

Coaching shortcomings

COACHES Rashid Sidek (badminton) and K. Dharmaraj (hockey) were blamed for their team's failures. With the Asian Games set to begin next week, will more coaches bear the brunt of their players' shortcomings? Is it right to blame the coaches? Starsports RAJES PAUL speaks to senior lecturer Kok Lian Yee, from Universiti Putra Malaysia's (UPM) Department of Sports Studies, to try and make some sense of it all.

How deeply rooted are you in coaching?

I graduated from UPM with a degree in physical education in 1991. I taught the subject in schools for five years. In 1996, I joined the sports unit of Universiti Malaya when the sports science programme was introduced. A year later, I joined UPM, where I am now a senior lecturer. My area of expertise is physiology (PhD). I also focus on physical conditioning and fitness. I teach sports coaching too and I work with associations to develop coaches. I also do a lot of work for the National Coaching Academy. I started as a national athlete, being a member of the netball team who won the inaugural Asian Netball Championships in 1970s, and I was the national netball coach when the team won the 2001 Kuala Lumpur SEA Games gold.

Have you come across an ideal framework to develop a good coach?

There is the ICCE – International Council for Coach Excellence – which began in 2005. It is quite a comprehensive and good framework for coaches. Experts from England, Canada and Australia drafted a useful coaching education module. It is a good manual about what a coach should be and what a coach should do. It is also about coaching certification and

development of coaching. They launched it during the 2012 Olympic Games but, as far as I know, no Malaysians were involved.

Who is the authority when it comes to coaching education here?

There is a coaching unit under the National Sports Council (NSC) called the National Coaching Academy. It has existed for the last 20 years under different names. What do they do? They have coaching certifications for Levels 1, 2 and 3 coaches. They have courses for coaches on sports science and sports specifics. Some 20,000 coaches have come through the Level 1 certification.

How effective is it?

I was a pioneer and was involved in preparing the module and curriculum. The frame work changes depending on who handles the unit. The curriculum is not as comprehensive. It is taken from studies and books and put together. We never had a proper curriculum but many have come through it. We need to have some kind of framework and maintain some form of quality.

What are the challenges?

Many of those in the academy as well the content contributors for the coaching courses are university lecturers. Some are good in theories and some are good in practi-



Kok Lian Yee: 'It is not too late to change our sporting culture'.

cal. Some coaches lack sports science knowledge but are excellent in tactics and skills.

The hiring of local and foreign coaches, especially for elite programme, are done by national associations. But do they have the knowledge to verify the credentials of the coaches? Many foreign coaching directors have been come but most don't last long because our coaches, who have not come through a systematic structure, are unable to blend in or complement their vision and mission.

Any suggestions on how to improve that?

I would recommend that all our modules be written in English and Malay. It is also important for coaches to be assessed. Coaches

who are good in theories may not be best on court. In countries like Australia, a coach is assessed while he is doing work on the field. I do not see this here. We have poor quality of coaches at the grassroots level. The most important coaches should be at the bottom, not the top. I don't understand why coaches do not want to be assessed while at work. That's the best way to know if they are doing what is required of them.

Some coaches are also weak in analysing things.

It is important to have a key person in every association handling the coaches. They should have technical knowledge and good communication skills to manage and empower the coaches.

There are so many resources available for coaches to upgrade themselves. They need to take the initiative to equip themselves.

So, do you think a coach should be blamed for an athlete's failure?

I have read about Rashid Sidek and K. Dharmaraj. I have followed the progress of other coaches from other sports too. We have to look at this from different levels. Some coaches only get to work with their players three to four weeks before a major tournament. It's unfair to blame just the coach if the team fail.

Some sports – like in badminton,

shooting, diving, hockey and football – have full-time coaches, who work with their players for years.

It is different for elite-level athletes. The main coaches focus on their tactical preparations and skills. Other responsibilities are given to others. For example, the players' fitness are handled by experts from the National Sports Institute (NSI).

Elite athletes should be less dependant on their coaches. These athletes should be thinkers. Coaches and athletes must exchange ideas in order to improve. At this level, an athlete can choose to disagree with his coaches.

How do we build thinking players?

It has to start from coaches at the grassroots level. That is why I believe that educating the coaches at the grassroots level is so important. It goes back to what is taught and what they learn as they come through the Levels 1, 2 and 3 certifications. If a grassroot coach can mould and groom a youngster in the right way from the start, we will not have major problems later. The athletes will be able to think for themselves.

It is not too late to change our sporting culture. It takes a bold person or a group of people to right the wrongs. Otherwise, we will be going in circle.