# National Coaching Standards: Perceptions and the Undertaking of Core Responsibilities by Beginner, Intermediate and Elite Sport Coaches

## Simon M. Pack[1], Sungwon Kim[2], Carol A. Fletcher[3], David P. Hedlund[4]

**Abstract:**

In recent years, the responsibilities of sport coaches have expanded to include more than just directing practices, overseeing training and game management. As a result, a greater focus is being placed on providing coaches with education, knowledge and training in-line with the evolving National Standards for Sport Coaches (SHAPE America, 2019) and the seven areas of core responsibilities: (1) setting vision, goals and standards; (2) engaging in and supporting ethical practices; (3) building relationships with stakeholders; (4) developing a safe sport environment; (5) creating a positive and inclusive sport environment; (6) conducting practices and preparing for competition; and (7) striving for continuous improvement. To understand the current state of sport coaching education in the United States, online survey research of beginner, intermediate and elite coaches (n=1,235) was undertaken about (1) how frequently sport coaches use the knowledge and skills listed in the national standards and (2) in order to be a successful sport coach, how important is it to be able to use the knowledge and skills described in the national standards. Analysis of variance testing for 39 of 42 standards focused on frequency of use found statistically significant differences between the three groups of coaches. Additional analysis of variance testing for the three groups of coaches regarding perceptions of the importance of each standard showed that 36 of 42 comparisons had statistically significant differences. A discussion of the results and implications for sport coaches, coaching educators and national sport coaching standards are provided.

**Keywords:** sport coaching education, successful coaching, coaching knowledge, coaching skills, coaching training

## Introduction

Sport coaches are important figures impactingathletes'on- and off-field success, health, well-being and personal development (Eichner, 2018; Lauer & Dieffenbach, 2013; Roxas&Ridinger, 2016). Additionally, coaches often play critical roles such as mentor, parental figure, tactician and academic tutor (Davis, 2005).More recently, the coaching profession has evolved and developed into a more complex profession, in which their roles include more than the traditional responsibilities of directing practices, overseeing training and managing game personnel (e.g., Bush & Silk, 2010; Duffy et al., 2011; Gilbert &Trudel, 2004). Given the diverse nature of coaches' roles, theirknowledge, skills and experiences have garnered considerable attentionfrom sport organizations such as the Society of Health and Physical Educators (SHAPE America), the United States Olympic Committee (USOC), and the International Council for Coaching Excellence (ICCE). These organizations, among others, have been instrumental in the development of appropriate sport coaching standards.

Despite the continued growth of the coaching profession and the on-going development and revisionstothe National Standards for Sport Coaches (NSSC) in the United States,there are still important issues that remain unresolved in the areas of formal education, training opportunitiesand core responsibilities for sport coaches (Cushion et al., 2010; Duffy et al., 2011).

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One of the more prominent issues in this regard is the consistency of coaching requirements (e.g., education and qualification) across sports (Hedlund, Fletcher, & Dahlin, 2018).While there are a multitude of coaching-related education and trainingresources (e.g., coaching certification, clinics, seminars, books, videos), the lack of consistent and formal coach education and training requirements may create confusion on what coaches need to know to become an effective coach. This is especially concerning, because previous research suggests that formal education and training programs have a more positive impact on both coaches and athletes compared to informal training (Fraser-Thomas &Côté, 2009). While coaches need to fulfill dynamic and evolving roles, it is also important to provide consistency in coaching performance as it pertains to goal setting, ethics, safety and inclusion. Furthermore, sport organizationsmay also havean additional burden ofdeveloping their own set of specializedstandards and requirements in the absence of formal coach education or in the case there are, unique aspects of a sport not covered by traditional sport coaching education (Dawson & Phillips, 2013).Governing bodies should do everything possible to ensure sport coaches receive high quality education, and as a result, they are effectivein the various roles and challenges they face. In sport coaching and education research, this is often described as coaching effectiveness.

Côté and Gilbert (2009) define coaching effectiveness as "the consistent application of integrated professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal knowledge to improve athletes' competence, confidence, connection, and character in specific coaching context" (p. 316). Coaching standards of practice can be utilized as aresource that can provide consistency to sport coaching education offerings and subsequently increase the knowledge and skills associated with coaching effectiveness. Many governing bodies in sports have created standards in which the knowledge and skills needed to be an effective coach are listed.

Due to recent updates to the National Standards for Sport Coaches (NSSC) in the United States (SHAPE America, 2019), the purpose of this research is two-fold. First, in order to understand whether or not the updated NSSC reflect core responsibilities sport coaches undertake, an examination of how frequently sport coaches use the 42 national standards is reported. Second, sport coaches' perceptions of the 42 national standards and their relationship to being an effective coach is also displayed. Finally, prior research (Gilbert &Côté, 2013; Gilbert &Trudel, 2005) has consistently shown there are often differences between diverse levels of coaches (e.g., beginner, intermediate, elite). Because the NSSC are developed to guide the education and training of coaches at all levels, the results are all segmented and analyzed based on coaches self-perceived coaching level.

**National Standards for Sport Coaches**

From a brief, historical perspective as it relates to coaching standards in the United States, there have been substantial changes since the mid-1980s. The implementation of these changes was due in part to accommodate the ever-changing context in which coaches operate as it relates to education, practice and science (Bodey, Brylinsky, & Kuhlman, 2008). In 1984, a set of youth sport coaching standards were presented in a position paper published by the National Association of Sport and Physical Educators (NASPE). That version subsequently underwent a series of revisions, which were supported by over 150 sport governing bodies,and the result was the 1995 National Standards for Athletic Coaches(NSAC). This versión consisted of eight domains and 37 coaching standardsspread across those domains. With the various sport stakeholders in mind (i.e., administrators, athletes, the public), another revision was undertaken and released in 2006 which led to the renaming of the standards to the National Standards for Sport Coaches (NSSC). The2006 version also contained eight domains but an additional three standards were added, bringing the total to 40 (NASPE, 2006). The NSSC are used to inform various stakeholders (i.e., coach educators, sport administrators, athletes) about the core responsibilities that coaches should possess in providing a quality experience for their athletes. Utilizing the notion of core responsibilities, the most recent revision, completed in 2019 and outlined inGano-Overway, Van Mullem, Long, Thompson, Benham, Bolger, Driska, Moreno, and Schuster (2020), consistsof a robust set of seven areas of core responsibilities for sport coachesand42 coaching standards (see Appendix). Whilethe NSSC were originally created to provide guidanceto coaches and related stakeholders, the latest revision creates a greater specification of those stakeholders (e.g., sport administrators, athletes and their families) and updated information about the knowledge and skills sport coaches should possess. Additionally, in the most recent NSSC,coaches can evaluate their own learning process in an effort to benchmark or improve their overall coaching effectiveness (Gano-Overway et al., 2020).

The updated NSSC are partly a response to the emergence of new issues inthe sport coaching profession (e.g., players'health and wellness, concussion protocol, wearable technology, training methodologies, education, virtual coaching) and the development ofcompeting international coaching frameworks (e.g., European Coaching Framework, seeLara-Bercial et al., 2017).

The seven core responsibilitiesof coaching and the respective number of standardsunder each of the those are: set vision, goals and standards for sport programs(Standards 1-5); engage in and support ethical practices (Standards 6-8); build relationships (Standards 9-11); develop a safe sport environment(Standards 12-20); create a positive and inclusive sport environment (Standards 21-23); conduct practices and prepare for competition (Standards 24-37); and strive for continuous improvements (Standards 38-42). Each of the 42 standards fit within a particular core responsibility, and each area of core responsibilities contains between three to 14 standards. The subsequent sections providesfurther details concerning the seven core responsibilities.

## Set vision, goals and standards for sport programs

The managerial aspects of the coaching profession are on full display within the core responsibilities included in this area. Standards within this core responsibility include everything from developing a coaching philosophy to managing resources. These standards and responsibilities are in-line with Vallée and Bloom's (2005) notion of the program-building coach. Most importantly, program-building coaches possess strong organizational skills and have a vision for the program that unites the various groups of stakeholders, especially program administrators. Westfall (2020) found that even the most undesirable conditions within the coaching profession can beovercome by setting a clear vision.

## Engage in and support ethical practices

There has been a tremendous amount of scholarly work (e.g., Agnew, Henderson, & Woods, 2017; Hardman, Jones, & Jones, 2010) regarding the establishment of a code of conduct; modeling, teaching and reinforcing ethical behavior; and helping others to develop ethical decision-making. For example, the ethical practices of coaches have garnered considerable attention with in the popular press and media. Constandt, De Waegeneer, and Willem (2018) found that coaches have considerable influence on ethical player behavior and this is further supported by a wealth of literature in this area (e.g., Burton, Welty Peachey, & Wells, 2017; DeSensi, & Rosenberg, 2010; Sagas & Wigley, 2014). In other words, it is incumbent upon sport coaches to both model and teach athletes how to be ethical in one's decision-making and choices.

## Build relationships

Coaches are required to manage a number of relationships in their day-to-day work responsibilities. Beyond the relationship that must be developed with players, there are critical relationships that cannot be overlooked. For example, relationships with sport administrators, other coaches and staff, referees, parents and supporters, and the media all may be important to build. Moreover, Norris, Didymus, andKaiseler (2020) found that coaches should look to build connections which provide emotional and social support as these will come in handy during difficult times and serve to help alleviate burnout and increase psychological well-being.

## Develop a safe sport environment

The safety and welfare of athletes of all ages is instrumental to the success of any sport organization. This set of responsibilities entails some of the most critical aspects within the coaching profession and includes standards related to injury prevention, nutrition, monitoring for signs of abuse or violent behavior, and adverse playing conditions. Diamond, Callahan, Chain, and Solomon (2016) found high rates of hazing from middle school to collegiate athletics with an overwhelming majority (80%) reporting it as an organized team function. Coaches have a responsibility of preventing such abuses and for being active participants in the development of policies and procedures. In the case of sexual abuse, Johnson, Hanna, and Novak (2020) emphasized the need to developmultiple policies, as only one policy is insufficient, and to put in place additional safety measures (e.g., education, awareness, monitoring) to help protect athletes. Whatman, Walters, and Schluter (2018) cited coaches 'attitude to injury' as having a dramatic impact on the implementation of injury prevention strategies and the subsequent involvement of key stakeholders.From a mental health perspective, coaches are viewed as a facilitator of early symptom detection and a resource for directing athletes to seek out the proper care (Kroshus, Chrisman, Coppel, & Herring, 2019).

## Create a positive and inclusive sport environment

Coaches, administrators and all stakeholders within a sporting context maintain a duty to uphold an inclusive environment void of prejudice and other biases. Cunningham (2015) described sport as possessing a "change-averse nature" (p. 44) and that certain areas within sport (e.g., intercollegiate athletics) suffer from a high degree of institutionalization. Cunningham also found, however, that individual agents and outside stakeholder groups are the most likely to undertake change.

The coach, in this regard, has the ability to wield a tremendous amount of power to become a change agent to advocate for inclusivity in all aspects of a sport program. Magnanini (2017) noted that inclusive coaches are in a position to design programs that recognize and build upon the strengths of all athletes, regardless of ability and other demographic and socioeconomic characteristics.

**Conduct practices and prepare for competition**

The technical aspect of coaching entails a tremendous amount of preparation, education and training. Coaching education and development have long been some of the more highly assessed and scrutinized areas within the profession (e.g., Newman, Santos, Cardoso, & Pereira, 2020; Paquette, &Trudel, 2018). Stodter and Cushion (2019) found that there are various gaps in the theory and practice of coach educators which has led to confusion and inconsistencies in the profession. The facets of planning, teaching, assessing and adapting can involve tremendous challenges that coaches need to overcome. Involving all stakeholders in this process through the"it takes a village" mentality, is somewhat of a necessity to achieve success. The combination of the various technical aspects of coaching are evident in the standards outlined within this core responsibility and coaches must demonstrate the ability to plan, teach, assess and adapt (SHAPE America, 2019). Westfall (2020) suggested that success in these technical aspects must be achieved even under the harshest conditions. As such, coaches must be wary of becoming overly tactical (e.g., Kinnerk, Harvey, MacDonncha, & Lyons, 2018) with regards to their responsibilities and incorporate positive coaching attributes such transformational leadership and fostering relationships with athletes.

**Strive for continuous improvement**

As coaches gain knowledge and experience, it isconceivable they desire to improve their skills and abilities, not just for the benefit of the various stakeholders assessing their performance but for themselves.Through this constant self-reflection, coaches must counter the notion of sport as being "change-averse" (Cunningham, 2015).Under stressful circumstances, like change or with other issues, reflection is an effective tool in the coach decision making process (Wharton &Roussi, 2015). Some of the various processes used to achieve the highest degree of self-reflection include journaling (Gilbert &Trudel, 2013), reflective conversation (Gilbert, 2017), and the development of a personal coaching narrative (Gearity, 2014). When examining the pursuit of mastery in coaching, Van Mullem and Dahlin (2017) found that progress in the area of reflection occurs away from the game. Consistent with Vallée and Bloom (2005), the process of self-reflection has a cyclical effect and also benefits the other six core responsibilities.

**Coaching Expertise and Context**

One of the primary questions regarding the NSSC,its seven core responsibilities and 42 standards, is the applicability to the various coaching expertise levels and contexts (Gano-Overway et al., 2020). Although the NSSC were designed to provide the fundamental guidelines for all coaching-related professionals, the knowledge and skills contained in the standards may be applied differently based expertise and context.Beginner coaches who are new to coaching or to coaching a particular sport, can benefit fromfoundational knowledge such as proper practice plans, effective team organization, administrative strategies, positive motivation techniques and ethical coaching behaviors (Murray, Schoenstedt, &Zwald, 2013). Intermediate coaches are characterized as the ones who gained some coaching experience but need additional knowledge and skills for a specific age group or sport. For example, appropriate training materials for intermediate coaches may be those concerned with social development, complex organization skills, techniques for evaluating athletes, and creating developmentally appropriate training plans. Finally, elite coaches are those with significant coaching experience (e.g., 10 or more years). These coaches may have a wealth of practical and conceptual knowledge learned over time through reflection, engagement and experience (Culver &Trudel, 2008; Schempp, McCullick, & Mason, 2006). While elite coaches are more likely to be "innovators" by relying on applied knowledge, they can also benefit from newer information derived by evidence-based research and best practices. Specifically, sport organizations and governing bodies are recommended to utilize the NSSC by tailoring specific needs of coaches depending on their level of expertise.For instance, coaches at different stages of their career may have different approaches and philosophies as it relates to their coaching practices. Because most coaches do not spend their time developing philosophical beliefs earlier in their careers (Wilcox &Trudel, 1998), it is likely that beginner coaches' priorities are not centered around, for example, setting a vision, goals, and standards (see NSSC Standard 1). Elite or expert coaches, on the other hand, are more likely to have developed their coaching knowledge and philosophies over time through experience (Gilbert &Trudel, 2005), and subsequently, may have an increased understanding and use of the NSSC standards.

**Purpose of the Study**

The NSSC offers a robust list of core responsibilities and standards all sport coaches should learn about and be able to execute. To date, research regarding sport stakeholders' perceptions of the core responsibilities and standards within the NSSC is limited. While previous research on coaches' perceptions of coaching standardsis sparse (see Hedlund et al., 2018 as an exception), because the NSSC was updated in 2019, new research is warranted (Gano-Overway et al., 2020). In addition, to our knowledge, no prior research has segmented results based on the self-perceived level of coaches. Anecdotal evidence aside, at some levels of sport coaching, coaches and their organization may have sufficient resources to hire experts to manage and oversee specific aspects of their team and athletes (e.g., the hiring of dedicated athletic trainers, physical trainers, nutritionists, etc.). While this does not remove the responsibility or oversight, coaches still should understand basic principles and practices of specialized experts on their staff, while also recognizing it may be beyond the scope of responsibilities for sport coaches to undertake certain tasks. For example, depending on legal jurisdiction, in many states within the United States, it would be illegal, or at the very least ethically questionable for a sport coach or parent to have a minor continue playing in a competition after suffering head trauma (e.g., a concussion) through contact/collision (Kim & Connaughton, 2020). As a result, due to legal liabilities, coaches may not have certain responsibilities, however in many cases, they must understand the important issues and responsibilities of the people working around them. Based on the newly updated NSSC, it is first necessary to examine the frequency of respondents' use of the listed 42 core responsibilities. If behaviors under examination do not accurately reflect frequent behaviors of sport coaches, then alternative research questions might be warranted. Second, because coaching effectiveness is an abstract, complex and often multidimensional construct to measure (e.g., effective at winning championships, effective at developing talented players, effective at helping athletes to succeed in life), numerous researchers have instead measured the concept of being a successful coach (see Côté&Gilbert, 2009; Gilbert, Lichtenwaldt, Gilbert, Zelezny, &Côté, 2009; Horn, 2008; Jowett, 2017). As a result, the question: "In your opinion, in order to be a successful sport coach, how important is it to be able to use the knowledge and skills described in the standard?" was used to measure the perceived relationship between the standard and coaching effectiveness. Finally, because it remains largely unknown whether coaches' perceptions of the NSSC are associated with their self-perceived level of being a beginner, intermediate or elite coach (Trudel& Gilbert, 2013), when the analysis was undertaken, the results were segmented based on the three groups.

**Methodology**

**Participants and Procedures**

After receiving IRB approval to undertake this research, using Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and offering approximately 40 cents per completed response, US-based coaches aged 18 and older from across the US were solicited for participation. In total, 1,982 respondents agreed to participate in this research. After filtering out ineligible (e.g., non-coaches, international coaches, under 18-year old coaches) participants at the outset of the electronic surveyand incomplete responses after all data were collected, 1,235 responses were subjected to analysis. In summary, coaches were 35.95% female, had an average age of 33.87 years old, and had an average of 6.06 years of coaching experience. In terms of their self-perceived coaching level, 29.2% were beginners, 53.2% were intermediate, 17.6% were elite coaches. When asked at what level they primarily coach, the top five responses were youth/community sports (20.67%), college/university sports (16.75%), middle/junior high school sports (12.83%), elementary school sports (10.97%), and senior high school sports (10.09%). In terms of their role, 14.30% were full-time, paid head coaches, while 16.26% were full-time, paid assistant coaches, and 13.42% were volunteer coaches. When asked about their race, 53.28% indicated white/Caucasian, 13.32% black/African-American, 11.36% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 6.95% Hispanic/Latinx. Finally, in terms of where respondents currently lived, 49 of 50 states, plus the District of Columbia, Guam and American Samoa all were represented in the sample, and the top five states represented were California (11.56%), Indiana (10.09%), Texas (9.50%), Florida (7.15%) and New York (6.37%).

**Instrumentation**

Due the online and monetary compensation provided to support the survey data collection, first, four filter questions were asked to receive respondent's agreement to participate, ensure minimal response bias, and check basic facts about each respondent. In order to move forward, respondents initially needed to agree to participate in the research. Next, because the NSSC is a US-specific document used by numerous governing bodies, respondents were asked to confirm they currently lived in the US or its territories.

Subsequently, respondents were asked to confirm that they had had at any point in their life been a sport coach of any type or at any level. Finally, respondents were asked to confirm their age was currently 18 years old or older.  If respondents responded in the affirmative to all four questions, then they were able to complete the online questionnaire. All others were thanked for their time and interest and disallowed to continue with the survey and blocked from further attempts at completing it.

After entering the main portion of the online survey research, randomly selected blocks of questions about each of the 42 standards were posed to respondents. After first being shown the exact text of each randomly selected standard, respondents were then asked two questions about each standard. First,they were asked "In your role as a sport coach, how frequently do use the knowledge and skills described in Standard #?" A 7-point (1-7) scale with the ordered answer choices never, rarely, occasionally, sometimes, frequently, usually and all the time used. After answering the first question, the second question appeared and asked "In your opinion, in order to be a successful sport coach, how important is it to be able to use the knowledge and skills described in Standard #?" Again, a 7-point (1-7) scale was used with the ordered answer choices not at all, of little importance, slightly important, moderately important, very important, extremely importance and absolutely essential. The 42 standards and each pair of questions and answer choices were randomly shown to all respondents. Finally, questions about respondents coaching experiences and demographics were posed to respondents before the survey concluded. On average, respondents took between 10-15 minutes to complete the survey.

**Data Analysis**

For this research, due to the large number of results (i.e., 84 results, each of which shows mean scores forthe three types of coaches [i.e., 252 group results in total are calculated]), analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to examine the differences between the three groups of coaches (beginner, intermediate and elite) for the results of all 84 questions.  To simplify the reporting of the results, figures for different set of results from the core responsibilities are shown below.  In addition, accompanying each figure are the ANOVA results for each standard among the three groups.
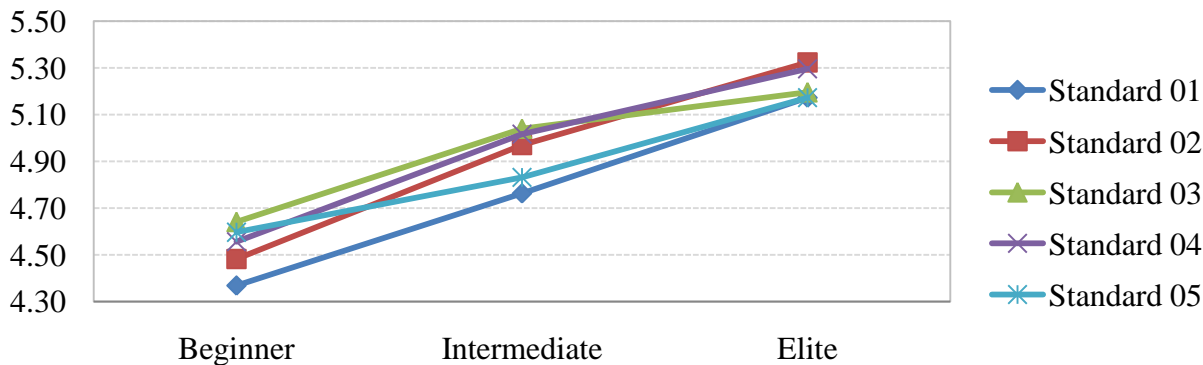
**Results**

The five most frequently used core responsibilities overall were "Standard 12: Create a respectful and safe environment which is free from harassment and abuse" (mean = 5.30, standard deviation = 1.65), "Standard 06: Abide by the code of conduct within their coaching context" (mean = 5.23, standard deviation = 1.65), "Standard 15: Monitor environmental conditions and modify participation as needed to ensure the health and safety of participants" (mean = 5.18, standard deviation = 1.58),  "Standard 30: Know the skills, elements of skill combinations and techniques, competition strategies and tactics, and the rules associated with the sport being coached" (mean = 5.16, standard deviation = 1.52), and "Standard 16: Reduce potential injuries by instituting safe and proper training principles and procedures" (mean = 5.12, standard deviation = 1.64).When examining the data trends and conducting ANOVA testing, 39 of 42 groups had statistically different results between the coaches. The three core responsibilities where statistically significant results were not found were "Standard 12: Create a respectful and safe environment which is free from harassment and abuse"($F_{[2, 1016]}$ = 1.88, p is not significant), "Standard 15: Monitor environmental conditions and modify participation as needed to ensure the health and safety of participants"($F_{[2, 1016]}$ = 0.23, p is not significant), and "Standard 16: Reduce potential injuries by instituting safe and proper training principles and procedures"($F_{[2, 1016]}$ = 1.57, p is not significant).

The five core responsibilities respondents felt were most importantare "Standard 12: Create a respectful and safe environment which is free from harassment and abuse" (mean = 5.40, standard deviation = 1.64), "Standard 17: Develop awareness of common injuries in sport and provide immediate and appropriate care within scope of practice" (mean = 5.30, standard deviation = 1.60), "Standard 16: Reduce potential injuries by instituting safe and proper training principles and procedures" (mean = 5.30, standard deviation = 1.59), "Standard 7: Model, teach and reinforce ethical behavior with program participants" (mean = 5.25, standard deviation = 1.57), and "Standard 6: Abide by the code of conduct within their coaching context" (mean = 5.23, standard deviation = 1.59). After examining the trends of the data and conducting ANOVA testing, 36 of 42 groups had statistically different results between the three groups of coaches. The six core responsibilities where statistically significant results were not found included "Standard 6: Abide by the code of conduct within their coaching context" ($F_{[2, 1016]}$ = 1.25, p is not significant),"Standard 12: Create a respectful and safe environment which is free from harassment and abuse"($F_{[2, 1016]}$ = 1.94, p is not significant), "Standard 14: Identify and mitigate physical, psychological and sociocultural conditions that predispose athletes to injuries" ($F_{[2, 1016]}$ = 1.08, p is not significant), "Standard 15: Monitor environmental conditions and modify participation as needed to ensure the health and safety of participants" ($F_{[2, 1016]}$ = 1.79, p is not significant), "Standard 16:

Reduce potential injuries by instituting safe and proper training principles and procedures" (F[2, 1016] = 1.92, p is not significant), and "Standard 21: Implement a positive and enjoyable sport climate based on best practices for psychosocial and motivational principles to maximize athlete and team well-being and performance" (F[2, 1016] = 2.86, p is not significant).

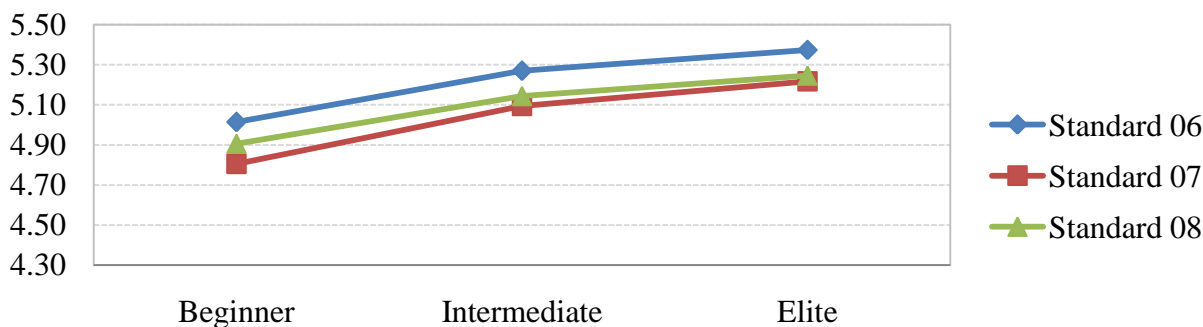Table 1  Results for the Frequency of Use of Core Responsibilities

## Set Vision, Goals and Standards for Sport Program



Note: ANOVA Results:  Standard 01: (F[2, 1016] = 14.54, p<.001), Standard 02:  (F[2, 1016] =18.16, p<.001), Standard 03:  (F[2, 1016] = 9.75, p<.001), Standard 04:  (F[2, 1016] = 13.61, p<.001), Standard 05:  (F[2, 1016] = 7.34, p<.01)

Table 2  Results for Frequency of Use

## Engage in and Support Ethical Practices



Note:  ANOVA Results:  Standard 06: (F[2, 1016] = 3.42, p<.05), Standard 07:  (F[2, 1016] = 4.17, p<.05), Standard 08:(F[2, 1016] = 3.17, p<.05)

Table 3  Results for Frequency of Use

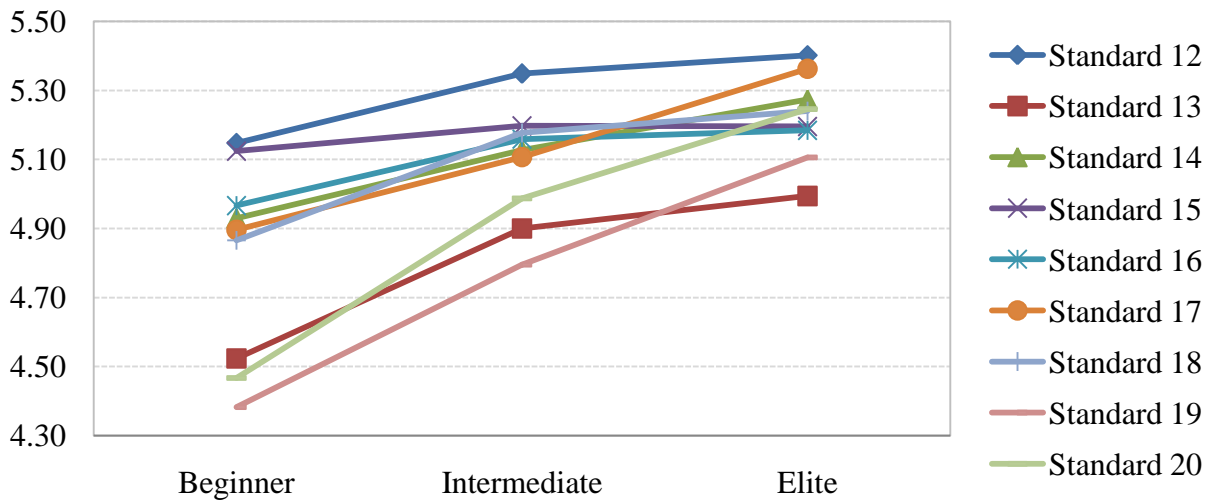## Build Relationships
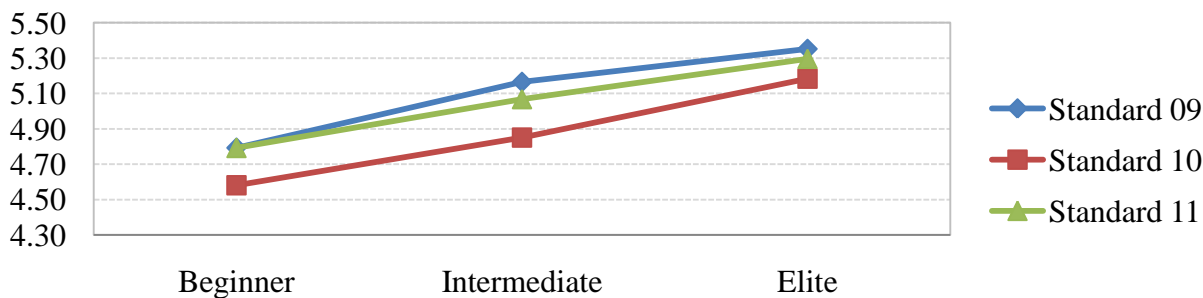


Note:  ANOVA Results:  Standard 09:  (F[2, 1016] = 8.81, p<.001), Standard 10:  (F[2, 1016] = 8.02, p<.001), Standard 11:  (F[2, 1016] = 6.23, p<.01)

Table 4  Results for Frequency of Use

## Develop a Safe Sport Environment



Note:  ANOVA Results:  Standard 12:  (F[2, 1016] = 1.88, p is not significant), Standard 13:  (F[2, 1016] = 6.70, p<.01), Standard 14:  (F[2, 1016] = 3.07, p<.05), Standard 15:  (F[2, 1016] = 0.23, p is not significant), Standard 16:  (F[2, 1016] = 1.57, p is not significant), Standard 17:  (F[2, 1016] = 4.70, p<.01), Standard 18:  (F[2, 1016] = 4.60, p<.05), Standard 19:  (F[2, 1016] = 12.56, p<.001), Standard 20:(F[2, 1016] = 14.25, p<.001)

Table 5  Results for Frequency of Use

## Create a Positive and Inclusive Sport Environment
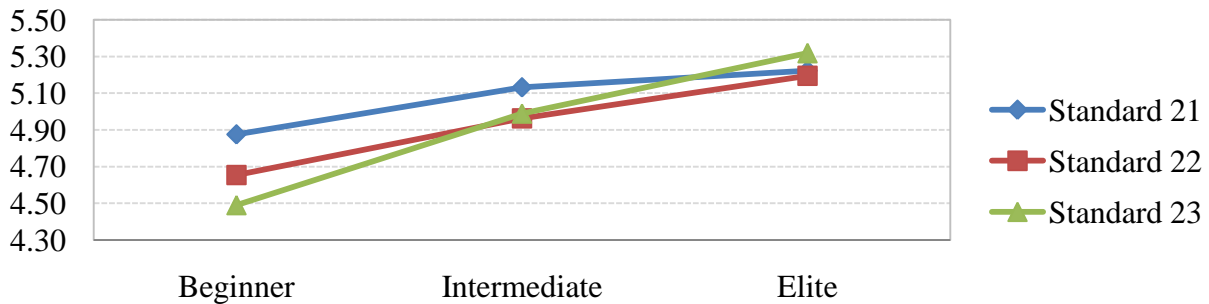


Note:  ANOVA Results:  Standard 21:  (F[2, 1016] = 3.68, p<.05), Standard 22:  (F[2, 1016] = 6.58, p<.01), Standard 23:  (F[2, 1016] = 16.82, p<.001)

Table 6  Results for Frequency of Use

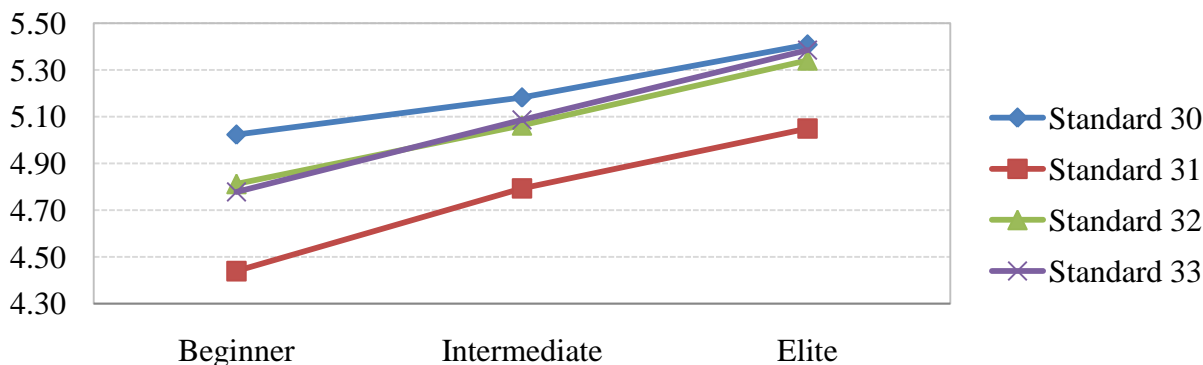## Conduct Practices and Prepare for Competition - Planning
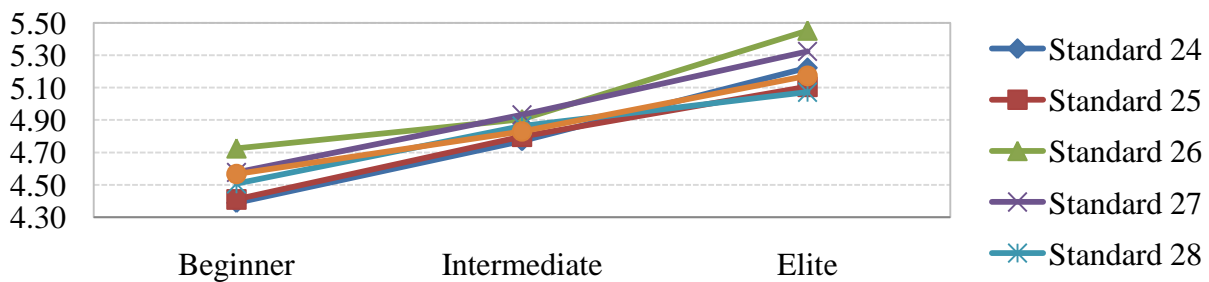


Note:  ANOVA Results:  Standard 24:  (F[2, 1016] = 18.56, p<.001), Standard 25:  (F[2, 1016] = 11.86, p<.001), Standard 26:  (F[2, 1016] = 12.75, p<.001), Standard 27:  (F[2, 1016] = 13.84, p<.001), Standard 28:  (F[2, 1016] = 8.19, p<.001), Standard 29:  (F[2, 1016] = 8.28, p<.001)

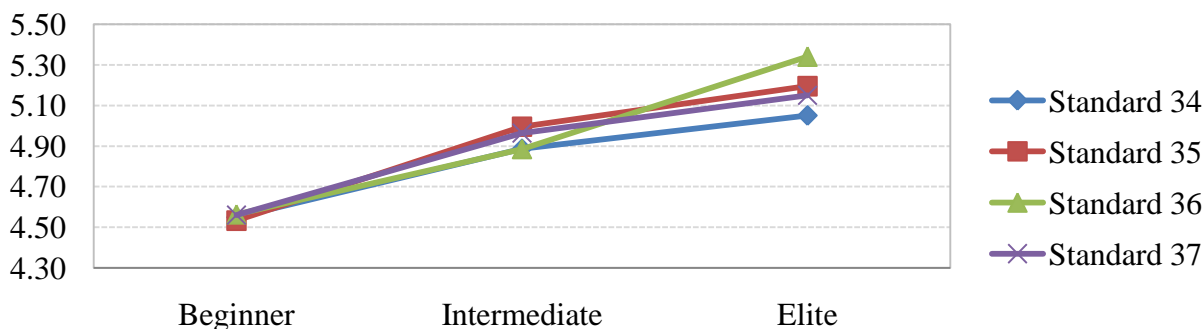Table 7  Results for Frequency of Use

**Conduct Practices and Prepare for Competition - Teaching**



Note:  ANOVA Results:  Standard 30: (F[2, 1016] = 3.61, p<.05), Standard 31: (F[2, 1016] = 10.03, p<.001), Standard 32:  (F[2, 1016] = 7.21, p<.01), Standard 33:  (F[2, 1016] = 9.42, p<.001)
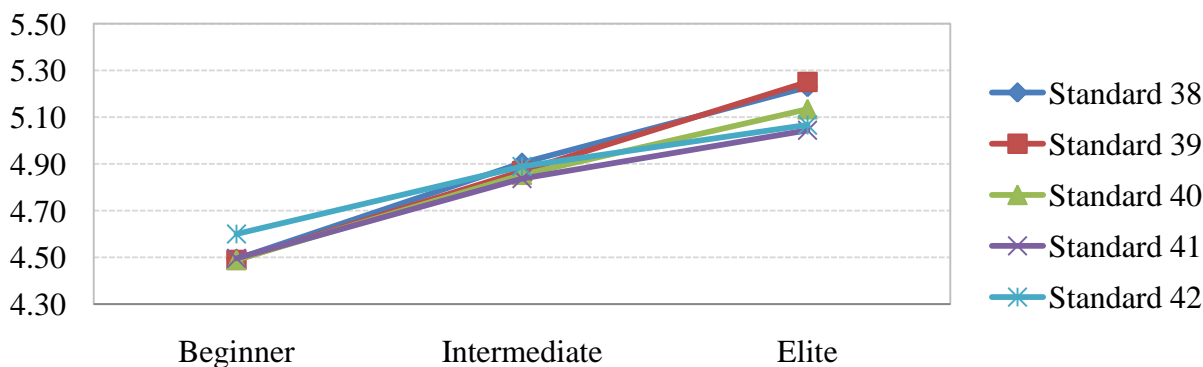
Table 8  Results for Frequency of Use

**Conduct Practices and Prepare for Competition - Assessing and Adapting**



Note:  ANOVA Results:  Standard 34:  (F[2, 1016] = 7.07, p<.01), Standard 35:  (F[2, 1016] = 12.99, p<.001), Standard 36: (F[2, 1016] = 14.77, p<.001), Standard 37:  (F[2, 1016] = 10.07, p<.001)

Table 9  Results for Frequency of Use

**Strive for Continuous Improvement**



Note:  ANOVA Results:  Standard 38:  (F[2, 1016] = 14.41, p<.001), Standard 39:  (F[2, 1016] = 14.45, p<.001), Standard 40: (F[2, 1016] = 10.63, p<.001), Standard 41:  (F[2, 1016] = 8.47, p<.001), Standard 42:  (F[2, 1016] = 5.73, p<.01)

Table 10  Results for the Importance to Successful Coaching of the Following Standards

### Set Vision, Goals and Standards for Sport Program
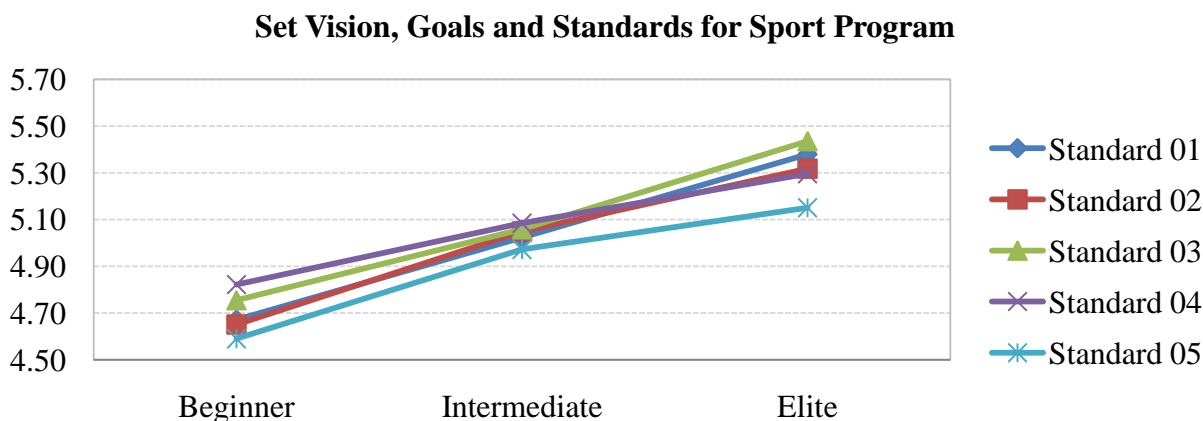


Note:  ANOVA Results:  Standard 01:  (F[2, 1016] = 12.72, p<.001), Standard 02:  (F[2, 1016] = 12.65, p<.001), Standard 03:  (F[2, 1016] = 12.77, p<.001), Standard 04:  (F[2, 1016] = 5.95, p<.01), Standard 05:  (F[2, 1016] = 9.03, p<.001)

Table 11  Results for the Importance to Successful Coaching of the Following Standards

### Engage in and Support Ethical Practices
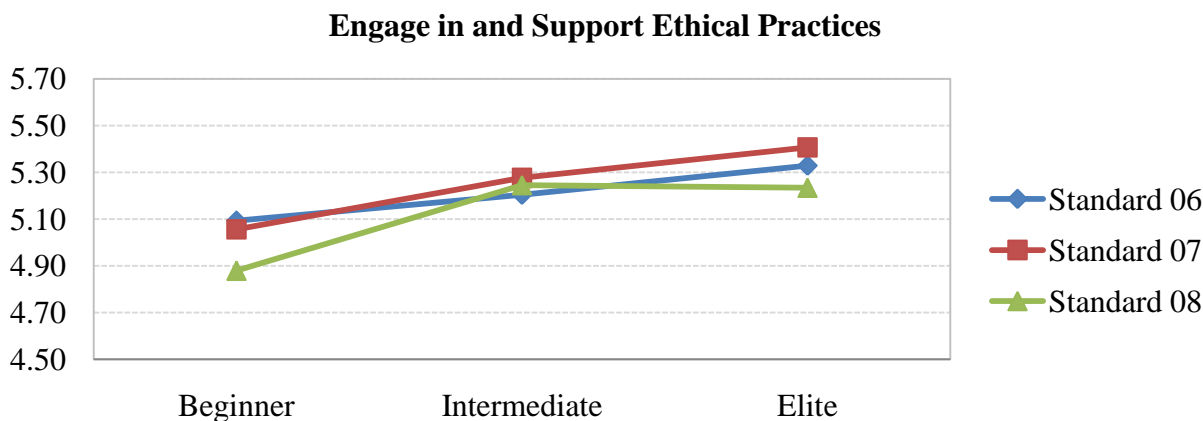


Note:  ANOVA Results:  Standard 06:  (F[2, 1016] = 1.25, p is not significant), Standard 07:  (F[2, 1016] = 3.20, p<.05), Standard 08:  (F[2, 1016] = 5.37, p<.01)
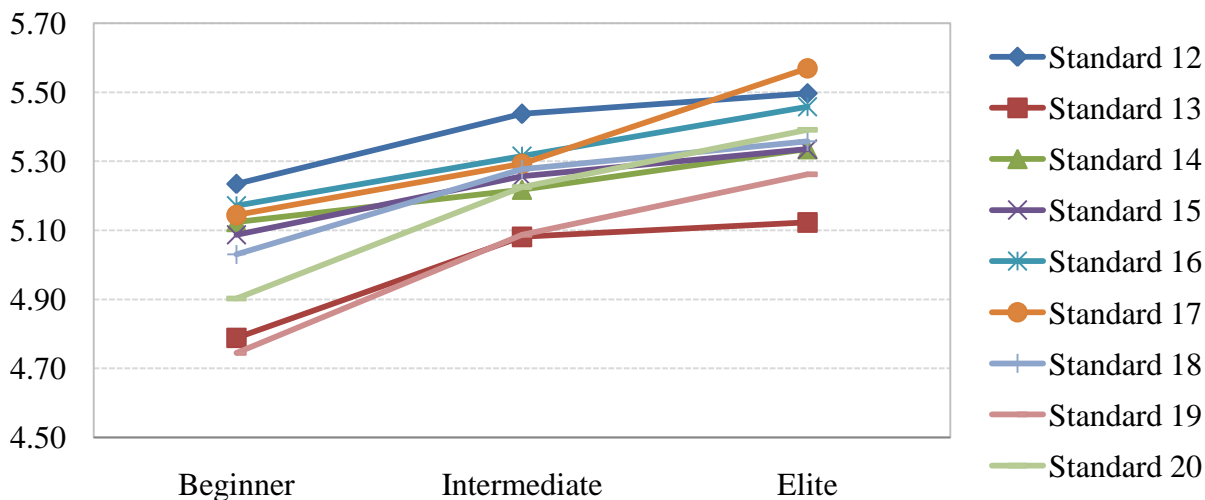
Table 12  Results for the Importance to Successful Coaching of the Following Standards

### Build Relationships
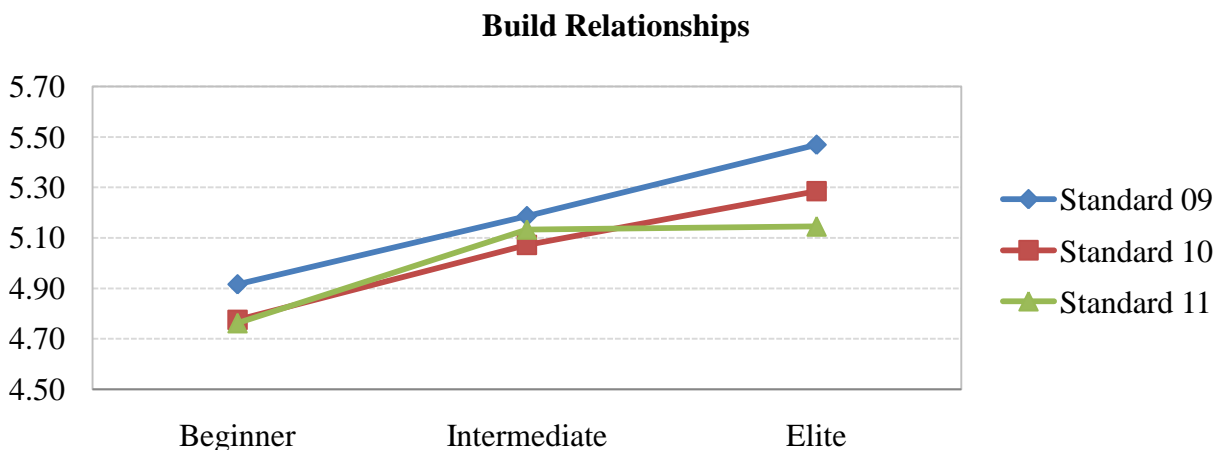


Note:  ANOVA Results:  Standard 09:  (F[2, 1016] = 7.75, p<.001), Standard 10:  (F[2, 1016] = 6.19, p<.01), Standard 11:  (F[2, 1016] = 6.50, p<.01)

Table 13  Results for the Importance to Successful Coaching of the Following Standards

## Develop a Safe Sport Environment



Note:  ANOVA Results:  Standard 12:  (F[2, 1016] = 1.94, p is not significant), Standard 13:  (F[2, 1016] = 3.97, p<.05), Standard 14:  (F[2, 1016] = 1.08, p is not significant), Standard 15:  (F[2, 1016] = 1.79, p is not significant), Standard 16:  (F[2, 1016] = 1.92, p is not significant), Standard 17:  (F[2, 1016] = 4.02, p<.05), Standard 18:  (F[2, 1016] = 3.21, p<.05), Standard 19:  (F[2, 1016] = 7.38, p<.01), Standard 20:  (F[2, 1016] = 6.48, p<.01)

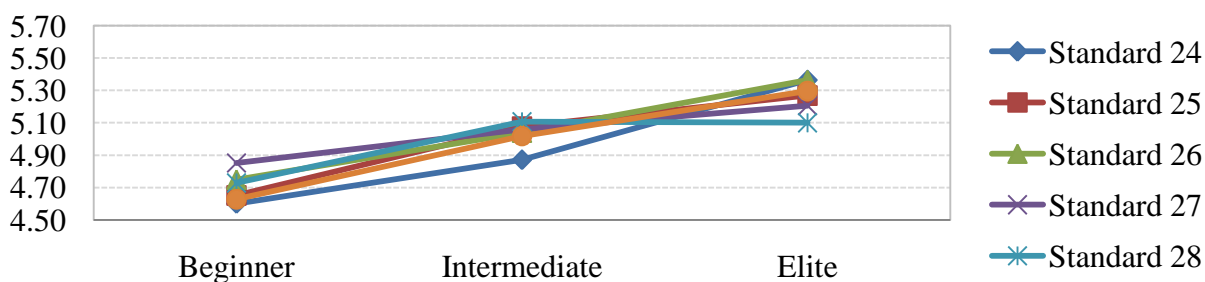Table 14  Results for the Importance to Successful Coaching of the Following Standards

## Create a Positive and Inclusive Sport Environment
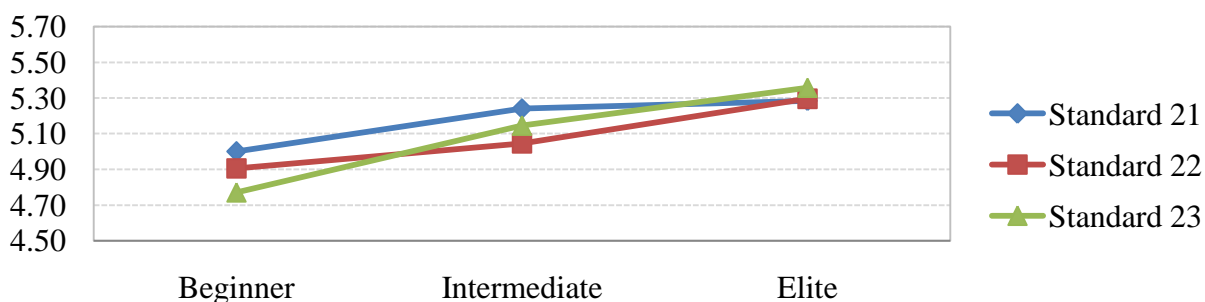


Note:  ANOVA Results:  Standard 21:  (F[2, 1016] = 2.86, p is not significant), Standard 22: (F[2, 1016] = 3.27, p<.05), Standard 23:  (F[2, 1016] = 9.37, p<.001)

Table 15  Results for the Importance to Successful Coaching of the Following Standards

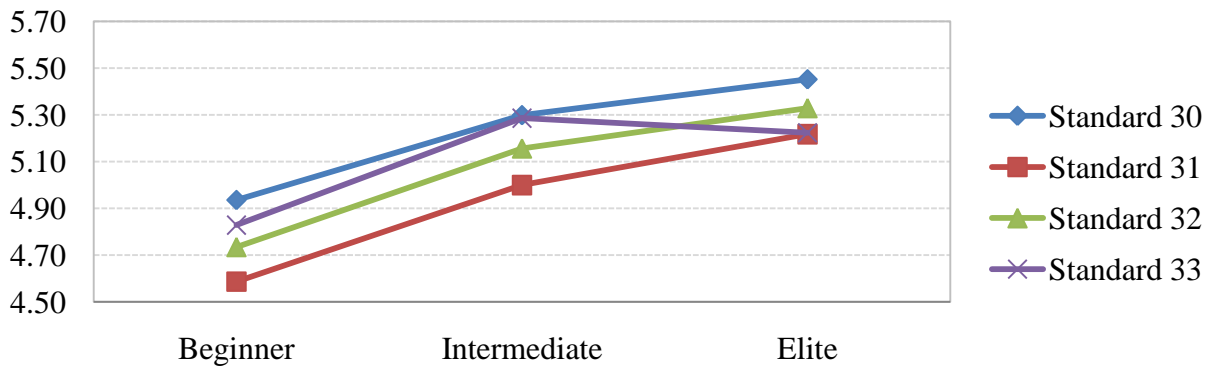## Conduct Practices and Prepare for Competition - Planning



Note:  ANOVA Results:  Standard 24:  (F[2, 1016] = 14.58, p<.001), Standard 25:  (F[2, 1016] = 11.93, p<.001), Standard 26:  (F[2, 1016] = 9.31, p<.001), Standard 27:  (F[2, 1016] = 3.47, p<.05), Standard 28:  (F[2, 1016] = , p<.001), Standard 29:  (F[2, 1016] = 11.09, p<.001)

Table 16  Results for the Importance to Successful Coaching of the Following Standards
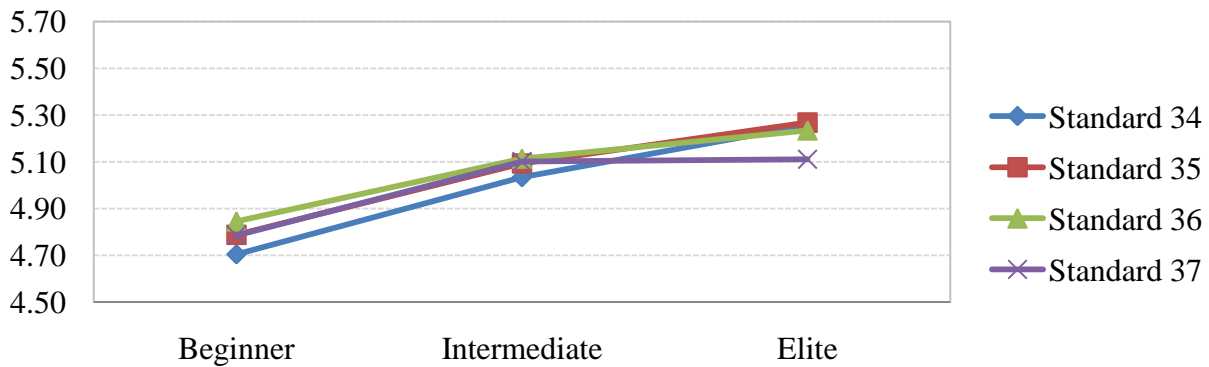
**Conduct Practices and Prepare for Competition - Teaching**



Note:  ANOVA Results:  Standard 30:  ($F[2, 1016] = 7.68$, $p<.001$), Standard 31:  ($F[2, 1016] = 11.70$, $p<.001$), Standard 32:  ($F[2, 1016] = 10.83$, $p<.001$), Standard 33:  ($F[2, 1016] = 9.28$, $p<.001$)

Table 17  Results for the Importance to Successful Coaching of the Following Standards

**Conduct Practices and Prepare for Competition - Assessing and Adapting**



Note:  ANOVA Results:  Standard 34:  ($F[2, 1016] = 9.01$, $p<.001$), Standard 35:  ($F[2, 1016] = 6.63$, $p<.01$), Standard 36:  ($F[2, 1016] = 4.52$, $p<.05$), Standard 37:  ($F[2, 1016] = 4.47$, $p<.05$)

Table 18  Results for the Importance to Successful Coaching of the Following Standards

**Strive for Continuous Improvement**
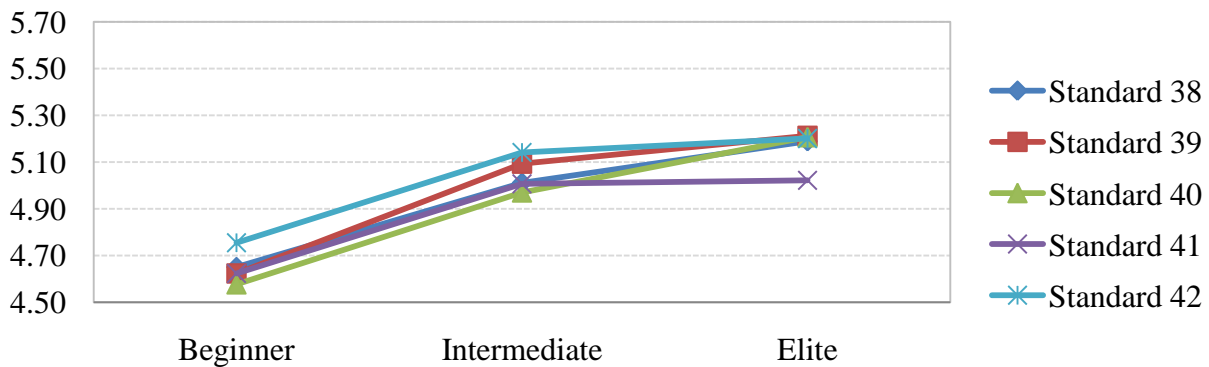


Note:  ANOVA Results:  Standard 38:  ($F[2, 1016] = 8.69$, $p<.001$), Standard 39:  ($F[2, 1016] = 12.05$, $p<.001$), Standard 40:  ($F[2, 1016] = 11.00$, $p<.001$), Standard 41:  ($F[2, 1016] = 7.26$, $p<.01$), Standard 42:($F[2, 1016] = 7.50$, $p<.01$)

**Discussion**

In 2019, the National Standards for Sport Coaches were revised for a third time since their initial creation in 1984. In the newly revised standards, "the core responsibilities, underlying knowledge, and professional, interpersonal, and intrapersonal skills coaches need to create quality sport experiences for athletes" (Gano-Overway, 2019, para. 3) were created and updated to demonstrate what sport coaches need to know and understand in various areas often under their charge. At the same time, there has been a recognition that different types of coaches at different levels and within different types of organizations all may have diverse perspectives, roles and responsibilities. As a result, the current research attempts to identify some of these areas of similarity and differences, while at the same time, providing and opportunity to evaluate and understand the relevance and importance of knowledge and information such as a list of national standards and core responsibilities of sport coaches.

In this research, for 39 of 42 standards, there were differences found between in the frequency of use of each standard among beginner, intermediate and elite coaches. In all of these cases, higher level coaches more frequently used most standards when compared to those with less expertise and experience. However, the three cases in which there were no statistically significant differences among all three groups of coaches share an interesting connection, in that all are part of the section of the standards labelled as "Developing a Safe Sporting Environment." In other words, regardless of any differences, sport coaches' frequency of behaviors in terms of "Standard 12: Create a respectful and safe environment which is free from harassment and abuse,""Standard 15: Monitor environmental conditions and modify participation as needed to ensure the health and safety of participants, and "Standard 16: Reduce potential injuries by instituting safe and proper training principles and procedures" indicate there is a similarity ofunderstanding among all types of coaches aboutthe ideas engendered in these standards. While the media often portrays sport coaches, especially elite professional ones as focused and caring more about winning than and their players' health and safety, these results suggest that coaches across the board are indeed aware of and engage in behaviors focused on ensuring respect and safety within the sporting environment in similar ways.

In terms of success, effective coaching and their relationship to the national standards, while again, there are differences found between beginner, intermediate and elite sport coaches, in six areas, those perceptions are found to be similar. In these results, one area where perceptions are similar is in "Engaging in and Supporting Ethical Practices," four stem from "Developing a Safe Sport Environment," and one is based in "Creating a Positive and Inclusive Sport Environment." Each of these three areas focus not about the skills one is coaching, but instead how coaches create a positive and ethical environment in which their players can practice, compete and develop the skills necessary to be a better player and person. Specifically, the six areas where differences between the three groups of coaches were not found included "Standard 6: Abide by the code of conduct within their coaching context," "Standard 12: Create a respectful and safe environment which is free from harassment and abuse," "Standard 14: Identify and mitigate physical, psychological and sociocultural conditions that predispose athletes to injuries," "Standard 15: Monitor environmental conditions and modify participation as needed to ensure the health and safety of participants," "Standard 16: Reduce potential injuries by instituting safe and proper training principles and procedures," and "Standard 21: Implement a positive and enjoyable sport climate based on best practices for psychosocial and motivational principles to maximize athlete and team well-being and performance." While a similar phenomenon can be seen in these results compared to the earlier ones, in that the health and safety of athletes are important, in these cases, a second group of standards related to creating an ethical, respectful, positive and enjoyable environment is perceived as something that all types of coaches similarly note are important when it comes to being successful and effective.

**Conclusion, Implications and Future Research**

In this research, the frequency of the use and the importance, relative to being a successful coach, of 42 core sport coaching core responsibilities were examined.  Both sets of results were segmented based on respondents' self-perceived beginner, intermediate or elite level of coaching. The results indicated that while there are statistically significant differences in many areas and levels of coaching, there are several areas where similarities are about, notably in areas focused the safety, health and wellness of athletes as well as fostering environments in which ethics, respect, and having positive and enjoyable experiences are important.  One of the largest resulting takeaways, therefore, is that one of the main ways in which all types of coaches both behave and think similarly is through focusing energies on how they coach, the environment they create and an athlete's wellness first focus.

Standards established for coaches have long served the profession and have guided the path of many beginner, intermediate and elite coaches alike. Based on the results of this particular study, it is important to continually reassess and amend the standards underpinning how coaches perform their job responsibilities. The dynamic nature of the coaching profession and the significant role of a coach has served as a reminder of the necessity to adapt to the needs of athletes and the myriad stakeholders involved in the administration of sport. While the main purpose of this study was to discern the frequency of use and importance of the 42 core responsibilities listed in the NSSC for various levels of coaches, the implications are far reaching.

While there are numerous implications of this research, in brief, the findings from this study can be used to assist sport coaches, sport coaching educators, future task forces overseeing future revisions, and other stakeholders. More importantly, sport coaches themselves may now have an enhanced level of confidence that if they maintain a good understanding of the principles and practices underlying the 42 core responsibilities, then the results support and reinforce the continued use of the NSSC standards in their present form and to maintain one's sport coaching readiness and facilitate life-long learning activities.

Sport coaching educators can use these results to identify areas where sport coaching education may be lacking and additional activities are required to prepare coaches for these roles and responsibilities. In addition, the coaching standards taskforce (Gano-Overway et al., 2020) and other practitioner-based sport organizations can also use these results to examine how coaches self-report their use of the standards and apply them to their coaching responsibilities.

In the future, sport coaches, sport coaching educators and the coaching standards task force will again undertake and attempt to improve the NSSC. The results of this research suggest some ways in which this process could be undertaken to examine the behaviors and perceptions sport coaches have of many of the core responsibilities they have. At the same time, future iterations of the NSSC might be wise to note that there are some areas of core responsibilities which are always important and should be ever-present in a coaches' mind, including the health, safety and wellness of athletes. At the same time, different types of coaches at different levels of coaching and those with different sets of coaching experiences may perceive different areas as important. As a result, some areas of coaching education may have be more important than others, and coaches would then be well-advised to always take those areas into consideration and to attempt to improve and enhance their knowledge, skills and ability to be effective in those areas.

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**Appendix**    National Standards for Sport Coaches (SHAPE America, 2019)

Set Vision, Goals and Standards for Sport Program
1.  Develop and enact an athlete-centered coaching philosophy.
2.  Use long-term athlete development with the intent to develop athletic potential, enhance physical literacy, and encourage lifelong physical activity.
3.  Create a unified vision using strategic planning and goal-setting principles.
4.  Align program with all rules and regulations and needs of the community and individual athletes.
5.  Manage program resources in a responsible manner.

Engage in and Support Ethical Practices
6.  Abide by the code of conduct within their coaching context.
7.  Model, teach and reinforce ethical behavior with program participants.
8.  Develop an ethical decision-making process based on ethical standards.

Build Relationships
9.  Acquire and utilize interpersonal and communication skills.
10. Develop competencies to work with a diverse group of individuals.
11. Demonstrate professionalism and leadership with all stakeholders.

Develop a Safe Sport Environment
12. Create a respectful and safe environment which is free from harassment and abuse.
13. Collaborate with program directors to fulfill all legal responsibilities and risk management procedures associated with coaching.
14. Identify and mitigate physical, psychological and sociocultural conditions that predispose athletes to injuries.
15. Monitor environmental conditions and modify participation as needed to ensure the health and safety of participants.
16. Reduce potential injuries by instituting safe and proper training principles and procedures.
17. Develop awareness of common injuries in sport and provide immediate and appropriate care within scope of practice.
18. Support the decisions of sports medicine professionals to help athletes have a healthy return to participation following an injury.
19. Model and encourage nutritional practices that ensure the health and safety of athletes.
20. Provide accurate information about drugs and supplements to athletes and advocate for drug-free sport participation.

Create a Positive and Inclusive Sport Environment
21. Implement a positive and enjoyable sport climate based on best practices for psychosocial and motivational principles to maximize athlete and team well-being and performance.
22. Build inclusive practices into the program for all groups (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender/gender identity/gender expression, religion, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, nationality, etc.) which are aligned with current legal and ethical guidelines.
23. Understand the importance of including athletes with disabilities in meaningful participation in established sport programs and consider options for athletes who cannot participate in traditional sport opportunities.

Conduct Practices and Prepare for Competition
Plan
24. Create seasonal and/or annual plans that incorporate developmentally appropriate progressions for instructing sport-specific skills based on best practices in motor development, biomechanics, and motor learning.
25. Design appropriate progressions for improving sport-specific physiological systems throughout all phases of the sport season using essential principles of exercise physiology and nutritional knowledge.
26. Plan practices to incorporate appropriate competition strategies, tactics and scouting information.
27. Incorporate mental skills into practice and competition to enhance performance and athlete well-being.
28. Create intentional strategies to develop life skills and promote their transfer to other life domains.
29. Understand components of effective contest management.

Teach
30. Know the skills, elements of skill combinations and techniques, competition strategies and tactics, and the rules associated with the sport being coached.
31. Develop and utilize pedagogical strategies in daily practices.
32. Craft daily practice plans based on sound teaching and learning principles to promote athlete development and optimize competitive performance.
33. Use appropriate motivational techniques to enhance performance and athlete engagement during practices and competitions.

Assess
34. Implement appropriate strategies for evaluating athlete training, development and performance.
35. Engage athletes in a process of continuous self-assessment and reflection to foster responsibility for their own learning and development.

Adapt
36. Adjust training and competition plans based on athlete needs and assessment practices.
37. Use strategic decision-making skills to make adjustments or improvements or change course throughout a competition.

Strive for Continuous Improvement
38. Regularly engage in self-reflection or peer-reflection to deeply examine situations, generate potential solutions, and think through those solutions.
39. Develop an evaluation strategy to monitor and improve staff and team performance.
40. Improve coaching effectiveness by seeking to learn the latest information on coaching through various avenues of coach development.
41. Engage in mentoring and communities of practice to promote a learning culture and continual improvement.
42. Maintain work-life harmony and practice self-care to manage stress and burnout.