

Applying educational psychology in coaching athletes [Book Review]

By: [Tsz Lun \(Alan\) Chu](#)

Chu, T. L. (2020). [Review of the book Applying educational psychology in coaching athletes, by J. J. Huber]. Sports Coaching Review, 9(1), 119–121. DOI: 10.1080/21640629.2019.1694807

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in Sports Coaching Review on November 19th, 2019, available at:
<https://doi.org/10.1080/21640629.2019.1694807>.



This work is licensed under [a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International](#)

Abstract:

Sport coaches are influential leaders who have frequent interactions with athletes and thus have important impacts on athletes' physical and psychosocial well-being (Conroy & Coatsworth, Citation2006). "Applying Educational Psychology in Coaching Athletes" – a user-friendly practical book with 11 chapters – is a text that exclusively covers how to incorporate different psychological concepts in coaching athletes. The focus and goal of that book is on helping readers become effective coaches through applying psychological principles, grounded in educational psychology in particular, in teaching and learning. This book is based in both the science and the art of coaching by emphasising a scientific-practitioner approach to understand athletes with artistic and humanistic adaptations. Based on the premise of teaching athletes as human beings both inside and outside of sport contexts, this book views effective coaching as developing athletes who are not only competitive and confident in the sport arena but also physically and psychologically healthy in their life. Throughout his book, Huber – a three-time U.S. Olympic coach and veteran collegiate diving coach – includes applications and specific examples of effective coaching in working with athletes across various competition levels.

Keywords: educational psychology | sports psychology | coaching | athletes

Article:

Sport coaches are influential leaders who have frequent interactions with athletes and thus have important impacts on athletes' physical and psychosocial well-being (Conroy & Coatsworth, Citation2006). "Applying Educational Psychology in Coaching Athletes" – a user-friendly practical book with 11 chapters – is a text that exclusively covers how to incorporate different psychological concepts in coaching athletes. The focus and goal of that book is on helping readers become effective coaches through applying psychological principles, grounded in educational psychology in particular, in teaching and learning. This book is based in both the science and the art of coaching by emphasising a scientific-practitioner approach to understand athletes with artistic and humanistic adaptations. Based on the premise of teaching athletes as human beings both inside and outside of sport contexts, this book views effective coaching as developing athletes who are not only competitive and confident in the sport arena but also physically and

psychologically healthy in their life. Throughout his book, Huber – a three-time U.S. Olympic coach and veteran collegiate diving coach – includes applications and specific examples of effective coaching in working with athletes across various competition levels.

In his book, Huber introduces the idea of the developing the coach as both the teacher and learner in applying coaching principles and a personal coaching philosophy as a strong foundation. The book is organised into an introduction and five parts of two to three chapters that are interconnected but can also stand-alone for a quick read as a reference. At the beginning of each chapter, there are key terms, a case scenario that highlights the significance of the chapter topic, and a chapter overview; at the end of each chapter, there are brief application tips on creating a coaching toolbox, using the theories as a scientific and artful coach, as well as the “if you remember only three things” section from the chapter with further recommended readings. The “if you remember only three things” section is a unique feature, which in and of itself applies educational psychology principles to help readers remember the most critical three concepts in each chapter. For instance, the three important things to remember for Chapter 11 The Philosophical Coach are “remember to (1) have a coaching philosophy, (2) let your philosophy reflect holism and pragmatism, and (3) let your coaching philosophy reflect your growth as a coach and human being” (p. 397–398). Huber then elaborates on each point with specific details on how the readers can accomplish the three points.

Part I (Chapters 1 and 2) pertains to the theories of motivation and introduces the use of behaviourism, cognitivism, social-cognitivism, humanism, and attribution and achievement motivation theories to facilitate “unstoppable” and “resilient” athletes. Huber emphasises the coach’s role not only as a coach, but also as a disseminator of positive reinforcement, creator of a conducive learning environment, role model of attitudes and behaviours, determiner of goals, conveyor of beliefs, proponent of effort, fulfiller of basic needs, and facilitator of good coaching. Part II (Chapters 3 and 4) focuses on the use of behaviourism, including classical and operant conditioning theories, in enhancing positive social behaviour, motor behaviour, learning behaviour, and champion behaviour among athletes. Huber suggests that reinforcement and punishment be used differently with varied schedules for different athletes, such as praising self-critical athletes who need that acknowledgement more than others. Part III (Chapters 5–7) emphasises the development of competent and expert athletes by implementing cognitivism, which includes social cognitive theories, learning theories, and deliberate practice. Huber describes how observational learning could contribute to positive and negative modelling effects. He provides an example in which, as the coach, he removed the team captain who exhibited a lack of effort and assigned the member who was the most hardworking and dedicated for the captain replacement; the team achieved the national team champion through determination and commitment after that. Part IV (Chapters 8 and 9) discusses the application of humanism in coaching by treating athletes as people and explaining relationships among different emotions and performance. Huber argues for the necessity of incorporating the nondirective model of coaching influenced by Carl Rogers’ work and the seven humanistic principles (e.g. positive regard, involvement) in coaching athletes.

As the final section of the book, Part V (Chapters 10 and 11) builds on the previous four parts and helps coaches refine their toolbox by considering the concepts of practice management, discipline, values, and coaching philosophy. By linking all of the chapter contents together, the last chapter The Philosophical Coach concludes the book with many thought-provoking questions for readers to ponder, including important ethics, values, and goals of sport within the coaching philosophy on which the coach would keep developing and reflecting throughout the career. As exemplary models, John Wooden’s Pyramid of Success and the modified Pyramid of Teaching

Success are introduced as for coaches to develop their philosophy and own version of the pyramid of success as building blocks for coaching (Gilbert, Nater, Siwik, & Gallimore, Citation2010). Emphasising the link between theory and practice, as indicated in its preface, “this book is written for coaches yearning to reach their greatest coaching potential and be the elite coach they dream of becoming” (p. xvi). At the same time, beyond coaches, I found the book resourceful for coach educators. This book is an informational and interesting read that includes many athletes’ stories from which readers can learn. It is a useful resource either as a textbook for a coaching course or as a reference book for strategies in working with athletes and coaches.

Although there are many benefits of using this book for a coaching course or professional development, a few limitations should be addressed. First and foremost, the theoretical frameworks in psychology mentioned in the book are not comprehensive. For example, the book discusses attribution theories in Chapter 2, including entity versus the incremental view of ability and mastery versus performance, but the actual achievement goal framework (Dweck & Leggett, Citation1988; Nicholls, Citation1984) and fixed versus growth mindset are not mentioned. Because Carol Dweck and John Nicholls have a big influence on educational psychology, not mentioning their work is difficult to justify. Second, although it is understandable that this book focuses on educational psychology, more information based on the field of general psychology and pedagogy could have been briefly provided to inform readers about their existence and influence on coaching. For instance, pedagogy includes subject matter, learning, instruction, and context that both coaches and athletes play a role. Not mentioning the interaction among these components may lead to faulty beliefs that coaches have an influence on every single aspect of athletes. Third, the book does an exceptional job of including multiple examples throughout the book to promote critical thinking and practical knowledge of readers, yet the developmental considerations have not mentioned. For instance, Huber introduces emotion theory in Chapter 9, but neither the content nor the scenarios include considerations of the age, gender, and maturity of athletes. As the book mentions the developmental model of sport participation (DMSP; Côté & Vierimaa, Citation2014) in relation to deliberate practice, these developmental aspects of sport participation could have been included in discussing different scenarios as well.

Despite these limitations, “Applying Educational Psychology in Coaching Athletes” is an engaging practical book that would be a good introductory text in regard to the psychology of coaching based on both theory and practice. If an instructor chooses to use this text, it would be beneficial for him/her to include some historical and theoretical aspects of general psychology and sport pedagogy that could complement the aforementioned shortcomings. Coaches who decide to purchase this book should also consider the characteristics of their sport and developmental aspects of their athletes when applying the content in their coaching practices. For instance, fostering coach–athlete relationship in an individual sport versus a team sport, or across different age groups, can be very different in terms of strategies and outcomes. Regardless, every reader will be able to learn some tools from this book to put into the coaching toolbox.

References

- Conroy, D. E., & Coatsworth, J. D. (2006). Coach training as a strategy for promoting youth social development. *The Sport Psychologist*, 20, 128–144.
- Côté, J., & Vierimaa, M. (2014). The developmental model of sport participation: 15 years after its first conceptualization. *Science and Sports*, 29, S63–S69.

- Dweck, C. S., & Leggett, E. L. (1988). A social cognitive approach to motivation and personality. *Psychological Review*, 95(2), 256–273.
- Gilbert, W., Nater, S., Siwik, M., & Gallimore, R. (2010). The pyramid of teaching success in sport: Lessons from applied science and effective coaches. *Journal of Sport Psychology in Action*, 1, 86–94.
- Nicholls, J. G. (1984). Achievement motivation: Conceptions of ability, subjective experience, task choice, and performance. *Psychological Review*, 91(3), 328–346.