

CROFTON COACHES CLUB (C³)

By

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ABSTRACT

MENTORING YOUNG ADULTS IN THE ART OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
THROUGH COACHING

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There is an overwhelming body of evidence that youth sport coaches play a significant role in the psychosocial development of children involved in organized sport (Gould, 2018; Gould 2016; Hellison, 2003; Lauer 2018; Orlick, 2002; Shields & Bredemeier, 2002; Shields & Bredemeier, 1995; Smith & Smoll, 2002; Smoll, Smith, & Passer, 2002; Weinberg & Gould, 2015). However, a large majority of new coaches typically begin their journey into coaching with little or no formal training. Many of these coaches are left to rely on the coaching style, both positive and negative, witnessed during their youth sport experiences (Gilbert & Trudel, 2001). The goal of the Crofton Coaches Club (C³) is to provide youth with an opportunity to gain a head start in the art of Positive Youth Development (PYD) through coaching. C³ aims to match local high school aged youth (grades 9-12) interested in learning about PYD and coaching life skills with experienced adult coaches/mentors. C³ will be working with the local youth sports organization, the Crofton Athletic Council (CAC), and local high schools in the surrounding areas to grow the level of awareness about PYD in a grass roots fashion. Program participants can then carry the lessons of PYD through sport into their adult years.

PROGRAM INTRODUCTION

The Crofton Coaches Club (C³) is a non-profit and volunteer-staffed organization with the goal of educating the coaches and leaders of tomorrow in the principles of Positive Youth Development (PYD) and life skills development through sport. C³ is scheduled to begin a pilot program (currently underway) during the winter 2018-19 intramural basketball season. C³, in collaboration with the Crofton Athletic Council (CAC), a local youth athletic organization in the Crofton, Maryland area, will be seeking high-school-aged youth (grades 9-12) from the surrounding area who are interested in learning the art of PYD through coaching. Interested youth will also have an opportunity to meet their annual high school community service obligation while, at the same time, learning the life skills required to take on the role of a youth sport coach and community leader. Since each high-school-aged youth in the state of Maryland is required to perform community service, this could provide an excellent opportunity for a constant and consistent number of program participants annually.

C³ could also serve to reduce an increasing void of adults and parents who are not interested in volunteering for a coaching role in local youth sports. In the CAC intramural basketball program for the winter 2018-19 season there were six (6) teams where the parents of the children on the team were told that if no parent was prepared to step up and volunteer to coach the team, that there would be no season for that team. Many adults lack the necessary technical skills and previous experience required to competently coach a youth team and, in many cases, these same adults do not want to take on the responsibility on their own. Forcing parents to coach youth sports teams, especially teams with their children on those teams, can lead

to scenarios where parents with little or no desire or experience end up with the responsibility of coaching young children (Smith & Smoll, 2002), but with no tools to make it a positive experience. To that end, youth participants in the C³ program who have participated for multiple years, and who have experience in the art of PYD through sport, could be used to serve in the role of youth mentor to augment and assist this parent volunteer population. This would not only provide a coaching staff for the team and keep large numbers of children involved in sport, but also allow the C³ program mentee to hopefully influence the adult coach to adopt a PYD strategy when coaching during the current season and possibly seasons in the future. For many parents the it is the feeling of not knowing what they are doing that will cause them to shy away from opportunities to coach. Through participation youth volunteers will also be adding valuable coaching tools, techniques, life skills, and experience to their coaching skill set toolbox that will hopefully continue to serve them well in adulthood. The structure of the C³ program will reflect these goals.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

It has been found (Gould, et. al., 1990) that expert coaches identified experience and observation of other successful coaches as one of the most valuable tools in their coaching toolbox. For this reason, C³ will focus on matching youth participants in the program with experienced, carefully selected, and qualified coaches who believe in the PYD approach to coaching. There is also a substantial body of research (Bloom, 2013; DuBois & Rhodes, 2006) to support the idea that a mentor-mentee relationship in life and in sport has the potential to lead to a more meaningful experience than simply having program participants gather up equipment and hand out snacks at the end of a practice. C³ is looking for its mentors to truly educate and inspire

program participants in a transformational way and not just use them as free labor or transactional placeholders during a season.

C³ firmly believes that it is not about the quantity of participating mentor coaches, but rather the quality of those coaches. For the mentor-to-mentee ratio, the program will strive to keep a ratio of 1-to-1, but will need to make adjustments when there are more program participants than there are mentor coaches available. The number of mentees assigned to any specific mentor will also be decided based on feedback from the mentor as to the number of mentees that mentor feels they can competently handle at any given time. C³ does not want to turn away any possible candidates, but program selection could be limited given the number of mentor coaches available, and this will be especially true with the initialization of the program. The current pilot program is being run by the program founder with a single mentee participant from Arundel High School in Gambrills, Maryland. In addition, C³ will be focusing on mentors who are coaching at all levels in sport with a particular focus on sports at the recreational and intramural levels of play. These tend to be the levels of play with the largest need for qualified coaches as well as the youth sport population most at risk for attrition.

A critical component of the C³ program will be the identification and selection of the adult mentor coaches who will serve as exemplars for the youth participants. C³ will employ a series of selection methodologies to ensure that only qualified adult candidates are allowed into the program. The first criteria will involve the successful completion of the Anne Arundel County (AACO) volunteer background check form. C³ will also be conducting a series of face-to-face interviews with any potential adult candidates to ensure that their philosophy and approach to youth sports is congruent with the C³ mission and objectives. C³ will be asking to speak with at least three (3) current or former parents of players who have experience with the

candidate coach so a non-biased view of the candidates coaching philosophy can be acquired. If possible, all adult candidates will be observed coaching in a live sport context to allow the C³ administrators an opportunity to evaluate the candidate under realistic and competitive conditions. It is typically in these competitive situations where the true colors of a coach will shine through and reveal themselves.

Maybe the most critical component of the program will be the matching of adult coaches with youth participants. Making a good match in terms of personality and style will be important to ensure a good relationship and bond is formed. It is also possible that the program could end up having male mentors working with female mentees and vice versa. This also raises program safety concerns that will be addressed in the “PROGRAM SAFTEY” section of this proposal.

Youth participants in the program will be required to do more than just show up and keep track of the team’s equipment. Each youth participant, during the course of the season, will be required to keep a personal journal. Research has shown that journaling can be an effective approach to self-appraisal and evaluation (Gould, 2018). In addition, journaling can provide the participant with material they can use to perform self-reflection and self-evaluation. The process of self-reflection can help serve to educate participants over the duration of the season and over the duration of their participation in the program. Furthermore, it creates an artifact that details the mentees participation in the program.

In addition to journaling, each youth participant will need to complete the reading of one (1) of two (2) important books on PYD, in addition to a selection of short articles on PYD, throughout the season. The first book will be “The Double Goal Coach” (Thompson, 2003) and the second book selection would be “InsideOut Coaching” (Ehrmann, 2011). In the event that a participant has completed both books or who has completed several seasons or years in the C³

program and exhausted the reading list, additional and carefully selected books could be added to enhance their PYD experience. The reading of the books would also be required by mentors so that valuable conversations could be had regarding the material and how it relates to PYD and the coaching context. Depending on the appetite for knowledge in the youth participants, there are also a number of free online educational resources that deal with the topics of PYD and life skills development which could be included. Right now, given the infancy in the program, further evaluation will need to take place to determine a manageable workload for both the mentor and the mentee. The program will need to find a ‘happy medium’ between overloading a program participant and not providing sufficient literature on PYD through sport.

PROGRAM EVALUATION

C³ will need to ensure the effectiveness of the program through program evaluation from both a short- and long-term perspective. According to Izzo (2004), it is extremely difficult to prove the effectiveness of any program in a scientific fashion, especially when what is being measured is difficult to immediately assess. With that in mind the methodology of C³ will be to perform its program evaluation following the “Theory of Change (TOC)” approach (Izzo, 2004). According to the theory of change approach, evaluation is conducted by observation of participants to determine if there is any difference in their actual performance as a result of the training. C³ will attempt to achieve this goal by periodically recording both the mentor coach and the mentee in live competitive coaching and practice contexts. These video recordings can then be used to provide review of performance and evidence of behavior that can assist in the continued improvement of the mentor, the mentee, and the program. In order to establish a baseline for the mentor coach and the mentee an initial recording would be done at the start of

the season when the mentee has had little or no mentorship and then be compared to a recording that would be done at the completion of the season. As Izzo (2004) implies, by identifying key program evaluation criteria, as has been done in the C³ program evaluation description above, in an age of increasing accountability C³ will be able to demonstrate and determine program effectiveness to make the program more efficient. Finally, evaluation criteria will be developed specifically for the program and C³ will not be developing the program to fit the blueprint of some evaluation criteria.

Based on the TOC methodology C³ will also attempt to include summative and formative evaluation – summative being the clear demonstration that the results are valid and documenting the impact. From a formative perspective, C³ administrators will leverage the lessons learned during program participation to shape and improve the program activities and outcomes (Kellogg, 2017). Appendix A provides a ‘Program Logic Model’ developed using the Kellogg (2017) guide as a model. Through these evaluation activities, C³ can make a clear decision as to whether or not the program is being implemented as planned and more importantly whether or not the program is actually achieving its originally stated goals.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

The program outcomes have been arranged into three (3) categories and are also reflected in the program logic model diagram in Appendix A: immediate-, intermediate-, and long-term. The immediate outcomes that the program hopes to produce are those that see program participants embracing and adopting the PYD through sport approach. Evidence of this could be asking questions about PYD activities and strategies, telling friends and teammates about their participation in the program, not missing any days, and eager to learn. The intermediate goals

should consist of the program participant gaining a voice and agency in their development by running individual drills during practice and displaying the traits and characteristics of a PYD-grounded coach. Since experience as a coach is what leads to more effective coaches, program participants should be encouraged to find their own voice as coaches. The program participant would also be completing their readings, having discussions about the readings and journaling with their mentor coach, and looking for opportunities to implement the knowledge that they are acquiring. During the intermediate phase of the program the program participants should also be growing in confidence and have an increased sense of self-efficacy. The long-term program outcomes stretch across the life span and extend well beyond a program participant's high school years. For example, a key long-term goal of the program is to see program participants actively participating in their communities through their adulthood as mentors, coaches, and exemplars of what PYD through sport is all about. This includes passing on the lessons learned from C³ to a new generation of athletes, parents, and coaches. Another key goal of the program is that the program participants have just as much fun learning how to become coaches as they do participating in sports as athletes. One great aspect of coaching is that once a program participant's playing days are over, they can always give back to the game by becoming a coach. Finally, the hope is that the experience has been so transformational and so enjoyable for program participants that they continue to remain in touch with the program administrators so that longitudinal effect can be measured.

PROGRAM CHALLENGES

As with any program there are bound to be challenges that occur in its implementation. The first and most obvious program challenge is the identification and retention of qualified

adult coach mentors. Given the current challenges in youth sports with quality coaches who truly understand the purpose of PYD through sport (Anderson, 2002; Gould, 2016; Lauer, 2018; Martens, 1978; Smoll & Smith, 2002) it will be critical to recruit only the highest quality coaches. This will ensure a positive experience for the youth mentees participating in the program and help to build a positive reputation within the community. In addition to finding the right adult coach mentors, there could be challenges finding individuals who will be willing to dedicate the time and effort required to not only coach, but to mentor a young adult. As mentors in the program there will clearly be additional responsibilities that will need to be undertaken and this could deter qualified individuals from wanting to participate.

Program dosage will also be a challenge because you have only a few nights a week and possibly a single day on the weekends. Hellison (2003) found that positive results could be achieved in as little as a single day dosage, however this still leaves a number of questions around the permanence of the training being received.

A final program concern surrounds the number of participants. An assumption is being made that learning how to coach in sports would be just as appealing as playing sports. While this might be true for adults who are no longer participating in organized sport, it might not be seen the same way by high-school-aged youth. In addition, the fact that participants will need to take on additional reading and writing might serve to dissuade possible candidates from seeking an opportunity with the program.

PROGRAM SAFETY

As with any program where working with youth is involved there are always safety concerns and on many fronts. The C³ program will continue to leverage the existing Anne

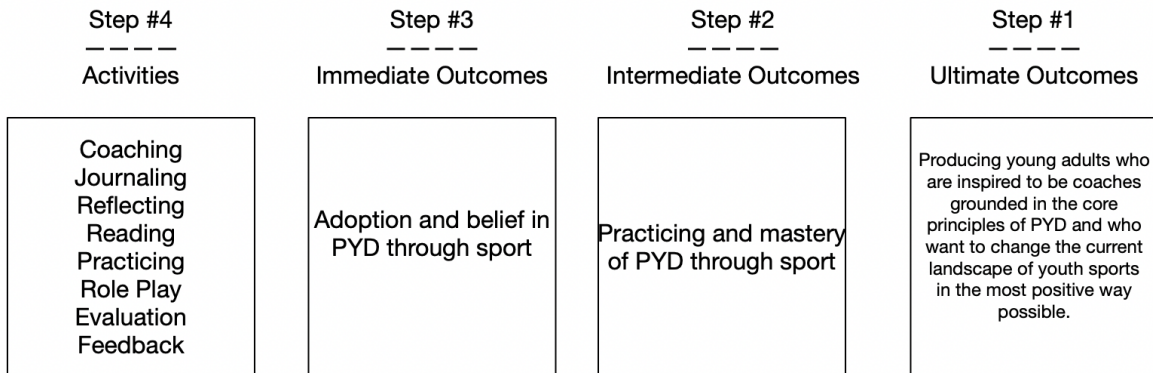
Arundel County background check procedure but will also be adding a number of additional safety nets as well. To protect itself, C³ will also require all program participants to sign a liability waiver to protect against injury caused or received from participation in the program. This is a standard form that can be used to provide basic protection from litigation. C³ will also make every effort to ensure that female program participants are paired with female program mentor coaches. When this is not possible, or if the program participant requests a male mentor coach, C³ will ensure that opposite sex mentor coaches understand the program risks involved and ask that a third individual (another parent, coach, player, etc.) be present and that the pair not conduct activities behind closed doors.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of the C³ program will provide aspiring youth an opportunity to get a head start on the art, benefits, and joy of coaching through PYD. The advantages of a program like C³ are that it will have overhead from an operational budget perspective, can be integrated into the existing local athletic organizations, and, while costing next to nothing, will provide a Return on Investment (ROI) that could quite possibly change the youth sport coaching landscape in the state of Maryland and beyond. If just one program participant goes on to make a difference, to become a youth sport advocate grounded in PYD through sport, then C³ will have had a positive impact.

APPENDIX A:

Program Logic Diagram:



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