

Introduction

This paper is designed to look at how behavior is reinforced during a college practice. I have looked at and examined these results in an effort to understand what helps create a better learning environment. I was surprised at some of the results but found the entire exercise to be very helpful.

Method

The coach I chose to observe was Jody May. He is the head men's basketball coach at Albion College. He has been the head coach for the last five years and spent the thirteen years before that as the assistant. In order to collect the data I created a table of eight different reinforcements that the coach would use. I then tallied them any time I heard a comment that fit into one of the categories. The categories include specific and general positive reinforcement, specific and general negative reinforcement, specific and general technical instruction, keeping control, and organization. I studied each category so that I would be familiar with each one allowing me to get as many tallies as possible. Once I had compiled all of the information I formed ratios that will be discussed later in the paper. These ratios and the reaction of the players helped form my conclusions of this research.

Results

The first ratio I explored was the relationship between positive and negative reinforcements. I found that there was a ratio of 1.76:1 between positive and negative. This means there was almost twice as many positive comments as there were negative ones. The next ratio I looked at was the relationship between specific positive and negative reinforcements which came out to 1.71:1. This was almost identical to the overall positive to

negative ratio. The third ratio I looked at was that of specific positive to general positive reinforcement. This ratio came out as a complete 2:1 contrast. The next relationship I examined was that of specific technical and general technical instruction. This ratio came out at 1.3:1, but also held the most total tallies of any of the behaviors. The last ratio I wanted to look at was the total number of technical instructions to that of all other behaviors. This came out as an even 1:1 ratio. Half of all behaviors were a form of technical instruction.

Discussion

As I stated earlier the most common behavior was technical instruction. The coach was always giving instruction, letting his players know what could be corrected both to the individuals and the team as a whole. I believe that by giving specific instruction he was informing the players of what they needed to work on and when there was no instruction the players assumed that they had performed the movement correctly and tried to repeat it the next time.

The reinforcements were used primarily to motivate the players. The instruction was used primarily to inform them. The coach used positive reinforcement to get the players to repeat an action or thought in order to be successful. He used the negative comments for the same reason but kept these more for when an athlete or the team continuously repeated the wrong behavior. When a mistake was made the first or second time he chose to instruct the player on a different way to perform but if they still did not make the corrections then he chose to use negative reinforcement. These comments were highly related to the behaviors that the players had. The better or harder they played in the eyes of the coach the more positive reinforcement they received.

I felt that he was an extremely effective coach at this level. Part of this may be based on a relationship and trust that he has built with his players. I thought this because the older players were much more receptive to the comments and struggled less to correct their behavior. Also, the amount of instruction that he gave his team was impressive. He was very intent on details and “doing the little things”. When they did this they were rewarded and when they failed they were expected to repeat the action until they accomplished the goal. By creating this environment it gave everyone a clear picture of what would be expected of them in order to play at Albion.

The coach had a great relationship with the players. Watching them before and after practice I could see that both the players and coach were able to separate what happened and was said on the court from life off the court. There a couple of players that looked like they struggled with being told they were doing something wrong but understood that the coach was doing it to help them reach their potential.

In closing I would say that this assignment has opened my eyes a little bit to how to handle a team. I always thought that you wanted to have higher levels of reinforcement, mainly positive but with some negative as well. I now think that it is important to have more instruction. By instructing you are helping the athletes learn the behavior and they know what you are looking for. This in itself is a form of positive reinforcement because if you do not correct the behavior they will feel that they did it correctly.