

## SPECIAL ESSAY

### Sociocultural Competencies for Sport Coaches: A Proposal for Coaches and Coach Education

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#### Abstract

As social and cultural diversity increases in the United States, coaches frequently interact with athletes from a wide range of backgrounds. Therefore, it would be useful if coaches had established guidelines for best practices to support their socially and ethically responsible work with athletes. However, coaching organizations have not published best practice standards specifically for coaches' work with socially and culturally diverse athletes. This article proposes *Sociocultural Competencies for Sport Coaches* (SCSC) to support positive coach-athlete relationships. Specifically, the paper (a) reviews standards for social and cultural competencies used in similar professions, (b) introduces SCSC to the field of coaching education, and (c) presents competencies, standards, and benchmarks to guide the implementation of SCSC with diverse athletes.

**Key Words:** athletics, coaching education, multiculturalism, sociocultural competencies, sport coaching



# Journal of Coaching Education

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## Sociocultural Competencies: A Proposal for Coaches and Coaching Education

The United States Census Bureau (2011) has clearly described the increasing ethnic and racial diversity of the U.S. population. The United States is comprised of 196.8 million (72%) non-Hispanic White Americans, 50.5 million (16%) Hispanics, 38.9 million (13%) African Americans, 14.7 million (5%) Asians, 2.9 million (0.9%) persons identifying themselves as American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.5 million (0.2%) persons who categorize themselves as Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and with 19.1 million (6%) persons identified as some other race or combination of races and ethnic backgrounds.

The Latino population in the United States increased from 35.3 million to 50.5 million (43%) during the first decade of this century, accounting for over half of the total population growth during those years (Knickerbocker, 2011). During this same period, the proportion of non-Hispanic Whites declined by five percentage points (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Increased diversity in the general population has been accompanied by increased diversity among college and professional athletes. Additionally, Popp et al. (2009) note that international athletes have been recruited since the 1950s by U.S. universities and this practice has increased in recent years to the point that there is a need for research on cultural issues and sport participation.

As athletes become more socially and culturally diverse across various sports, coaches face the challenge of working effectively and ethically with athletes from backgrounds different from their own. Coaches unable to adapt to these changing population trends are likely to find that their taken-for-granted ideas about race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, religion, and (dis)ability may inadvertently evoke conflicts in their relationships with athletes (Coakley, 2009).

To avoid practices that are socially or culturally insensitive or perceived by others to be so, coaches should have standards of practice that facilitate sociocultural competence. Such standards can serve as guidelines enabling them to work responsively with athletes without engaging in actions that may be perceived as insensitive or discriminatory. The *Sociocultural Competencies for Sport Coaches* (SCSC) proposed in this article are grounded in theory and research widely used to create standards in other professions (Arrendondo, et al. 1996; Sue, 2001; Sue, Arrendondo, & McDavis, 1992; Sue & Sue, 2003; 2008).

It is important to note that the National Association of Sport and Physical Education (NASPE) developed benchmarks and competencies within the *National Standards for Sport Coaches* (2006). A review of the 40 standards in this document indicates that at least seven of them — listed in Table 1 — are relevant for coaches working with socially and culturally diverse athletes and in multicultural sports settings. These seven serve as a useful starting point for



# Journal of Coaching Education

developing a more complete set of standards designed to maximize the social and cultural competencies of coaches.

## Sociocultural Competence

Sociocultural competence consists of skills, dispositions, and behaviors that support professionals in effectively working with and teaching socially and culturally diverse populations of people (Arredondo et al. 1996; Sue & Sue, 2003, 2008). These competencies are grounded in three factors:

- (a) *awareness* of one's beliefs and attitudes toward diverse cultures and people
- (b) *knowledge* and *appreciation* of social and cultural differences
- (c) *skills* to interact effectively with people from diverse experiential backgrounds (Sue, 2003; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992).

Unlike many professional associations for service workers or teachers, coaching organizations in the United States have not established specific competencies for dealing with socially and culturally diverse students and athletes in sport and physical activity, literature has emerged relating to the development of multicultural competencies for physical educators, athletics trainers, sports medicine physicians, parks and recreations practitioners, and sport coaches (e.g., Anderson & Stone, 2005; Cartwright & Shingles, 2010; Harrison, Carson, & Burden, 2010; Schinke & Hanrahan, 2009). For example, sport psychologists coined the term *cultural sports psychology* to reflect their emerging concerns about sociocultural competence in clinical and experimental work with athletes (Schinke & Hanrahan, 2009). Ryba (2005) described cultural sport psychology as having a multidisciplinary focus on "issues of sociocultural difference and social justice" as well as a concern for understanding current processes of identity construction that are characteristic among young people today (p. 15-16). In addition, Schinke and Watson (2011) suggested that cultural competence should be included in the Association of Applied Sport Psychology's (AASP) *Code of Ethics*.

Similarly, the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA, 2006) has established *Athletic Training Educational Competencies* that integrate sociocultural competencies with educational competences and identified multicultural competence as a primary qualification in the professional practice of athletic training. NATA standards (2006) clearly specify that athletic trainers are expected to "demonstrate knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and skills necessary to work respectfully and effectively with diverse populations and in a diverse work environment" (p. 6).

Parks and recreation professionals have investigated the need for clearly defined sociocultural competencies in their association. Anderson and Stone (2005) examined social and cultural awareness among members in the North Carolina Parks and Recreation Society ( $N =$



# Journal of Coaching Education

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1,053) and found significant differences in levels of competence: women, non-whites, certified professionals, and those who had received diversity training were more competent than men, Whites, professionals who were not certified, or those with no previous diversity training. Anderson and Stone also noted that many of the people in their study felt that they had sufficient cultural awareness and knowledge, but that they lacked the practical guidance and skills to effectively serve a full range of socially and culturally diverse clients.

Finally, Harrison et al. (2010) gathered data from a sample of physical educators in the southwestern region of the United States ( $N = 190$ ) to see if teachers of color or White teachers were more culturally competent, and if White physical educators in schools settings with racially diverse student bodies were more culturally competent than their peers in more racially homogenous K-12 settings. Their analysis showed that teachers of color scored higher in both multicultural teaching knowledge and skill competence, and White teachers in inner-city school settings possessed greater multicultural teaching knowledge than their peers from more rural schools. Therefore, in professions similar to coaching, sociocultural competency standards of practice and empirical research have been done to support effective and ethical delivery of services.

## **Proposing Sociocultural Competencies in Sport Coaching**

Professional competence allows coaches to apply theory as they work with athletes, but coaching effectiveness requires that competence be fully understood and integrated into the coaching process (Santos, Mesquita, Graca, & Rosado, 2010, p. 64). Additionally, Mesquita, Borgers, Rosado, and De Souza (2011) note that in sport coaching, professional competencies are established, and coaches are expected to possess competencies enabling them to perform multiple tasks while exercising leadership in complex situations. Coaching education curricula and programs should highlight “the competences to be developed, the professional environment in which they will be applied, and the areas of coaching practice that must be mastered” (Mesquita et al. 2011, p.193).

As research has increasingly documented significant increases in the social and cultural diversity of U.S athletes, sports, and athletic settings, coaches and coaching educators face the challenge of need to integrating sociocultural competencies with established general competencies so that coaches will have adequate guidelines for working effectively with socially and culturally diverse athletes. This is especially important in the current context of the United States because conflicts between coaches and their athletes as well as cases of unethical actions by some coaches have received widespread media coverage in recent years. Figure 1 illustrates four primary spheres in which there are potential sociocultural conflicts between coaches and athletes.



# Journal of Coaching Education

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**Figure 1: Dimensions of potential sociocultural conflict between coaches and athletes**



The most commonly reported and observed conflicts generally involve the following actions by coaches:

- Overt or subtle racial and ethnic bias
- Positional “stacking” based on racial and ethnic stereotypes about innate athletic ability
- Sexism, gender stereotyping, sexual harassment and abuse
- Homophobia and intolerance of alternative sexual identities
- Intolerance and bias against certain religious beliefs
- Ableism and stereotypes about people with disabilities

Research has documented cases in which coach-athlete conflicts have occurred in connection with one or more of these actions by coaches. African American and ethnic minority athletes have reported perceived overt and subtle racial or ethnic discrimination primarily by white Euro-American coaches who are insensitive about or demean their cultural or racial background (e.g., Hodge, Burden, Robinson, & Bennett III, 2008; Lawrence, 2005; Massao & Fasting, 2010; Melendez, 2008; Ruggiero & Lattin, 2008). For example, Ruggiero and Lattin (2008) reported that African American female athletes were offended and discouraged when their intercollegiate coaches used stereotypes and verbally aggressive language with them. Although some coaches continue to view this way of interacting with athletes as normal rather than abusive, when it occurs in relationships between white male coaches and African American female athletes it is likely to cause conflicts and undermine team morale and cohesion. When such actions of a coach are tolerated, covered up, or dismissed by other coaches and athletic department personnel, conflicts are exacerbated, and often are driven underground where they take on even more disruptive meanings (Ruggiero & Lattin, 2008). Therefore, it is important that coaches be aware of their own racial or ethnic identity and experience and how it influences their attitudes, beliefs, and actions.



# Journal of Coaching Education

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Related conflicts have occurred when coaches do not realize that they engage in positional “stacking” based on assumed innate athletic abilities they perceive to be shared by all members of a particular racial or ethnic population (Coakley, 2009; Harrison, Azzarito, & Burden, 2004; Rasmussen et al., 2005). Assigning athletes to certain playing positions based on stereotypes about physical or intellectual abilities will eventually lead to conflict and even accusations of racism by athletes.

Sexism, gender stereotyping, sexual harassment and abuse encompass a range of actions that sexualize female athletes and focus on their femininity rather than their athleticism (Daniels, 2009; Kravchek & Ranson, 1999). Sexism and gender stereotyping occurs when coaches identify gender “appropriate” or “inappropriate” sports and perceive male and female athletes as more or less masculine or feminine depending on the sports in which they participate (Alley & Hicks, 2005, p. 274). When coaches are not cognizant of the subtle ways through which this occurs, conflict is likely, most typically when working with female athletes. Communication about these issues is required to avoid practices and policies that could be perceived as sexist or based on stereotypes, such as a team rule requiring female athletes to dress in ways that emphasize traditional feminine appearance.

Sexual harassment is illegal and unethical. It involves a variety of actions, such as inferred sexual advances, sexual favors, and verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature towards an athlete (Martens, 2004). Kravchek and Ranson (1999) have identified three primary categories of sexual harassment that have traditionally occurred in sports: 1) coaches using profanity, 2) coaches engaging in intrusive physical contact, and 3) coaches making derogatory remarks with gender innuendo. Therefore, coaches benefit when they are sensitive to the ways that their words and actions may be perceived by athletes whose definitions of sexual innuendo are different than their definitions (United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2011).

Conflicts related to insensitivity or unawareness about sexual identity issues has been common in recent years. Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transsexual athletes are especially alert to coaches’ comments or actions that oppress, marginalize, or demean them. When these occur, they undermine trust and communication in coach-athlete relationships and prevent coaches from working effectively and responsively with athletes (Anderson, 2005; Martens, 2004; Women’s Sports Foundation, 2011).

Increasing diversity of religious beliefs and practices may also present coaches with challenges, depending on their own experiences and beliefs. In public educational institutions, athletes have the support of federal law (First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution) when it comes to equal treatment by coaches and other school personnel (Idleman, 2001). Apart from legal issues, it is important for coaches to be aware of how various religious beliefs may impact



# Journal of Coaching Education

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an athlete's conformity with coaches' rules and team norms. It may be difficult to prove a case of religious discrimination, but a lack of knowledge about athletes' religious beliefs may cause serious conflicts on a team. For instance, if an athlete is reprimanded for missing a practice or competition due to a formal religious belief or commitment, a coach could be accused of religious intolerance or discrimination.

Finally, it is becoming increasingly important for coaches to know how to work effectively with athletes with disabilities. Research by Hatamleh, Abu Al-Ruz, and Hindawi (2009) indicated that athletes with physical disabilities perceived their coaches to be overly autocratic and controlling when it came to team decisions, rules, and strategies. This has the potential to create conflicts because athletes with disabilities often require autonomy so they can make adjustments and adaptations not anticipated by able-bodied coaches. Without autonomy and with a coach who does not understand their need for it, conflicts are inevitable. The need for coaches to understand athletes with disabilities will only increase as former soldiers who have been injured in recent wars attend college and hope to participate in intercollegiate sports, either on established teams for people assumed not to have disabilities or teams explicitly for people with disabilities. Therefore, sport coaches need guidelines for modifying their coaching practices to respect and be responsive to the needs of all their athletes.

## ***Lack of Recognized and Formally Established Sociocultural Competencies in Coaching***

Dealing with difference is one of the major challenges facing coaches today. For example, Passmore (2009) noted that "be it coaching or any job, we need to interact with others who are different to us. ... The cultural differences between individuals increases the complexity of the leadership role, and adds to the individual differences between us all, which leaders need to consider," (p. 5). This means that coaches today must be able to "unpack" these social and cultural complexities and deal sensitively with diverse athletes. Traditional approaches to coaching and coach training are no longer effective if they do not consider sociocultural diversity in connection with coach-athlete relationships (Passmore, 2009). However, despite the importance of sociocultural competencies expressed by sport coaches (Mesquita et al. 2011; Santos et al. 2010), research on this topic has not been conducted.

## **Conceptual Development of Sociocultural Competencies for Sport Coaches**

Due to the variation of social and cultural identities among athletes, it is proposed here that coaches and coach educators consider implementing the following *Sociocultural Competencies for Sport Coaches* (SCSC) into their practices with all athletes. These competencies are similar to those that exist in counseling (Arrendondo, et al. 1996; Sue & Sue, 2008), sports psychology (Schinke & Watson, 2011), sports medicine (Cartwright & Shingles, 2010), and healthcare (Campinha-Bacote, 2002).



# Journal of Coaching Education

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Most fields in sport and physical activity (i.e., athletic training, recreation, sports medicine) have developed its sociocultural competencies by adopting or borrowing the competencies originally developed by Sue and colleagues in the field of counseling (Sue, Arendondo, & McDavis, 1992; Sue & Sue, 2003; Sue & Sue, 2008). Sue and Sue (2003) defined socially and culturally competent helping professionals as those who are aware of their own worldview, understand the worldviews of those from different social and cultural backgrounds, and can develop and implement “appropriate, relevant, and sensitive” policies and practices when working with diverse collections of people. With this in mind, the SCSC were based on the goals of: 1) improving coaches’ *awareness* of their beliefs, biases, and worldviews as they could influence their relationships with athletes from socially and culturally diverse backgrounds, 2) increasing coaches’ *knowledge* related to the identities and norms of culturally diverse athletes, 3) enhancing coaches’ *skills and strategies* related to the needs and goals of athletes from diverse backgrounds.

Structurally, as illustrated in Figure 2, the SCSC has three main competencies (self-awareness, knowledge, and skills/strategies) and 11 specific standards for addressing these specific competencies. In the following, we describe the conceptual framework that supports the sociocultural competencies. Following the discussion of the theoretical orientation of the competencies, the next section of this manuscript details specific standards and benchmarks for achieving each of the SCSC.

## ***Sociocultural Coaching Competence 1: Self-Awareness of Personal Beliefs and Biases***

Sociocultural understanding begins with self-awareness; therefore, competent coaches work to understand their own perspectives and ideologies about the worldviews and those used by athletes from diverse backgrounds with the goal being to avoid unintentionally insensitive or inappropriate words and actions in their relationships with them (Jones, Armour, & Potrac, 2002). Specifically, Schinke, Michel, Danielson, Gauthier, and Pickard (2005) stated that:

*Cultural uniqueness spans differences in hand gestures, differences in attribution style and resulting accountability, and differences in material and interpersonal wishes... It is wrong to assume that in sport, what works for one person’s frame of reference, be it an athlete, parent, coach, or administrator, will necessarily work for another... For instance, it has been recognized that not all cultures are inspired through self-determined and intrinsic motives. Some cultures are motivated through group process and shared achievement. The diverging values that belie individualism and collectivism are among myriad of potential differences that result in shared perception or misunderstanding in life, and so, in sport. (p. 2)*





# Journal of Coaching Education

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The first domain in the SCSC involves increased sociocultural *awareness*, which is a foundational and critical competency for all coaches in school sports. Sociocultural awareness may involve becoming cognizant of how coaches' own social and cultural backgrounds have influenced how they perceive those who are different from them. Therefore, a socioculturally competent coach is willing to be open, non-defensive, and receptive to critical self-reflection and working to understand and respect their athletes, whose identities and belief systems may be significantly different from her or his identity and belief system.

## ***Sociocultural Coaching Competency 2: Knowledge of Athletes' Worldviews***

As coaches realize that they may not share similar worldviews, values, and practices with their athletes, it is important that they remain receptive to understanding and gaining knowledge about those diverse perspectives and practices. Thus, the second domain of the SCSC involves sport coaches development of *sociocultural coaching knowledge*. In the second SCSC domain, competent sport coaches should aspire to gain knowledge and understanding of their athletes' culture and diversity (e.g., ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious/spiritual beliefs, and disability).

In order for sport coaches to increase their multicultural knowledge related to their athletes, we suggest that they acquire information about the beliefs, perspectives, practices, and norms of their diverse athletes (e.g., athletes' ancestral and cultural background, social upbringing, personal values and beliefs, and cultural practices and norms).

Athletes develop identities in accordance with their racial /ethnic group and researchers have explained these identities in terms of norms for participating in sport, such as the African American racial identity in sport models (e.g., Harrison, Harrison, & Moore, 2002; Kontos, & Breland-Noble, 2002), Latino cultures in sport (Kontos & Arguello, 2005), Mexican cultures in sport (Hanrahan, 2005), aboriginal peoples in sport (Hanrahan, 2004), and international athletes in sport (Popp, 2006). For example, Popp reported that international student-athletes in United States intercollegiate athletics settings perceived that their experiences as an athlete were different than their domestic teammates because international student-athletes reported higher values on academic achievement and placed lower values towards the mental preparation for athletics, and also they deemphasized competition more than their domestic teammates. In reference to the growth of diversity among athletes in United States sport settings, the "substantial investment athletic departments make in recruiting these athletes, coaches and administrators need to know how to interact, and help their teams interact, with student-athletes from around the world" (Popp, et al. 2009, p. 105).

Additionally, we suggest that in order for sport coaches' to increase multicultural knowledge, they should engage in learning activities that promotes their understanding of social,



# Journal of Coaching Education

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political, and economic discriminatory practices which impacts diverse athletes identity, and personal and athletic development in sport settings. To support athletes' development, sport coaches necessitate a sound understanding of the athletes' worldview and social-cultural lived experience. Sport coaches may acquire sociocultural knowledge through professional development activities, research scholarly literature, and attending activities common to their athletes (e.g., attending a church service with their athletes in the athletes' community). In addition, we advocate that coaching educators provide coaches-in-training with the knowledge grounded in sound research and theory to foster their effectiveness and ethical practice with diverse athletes.

## ***Sociocultural Coaching Competency 3: Coaching Skills & Strategies***

As sport coaches develop multicultural sport coaching awareness and knowledge, they are better able to employ effective coaching skills and strategies, leading to culturally competent coaching practices. Therefore, the third domain of the SCSC is *sociocultural coaching skills and strategies*. During the third SCSC domain, the sport coach is expected to strive towards the utilization of culturally appropriate strategies and skills within their coaching practices. In the process of developing multicultural sport coaching skills, coaches need to reflect upon their awareness of self and their knowledge of other specific cultures, in an effort to develop and exhibit culturally sensitive and effective coaching behaviors and practices. Furthermore, we recommend that sport coaches engage in professional development (e.g., diversity related workshops and professional development opportunities, especially those endorsed or promoted by coaches associations) that exposes them to a variety of behavioral strategies and skills which are culturally relevant and sensitive for accommodating diverse athletes. Attending or developing professional development opportunities which promote sport coaches' sociocultural competent service delivery to diverse athletes' increases their skill set to adapt their coaching practices to match their athletes' distinct needs, supporting all athletes' success.

## **SCSC Standards and Benchmarks**

### **Sociocultural Sport Coaching Competency 1: Self-Awareness of Personal Beliefs/Biases**

The socioculturally competent sport coach should be able to:

**Standard 1.** Demonstrate the ability to transition from being culturally unaware to being aware and sensitive to his/her own cultural heritage and to valuing and respecting differences.

- The sport coach should begin the process of exploring his/her attitudes, beliefs, values, and assumptions about human behavior. The sport coach should move away from being culturally biased in favor of his/her own cultural values, in an attempt to be respectful of cultural differences expressed in their athletes.



# Journal of Coaching Education

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## **Benchmarks:**

- 1) Sport coaches should be able to demonstrate a competence level beyond cultural blindness on the SCSC continuum.
- 2) Sport coaches should be able to develop an ability to utilize the SCSC continuum to continually measure their level of multicultural competence.

**Standard 2.** Develop an awareness of how their own cultural background and experiences, attitudes, values, and biases may negatively affect the *culturally diverse athletes* (CDA) they coach.

- Sport coaches should actively and continuously engage in awareness to avoid prejudices, discriminatory labeling, and stereotyping against their athletes. Sport coaches should avoid engaging in personally derived preconceived biases and notions regarding their CDA.

## **Benchmarks:**

- 1) Sport coaches should be able to challenge their own preconceived assumptions about CDA.
- 2) Sport coaches should become familiar with their personal stereotypical attitudes and beliefs, and
- 3) Sport coaches should demonstrate the ability to monitor their attitudes and impact with culturally diverse athletes via consultations, assessments, and professional development.
- 4) Sport coaches should be able to acknowledge their own racist attitudes, beliefs, and feeling biases held against other sociocultural groups of athletes. Although this standard applies to all groups, for traditionally dominant groups (White American or male sport coaches) in U.S society, it may involve reflection of how they may have directly or indirectly benefitted from racial and gender oppression in society.

**Standard 3.** Demonstrate an ability to appreciate and be receptive of differences that exist between themselves and athletes in terms of race ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, and beliefs.

- Sport coaches should be able to develop sensitivity towards their CDA that may not share the same ethnic racial, gender, sexual, or religious orientations.

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## **Benchmarks:**

- 1) Sport coaches should be able to exhibit ethical practices and respect for their athletes despite their differences in identity orientations with the athlete.
- 2) Sport coaches should demonstrate an appreciation for coaching athletes of all sociocultural orientations.



# Journal of Coaching Education

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## Sociocultural Sport Coaching Competency 2: Knowledge of Athletes Diverse Worldviews

The socioculturally competent sport coach should be able to:

**Standard 4.** Acquire specific knowledge and information about the variations of sociocultural groups that they are working with.

- Sport coaches should become aware of the variety of life experiences, cultural heritages, and historical backgrounds of their CDA. This particular competency is strongly linked to sport coaches obtaining an understanding of “racial/ethnic identity” development in sport models.

**Benchmarks:**

- 1) Sport coaches should be able to obtain knowledge of their athletes’ family and social upbringings.
- 2) Sport coaches be able to demonstrate knowledgeable about various sociocultural norms, practices, beliefs, values, and hierarchies in sport, and understand how these implications may influence attitudes, values, and behaviors expressed by their athletes.

**Standard 5.** Acquire clear and explicit knowledge and understanding of the sociopolitical dimensions of multicultural conflict in sport coaching (e.g., racism, sexism, disablism, religious bias).

- Sport coaches should understand the influx of oppressive and stereotypical practices (i.e., racism, sexism, religious biases, disablism) exhibited in the process of coaching in sport/athletic settings. In addition, sport coaches should obtain specific knowledge about their own racial and cultural heritage, gender, sexual orientation, and religious beliefs and how it personally and professionally affects their biases and explanations of superiority-inferiority or normality-abnormality as it relates to culturally diverse athletes in sport and athletic settings.

**Benchmarks:**

- 1) Sport coaches should be able to acknowledge how their communication styles negatively and/or positively impacts the coaching process with their athletes on the basis of their racial/ethnic affiliation, sexual orientation, gender, disability, and religious practices.
- 2) Sport coaches should be able to acquire knowledge (via Google, academic journals, books, etc.) on a variety of sociocultural issues in sport coaching to better define their understanding of the perpetuation of such issues.

**Standard 6.** Acquire knowledge about institutional barriers that limits or prevents some athletes from participating in or having access to sport and physical activity programs and resources.



# Journal of Coaching Education

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- Sport coaches should be aware of public and private institutional barriers which may limit their athletes' accessibility to places of sport. Thus, sport coaches should become aware of social and economic disparities among cultures, which could influence the availability and access to sport related resources and facilities in sociodemographic areas their athletes have access to utilize.

## **Benchmarks:**

- 1) Sport coaches should be able to identify social and economic factors which may have limited the types of community resources, facilities, and equipment which are/were accessible to their athletes and understand how these aspects of accessibility may have influenced their athletes previous and current development of specific sport skills.

## **Sociocultural Sport Coaching Competency 3: Multicultural Skills & Strategies**

The socioculturally competent sport coach should be able to:

**Standard 7.** Apply methods to send and receive a variety of verbal and nonverbal responses and messages accurately and appropriately to culturally and linguistically diverse athletes.

- Sport coaches should develop an ability to send and receive both verbal and nonverbal messages *accurately* and *appropriately*. Sport coaches should utilize a variety of communication methods or approaches to be able to send and also receive messages to and from their athletes, and realize that these methods should be culturally sensitive and appropriate.

## **Benchmarks:**

- 1) Sport coaches should be able to avoid culturally insensitive words (i.e., racial or sexual slurs) when communicating with their athletes.
- 2) When necessary, sport coaches should be able to exhibit effective non-verbal and verbal methods /strategies to communicate with hearing or visually impaired and limited English proficient athletes.

**Standard 8.** Demonstrate an ability to refer their athletes to a variety of institutional interventions.

- Sport coaches should exhibit an ability to facilitate their CDA through effective out-of-the office strategies (i.e., make referrals to community outreach programs, social support systems, and counseling) and understand that some CDA issues or dilemmas result from factors outside the coach-athlete relationship or team dynamics.

## **Benchmarks:**



# Journal of Coaching Education

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- 1) When multicultural issues or problems beyond the experience or expertise of sport coaches occur, they (sport coaches) should be able to seek appropriate referral for athletes to trained professionals who can provide counseling, evaluation, and mediation.

**Standard 9.** Demonstrate an ability to recognize their limitations across the dimensions (e.g., race, gender, religion, and disabled) of sociocultural competencies, and reflect on its impact for their diverse athletes.

- Sport coaches should be able to seek out educational, consultative, and training experiences to enrich their understanding and effectiveness in working with culturally different populations.

**Benchmarks:**

- 1) Sport coaches should be able to evaluate their sociocultural limitations through measuring their levels of multicultural competence in the SCSC continuum.
- 2) In sociocultural dimensions where improvement is needed, sport coaches should be able to seek consultation with qualified or experience professionals, obtain further professional development, and refer out to more qualified individuals or resources to improve their coaching skills and experiences with diverse athletes.

**Standard 10.** Demonstrate the ability to eliminate personal biases, prejudices, and discriminatory practices across sport settings.

- Sport coaches should be able to exhibit sensitivity towards issues of social injustice and oppression and be cognizant of sociopolitical contexts in providing evaluations and other coaching responsibilities relative to their CDA.

**Benchmarks:**

- 1) Sport coaches should be able to exhibit coaching practices which exclude sociocultural related biases, prejudices, and oppressive practices (i.e, specific exclusion of an athlete because of their race, sexual orientation, or religious practices).
- 2) Sport coaches should be able to avoid utilization of preconceived stereotypical notions of athletic ability (e.g., racial, stacking, gender ability stereotyping) when coaching their CDA.

**Standard 11.** Demonstrate an ability to become actively involved with their athletes in a systemic sociocultural focus outside of sport and athletic settings.

- Sport coaches should have social interactions with their athletes in various sociocultural contexts (community events, fraternity and sorority events, political functions, cultural festivals, and family gatherings) so that their understandings of athletes' worldviews are beyond just that of their athletic and sport identities.



## **Benchmarks:**

- 1) Sport coaches should be able to participate in various social events with their athletes.
- 2) Sport coaches should be able to effectively communicate with their athletes outside of their respective athletic and sport settings.

## **Gauging Sociocultural Competence among Sport Coaches**

Achieving sociocultural competence is a process whereby a sport coach obtains specific multicultural information and then applies that knowledge within her or his practices to better accommodate culturally diverse athletes' needs (Campinha-Bacote, 2002). For that reason, it is important to note two factors in measuring SCSC as: (a) a sport coach cannot fully achieve SCSC because it is an on-going continuous process and (b) a sport coach may have a high level of SCSC in one domain (e.g., sociocultural knowledge) and have a low level in a different SCSC domain (e.g., self-awareness).

Sport coaches need to appreciate that achieving sociocultural competence is an ever evolving process (Cross, 1988). In summarizing the three characteristics and dimensions of sociocultural competence, Sue and Sue (1990) stated:

*These three goals stress the fact that becoming culturally skilled is an active process, that it is ongoing, and that it is a process that never reaches an end point. Implicit is recognition of the complexity and diversity of the client and client populations, and acknowledgement of our own personal limitations and the need to always improve (p. 146).*

Hence, we present the SCSC as a practical guide for coaches to work to aspire to achieve with the understanding that their achievement is a journey, not an attainable goal. In addition, the development of SCSC necessitates sport coaches to engage in continuous examination of their relationship with all their athletes. Thus, the development of sport coaches' sociocultural competence is a process (a continuum), rather than achievable endpoint (scoring 100% on a test). In regard to SCSC being domain specific (e.g., high multicultural knowledge does not necessarily equate to high multicultural skill levels), sport coaches need to work on all three domains (self-awareness, knowledge, and skills) to move on the continuum of sociocultural competence.

Additionally, sport coaches may be competent in working with one group of athletes (e.g., racially diverse athletes) and incompetent in coaching another group of athlete (e.g., sexual minority athletes). Consequentially, sport coaches necessitate self-understanding of their levels



# Journal of Coaching Education

of competence and areas for improvement, supporting their ability to work in an ethical and effective manner with as many diverse athletes as possible.

## Measuring Sociocultural Sport Coaching Competence

Cultural competency exists on a continuum (Bennett, 1993, Cross, 1988; Cross et al. 1989). For example, Bennett's (1993) model of cultural competency involves a continuum in which an individual may move from a level of ethnocentric (race-insensitive) to ethnorelative (race-sensitive) values, beliefs, and practices. However, the *Cross Model of Cultural Competence* (Cross, 1988; Cross et al., 1989) designed a multicultural competence framework to facilitate professionals in assessing their progress on the competency continuum, fostering their ability to accommodate to their diverse clients. In addition, Cross's and colleagues (1989) model presents a progressive continuum that is structured to describe an individual's level of receptivity and appreciation of diverse individuals, where individuals may be insensitivity/incompetency on one end of the continuum and progress towards cultural sensitivity/competency at the other end. Six levels of cultural competence are delineated in Cross's model, ranging from low to high achievement of competence: (a) cultural destructiveness, (b) cultural incapacity, (c) cultural blindness, (d) cultural pre-competence, (e) cultural competence, and (f) advanced cultural competence.

We integrated tenets of Cross and his colleagues (1988, 1989) models into our SCSC, supporting the practicality of the proposed sport coaching competencies (Table 2 presents the SCSC continuum) which provides behavioral characteristics that sport coach may exhibit per level). When utilizing the SCSC continuum, sport coaches should gauge their sociocultural competence across the different sociocultural identities (e.g., sexual orientation, religious practice, ethnic/racial background) of athletes they coach. Sport coaches begin at varying places on the SCSC continuum, and logically, should progress toward multicultural competence as a result of the following the SCSC standards and benchmarks. The SCSC continuum should be viewed as a growth model rather than a deficit model in hope that all sport coaches develop the specific sociocultural skills, while recognizing that some coaches will begin at different levels on the continuum and will progress faster along the continuum than others. For example, sport coaches may be at the Basic Culturally Competent level in reference to addressing athletes' religious/spiritual practices; however, they may be at the Cultural Incapacity level in relation to athletes' sexual orientation.

## A Call for Action

Socioculturally competent sport coaches are accountable for promoting social justice and equality among their athletes through the processes of coaching. We believe that the SCSC represent the first conceptual model to define the characteristics of a socioculturally competent





# Journal of Coaching Education

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sports coach. We propose that individuals should not view the SCSC as a final product but rather as a starting point developed from previous theoretical underpinnings of sociocultural competence that we consider relevant for accommodating sport coaches ethical practical when working with culturally diverse athletes. We anticipate that practitioners will further investigate the conceptual validity of the SCSC through empirical research, and aspire that this exploration will lead to; (a) the development and validation of a psychometric scale to measure SCSC; and (b) continued improvement of the SCSC through conceptual modifications and revisions, with the addition or deletion of specific competencies which are found to be strong or weak predictors of multicultural competence. It is our intention that NCACE and NASPE will eventually adopt the SCSC into the sport coaching standards of the profession. We forecast this possibility through the implementation and inclusion of a ninth domain called “sociocultural competence” within the next revision of the NCACE/NASPE *National Standards for Sport Coaches*.

As athletes come from more diverse backgrounds and identify themselves in new ways, coaches should be aware to develop and practice sociocultural competencies. The position developed in this paper is that implementing SCSC into coaching and coach education will enhance coaches’ and their athletes’ holistic growth and development. In addition, SCSC may support both sport coaches and their athletes in becoming self-reflective individuals, and reduce the prevalence of sociocultural conflict within sports and athletics programs. Furthermore, we believe that SCSC provides an initial step for furthering research related to sociocultural competence in the field of sport coaching and coaching education.



# Journal of Coaching Education

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# Journal of Coaching Education

**Table 1: Sociocultural Related NCAACE/NASPE National Standards for Sport Coaches**

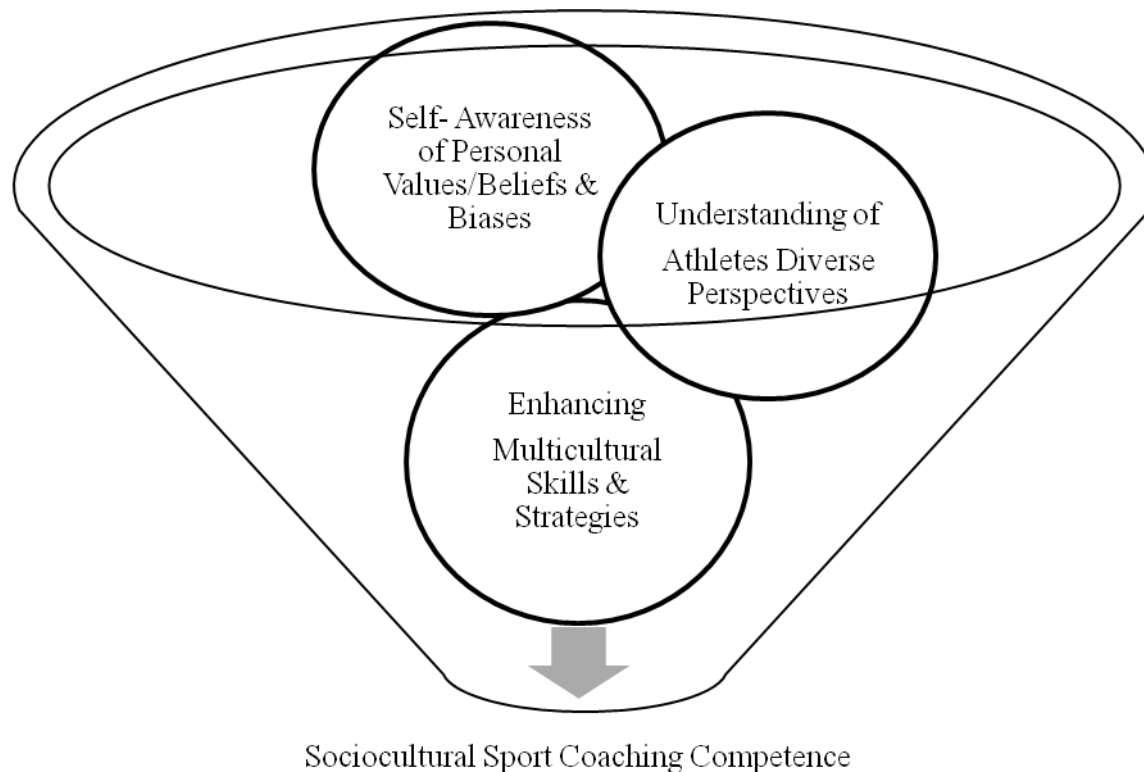
Coaching Domain #	National Standards for Sport Coaches	Multicultural Based Benchmarks/Competencies
Domain 1: Philosophy & Ethics	Standard 1- Develop and implement an athlete centered philosophy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Welcome all eligible athletes and implement strategies that encourage the participation of <b>disadvantaged and disabled athletes</b>.</li> </ul>
Domain 1: Philosophy & Ethics	Standard 2- Identify, model, and teach positive values learned through sport participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Practice respect for <b>diverse populations</b></li> </ul>
Domain 1: Philosophy & Ethics	Standard 4- Demonstrate ethical conduct in all facets of the sport program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use personal and official power in a responsible manner to reduce the potential for <b>sexual harassment</b> and athlete abuse.</li> </ul>
Domain 4: Growth & Development	Standard 17- Facilitate the social and emotional growth of athletes by supporting a positive sport experience and lifelong participation in physical activity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acknowledge the <b>social-emotional</b> issues that affect athletes of all ages.</li> </ul>
Domain 5: Teaching & Communication	Standard 19- Provide a positive learning environment that is appropriate to the characteristics of the athletes and goals of the program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote opportunity within sport by encouraging appropriate and equal participation regardless of <b>race, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status</b>.</li> </ul>
Domain 5: Teaching & Communication	Standard 25- Use effective communication skills to enhance individual learning, group success, and enjoyment in the sport experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use professional and age appropriate language at all times. Use <b>nonsexist</b> and <b>inclusive</b> language.</li> </ul>
Domain 7: Organization & Administration	Standard 36- Fulfill all legal responsibilities and risk management procedures associated with coaching.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognize that full participation of all athletes may require reasonable accommodations in accordance with the <b>Americans with Disabilities Act</b>, and conforming to <b>Title IX</b> or other legislative actions.</li> </ul>

(Source: National Standards for Sport Coaches, NASPE, 2006).



# Journal of Coaching Education

Figure 2: Sociocultural Competencies for Sport Coaches



# Journal of Coaching Education

**Table 2: Sociocultural Competence for Sport Coaches Continuum**

Stages of SCSC	Characteristics of a Sport Coach at Each Stage of the SCSC Continuum
<p>Stage 1: Sociocultural Destructiveness</p>	<p>The sport coach in the first stage of the SCSC continuum exhibits overt discriminatory attitudes, policies, and practices that are destructive to cultures and to athletes within those cultures. Sport coaching practices here exhibit culture/race -based oppression, forced assimilation, or even harassment of multicultural athletes.</p> <p><b><i>Sport Coach Characteristics' Exhibited in Stage 1:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The sport coach</i> dehumanizes or humiliates athletes whose races and ethnicities', sexual orientations, physical abilities, and religious beliefs are different than his/her own.</li> <li>• <i>The sport coach</i> intentionally or overtly denies athletes access to team resources because of biases against their social identities or social orientations.</li> <li>• <i>The sport coach</i> intentionally or overtly fails to provide social equality in athletic opportunities which are provided (i.e., recruitment, playing time) to athletes on the basis of their race, sexual orientation, physical disabilities, or religious practices.</li> </ul>
<p>Stage 2: Sociocultural Incapacity</p>	<p>The sport coach in the second stage of the SCSC continuum does not intentionally seek to be culturally destructive but lacks the capacity to help athletes because of personal biases, beliefs in racial and gender superiority of dominant groups, and negatively held attitudes towards the perceived "lesser" cultural groups in various sport settings. The sport coach may use discriminating practices, infer messages that minority groups of athletes are not wanted on his/her team, and generally holds negative values towards athletes whom are among sociocultural minority groups in various sport settings.</p> <p><b><i>Sport Coach Characteristics' Exhibited in Stage 2:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The sport coach</i> holds dispositions towards sociocultural groups perceived as subordinate or the minority in mainstream society and ideology.</li> <li>• <i>The sport coach</i> may integrate coaching policies that support segregation of athletes they perceive as subordinate in mainstream society and ideology</li> <li>• <i>The sport coach</i> enforces policies which exclude race, gender, disability, and religious issues in sport settings.</li> <li>• <i>The sport coach</i> may perpetuate racial, gender, physiological and religious sport-related stereotypes.</li> <li>• <i>The sport coach expresses</i> subtle "not welcome" messages to athletes whose identities may not be consistent with dominant or mainstream culture.</li> </ul>
<p>Stage 3: Sociocultural Blindness</p>	<p>The sport coach in the third stage of the SCSC continuum utilizes practices that exhibit the belief that all people are the same and that factors such as ethnicity, sexual orientation, and religion make no difference. Therefore, the sport coach fails to use culturally sensitive approaches and insists that practices used by and with the dominant culture are just as</p>





# Journal of Coaching Education

	<p>relevant. This stage describes the sport coach as unintentionally exhibiting attitudes, policies, and practices which are ethnocentric (culturally-blind).</p> <p><b><i>Sport Coach Characteristics' Exhibited in Stage 3:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The sport coach</i> believes that color or culture makes no difference; that all athletes are the same.</li> <li>• <i>The sport coach</i> believes helping approaches used by dominant culture are universally acceptable and universally applicable.</li> <li>• <i>The sport coach</i> ignores cultural strengths, encourages assimilation, and blames athletes' for their social problems on and off the field.</li> <li>• <i>The sport coach</i> utilizes coaching practices which perpetuate institutionalized racism sexism, disability, and religious intolerance.</li> </ul>
<p>Stage 4: Sociocultural Precompetence</p>	<p>The sport coach in the fourth stage of the SCSC continuum has begun developing an awareness that he/she may exhibit a need to improve his/her coaching practices for accommodating sociocultural characteristics of diverse athletes, thus leading the sport coach to take proactive measures to improve these practices (i.e., attends diversity workshops/clinics). In this stage, the sport coach seeks to implement and provide innovative culturally relevant coaching practices and policies, increase diversity on team and staff, and begin to engage his/her athletes and co-coaches in culturally relevant dialogue and training. It is cautioned that at this stage, sport coaches should not underestimate the impact of their proactiveness to increase cultural cohesiveness among their athletes and co-coaches, as this may prevent them from progressing further along the continuum.</p> <p><b><i>Sport Coach Characteristics' Exhibited in Stage 4:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The sport coach</i> has realized his/her weaknesses in serving diverse athletes and attempts to make specific improvements.</li> <li>• <i>The sport coach</i> starts to implement sociocultural experimentations in an effort to increase his/her sociocultural sensitivity and competence such as; increasing diversity among the coaching staff, and exploring how to better accommodate diverse athletes,</li> <li>• <i>The sport coach</i> has committed to addressing issues of social injustice and inequality which surround his/her specific athletic and sport settings.</li> </ul>
<p>Stage 5: Basic Sociocultural Competence</p>	<p>The fifth stage involves the sport coach being accepting and respectful of athletes whom are culturally different. Here, the sport coach uses practices which exhibit continuous self reflection about aspects of multiculturalism, on-going attention to the dimensions of sociocultural difference in athletes, continuous expansion of cultural knowledge and resources), and modification of his/her coaching practices to facilitate the needs of all athletes.</p> <p><b><i>Sport Coach Characteristics' Exhibited in Stage 5:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The sport coach</i> has developed an acceptance and respect for sociocultural identity variations in his/her athletes.</li> <li>• <i>The sport coach</i> engages in continuing self-assessment regarding their use of socioculturally competent practices with his/her athletes.</li> </ul>



# Journal of Coaching Education

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The sport coach</i> seeks advice and consultation from diverse communities and athletes of all races, sexual orientations, ability levels, and religious affiliations’.</li> </ul>
<p>Stage 6: Advanced Sociocultural Competence</p>	<p>The sixth and last stage of the SCSC continuum involves the sport coach acquiring new knowledge by developing new interventions, evaluating and disseminating the results of sociocultural assessments of their team, and experimenting with changes in its teams organizational structure which supports the sociocultural values and beliefs of the athletes’ whom they serve.</p> <p><b><i>Sport Coach Characteristics’ Exhibited in Stage 6:</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The sport coach</i> places high values on sociocultural aspects related to effectively coaching diverse athletes.</li> <li>• <i>The sport coach</i> engages in continuous professional development, research activities, and self reflections which allow him/her to increase their sociocultural knowledge base.</li> <li>• <i>The sport coach</i> engages his/her team in social practices such as diversity think tank sessions, workshops, and meetings to 1) better understand multicultural conflict on their specific teams and 2) dispel and eliminate sociocultural biases, stereotypes, discriminatory actions, and other multicultural conflicts which may exist.</li> </ul>

(The SCSC Continuum was developed and modified from the Cross (1988) Model of Cultural Competence)

