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A valuable contribution to the growing research field of the history of sports coaching

Today the coach is a central figure in sport. There is also a vast body of literature on coaches and coaching. A few of years ago, *The Routledge Handbook of Sports Coaching* was published - a 500 page tome depicting the width and depth of the field. Over the years coaches and coaching have been scrutinized from psychological, sociological and pedagogical perspectives.¹ One can say that interest in the history of coaching began with the publication of Australian sport historian Murray Phillips' book, *From Sidelines to Centre Field: A History of Sports Coaching in Australia* in 2000. Phillips studied the development of the coach from being a somewhat peripheral figure, to one standing in the limelight. This interest has continued to grow. In 2010, the journal *Sport in History* published a special issue examining the history of coaching in several different sports.² Two years earlier, the British historian Dave Day published his thesis *From Barclay to Brickett*, in which he studied coaching practice and coaching lives in athletics and swimming in nineteenth and early twentieth century England.³ In the book that is the focus of this this review, *A History of Sports Coaching in Britain: Overcoming Amateurism*, Dave Day returns to the history of coaching in swimming and athletics, but this time, together with Tegan Carpenter and similar to Phillips, continues the development to the beginning of the twenty-first century. Here, the focus here is not only on England, but also on Britain.

Using swimming and athletics as examples, Day and Carpenter study the shift from an amateur approach to coaching, training, government involvement and centralized funding towards a systematic programme of competitive preparation. The aim is to offer an understanding of how National Governing Bodies (NGBs), such as the Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) and the Amateur Athletic Association (AAA) reacted to the changes in the social and sporting contexts of the twentieth century. The book has a comparative approach and the authors have chosen the Olympic Games as the point of reference for assessing British coaching standards in relation to the rest of the world. *A History of Sports Coaching in Britain* is divided into two sections. In the first (chapters

¹ See Potrac, P., Gilbert, W., & Denison, J. (Eds.). (2013). *Routledge Handbook of Sports Coaching*. Routledge.

² With Neil Carter as an editor, this issue - *Coaching cultures* - was released in 2014 as an anthology by Routledge.

³ Departing from his thesis, in 2012 Day wrote *Professionals, Amateurs and Performance: Sports Coaching in England, 1789-1914*.

1–5), Day and Carpenter take a chronological approach and describe the development of the coaching role from its roots in the eighteenth century up to the 1960s. In the second section (chapters 6-8), the authors deal with developments during the second half of the twentieth century in three different themes: Cold War influences, coaching sciences and medicine and structural changes and British coaching. The narrative in the first section builds on archival material, but in the later periods oral sources are also used.

The authors show that the status of the coach has increased over time. In the decades following the launch of the modern Olympic Games in 1896, America was at the forefront of employing professional coaches and using systematic training. As they started to dominate international sports, many European countries followed in their tracks. However, in Britain the amateurism that had become strong during the nineteenth century still influenced decisions as to whether to employ a coach or not, which “remained firmly within the control of their amateur masters” (p. 51), i.e. the amateur administrators of ASA and AAA. This resulted in Britain lagging behind in international competitions. After the Second World War, the Soviet Union became something of a role model, with a “sophisticated and comprehensive sports system” (p. 128) funded by the government and its close relationships to scientific research and expert coaches. Again, Britain was slow to react. Using AAA and the coach Geoff Dyson as examples, Day and Carpenters stress that the administrators of the NGBs were jealous of the influence and the authority that scientific knowledge bestowed on coaches. When Olympic success also became important for political reasons, the British Government started to take a more active role in sport and sports coaching. For example, in the 1980s the National Coaching Foundation (NCF) was formed with the task of producing education material and organizing courses in order to establish a national coaching standard. Later, academic institutions picked up the baton and the NCF was transformed into two councils, now UK Sport and Sport England, which worked more at a strategic level. Day and Carpenter argue that the structures that now surround British sport “mark a significant change in the sporting landscape of the nation and have had a major impact on the role and status of elite coaches” (p. 186).

A History of Sports Coaching in Britain is a valuable contribution to the growing research field of the history of sports coaching. With its comparative approach, the book not only gives an insight into the development of coaching in Britain, but also in other parts of the world. Due to the fact that former research has first and foremost been

occupied with the establishment of the coach position during the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, I appreciate the longer time span covered by Day and Carpenter. Not only does the book makes what has changed over time visible, it also highlights the continuity. One of these continuities is British sport struggling overcoming amateurism, because even though the British Government and NGBs now are investing in coaches and coach education programmes, Day and Carpenter conclude that “British professional coaches still have some way to go before their social status matches that of their counterparts around the globe” (p. 186).

Keywords: coaching, history, Britain