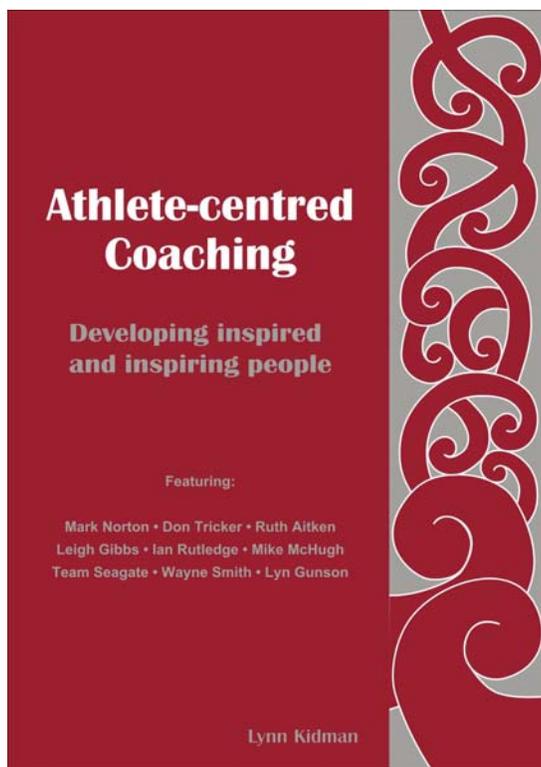


LYNN KIDMAN'S LATEST BOOK – ATHLETE CENTRED COACHING.

Lynn Kidman, the author, is well known to many RFU coaches. She presented at the Level 4/ Level 3 Conference in June 2002 and her views on empowerment and questioning are seen as vital coaching tools by the RFU's coach development programme.

This book could be a very useful tool for coaches who want to encourage their athletes to own and take responsibility for the development of a successful team culture. The end result can be enhanced performance by the individual and the group/team within a thriving, supportive team environment. In the book, seven coaches and athletes, involved in sports from international to school level, share their knowledge, experiences and philosophies, offering practical insights into how athlete-centred coaching can be put into practice.

ATHLETE-CENTRED COACHING. A BOOK REVIEW BY YUSUF IBRAHIM.



Yusuf Ibrahim is a Level 3 coach. He played for Sidcup then coached the club when he retired from playing. He now coaches Blackheath second team and Kent U15s and U16s.

I first came into contact with Lynn Kidman's work when I read 'Developing Decision Makers' in 2001. This book changed my whole mind-set of how to coach and how to deal with and talk to people as a coach. The whole book is based around an empowerment approach to coaching and it dealt in depth with areas never previously discussed at coaching meetings that I had attended.

The topics in this book that really excited me were:

- Current coaching practices.
- The definition of empowerment.
- The creation of an empowering philosophy.
- Success versus simply winning.
- The development of teaching games for understanding. (TGFU)
- A case study with Wayne Smith, an empowering coach with the All Blacks.
- How to ask meaningful questions.
- Children and sport.

I then read Lynn Kidman's latest book, *Athlete-Centred Coaching*, on a hot beach in Mexico in early August 2005 and found it a very good read with many further, excellent examples of empowerment. The book seems to follow on naturally from the first one that I read and offered me more depth on the subject of empowerment. Dave Hadfield's chapter had my total attention many times over!

Athlete –Centred Coaching: Developing Inspired and Inspiring People offers insight into how to enhance athlete learning and development through sport and the examples are from successful coaches who hold athlete-centred philosophies. Although these coaches are from a variety of backgrounds, they share similar goals in regard to long-term athlete learning and a quality team environment. All the coaches believe in sharing power with their athletes, enabling those athletes to be effective decision makers through focusing on their motivation to participate to the best of their ability. As the book demonstrates, coaches who use such an athlete-centred approach inspire their athletes and, in turn, the athletes inspire each other.

With an athlete-centred approach, athletes take ownership of their learning, thus increasing their opportunities and strengthening their abilities to retain important skills and ideas. This learning also develops athletes' ability to make informed decisions during competitions, an important element in successful performance at any sporting level. It helps athletes to take leadership roles and ownership in enhancing the team culture.

Athlete –Centred Coaching begins by defining this innovative and successful coaching approach. As well as introducing athlete-centred approaches, the first chapter discusses the benefits of using this term rather than ‘empowerment’, which is less valuable due to the nature of the sociological understanding of it. The chapter also compares athlete-centred approaches with their polar opposite, a coach-centred approach, and discusses

why coaches should consider using the former. Questioning, Teaching Games for Understanding (TGFU) and team culture are introduced as aspects that are important in enabling athletes to own and take responsibility for their learning. How to develop athlete-centred philosophies and how to relate success (rather than just winning) to an athlete-centred approach are discussed as well. The case studies of the coaches have a commonality that all want to develop athletes as people, not just as sport jocks.

In chapter two, Dave Hadfield presents information to show how the athlete-centred approach can be implemented. He discusses how coaches can gain the confidence that is necessary to change what they do now. His major initiative is the ‘query theory’ approach, whereby coaches question athletes for understanding of technique.

In *Developing Decision Makers*, Rod Thorpe presents his valuable philosophy on TGFU, and tries to suggest moving away from the use of traditional drills that are irrelevant to the actual sport; the key factor in TGFU is the game. Coaches should design their training sessions to make the drills more game-like so that athletes learn about tactics and skills. All coaches in the book use TGFU in various forms, but what unites them is the general model, which is the backbone to understanding the game.

One of the key components to an athlete-centred approach, including the strategy of TGFU, is that coaches ask questions that encourage athletes to be self-aware whilst learning about tactics and skills; guidelines for planning and how to ask meaningful questions are explained. The very technique of questioning is addressed as well as the art of just how to phrase/ask that meaningful question.

Team culture is discussed in relation to how coaches can explicitly work on establishing a successful team environment. Part of implementation is self-reflective analysis, a tool that coaches can use to monitor their ongoing coaching.

Athlete-Centred Coaching was very readable while being packed with advice and information; more importantly, it challenged me to evaluate my own coaching techniques. And that was on a beach in a very warm spot, far away from the cold, wet training pitch! I thoroughly recommend that all coaches read Lynn Kidman’s book.

Details of how to buy the book on following page:

The book, ISBN 047601445X, is available through Well Read Bookshops, c/o Northumbria University Students' Union, 2 Sandyford Road, Newcastle Upon Tyne NE1 8SB. Their contact numbers are:

0191 227 3400 (Phone).

0191 232 7279 (Fax).

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The cost of the book is £13.99 with a £2.00 charge for first-class post and packaging.