



by Sandro Gamba

# RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COACHES AND PLAYERS

**Sandro Gamba was the head coach of Ignis Varese, winning two Italian championships and two European Cups. He also coached Turin and Virtus Bologna. At the helm of the Italian National team, he won the silver medal at the 1980 Olympic Games. At the FIBA European Championships, his teams won the gold medal in 1983, the bronze medal in 1985, and the silver medal in 1990. He is presently the technical supervisor and coach of the Rest of the World team at the NIKE Hoop Summit and the Technical Director of Psicospport (e-mail: [gamba@psicospport.it](mailto:gamba@psicospport.it)), a Milan-based company focusing on sport psychology.**

Why become a coach? What do you need to know to be successful? Of course, you must know the fundamentals of the game, such as how to pass, shoot, dribble, and rebound. Defense, motivation, game strategies, and vocabulary are all important aspects needed to coach the game. Teaching students in school parallels coaching a basketball team. In the United States, basketball coaches are enmeshed in the school system, on both the high school and university level, because young basketball players are students first, athletes second. In other countries, coaches are usually part of a club system and coach the athletes that come to the club. There is no link with a university or school.

In order to teach in any environment, you need communication skills. It is important to assess the developmental level of the people you are coaching and try to reach them on that level. You must maintain a sense of discipline and also have fun. Once the players understand this, you can begin to prepare and organize practice sessions and watch as their comprehension increases rapidly.

Thus, three key components of coaching include knowledge of the game, learning with your players, and effective communication. Implementation of these components will lead to a rewarding experience and worthwhile interpersonal relationships. It's only then that your team begins to reflect part of your personality.

I feel basketball is over-coached and under-

taught. I found that good coaches build character, personality, teamwork, skills, spirit, and fair play. Evidence of this can be found in the improvement of drills.

- ▼ Always keep players working (no boredom). Many good coaches maintain a happy medium between talking and working and they always keep their players involved.
- ▼ Young coaches can learn a great deal from watching different practice programs organized by different coaches. This enables the young coach to see how different coaches relate to their players and how they motivate them.
- ▼ Create situations in practice that are more difficult than game situations. You may want to confuse players, to see how they will react in a game.
- ▼ There are drills for everything - even hustling!
- ▼ Handling end of game situations is very important.
- ▼ Make players play and think when they are fatigued.

Every player has a different threshold of pain. Coaches who understand this can condition their players to accept pain (high levels of fatigue) as a positive rather than negative factor. By stressing that pain is a signal of great performance, and that athletes are constantly rewarded for enduring pain, the coach can get his players to push harder whenever they feel pain.

It's important to discriminate between nuisance pain and warning pain in team sports like football. The athlete's conditioning tends to make him less perceptive and less discriminating. For example, in his eagerness to please his coach, he may ignore a danger signal. We want the athlete to be more perceptive and more discriminating.

Great players tend to perceive more of the



detail of their outstanding skill. For example, the great shooter will see the ball vividly and prepare himself accordingly for the coach. He has learned to discriminate and differentiate at a high level. That should be the goal of the teacher. A complex task can generally be learned easier under low tension, whereas a simple task is learned better under high tension. The beginner learns better under low tension; the veteran absorbs more under high tension. The inexperienced coach will tend to harass the beginner and impair learning by being over-demanding. Once the coach begins to realize that the beginner's perceptions are elementary, he will become more patient. Coaches tend to put more pressure on the veteran, as it's easy for a veteran to become lackadaisical, doing the same drills day after day. The coach should tolerate this, and he must continually challenge the veteran with new drills or greater concentration on the easy drills. I'm a student of the game and have spent many years in developing my coaching philosophy and psychology, and coaching techniques and methods.

I don't believe that you can take what other coaches teach and make it yours. You must develop your own philosophy, methods, and coaching style, using ideas of others where you can. However, you must teach your personality, because you are the only one that truly understands your own situation and circumstances. You must coach according to your particular situation. Be flexible and able to adjust to changing situations. Each job demands a unique understanding of the setting.

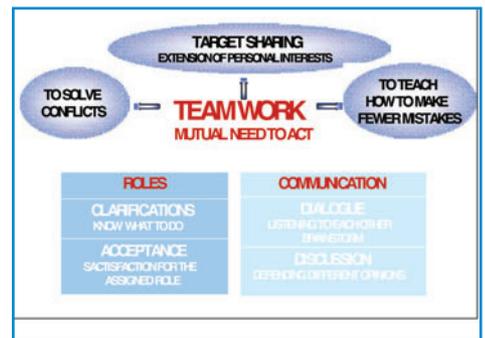
**ESSENTIALS OF COACHING**

- A. Total preparation of the mental, emotional, and physical aspects of athletes then permits greater technical preparation.
- B. The answer to success in coaching does not lie in some form of super strategy, or some ultra super plan.
- C. Success, overall, does rely on basic, sound teaching abilities. The ability to teach the fundamental skills (basic basketball) to the individual athlete is critical. Your players must understand that their natural ability can take them only to a certain level.
- D. As coaches, we must develop and organize out-of-season programs that promote greater total development of our athletes, so that they can break personal physical barriers.
- E. A player has not learned a fundamental until it becomes second nature (a habit). Automatic reaction is the goal of skill execution. No thought process necessary; react.
- F. Athletes "are in the process of learning" and have not learned a skill until they can perform this skill correctly and quickly while involved in game situations, automatically.
- G. Practice does make perfect, only if the proper techniques and mechanics are being practiced. Proper techniques become movement habits.
- H. Repetition must be done with high levels of interest, enthusiasm, and in an exciting manner until it becomes an instinctive reaction.
- I. We must demand correct execution of basic skills.
- L. Practice sessions must be so designed to lead to superb physical conditioning. Basketball is a game that cannot be played properly, unless you are in the very best possible physical condition.
- M. Evaluate your practice sessions to determine if they are designed to prepare the individual player physically, technically, mentally, and emotionally. If these factors are included, then we should be able to visualize victory (see victory in the mind's eye).

- N. By keeping practices interesting and alive, we eliminate boredom, which may be a major cause of lack of attention and of players eventually dropping out of the game.
- O. As coaches, we must keep our temper under control.
- P. As teacher/coaches, we must always consider the individual differences, age, playing level, experience, personality, emotional stability, and make-up. Know the total person and remember that the younger the athlete, the more sensitive he or she will be. At the pro level you are dealing with the "over-inflated ego". Understand that the professional athlete must have that type of ego, if he expects to make it and have a successful career, but be aware at what level of coaching you are expressing. Junior athletes (players under twenty years of age) are not miniature pros.
- Q. Don't let your players practice bad habits-demand that each practice bring the team closer to the team's goals. It is my obligation to take care of my team. It is our obligation as a coach to take care of our people and not to be frightened by board members of the team and other outsiders. We take care of our players. We allow them a place in our plans. When a player has talent, I have a marvelous obligation to get him to produce. Talent is rare and you have to nurture it so the player can realize his potential. Just because a player has certain abilities doesn't mean that he is going to produce or reach a certain athletic level. We must study our players to know what is best for each particular person so that we can get the most out of their talent. Don't be afraid to be wrong. You are a coach, not a spectator. You are not out on the court to please anyone. You're not an executive who can post-date a memo. What you do as a coach is out there in the open for all to see. There is no equity in your profession. You have to accept that. It's a very manly type of pressure.

**PREACH FLEXIBILITY/VERSATILITY**

The individual player with the ability to drive either way, change direction on his dribble, and shoot with either hand will be hard to stop. This will be especially true if the faking moves can be executed in both directions. Of paramount importance is the fact that versatility negates stereotyping. The player with a wide range of offensive moves is tough to scout and tough to defend. A physically strong body adds power to the moves. It lends explosiveness to the drive and adds pressure to the defense. Once the strong attacker gets the slightest edge, he can go all the way to the basket without



being thrown off by body contact. He'll also be able to maintain a high endurance level throughout the game. In fact, many of the great shooters simply overpower their opponents.

Continuous repetition of movements is the key for developing individual offense, and the player must have clear awareness of:

1. When to fake;
2. Looking to the basket after receiving the ball;
3. Using natural movements to initiate his fakes;
4. Working for simplicity of movement;
5. Moving on a straight line towards the basket;
6. Being "mentally tough";
7. Diversifying his moves.

With these thoughts in mind and with a well-conditioned body, this basketball player is well on his way to offensive success.

I coach by winning. What you accept in winning, you must also accept in losing. I do not say a word after a game is lost. However, after we win a game, I bring out all the errors the players have made. I have never won a game in which I did not follow it up by pointing out all the mistakes that they made.

The following two statements of philosophy express two different emphases in coaching:

"It isn't whether you win or lose, but how you play the game."

"Winning isn't everything; it is the only thing." One is concerned with the playing of the game, the other with the end result. Neither is right or wrong; both must be related to the coach's purpose.

When you step on the floor, know:

1. WHAT you are going to teach.
2. HOW you are going to teach.
3. WHY you are going to teach it.