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**WORKSHOPS: A DIRECT AND INTERACTIVE FORUM  
FOR FORENSICS COACHES/JUDGES**

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Forensics is an educational function set in an educational environment. While the obligations and concomitant responsibilities are many, forensics personnel preeminently are serving a teaching function... (McBath, 1975, p. 47)

Most would agree with the assumption that forensics serves primarily a pedagogical function. Consequently, forensics personnel often utilize opportunities for professional growth by actively participating in professional associations and contributing to research in the field. The unique concerns and opportunities in forensics, however, present a need for a more direct and interactive forum, such as workshops for forensics personnel.

A search of the literature has revealed very little emphasis concerning the use of workshops for coaches (Ross, 1984). Additionally, workshops for college individual events coaches are limited in number and scope. Despite this apparent dearth of workshops and discussion concerning them, the fact remains that workshops can provide an effective pedagogical and experiential laboratory for the exchange of theories, ideas, and practices regarding issues in forensics.

This paper will present a rationale for the use of coaches' workshops, and offer several proposals for the implementation of these workshops. It should be noted, however, that the intent of the authors is to be descriptive, rather than prescriptive in this discussion.

**RATIONALE**

Tournaments, professional conventions, and journal articles comprise the primary opportunities for professional growth available to individual events coaches. While many coaches utilize these opportunities, we believe that different types of opportunities for professionalism would enrich the quality of individual events programs and competition. The workshop setting, due to its very nature, is conducive to learning and growth for two primary reasons.

First, intellectual stimulation is given a boost through the open exchange of ideas. The other arenas for professional growth generally offer limited chances for direct and immediate feedback, although they are invaluable resources. Workshops, on the other hand, encourage open discussion regarding ideas that are presented. Questions can be addressed as they occur. A variety of opinions regarding the issue(s) being discussed can be presented for consideration and analysis. In other words, communication is primarily two-way, in which ideas can be directly challenged, discussed, modified, and evaluated by all the participants immediately.

This type of informal atmosphere allows for much more possibility of interaction than traditional means of professional enrichment. Colleagues can learn from, and stimulate each other as issues of concern are raised. Often, the time lapse between the conception of an idea and its appearance in print is lengthy. Regardless of the time frame differential, the communication is still basically one-way. Ideas and theories found in journals, and even conventions (due to time constraints), often receive only a superficial consideration. Through the vehicle of workshops, the presentation of ideas can become more than a statement. Potentially, workshops can provide a significant forum for the discussion and testing of ideas.

Second, intellectual stimulation is further increased through the experiential environment that is often characteristic of workshops. Workshops offer a productive arena in which individual events coaches can not only discuss ideas, but also often get hands-on experience through direct involvement in the application of ideas and concepts being discussed.

Coaches rarely get the opportunity to test new ideas, theories, and practices before applying them to their students. The workshop can offer this opportunity. Participants can get involved in formulating intuitions, analyzing concepts, devising pedagogical methodologies, submitting ideas to careful testing, establishing criteria, and modifying current options or discovering new ones.

Essentially, the workshop can be viewed as a means of encouraging innovation in individual events theory, techniques, and practice. It serves primarily a two-fold function. First, the workshop is an open forum or marketplace of ideas than can be addressed and discussed at the moment that ideas are communicated. Second, the workshop is a laboratory or workplace where ideas can be applied and tested before a decision is rendered. As a result of these primary

functions, workshops can be critical tools in the professional growth and development of individual events coaches.

#### PROPOSAL

In an effort to promote the professional growth and development of coaches/judges, we advocate the implementation of workshops in conjunction with individual events tournaments at the state, district, and national levels. This recommendation does not exclude the rights of directors of various local tournaments to offer workshops on topics and issues they see fit. However, there exists guidelines for how to conduct such workshops (Ross, 1984, Dean, 1988).

It is probably safe to assume that most of us participate in our respective state tournament every year. The implementation of a workshop at this tournament has many benefits. First, it affords coaches/judges the opportunity to discuss issues relevant to that particular state tournament. Second, it allows judges/coaches to establish uniform rules and standards for the evaluation of individual events. Third, it provides the opportunity to share different coaching philosophies and approaches to individual events. Finally, it serves as a useful educational tool for those coaches/judges who are new to the activity.

Such a workshop could be planned by the governing body of the state tournament. This governing body would be responsible for soliciting issues and topics of concern from all of the programs within the state. Upon close examination of the information received, the committee would design a workshop around the most salient issue(s) of the programs within the state. If the committee discovered coaches/judges were interested in criteria for evaluating after-dinner speaking, a workshop could be planned in the following manner. First, the committee would have to select an appropriate time frame within the tournament to allow coaches/judges to attend the workshop. Second, the committee would select a panel of coaches/judges to present their philosophies on the event. Third, a live or videotaped performance of the event could be evaluated by all of the participants. Following the performance, workshop participants could be broken into small discussion groups to share their reactions and criteria for evaluating the performance. Finally, from these discussions a list of criteria could be compiled and incorporated in the rules for after-dinner speaking in the tournament invitation. This type of format could be used for any event coaches/judges want to discuss at the tournament.

Now we realize this type of format may not be suitable for resolving all of the issues surrounding an event. However, this type of format provides the opportunity for coaches/judges to share ideas, interact with each other, and hopefully reach some consensual agreement/understanding about criteria for evaluating specific individual events. Ideally, this type of workshop could help to establish uniform standards and criteria for evaluation of individual events throughout the state.

In addition to workshops at the state level, for those who attend their respective AFA district tournament, a coach/judge workshop is also beneficial. Unlike the state tournament, AFA district tournaments attract coaches/judges from several states with various philosophies and approaches to individual events. It is probably safe to assume that there are numerous issues concerning individual events coaches/judges would like to discuss and/or resolve. The best way to discuss and resolve these issues is through the use of a workshop.

Planning such a workshop could be left up to the district committee or an ad-hoc committee representative of the schools within the district. It would be the responsibility of the committee to solicit topics and issues of concern from the programs within the district. Upon careful examination of the information received, the committee would design a workshop on the most salient issue(s) recommended by the coaches/judges within the district. The format of the workshop could be modeled after the one previously discussed for state tournaments, or the committee could plan the workshop according to a format which best suits the topic or issue of discussion. For example, a workshop on how to prepare students to compete in limited preparation events may not work under the guidelines discussed for the state tournament.

Regardless of the issue or format of the workshop at the district tournament, the purpose of the workshop should be geared towards providing coaches/judges with the opportunity to get involved with the discussion and critique of salient ideas surrounding individual events. This type of interaction can serve to foster coach/judge growth and hopefully help to establish uniform standards and criteria for evaluation of individual events within the district.

Our final proposal deals with implementing coach/judge workshops at all of the respective national tournaments. Unlike the state and district tournaments, national tournaments attract hundreds of coaches/judges from many states with large and small programs, diverse coaching philosophies and perspectives on individual events. We have all probably experienced reading ballots or engaged in interaction with judges/coaches who represent the regional differences in individual events at national tournaments. In an attempt to address and resolve issues of national importance to individual events, numerous convention papers and journal articles have been written to advise and inform coaches/judges of criteria for evaluation, innovations, etc. This work has been beneficial in promoting professional growth and development of coaches/judges. However, we believe workshops at national tournaments would provide coaches/judges with a different type of experience for professional growth and development. First, coaches/judges are given the opportunity to directly interact with coaches/judges from various parts of the nation. This interaction could promote understanding of and agreement about varying philosophies in individual events. Colleagues could learn from, and stimulate each other as issues of concern are raised. Second, coaches/judges are provided

with a means for understanding any new innovations in individual events (i.e., the experimental event offered by AFA Nationals). Third, coaches/judges are given the opportunity to re-think their current philosophies, modify these philosophies or discover new ones.

Organizing a workshop at a national tournament could require considerable planning on the part of the committee overseeing the administration of the tournament. However, the committee could select an ad-hoc committee to organize the workshop(s). It would be the responsibility of the committee to gather information from coaches across the nation about issues they would like to see addressed in the workshops. The committee would also be responsible for finding an appropriate time for conducting the workshops, finding coaches who would want to serve as workshop leaders, and designing the format of the workshop to best meet the needs of the participants.

At a national tournament a variety of topics for workshops could be pursued. Workshops could be held to deal with issues/topics such as, how to attract students to individual events programs, how to secure administrative support, mechanics of administration and management of tournaments, how to train graduate assistants in forensics, how to prepare students to compete in any of the respective events, and the list goes on.

The pedagogical value of implementing workshops for coaches/judges at the state, district, and national level appears to be endless. Regardless of the nature of the workshop, it should serve as an experiential laboratory for the exchange of theories, ideas, and practices regarding issues in individual events. To this end, the workshop, as a direct and interactive forum, provides coaches/judges a different type of opportunity for professional growth and development. This growth and development may well serve to enrich the quality of individual events programs and competition throughout the nation.

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