

Developing Coaches – Success Story

Club: Midlands Gymnastics Academy

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Midlands Gymnastics Academy (MGA) opened in March 2016 with three qualified coaches and two young volunteers kick starting its gymnastics offering. The academy, based in Nuneaton, is a 6000 sq ft unit with a full floor area, three beams, two sets of bars and U pit, plus a fast track and vault into pits. Since its opening the academy has grown and now has seven Level 2 and above coaches, 11 Level 1's and many other junior coaches' part of its Leadership Academy. The club offers a range of classes from general gymnastics to parent and child preschool classes along with tumbling, progressive and advanced group sessions. MGA is also developing its own women's artistic squad.



What do you believe makes a great coach?

“We believe a great coach has to have many qualities and these qualities depend on the classes they are teaching. We would expect a preschool coach to have different qualities to an advanced coach and the best coaches are able to swap their coaching styles depending on the classes and children they teach. A great coach can build a rapport with the gymnasts and provide a safe but fun environment for the gymnasts to enjoy. They encourage the children to be the best they can be and offer support where needed. They understand that a child's behaviour or progress can be influenced by lots of outside factors such as school or home life and that each child should be treated as an individual. A great coach will always look at ways to learn from others, gain new ideas and strive to be the best they can.”

Why do you mentor and develop your coaches?

“When we first opened the academy three years ago, we advertised externally for coaches and had very little success. There was a lack of response from advertising and we had found that external applicants didn't always share the same standards and values as our existing coaches. We also found that this was something that was difficult to teach. We decided the best thing would be to grow our own. We made it our mission to invest in coach development with new unqualified coaches, some of which were gymnasts. We found the older gymnasts that had trained with us for a year or so understood our ethos and had seen the modelled behaviours from our existing coaches, making it very easy to support their coach development and offer them in-house training.

How do you mentor and develop your coaches?

“We have an in-house Coach Development Programme which is still fairly new. We offered applications to our 14-17 year-old gymnasts that showed an interest in coaching and would be committed to 3-5 hours a week for a minimum of 12 months. Successful applicants then had to go through an interview process with two senior coaches and we felt this was good experience for them and this is something they can benefit from in the future outside of the gym. All coaches in our in-house Coach Development Programme have a skills learning matrix that they work through in their own time. This includes shadowing different coaches in all of the different classes, learning how to test the fire alarms, do equipment safety checks, learn about the club structure including classes prices and times etc. as well as having some paid coaching experience in the general gymnastics classes. At the end of the 12 months, we assess their ability to attend a Level 1 course and talk through the options and routes within the sport. We also use the British Gymnastics Leadership Academy as a form of mentoring. All of the Leadership Academy volunteer one hour a week to shadow a qualified coach. “We feel it’s important they are not just left to stand and watch the qualified coach, but they are given help and advice and set small tasks of their own, so they start to develop in confidence. Many of our newly qualified Level 1 coaches started in the Leadership Academy.”

What are the barriers to developing coaches?

“Time has to be the biggest issue when trying to develop the younger coaches. General gymnastics classes are very fast paced, and it is not always that easy to try and train another coach as well as taking your own group. This is something we have had to work at and initially we did it separately and invited them all in on a training afternoon when there were no classes running. Overall, we feel the younger coaches learned better from actually being in the class environment, but we do still offer occasional separate training days.”

What would you do differently in the future?

“For the time being, we do not feel we will change our programme. It is still fairly new to us and has worked well so far. However, as a club, we are always open to new ideas and suggestions and we feel it is important to reflect on your own practice. The senior coaches regularly chat about ways to improve many aspects of the club so we will continue to reflect, improve and make changes in the future if we need to.”

How much money do you spend on developing your coaches?

“We have committed to investing financially in coach development as we only had three qualified coaches when we first opened. Over the three years we have spent approximately £3500 on Level 1 courses and £1500 on Level 2 courses. We have also invested in several Level 3 add on modules and a High Performing Coach course - so around £7000 in total. This was mainly due to us being a new club and having to build up our coaching structure.

“Our in-house Coach Development Programme doesn’t cost us a great amount to run has given the younger coaches a better idea of how the whole gym is run. Hopefully it has given them life skills they can take outside of gymnastics too.”