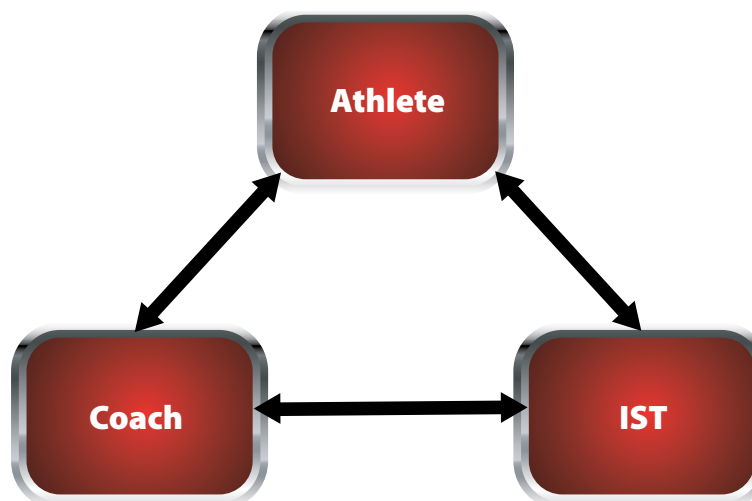


## Completing the Athlete-Coach-IST Triangle: learning from the experiences of athletes, coaches and performance analysts

Achieving international success in sport requires that an athlete is prepared for competition and training in a number of ways. Specifically, an athlete must be properly conditioned, mentally tough and prepared, and be equipped with the necessary technical knowledge. Given that preparation for elite-level competition requires the athlete to be prepared in many different ways, it is important the training involves a multidisciplinary team of experts including coaches, strength and conditioning specialists, sport psychologists, dietitians and performance analysts, also known as the Integrated Support Team (IST). The performance analyst, specifically, has many roles in helping to provide optimal training for an athlete including: identifying relevant performance variables, collecting data on those variables, identifying the strengths and limitations of the athlete, communicating the findings to the coach and athlete, and working with the coach towards implementing the necessary changes in the training or competition setting.



In an effective training environment, the performance analyst must work closely with both the athlete and the coach to ensure everyone is on the same page. Thus, an essential role of the performance analyst is to communicate effectively with both the athlete and the coach.

Understanding the unique roles of the coaches and athletes can go a long way toward helping the performance analyst, or any other member of the support staff, provide effective feedback. I have been fortunate enough to have held all three roles throughout my career and have learned that lessons and skills can be applied from one role to another. Although these lessons were learned from a performance analyst perspective, they can apply to any member of the IST.

### Lessons learned from an athlete perspective:

#### Respect first, knowledge second

While everyone is aware that IST personnel have good intentions and knowledge, most athletes will be hesitant to allow you to make changes to their training program until you have established trust and respect. This relationship will develop gradually so, until then, keep opinions to yourself.

#### Do not interfere

Nothing infuriates athletes more than feeling like someone is interfering with their training. Find ways to be effective, without being intrusive. When in doubt, check with the coach. Always act quickly and be aware of the athletes' current objective before engaging them.

### Lessons learned from a coaching perspective:

#### Respect first, knowledge second

Coaches are reluctant to relinquish control of their athletes' program to another person, especially if trust has not yet been established. Just like with athletes, you must first gain the trust and respect of the coach before becoming involved with the athletes' training. This relationship can be built up gradually by working on elements the coach specifically asks from you, and, as time passes you will likely be able to jump in with your own ideas.

#### Keep feedback quick and succinct

In order to keep the training effective, athletes need to keep their bodies warm. Removing them from their training environment for several minutes will detract from their training more than help it.

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### **Focus on one detail at a time**

In the midst of a training session, athletes and coaches generally only retain a small amount of new information at any given time. Often support staff will try to change too much at once, and end up hindering performance more than helping it. Focus on one specific element at a time, fix it, then move forward.

### **Be prepared**

When working with technology, things will go wrong. Practice using the tools outside of the training environment, and be sure to always have a back-up plan.

### **Lessons for coaches and athletes learned from an IST perspective:**

#### **Be prepared to learn**

Many athletes and coaches want to stick to the physical aspect of training and competing. In order to be a successful coach or athlete, you can't just train hard, you must also train smart. Make sure your mind and body are alert when you arrive at your training or competition.

#### **Keep an open mind**

Both athletes and coaches need to be open to the fact that they don't have all the answers. IST personnel are experts in their field, but can only deliver information effectively if the athlete and coach are willing to listen.

#### **Be patient**

Working with IST personnel will not guarantee immediate results. Hard work and dedication from the coach, athlete and IST is required to ensure the optimal environment is in place for the athlete to achieve success.



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