

## Coaching Those Who Coach

- [00:00](#) J: Welcome to the compete like a champion podcast, you're here with Dr. Larry Lauer and coach Johnny Parkes with USTA player development. Today we have a special guest, the president for the United States center for coaching excellence. Kristen Diefenbach. Kristen, welcome to the podcast.
- [00:21](#) K: Thank you.
- [00:22](#) J: Alrighty, we'll we're here live at the U S open and we've just concluded a lot the qualifying event, we're into the main draw now. And one of the dynamics we have at the US open here is we're allowed coaching in the qualifying. So we thought we'd talk a little bit about that, but then also coaching globally and what you're seeing. But first before we kick off, I wanted to maybe get an insight into your backgrounds. Maybe if you can explain what is the USCCE, what they do?
- [00:48](#) K: Sure. Um, well, I'm currently the president of the United States center for coaching excellence, the USCCE, as we call it. And we are an organization that really is focused on quality coaching, coaching education, and coach development. So we take a look at, if we're really looking at longterm player enjoyment and positive outcomes, we need really quality coaches, which means we really need to pay attention to the systems in which coaches are prepared and developed and how we support that.
- [01:12](#) J: Great. So as, in your role, or do you say is the qualities of a of a coach developer?
- [01:18](#) K: Well, a coach developer is really part of the educational system. So they not only have to know the sport organization in the sport system, but they have to understand educational theory and educational ideas. In particular working most often with adult learners. So they're working in the professional workforce.
- [01:33](#) J: So we are here at the US open, why are you here in the nicest terms?
- [01:38](#) K: Why am I here?
- [01:38](#) J: Why are you here?
- [01:39](#) K: Well, uh, no. Uh, one, tennis is awesome, but uh, we came in with USTAU to work with their coach developers in the system to really take a hard look at how are the folks that prepare the coaches best prepared to transmit the knowledge and to prepare the coaches that are working in the field.
- [01:56](#) J: Nice. So what are you seeing are, have you been at the chance to go out to the site and watch any matches?

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K: Oh yeah, we got to go to the opening night. So we got to see the exciting matches that went on the first night and check out just the amazing layout. The new, um, Thea Gibson statue that was unveiled was pretty amazing.

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J: So have you been a, when you're walking around the grounds you watching matches you looking at the sidelines at all the coaches and what they're doing.

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K: Nah, we're not there to watch the coaches. When I go to watch a coach, I'm there to work with a coach directly. But when I go as a fan, I just go as a fan.

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J: So Larry, I mean I want to take it over to you here cause I think it'd be good to dive into coaching and how it's allowed at the US open, the dynamics we face with that and challenges or positives from it.

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L: Well, I think what we're seeing, first of all, JP, is that coaching has become more and more important in tennis where it's playing an influential role. And coaches now are directly impacting matches, being able to coach while the match is going on. We've seen it at WTA where coaches can come out in change over, so players call them over and now here at the Open, during Qualis actually being able to walk over during a break and play [inaudible], but the coach can also give feedback advice between points. One of the things they can't do is yell out during the point or yell across the court to the other side, but they are allowed the opportunity to give information, which in tennis is extremely valuable if you think about it because if a player is playing someone else the wrong way and the coach can give them that bit of information, you know you need to do this instead, you need to serve them more out wide or move your serve around for example, that can impact the outcome of the match. So the coaches what we're seeing now have a greater opportunity to impact what's happening in the course of a match. And it'll be interesting to see where this goes if we're going to see this in main draw of slams in the future and if we're going to see it in the ATP as well. But to me it begs the question of are our coaches prepared to be in that situation? Because if you're a basketball coach, football coach, hockey coach, you're used to being in the throw of the competitive situation, having to give feedback under a time crunch, under a time pressure, understanding your role and the messages you're trying to give for tennis coaches. Um, this can be completely new unless, for example, you've coached in college or an international event where you're allowed to coach.

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J: Yeah, it's interesting. I'm always conflicted by what my opinion is on the coaching on the court because on one side, we are an individual sport and part of it is you're trying to train the decision making and how they problem solve. And the best way to go about doing that is to kind of let them own their own devices to try and figure it out. But at the same time, there's a lot of high stakes here and players, we talked about in a previous episode about the external factors and the pressures and the extra stresses, so I think sometimes the players look for, look over to the box for that sense of comfort and to be able to maybe calm down a little bit if they do feel highly stressed. So it's, it's one of those where I'm not really sure how I feel about it, but it's interesting and

sparks a lot of good debate. Well, what do you think, let's ask Chris, what do you think as an individual sport, I mean you work with a lot of different organizations, different sports. How's tennis maybe a little bit different in regards to maybe the team sports you work with?

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K: Do you mean from a standpoint of coaching and looking at the coaching?

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J: Yeah.

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K: Well, I think as Larry mentioned, when you have a team sport, most team sports, the coach is right on the sidelines and can be very involved and very engaged. And there's a culture around that where the team comes in for huddle and does lots of things. And as he was mentioning, when you get into a situation where the coach may not normally be able to do that, there certainly is a different style where the coach has to be thinking ahead and planning and now that you bring it in where they're on the sidelines and they can do those things, it becomes really, really important for the coach, not only to know their content knowledge and things that they need to tell the athlete, but to be able to control their own emotions and regulation. Because if I'm getting flustered and upset or struggling with something and the player comes over, I need to be able to present the right tone and everything to the athlete and so I think in tennis that's a, especially given this sport that there's such a reserve around how things are done in the silence and all that, that there's a really big piece for helping coaches understand themselves and how to regulate themselves as much as it is when they're working with the athletes.

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J: Yeah, I was gonna say cause a lot of that may be dependent on the individual athlete they're working with and their personality and how they fit, cause we see a lot of different types of coaching out there. We're seeing some coaches that are, the tone of their voice is quite strong, quite commanding, quite as if they're demanding something out of athletes. Some are trying to be a calming influence. So how much awareness to that do you bring to the coaches in understanding that the impact of their tone of their behaviors, whether they're nonverbal side of it, when the player's looking over and, and you maybe see the coach's head go down after a point or how much of that is taught in your role and what you do?

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K: I think it's like any really good leader, a really good teacher, there's going to be a certain amount that might have to do with who the person is and how they do it. But it certainly is something that the really great coaches, the really great teachers study and learn over time about themselves and about their interactions with people. So it's something that you might be good at as a person, but we can make it better and better and the really great ones study it and work on it as an intentional thing, but that ability to introspectively look at how am I acting and how is that impacting somebody else? Because as a coach, you're in a position of power and as you noted, the athlete will look over and pay attention because you are an authority figure. Even if it's an adult adult coaching relationship. There is that dynamic of I'm looking to you for some sort

of feedback or approval or something along those lines and we really need to be careful. The research does suggest that the coach-athlete relationship is a very important one and what the coach says and does impacts the athlete. We've been doing some preliminary research that the self-awareness in a coach to understand themselves and how they're thinking, how they're doing things is one of the things that puts that coach on the trajectory of being able to be influential with a lot of different athletes and a lot of different ways because it's not just my style and if you fit it great, it's I can adapt to what does the athlete need in this moment, in this time, in this phase of their career. But that's a skill that the coach has to actively work on. It's not something that happens by accident.

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L: I think in tennis that would be uniquely important because of the different personalities and you're working closely one on one with a person. It's not with a group of people, not a team of people. So that relationship between coach and player maybe is, is closer and more emotional. There's more of an emotional connection. And we see that sometimes players and coaches get a little too close and, and not in a in a negative way, but in a way that they, maybe a player becomes dependent on the coach and the coach really needs that player to be successful because of that connection or because, well, they're paying them. You know that's part of it too.

[09:05](#)

K: It's a unique setting too in that, unlike some sports like running where the coach and the athlete are there, but then the athlete is going away as they run away as it were. But in tennis you're right there all the time and when you have practice, you're right there on the court together and there's a, there's also a history of the genteel country club kind of a, you're together, the club is there, you're going to be at the court, but then you're going to go inside to the club and you're just around each other where in a track or in a field, you're often going away to another space afterwards. And so it really does make for a very small family dynamic within your sport, which I think extends that closeness of everyone

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L: Now with this ability to coach at the slam in the qualis, one of my, my fears is that coaches get excited about that and they can tend to overcoach. And I don't think that I'd seen that from our coaches. I think they actually have done a great job on the sidelines. But is that something Kristen, that you see is maybe we transition a little bit in just generally into sport and maybe more with youth. Do you tend to see overcoaching from coaches because they're trying to either control what's happening or to impact learning in their own way instead of allowing it to happen? And maybe that's more of a guided question there.

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K: I was going to say, I'm grinning a little, I'm wondering if you're reflecting on your experiences in youth sports in the last couple of years as your kids have gotten older.

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L: Well, yeah, let's not get into that publicly.

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K: Um, I think definitely I think a lot of times people coach is a capital C word, right? You come in and you're the coach and you're the capital C coach and everybody knows you by coach and that's what they call you, coach, right? And you just, you don't need any other name. So it's a very powerful position in our culture and how we look at sport is, and parents aspire to be a coach. I've had dads tell me, it's my right as a parent to be coach. It's a very, very powerful sense of a community. Some of the college coaches I've worked with have said, I can't go out publicly and just in my sweats. I've gotta... Because people look at me as an authority figure and a, an important person. And so all of that weight we put on there then puts it into a situation where the coach is all powerful, the coach is authority. And that, I think, trickles down into youth sport where I must do this, where then it's very coach centered my agenda, what I'm doing. And they really don't shift to what we call a learner centered environment or an athlete centered environment where, what does the athlete need right now and how do I have the skills as a coach to give them what they need right now? Not everything I know, right? So I might be great wisdom many, many years, but the good coaches know how to go, what's needed in this moment and then how do I be quiet?

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L: Well, I think there's a simple way to figure that out too. When you hear coaches saying, I want you to do this or I feel like this a lot when they, I felt that that was great or I felt that was bad or using that kind of language. I don't know what you think JP, but I think when you listen to the language of a coach you can decipher if it's about them or if it's about the athlete.

[11:55](#)

J: Absolutely. And I think the tendency is to put our opinion onto the player because we think that that's what's going to have the most influence. But in fact it's, I always felt that it's trying to get feedback and as much information out of the player or out of the athlete as possible. But there's some interesting things out as a, as a coach that I, that I listened to who always talks about, I think this is more along the lines of coach centered where we're trying to fit athletes to a system rather than fit the system for the athlete. Hence athlete centered coaching, and I think that that's, the segway here is really I want to talk about the status of youth coaching a little bit here because it would seem to me that reading a lot of the articles coming out, reading a lot of the research is that a lot of lot of sports systems are just doing that. They're trying to fit every athlete to their system and it's not necessarily the most productive way to help those kids, A. have fun, stay in the sport, enjoy what they're doing, try a lot of different sports. So it becomes a little bit of a cycle around like basically it's forcing the hand of decisions of parents and others or how do you feel the status of youth coaching is? And let's talk a little bit about that.

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K: How long have you got? Um, no, it's a, it's an, it's a great question and it's a really important discussion and conversation that has been started and is happening nationally but needs more exposure and more conversation that you hit the nail on the head. We have really clear objectives for what we think youth sports should be. Fun, development, engagement, introduction to lifelong physical activity, physical movement, all those things that we know are so

powerful. We wouldn't be here if sport hadn't had an amazing impact on our lives. That's why we do what we do. Right? And yet we know that by 13 or 14 the vast majority of kids have dropped out, that have started. And that by the time they hit 18, 19, 20, they're not engaged anymore. And then we dive into the obesity crisis and all of those issues and health issues. And so why we have those amazing objectives, and that's what we say we want to do when we look at our youth sport environment, we actually get into a place where competition is what's emphasized and from a very young age. We make sport about competition even though the mission statements all say fun and engagement and in that environment we really have put a lot on youth sport coaches and youth sport. It's funny, in a PE class we know that there's a PE teacher who's been trained for four years and their job is to do certain things and they get special preparation on working with kids at certain ages and special preparation on how do you develop movement patterns and all those things. And we expect school to help with kids development. We take that same court, that same field, that same ball, put it in a youth sports setting and now we have an entirely voluntary system of coaches, which youth sport wouldn't work if we didn't have amazing volunteers. But we've thrown them to the wolves with a few apps and a few pieces of paper and maybe a couple hour course and said, you're responsible for helping to continue the development in a very specific competitive environment space that we have four to six year training for our teachers to do. And there's no guidance and support often beyond, "here's your pamphlet and your roster. Go." And so we've put youth development, quality, physical engagement, all those things on coaches. And so they mean well. They want to do well. We have some amazing youth sport coaches, but we're asking them to do more and more and more in that setting. And so it's, it's created a situation where I think kids don't get the quality experiences that they could and we need to take a hard look at that.

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J: And I think that's a little bit of the tough piece here is, and we have a lot of really great volunteers that want to help him [inaudible] youth, but we're not equipping them in the right way.

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K: 100%. Volunteers are amazing people. They give their time and their space and they want to do this. How well are they equipped and is it about asking them to do more? Or can we do the other equipping by supporting them as opposed to saying, you must do another module, you must do another pamphlet. I think there's other ways to do it that we can be creative about.

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L: I mean, look, coaching is a tough, tough role or a tough job that you as a coach, you're, you're, you're not a master of necessarily one thing. You're expert in a lot of things. You have to be able to do so many different things and, and you're taking someone who they may really have no experience in terms of teaching how people learn, uh, growth and development, all these things, movement patterns, let alone the sports skills that they're being asked to teach or organization of practices, how to run practices, how to communicate all these things. It's such a challenging role. So here you go, take this on and, and then you have a group of parents who are like, okay, make my kid better, let's have

fun and let's win. And they want to win too and that seeps into this whole thing. But I do think that we set up volunteer parent coaches for more than they're prepared for and one of those, some, some of those creative ways that we might better equip those parent coaches as volunteers.

[16:57](#)

K: Yeah. And that's where I think we start to get into this idea of coach development coach support the work of the USCCE and globally of the international council for coaching excellence. So this is not just a something we're doing in the US this is actually a global movement around this area. And we start to think about how do we think about the coaches as adult learners because the vast majority of them are and start to create materials and things that do support that. But more importantly, we put into place a coach developer, someone that's going to do more than just hand out the rosters and assign fields, but is responsible for helping those coaches. There's been some interesting programs in youth sport where the volunteer coaches are assigned their teams and then you have a coach developer who, once a week, has a global practice for all you 10 teams help set it up and then while the teams are coaching that coach developer can move around and assist the volunteer coaches, give them tips and ideas, sort of keep an eye on things where they might have to do a little bit more conversation and education and so now the volunteers are just doing what they always have, but there's someone there that can build a relationship with them who has that requisite knowledge that Larry was talking about of the systems and everything as well as the learning platform for working with the adults, the learning for the kids, the motor development and they can be the one helping support that by moving around and then it starts to create a system of support for the volunteer coaches.

[18:14](#)

L: Yeah, I was super excited when I saw my son's hockey practice and they brought a bunch of kids together once a week and the coaches work together to put on a practice with a bunch of different stations. The kids are constantly moving. I was like, this is great. I'm going to sit back and enjoy it and it's so nice to see that you have people who are professionally trained, um, leading the volunteers and really giving them the opportunity to learn and to also use some of these ideas and what you start to see as they take them on as their own. It's like, Hey, this works pretty well. The kids are motivated, they're having fun, they're getting better. I'm going to do this as well.

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K: Well, USA hockey is really at the forefront of a lot of the movement in some of this in the United States with USTA coming up close behind with some of the work they're currently doing.

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L: This is a tennis podcast, by the way.

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K: Well, I know, but you like hockey so we can talk a little hockey. Well, the hockey guys really, 10 years ago, sunk a lot of time and energy and money into ADM and really thinking about the American development model of their athletes. Developed amazing materials for coaches, um, practice plans that I'm a mites coach currently for the U8s on the ice and really detailed plans. But as a

volunteer parent, it's like, I don't know what to do with this. And so what we're starting to do when we start thinking about coach development, certainly we need really good materials on what to coach. Giving them clear ideas that are age appropriate, uh, for the development of the athlete and the progression in the sport. But then we're also addressing and supporting the how to coach, which are the other skills that sometimes people call soft. I prefer to think of them as essential because if somebody doesn't know how to give a clear explanation, how to give a good demonstration, a proper demonstration, how to analyze and give feedback, how to have conversations and building relationships, how to work with the child who might be a little more challenging than another child, or we all know that kid's maturity levels for all the different social, emotional, et cetera, can be at different levels at different times. If they don't know how to handle that, then they're not going to be able to do the what very effectively. And so how can we in those systems start to support and prepare them, whether it's through better preparation and team coaching or having that development person or some sort of system that pulls those different ideas together. But how do we start to support that systematically and help parents expect more? Because a lot of times, and again parents aren't doing this even because they're competitive. They're doing it because they want the best for their children and they think this is the best path. They want the best outcomes. They want the best experiences. They mean tremendously well and they're in a system that this is what they think it is. So how do we help them understand that the sports systems themselves, they should, what should they be asking? They need to know more than, did the coach play? They need to know how are you trained to work with kids of this age? What do you know about progression? What's your role in my child's experience right now that's preparing them for the next experience. When you think about school, you wouldn't want a third grade teacher that didn't know what went on in fourth grade and didn't know how to prepare them to go to the next level. And is it the right coach? Right age? And your coach might change over time. Who you need when you're six and seven will be a different personality, different style of teaching, different everything than when you're 16 or 17. That doesn't mean your coach can't adapt with you over time, but that takes a very skilled coach who knows how to do that.

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L: That's interesting. And USTA put together an ADM way back in like 2000, early 2000, with Ann Packers and Paul Lubbers and a number of folks. And I think what we've seen is that tennis coaches tend to follow their players or maybe it's pulled their players along with them across the ages. So we needed to have that age and stage appropriate competencies and actions, coach actions. So that's something that came out long ago, but you know, you start to wonder how long should a coach stay with a player, right? And not that, every case is different. And then if you have that coach developer, that person can be overseeing the whole thing and making sure the relationship is going in a direction that actually is fruitful, that the coach can actually manage a teenager versus a youth, has the capabilities of doing that and the player continues to improve and, and is enjoying this coaching relationship, right? It's not, it's not being done only at the

prerogative of the parent and the coach, but there's someone, a third party sitting back and saying, what is the best thing for this young person?

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K: Well, and then the big picture, right, that somebody has to be looking out for it in the, in the larger global scale of longterm wellbeing, longterm development, and there's a breadth and a depth of coaching that I think we sometimes forget. We somehow think that, Oh, if I start out coaching the little kids, then my next step is to get the high school job, the college job and the pro job. But what about working with high school kids prepares you for the college environment really because it's a different set of... The game's different and the kids are different and the environment's different and everything is about as different and we don't recognize the depth of experience and information. There's a reason why teachers, again, pull from the educational model. They do ongoing professional development in their area. It doesn't mean you can't be expert or develop expertise in multiple areas, but one doesn't translate to the other as an automatic crossover. I might be really good at teaching eighth grade English. That's not going to be the same as composition at the elite level or really good at geometry. That doesn't automatically make calculus your thing and same in coaching.

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L: Let me make a point. Sorry Johnny. I'll stop budding in. But the point of, I'm not trying to tell coaches or upset them on this podcast, you should not be staying with kids for a number of years, but what I'm saying is that you really need to take a hard look at your knowledge and your understanding of the ages and stages and the growth and development and have you prepared yourself for that transition to the next level and maybe working with, you can call him a mentor coach, a master coach.

[24:10](#)

K: Coach developer.

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L: Coach developer. Yes. A coach developer. Working with someone who can help you make that transition and not just, well it's my right because I work with this kid. That's not the case. The kid deserves to have the best opportunity to achieve and get better no matter what age and stage. And you may be prepared for that and you may not be. Sorry JP. I just wanted to clarify that.

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K: Well, I'm 100% in on Larry on that one. That's exactly, that's exactly the message that we need to be getting out.

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J: I remember a conversation I had with the great Gill Reyes, who who is a longterm I guess, mentor, coach, strength and conditioning for Andre Agassi and he, he always gets asked the question now, what was it like coaching Andre? And he goes, which one? Which Andre? And he goes, I had, there were like three different Andres. And he always talked about how he had to adapt over time because Andre changed and different things changed and he had to adapt with him so that he could help him the most. And so as we relay that down to the youth level, this whole growth and development stage between going from childhood through puberty to adult hood is so complex that we need to be

absolutely clear on A. bare stage of growth and development, but B. as well, their level or their intentions that, the athlete's intentions hopefully, the athletes intentions of how good they want to be. What level do they want to be playing at competitively. So all that gets factored into the mix. We know obviously childhood, right, should be about fun. Learning skills in a fun dynamic environment. We're trying to help the athletes experience a lot of different areas so that they can learn all these variety of skills as if they're getting, you know, if they go down that path of being competitive in a sport or multiple sports, then through those growth and development years of puberty, pre-puberty, post-puberty, you're then looking at sort of like these transition years where like in tennis I think we would hope that their technical skills around it and we can spend more time on doing appropriate physical training and mental emotional training and then also start making them aware as to tactical, like what's their game style, what is their, what is their makeup, what is their identity as a player? And then as they get to adult hood, we're hoping that all that work that's gone in has prepared them for the professional game or to be playing at a high competitive level collegiately or whatever it may be. So I always felt that we never do a great job of educating or learning through those growth and development stages. So yes, I mean, so going back to my point, Gil talked about adapting and so I think through those years where there's childhood puberty, you can be good at all those, but you have to put a lot, a lot of time and effort in and you're going to have to have that mentor or that coach developer to really guide you through that because that can't be done over a weekend and it can't be done with a pamphlet of information. Which is why I love what you do is coach development. It's not education, well it is education, but it's coach development. Coach education to me would say that we're improving on knowledge through theory, understanding the theories. Coach development is actually pinpointing that coach as to what skills that they can learn, what good skills that they have, but then maybe what deficiencies that they have and how they can overall impact the athletes that are in, in their care. So I've started to notice across a lot of different organizations, this shift from education to development. So what has been, what has been the driving force behind that?

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K: I think it's exactly where you're starting to head, both of you that it's the idea of readiness, readiness for what my job is and that if I'm going to be a really good professional and it really is the professionalization of coaching. Not saying that every coach is going to be academically or professionally trained because we have a huge volunteer army and that's powerful. But shifting to the professionalization of of how the job is done so that even if you're a volunteer, you've got the training that is appropriate and we're taking it a little bit more seriously. Just cause you want to volunteer if you're not prepared, doesn't mean you get to, right? We don't let volunteer firefighters come in just cause they want to fight fires. There's some training that's involved because there's science and because it's important and we need to say it's just as important for our children as it is for fighting fires, right? That there is a requisite level of base knowledge. So you're right, there's a coaching education piece of base content that we need to have and that content matters. And then from there we need

to start thinking about the ongoing development of what they're doing so that we can prepare them for the challenges they're facing. Cause the other thing about coaching is it's a really dynamic shifting environment. No two situations that are the same. It's competitive. The people, the, the game is always shifting and changing. And so if you're playing the game that you played 15 years ago, you're behind. If you're preparing your athletes to play the game of yesterday or today, you're still behind. Because if you're not preparing your athletes to play the game of tomorrow, the game's going to change. The rules are going to shift slightly. The style of play, all those things change. And so you as a professional have to be in a position where you're constantly developing. And it's not only safe to do that so that people aren't looking at you going, Oh, you're studying. Why? Because you don't know something. No, I'm studying cause I want to be the best. I'm working on this cause I want to be the best and a coach developer in an education setting might be laying a foundation and delivering content and helping people understand. When we get into more advanced coach development, it might be one on one work, which is what is happening globally. The FA in England is doing work around this, the premier league. Paul Lubbers spoke about this recently in an IMG article looking at coach development that this position, this person or department is about supporting in high-performance and by high performance I don't just mean the U S open, I mean high performance of human experience, maximizing people's development. When we start looking at that, there's someone who's responsible for bringing together the science, the education, the art of coaching. How do we bring them together and then help people continually strive for the next best thing? It amazes me in sport. Sports about performance and yet we get stuck in the coaching ideas of don't change anything, don't talk about it. We are constantly looking to revise our training plans and to make things better and stronger. Now we're just bringing that over into coaching and bringing that into the high performance realm as well.

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L: So Dr. Dieffenbach?

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K: Yes, Dr Lauer.

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L: Yes. So help me frame this because I think our audience that listens to the podcast, probably mostly tennis folks are, are listening to this and saying it sounds great, but I have a 12 year old girl playing tennis. I have a coach maybe, or she's in group lessons. There's someone at the local club or at the local park. But what should I expect? And is there a role for a coach developer? Even for the the young kid who's playing in the park with a coach a couple times a week?

[31:10](#)

K: I think coach development is actually the most crucial, well, at the elite levels coaches are under a lot of pressure and a lot of stress in a one-on-one coach developer can help them solve the unique challenges as they integrate the sports science as they think about all of the pieces that they have to pull together. And so that coach developer can be a powerful resource for the coach who's often high-performance without support. When you bring it down to the youth level, I think it's a different role, but it's just as important that person, someone within

the area of the department that is making sure that this is age appropriate, knows all those pieces. And so for the parent, the question becomes, of the coach, how are you prepared to work with these things and do you know children and do you know adolescent development? Do you know the development model and to have those conversations with the coach, but if you're going into a club or a system, asking a little bit about how do you prepare your coaches, how do you support your coaches, how do you ensure your coaches are getting ongoing development? And this is relatively a new concept in the American sport model. Something that, as parents are asking, will hopefully help drive this because kids deserve that. If you don't go to a school system without someone who maybe behind the scenes is responsible for curriculum development and making sure the teachers are on point. You should expect the same thing in your sport organizations. There should be someone there that's keeping everything on point.

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L: One thing is the background screening.

[32:29](#)

K: Huge.

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L: Huge, but that's not the only thing. I think that what we've missed in this country is that was some of the issues that happened with abuse from some coaches. It was a good thing, but it was a bad thing. The good thing was that the background checks and all that stuff became this cry out that this has to happen. It needed to happen and there was more awareness at the same time, what got lost in all of this was the actual preparation of coaches to prepare kids to, well, if they're going to stay in a sport to enjoy what they're doing, to be motivated, which it means they're getting better and they're enjoying being around their peers and playing the game and to have a relationship where they feel like they're cared about and that they're wanted. People want them there. And I think in this whole sort of movement that happened after the thing with Sandusky and we've had other issues, um, that got lost in this whole sort of cry out, a very important one, which has led to some very good things. But the preparation of coaches was lost in that sort of noisy effort to, to get the background checks, I think.

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K: Well, I think we do background checks and they are important and they're an important part of it. But when you really look at background checks, it's very limited in what they can tell you and where they can prepare you. And I think to your point, the really bad abuses and the terrible things that happen are things that we absolutely need to work as a collective unit to prevent. But we have to keep in mind too that the abuse that can happen with a coach who is not well prepared, that doesn't understand kids, it doesn't, it can be much greater. The emotional abuse or physical abuse in the form of pushing too hard and training kids too hard becomes about coaches who either don't have the right focus or don't have the right training or both. The US center for safe sports, which is the national organization that has training for coaches looking at the abuse of power and the different types of abuses is really important, but we need additional education. It happens every year. There are a couple of athletes who

will die because coaches will push too hard in training because they don't know how to modify training. We know that there are kids that will have serious lifelong mental health issues because a coach was emotionally abusive and that there were issues there. Sometimes it's an abuse of power issue. Sometimes it's just a lack of education and knowing what really is appropriate in a system that's not then checking and balancing and this is where again, a coach, developer system starts to put someone into place who's responsible for that and saying, you can't train that way. You will lead to a situation where your athletes will have [inaudible] or one of those issues where very serious health consequences or even just a shoulder that will never get better because of the way you were serving wasn't appropriate and proper and now you have lifelong damage because there was over-training too much, too young. All those things. How do we help make sure, and that's again where we can't trust this to a pamphlet and an online workshop or a background check tick box. There has to be something about the system and that's where again, coach development comes in to oversee and support the coaches, both for the protection of the athletes but also for the protection of the profession and the coaches themselves who are doing a great job.

[35:38](#)

L: Big word there, Kristen, and that's profession, right? And treating it like a profession and if it's profession then you have someone who's overseeing things and making sure that the system is running in an effective, efficient way. I mean I think parents owe it to their children to start asking if you go to the local Y program, are these coaches going through some kind of training? Is someone watching the games and practices and observing what they're doing? Because I think one of the biggest frustrations for parents, being a youth sport parent, is that you can go to a two hour coaching education workshop, but that doesn't mean that anything has changed. In fact, what we find is that it becomes sort of the, like you said, a checkoff. I did it, so therefore I'm a coach, but in reality the person's doing C time, they're not really, they're engaged in learning and then they go out and they do whatever they did when they were a youth sport athlete or whatever they think is appropriate, which might be what they see on ESPN or on some network station where the coach is screaming, yelling at the players. Meanwhile, those players are getting paid or, or maybe not at the collegiate level, but so I think there's a mismatch here that we expect a lot out of our coaches. We don't prepare them for it and we think that we're ticking the box off with these coaching education programs, which are very important, but they're not the end all be all. There needs to be someone in the system constantly overseeing, whether it's a general manager, it's a youth program director, athletic director, someone who knows enough about sport and about teaching and learning who can make sure that, okay, we did, we did the educational part, the front end, but actually what we need to do is, throughout this progression, throughout the season that we're touching base, that we're observing what they're doing and we're giving feedback.

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K: We have amazing content. There's tons of great information out there, but content isn't knowledge and education isn't learning. And so one of the big movements here is within coaching education and coach development is the

application in a safe supervised environment. So in a coaching education program, are there opportunities for the coaches to peer practice? So they're going to do things in practice, things around each other so that they get feedback. If you have a quality system, whether it be like you said, the AD or the coach developer or the coach supervisor or the rec department manager, they have that job cause they're overseeing those people of being the coach developer, if we're using that term globally, but dropping it into the job titles and how are they then making sure that the practice, the application and the knowledge is happening. And so that's again, the other big piece here that I can sit and listen to that. Can I do it, can I do it? Then you get peer supervision or some sort of, and I'm not seeing it from the perspective of, oh, somebody has to watch me to see if I'm good enough. But in other professional disciplines, there is a period of some sort of internship. You don't get your doctor's certificate and walk right into taking care of patients. You go through a period of some sort of peer supervision and then quality professionals do that through the rest of their careers. Medical doctors do that on purpose because you know what, I've got to stay sharp, right? We protect and pull it in and Oh no, nobody can see what I'm doing because it's coaching and you might get my secrets. Well, if they're going to get your secrets, then you're not innovating all the time and you're not working on yourself because now you have a secret sauce and that's absolutely not how sport performance works. So we get better through that professional collaboration. And if I would be really, really shy away from a coach who didn't talk to other coaches, who didn't go to coaches conferences for more than the beer, who didn't make sure that they were engaged, you know, I would ask a coach, how are you engaging in ongoing professional development? What do you do? Do you often go to conferences, what do you pay attention to? Because that's essential. If I'm not working with my peers, I'm not really professional. I'm an isolated, it's just me. I do it. I know it all. That's terrifying to me cause that is so not the way knowledge works.

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J: To that point, we always as coaches try and emphasize growth mindset in our athletes. Oh, you gotta have a growth mindset? You've got to be willing to learn. But how can we emphasize a growth mindset if we don't show it ourselves? So if, if I tell my parents, Hey, a few days this year, I'm sorry, but I'm going to be out in June for a few days because I'm going to go to this conference to learn more about my craft, my skill that's showing your families, that's showing your athletes that you're willing to go out there and learn. Right. And I think sometimes, you know, I don't know, maybe you can attest to this in the other sports, but I think we feel sometimes in the tennis world, we always weigh up, Oh, well I've got to make my money versus the loss of income to go and work on this. And obviously the coaches that are willing to do that to give up a little bit of loss of income for a couple of days or a few days in order to better themselves. I mean those coaches, really, obviously those are the ones that are going to emphasize the growth mindset. They're the ones that are showing it, but they're also gonna be able to go back and relay that to with their athletes. But that's the thing I think we're always looking for is coaches, are they taking the effort to calm and, obviously, sometimes there's things, things that happen and can't take advantage of a lot of coach development workshops, but at the

same time I always feel that if you're really committed to making yourself better and leading by example to your athletes, then you will find the time.

[41:02](#)

K: You just hit, you just said the word craft and I think that is so powerful. This is my craft. This is, as Larry said, my profession and taking that seriously from a professional standpoint and it becomes your professional responsibility to your profession, but also to your athletes that if you're not becoming an engaging and constantly evolving as a coach, you really aren't performing a craft. You're just doing a job and you're just ticking it off and doing the box cause you're not professionally developing. Now, one of the things around this USCCE that that we're working on and trying to talk to folks about is that it certainly is the coach's responsibility to be an engaged lifelong learner and to make the investment in their own growth and development. So when they're studying, it's not just what's the latest technique from my athlete, it's how do I get better as a leader? How do I get better as a teacher? How do I make sure that I am the right teacher for the situation? So there's a lot of self-introspection, reflection that has to go on and thinking about those teaching leadership skills in myself. So coaching education is not just about what is going on in the the athlete world, but the other piece about that is we put a lot of that on coaches and it's an incredibly demanding, busy profession. So we're calling upon, USCCE is really calling upon the systems to say, how are you going to provide it better for the coaches in a way that is consumable in the environments that they're in and supporting them in the environments that we're in. Because we can't just tack this on and say, coaches, you need to be more professional. Go get this, go do this. The systems of sport themselves are responsible for creating and treating it like a profession and providing their professionals with those resources and that's what USA hockey is beginning to do as they really rethink their approach to coaching ed. That's what USTAU is really starting to do is think about how do we, what's our responsibility to support the coaches in their ongoing quest for professional development? Then that feeds through the system, so it's not just that we're bashing on coaches here and saying you guys aren't being professional. The whole system has to professionalize and treat that profession better.

[43:07](#)

J: USTAU there and what we're doing I think with coach accreditation, things like that and X amount of hours to get your certification. Some people are like that. Some people may be [inaudible] about it, but the way that I look at it is, is that we're coming back to what we started with at the beginning of this podcast, is we are equipping coaches with hopefully the best tools to then go out there and make an impact on these athletes or these young people or adults, right, on their development. And I think that's something that everyone has their rights when they go into a profession is to be equipped with the best education, the best development, the best knowledge that they need to be. That's their right. If I was a young person coming out of college and I wanted to be a coach and had zero coach training, I would feel that I've been a disservice to me because even if I'm looking for it and I can't find it, I'd be lost. So now I've got to go out there and just figure it all out, which you can do, it will take a lot of time. But I think it's our right when we go into a profession that we are teed up to the best of the

organization's ability so that we're out there and we can make better decisions, more well-informed products, right? So we're developing products that are well-informed around the information that best suit the athletes. And so, but I just feel sometimes that we get lost from that. And especially I think in the tennis profession, maybe and I mean, that's what we're working towards. But I think it's all right to be able to have that information so that we're equipped to impact people.

[44:37](#)

K: Well. I think our kids deserve, they deserve the best doctors, they deserve the best education, they deserve the best sport experiences. And there's something to be said for, they also deserve great opportunities to just go play without adult interference. But if we're going to put them in situations where there is adult interference and put them into systems of play, they deserve the best that they could possibly have from the beginning all the way through the masters athletes that want to keep playing and that means we have to have a standard of the profession. Something that I, as I'm a professional coach, I've coached for 20 years, mostly elite cyclists, but I want to know that the other professionals out there are taking care of their athletes to a standard of care. They deserve that. And I want that protection as a professional coach, knowing that the other professionals, if they hang a shingle, that someone's overseeing that and saying, yeah, there's a standard. Right? And it's just a really important conversation that is about the protection of the athletes, but also the protection of the coach. That we are a professional. We deserve that. That may come with pay and some other things, but it's an important conversation that we can't just assume it's going to happen because there's a ball involved.

[45:40](#)

L: Well, I think, you know, when I think about this, you then have to prepare the coach developer to develop the, create the system and then develop the coaches over time is, or we're talking about in, in theory what you'd want is to take a parent volunteer and bring them from novice to some sort of, I'm a quote unquote expert over time and however long that takes. So you're going to need to keep them in the system, which means you need to invest in them and you may need to make it a great experience. So the coach developer then needs to have their own way of preparing them for this job and they need to frame this role. They need to understand what the role is and it is a part of what they do. And I think, again, this is where the USCCE comes in, right? And being on the board. So just being open about that. I'm on the board, and this is why I believe in that is that if we're tasking the coaches in getting better at tuning learning, and as you've been saying, we need create a system that makes that easily accessible and actually makes it a part of what they do, we then have to then make sure that we have the right coach developers in place. Otherwise the whole thing breaks down where we stand

[46:49](#)

K: Well and it's not happening in a void. So let's not think we're creating systems here that don't exist. Education exists already, and we have educational systems and we have, we do this in other areas. So this is not like, Oh, let's create this and we've never talked about it before. There are many academic disciplines. There's great research. I'm at West Virginia university where I'm an associate

professor in coaching education. This is not a new thing, it's just we haven't pulled it into sport the way that we could. And so the coach developer is a teacher developer, it's a person developer. There's a little sports psych there. There's a little andragogy, which is the study of adult learning. There's a little pedagogy study of children. There's a little of physical education, a little sport science, and we're pulling those together and the coach developer is trained and prepared to do this job within sport with educational learning theory and they're then developing the systems. There's also curriculum development, design, all those things. So this is not coming from scratch. This isn't just, ouh, we think it'd be a good idea. There is really solid learning science behind a lot of this that we can already, that exist that we can pull together to make this happen.

[47:52](#)

J: Awesome. Well we're running out of time here and really appreciate you taking the time to be here. We know you've got some other things to get on with, so we always like to leave the listeners with some, some advice. I think maybe as coaches, what may be some of your top tips that you can give coaches moving into the profession of teaching coaching athletes?

[48:10](#)

K: Sure. Oh, I think the biggest thing with coaches is pay attention to yourself. Think about how you're prepared as a coach, your content knowledge, but also your interpersonal skills, your intrapersonal skills in understanding yourself and take the time to self reflect on your knowledge and what you know and to actively seek it, not just within your sport environment, because the more you can learn, the more you can pull in, the stronger you'll be as a coach. So put that time that you were mentioning earlier into your own professional development for the enhancement of your work with your athletes.

[48:42](#)

L: Should we make a shout out to coaches who have the experience to reach out to young coaches? What do you think, Kristen?

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K: I think that'd be amazing that that you have a responsibility to the profession. How can you turn around and bring up other coaches? How can you share that and be a part of that system of let's make the profession better for the sake of our sport and our athletes.

[49:02](#)

L: So this is maybe how it trickles down, where you have these coaches who have gained the experience and knowledge and they're reaching out to other coaches who are younger, they're pulling maybe athletes who retired and say, Hey, you know, do you want to be a part of coaching and it's a profession and here's how we go about getting better. And I think that in and of itself starts to change things at the local level.

[49:24](#)

K: And not just the novice coaches, but peer coaching. Let's, let's sit down and talk about this. Let's talk about these ideas or these things because I may apply them differently. They're going to work different with different athletes. This isn't secrets. This is about how do we enhance performance, draw from that and work, you know, look for the ways to develop those communities of practice.

[49:42](#)

J: Absolutely. And uh, I would do a shout out here to any of these young coaches or any coaches around the country that as you said, Larry, go seek a mentor. Right? Go find someone that you can bounce ideas off, like you're saying Kristen, and for those of you out there that are really struggling to find that, you can always reach out to us and we can try and find someone. Part of what we do here at the USTA player development with, especially with the juniors, is we do a lot with the coaches and so any coaches out there, if you're looking for a mentor, we can try and help facilitate that and for anyone who actually wants to be a mentor that's been on the coaching scene a long time, learned a lot. Please reach out if you're interested in doing that and we can try and facilitate that. Dr. Paul Lubbers in his department piloted a great mentor-mentee program and they yielded some absolutely fantastic results and Jessica Bataglia in our department has spearheaded that too and so we can put you in touch with them. They can help facilitate. They've got some really great best practices centered around mentor, mentee relationships and so we can try and do that. Well, that concludes this week's episode of compete like a champion. We are here live from the US open. We're going to go head out there and watch some more matches. Kristen, we thank you for your time. That was really great. We could have talked a lot longer, but we really appreciate you sharing those insights into what the USCCE does. Until next time, Dr. Lauer and I, and Kristen, we're checking out