

## EXPLORING DIMENSIONS OF INTELLIGENCE FOR EFFECTIVE COMBAT SPORTS COACHING IN NIGERIA

Ogbouma, S.

Dept of Human Kinetics and Sports Science  
Faculty of Education, University of Benin

### Abstract

*This paper examined some facets of aptitudes required by combat sports coaches to function effectively in the coaching career. The study examined three dimensions of intelligence viz, academic intelligence, professional intelligence, and emotional intelligence. It discussed these three dimensions of intelligence vis-à-vis their contribution to the success of combat sports coaching profession. The study involved a review of literature on the dynamics of coaching in the face of multiple aptitudes such as cognitive, practical, and affective mastery. The paper reviewed the benefits of being academically, professionally, and emotionally intelligent, and further examined how these dimensions of intelligence can contribute to the success of combat sports coaching. Drawing from current on-field experience and practices in combat sports coaching in Nigeria, the paper recommended that coaches should, at all times, bring these three dimensions of intelligence to bear in the discharge of their coaching duties. It is expected that when this is done, combat sports coaches will become more proficient in the overall discharge of their duties and become more impactful in the sports industry.*

**Keywords:** Academic intelligence, professional intelligence, emotional intelligence, combat sports, effective coaching.

### Introduction

The popularity enjoyed by combat sports in recent times is largely owed to the ability of the sport to appeal to the diverse taste of persons from all walks of life. Like all other sports in contemporary times, combat sports are practiced by different people for different reasons. Such reasons include the need for self-defence, physical fitness, recreation and fun, and for sports competition. Irrespective of the motivating factors behind participation in combat sports, any practitioner that intends to make a success of their combat sports practice must enlist the service of a professional trainer. In the case of persons practicing the sport for competition, they must enlist the service of a coach. Thus, the role of a coach is vital to the success of combat sports.

Given the core role of coaches in facilitating the success of combat sports, it is expected that, for a coach to be able to make any meaningful impact on, and

contribute to the growth and development of combat sports practitioners, and by extension, the sport, such coach must be amply equipped with a good measure of all-round intelligence. That is, the coach should have the minimum academic requirement to function effectively as a coach, must possess sufficient on-the-job experience and the technical and tactical-know-how to discharge his duties effectively, and must be able to sufficiently understand the dynamics of human temperament and how to manage humans under various psychophysiological conditions to bring out the best in them. However, everyday experience in the world of sports, especially combat sports, has revealed a worrisome situation where coaching has become an all-comers profession with discordant practices arising from shallow levels of intelligence.

It is now commonplace for any retired sports star to take up coaching

irrespective of what background coaching training they may or may not have. This singular practice has ushered into the world of sports, particularly combat sports, a plethora of unhealthy, discordant, and uncoordinated practices that can sometimes degenerate into embarrassment. This development goes to suggest that, though some of the coaches may have possessed sufficient skills to excel in competition as athletes, they however, do not have the complete package of skills required to function effectively as a coach. Practical experience in the field has shown that a good number of combat sports coaches in major cities in Nigeria can hardly demonstrate all-round coaching abilities. Some lack sufficient academic background while others lack the ability to effectively coach athletes to desired levels of skill proficiency. Furthermore, many of these coaches do not have adequate understanding of the delicate pathways and workings of human psychology, and as such, are unable to employ, control, and manipulate their emotions in relation to other people's emotion for maximum service delivery. It is against this backdrop that it has become necessary to examine the various dimensions of intelligence needed for effective sports coaching and how possession of these abilities can translate into effective coaching career in combat sports.

### **Effective Coaching in Combat Sports**

As the name implies, combat sports are sports involving physical aggression and fights. Some examples include kickboxing, mixed martial arts, karate, kung-fu, Muay Thai, wrestling, and boxing. Though the origin of some of these combat sports dates far back, however, a few are relatively new in competitive sports as they originated from a blend of older versions of combat sports. For instance, kickboxing is a new combat sport which involves a modified blend of Japanese karate, Western boxing, and Muay Thai (Rousseau, 2019). In the same vein, mixed martial art (MMA)

is a relatively new sport involving a blend of karate, boxing, Muay Thai, and wrestling. Though some of these combat sports are relatively new, they have begun to gain so much popularity across various nations of the world due to their ability to appeal to the diverse sports taste of people from all walks of life. Combat sports are governed by various rules in accordance with the principles of each combat sport. Some involve only kicking and punching such as kickboxing. Some involve only grappling and tumbling such as wrestling. Furthermore, some involve only punching such as western boxing while others involve all fighting techniques such as mixed martial arts.

Majority of athletes who practice combat sports do so for competition purpose. However, there are other persons who practice the sport for less rigorous purpose such as for recreation, physical fitness, and self-defence. Like all other sports, the ability to attain peak performance in combat sports requires the input of a coach. Irrespective of the innate abilities of the athlete, the service of the coach is needed to identify, develop, and hone such abilities towards peak performance (Starr, 2016). A sports coach is a certified professional with the requisite academic and practical expertise needed to facilitate the acquisition and development of motor skills and knowledge in a specific sport. The coach specializes in a particular sport wherein he is an expert. While the coach's major concern is the acquisition and development of motor proficiency towards peak performance for sports competition, he also plays some roles in helping to manage the personality traits and personal affairs of athletes (Martens, 2012; Palmer & Whybrow, 2008; Starr, 2016). Such affairs include emotional problems, financial problems, and other problems that are likely to affect the athletes' sports performance. The coach may employ various methods of training to sharpen the motor skills of athletes. But such methods must be directed at improving motor

proficiency in the specific sports of concern.

The term coaching, can be applied to diverse fields of human endeavour where there is need to build in a person with less experience in a defined field, a set of skills, knowledge, aptitude, and attitude needed to excel in the specific field of concern. In the world of sports performance, coaching can be described as the development of skills, knowledge, aptitude, and attitude in athletes for the purpose of building in them, a set of attributes needed to excel in a specific sport (Martens, 2012). The success and effectiveness of coaching is reflected in the ability of the coach to thoroughly understand the technical and tactical details of their sports, and to be able to transfer such details to the athletes while also developing the athletes' personality profile towards peak performance in the sport of concern (Martens, 2012). Though, the success and effectiveness of a coach is generally determined by their ability to win competition, it must be noted, however, that in addition to winning competition, the coach should be able to develop the athletes' cognitive, affective, as well as psychomotor capacities that will transform the athlete into a well-rounded sportsman. Furthermore, beyond the ability to initiate positive changes in the motor skills and personality of athletes, a coach's success and effectiveness can also be measured by the extent to which he possesses and demonstrates cognate technical and tactical experience, motor skill proficiency, and positive personality traits to function maximally in the field of concern.

The future of combat sports is largely in the hands of coaches. This is owed to the fact that it takes a good coach to bring out the best in any combat sports athlete. Notwithstanding the natural aptitude of the athlete, a lot of the athlete's success or otherwise depends on the ability and personality of the coach. History has shown that a good coach can bring out the best performance in a bad athlete, and a bad coach can ruin the sporting career of a good

athlete. Thus, the fate of the athlete, and by extension, the sport itself, hangs on a delicate balance between the coach's ability and personality. It is evident that coaching ability goes beyond possessing adequate academic information and qualification in the sport of concern to include sufficient technical and tactical field experience in the selfsame sport. Thus, the coach's ability is a combination of academic proficiency and practical experience. These, combined with appropriate personality can constitute the needed intelligence package for a coach to be effective and successful in combat sports.

### **Dimensions of Intelligence**

Over the years, it has been a common practice to measure intelligence through academic proficiency. However, in recent times, this practice and notion that intelligence is only determined through academic prowess has largely been questioned. In addition to academic intelligence which is determined by cognitive ability, some authorities have examined other dimensions of intelligence with a view to understanding and defining abilities beyond cognitive prowess (Gardner, 2011; Jago, 2013). This development has given rise to such notions as emotional intelligence, professional intelligence, naturalist intelligence, musical intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence, existential intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, linguistic intelligence, intra-personal intelligence, and spatial intelligence (Gardner, 2011; Jago, 2013). These various dimensions of intelligence attempt to give due recognition to certain traits that may be easily overlooked when determining intelligence. Though some authorities have questioned the applicability of these various dimensions of intelligence, however, the weight of evidence that have been used to support the existence of other dimensions of intelligence have convinced many scholars to accept the position. Thus, the

possession of a good number of these various dimensions of intelligence can go a long way to determine the extent to which a person can succeed under any given situation, including combat sports coaching.

Given the peculiarity of sports performance coaching, especially in combat sports, a successful coach will need ample measure of cognitive ability, adequate technical and tactical experience, bodily-kinesthetic prowess, and a good degree of emotional stability to effectively discharge their coaching duties. Thus, the coach should possess and demonstrate ample level of academic intelligence, professional intelligence, and emotional intelligence.

### **Academic Intelligence**

Academic intelligence is a measure of the extent to which an individual possesses requisite intellectual abilities in a specific area of expertise. This is usually defined by level of academic achievement in terms of grades and qualifications obtained (Grigorenko et al., 2004; Pam, 2013). Gardener's (2011) logical-mathematical intelligence has a similar definition with academic intelligence, and can be assumed to be based on the same premise. This premise holds that academic intelligence involves the ability to perform abstract reasoning, compute, analyze, understand propositions and hypotheses, perceive relationship between concepts, understand logical sequencing, and inductive and deductive reasoning. These abilities have been shown to impact positively on leadership roles and organizational effectiveness (Polat, 2011; Bhuyan, 2018). Thus, it can be granted that a good measure of academic ability can positively impact on the success and effectiveness of a coaching profession, including combat sports coaching. Consequent upon this premise, it is expected that a combat sport coach should possess a minimum acceptable academic requirement in coaching, and should be

able to show sufficient knowledge and understanding of combat sports to be able to function maximally in the sport. While cognate experience is often deemed invaluable in any area of concern, experience borne out of past athletic glory alone without the necessary academic qualification and intelligence is not sufficient to make an effective combat sports coach. It is thus necessary for combat sports coaches to acquire adequate level of knowledge and academic qualification in order to be successful in the coaching profession.

The rate of growth in the sports industry today is such that, in no distant time, coaches without the minimum academic requirements for coaching profession will be faced with the option of either leaving the system, or get certified. This development is owed to the continued recognition of the importance of academic proficiency in the success of any profession. Such drive, apart from ensuring quality service delivery in the sports industry, particularly in combat sports, will also protect the integrity of the sport and other practitioners therein. However, on the bright side of things, there are several academic training programmes in coaching offered by recognized bodies and institutions in different areas of coaching that coaches can take advantages of. Apart from providing the required academic qualification needed to remain relevant in the sports industry, these programmes can also provide the coach with relevant up-to-date information and knowledge to keep abreast with current changes and innovations in their sports of concern. Nonetheless, it has been amply demonstrated that academic qualification alone is not sufficient to ensure peak organizational performance in any setting without the contributory impact of practical experience (Grigorenko et al., 2004). Thus, it is suggested that, in addition to possessing academic proficiency, combat sports coaches should also possess and demonstrate ample measure of practical

and professional proficiency in combat sports in order to make meaningful contribution to the development of their athletes and the sport industry.

### **Professional Intelligence**

Professional intelligence is used to describe the extent to which an individual possesses and demonstrates skills, attitude, and aptitudes that are needed to function effectively in a given occupation. This definition is in consonance with the definition of practical intelligence offered by Grigorenko et al. (2004). In describing the attributes needed to perform effectively in an organizational setting, Jago (2013), highlighted and explained 21 principles of professional intelligence as key constructs for successful performance. Some principles discussed in her submission include listening with all senses, never replying in anger, not getting caught up in other people's battles, not shying away from making the wrong decision, not challenging or undermining anyone in front of others, and the need to always have a plan. In addition to these principles, it can be submitted that adequate possession and demonstration of requisite physical performance skills needed in skill-oriented occupation is part of professional intelligence. Gardener (2011) described such possession and demonstration of physical performance skills as bodily-kinesthetic intelligence. Consequently, professional intelligence in sports setting can be said to include bodily-kinesthetic intelligence and some aspect of academic intelligence.

On-field experience has severally shown that academic intelligence alone is not enough to make a good coach. For combat sports coaches to be able to amply discharge their needed coaching duties, they need to have the necessary occupational skills in addition to the required academic qualification. This is especially so as it is the occupational skills that are more visible in the discharge of a combat sport coaching duties. This

underlines the importance of professional intelligence in the world of sports coaching, especially in combat sports. However, having the requisite academic qualification and knowledge in addition to ample practical field experience may not completely prepare combat sports coaches for the assortment of personality traits demonstrated by their athletes. In the light of this, a coach needs to have sufficient mastery of his emotional characteristics and those of his athletes to be able to adequately address the plethora of psychological issues confronting sports persons. Thus, in addition to the set of aptitudes that a combat sport coach needs for a successful service delivery, the coach also needs to possess emotional intelligence.

### **Emotional Intelligence**

Emotional intelligence is the ability to understand, master, and be in control of one's feelings in relation to other people's feelings and sentiments, and to use such understanding to make informed decisions. Simply put, emotional intelligence is likened to putting one's self in other people's shoes (Sharma & Sehrawat, 2014). Emotional intelligence has a similar premise with Gardener's (2011) interpersonal and intra-personal intelligence in that it is concerned with an understanding of one's emotions and the emotions of others, and how to use such understanding for the advancement of better relationship and communication towards the achievement of goals. It has been severally argued that emotional intelligence is the core factor that determines the success of a leader, and that in leadership and organizational performance, emotional intelligence plays crucial role in determining extent of success and effectiveness (Temaismithi, 2013; Sharma & Sehrawat, 2014). These submissions clearly highlight the importance of emotional intelligence to any leader and, of course, coaches. A good measure of emotional intelligence can



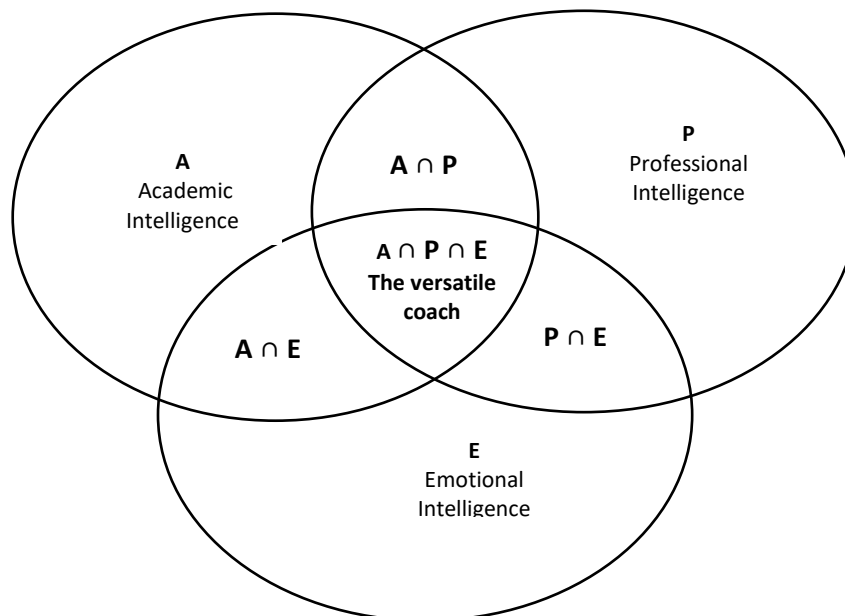
facilitate successful on-time achievement of set goals.

Given that combat sport often requires the demonstration of instrumental aggression, it is expected that such display of aggression may sometimes make emotions and tempers high. Thus, a combat sport coach must, at all times, have sufficient understanding of how to manage other people's temperament, and to have sufficient grip on his own emotions in the face of athletes' demonstration of diverse tempers. Besides on-field application of emotional intelligence, combat sports coaches also need such construct to be able to handle the various personality and emotional problems of their athletes in order to prevent the incursion of personality issues on sports performance.

### The Versatile Coach

It is evident that academic, professional, and emotional intelligence contribute to bringing out superlative performance in coaches and athletes alike.

Thus, these traits are needed, especially in coaches since they assume leadership roles, to propel athletes towards attaining peak performance. For lack of sufficient empirical evidence, it cannot be outrightly declared that any of the three dimensions of intelligence is superior to another, and thus, emphasis cannot be placed more on one against another. Irrespective of what type of intelligence is given prominence by any school of thought, it is absolutely necessary that any person in a leadership position, particularly combat sports coaches, should possess a considerable measure of academic, professional, and emotional intelligence. It is not sufficient to be highly endowed with one or two of these three traits and lacking in the other(s). Having a combination of these three traits will help to bring out the best qualities and skills in the coach and ensure a healthy balance between theoretical expertise, technical and tactical know-how, and personality disposition in the discharge of the coach's duties. This is illustrated in Figure 1 using Venn diagram and set notation.



**Figure 1: The versatile coach**

Figure 1 depicts three dimensions of intelligence necessary for effective coaching in combat sports. Sections A, P, and E represent coaches who predominantly possess and demonstrate academic, professional, and emotional

intelligence respectively. This means, for example, that coaches in section A only manifest a preponderance of cognitive prowess with an insignificant measure of on-field technical and tactical know-how and emotional intelligence. The same

applies to coaches in sections P whose sole area of strength is in the possession and demonstration of on-field practical expertise with no show of intellectual and emotional understanding. In the same vein, coaches in section E are those with high level of emotional intelligence with no observable manifestation of academic and on-field practical experience. Sections  $A \cap P$ ,  $P \cap E$ , and  $A \cap E$  represent coaches who predominantly possess and demonstrate academic and professional intelligence, professional and emotional intelligence, and academic and emotional intelligence respectively. In these cases, the coach is only strongly endowed in two out of the three traits. Thus, the coach's performance will be hinged on demonstrating the only two areas of strength while his performance may be grossly undermined by the area where he is lacking in proficiency. The point,  $A \cap P \cap E$ , at which all three dimensions of intelligence intersect represent coaches who possess and demonstrate a balanced measure of the three traits. This is the versatile coach. The coach is sufficiently equipped with the academic proficiency, professional skills, and emotional intelligence needed to prove their versatility in their specific sport.

### Conclusion

Effective coaching is, without doubt, a function of adequate academic, professional, and emotional intelligence. These constructs serve to provide the needed elements for driving the successful implementation of all coaching programmes, and as such, are essential to the success of coaches and coaching duties in every area of sports. For combat sports coaches to function effectively, they need to be academically, professionally, and emotionally intelligent. Without baseline academic qualification, sound knowledge and theoretical understanding, a robust technical and tactical know-how, and an appreciable level of emotional intelligence, combat sports coaches will not be able to make any appreciable impact on, and

contributions to the sports industry and their sports of concern. Thus, all combat sports coaches must have all three traits in good measure to be able to impact positively on the growth and development of combat sports in order to steer the sports in the right direction.

### The Way Forward

A look at everyday combat sports coaching practices in sports arena around some major cities in Nigeria will reveal series of unwholesome and uncoordinated practices. A good number of combat sports coaches hardly demonstrate a modicum of proficiency in core coaching abilities. If this is allowed to continue unaddressed, it can negatively affect the development of combat sports and bring the sports to disrepute in the face of global best practices. To forestall this, the following recommendations are deemed apt:

1. Combat sports coaches should, as a matter of necessity, acquire the needed academic qualification to function as a coach. This will ensure that combat sports coaches have the academic requirement to engage in the profession of coaching the sport. Such academic qualification may provide the coaches with the necessary knowledge and understanding of the sport, thereby reducing their possibility of offering poor services in the line of their duties.
2. Coaches should endeavour to update their knowledge and expertise in combat sports by frequently attending conferences, workshops, seminars, and other academic fora. Beyond attending these programmes, the coaches should also strive to actively participate as such participation will provide opportunities to identify their shortcomings and hone their academic and professional skills.
3. Combat sports coaches should, beyond verbally instructing athletes, endeavour to get involved in practicing what they coach. It is usually not good enough to stand on the side lines and verbally instruct athletes on what to do. Getting

involved in the action will provide opportunities for the coach to identify and sharpen rusty personal motor skills and improve their professional intelligence. Such involvement can also instill more confidence in the athletes while building the coaches' credibility before the athletes.

4. Combat sports coaches must endeavour to adequately understand, use, and control such emotional constructs as selflessness, self-esteem, fear, anxiety, stress, motivation, active listening, sympathy, empathy, confidence, and other traits that can considerably improve their emotional relationship with athletes, fellow officials, and of course, with themselves.

It is expected that if the forgoing recommendations are adhered to, there may be some improvement in the services of combat sports coaches in Nigeria. Such improvement may translate into better performance for combat sports athletes and promote the development of the sport in Nigeria.

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