BOOK REVIEWS

A. Hardman and C. Jones (eds.), The Ethics of Sports Coaching.
London: Routledge, 2011, pp. 215. (pbk)
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For those seeking resources on sports coaching, there is no shortage of available possibilities. One may find topics distinguished by sport (coaching swimming, coaching basketball), by level (coaching youth athletes, coaching intercollegiate athletes), by approach (psychological, physiological), and by strategy (offensive, defensive). The literature on sports coaching is seemingly limitless yet the vast majority focus on what could be called the technical side of coaching. Convention would have us believe that effective coaching involves following a certain script or recipe. One need only attend the right coaching workshop, read the right book, or follow in the footsteps of the right mentor coach, to become a successful coach. Books on coaching often follow an approach similar to Rainer Marten’s work, Successful Coaching (2004). This extremely popular work targeted for high school and club sport levels includes sections on coaching philosophy, motivation, pedagogy, physiology, and management. While the book touches on ethical issues, sports ethics certainly is not the overall focus. Furthermore, the fascination with this technical side of coaching has unwittingly prevented the consideration of coaching in normative terms.

It is this gap in the literature editors Alun Hardman and Carwyn Jones aim to address. The Ethics of Sports Coaching, another insightful work in the Ethics and Sport series published by Routledge, examines ethical issues directly related to the nature of coaching. The authors do not discount that coaching involves technical expertise and planning but that the nature of coaching, which involves the complexity of human relationships, entails significantly more. In this sense the guiding framework for this book is that ‘coaching is fundamentally a moral practice’ (2011, 2). The series of original essays from a variety of scholars focus on normative concerns surrounding sports coaching, from foundational issues such as what it means to be a ‘good coach’ to ethical matters related to youth sports, dangerous sports, and Paralympic sports. The editors target both academics and practitioners although the work is more likely to serve as either a valuable reference tool for researchers or a text for
undergraduate or graduate coursework related to sport studies or sport philosophy. The editors are also conscious of coaching education programs and, to this extent, hope the volume impacts the way these programs are designed and implemented at all levels of instruction.

Hardman and Jones write that their work accomplishes two tasks: ‘First, it articulates an alternative conception of coaching as a moral enterprise. Second, it exemplifies how ethical reflection might proceed in a variety of morally-laden contexts’ (2011, 4–5). In many respects the authors point towards ways of thinking that challenge convention with regards to coaching. The general public, for example, may rarely think of coaching in moral terms (sideline histrionics and chair-throwing notwithstanding). Conversely, some individuals may view coaches as inherently selfish and at odds with any ethical framework. Others may believe that while pursuing ethical norms may be ideal, coaching involves real-world pressures and contexts that supersede ‘doing the right thing’. After all, elite coaches are more likely to be concerned with winning and notoriety than displaying compassion or humility. In sum, addressing the topic of ethics in sports coaching is a daunting proposition albeit one critical for our broader profession of sports philosophy.

The book is organized in a very straight-forward manner, beginning with conceptual issues related to coaching and then progressing towards topics focused on specific coaching contexts. The work is divided into four sections preceded by an introduction which explains the book purpose and overall structure. The first section examines the nature of coaching itself, addressing normative aims in coaching as well as the role virtues play with regards to coaching conduct. In the second section, the authors focus on issues of character and behavior such as practical wisdom and coaching identity, decision-making in the context of objectivity and subjectivity, and the applicability of virtue ethics for the coaching practice. The third section moves to examining specific coaching contexts, most notably various type of athletes – this includes addressing issues related to coaching at the youth sport level, males coaching females, and coaching Paralympic sport. Finally, the fourth section takes a look at coaching in regards to broader issues that impact the coaching practice – these include performance enhancement, coaching dangerous sports, and expatriate coaching.

All of the essays demonstrate a familiarity with the broader philosophical landscape related to sports and coaching ethics. Mike McNamee situates his essay within a neo-Aristotelian framework of virtue-based ethical theory. Paul Davis examines sports coaching in the context of Nagel’s notions of objectivity and subjectivity. Essays throughout the book demonstrate conceptually clear, well-reasoned arguments and point towards the ongoing discussion in the sport philosophy and mainstream philosophy literature. One of the clear strengths of this book is that the authors not only demonstrate philosophical expertise but athletic and coaching experience and prowess too. The short list
of such experiences and levels of proficiency include a Paralympic champion (Anne-Mette Bredahl), elite-level rugby participant (Steve Olivier), and elite level coach (Sigmund Loland).

In terms of the overall organization and flow, chapters in general tend to build on each other and are, for the most part, related. For example, in his chapter on the *The Normative Aims of Coaching*, Loland refers to the Aristotelian conception of *phronesis* or practical wisdom. At this point the editors cross-reference the chapter written by Oyvind Standal and Liv Hemmestad titled *Becoming a Good Coach: Coaching and Phronesis*. Similarly, in her chapter, *Coaching Ethics and Paralympic Sports*, Bredahl notes the importance of coach education ‘as mentioned elsewhere in this book’. The essays, while often in agreement, also prompt reflection and, at times, differing points of view. In his essay *Males Coaching Female Athletes*, Michael Burke posits that behavioral codes implemented by sports organizations can help prevent potential ethical problems. Conversely, McNamee cautions that codes of conduct or other approaches relying on rules or principles ‘are not exhaustive of the basic facts of moral life, a picture of which is incomplete without reference to the virtues’ (2011, 33). On this point the editors would contend that this represents the diversity of ideas surrounding coaching ethics and encourages additional dialogue in the area. As a final note in regards to organization, an editorial postlude would provide a fitting summary and perhaps encouragement towards applying these ethical concepts to sports coaching and the continuing dialogue surrounding such issues.

One of the challenges of presenting a collection of works is maintaining a tight sense of focus on the topic at hand – in this case ethical issues related to coaching. While virtually all of the essays maintain this focus, some follow more closely than others. For example, the chapter on *Rethinking Luck and Justice*, while insightful in its own right, is somewhat tangential to the issues of ethics and sports coaching. In their conclusion, Richard Bailey and Martin Toms the authors offer implications for coaches – to recognize and even challenge ‘the structural unfairnesses within talent development systems’ (2011, 161) – but the issues are not as central as some of the other essays.

In a number of ways the essays represent starting points for continued discussions related to ethical issues of sports coaching. For example, Bredahl, writing from a perspective of clinical psychology as well as a Paralympic cross-country skiing and biathlon, examines coaching ethics as it relates to Paralympic sports. She notes the need for coaches to ‘treat athletes with respect’ and ‘the particular difficulties associated with the athlete’s impairment and their individualized experience of it’ (2011, 141). To some degree all athletes have areas of impairment – some physical, some emotional, some intellectual, some social. As Hardman and Jones rightly contend, the nature of coaching involves the very messy task of dealing with humans. Future works might focus on the
extent of this messiness and how coaches might work to relate with and suc-
cessfully coach athletes with a variety of “impairments” in this sense. Other
possible topics that could serve as fodder would be how to handle issues with
parents, and sport specialization at an early age. In addition, in that The Ethics
of Sports Coaching examines coaching from a largely Westernized point of
view, future projects could examine ethical issues surrounding sports coaching
from an Eastern viewpoint.

To summarize, The Ethics of Sports Coaching makes an outstanding contri-
bution to the sport philosophy literature. The work addresses an important
aspect of sport ethics in an insightful and well-reasoned manner. The authors
approach the topic from an academic perspective yet with clear experiential
understanding of the complexity of sports coaching and human relationships.
The book will no doubt encourage continued discussion around this significant
topic.

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Jim Parry, Mark Nesti and Nick Watson (eds.), Theology, Ethics and
Transcendence in Sport.
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This work of collected essays is the fourth publication in a series called
Routledge research in sport, culture and society. The 11 articles in Theology,
Ethics and Transcendence in Sport are organized into three parts that examine
theological ethics in sport, psychological and spiritual dimensions of sport, and
transcendence in movement, play and sport. Each part contains a useful intro-
duction that orients and explains to the reader how the preceding themes are
related to the articles. All the essays were first presented as papers at the Inau-
gural International Conference on Sport and Spirituality hosted by the Centre
for the Study of Sport and Spirituality, York St. John University, UK in August
of 2007. More can be read about the significance of this conference and the
general theme of religion, spirituality and sport in the informative Introduction
written by Nick Watson that includes an extensive bibliography. The Foreword
by Professor Robert J. Higgs does more than provide an endorsement of Theol-
ogy, Ethics and Transcendence in Sports; he also sets the tone and expectations
for the reader who will no doubt find the articles stimulating and thought-pro-
voking.