

## THE JOB SECURITY OF COACHES

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### ABSTRACT

*The proliferation of international sport competitions has drawn considerable attention to coaching. However, it appears that when a team loses, the first solution seems to be to fire the coach. This study thus aims to investigate the job security of professional coaches in South Africa. It attempts to identify the problems experienced by coaches, the solutions they propose and to make managers of sport and future coaches aware of the stability or instability, security or insecurity involved in coaching. Postal questionnaires and telephonic interviews were used to gather data from 25 professional coaches from five major sport codes. Frequencies, percentages and averages were computed. The majority of coaches felt insecure about their jobs. The most common reason for their dismissal was dissatisfaction experienced by players and management with the inability of coaches to make their team win.*

**Key words:** Coaching; Job security; Stability; Dismissal.

### INTRODUCTION

Professional coaching today is an exciting, highly valued and lucrative occupation, but only for those who are dedicated and enjoy it. Professional coaches have the most prestige, whatever their sport. They also have the least job security. For a head coach, losing games can mean losing a job (Mariani, 1995). Weingarten (1980) strongly regards sport coaching not only as a dignified profession, but a most complicated and demanding one. It is a profession in which science and art are moulded together to produce a specialist of high quality. According to Ritzers (1977) in Massengale (1985), coaching has special status, power and prestige. It enjoys the mystique of a profession with special rights, privileges and obligations. It has public acceptance and displays a distinctive occupational culture. Coaching also embodies authority, a norm of altruism, a body of knowledge, technical skills and a norm of professional autonomy (Weingarten, 1980; Massengale, 1985; Gummerson, 1992).

One of the first concerns that anyone has upon entering a new profession is job security, or tenure of employment. But it would appear that flexibility and mobility have become bywords for workers in the 1990's. Ever since the big corporate layoffs, downsizing and rightsizing began in the last decade, it has been said that job security is a thing of the past. The perception is that all workers have to get used to changing jobs more frequently (Booth, 1999; Landry, 1999). Kenny (in Leonard, 2000:29-30) maintains that "Even in a thriving economy, mergers and acquisitions, changes in business directions and staff realignments cause organizations to lay off employees. But few workers expect it to happen to them." According to Nigro (1997), enhancing job security is fundamental to career management and it connotes adding character to the resume by broadening areas of specialization.

Beach (1970) in Paterson (1990) identified four categories of job dissatisfaction, namely: nature of the work; job insecurity; interpersonal relations; upward mobility and status. While these four factors account for the major reasons for job dissatisfaction in general human resource management, they could also apply to the sport industry, particularly since professionals such as coaches are paid employees. Job security is closely related to the opportunity for upward mobility and status and thus is a significant determinant of job satisfaction. Herzberg's theory of job satisfaction also explains that "motivators" such as "recognition" and "advancement" are essential for job satisfaction (Paterson, 1990).

Pospasil (1998) maintains that retaining talent is a major issue for companies today, but contrary to popular opinion, increased workloads and decreased job security are less important to employees than opportunities for skill development, management competence, and rewards. Schmidt (1999) also expressed concern over job security and states that in recent years in the United States, workers are more anxious about losing their jobs than they have been in the past.

In discussing reasons why people leave a job, De Marco and Lister (1987) identified the following as the main reasons that account for most departures for organizations with pathologically high turnover (over 50%): a just-passing-through mentality; a feeling of disposability; and a sense that loyalty would be ludicrous. The insidious effect here is that turnover engenders turnover. People leave quickly, so there is no use spending money on training. Since the organization has invested nothing in the individual, the individual thinks nothing of moving on (De Marco & Lister, 1987).

The fore-mentioned principles of job security are particularly relevant to the sport industry in South Africa. South Africa is a fairly young democracy, and as it has become part of the global sport economy it needs to become internationally competitive. The recognition and acceptance of the importance of sport coaching in the past was largely based on the notion of developing healthy participants. Today, the emphasis is on the economic benefits that success in major international events generate. However, without the provision of competent coaches, any athlete's potential will never be fulfilled (Gummerson, 1992).

Unlike Australia, Britain, America, and some of the 'eastern bloc' countries where their economies are strong and large sums of money are spent on sport, South Africa does not have the financial resources to lavish on sport alone. There are several other priorities. Hence, it would be vital to ensure that whatever funds are spent on sport, on coaches and coaching programmes in particular, are spent judiciously. This would mean that coaches should feel secure and satisfied in their profession or it would lead to vast losses in terms of finances and expertise.

Security in coaching lies in three broad areas. Firstly, coaches must rely mostly on their own ability, regardless of the number of assistants on the staff. Secondly, the head coach must have complete faith in the players on the team, faith that the athletes will perform in the excitement of competition the way they have been taught in practice. Thirdly, the coach must have faith in the assistant coaches, in that they are dedicated enough and possess sufficient knowledge to do an outstanding job of teaching skills and attitudes necessary for excellence in an athlete (Gummerson, 1992).

Every coach should be aware that coaching is a volatile profession involving many pressures. It places demands on a coach's time, energy, family life and physical well being. Many coaches do not last long in their jobs (Templin & Washburn, 1980). Further, coaching is a perilous occupation. In the 1998 soccer World Cup finals in France, Saudi Arabia, after a 0-1 loss to Denmark and a 0-4 loss to France, dismissed Brazilian coach Carlos Alberto Parreira, the man who assisted Mario Zagallo in Brazil's triumph at the 1994 World Cup finals in the United States. The Saudi Arabian federation officials argued that Parreira failed to build on the achievements attained by the team at the 1994 finals. Parreira earned a monthly salary of R1.4 million and had signed a one-year contract at the end of the Confederation Cup in Riyadh the previous December. However, his employers perceived Saudi Arabia's two defeats as failure and they dismissed the Brazilian (*Natal Mercury*, 11 July 1998).

Tunisia's Henry Kasperazak was also not fortunate. When the 1996 Africa Cup of Nations runners-up were defeated 0-2 by England, followed by a 0-1 loss to Columbia, he was also dismissed. Parreira stated that building a winning team takes time and hard work. Being the coach of a national team is one of the most arduous undertakings in sport. Even though a coach may help his team win the World Cup, fans and the media will still complain that the type of soccer was not artistic, imaginative, or attacking enough. Excessively high expectations can have painful and unpleasant effects on a coach (*Sunday Times*, 18 October 1998).

A similar trend appears to have infiltrated South African sport, as witnessed by a high turnover of coaches recently. Soccer fans and administrators have expressed vociferous concerns about Bafana Bafana's poor performance in international competitions, and wanted coach Trott Moloto fired. It seems that the Natal Sharks rugby coach, Hugh Reece-Edwards was also dismissed after the team suffered six defeats in six home-games, although he had a one year coaching contract. His service to his province for 18 years, 14 of which were as a player and four as assistant coach to Ian McIntosh, and his experience, seemed to matter little (*Sunday Times*, 13 February 2000).

The Springbok rugby team has also seen a high turnover of coaches in the recent past (four coaches over the last 4-year period). After Kitch Christie was relieved of duty due to ill health, Markgraaff was dismissed for racist slurs which he admitted making (*Mail & Guardian*, 3 August 1997). Carel du Plessis was the surprise replacement as the new Springbok coach, ahead of the deputy coach Nick Mallett. Du Plessis had relatively little coaching experience, and was not a provincial level coach, usually one of the criteria for selection (*Mail & Guardian*, 26 February 1997). However, he too was dismissed before his contract expired, apparently because of poor performances of the team. The condemnation of a Springbok coach has never been more universal than in Nick Mallett's case in the recent past, because of a spate of defeats. In fact, a formidably powerful "Mallett must go" movement developed. The South African Rugby Football Union (SARFU), in spite of the assurance that Mallett's position would be secure until the end of his contract in 2001 (*Sunday Times*, 9 July 2000), dismissed him with an out-of-court settlement of R1.25 million over fifteen months (*Sunday Times*, 1 October 2000). In a similar fashion, both du Plessis and Markgraaff were also appointed to take charge of the Springbok team at the 1999 World Cup, but were dismissed prior to it.

Workers' perceptions of job insecurity are said to affect a number of economic variables. Manski & Straub (in Anonymous, 1999) studied the issue in the United States and found that expectations of job loss tend to decline as age increased, but so do expectations that a subsequent job search would be successful. They further found that perceptions of job insecurity tended to decline as educational attainment increased .

Lackey (1977) conducted a study to find out the causes and frequency of coaching dismissals and resignations in Nebraska. He sampled 320 principals of public high schools. Forty five percent indicated that they had been administrators in schools where an athletic coach had been dismissed, and 71% witnessed resignations. A striking finding was that coaching ability was ranked as only the sixth main reason for dismissal. The three most significant reasons provided for resignations were career changes (42%), personal factors (27%) and job pressures (24%).

Research on job security in South Africa is fragmentary and anecdotal. There are no academic papers on job security in sport or in sport coaching. There is a need for relevant information to inform future coaches about what their expected roles are and if there is stability/security in the coaching profession. This is important for their professional self-determination. Information is also needed to assist curriculum developers to design relevant and up-to-date courses that prepare coaches with the requisite skills and knowledge. Since South Africa's re-entry into the international sporting arena, and the sudden interest and growth in sport, there is a dire shortage of qualified coaches in all sports, necessitating the training of coaches who will be required at communities, schools, colleges, technikons, universities, and professional clubs.

## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the job security of professional coaches in South Africa. It attempted to identify the problems experienced by coaches, the solutions they propose and to make managers of sport and future coaches aware of the stability or instability, security or insecurity involved in coaching in general. As this was the first investigation of this type, it was not intended to report on sports individually, notwithstanding the fact that there would be variations in responses from individual sports types. The critical questions to which answers were sought were as follows:

1. Are coaches dismissed frequently because of stress, pressures from administrators, public expectations and media pressure?
2. Should a coach who has been a credit to a team for years be dismissed when s/he has a losing season?
3. Is it fair to dismiss a coach from coaching when that person has been evaluated as an excellent instructor?
4. Should the coach be accountable to individuals with little/no training in the mechanics or the psychology of coaching?

## **METHODS AND PROCEDURES**

The instrument used in the primary data gathering was designed by the researcher as an interview schedule appropriate for use as a mailed questionnaire, for face-to-face interviews, and telephonic interviews. It was designed specifically to provide data about job security and

job satisfaction in sport coaching. The components that were considered were coaching contracts, dismissals, anxiety and stress, media influences, expectations from coaches, availability of assistants, decision making, and accountability. A pilot study was undertaken to check the validity of the questionnaire. Where it was not possible to conduct personal interviews, either because of distance or time constraints, the questionnaire was mailed. A covering letter explained the purpose of the investigation and assured the respondents of confidentiality and anonymity. This was done to remove any scepticism that respondents may have and to encourage them to co-operate. Where the respondents could not be physically available, telephonic interviews were conducted.

For the purposes of this study, a professional coach was regarded as a coach who had an academic and/or professional qualification in coaching, and one who was paid for his services. A stratified random sample of 12.5% was drawn from the approximately 200 professional coaches of all disciplines in South Africa who were listed on the database of the National Department of Sport and Recreation in Pretoria. This gave a valid sample of 25, consisting of males and females. To be representative of all disciplines, the total population was divided into codes and five coaches were randomly selected from each of the following five major sports utilizing professional coaches: soccer, rugby, cricket, hockey and gymnastics. The data was analyzed by computing frequencies, percentages, cumulative frequencies and averages.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

TABLE 1. EXPERIENCE IN PROFESSIONAL COACHING

Number of years	Percentage
0-4	8
5-9	16
10-14	16
15-20	60

The respondents were all South Africans. According to table 1, a total of 60% of the respondents had between 15-20 years of experience in coaching, whilst 16% each had between 10-14 years and 5-9 years of experience respectively. Only 8% had relatively little experience of four years and less. Such high levels of specific experience in coaching would be indicative of a high standard and quality of coaching in South African sport.

A total of 84% of the respondents either had a diploma (32%), degree (40%), or post-graduate qualification (12%), while only 16% had a matriculation. This finding supports the contention of Riordan (1979) in Weingarten (1980) that coaches in the U.S.S.R. were "the most authoritative figures in Soviet Sport". In 1977, 60% of all coaches had at least a 4-year course in higher education, while the rest had a coaching diploma. Without such qualification, he claimed that it was impossible to obtain a coaching position on either a full- or part-time basis. It also confirms the findings of Mariani (1995:4), who states that "professional coaching jobs – the most difficult to get - do not require a bachelor's, but the degree is preferred". In the current study, 80% had attained their current employment through experience. This supports the findings of Mariani (1995:4), who stated that "although education matters in preparing for

a coaching career, experience counts for more". The educational qualifications, considered together with the high levels of experience amongst the coaches augur well for coaching to assume a highly professional image and level of functioning. This finding was further supported by their specialized coaching qualifications. A total of 80% of the respondents had the equivalent of a level 3 (40%) and a level 5 (40%) qualification. A small proportion of 12% had level 2 certification and 8% level 1. These levels had been standardised for all sports by the then National Sports Council's Protea Mmuso coach education programme since 1996.

An overwhelming 80% of the respondents had contractual obligations with their employers, with 20% reporting no such contracts of employment. In theory, this would suggest that professional coaches in South Africa, unlike their international colleagues, do enjoy tenure of employment through contractual obligations with their employers. Further, 80% of the respondents indicated that they were consulted in the drawing up of their contracts. Despite the high level of consultation reported, it should nevertheless be a matter of concern that 20% of the coaches had reportedly not been consulted. South Africa has a very progressive Labour Relations Bill which could have implications should these individuals not be treated fairly in the absence of a contract.

All of the respondents (100%) indicated that they did not belong to any professional coaches association. This was due to the absence of such an organization in the country at the time. This is noteworthy as South Africa has just emerged from four decades of international sports isolation. The absence of such an association could affect the development of professional coaching at the higher levels of performance. It would also suggest that for the advancement of the coaching profession in the country, there is a need for coaches to facilitate the formation of such a body.

With regard to job security, 24% of the sampled coaches felt secure in their jobs, whereas an overwhelming 76% were insecure. Further, 55% expressed anxiety about their jobs. Viewed against the knowledge that 80% had previously reported that they had employment contracts and 84% had appropriate qualifications, this raises serious concerns. A logical explanation for such insecurity and anxiety would be the unrealistic demands of coaching and the emphasis on winning and success. Coaches on the average indicated that "you are only as good as your last win". Hence, despite the fact that the majority of respondents had contracts and appropriate qualifications, feelings of job security were very low. This has to be appreciated by all that have an interest in sport, because by its very nature, the outcome of competitions is very unpredictable. Certainly the criteria for success in coaching has to include more than winning. The results also show that tenure of employment is not the only factor determining job security for professional coaches. This confirms the finding of Pospisil (1998) that opportunities for skill development, management competence, and rewards are more important considerations than increased workloads and decreased job security.

Twenty percent of these coaches were previously dismissed from employment, with some of the following being offered as the main reasons for their dismissal: poor attitude of coach; poor team performance; political reasons; and dissatisfaction of players and administrators with the coach's ability to make the team win. The implication here is that coaches experienced role problems which can generally be solved by an open, consistent approach to interpersonal behaviour. Perhaps a sharper focus is required on the matter of role conflict

arising from the management of coaching support personnel, and on the variety of role interpretations imposed by individuals and groups in top-level sport.

All respondents (100%) reported that the management personnel of sport organizations had very high expectations of the coaches to ensure that their team wins. This confirms that in South Africa the primary criteria for coaching effectiveness is winning. Chelladurai (1986) explains that sport's concern with the pursuit of excellence implies that the **outcome** of winning is the criterion of effectiveness whereas in other occupations the **process** is also included. The unfortunate part of this concept of control through outcome is that the coach is held responsible for a team's failure, but the athletes get most of the credit for victories. For these reasons, the community is not likely to confer on coaching a status or authority comparable to other established professions like medicine or teaching.

TABLE 2. FACTORS THAT AFFECTED COACHES

Factors	Percentage	
	Yes	No
Stress (High: 60%; Medium: 40%)	100	0
Media pressure	64	36
Assistant coach necessary	60	40
Management influence on team selection	100	0
Unfairness of dismissal due to losing a game	100	0

Sixty percent of the respondents indicated that stress levels in coaching were very high, and the remaining 40% felt that it was medium. Sixty four percent of coaches indicated that they felt pressured by the media, and that this affected their coaching performance. This suggests that the media had a profound influence on the levels of stress and anxiety experienced by coaches. This could be attributed to the fact that the media brings them under public scrutiny and thus exerts pressure on them to deliver success. This could be further exacerbated by the fact that 40% of these coaches did not have assistant coaches, who may have reduced the demands placed totally on them by the media, administrators, public and players. This could be borne out by the report of the 60% of the respondents who had an assistant coach and regarded them as a vital source of support.

A total of 100% of the coaches indicated that management influences the selection of teams. This meant that professional coaches do not own the end product of the coaching process. This marginalisation of coaches from the final decision making process renders them powerless, but yet accountable should the team fail to win. All coaches (100%) indicated that they should not be held accountable to individuals with little or no training in the mechanics or psychology of training.

All of the respondents (100%) also indicated that it was unfair for a coach to be dismissed in the event of losing a season. Some of their reasons were as follows: success comes over a period of time and not just a season; although a coach may have a losing season, s/he must have impacted on the skills of the players; the main goal of coaching is to help players to perform effectively and not just to win; and winning is dependent on many factors other than the coach. This situation of unfairness adds to the many instances cited earlier as evidence of

the impact that a spate of losses usually has on coaches in South Africa. Regardless of their contracts, many have been dismissed prematurely. It appears that those who legally challenge their dismissal are offered out-of-court settlements.

## CONCLUSION

It is essential to return to the critical questions that were addressed by this study. The results show that coaches do get dismissed frequently because of stress, pressures from administrators, public expectations and media pressure. Coaching is a very stressful profession. The majority of coaches felt pressured by the media, which exerts anxiety and stress on their lives. Public expectations of a coach to produce winners constantly are extremely high and this also places undue stress on them.

The second critical question ascertained that professional coaches should definitely not be dismissed solely because they have lost a game or had a losing season. Winning is dependent on more variables than the coach alone. If this factor is not taken into consideration it can undermine the stability and security of the profession. A further disturbing finding was that employment contracts do not promise stability or security in coaching. Coaches thus become extremely anxious and insecure about their jobs.

The third conclusion is that it is unfair to dismiss a coach when that person has been evaluated as an excellent instructor by the management and players. The results indicate that the primary criterion for coaching effectiveness has been winning. In the words of Gummerson (1992), the ideal coach is one who can help each individual to achieve his/her potential, no matter what the final level of performance might be.

Finally, all coaches felt strongly that they should be accountable, but not to individuals with little/no training in the mechanics or the psychology of coaching.

It is recommended that all coaches, both amateur and professional, in the interests of their own self-determination and professionalization, should constitute a strong coaches association. This would afford an opportunity to an emerging profession to protect its specialized skills, control entry to the profession and establish codes of ethical behaviour.

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