

# Finding A Coach

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## A GUIDE FOR PARENTS.....

Parents can sometimes face a daunting task in finding a good coach for their child/ren. The Little Athletics NSW office regularly receives enquiries from parents keen to find a coach. The key is that it does not need to be daunting at all, especially if you are armed with the right questions and know where to go to get the information.

As the parent/s, it is up to you to determine if the coach you choose will have a positive effect on your child/ren. Coaches can be powerful role models for young athletes and they also face tremendous challenges and considerable responsibilities (Sport Parent, 1994). Coaches can help determine the degree of enjoyment the athlete has in the sport and can also affect the athlete's psychological, physical and social development.

So where do you go to find a coach?

### Step 1

Contact your local Little Athletics Centre and enquire about coaches that may be available.

Some issues worth considering when making enquiries are: - Is the coach accredited with the AT&FCA? A coach who is accredited shows they have a commitment to quality coaching through their constant updating of skills and knowledge by having undergone some formal qualifications. After all, would you take your sick son/daughter to someone who is not qualified to be a doctor?

Other questions to ask...

- What day/s do they coach?
- What is their coaching philosophy?
- What events do they coach?
- Do they charge a fee?
- What aged athletes do they coach and how many?
- What other qualifications and experience do they have?

By asking these basic questions, parents can make an informed decision about the suitability of the coach for their son/daughter.

### Step 2

What if the coaches at the Centre are fully booked? It may be worthwhile searching for a coach through another Centre or an independent coach.

[Click here](#) to find a coach through the Australian Track & Field Coaches Association (ATFCA).

### **Step 3**

Find out if the coach teaches a multi development approach (running, jumping and throwing).

As a guide, young athletes need encouragement to develop all athletic skills. Research has shown that athletes who specialise too early can sometimes achieve quick results, however this can lead to neglect of a good training base.

Early specialisation can cause a narrow development of muscles and systems, over-training and overuse injuries, boredom and burn out. Any combination of these can cause an athlete to drop out of sport early, meaning that they never find out how talented they could have become (Bompa, 2000).

### **Step 4**

So what criteria do you look for in a "good coach"?

Sometimes it is difficult to know how good the coach will be until you start with them; often the coach's reputation will precede them. Sometimes it is a matter of trial and error, however if armed with some basic questions and knowledge of what you are looking for in a good coach, you are at least part way there!

The American Sport Education Program has published a book titled "Sport Parent". The following is an extract from that book: -

#### **What Makes a Good Coach?**

Many people think that if you've played a sport, you're qualified to coach it. Wrong! (If this were true, all actors would make good directors and all students would make good teachers.)

A good coach.....

- Must know the sport - and kids. The coach must know about the physical development of boys and girls, what children are, and are not capable of doing.
- Must know about differences in personality - that what is right for one child isn't necessarily right for another.
- Must understand each child's motivation for being on the team. Some kids are very serious about the team; others are there because a best friend is playing.
- Must be able to understand, and deal with, differences in children's physical and emotional maturity, and appreciate children for their individuality.
- Needs to be sensitive to children with physical disabilities and children coming from various social, economic, and racial backgrounds. The coach must give attention and instruction to all players and attempt to make them all feel part of the team.
- Must be skilled at teaching the fundamentals of the sport. Skill development is a major reason kids play - most children want to improve their abilities, and getting better at their sport is a prime source of enjoyment.
- Teaches young athletes to enjoy success and to respond to failure with renewed determination.

- Has more than just winning in sight. Long-term goals of helping young people develop physically psychologically and socially should take precedence over the goal of winning.
- Emphasizes improvement, competence, and striving for excellence.
- Helps children develop positive self-images and learn standards of conduct that are acceptable to society.
- Teaches and models conduct that reflects basic desirable values.

The successful coach is one who conveys: -

- The joy of competition,
- The meaning of effort,
- The worth of character,
- The power of kindness,
- The wisdom of honesty,
- The influence of example,
- The rewards of cooperation, and
- The virtue of patience.

The coach's challenge is to convey these values while striving for victory and not diminishing the fun in sport. Not as easy task!

Now with this extra information and four-step approach, parents will be able to better recognise a 'good coach' in action. Keep in mind the information listed as a guide, not an exhaustive list. Once parents have decided on a coach, it is important that trust is placed in the coach, and it is the parent's responsibility to support and assist the coach without interfering.

There is no doubt that athletes involved in a coaching regime will be positively effected through a well balanced and broad based athletic skills foundation. The athlete's involvement will also hopefully mean long term development and involvement in the sport.

#### *References:*

*American Sport Education Program (1994) - 'Sport Parent', Human Kinetics (USA)*

*Tudor O Bompá (2000) - 'Total Training for Young Champions', Human Kinetics (USA)*