

Excellence not perfectionism

Some coaches are cursed with a perfectionist outlook which can stand in the way of them achieving their goals



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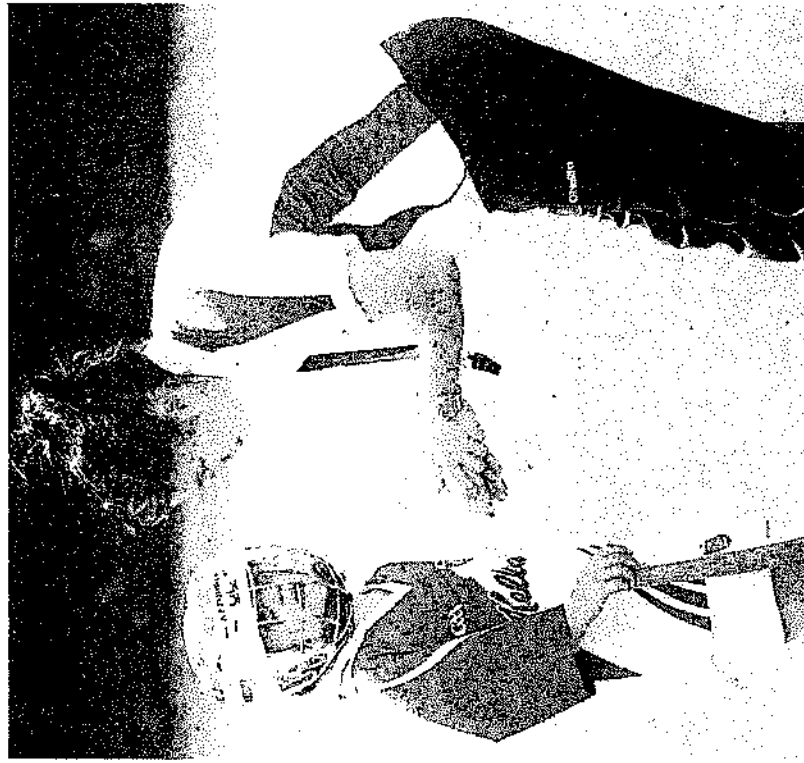
SPORT is about the pursuit of excellence. There's a saying, "There is no such thing as perfection, but when you chase it you catch excellence."

Some coaches go over the top and strive relentlessly for perfection. Perfection can be very debilitating to coaches, players and the coach-player relationship.

When coaches are perfectionists about themselves, they are never satisfied and so get little enjoyment from coaching. When they direct their perfectionism at others, constantly demanding that players and assistants to perform perfectly, they destroy relationships and damage self-esteem.

High standards and pursuit of excellence are positive coaching qualities, but excessive pressure to achieve perfection is corrosive. Perfectionist coaches tend to think:

1. There is only one correct way to do things.
2. My standards are very high. I will not lower them.
3. Don't muddle the issue. It's either right or wrong, black or white.
4. Why is everything not working? Why can't people do it right?
5. I know how they think about



PERFECT PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT... There's perfect and then there's perfectionism
Picture: Ray McManus / SPORTSFILE

- me. I'll show them they're wrong. As a result, perfectionists tend to act as follows:
 1. Have trouble seeing big picture as pay too much attention to detail.
 2. Believe they have more control over events than they do.
3. Often are over-organised, incessantly checking all is in order.
4. They over-practice and are unable to judge when to quit.
5. They over-correct players who in turn see them as over critical.
6. Having a high need to control,

they have difficulty trusting others to complete tasks and so have poor delegating skills and rarely entrust players with responsibilities.

The first step towards developing a healthy striving for excellence is to recognise that perfection is destructive often leading to reluctance to start a project or develop an inability to finish projects.

Here are some steps to eliminate the excess associated with perfectionism:

1. Identify Perfectionist Triggers and Fix Them

For example if over-critical, encourage more, if negative in attitude, talk or body language, discover a more positive approach. Learn to delegate more and trust more. Use discovery and experimental (nurturing), questioning and learning methods rather than telling.

2. Take a Reality Check

Self-assess yourself and get assistants to also assess you. Compare notes and act on the findings in answer to the question - "Are my standards helping me and my players to achieve their goals or getting in the way of achieving them?"

3. Cost - Benefit Analysis

Assess what it costs you and your team in striving for perfection and what the benefits would be of lessening your standards to the excellence level. For the perfectionist, this can be difficult so recruit someone you know can be objective to help you weigh up the costs and benefits.

4. Gain Perspective

Step back to look at the big picture of your coaching. What are your coaching objectives. PF - Perfect or PB - Personal Best? Are you achieving these objectives by the actions you're taking? Try to imagine how others see or feel about your coaching.

5. Seek Assistance

If perfectionism dominates your coaching and life and is now compulsive, you may benefit from seeking professional help.

6. Educate Yourself - By reading up on the subject.

Even the Oxford English dictionary gives an insight into the dangers of being a perfectionist. The dictionary definition reads: 'perfectionist. Noun, a person who refuses to be satisfied with something unless it is perfect. Compare this with the definition of excellence which reads: 'Excellence. Noun, the quality of being extremely good; outstanding'.

So ask yourself the question: "Are you a perfectionist coach or person? What can you do to lessen your need for perfection and control?"

When you do, decide which of these statements is for you.

- (i) Practice makes permanent - (even bad habits).
 - (ii) Excellent practice makes excellent - (personal best).
 - (iii) Perfect practice makes perfect - (perfectionist).
- Yes, why not perfect?