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## Inspiration: can we finish the course?

Following our April Coaching Insight seminar which looked at inspirational coaching, Richard Cheetham focuses on coaches as a source of inspiration and why they are crucial to a post-Olympic legacy.

An unforgettable 17 days of the London 2012 Olympics left a nation inspired and, along with previous UK sporting success (thank you Bradley Wiggins), they can have a wonderful legacy by promoting increased participation in sport at all levels. Many of those inspired to try sports for the first time, plus those dusting off the boots and returning to the arena, will be arriving at their first session wishing to begin the pathway to, if not the Olympics, a lifelong involvement in the sport.

The word 'inspiration' has been used in all the media commentary, the reviews and interviews. I doubt any of us were unmoved by some incredible achievements and poignant, often tearful, moments, moments that gave even the pre-Games cynics a warm glow, a feeling of national pride and of money well spent.

Are the coaches as inspired as the participants? Can you recall what or who inspired you and why? What does it mean to inspire? Sport is not short of a new generation of role models and from a wide range of disciplines. From boxing to judo, from rowing to cycling there are people to look up to. This is not something in short supply but, alongside continued funding and resourcing, where should the real focus of attention come from after London?

Without wishing to cast a shadow over the events of the summer Olympics, I listened eagerly to hear a medallist thank their first coach or their early inspiration but sadly this was rarely mentioned. As I scoured the pages of the broadsheets too few of the headlines, seemed to mention the role of the coach as the people who introduce youngsters to sporting enjoyment and success. This is the front line of sports participation -- the grassroots coach, the parent, the volunteer -- armed with enthusiasm more often than with resources. These are the thousands of volunteers who willingly give up their time to encourage youngsters to engage and stay involved in sport. They can have a significant impact and channel the enthusiasm that has been generated to try a particular activity. The definitions of 'inspiration' and 'inspire' can easily be related to sport: "to stimulate to activity or creativity" (the coaching) and "a person that causes this state" (the coach). Coaches need to recognise that there is clear evidence that they are the most significant influence on continued participation.

So what are some of the ingredients needed for an inspiring coaching philosophy? Educational research highlights that learners and learning environments have evolved over recent years but not always at the same rate as the teaching that is needed to adapt to these changes. Coaching sport is no different. There are a host of other ways for us to spend our free time and the challenge for coaches at all levels is to create an approach that is high on creativity and innovation with new ideas to challenge and engage individuals.

The first impressions of what can be achieved in sport need to be matched by the second impression, which is that delivered by the coach. Thinking differently and taking on new challenges with new ideas can develop the athletes as well as the coaches, harnessing that capacity for enthusiasm so evident among young people. Coaches and the governing bodies of sport which train them need to recognise their responsibility in creating highly energised, inspirational sessions that can ensure participants are hooked and committed early on.

Sixteen of the gold medals Great Britain achieved in London were won by women but women's sport receives only 5% of media coverage. This suggests that there has been some excellent inspirational coaching at all levels to achieve these results as the sports flourish despite the lack of 'visibility'. Laura

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Trott, a double gold medallist, is someone who came through the British Cycling Go-Ride scheme and is an example of the influence and impact of the grassroots coach.

There is a poignant joke to consider and apply. Question: "How many psychoanalysts does it take to change a light bulb?" Answer: "One but the light bulb has got to want to change." Just like the light bulb, coaches have got to want to innovate and create, to inspire those who have, through whatever impulsive moment, decided to take part in their sport. The impact could be surprising.

The undoubted success of the London Games means sport now has a heightened profile and a limited window of opportunity during which it can capitalise. By appreciating the role that coaches play in inspiring others at all levels the surge of interest can be sustained to Rio and beyond. We must ensure that the new generation of eager young sports enthusiasts are connected with people who share the same passion and that their impact is not underestimated. Only then will the battle with what Lord Coe describes as the "cluttered landscape of distraction that sport competes against" be won.

**Richard Cheetham is a senior lecturer at Winchester University and a highly experienced coach.**

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