

## Coaches Attitudes, Efficacy and Proposed Behaviors towards Athletes with Hidden Disabilities: A Review of Recent Survey Research

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**Abstract :** Within the United States, youths with hidden disabilities (specific learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, emotional behavioral disorders, mild intellectual disabilities and speech/language disorders) can often be part of the kindergarten through twelfth grade school population. Because individuals with hidden disabilities have no apparent physical disability, learning difficulties may be overlooked and these youths may be mistakenly labeled as unmotivated, or defiant because they don't understand and follow directions, or maintain enough attention to remember and perform. These behaviors are considered especially challenging for youth sport coaches to manage and they often find it difficult to successfully select and deliver effective accommodations for the athletes. These deficits can be remediated and compensated through the use of research-validated strategies and instructional methods. However, while these techniques are commonly included in teacher preparation, they rarely, if ever, are included in coaching preparation. Therefore, the purpose of this presentation is to summarize consecutive research studies that examined coaching education within the United States for youth athletes with hidden disabilities. Each study utilized a questionnaire format to collect data from coaches on attitudes, efficacy and solutions for addressing challenging behaviors. Results indicated that although the majority of coaches' attitudes were positive and they perceived themselves confident in working with athletes who have hidden disabilities, there were significant differences in the understanding of appropriate teaching strategies and techniques for this population. For example, when asked to describe a videotaped situation of why an athlete is not performing correctly, coaches often found the athlete to be at fault, as opposed to considering the possibility of faulty directions, or the need for accommodations in teaching/coaching style. When considering coaches' preparation, 83% of participants declared they were inadequately prepared to coach athletes with hidden disabilities and 92% strongly supported improved preparation for coaches. The comprehensive examination of coaches' perceptions and efficacy in working with youth athletes with hidden disabilities has provided valuable insight and highlights the need for continued research in this area.

**Keywords :** health, hidden disabilities, physical activity, youth recreational sports

**Conference Title :** ICDD 2017 : International Conference on Disability and Diversity

**Conference Location :** Rome, Italy

**Conference Dates :** May 04-05, 2017