

MENTORSHIP STRATEGY *for young coaches*

A general model for sports clubs of all sizes and disciplines

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PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGY

To establish a systematic and sustainable pathway for the development of young coaches (with little or no prior experience), grounded in practical learning, mentorship relationships, role rotations, internal education, access to coaching objectives by age category, and an expanded range of support systems. The strategy aims to professionalize the coaching career path, strengthen ethical values, and foster a sense of community within the club around the development of coaching staff.

Target group for this strategy are graduates of sports faculties, former athletes at the end of their careers and people with a strong interest in coaching. These individuals often enter the coaching environment with high motivation but lack practical knowledge and the structured support that this system provides.

1. COACH DEVELOPMENT PATHWAY

PHASE 1 : OBSERVER

Before starting to observe training sessions, an **introductory mentoring interview** is conducted in which the young coach's motivation, areas of interest, previous experience, preferences regarding work with different age groups, and initial self-assessment of competencies are discussed. Based on this, an individual observation plan is created (e.g. which age groups to observe, which coaches to follow as role models, which topics to focus on during observation).

The coach then systematically attends training sessions: at least two per week with different coaches and age groups (e.g. U10, U14). The coach keeps an **observation journal**, and after each session, the mentor conducts a short reflection. The use of structured observation forms is recommended covering areas such as communication, group dynamics, game management, and safety.

What to pay attention to:

- Does the coach recognize the basic structure of a training session (warm-up, main part, cool-down)?
- How does the coach communicate with children of different ages?
- What are the athletes' responses to feedback?
- How are drills adapted to the group?
- Is the coach's motivation aligned with long-term goals (working with children, senior athletes, competitive vs. recreational focus)?

Benefits for the coach:

Develops the ability to analyze and understand diverse coaching styles. Forms the basis for building one's coaching identity. The mentor can guide development more intentionally after this early insight.

Benefits for the club:

- Enables profiling of coaches for future staffing and role allocation
- Increases mentor effectiveness by building on a better understanding of the individual

Required club resources:

- A mentor with time and willingness to engage in regular reflection
- Observation and reflection templates (e.g., PDF or digital journal)
- Access to various training sessions and age groups

PHASE 2 : ASSISTANT COACH



The young coach prepares one drill per week and delivers it independently within the training session. They assist with organizing the space and equipment and are co-responsible for ensuring safety. The mentor provides targeted feedback and helps the coach understand the purpose and developmental goal of each drill (why it is used, what it develops, and how to adapt it). Responsibility is limited to clearly defined tasks.

What to pay attention to:

- How does the coach give instructions and set up the drill?
- Can the coach observe and adjust the drill based on performance?
- Is the coach learning to ask reflective questions, not just give directions?

Benefits for the coach:

Gains a sense of leadership and builds self-confidence. Transitions from a passive observer to an active contributor while still operating under the safety net of a mentor.

Benefits for the club:

- The coach contributes directly to the session.
- Supports the head coach with minimal risk to session quality.

Required club resources:

- A head coach willing to take on an assistant
- Access to basic equipment for drill setup

PHASE 3 : CO - COACHING



The coach now progressively plans and leads larger portions of the training session. During the session, the mentor observes or records part of the activities. After the session, they jointly analyze how the training unfolded, with a focus on feedback delivery, interpersonal relationships, motivation, and organizational flow.

What to pay attention to:

- Can the coach manage the full segment (warm-up, main part, game)?
- How do they shift between the roles of organizer, educator, and leader?
- What is the coach's relationship with the players. Is it too strict or too permissive?

Benefits for the coach:

Gains greater autonomy and the ability to reflect. Learns to manage complex responsibilities such as time, rhythm, group dynamics, and motivation.

Benefits for the club:

- Enables a realistic assessment of the coach's readiness for independent work.
- Highlights strengths and areas for improvement in a relatively safe setting.

Required club resources:

- A video camera or mobile device for recording sessions
- Mentor's time for joint post-session analysis

PHASE 4 : INDEPENDENT COACHING



The coach independently conducts training sessions and leads teams in matches. They prepare monthly and seasonal plans, evaluate player progress, and maintain communication with the mentor, parents, and the club. The mentor provides monthly supervision (once per month).

What to pay attention to:

- Can the coach prepare and adapt a training plan effectively?
- How do they respond to losses, conflicts, and internal team challenges?
- Are they able to justify their coaching decisions?
- Quality of long-term planning
- Ability to manage the group in crisis situations

Benefits for the club:

- The coach contributes independently to team development.
- The club can identify the coach's evolving role (leader, educator, or specialist).

Benefits for the coach:

Establishes a personal coaching identity and transitions from “learner” to a responsible professional role. Maturity and professional autonomy increase.

2. KEY SYSTEM ELEMENTS

MENTORING PAIR

Regular meetings (at least twice per month) and an Individual development plan (IDP) with monthly goals and reflections. The goals include technical skills (e.g. giving clear instructions), soft skills (e.g. giving feedback to athletes), and long-term objectives (e.g. taking over a team).

Possible implementation:

1. Appointment of a permanent mentor from the same club.
2. Mentor–mentee pairing between coaches of different age categories (e.g., seniors – U10).

External mentor from an affiliated club (in cases where there are not enough experienced coaches within the club).

Benefit: The coach does not feel alone, has a clearly defined path, the mentor guides and supports them in everyday dilemmas. The mentoring relationship builds trust and enables learning through questioning and reflection.

ROTATIONS

The coach works with different groups (e.g., U8, U12, seniors) and with different coaches (e.g., female/male coaching style, different personalities). A group rotation is planned once a month.

Possible implementation:

1. Project-based rotation – the coach participates for a specific period in preparing for an event (e.g., U14 competition).
2. Pre-defined monthly rotation schedule between age categories.
3. Rotation in pairs – together with the mentor, they switch the group for one training session.

Benefit: Increases flexibility, understanding of the developmental stages of athletes, and the ability to adapt one's coaching style to different situations. The coach works with various groups and coaches. Identified by Cushion (2010) as a key strategy for developing adaptability and responsiveness in group coaching.

INTERNAL EDUCATION

Micro-workshops (45 minutes), once per month, on topics such as motivation, communication, ethics, ecology, and cooperation with parents. The workshops are led by experienced coaches or external experts (psychologists, pedagogues). Example: Workshop on "How to react to negative behavior from parents" using role-playing. Benefit: The coach learns how to manage real-life situations.

Possible implementation:

1. Club-level professional meetings – each month an experienced coach presents a topic and leads a discussion.
2. External guest (e.g., sports psychologist) included in regular educational sessions.
3. Online seminars followed by group discussions after viewing the material.

Benefit: Raises the overall professional standard and enables an understanding of the theoretical foundations of practice. Encourages integration of knowledge from different professional fields.

COACHING COMMUNITY



A digital knowledge base (Google Drive) is established, containing exercises, video analyses, articles, and guidelines from national federations. Monthly “Coaching Café” meetings are held for sharing experiences and addressing challenges in an informal setting.

Possible implementation:

1. Weekly email loop with short reflections or dilemmas
2. Monthly video call with all club coaches on a selected topic.
3. Themed “Coaching Café” event involving senior coaches as discussion partners

Benefit: The community strengthens the sense of belonging, supports learning through shared experience, and prevents coach isolation. It contributes to continuous learning and social cohesion within the club.

CODE OF CONDUCT



A set of 10 principles (respect, safety, leading by example, environmental responsibility), signed upon entry into the mentoring program. It is included in the mentoring diary as a regular point of reflection.

Benefit: Enhances ethical awareness, strengthens values, and increases parents' trust in the club.

PEER OBSERVATION SYSTEM



Each young coach invites another young coach once a month to observe their training session and provide constructive feedback. This process is based on mutual trust and a structured feedback form. Example: After a U10 training session, Coach Matic receives feedback from Coach Nina regarding the tempo, the engagement of the children, and the clarity of his instructions.

Possible implementation:

1. Scheduled “Peer Review” days with role exchange.
2. Use of a short video clip from training as a basis for reflection.
3. Written exchange of observations using a structured form (including self-assessment).

Benefit: Promotes openness, peer communication, and multiple perspectives for development. The coach learns to provide and receive criticism professionally. Enhances self-awareness and accountability in coaching development.

TEAM - BASED TRAINING PLANNING

Coaches meet **once a month** to jointly plan a training session for a selected age group.

Each coach proposes one exercise, and together they design the structure and goals of the session.

Example: Three coaches prepare a complete session plan for the U12 group with the topic “defensive positioning.” Each coach leads one segment of the session.

Possible implementation:

1. Monthly strategic meetings of coaches for the same age category.
2. One-day preparation of a series of training sessions (e.g., for a holiday week).
3. Online shared table with tasks and suggestions, updated by all coaches.

Benefit: Fosters team spirit, reduces the time burden on individuals, leads to more consistent coaching approaches and strengthens collaboration, understanding of training structure, and exchange of effective exercises.

OBSERVATION OF ‘BEST PRACTICES’ IN OTHER CLUBS

The club organizes annual visits to training sessions in neighboring or sport-related clubs. Young coaches have the opportunity to observe different working methods.

Possible implementation:

1. One- or two-day visit to a club with a similar structure (same sport, different region).
2. Job shadowing with a selected coach from a partner club.
3. Group observation of a training session and analysis using a predefined observation protocol.

Benefit: Expands perspectives, encourages openness to new practices, and builds inter-club connections.

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3. STRUCTURE OF EXPECTATIONS BY AGE CATEGORY

The organization / sport club prepares a document that outlines development goals and technical standards for each age group.

BENEFITS

The coach gains a clear overview of training objectives and standards, which increases professionalism, enables independent planning, and ensures consistency of approach within the club.

EXAMPLE - Under 12 years - volleyball:

- Physical: coordination, reaction speed
- Technical: serve, reception
- Tactical: basic positioning
- Psychological: self-confidence, cooperation
- Behavioral: listening, respect

4. ADDITIONAL FORMS OF SUPPORT

SHADOW COACHING

The young coach follows the work of an experienced coach using an observation form (e.g., communication, time usage, space management). This is followed by a discussion with the mentor. This can provide deep understanding of soft and invisible coaching competencies.

Possible implementation:

1. Silent observer using the observation form.
2. Active observation with the option to ask questions during breaks.
3. Shadow coaching during a match, with a focus on communication under pressure.

Benefit: Learning through observation enhances subtle social and leadership skills that coaches often struggle to develop independently.

COACHING CAFE



Informal monthly meetings of coaches, where they exchange experiences and tackle challenges. Each meeting has a specific topic (e.g., “*My coaching failures*”). This can foster social support, building a trust-based community, less stress, and greater satisfaction.

Possible implementation:

1. A relaxed discussion session after practice with a guided theme (e.g., relationship with players).
2. Evening online forum (e.g., via Zoom) for sharing real-life coaching examples.
3. Weekend gathering with internal exchange of materials and drill examples.

Benefit: Strengthens sense of belonging, reduces stress, and encourages sharing and openness among coaches.

360° FEEDBACK



The young coach receives evaluations from the mentor, players, parents, and other coaches every 3 months through short questionnaires. Multi-source reflection can encourage growth.

Possible implementation:

1. Anonymous questionnaires for players, parents, and coaches.
2. Group feedback circle with the mentor acting as a moderator.
3. Self-evaluation as a starting point for comparison with external feedback.

Benefit: Enhances self-awareness, supports balanced evaluation of one's work, and improves communication with all stakeholders.

K N O W L E D G E L I B R A R Y

A digital collection including: video recordings of training sessions, articles, research (e.g. International olympic comittee's plastic games plan for sport), manuals of national sport federations, webinar recordings and similar.

Benefit: Provides constant access to educational resources for independent learning and professional development.

R E S E A R C H A S S I G N M E N T S

Solving case studies, e.g.: *“The U13 team is struggling with focus. What would you suggest?”*, which offers the opportunity for The coach to develop analytical thinking and preparedness for unexpected situations.

Possible implementation:

1. Assignments based on one's own team (e.g., analysis of players' response to feedback).
2. Mini-interviews with other coaches and comparison of methods.
3. Translation of an article and presentation of its key ideas to the coaching community.

Benefit: Strengthens the academic dimension of coaching work and promotes critical thinking.

C O N N E C T I O N W I T H N A T I O N A L F E D E R A T I O N

The club enables participation in seminars, online trainings, and national forums. The coach connects with the broader sports community, gains access to current practices, and maintains long-term motivation.

Possible implementation:

1. Active participation in licensed seminars of the national federation.
2. Inclusion in the national mentor database.
3. Participation in projects (e.g., Erasmus+, local initiatives).

Benefit: Expands professional network, increases credibility, and deepens involvement in the expert community

PROGRAM 'TRACK YOUR PROGRESS'

Each coach keeps a personal progress notebook or a digital journal, where they record information on monthly basis, such as key lessons learned from trainings, personal goals, challenges and solutions and reflection on important events (e.g., first match, conflict, successful training).

Benefit: Encourages self-analysis, and gives the coach a clear insight into their own progress over time.

WEEKLY COACHING CHALLENGE

At the start of each week, all coaches receive a professional challenge (e.g., “How would you introduce a focus-enhancing drill for U8?”). By the end of the week, they write their answers in the internal forum or record a short video.

Benefit: Promotes creative thinking, sharing of best practices, connects coaches across different categories, and deepens understanding of psychological and technical content.

MENTORING DUO FOR MATCHES

For each official match, the coach is assigned a “co-process mentor”, who observes their behavior during the game, especially reactions during stressful moments, communication with players, and decision-making.

Possible implementation - Example:

1. Coach Sara leads her first U12 match; her mentor John observes and later analyzes her behavior during timeouts.

Benefit: Improves the quality of match coaching and accelerates the growth of self-confidence in competitive environments

5. LONG TERM GOALS

The long term goals we are trying to achieve are:

- Retention of young coaches in sport
- Higher professional standards
- Alignment of work with age-specific developmental goals
- Preparedness for formal licensing
- Development of club identity and a high-quality professional environment

6. IMPLEMENTATION IN THE CLUB

Each organization should adapt the strategy according to its resources and create a strategy that is sustainable in the long term. Here are suggested steps for the implementation:

- Club leadership approves the strategy that is adapted according to the resources available.
- Appointment of mentors and introduction of structures
- Each coach receives a folder with development goals
- Regular monitoring using the IDP (Individual Development Plan), diary, and evaluations.
- Conclusion with analysis, feedback, and recommendation

Smaller organizations can have only one mentor for multiple coaches and do informal rotations whereas large clubs can provide different mentor roles based on the area of expertise (e.g., communication, tactics). For each individual sport the mentoring strategy should be adapted to align with national guidelines and sport-specific characteristics.

Propositions for key guidelines by season:

S E A S O N 1

m o n t h 0 - 9

Purpose: Get to know the club, acquire basic coaching skills

Focus: Observation, assistance, mentoring

Club must provide: Flexible scheduling, experienced coaches as mentors, internal training materials

S E A S O N 2

m o n t h 1 0 - 1 7

Purpose: Transition into (co-)independent coaching, strengthen reflective practice.

Focus: Larger portions of session leadership, video analysis, evaluation

Club must provide: Access to video recording of training sessions, structured feedback

S E A S O N 3

m o n t h 1 8 - 3 6

Purpose: Full responsibility for a team, readiness for formal coaching roles

Focus: Independent work, long-term planning, involvement in club vision

Club must provide: Ongoing mentor supervision, involvement of the coach in decision-making

Phase	Time Frame	Main Goals	Coach's Activities	Role of the Club / Mentor
Phase 1: Observer	Months 0–3	Get to know the environment, develop analytical observation, establish a mentoring relationship	Introductory interview, observing training sessions, keeping a journal, reflection with the mentor	Assigning a mentor, providing access to various groups, preparing observation forms
Phase 2: Assistant Coach	Months 4–9	Transition to active participation, develop confidence and basic leadership role	Leading individual drills, organizing equipment, communication with players	Permission to participate in training sessions, continuous feedback
Phase 3: Co-leading	Months 10–17	Preparation for independence, reflective leadership, handling complexity	Leading larger parts of training, video recording, analysis with mentor, managing gameplan.	Recording training sessions, reflective mentoring, monitoring motivational climate
Phase 4: Independent Leadership	Months 18–36	Independent responsibility, season planning, professional identity	Leading the group, planning training cycles, communication with parents, evaluating progress	Supervision (1x/month), annual evaluation, integration into club systems



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9. ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: INITIAL INTERVIEW

To better understand the new coach, their values, preferences, and long-term goals, which enables targeted mentorship and an individualized development path.

BASIC INFORMATION

Full Name:

Age:

Contact (email, phone):

Education:

Do you hold a coaching license? (check one):

Yes No Level: _____

Coaching experience (if any):

MOTIVATION AND ASPIRATIONS

Why do you want to become a coach?

Which areas of coaching interest you most? (you may select more than one):

- Working with children
- Working with youth
- Working with senior teams
- Working with the national team
- Organization
- Communication
- Technique
- Tactics
- Psychology
- Match preparation

Which age group would you prefer to work with? (select up to 2):

- Mini volleyball (U9–U10)
- Small volleyball (U11–U12)
- Younger youth (U13–U14)
- Cadets (U15–U16)
- Juniors (U17–U19)
- Seniors

Why did you choose these age groups?

What is your long-term goal in volleyball as a coach?

SELF-ASSESSMENT OF COMPETENCIES (1 = very weak, 5 = very strong)

Area	Rating (1-5)	Comment (optional)
Communication with players		
Ability to give instructions		
Understanding child/youth development		
Organization of space/equipment		
Reacting in unpredictable situations		
Knowledge of volleyball fundamentals		
Working in tandem with an experienced coach		

ANNEX 2 : OBSERVATION DIARY – Template for the Observer Phase

Date:

Team / Age Group:

Head Coach:

Training Phase Observed (check):

Warm-up Main Part Cool Down Entire Training


Observation Areas (write down your observations):

- How does the coach communicate with the players?
- How are instructions given?
- How does the coach adapt the exercises when things don't go as planned?
- What is the level of cooperation among the players?
- What would you have done differently?

Reflection after conversation with mentor:

- What did I notice for the first time today?
- Which coaching approach did I find especially effective?
- What will I pay more attention to next time?

ANNEX 3: REFLECTIVE JOURNAL – Assistant Coach Phase



To encourage reflection on one's own implementation of a single exercise, observation of players, and reception of mentor guidance.

DATE:

AGE GROUP:

MENTOR:

TRAINING TOPIC:

TRAINING SEGMENTS:

My Preparation:

- What was I trying to achieve with this exercise?
- How did I adapt the number of players, space, equipment?

Execution:

- What instructions did I give?
- How did the players understand and respond?
- What did I change during the execution?


Mentor's Feedback:

- What went well?
- What should I pay more attention to?

Self-reflection:

- What would I do differently next time?
- What did I learn today about coaching and communication?

ANNEX 4: REFLECTIVE JOURNAL – Co-Coaching Phase



Reflection on the full course of the training session, analysis of key moments, and leading the group.

DATE:
AGE GROUP:
MENTOR:
TRAINING TOPIC:
TRAINING SEGMENTS:

ANNEX 5 : REFLECTIVE JOURNAL – Independent Coaching Phase



Systematic self-evaluation of a coach independently leading a team. Intended for monthly or cycle-based reflection, tracking long-term progress, and preparing for annual evaluation.

COACH NAME:
DATE:
OBSERVATION PERIOD (*e.g., last 30 days*):
AGE GROUP:
MENTOR:

1. Planning and Implementation

- What training topics did I cover during this period?
- How were the individual sessions structured (time, intensity, content)?
- How did I decide on the choice of drills? Did I follow the club philosophy and age group objectives?

2. Group Management and Communication

How did I build authority?

- How did I communicate with different types of players (motivated, disengaged, conflict situations)?
- How did I cooperate with parents (if applicable)? Provide an example of good or challenging communication.

3. Results and Responses

- Do I observe progress in the players? In which areas?
- Which methods proved to be the most effective?
- Did I notice a drop in motivation or behavioral issues, and how did I respond?

4. Self-Reflection and Goals

- What was my biggest challenge this month?
- What was my greatest success?
- What would I like to improve in the next period? (*choose one element: organization / communication / relationships / technical knowledge / psychological climate*)

5. Cooperation with Mentor

- What advice did my mentor give me during recent meetings?
- Did I follow that advice?
- What would I like to clarify or discuss further in our next session?

ANNEX 6: : POST TRAINING REFLECTION (Phases:
Assistant Coach, Co-Coaching, Independent
Coach) - SIMPLER EDITION



Date:

Team/Age Group:

Training Theme:

What part did I lead?

- Warm-up Drill Main Part Final Game Entire Session

Successes

- What went well?
- What did I do better today than last time?

Challenges

- What could I improve?
- Did I respond appropriately to any difficulties?

Feedback from Mentor