

Making a Strength and Conditioning Coach Indispensable to the Athletic Program

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SUMMARY

IN ANY HIGH SCHOOL, THERE IS A VITAL PLACE FOR A CERTIFIED STRENGTH AND CONDITIONING SPECIALIST (CSCS) IN ALL ATHLETIC PROGRAMS. THE CSCS WILL HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO IMPACT UPON ATHLETIC PERFORMANCE IN A WHOLE HOST OF WAYS AND IN A VARIETY OF DOMAINS. HOWEVER, IN MANY CASES THE COACH IS UNDER-USED AND THE ROLE LIMITED MERELY TO THE WEIGHT ROOM. BY EXPANDING HIS OR HER SPHERE OF INFLUENCE, A CSCS CAN BECOME AN INTEGRAL AND INDISPENSABLE PART OF AN ATHLETIC PROGRAM.

A key aim of the National Strength and Conditioning Association High School Special Interest Group is to enhance the standing of the certified strength and conditioning coach (CSCS) within all high

schools and to eventually achieve a point at which all high schools have a CSCS within their coaching ranks. A vital role for strength and conditioning coaches within this process is to convince all coaches and athletic directors (ADs) that a CSCS is a central and indispensable part of any athletic program.

A look at the contents of the *Essentials of Strength Training and Conditioning* text (1) clearly demonstrates the wide-ranging knowledge required to become a CSCS and the wide-ranging influence that a high-quality CSCS can have on the whole athletic program. These areas could include, but are not limited to:

- Planning nutritional strategies and developing systems before games, during games, and after games, whereby athletes have access to appropriately timed nutritional interventions.
- Designing and implementing a comprehensive testing program. This could include tests that address all of the key fitness variables for sports but could also include screening for muscle balance, range of motion, quality of movement patterns, indices of stability, and posture.
- Organizing travel schedules to allow for optimal recovery, nutrition, etc.
- Monitoring and controlling overall training loads and implementing recovery strategies.
- Applying skill-acquisition theories to training programs and session

designs for all coaches in addition to working with coaches on how best to structure training sessions, etc, to maximize the skill development of players.

- Assisting in the design of a long-term athlete development model within the high school program.
- Introducing novel training practices into the athletic programs, such as vision training.

Although some of the aforementioned areas may not require a radical change in thinking among coaches and administrators, others may require a complete paradigm shift. However, by applying basic strategies of expanding the sphere of influence, a massive change is possible.

A key to this expansion is searching for a win/win relationship for both the school and the CSCS. Win/win can be defined as a frame of mind and heart that constantly seeks mutual benefit in all human interactions (2) and, therefore, a first step must be to understand the needs and requirements of the coaches and the AD. By carefully listening and responding to their needs, the CSCS will be able to build up empathy, which is fundamental in building the key personal relationships that will facilitate the change (3). In all likelihood, the key aim of the sports coach will be to produce winning teams and, clearly, the CSCS can positively affect this area. In developing this program, it is

important that a patient step by step approach be used. It is highly unlikely that all potential developments will be addressed in the short term. However, by gradually introducing developments, the CSCS can have an increasingly greater effect on the entire athletic program and possibly get to a position where his or her opinions and knowledge are used to guide the program.

Initially, a key to achieving this position is to develop a reputation for excellence within the current sphere of influence. A high-quality strength and conditioning program will develop better athletes, which will directly enhance the likelihood of achieving the main aim of most coaches, i.e., winning. Student athletes who are enthused by the program, who speak highly of it, and who achieve results will greatly enhance the standing of the CSCS within the whole program. This will assist in developing a situation where the opinions of the strength coach are respected, appreciated, and valued. At the same time, it is important that the coach avoids falling prey to actions that can reduce their reputation and thus their sphere of influence, such as complaining, criticizing, etc.

Once respect has been developed, it is important that the CSCS is proactive in actively expanding his or her sphere of influence. This action can be facilitated by identifying areas in which he or she can enhance the entire athletic problem but at the same time be aware that these may increasingly lie on the edge of the current sphere of influence, such as advising on pre-game meals, etc. These suggestions can then be taken to the AD or coach, but it is important that they incorporate recommended solutions rather than reporting problems.



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In carrying out these actions, it is important that the CSCS is able to address the key questions of what to do, when to do it, and how to do it (3). By addressing these with vision, passion, discipline, and conscience (3), the strength coach will increasingly be seen as a team player, addressing the same goals as the AD and coach. As trust increases, the CSCS will be involved more in the planning and decision making for the betterment of the program. ■

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