

Ryan M. Nie

Professor Groninga

College Writing and Research

26 April 2010

Coaching Don Bosco Track

I always knew that someday I wanted to coach, but I never knew that such a big part of coaching has nothing to do with the sport at all. If you would've asked me what responsibilities a coach has a couple of years ago, I would have told you something completely different than I would now. I probably would have said that they organize practices, make plays, and teach you the skills of the sport. Yes, coaches do all of those things, but there is a lot more to it than that and that is what I have learned volunteer coaching this year.

I am majoring in Exercise Science and I'm going to get my masters in Strength and Conditioning, so that I can become a Strength and Conditioning Coach. I have also competed as a running back for two years of college football, so I know a great deal about training athletes to become stronger and faster. When my high school track coach contacted me about helping out this year that was all I had in mind. I know a lot about strength, speed, and sprinting mechanics, so I would be able to help her train the sprinters. I had only ever trained college and elite athletes though and the first thing I found out was that high school athletes are completely different.

My first day of practice I walked in there with my shirt tucked in, trying to look like my strength coaches from Central, and was ready to whip these kids into the best shape of their lives. The first thing that I realized was that only a few of the kids could actually complete all of the

drills correctly. I was used to the college coaches watching and waiting for that one athlete to slip up and they were going to be all over them in a second. It was nothing like that at all, I stood there and watched over half of the kids attempt to do a basic plyometric drill and not even coming close to getting it right. When it came time to lift, we did a basic stick warm up and then our first lift was dumb bell snatches. I demonstrated the lift and explained in precise detail how to perform it and expected the kids to be able to do it with little difficulty. Not a single kid was able to perform the lift with proper form and I was confused because it was an easy, developmental lift. I quickly realized after that first day that I was going to have to make some big changes in my training programs and mind set.

The next big surprise for me was the lack of effort and motivation the kids displayed. Playing sports in college the athletes knew they had to give it their all everyday if they wanted to play. A lot of these kids had absolutely no interest in running and would rather watch TV. They had no problem telling you that either. If you put them in a race they didn't want to run they would complain or some of them would just not try at all, so that you wouldn't make them run it again. They didn't see the race as an opportunity to get better, but rather a punishment.

Through out the season I adapted and got creative, coming up with new work outs that better fit the athletes I was training. I had limited resources and space and had to develop new ways to train. I had to develop lifts that would accomplish the purpose I was trying for, but at the same time fit the young undeveloped bodies of my athletes. I also developed work outs that made the kids work together to get through them and bring them closer as a team.

I learned a lot about relating to the kids and figuring out how to motivate different athletes in specific ways. I have some athletes that need someone to get on them, yell at them,

and push them to work harder, but at the same time if I would yell at some of my other athletes they'd quit working or maybe even cry. I found out that some athletes didn't respond well to public criticism, so I would talk to them one on one to get them to listen and respond to what I was saying.

This was also my first time ever working with girls and there was a lot of learning involved with that. In order to get the girls to train hard I had to become their friend rather than a hard nose strength coach. A lot of them don't want to train hard, so I have to make it fun for them and occasionally joke around with them. I would say that we are lifting "bi's for the guys" or remind them that lifting their core would make them look better in their prom dresses and swim suits this summer. I also had to take on a completely different role at the girls track meets. They usually didn't want to be there or run, so I would make sure they got ready for their races properly and that they don't psych themselves out. My girl athletes have very low confidence and sometimes they need some reinforcing, comforting words before they run. I also had to comfort girls after they had a bad race and were really upset. I learned how to connect with my athletes on a much deeper level than the average coach.

I learned a lot as a coach this season and really feel like I made some positive influences on my athletes. I still worked on their explosiveness, strength, starts, sprinting mechanics, and speed, but it was much more than that. I learned how to read my athletes and know when to push harder or when they really needed me to back off. I learned how to relate to a whole new group of athletes than what I was used to. I feel as if I helped them prepare mentally as well as physically. It was a great learning experience for me and I'm glad I could make a difference.