

What Does Great Coaching Look Like?

"The secret to great coaching is to love the sport you coach and have the enthusiasm to help and develop all that are interested in this amazing sport of gymnastics."

Andrea Paice, Bromsgrove Gymnastics Club

Andrea has been coaching Gymnastics since the age of 14. She has been Head Coach at Bromsgrove Gymnastics Club since its foundation in September 2009. She was Community Coach of the Year in Bromsgrove in 2010 and nominated for the national British Gymnastics Awards for Commitment to Gymnastics in 2011. The club started in 2009 with 15 members. It now has approximately 250, and a satellite club recently started to meet demand arising after the Olympics is also full. In the period October 2011-June 2012, the club retained an impressive 98% of its members. **Here she explains her approach to great coaching to share practical tips with peers.**



Andrea's Top Tips for Other Experienced Coaches

Delivering a Great Coaching Session

•The Floating Coach

- One coach with a role and responsibility to 'float' across groups to improve observation quality

•Recovery Time

- One break every hour (10 mins)
- One longer half hour break in the middle of the (5 hour) session

•Spice

- Variety is essential - as well as technical routines. Mix it up with 'games' and other sport exercises

•Peer Power

- Young athletes are asked to watch and evaluate peers and comment on each other's performance

Practical Examples: Coaching a large group (50 people ages 6-16 for 5 hours)

- Andrea deploys a team of 5 coaches to coach different groups. In addition she deploys a 'floating coach' to add oversight and cross-group observation (plus if the unexpected happens you have a ready-made solution to help deal with it)
- Participants warm up together before splitting into groups, but come back together at regular intervals (3 times) throughout the session. Opportunities to rest provide valuable recovery time and contribute to giving overall structure to the session
- Andrea uses her fellow coaches effectively e.g. giving an assistant coach the opportunity to develop and lead a floor routine for gymnasts to work on and perform together. This opportunity to perform in front of peers is an opportunity relished by participants
- Games are an essential part of bringing a wide mixed age group together – a 'parachute game' at the end of the session has been found to be particularly fun and effective. A parachute game involves every member of the club sitting around a parachute. Certain attributes are selected e.g. "Birthday in September" and then the group lifts the parachute. Everyone who meets the selected criterion has to run across the parachute and find a new spot to sit before the parachute falls. Using exercises from outside the sport (of gymnastics) altogether also add 'spice' to the sessions
- Andrea uses variety to keep sessions fresh, interesting, and fun. Participants try different types of equipment in sessions and also try other disciplines including dance and rhythmic gymnastics. Andrea has even had gymnasts participating in a bleep test in sessions before

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Helping The Athlete Find the Right Pathway

•Goal Setting

- Coaches guide younger participants through this process using the British Gymnastics Proficiency Awards using groups tailored to different ability levels.

•Confidence Building

- Rolling out all equipment even in a squad session pre-competition (inc. small beams and vault) to relax the athlete despite competition pressures and fears

•Emphasis

- Help (young & old) athletes explore leadership and volunteering (not just elite) pathways to sustain their interest in the sport for longer

Practical Examples: Focus on Goal Setting and Review

- Participants sit down with Andrea in September when they start to discuss what they would like to achieve e.g. handstands, backflips or walkovers. She explains the progression they will need to follow to achieve that. Setting out on that progression, there is a programme of regular reviews of how far they have come and adding or amending goals approximately every 3 months, culminating in an in-house competition in June (9 months after starting) using the moves that the participant wanted to learn in their original meeting
- With younger participants, a similar process of asking them what they want to achieve and regular reviewing those goals is carried out. In addition, they are given a few weeks' taster at the start of the process to identify what aspects of gymnastics they enjoy most and want to progress. They then look at those activities in their group sessions. Andrea also mentions the award scheme and gives the participant the opportunity to say which 'badges' they are keen to achieve and again tells them what the route is to that success



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Great Relationships

Andrea says: "An excellent session is busy...participants can talk to each other, laugh with each other, talk to the coaches...but know where that line is that they can't cross."

•Right Atmosphere

- Creating a family atmosphere where young athletes support each other 'habitually' during coaching sessions

•Social Opportunity

- Athlete 'boundaries' are broken down for example by having groups of all ages take breaks together

•Sense of Team

- Uniforms help create a sense of common purpose and belonging as well as discipline
- Knowing names and using them makes a big difference to the relationship

Practical Examples: The 'Coach-Athlete' & 'Athlete-Athlete' Relationship

- When one child suffered a minor accident, over the course of the session at least six other young people came over to check she was in good spirits and, in the case of one older girl, share some of her own 'war stories' and experience of bad landings
- The leadership of this family atmosphere comes from Andrea; as one parent comments, "She knows the name of every child at every session," providing a sense of belonging and care
- Rotation across different pieces of equipment also allows participants to socialise and spend time with friends while waiting for their 'turn' – again encouraging positive athlete-athlete relationships and making valuable use of down-time
- Increasingly throughout the session, young people are asked to watch, evaluate and comment on the performance of their peers as part of their own development
- Customised feedback after every routine is provided to the individual participant one-on-one which they find very motivating
- Andrea insists asks all her gymnasts to wear their club uniforms to all sessions; they also have their names printed on so that the coach can always refer to someone directly and personally (it sounds an obvious tip but with large groups it can sometimes be difficult to remember every participant's name so this helps massively create a culture of respect between coach and athlete)

Kathryn Bonner of British Gymnastics observes,

"You don't want gymnasts sitting around doing nothing for too long – but a bit of sitting is to be expected and in fact needed...without losing the focus of the session Andrea lets the social aspects happen."

