

Coaching Craft

In my opinion, there are four craft areas that head coaches are required to master. (*Cody Royle – @codyroyle*)

1. Organizational Craft
2. Personal Craft
3. Locker Room Craft
4. Game Craft

All four are equally intricate to learn, constantly evolving, and littered with landmines.

These areas take a different level of precedence and priority depending on the stage of the season or the state of the team, but they are always active.

This is perhaps what goes most unseen and under-appreciated about head coaching, even by close observers within the club.

1. **Organizational Craft** – *“Great organization is the trademark of a great organization.” – Bill Walsh*

This includes your operations, commercial, logistics, budgeting, media, politics, community, hiring & firing, club culture, change management, strategy, process, and internal dynamics.

It is here where many organizations beat themselves before their players have even stepped foot on the field of play.

It is also the craft area that most head coaches struggle with the most as it is the most removed from what they did to get the head coaching role in the first place.

As Frank Lampard is quoted as saying, “A head coach gets fifty problems a day. It’s so far removed from just football.”

2. **Personal Craft** – *“Becoming a leader is synonymous with*

becoming yourself. It is precisely that simple, and it is also that difficult.” – Warren Bennis

This includes how you construct the world, your sense of self, your conceptualization of coaching and leadership, and pursuit of greater command of your primary coaching skills (awareness, communication, and decision-making).

This is the craft area that has seen the most development in the last decade, and the one that still has the highest potential for continued growth.

Unlocking yourself is a worthwhile pursuit because in copycat leagues with largely commoditized tactics, analytics, and preparation techniques, you are your team's greatest source of unique competitive advantage.

3. Locker Room Craft – *“A healthy dressing room is worth more than a hundred hours of tactics.” – Vicente Del Bosque*

This includes your visioning, cultural development, leadership groups, role clarity, staff optimization, recruitment, agents, parents, player discipline, wo/man management, storytelling, messaging, connection, rituals, and empathy.

The most fascinating of the crafts, it is also the most volatile. It is an exercise in trying to understand why certain groups can/cannot do certain things.

While it can often feel like herding cats, your locker room mastery is the bedrock upon which sustained success is built.

“We had the worst record in the league, and nobody wanted to leave,” Steve Kerr said of the Warriors' injury-riddled 2019/20 season. “If you can't maintain your culture during the down times, then you don't really have a culture.”

4. Game Craft – *“Everyone seems to know what should be done after the game.” – Rinus Michels*

This includes your conceptualization of the game,

ability to set up a learning environment to teach the game, team construction, tactical warfare, staff dynamics, competition framing, physical and mental preparation, technical development, game knowledge, resource allocation, and foresight.

Most head coaches are elite in their game craft, but in my opinion the greatest opportunity for continued development is refinement.

Despite the increased complexity of tactical systems in modern sport, it is the growth in staff sizes that has made it toughest to master game craft. The fragmentation of performance makes depth of knowledge difficult, and the need to 'pull it all together' into a cohesive effort adds layers of dynamism that are still relatively new.

There has also been a deferral to practice design in order to solve problems after the fact, rather than in-game interventions.□

"A lot of good coaches can make a pre-game plan and put it into action. But really good coaches change the plan after seven minutes if it's not working." Julian Nagelsmann

The reason I use 'craft' is because craftspeople have high skill and experience, but their creations are determined by each individual's unique interpretation of the world.

Coaching has a similar body of knowledge, but we disregard it and write it off as old school. For instance, the word 'press' or 'pressing' appears 89 times in Arrigo Sacchi's autobiography about his AC Milan teams of the late 1980s.

Pursue mastery for your own coaching, but don't forget the lessons of all of those who have been in the arena before you.