

Who Wants to Be a Strength Coach?

Todd Hamer

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Everyday athletes come into the weight room to train. Some train with me, some with one of the other coaches here, and still others (now in professional ranks) have their own workouts. The athletes with their own workouts amaze me. Many times they have workouts designed by “top-level strength coaches.” These are the strength coaches making six figures. I watch some of these workouts and wonder, what are they doing? I have seen professional athletes who use our facility doing piss poor squats, piss poor cleans, LEG PRESS, and many other unsafe or mediocre exercises. So how did these athletes develop such poor lifting techniques?

I blame the coaches. I interviewed at a school with, what I would consider, one of the top athletic programs in the country. During the interview I had to meet with some of the coaches of the female teams. I have always prided myself on being able to relate to every athlete, male or female, but one particular coach told me that her female athletes would never want to learn about strength and conditioning. I don't believe this and, if it is true, then whose fault is this? The coaches! I read a good comment today on Charlie Francis's forum. The general gist of the comment was that a coach must be able to justify what they are having their athletes do. This sounds like common sense but how many times has a coach done something because “that's the way it's done.” This is one of the reasons this coach's athletes were not asking questions or showing interest in strength and conditioning. Either the coach didn't have any answers for them or she had such an ego that she would not allow anyone to ask questions. Always have a reason for what you are doing. If you are honest with your athletes and are able to justify what you are doing, you will only make your athletes work harder for you. If you do not know the answers, then find them.

What kind of coach are you?

I try to steal ideas from the many good coaches that I have met, and I try to incorporate what is working for others into the workouts I write for my teams. Does this make me a good strength coach? NO! Buddy Morris said that there is no such thing as a great strength coach. What I believe Buddy meant by this is that we are only as good as our athletes. If my athletes do not work hard for me, then I am not a good strength coach. I could write the best strength programs and be up-to-date on the latest research but, without the hard work of my athletes, I am a worthless strength coach. If you are training a team, find a way to make that team work for you. I truly believe that 80% of being a good strength coach is making the athletes believe in your program. Coach each group differently. The easiest team to coach is football. Football players inherently want to lift. Try to take your field hockey team and treat them like a football team. This will challenge your coaching abilities.

Lately I have been reading articles by Joe DeFranco and trying to learn from him. Joe trains many football players. However, something I appreciate about him is that he also

10/26/2004
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works with some female athletes and athletes from different sports. This is important because you should train athletes from all different sports.

Tim Beltz (University of Pittsburgh) once mentioned that a stubborn athlete was challenging him to be a better coach. I know that I am not as positive as Tim. When I have an athlete who doesn't work hard, many times I get frustrated. However, if I get too frustrated and give up on these athletes, who did that help? Find a way to reach these athletes. Take your least motivated athlete and make them your most motivated. Train with them, educate your athletes, and treat them like adults. Do whatever you have to in order to make them better. This will also make you a better coach.

“What is your job here?”

I once had a boss ask me this question. It must have been a rhetorical question because he answered it for me. His answer was “to make me happy.” My rebuttal was, “I thought I was hired to make my athletes more prepared to take the field and also for life after the field.” Always remember as a coach you work for the athletes you are training. Never forget this. Your job is to make them better as athletes and people. If you are training athletes it should be a lifestyle, not just a job. Athletes can see through lies, so if you don't want to be a strength coach or are only one because it seems like fun, you should probably quit. There are plenty of good strength coaches out there looking for a job.

I heard a great quote today (I think at www.elitefts.com) “Some people get things done, others get things done to them.” If you are a coach at a school with no budget, 600 athletes, and no assistants, then be innovative. Get things done! Utilize what you have. Make friends with your coaches and have them work for/with you. If this means building your own lifting platforms for your weight-room, then just do it. These are some of the sacrifices I think every good strength coach should make.

I have learned many lessons in the last six years of my life. Many of these lessons were learned the hard way and a few were taught to me through mentors. As I continue to learn, I realize that anyone who has “all” the answers really doesn't! There are many strength coaches I look up to. Whenever I am having a bad day or my teams aren't doing well, I just think of some of the coaches and lifters I know who *are* getting it done that day. All I want to do is keep up with them. As long as I do that I know I will continue to make my athletes better and make myself stronger—the only other important thing to a strength coach).

Todd Hamer is currently Assistant Strength and Conditioning Coach at George Mason University. Hamer was previously the Head Strength and Conditioning Coach at Marist College in Poughkeepsie NY. Hamer has also had stints at Virginia Commonwealth University as well as the University of Pittsburgh. Hamer is a current competitive power lifter competing in the IPA.