Developing the Competitive Environment

Kyle McDonald
Iowa State University and Competitive Will Sport Psychology, USA

Summary of Presentation

Developing a competitive environment for the long-term development of his or her athletes is the coach’s responsibility. Coaching development practices involve education on the technical, tactical, physical and mental aspects of sports. This presentation looked to establish the concept of hardiness in coaches as it relates to their development of competitive environments for athletes.

The key outcomes of building an elite performance environment include missions and developing a plan for athletes and staff to excel in. Athletes and coaches share the ability to handle adversity or stress in sporting events. This ability is the foundation of positive environments, starting with the coach and his/her ability to cope in adverse situations. This process begins with the concept of hardiness. Hardiness (commitment, control and challenge) has been used to describe stress resistant individuals (Bartone, 1999; Maddi, 2006). Maddi (2006) implicates that hardiness involves the three C’s – commitment, control and challenge – and can be seen through the courage “to remain involved with the events and people around you, no matter how stressful things become” (p. 160). Maddi (2006) goes on to suggest that the three C’s “provide the courage and motivation to do the hard work of turning stressful circumstances from potential disasters into growth opportunities” (p. 160). Furthermore, “the aspects of performance that are expected to be enhanced by the hardiness process include effectiveness in carrying out difficult tasks, taking a leadership role, being creative, increasing awareness and wisdom, and avoiding rule-breaking and other conduct problems” (p. 161). Commitment is an attitude in which people initiate instead of reacting, control involves people influencing what is going on around them through effort, and challenge involves people continuously growing in wisdom and learning from negative and positive experiences (Salvatore, Khoshaba, Persico, Lu, Harvey, & Bleecker, 2002, p. 82).

As Maddi (2006) suggests, the concept of hardiness as a strong foundation to developing coaches include enlightening those involved in developing coping strategies to include problem solving and positive interaction. To further establish the concept of hardiness in coach development, Hanton, Evans, & Neil (2003) stated that “the elite sporting environment place(s) the athlete into highly stressful situations, be it physically and psychologically” (p. 167). Furthermore, Hanton and colleagues explain “when confronted with stressful changes, disruptions, or failures, ‘hardi’ individuals react not only with a renewed attempt to control the situation, but also appraise the experience as interesting and worthwhile (commitment), and concentrate on the growth in knowledge and wisdom that is taking place (challenge)” (p. 168).

This presentation looked to evaluate coaching objectives and approaches to building the environment using the conceptual framework of hardiness. If a coach shrugs away from
commitment, control and challenges during times of adversity, it is the author’s belief that athletes will do the same and ultimately break down the environment.
Resources


Author Bio

Kyle McDonald is the associate head coach for the Iowa State men’s hockey program. He also works with 12 hockey teams and three athletes through his company Competitive Will Sport Psychology (www.competitivewill.com).