

Healthy Coach Better Coaching



By Wayne Goldsmith

Ten Tips for Sports Coaches to Stay Healthy and Happy.

Coaches spend a lot of time helping their athletes to get better. Fitness training, gym work, skills practice, flexibility sessions, mental skills training, seminars on nutrition and hydration....coaches do all they can to help their athletes achieve their performance goals.

But do coaches apply the same standards and commitment to their own health?

Ask a coach about the performances of their team or the successes of their athletes and they can rattle off training sets, win-loss records and improvements in skill execution ad infinitum.

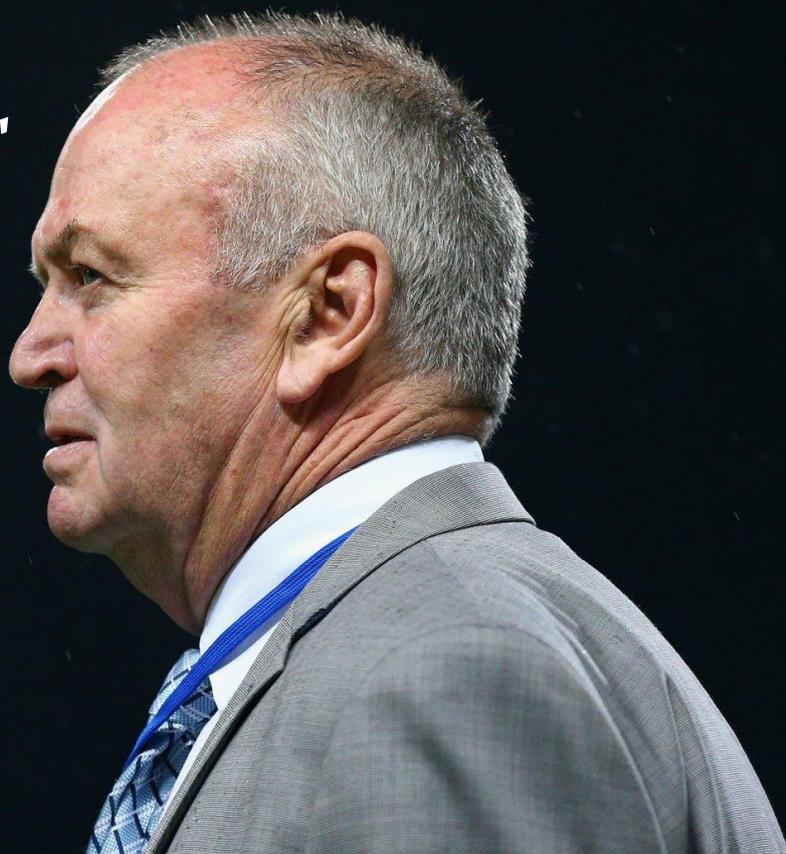
However, ask them about the last time they took a break and just relaxed or when was the last time they had a deep, satisfying, restful sleep and they can't remember.

Coaches are notorious for two things:

1. Giving everything, they've got to helping their athletes and;
2. Ignoring their own health and wellbeing.

"Getting Better Never Stops"

Sir Graham Henry
Former All Blacks Rugby Head Coach



Here's Ten Tips for Sports Coaches to Stay Happy and Healthy

1 Nutrition

What you eat and drink today – coaches tomorrow. Eat a healthy, balanced diet of fresh fruit, fresh vegetables, lean healthy protein choices and a wide range of nutritious foods every day.

2 Exercise

Coaching can be physically demanding. It can take a lot of physical effort to demonstrate skills and techniques, to keep moving for long periods of time during training sessions and to give athletes the energy and enthusiasm they need to see from their coach. Try to find 30 minutes a day for some form of enjoyable exercise to stay **Coach-Fit!**

3 Stress Management

It's no good having a stressed-out coach working with stressed out players in a highly stressful environment! Coaches need to be seen to be calm, confident and composed under pressure to ensure they make the right coaching decisions at the right time and to also provide athletes with consistent, cool leadership in critical situations.

Find a passion away from sport....reading, hiking, movies, collecting, exercise, yoga – something that allows you to switch off and mentally re-energize.

4 Mental Health: Coaching, no matter how wonderful and inspiring a career it may be, can place considerable demands on the mental health of coaches in all sports and at all levels of the industry. Ensure you've got a mental health plan in place: a balanced combination of sleep, rest, stress management, down-time and regular exercise. Importantly, know how to find help and support when you need it.

Why not develop a support network of coaches in your local area who meet regularly and talk about the challenges of coaching?

5 Relationships

Sport "Widows, Widowers and Orphans", i.e. the family of coaches who are all but "deserted" during the season, are all too common. Give everything you can to your athletes. Strive for continuous improvement in your coaching. But once you walk away from practice, focus on the things in life that matter the most of all...family and friends.

"Did you ever hear about the Transfer Of Happiness Theory Of Coaching?"

Athletes arrive at training in the morning tired, yawning, a bit flat – not really wanting to be there. Coaches on the other hand are jumping around, laughing and joking, motivating the athletes and getting excited about the workout ahead.

Gradually, over the practice session the coach's energy and enthusiasm become infectious and the athletes slowly start to wake up and engage with their training. Finally, after two hours of workout, the athletes jump out of the water feeling great, smiling and excited. The coach, having given everything to the session is left sitting at the end of the pool completely drained of every ounce of energy having "transferred" all the happiness they had to give to the athletes"

(Master Swimming Coach Bill Sweetenham).

6 Time off means Time off! At the end of every season, it is important for athletes to have some time away from training and competing to rest, recover and re-charge.

We know that this down-time is essential for athletes to sustain high level performances year after year. It's the same for coaches! Take a holiday every year.

Have a complete break from coaching where you follow your other passions, have time with family and friends or just chill out. Scheduling time off means minimising the risk of burning out!

7 Sleep. They used to recommend counting "sheep" if you couldn't sleep. Coaches, however, lay in bed at night counting "laps", planning tomorrow's workout and going over game strategies for next week's big match. Many coaches report that it is difficult to switch off their "coaching-brain" and settle down for a good 8-10 hours of quality sleep. Sleep is vital for good health, wellbeing and mental recovery.

Try to go to bed around the same time every night so your body and mind get into a sleeping routine. Ensure the room is dark and a little cool. And never take your mobile, tablet or laptop to bed with you. The coaching can wait until the morning.....

8 Hydrating during coaching sessions and competition days. Coaching is a dehydrating activity. Talking, walking, teaching, demonstrating, instructing...all the activities a coach typically does every day can be dehydrating.

Carry a water bottle with you and drink regularly when you're coaching – particularly if coaching outdoors in the warmer seasons. It's not only a great idea for you – but it sets a great example for your athletes.

9 **Be Sunsmart!** If you're coaching outdoors, being Sunsmart is an important part of staying healthy. Swimming coaches, rowing coaches, athletics coaches, football coaches, tennis coaches....you name a sport – and the sun is a huge factor.

Remember that old slip, slop, slap campaign...slip on a shirt (ideally an appropriately rated long sleeved shirt with a collar), slop on some sunscreen (50 plus!) and slap on a hat (NOT a cap which offers minimal sun protection at best) when coaching outdoors.

10 **Coach yourself.** The simplest and most common-sense way to think about coaching, health and wellbeing is to imagine you're coaching yourself. If you knew an athlete who worked very long hours, who regularly had to deal with stressful situations and who was often too busy to eat healthy, nutritious meals, you'd probably coach them to manage their time and their life a little better.

Apply the same coaching principles that you use every day to help your athletes to your own life.



Summary

1. The bottom line: Apply the same coaching principles that you use every day to help your athletes – to your own life.
2. Think about it. Can an athlete who is tired and stressed, who doesn't sleep well, who has a poor diet, who is suffering with mental health problems and who has a challenging personal life perform to their full potential? Of course not. Then it's ludicrous to expect that you can coach effectively unless you commit time and energy to your own health and well-being.
3. Imagine that you and your athletes are partners in potential and performance: what applies to them – applies to you. Want your athletes to achieve their peak performance goals? Ensure they are committed to their own physical and mental health and wellbeing. And that goes for you too!

Additional Sources of Information on Health and Wellbeing for Coaches

HEART FOUNDATION (GET ACTIVE) www.heartfoundation.org.au/active-living/get-active

SPORTS DIETICIANS AUSTRALIA (FACT SHEETS) www.sportsdietitians.com.au/factsheets

RELATIONSHIPS AUSTRALIA www.relationships.org.au

BEYOND BLUE www.beyondblue.org.au

SUNSMART www.sunsmart.com.au

Wayne Goldsmith has been an influential figure in coach education for the past 25 years. He's worked with professional, college and Olympic level athletes, coaches and teams in the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the U.K., Europe, Asia and throughout the Pacific. www.newsportfuture.com

