Developments in coaches education.

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ABSTRACT
Changes have occurred within Coaches Education due to a strong focus on sport science and the drive by many associations to fund and develop the area as a true profession. Certification and education of coaches has become necessary compared to a bonus in the past. The introduction of a competency based approach and the dissemination of quality information through the internet and other sources, have allowed international coaches education to be more relevant and available to coaches worldwide.

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INTRODUCTION
In the last 30 years I have seen a lot of changes in coaches education. The two words covering most of the developments are: competencies and media.

COMPETENCIES
Federations used to apply a more or less limited margin in the description of how to actually play (ideal grips and strokes) and coach (coaching style). Players like Borg, Berasategui and Courier (to name just a few) showed that playing at top-level could be done in different ways that the textbook descriptions ‘forced’ us to do. By looking at the qualities of those players, coaches started (implicitly) to understand the importance of the competency instead of just the ‘technical looks’ of a player.

In coaches education most curricula were based on a - sometimes eclectic - gathering of books and specialists that would automatically lead to a necessary number of hours to get through that information. Knowledge seemed to be enough to become a good coach.

A few years ago competency based learning was introduced to coaches education and became the new standard within the European Union (also in Australia). A competency can be defined as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitude.

First describing the occupation of a tennis-coach, we were challenged to then think about the necessary competencies to be able to be successful in that job. Among the last steps in the thinking process appeared the curriculum and the textbooks. Indeed, the steps we used to start with!

‘On-the-job learning’, being reflective, using 360° feedback and assessment with concrete criteria (observable behaviour) became standards in the field of coaches education. Together with some of the most developed (coaches education) countries, the ITF has now available lists with competencies and ‘learning outcomes’ on different levels. Through this material all countries willing to start or review a national tennis coaches education programme can use this information and through that catch up with other countries.

MEDIA
When I started coaching I was depending mostly on books from Germany and the United States. It wasn’t easy to get specific information on tennis. Later on, video-tapes appeared and introduced a different means of practical information. Through my position in the Dutch federation, the KNLTB, I have been fortunate to be able to go to the most important international coaches workshops and conferences. Through those conferences I was able to inform coaches in The Netherlands about the latest trends in coaching and other developments.

In the last decade things have improved at an incredible speed. Through the internet people can have access to tons of information on all possible topics. Through Google one can
find information about everything on tennis, unfortunately without a guaranty on the quality.

Tennis-specific websites with memberships and annual fees mostly have a more professional approach and try to inform you with higher quality. ITF’s iCoach is a good example of lots of high quality information on all topics and for all levels.

Through internet, coaches worldwide can have access to up-to-date information from specialists from every continent.

Apart from all this information, the web is also used for different ways of learning. Interactive modules, online assessment, learning facilitators on distance, uploading video-clips with analysis in words or drawing, make learning and teaching much more flexible. Especially in large countries this is a crucial development in coaches education.

PROGRESSION

It is my feeling the development in coaches education has jumped forward in the last decade. Only a few countries can afford a well organised coaches education system, but even smaller and/or poor countries at least have access to all information needed. Countries lacking the structure for a decent tennis coaches educational system, will still have individual coaches browsing the internet and finding information to improve the quality of their work. We can expect more good players from countries formerly not being able to produce players, just because of the availability of all information that is shared by Federations, scientists, top-coaches and other talented coaches with good ideas and experiences.