

Collegiate Baseball Magazine

October 2000

The Case For A Teaching Pro Association

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How do these requirements strike you for a career position?

- No formal training or educational background
- Your first job came as a volunteer, someone's friend, former associate, or no one else wanted the job!
- If you received any money, it was much less than minimum wage
- There are no universal standards of performance or income
- No job title
- Job security is rare, organizations frequently fail
- There is no clear path for advancement
- No continuing education requirements
- No benefits such as medical, vacation, life insurance, etc.
- If you work for yourself, you are totally on your own in an industry that offers none of the benefits of working together like other professions.

Appealing? Hardly! Sound familiar? Is this a professional career path?

But here we are, baseball instructors!

Is there any wonder why the term "professional baseball" only applies to those players who at this moment are genetically superior, and a handful of significantly under paid, field coaches. Oh, there also is the occasional reference to the "ex-pro" ball player.

The reason the rest of us are not considered "professional" is that we do not act like professionals. We do not surround ourselves with professional standards, continuing education, and support systems. As professionals we do not hold ourselves accountable to each other and the profession.

If you are an on-field coach, you are supported by the ABCA (American Baseball Coaches Association). If you operate a school or are a teaching professional, you have no support, identity, or even a job title.

While institutional coaches are focused on winning games, we are focused on staying in business and reaching financial security. Our goals are the same - educate, produce on-field

results, win the game. BUT the biggest difference between a school coach and a teaching pro is profit. That is, how to make it, what to do with it, how to stay in business and to thrive?!

Full or part time school coaches are institutionally supported with budgets, marketing and facilities. Yes, if they need more funds than they are given, they have to be creative. In no way do I mean to diminish the complexity or challenge of a developing a baseball team. But, baseball schools are businesses with profit and loss responsibilities. It's hard. We have to generate all the funds month after month, year after year so we can stay employed, earn a living so we can do it again the next year.

It's also a business that is relatively new in a very old sport where an occasional company softball game, coaching your child, or previous casual participation has qualified someone as an expert. "After all it's only baseball".

That historical consciousness has permeated baseball teaching largely because we haven't raised the bar. In fact, there is no bar at all - no standards.

We can change that... The PGA (Professional Golf Association) is strong, unified, and broad based. The association has specific standards and bylaws for a PGA Teaching Professional. PGA Teaching Pros are credentialed, certified, and credible. A full time education department within the PGA supports them by conducting over 50 seminars a year, plus an annual in depth teaching summit. Here are a few of the professional skills seminars offered throughout the nation:

- The Art of Teaching
- Psychology
- Presentation Skills
- Food and Beverage Operation/Profit/ Marketing
- General management skills
- Marketing (how to find more business)
- Teaching aids and drills
- Stress management
- Supervising/delegating
- Pro shop management
- Biomechanics
- Tournament administration
- Flexibility, strength
- Acquisitions and operations
- Teaching different age groups
- Ethics, values, goals, and productivity

A few subjects that I would like to include:

1. Investor relations, partnerships and financial projections
2. Obtaining and training new instructors
3. Facility design, commercial equipment
4. Maximizing billable dollars per square foot
5. Institute programs for continuity of skill instruction among various in-house instructors

Consequently, in a much more competitive business with many more instructors at many more golf courses, PGA Teaching Pros command higher fees than do baseball instructors. (They also dress better. Yes, I would like to be able to afford a Bobby Jones shirt one day)

Baseball has yet to value a teacher for teaching. We have always associated coaching with a team and a win-loss record. A personal note: If I hear one more college or major league coach at a clinic pacify an audience with "you are the front line coaches, you coaches training the youth are the most important part of baseball, you (the little people) send them to us" -- I swear I'll SCREAM!

We need to learn that good competition in the teaching business is just like in the game --it makes us better. Trash talking and tearing down someone else's school or method of running a clinic does not help yours. The market place easily makes those judgments on its own and this kind of action makes us all look "un- professional".

There is an exploding market place out there for baseball. However, unlike the customer of the 70's & 80's, today's customers are increasingly sophisticated. Already well educated themselves, they are experienced in purchasing educational training services in varied subjects and under different circumstances, both for their family and in business, as well. Both players and parents expect a high level of education and results from their training experience. If they are not satisfied with our performance they turn the table and cut us!

I've contacted the ABCA and spoken with their executive director. I was told that organization has a specific focus on competitive college baseball and is not interested in the development of programs for people who are not team coaches. I really have no problem with that and respect their discipline. However, there is no other organization that can provide association support for us. We need to create our own professional teaching association.

Many of us have been running businesses for years. Each time we approach a new business subject it's like reinventing the wheel. Computerized scheduling, phone systems, media advertising, cash flow management, insurance, real estate, staffing, instructors, commercial equipment are all common place in business. But put these subjects in the world of baseball schools where your cash flow is seasonal, hours of operation are limited to after school and week ends, where your net revenue is total disproportionate to square footage needed safely operate your facility - you have some real complexity!

Professional baseball teaching is a new industry. We as individuals throughout the world need to pull together and help each other, and in doing so, help ourselves. If you own a business, run camps, or currently make your full time or part time living as a professional baseball teaching pro, you know exactly what I've been talking about.

No one says you are going to become rich. But you can enjoy a professional career with respect, self esteem, and make a good living. You can wake up every day and not feel that you have to go to work at a job, unfulfilled. You can experience the daily joy of baseball where you can make a difference in someone's life.

I have been in contact with and received enthusiastic comments from the Major League Baseball Players Alumni Association. Those discussions are positive and ongoing. The Baseball Players Association is receptive and requesting more details.

What can an association of baseball teaching professionals do for you? What do you want it to do? What do you need? I've briefly shared some of my thoughts. What are yours? There are many schools all over the country run by exceptional baseball people. I know there are great ideas about to emerge. This is also going to be one of those issues where someone down the line is going to say, "good idea --- but how many of them are out there, how many of them are interested?"

What do you think, who are you, where are you? Let's get organized. Let's get professional. Contact me by email, phone or postal service.

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Dear John,
I am interested in developing the
Association of Baseball Teaching Professionals.

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