as much as balancing it out with responsibility for moderation is necessary. If a coach shows authentically such a combination of virtues as a role model with integrity, it can have a tremendous positive impact on others. It is crucial to use common sense to keep a higher goal in mind than (just) athletic success in order to shape athletes into people with desirable personality traits in addition to their successful athletic careers. Although various initiatives (e.g. dual career, post career support) have been welcomed to guide athletes, I believe the coaching experienced by athletes still has a vast impact on them beyond their career in sports.

Once coaches master the interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge areas as good as other coaching domains and demonstrate excellence in all areas – including ethical aspects – we are a big step ahead, in my opinion. Equally important, coaches protect themselves better,

by having a solid philosophical – pedagogical foundation and firm grounds to stand on, and hopefully they can display integrity and explain themselves better when under (public) scrutiny. This way rules and regulations to protect the (vulnerable) athletes become a safeguard of last resort, and are not the first measure to address ethical issues in coaching. The solution to cultivate proper and sustainable ethical conduct is to have convinced coaches, who are committed to honourable values and beliefs – which they embrace and identify themselves with – and not because they have to. To underline and strengthen this, an oath as a (symbolic) commitment at the end of the respective coach education could be installed globally. Meinberg designed such a ‘Hippocratic Oath for Coaches’ in the late nineties already (Meinberg 2001). Although it will guarantee neither ‘good coaching’, nor being legally binding, it can still serve as a very strong and always present reminder, similar to the Hippocratic Oath of ethics historically taken by physicians.

The dilemma of excellent performance versus keeping a balance of moderation and no harm through excessive training and exigence; as well as balancing the performance driven ethos and the humanist-rooted educator approach will always exist and cannot be solved by rules. To master this balance act, modern coaches need to have a contemporary coaching philosophy with strong pillars of: ethical coaching, a modern coaching ethos, philosophical-pedagogical expertise and the capacity for critical self-reflection. Such pillars with a contemporary interpretation and practical application in elite sports coaching can address and put emphasis on fundamental coaching virtues. If coaches assume individual responsibility, they become pivotal in

catalyzing the needed cultural change.

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