

Institute for Sport Coaching

<http://www.instituteforsportcoaching.org>

Reviewed by Travis E. Dorsch, assistant professor and Founding Director of the Families in Sport Lab, Department of Family, Consumer, and Human Development, Utah State University; Nicole D. Bolter, Assistant Professor, Department of Kinesiology, San Francisco State University.

The *Institute for Sport Coaching* is a not-for-profit organization devoted to the creation and delivery of educational experiences and leadership tools to sport coaches. Based in Acton, Massachusetts, USA, the *Institute's* mission is to provide excellence in sport coaching education, ideally enabling sport coaches to be more effective in their mentoring of athletes. In the American sport system, the vast majority of coaches are volunteers and receive inadequate training. The *Institute* was founded in 2003 to be an organization that could provide educational opportunities to coaches across a wide spectrum of amateur sports. According to its website, the *Institute* aims to become the preeminent provider of sport coaching education, a goal facilitated by the creation of a leadership training center for professional, interscholastic, and youth sport coaches. This review includes a synopsis of the resources provide by the *Institute*, and evaluates both the content and format of the *Institute's* webpage.

As stated on the website, the mission of the *Institute* is to “develop and nurture professional, intercollegiate, interscholastic, and youth sport coaches capable of preparing athletes for positive experiences in sport and teaching life skills necessary to be valued members of their communities.” In striving to achieve this mission, the *Institute* is structured to enhance sport coaching, and subsequently the athletes and communities they serve. The aims of the *Institute* are vast and include creating a culture of innovation, enhancing professional development for coaches, improving funding for coaches across competitive levels, promoting professional and ethical

values, and providing broad participation opportunities for youth to combat obesity and inactivity trends.

The *Institute* was founded by Christopher Hickey, MPP, MSS in 2003. Prior to establishing the *Institute*, Hickey served as a folio reviewer, a member of the Board of Directors, and ultimately as the Executive Director for the *National Council for Accreditation of Coaching Education* (NCACE), where he oversaw coaching education programs and accreditation. In his past and present roles, Hickey has established himself as an advocate for the development and advancement of coaching resources. In addition to his front-line work at the *Institute*, Hickey also served as an assistant Men's Athletics Coach for the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Boston.

A unique aspect of the *Institute* is its primary assumption that coaching education and training should be an accredited process. According to the NCACE, having an accredited program enhances the reputation, augments the marketing capability, assures the quality, and allows for the continual improvement of an organization. Driven by this assumption, the *Institute* employs nationally recognized professionals with expertise in coaching education and accreditation to assist sports organizations and communities in preparing, applying for, and maintaining accreditation. *Institute* consultants assist with planning to launch coaching education programs in accordance with the NCACE's *National Standards for Sport Coaches* and develop and implement tailored workshops and courses for sport programs across the country. Accreditation work includes assisting coaches and league administrators in preparing NCACE applications and offering guidance for

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Nicole D. Bolter is an assistant professor in the Department of Kinesiology at San Francisco State University. She earned a Ph.D. in Kinesiology from the University of Minnesota where she specialized in sport and exercise psychology. Her research focuses on understanding how participation in sport and physical activity can be a growth experience for children and adolescents. Drawing from the positive youth development framework, recent studies published by Bolter were on effective coaching behaviors, character development, and evaluation of a physical-activity based youth development program.

programs to maintain NCACE accreditation over the long term. These accreditation-related services differentiate the *Institute* from other organizations and reflect nationally recognized standards for coaching. Framed by the current state of competitive and recreational athletics in the United States, the *Institute's* services are potentially valuable for administrators and sport organizations interested in accreditation, but not particularly useful for coaches looking for resources to directly improve their coaching styles and practices.

The structure and content of the *Institute's* website has both strengths and weaknesses. From the homepage, the user can access several pages helpful for understanding the organization itself. The 'About' page showcases the *Institute's* founding, provides brief biographies of its leaders, clarifies its mission, and lists frequently asked questions. The 'What We Do' page details the *Institute's* accreditation services, highlights coaching workshops, academies, and speakers, and outlines the *Institute's* consulting services. Finally, the 'What's New' page provides a record of all the recent happenings at the *Institute*. Unfortunately, portions of these pages are incomplete or out of date. For example, only two links were provided on the 'What's New' page, one from 2013 and one from 2014; and, a page under 'What We Do' refers to the Mid-Atlantic Coaches Academy as "Coming soon in 2012!" Moreover, many of the bios for the *Institute's* Board of Directors and Advisors are missing. Given this information, we are curious as to how active the *Institute* currently is and whether its advertised services are still being offered as of 2016.

The *Institute's* social media presence can be found through the 'Blog' and 'Media' pages, as well as icons included on the homepage for Twitter and Facebook. The blog page has posts from *Institute* staff and external contributors consisting of anecdotes, best practices, and resources for all levels of sport. The media page archives news releases related to sport coaching, as well as the *Institute's* past and present newsletters. The most recent blog post was dated September 2014, while the most recent news release and newsletter were published in July 2011 and January 2014, respectively. This calls into question the current activity of the *Institute* furthered by the Twitter account (@BetterCoaching), which lists an impressive 5,949 tweets and boasts 2,265 followers, but finding original (i.e., not retweets) tweets from the organization in any recent time frame was unsuccessful. It was surprising that the *Institute* did not have a more recent, consistent online presence. We believe a coach

looking for resources would be unlikely to subscribe to their blog or follow them on Twitter as a means for gathering current coaching information.

Two links on the homepage offer resources coaches may find useful in their coaching. One resource is the 'Bookshelf', which is organized around nine topics focused on coaching and coaching education and includes 54 resources. Coaches can sort these resources by topic and are able to search through numerous titles per topic area. The *Institute's* "Research and Advocacy" resources were also a highlight by providing in-house data on coach attitudes, mentoring, national coaching standards, coaching education, and offering a national report card on youth sports. It also provides updates on new research, links to web resources, and offers a vision for positive sports. The information in these sections is concisely organized with bullet points and tables and would be easily digestible for a coach. However, in light of the *Institute's* mission, we were surprised many of the resources offered by the *Institute* were not featured more prominently. While a coaching resource of the month and a link to additional archived resources were available directly on the homepage, the majority of coaching resources were a layer away. For example, "Resources" is the eighth of ten tabs on the header, a position that seems to minimize the importance of resource provision. Despite this criticism, the *Institute's* web resources could be a valuable tool for parent-coaches in recreational leagues who seek to create an atmosphere of positive youth development, as well as interscholastic and travel coaches striving to enhance their styles and practices. However, we do not envision coaches at the highest levels of club, intercollegiate, or professional sports utilizing the *Institute's* resources for learning or accreditation.

Ultimately, the resources and services offered by the *Institute* have the potential to positively impact coach effectiveness, thereby enhancing the sport experience for coaches, parents, referees, fans, and most importantly, the athletes who participate. Indeed, the *Institute's* consulting team is equipped to help and advise coaches, organizations, and communities enhance the sport experience. The *Institute's* role in accreditation may also become a valuable service for administrators or leagues. However, we are hesitant to recommend the website as a resource to coaches given the absence of recent updates and evidence of the organization's ongoing activity. Our review suggests the organization and website was more active prior to 2011 and has since declined, suggesting more current resources are available through other organizations.