



## **Should a Required Level for Coach Competency be Mandated for All School Coaches?**

*Y aurait-il lieu d'imposer un niveau de compétences particulier pour tous les entraîneurs dans les écoles?*

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The results of a recent pilot study (Robertson, Gallant & Pace, 2010) of coaching capacity within the community and school system of Nova Scotia suggest that there are few qualifications required to be a school coach. In cooperation with the Nova Scotia School Athletic Federation (NSSAF) and the Nova Scotia Department of Health Promotion and Protection (NSHPP), as part of a larger pilot study on developing coach capacity, one hundred and eighty three schools within Nova Scotia were provided with a survey to identify among other things, minimum coaching requirements. Within each school, the survey was completed by the NSSAF contact. Results of data collected from school officials indicate that there is little consistency in requirements for coaching qualifications across schools. Numerous schools in four regions of Nova Scotia indicated that there are no coaching requirements imposed whatsoever. This lack of universality appears to verify an extra-curricular “hobby” mentality toward coaching that reduces the importance of ensuring proper coaching certification discussed in the recent Canadian Sport Policy (2002 document).

*Les résultats d'une récente étude pilote (Robertson, Gallant et Pace, 2010) sur les compétences en entraînement menée auprès de la collectivité scolaire de la Nouvelle-Écosse révèlent que les écoles exigent très peu de compétences de la part des personnes qui entraînent leurs élèves. L'étude présentée ici, menée en collaboration avec la Nova Scotia School Athletic Federation (NSSAF) et le ministère de la promotion et de la protection de la santé de la Nouvelle-Écosse, s'inscrivait dans le cadre d'une étude plus exhaustive portant sur le perfectionnement des habiletés des entraîneurs. Un formulaire était remis à 183 écoles néo-écossaises en leur demandant d'indiquer, entre autres, les compétences de base que devraient avoir les entraîneurs. Dans chaque école, le sondage était administré par un représentant de la NSSAF. Les données recueillies auprès des responsables scolaires indiquent que les compétences exigées des entraîneurs varient beaucoup d'une école à l'autre. Plusieurs écoles de quatre régions de la Nouvelle-Écosse ont dit n'avoir aucune exigence relativement aux compétences des entraîneurs. Ce manque de constance confirme l'impression que l'entraînement est perçu comme un « loisir » parascolaire, ce*

*qui tend à minimiser l'importance d'exiger certaines compétences des entraîneurs, tel que mentionné dans la récente politique sur le sport au Canada (document de 2002).*

### **The National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP)**

Participation in sport by youth has been associated with numerous physical, psychological and social benefits such as improved fitness and health, enhanced self-confidence and mental health (Jarvis, 2006; Brandl-Bredenbeck & Brettschnieder, 1997), and increased opportunities to build friendships (Weiss, Smith & Theeboom, 1996). Because of the affect that sport has on children, it is critical that Canada's youth receive no less than a qualified leader. The leadership style of a coach and the strategies they employ in decision-making in the sport setting may have a direct and lasting impact on future participation by youth as a player or coach (Kowalski et al., 2007). Coaches also play a significant role in the development, training, and success of athletes in sports (Côté, Baker, & Abernethy, 2007).

If the use of volunteers is the only way to secure opportunities for youth to participate in sport, efforts must be made to provide coaches with training to prepare them for this responsibility (Bonne, 2000). Through participation in formal coaching education programs, coaches can improve their skills and knowledge by being exposed to content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and sport science (McCullick et al., 2005). Lines of communication need to be established and relationships developed in order for sustainable coach capacity to be built (Robertson et al, 2010).

In Canada the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) is a program designed to develop the abilities of coaches working with athletes at all levels, from community to high-performance sport (NCCP reference material, 2006). Established in 1974 (Coaching Association of Canada, 2010), the NCCP has become a recognized standard for acquiring coaching skills not only in Canada, but also around the world (Misener & Danylchuk, 2009). However, many sport organizations do not currently require coaches to become certified. The Nova Scotia School Athletic Federation (NSSAF), the commission for school sport in Nova Scotia, encourages but does not currently enforce coaches to become certified, stating in section 7.18 of its regulation handbook that “[i]t is highly recommended that coaches complete a minimum of NCCP Level 1 Theory and a Level 1 Technical in their respective sport(s)” (Nova Scotia School Athletic Federation Handbook, 2010, p.17).

Since many children participate in school sports (Fredricks & Eccles, 2008) and coaches are an important aspect of their sport participation (Wiersma & Sherman, 2005), it is important that those responsible for school sport expect that these coaches have some qualification other than being willing to volunteer.

### **The benefits of coach certification**

In Nova Scotia, the standards established by the Canadian National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) are respected as the benchmark for certification requirements in all sport settings including those within the schools (Nova Scotia Department of Health Promotion and Protection, 2007). Misener and Danylchuk (2009) report that most coaches who pursue certification, “believe that NCCP courses have been valuable for their own training and

development” (p. 240) thereby contributing positively to coaching effectiveness. Coaches, when exposed to certification training, are better equipped to provide specific instruction within a skill set particular to any given sport. Coaching certification has been shown to positively affect facilitation of social development and personal growth of athletes, a decreased rate of coach burnout by teaching coaches personal stress management and coping strategies (Erickson, Bruner, MacDonald & Côté, 2008) and an increase in coaching efficacy (Campbell & Sullivan, 2005; Maleté & Feltz, 2000).

Coaches are viewed as teachers, role models, and leaders of the community (Coaching Association of Canada, 2010) and through participation in formal coaching education programs, coaches can improve their skills and knowledge. For example, Maleté and Feltz (2000) examined the relationship between coaching education and coaching efficacy. The study involved 36 coaches who were participating in a voluntary-based coaching education program compared with 24 coaches who had not participated in any program. Compared to the control group, training participants had a significant increase in coaching efficacy. A similar study by Campbell and Sullivan (2005) produced comparable results. Among other outcomes, coaching education and certification programs were shown to increase coaching efficacy on four subscales – motivation, strategy, technique and character building.

In a review of the development of coaching as a profession, Woodman (1993) confirmed the assertion that the key to improved coaching lies with coach education and development. While several factors beyond coach education have been shown to influence coaches’ use of sound practices (Rodgers, Reade & Hall, 2007), coaching education and certification programs are needed to guarantee guidelines for qualified and competent coaches at all levels of our sport systems (Gowan, 1992).

This article describes some of the results of a larger study on school coaching which was directed towards gaining a better understanding of how to develop coach capacity in all sport settings in Nova Scotia. This excerpt from the report, *Building Community Level Coaching Capacity: A Nova Scotia Pilot Project* (Robertson, Gallant & Pace, 2010), examines the current state of coaching requirements in schools from all regions of the province.

### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the larger study, an initiative of Nova Scotia Health Protection and Promotion (NSHPP) in collaboration with the Nova Scotia School Athletic Federation (NSSAF) and six Provincial Sport Organizations (PSOs) was to gather data on the current status of coach capacity and the challenges faced by various groups within the province of Nova Scotia relative to building coach capacity in school and community settings. Partners within the Nova Scotia sport delivery system embarked upon a pilot initiative with a desired outcome of identifying effective means of building community/school level coach capacity. NS Health Protection and Promotion is committed to promoting and developing coach and leader training and standards for all levels and within all settings of sport participation( Nova Scotia Department of Health Promotion and Protection, 2007). This article specifically pertains to a comparison and discussion of the school-based data that were collected (Robertson et al., 2010).

### **Methodology**

A self administered survey was distributed through e-mail to over 150 Junior and Senior High Schools in Nova Scotia. School officials were asked to complete the survey and return it upon completion either by fax or email to the NSSAF office. The instrument included questions related to the status of coach development, training standards and requirements, existence of training and education opportunities and support, recruitment and retention, coach related support services available, coach motivation and constraint data, coach feedback mechanisms, monitoring systems, diversity and inclusion policies/procedures, and coach related issues and challenges currently faced by the schools.

The survey was distributed to each school with an introduction to the project and instructions regarding the completion and return of the survey. This initial contact was followed up by the former Executive Director of NSSAF with an e-mail, and later by another email sent out by the research assistant. After the second follow-up email, the research assistant contacted all of the schools with a phone call to the NSSAF contact.

### **Data Collection**

Surveys were distributed to 183 Junior High Schools and High Schools in Nova Scotia. Of those, 52% (96) responded by completing and returning the survey. Approximately 10% of these were returned after numerous follow-up attempts. The remainder of the schools were contacted a number of times but did not complete and return the survey as requested. Surveys originally were distributed to the contact in each school affiliated with the NSSAF but if they were not available, or non-existent, the Principal or a Physical Education teacher at the school completed the survey. In some cases, the Principal/ Physical Education teacher was the contact affiliated with the NSSAF.

The Annapolis Valley (Valley) is represented by 18 schools, Cape Breton (CB) is represented by 16 schools, Fundy is represented by 13 schools, Highland is represented by 13 schools, Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) is represented by 26 schools and South Shore is represented by 10 schools.

### **Results**

The following, Tables 1 through 9, identify the responses from school officials regarding the status of coach capacity within their schools. Table 1 identifies the most frequently reported answers participants gave when asked to identify the minimum requirements for coach qualifications at their schools.

Table 1

*Minimum Coach Qualification Requirements in the School*  
(in % of total schools from an area)

<b>Minimum Coaching Requirements in School Setting</b>	HRM	Valley	SS	CB	Fundy	Hghl	Avg.
No set requirements	39	17	27		23		27%
Basic NCCP*- Level 1	19	39	18	6	8	30	20%
Criminal Record Check and Child Abuse Registry	8	12	36	12	8	40	19%
Must have Coached High School level or Higher	4				31		18%
Experience/knowledge of the sport	19	11		6	15		13%
Experience/knowledge of the sport along with criminal record check and child abuse registry	4		18				11%
Has to be a teacher or a teacher has to be present	8	6				10	8%
Other				6	16		11%

\*NCCP is the National Coaching Certification Program that provides certification to coaches involved in all sport. The NCCP is used in Nova Scotia as the benchmark for certification requirements in many sport settings.

It is interesting to note that certain schools in four of the regions indicated that there are no set requirements for their coaches. The “other” category listed at the bottom of the chart included such responses as knowing the philosophy of school sport, being screened by an Athletic Committee and getting cleared by the school board volunteer policy. It is evident that there is little consistency with requirements for coaches in the school setting. A number of questions were asked of schools relative to current coach capacity.

Table 2 identifies the percentage of schools from each region that responded in the affirmative. That is, the majority of respondents (86%) indicated that they feel it is important to establish a level of required coaching competency. Furthermore, Sixty two percent of schools indicated that they do not have a sufficient number of coaches.

Table 2  
*Overview of Current Coach Capacity*  
(in % of total schools from an area)

	<b>HRM</b>	<b>Valley</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>CB</b>	<b>Fundy</b>	<b>Hghl</b>	<b>Average</b>
School has a sufficient number of coaches	39	28	46	71	23	20	38%
School has a policy or practice regarding coach recruitment	15	33	18	23	15	20	21%
Coaches have expressed a desire for coach training	31	39	27	41	31	40	35%
School covers the cost of coach training	39	50	55	88	46	40	53%
It is important to establish a required level of coach competency	96	94	64	88	84	90	86%

Tables 3 and 4 report the number of coaches involved in a particular sport in the school setting. The tables are divided into teachers and non-teachers in each sport. The percentages are compared between schools in each region as well as between schools within the same region, and indicate the number of teachers that are involved in coaching. For example, 76% of schools reporting from HRM have non-teachers coaching boys' basketball. It should be noted that this statistic means that only 24% of schools reported having teachers coaching boys' basketball. As some high school teams have more than one coach, it is possible for a single team to be coached by both a teacher and a non-teacher. Therefore, summing the percentage of schools reporting non-teachers as coaches with the percentage of schools reporting teachers as coaches, for a particular sport, will not necessarily yield 100%.

Table 3

*Percentage of Schools per Region with Non-Teachers Coaching*

<b>Sport</b>	<b>HRM</b>	<b>Valley</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>CB</b>	<b>Fundy</b>	<b>Hghl</b>	<b>Avg.</b>
Boys' Basketball	76	87	80	69	58	70	73%
Boys' Curling	70	44	50	67	25	80	56%
Boys' Hockey	67	73	100	67	100	38	74%
Boys' Soccer	83	56	50	69	36	30	54%
Boys' Volleyball	70	50	38	25	50	0	39%
Boys' Wrestling	43	30	25	0	50	33	30%
Girls' Basketball	79	59	80	73	45	60	66%
Girls' Curling	60	50	60	0	17	67	42%
Girls' Hockey	64	67	33	50	0	60	46%
Girls' Soccer	84	47	60	53	27	10	47%
Girls' Volleyball	68	44	87	53	55	17	54%
Girls' Wrestling	33%	25	40	0	50	0	25%

There are a notable number of non-teacher coaches in the school setting which indicates that schools are looking outside their existing staff to find coaches. Of the schools who responded, the overall average of non-teacher coaches is slightly over 50%.

Table 4  
*Percentage of Schools within a Region with Teachers Coaching*

<b>Sport</b>	<b>HRM</b>	<b>Valley</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>CB</b>	<b>Fundy</b>	<b>Hghl</b>	<b>Avg.</b>
Boys' Basketball	52	69	60	56	75	40	59%
Boys' Curling	30	63	75	33	87	20	51%
Boys' Hockey	56	54	0	92	0	62	44%
Boys' Soccer	29	73	90	100	73	80	74%
Boys' Volleyball	30	50	63	0	71	100	52%
Boys' Wrestling	57	78	75	73	10	100	81%
Girls' Basketball	54	76	60	100	91	60	74%
Girls' Curling	50	50	40	75	100	33	58%
Girls' Hockey	73	67	67	81	0	40	55%
Girls' Soccer	40	76	90	67	100	100	79%
Girls' Volleyball	55	88	90	0	73	83	65%
Girls' Wrestling	67	88	60	0	100	100	69%

School representatives were asked what they thought needed to be done in order for all coaches to meet the minimum standards recommended by the NSSAF, that is, a minimum of NCCP Level 1 Theory and a Level 1 Technical in their respective sport(s). In many cases, no actions were identified. That no action was identified to meet minimum coaching standards may indicate that school officials feel qualifications for school coaching are already in place with their coaches regardless of whether they are teachers or non-teachers. Further, school officials may deem that it is not a responsibility of the school system to ensure there is action needed to secure coaching credentials or to improve upon the existing credentials of coaches. The coaches of the 6 pilot sports who were interviewed for a different part of this study revealed a variety of credentials, varying from none to NCCP Level 1 (Robertson et al., 2010).



Table 5

*Action needed for Coaches to meet Minimum Standard in School Setting*  
(in % of total schools from an area)

	<b>HRM</b>	<b>Valley</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>CB</b>	<b>Fundy</b>	<b>Hghl</b>	<b>Avg.</b>
On-site training during weekdays/local training	35	17	27	29	31	50	32%
Coaching clinics to ensure required level of competency by board or Sport Nova Scotia	12		9	12			11%
Recruit coaches that are already qualified			11				11%
Financial compensation and local training	4	6	9	6	15	10	8%
Financial compensation for devoting their time	8	6	9		8	10	8%

Other responses that were not as frequently reported for action needed were that a) all coaches to meet the minimum standard, b) provide courses for teachers annually in September, c) give Athletic Directors need more time to devote to coach development, d) all coaches should be certified by the Athletic Director (if the AD has the appropriate qualifications), and e) administrators need a development plan for coaching. Although less frequently identified, these responses are still important to note.

Respondents were asked what type of training they considered to be valuable for coaches working within the school system. Most frequently identified in all regions was NCCP Level 1 Theory (now called Competition Development) and Practical components. Others indicated that they would like to see NCCP sport specific training as well as other forms of training that relate more to the behavioral and philosophical aspects of sport, such as dealing with parent attitudes, fair play, and First Aid and CPR training. Table 6 reports the types of training considered valuable to coaches working in school settings.

Table 6  
*Valuable Training for Coaches in the School Setting*  
 (in % of total schools from an area)

	<b>HRM</b>	<b>Valley</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>CB</b>	<b>Fundy</b>	<b>Hghl</b>	<b>Avg.</b>
Minimum NCCP Level 1 Coaching Certification	27	27	28	24	46	30	30%
Sport Specific Certification clinics	8	33	6	6	15	20	15%
Age Specific Training and better methods of education for teachers	4				8	10	11%
More training opportunities on sport philosophy (fair play vs. winning)			9	6			8%
Parent Education-learning how to deal with parents as spectators and what their role should be in a sport setting	8			6			7%
First Aid and CPR Training	8			6			7%

Coaches and their needs are a key aspect of capacity building yet often there are no formal vehicles for their voices to be heard. Schools were asked to indicate by what means they communicate with coaches in terms of gathering information from them related to their training needs and to feedback about their coaching experiences. Without this information it would be difficult to establish a baseline for change in coaching standards. The responses to this question showed that schools which completed the survey have no formal methods of obtaining feedback from their coaches. Further, none of the PSOs or clubs in the larger study gathered information from coaches to explain why they became involved in coaching or what benefits they receive from coaching that might motivate them to want to continue. Nor do they gather data about why individuals leave coaching.

Understanding what motivates coaches could provide valuable insights into how to retain them. Regardless of the motive for volunteering, if volunteers' motives are fulfilled, then it is possible more time will be spent volunteering (Finkelstein, 2008, p. 14; Strigas & Jackson, 2003).

Table 7  
*Means of Obtaining Feedback on Coach Satisfaction*  
 (in % of total schools from an area)

	<b>HRM</b>	<b>Valley</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>CB</b>	<b>Fundy</b>	<b>Hghl</b>	<b>Average</b>
Anecdotal evidence only	8	6	18	6	31		14%
Must be satisfied because they come back every year	4		9				13%
End of season conversations				6		10	8%
No data	4	61	46	59	54	50	53%

On average, only 38% of schools indicated having a sufficient number of coaches at the time the survey was completed, indicating that recruitment of coaches was a pressing issue. When asked about methods of recruitment, word of mouth rather than any formal recruitment planning was how coaches were generally obtained. The overwhelming response was that schools did not actively recruit, but rather sought simply to obtain a sufficient number of bodies for all scheduled school teams. Recruitment occurred mainly through word of mouth or by asking known individuals, rather than through strategic recruitment using a set of objectives - for example, to include more females as coaches. Table 8 reports how schools in each region approach this task.

Table 8  
*Methods of Coach Recruitment*  
 (in % of total schools from an area)

<b>Coach Recruitment</b>	<b>HRM</b>	<b>Valley</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>CB</b>	<b>Fundy</b>	<b>Hghl</b>	<b>Average</b>
Word of mouth in the community	19	33	36	6	31	10	23%
Through the staff	23	17	18	12	23	10	16%
Contacts in minor sport organizations	8			17			13%
Teachers sign up/asked if they want to coach	15		9		15	10	12%
Parents of children involved in sports within the school	8		9	18		10	11%
Newspaper advertisement	1	6	9	6		10	9%
By the Principal		6	9	6		10	8%
By the Athletic Director	4	11		6		10	8%
No recruitment occurs						20	20%

Other responses that were less prevalent in the data included phone calls to alumni of the school and contacts made through a nearby university.

Given all their other curricular responsibilities, school sport is not a priority for most school administrators. The NSSAF works with schools to ensure that provincial championships occur in 19 separate sports but does not legislate coaching standards within individual schools. Although informal relationships may exist between certain individuals involved with different sport agencies within the province, there is no systematic form of communication that would enable dialogue and help to determine who should play specific roles in building school coach capacity. At the end of the survey, school representatives were asked to indicate the ways and means that they felt coach capacity could be developed within the school system.

Table 9  
*Requirements for Coach Capacity Development*  
 (in % of total schools from an area)

	<b>HRM</b>	<b>Valley</b>	<b>SS</b>	<b>CB</b>	<b>Fundy</b>	<b>Hghl</b>	<b>Avg</b>
Greater availability of courses in rural areas		33	9	29	15	10	19%
Increased funding to cover training expenses	2		9	18			16%
Continued availability of general/specific clinics- (want both the NCCP Technical, Practical and Theory)*	8			6	15		9%
Pay coaches for their efforts- allows for coaching to be a paid job opportunity			9		8		9%
Promote the benefits of being a school coach				6		10	8%
Provide more professional development opportunities outside school year		6	9				8%
Develop a formal plan that offers training and standards- schools need a guideline for coach standards and how to follow through with that	4				8		6%
More awareness of when coaching courses are taking place	4			6			5%

\*NCCP as a part of each level of their certification programs has three components that include Theory, Practical and Technical (this is training specific to the sport).

Responses varied between school and region. Although there is little commonality amidst the responses to this question, the theme of availability of

courses in rural areas appears as a requirement for an average of 19% of schools across all the regions except for HRM which does not identify this as a barrier. Because HRM is the largest metropolitan region in the province more course offerings would be expected and therefore a lack of course offerings would not be perceived as a barrier to schools who wished to improve coach capacity in HRM.

In addition to the responses on the above table, there were a number of other responses to the question on what is required to develop coach capacity. School officials envisioned building coach capacity as, a) providing training onsite in the schools during working hours; b) setting standards with input from the Provincial Sport Organizations (PSOs) and establishing a monitoring system; c) recruiting qualified individuals; d) covering training costs for coaches; e) having athletic directors assume greater responsibility for coach development; and f) creating coach development action plans in schools and regions.

### Final Remarks

The NSSAF has relationships with individual schools but not necessarily with the regional school boards who establish policy. NSHPP is well connected to both the recreation and sport sector at the provincial and regional levels. PSOs consider themselves to be connected to the clubs but clubs do not necessarily feel a sense of connection to PSOs. There is no formal connection between the PSO and NSSAF or schools. Clubs, Schools, and municipal recreation departments within a given community do not necessarily have working relationships.

Despite the recommendations by the NSSAF and the NSHPP for across-the-board certification for school coaches, indications from the pilot study of coaching capacity in NS are that schools do not have consistent standards for coaches. The requirements to be a school coach are low. Further research beyond a pilot study is required to determine why the apparent gap exists between intention and action.

The NSSAF works with schools on administrative issues for 19 sports. The NSSAF sets policy and has made a strong policy recommendation regarding minimum qualifications to be a school coach. Traditionally however, school sport has existed as a separate domain from community/club sport and therefore formal linkages have not been made with the broader sport system. As such, school sport has existed as an entity unto itself with regard to setting system wide policy and regulations related to issues such as coaching education standards. The lack of attention to leadership development in school sport should not continue (Robertson et al, 2010). While training alone may not ensure competence, at the very least, it can help.

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