

Masters Age Athletes and Coaching: The Discrepancy Between Demand and Supply

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Introduction

Some General Statistics

- participation in masters athletics is growing worldwide
- the inaugural World Masters Athletics championships in 1975 had 1,408 athletes
- the 2007 WMA championships had 9,000 athletes
- there are about 900 masters track and field athletes registered in Canada
- 35 WMA indoor records are held by Canadian masters
38 WMA outdoor records are held by Canadian masters

Definition of Ageism

Ageism is discrimination based on age.
(Overcoming Ageism by Sandy O'Brien Cousins PhD)

Regarding Ageism

- seniors are not supposed to be engaged in competitive athletics
- "elite seniors become curiosities, an exception, not something to be emulated"
- their amazing performances are not viewed as a result of disciplined training efforts, skill mastery and tenacity
- they are viewed with puzzlement and revered for their inexplicable good fortune at having that much talent and genetic endowment"

(Competing For Life: Older People and Competitive Sport
by Rylee Ann Dionigi
PhD thesis, University of Newcastle June 2004)

Prime example = Ed Whitlock

NCCP Athlete Long Term Development in Canada Model

- Fundamentals
- Train to Train
- Train to Compete
- Training to Win
- The Retirement/Retaining:
Activities performed after an athlete has retired from competition permanently. Ex-athletes move into sport related careers that may include coaching, officiating, sport administration, small business enterprises, masters competition and the media.
(NCCP reference manual)

Assumptions Arising From the NCCP Model

- Masters' competitions are comprised of ex- high level athletes.
- These athletes no longer require coaching as they are "retaining".
- Masters' competitions are seen as less serious, a step down from the previous high level competitions of the elite athletes.

Flaws in the Assumptions

1. Most masters are not ex high level athletes.
2. A large percentage took up athletics as masters.
3. These athletes do require coaching to acquire technical proficiency and/or physical training based on sound scientific principles.
4. Masters athletes take their training and competing very seriously.

Methods

Information Sought From Surveys of Masters

- Gender
- Age
- Events
- Level of participation/competition
- Level of seriousness
- When they began
- How did they learn
- Do they belong to a club
- Do they have a coach
- Is the coach NCCP certified
- Various questions on availability of coaches, relationships with coaches, usefulness of having a coach, etc.
- Thoughts solicited on their experiences with a coach as a masters athlete
- Advice/comments/ ideas on masters and coaching

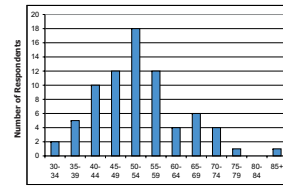
More than one response allowed for this question

Learned from:	Total %
Coach	75
Fellow competitors	40
Friends	21
Clinic	21
Club	59
Taught myself	52

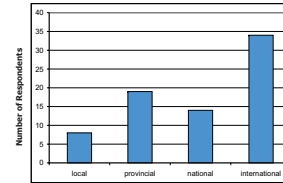
More than one response allowed for this question

Attitudes/feelings	Total %
It's just a hobby for me	8
I could easily quit	0
I mainly do charity events	16
I am very serious about my training/competing	75
I want to compete at the highest level	60
I train 3 or more days a week	87
I push myself very hard in training/competing	64

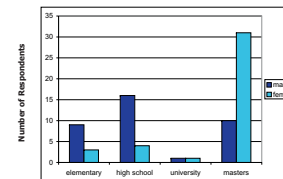
Results



Age of Respondents



Highest Level of Master's Competition



When Did you Start Competing in Your Event?

Masters Athletics Survey:

Summaries of responses from the three main groups of respondents

Runners Middle and Distance

- Tend to be fairly complacent and don't feel the need for a coach for a variety of reasons:
- had a coach when younger and continued to follow the programme into masters years began their events at a younger age
 - have access to more informal coaching through running groups, books specially geared to runners, magazines that couch training advice in simplified terms
 - feel comfortable and confident being self coached

Racewalkers

- 90% have a coach
- tend to be centered around a coach
- recognize the need for a coach as it is virtually impossible to be self coached, in terms of learning and acquiring technique
- almost exclusively took up the event as masters
- most coaches are retired or current masters racewalkers
- racewalkers are somewhat well served, although there are not that many coaches in the country
- no coach = no racewalkers

Throwers/Jumpers/ Sprinters

- expressed the need of a coach but lament the dearth of them
- men tended to begin their events at a younger age while women started as masters
- are very clear that masters in technical events should have access to a coach
- many sprinters who have a coach felt that coaches paid more attention to younger athletes or designed training programmes for them that led to injuries
- are clearly not satisfied with their current situation

Statements	Agree	Disagree	Neutral
Should have access to a coach	64%	29%	7%
All should have a coach	57%	25%	18%
I'm not good enough to have a coach	3%	93%	3%
Should share a collaborative approach	90%	3%	7%
Impossible to find a coach	30%	46%	24%
I know what works for me	43%	29%	28%
A coach is a waste of money	1%	92%	7%
A coach is essential for my development	81%	10%	9%
I'm fine without a coach	21%	62%	17%
Coaching has improved my performance	97%	3%	0%
Workouts are too hard	7%	83%	10%
Value the coach-athlete relationship	92%	4%	4%
My coach understands older athletes	89%	9%	2%
Workouts are geared for younger athletes	28%	60%	12%
More attention is paid to younger athletes	41%	41%	18%
It's too expensive to hire a coach	32%	47%	21%

A Sampling of Respondents' Comments

"My first coach was focused on the teenage athletes and as a newcomer at 48, I was expected to do the young runners' workout. I was injured in the first 6 months and had to take a month off."

"I sit at track meets (designed for young people) and hear the negative comments about the masters runners. I am not confident enough to compete under those circumstances."

"Masters athletes require a unique training programme and specific training that is geared toward the older athlete's body."

"After two injuries in a matter of months, my coach and I decided to still follow the kids' programme but have more recovery time between sessions. I want to be at the top but we are not sure what to do, so we are taking the safest approach to remain healthy."

"I cannot understate the value of working with a coach to design the workouts, and most importantly, to observe and 'coach' the technique."

"Masters athletes are just as deserving as younger athletes of coaching."

"As an adult just developing an interest in a sport and beginning to entertain the idea of competing, I think having a coach is extremely important."

"Coaches are not just for the young folk. Athletics for everyone should be encouraged and supported."

"All athletes should have ACCESS to a coach."

"I recently came from a situation where the coach did tout her ability to coach a national level athlete, and yet did not want to coach me, even though I had been stronger than some of her varsity group."

"I was lucky and had access to a coach but I'm not sure how I would find one if I hadn't had access. Training awareness and educating masters about what a coach can do for them and where to find a coach might be helpful."

"I'd love to have a coach or even share a coach."

"Coaches' training should include the specific needs of masters athletes."

"A masters athlete who is still relatively new to his/her event definitely needs coaching to improve."

"I think coaching clinics and certification should include a component on the special needs of masters athletes."

"Coaches are required for masters and I'm willing to pay for it. It's hard to train on our own, physically and mentally."

"Hard to find a coach anywhere but especially hard in Quebec where masters' sprinting gets me strange looks on the track."

"I think it's important that the coach has a background of training and/or experience in the coaching of the older athlete."

Conclusions

Masters in athletics want competent and qualified coaches who both recognize and understand their unique needs and are willing to seriously focus on them.

Problem

In Canada today, there is a lack of coaches who can fulfill that need.

NCCP Philosophy

"Coaching is about helping other people improve and achieve their goals in and through sport and creating an environment in which this can take place".
(NCCP reference manual)

Currently, the NCCP does not address the coaching of masters athletes in any formalized way.

Solutions/Recommendations

NCCP manual should include a section on the coaching of masters athletes.

A registry of coaches who are willing to work with masters athletes should be established.

Masters athletes and events could be featured in Athletics magazine as well as tips for those certified coaches who may be asked to work with a masters age athlete.

Coaches of masters athletes should be encouraged to establish a network to share information, ideas and expertise.