



## Sports Law and Coaches' Responsibility: Challenges and New Approaches in Iran

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to explore the role of sports law in the responsibility of coaches and to explain the challenges and new approaches in this area in the context of Iranian sports. To this end, in addition to collecting demographic data of coaches, variables such as education level, coaching experience, championship records, and possession of specialized skills, such as first aid, were examined. The main research tool was a questionnaire that assessed various dimensions of coaches' responsibility in areas such as training and supervision, safety and equipment, medical care, player coordination, and the recognition of dangerous conditions. The data were collected by distributing questionnaires among 700 active coaches in sports fields. The findings showed that educational and skill factors play a significant role in promoting coaches' legal awareness and the proper fulfillment of their responsibilities, while mere experience or coaching degree alone does not guarantee legal understanding. The results also indicated that having a championship record and specialized training in subjects such as first aid can lead to improved performance of coaches in protecting the rights and health of athletes. These results reveal the need to rethink the legal and professional training of coaches and design new programs to promote their responsibility within the framework of sports law.

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## **Introduction**

Sports law is a set of laws, rights and obligations that governs the real and legal individuals present in the sports industry. Sports law, as a relatively new concept, is a combination of private international law, international trade law and contract law. Determining the legal rights and duties of athletes, clubs, federations and confederations is one of the goals of sports law. Additionally, the professional sports lawyer considers the quasi-judicial, arbitration and mediation authorities that deal with conflict resolution to be effective in expanding and even changing some concepts of international sports law (Carpenter, 2008). A sports coach refers to someone who is engaged in teaching and practicing sports in one of the sports fields, regardless of the degree of coaching. Coaches play an essential role in working with athletes and must be qualified to teach specific skills. In addition to teaching sports skills, they should also teach athletes about sports regulations, safety issues, and the correct way to play. Participants in sports often have different ages, physical sizes, experience, skills, physical conditions, and abilities. These variables, in combination with intense physical activity, can create unstable and dangerous situations. One of the critical duties of coaches is to take care of the physical, mental and dignified integrity of athletes. Part of the potential liability of coaches is their role in physical assaults by athletes. In some sports cases, injured players have stated that the coach did not provide them with proper training. Trainers should have sufficient knowledge of the legal cases related to immunity, acceptable care and carelessness, because if the negligence and carelessness of the trainers in performing their duties or if the causal relationship between negligence and damage is proven, they will be responsible for compensation. Carpenter (2008) listed six duties as sub-categories of coaches' duty of care: proper training, adequate supervision, safe progress, providing medical aid in case of injury, providing safe equipment and facilities, proper training, and using safe procedures. In his research, Borkowski (2022) identified 12 legal duties for coaches, which if the coaches can perform well, the probability of injuries to athletes, the number of complaints, and the possibility of complaints against the coach will be reduced. This also makes the sports experience enjoyable for the athlete. These duties include proper activity planning, proper equipment, proper facilities, proper training, adequate supervision, proper preparation of the athlete, adequate warning about the risks of the activity, proper care after injury, proper sports activities, registration and maintenance, and proper compliance with laws and regulations. Qobadi Samani (2012), in his research titled "Civil Liability of Athletes and Sports Managers in the Iranian Legal System," highlights that sports rights and the civil responsibility of those involved in sports constitute an important and significant issue, as a lack of awareness of these responsibilities and the consequences of such injuries will have irreparable outcomes. In his research, emphasizing the awareness of civil responsibility, he investigated the civil responsibility of athletes and sports managers (technical managers and administrative managers) in Iran's legal system, as three influential strata in the field of sports. Madariani Nazari and Rajab Hassani (2016), by examining the cases related to sports activities that were registered in the judicial authorities of Tehran city, concluded that human, organizational and physical factors have an undeniable role in the occurrence of sports injuries and formation. They reported the lack of experience of trainers as the most important factor in the human factors section. The results of Bonyan and Kashif's research (2019) showed that most sports coaches were aware of legal duties and responsibilities in sports events. In terms of educational qualification, coaches with a master's degree or higher had more knowledge than others. Additionally, coaches with medium to high experience (15 years) possessed greater legal knowledge (Bonyan & Kashif, 2019). However, Adram (2023), while examining coaches across four sports—taekwondo, wrestling, football, and basketball—reported that sports coaches generally have low knowledge of the legal and legal aspects of

sports. In our country, various courses and classes are held to increase the legal knowledge of sports coaches, and this issue is emphasized in coaching classes and knowledge-enhancing courses. Greenberg (2017) identified various sources of learning for coaches, including formal training courses, coaching experiences, interaction with other coaches, non-sports experiences, university, and the Internet.

However, some research, conducted on the participants of coaching courses, indicate that the content of the courses was not suitable and should be practical, usable and related to educational approaches to engage the learners in an active way (Nelson et al., 2006). In addition to this, it is not clear how much some structural factors, such as education degree, coaching degree, coaching experience, championship experience, and having a first aid certificate, can affect the knowledge level of coaches and how they deal with the tasks that are assigned to them. Due to the fact that national studies do not address this issue in detail, this study was conducted with the aim of investigating the structural factors affecting the knowledge of sports coaches about their legal duties towards athletes.

### **Method**

In terms of its practical purpose and data collection method, the present study is a field-based research project. Data were collected through the distribution of questionnaires among the study participants. The statistical population consisted of coaches from various popular sports disciplines across Iran. Due to the lack of accurate statistics regarding the total number of coaches in the country, and based on recommendations from experts in structural equation modeling that a sample size of at least 700 participants is appropriate for such studies, a larger sample was targeted to account for potential missing data and to facilitate the use of the Maximum Likelihood (ML) estimation method. Therefore, a purposive sampling approach was employed, and questionnaires were distributed to coaches throughout Iran who were accessible and willing to participate in the study.

Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire designed based on an extensive review of the relevant literature and both domestic and international studies. The questionnaire consisted of 48 items assessing coaches' knowledge of their duties and responsibilities toward athletes. It comprised seven dimensions: supervision (8 items), training and instruction (7 items), facilities and equipment (7 items), medical care (6 items), player matching (6 items), player recognition (6 items), and hazard warning and risk awareness (8 items).

To establish face validity, the questionnaire was reviewed and revised by two professors of sports management and three legal scholars. For reliability assessment, the instrument was evaluated by 11 experts in sports management and law. The calculated Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.87, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, thereby confirming the reliability of the questionnaire. To establish face validity, the questionnaire was reviewed and revised by two professors of sports management and three legal scholars. For reliability assessment, the instrument was evaluated by 11 experts in sports management and law. The calculated Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.87, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, thereby confirming the reliability of the questionnaire. To establish face validity, the questionnaire was reviewed and revised by two professors of sports management and three legal scholars. For reliability assessment, the instrument was evaluated by 11 experts in sports management and law. The calculated Cronbach's alpha coefficient was 0.87, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70, thereby confirming the reliability of the questionnaire.

### **Findings**

**Table 1.** The Effects of Educational Qualifications on the Dimensions of Coaches' Knowledge (Effect Size)

Source	The dependent variable	d	F	The significance level	Eta
degree of education	Supervision	1	.030	0.863	0.0001
	Education	1	0.400	0.527	0.001
	Facilities and equipment	1	1.539	0.215	0.004
	Medical care	1	1.155	0.283	0.003
	Peering	1	0.115	0.734	0.001
	Getting to know the players	1	5.082	0.025	0.012
	Danger warning	1	0.189	0.664	0.0001

Regarding the hypothesis 2 that there is a difference between the coaching experience and the knowledge dimensions of the coaches, according to Table 2, the coaching experience could not have a significant effect on the knowledge dimensions of the coach, so this hypothesis is rejected.

**Table 2.** The Effects of Coaching Experience on the Dimensions of Coach Knowledge (Effect Size)

Source	The dependent variable	df	F	The significance level	Eta
Coaching experience	Supervision	2	.283	278.0	006.0
	Education	2	.7260	485.0	003.0
	Facilities and equipment	2	634.2	073.0	012.0
	Medical care	2	171.0	843.0	001.0
	Peering	2	627.0	535.0	003.0
	Getting to know the players	2	232.0	793.0	001.0
	Danger warning	2	640.0	528.0	003.0

Regarding Hypothesis 3, which proposed that differences exist in coaches' knowledge dimensions based on their championship records at the national and international levels, the results presented in Table 3 indicate that championship experience significantly influenced only the coaches' knowledge related to player recognition. No significant differences were observed in the other dimensions of coaches' knowledge based on championship records (at a significant level of 0.011).

**Table 3.** The Effects of Coaches' Championship Record on the Dimensions of Coach Knowledge (Effect Size)

Source	The dependent variable	df	F	The significance level	Eta
Championship record	Supervision	1	709.1	0.192	004.0
	Education	1	861.2	091.0	007.0
	Facilities and equipment	1	058.0	810.0	0001.0
	Medical care	1	197.0	657.0	0001.0
	Peering	1	103.1	294.0	003.0
	Getting to know the players	1	540.6	011.0	015.0
	Danger warning	1	001.0	973.0	0001.0

In relation to hypothesis 4, which proposed that there is a difference between having a first aid certificate and the knowledge dimensions of coaches, the results presented in Table 4 indicate that having a first aid certificate could affect the knowledge of trainers in medical care and danger warning; however, it did not affect other dimensions.

**Table 4.** The Effects of Having a First Aid Certificate on the Dimensions of the Coach Knowledge (Effect Size)

Source	The dependent variable	df	F		Eta
Having a first aid certificate	Supervision	1	116.0	734.0	0001.0
	Education	1	291.3	700.0	008.0
	Facilities and equipment	1	019.0	891.0	0001.0
	Medical care	1	459.0	049.0	001.0
	Peering	1	270.1	260.0	003.0
	Getting to know the players	1	002.0	969.0	0001.0
	Danger warning	1	078.2	015.0	005.0

As seen in Table 7, the coaching degree does not exert an influence on the knowledge of coaches, so hypothesis 5 is generally rejected.

**Table 5.** The Effects of the Coaching Degree on the Dimensions of the Coach's Knowledge (Effect Size)

Source	The dependent variable	df	F	The significance level	Eta
Coaching degree	Supervision	2	062.0	940.0	0001.0
	Education	2	141.0	868.0	001.0
	Facilities and equipment	2	789.0	455.0	004.0
	Medical care	2	488.0	614.0	002.0
	Peering	2	538.2	080.0	012.0
	Getting to know the players	2	099.0	905.0	0001.0
	Danger warning	2	543.0	582.0	003.0

## Discussion and Conclusion

The present study was conducted with the aim of investigating the structural factors affecting the legal knowledge of sports coaches about their legal duties towards athletes. Based on the findings of the research, the results of the multiple variance analysis showed that the educational degree could only significantly affect the knowledge of the coaches about the players and did not affect other dimensions. The degree of coaching could not influence the knowledge of the coaches; coaching experience could not have a significant effect on the dimensions of the knowledge of the coach. Having a championship experience could only affect the coaches' knowledge related to player recognition, but could not influence the other dimensions; therefore, it can be concluded that coaches with higher educational qualifications know more about players and are familiar with their physical and mental characteristics. Finally, having a first aid certificate was only able to influence the knowledge of the coaches in the medical care and danger warning sections.

However, the findings related to the other dimensions of coaches' knowledge suggest that coaches may lack sufficient knowledge in several areas of their professional responsibilities, potentially limiting their ability to adequately fulfill their duties and obligations toward athletes. The effect of education level on coaches' knowledge has been examined in some research (Demers et al., 2006; Duffy, 2008). A review of research shows that expert coaches have a higher level of education, skills, experience, professional ethics, and knowledge (Erickson et al., 2007; Cregan et al., 2007; Vallée & Bloom, 2005). According to the research conducted by Corso (2020), education is one of the most important factors that affect the legal knowledge of coaches, which means that individuals with higher education have more knowledge about legal issues. Castro (2019) stated in his research that coaches with higher educational qualifications scored higher in the first aid test. He also reported that coaches' general knowledge of medicine

improved as their degree increased to the bachelor's level. The results of Bonyan and Kashif's research (2019) also showed that, in terms of educational qualifications, coaches with a master's degree or higher had more knowledge than others. Research has also shown that coaches who have studied physical education have more knowledge about their duties in the field of supervision, training, facilities and equipment, warning of danger and recognition of players (Gray & McKinstrey, 1999; Gray & Park, 2020). Anderson and Gill's (1983) research showed that many expert coaches acquired their coaching knowledge by studying at a physical education bachelor's degree. Carter and Muller (2008) showed that, in addition to the plan of studying physical education in the university, another important factor in acquiring coaching knowledge is the assistantship of another coach. Regarding the existence of a difference between the coaching experience and the knowledge dimensions of the coaches, the results showed that the coaching experience did not have a significant effect on the knowledge dimensions of the coach. Although research indicate that coaching experience has an effect on their knowledge and experience (Johnson, 2019), in the present research, coaching experience could not have a significant effect on the dimensions of the coach's knowledge. Regarding the existence of a difference between having a championship record (at the national and international level) of coaches and the dimensions of their knowledge, having a championship record had an effect on the knowledge of the coaches only in the part of getting to know the players. Regarding previous sports participation, Sherman and Hassan (1986) discussed in their research that there is a significant relationship between sports history and coaches' behavior. They suggested that sports background can play an important role in coaching behavior. It seems that the coaches who have a history of championship themselves know more about the potential of the participants.

Regarding the difference between having a first aid certificate and the knowledge dimensions of coaches, the results showed that having a first aid certificate has an effect on the knowledge of coaches in medical care and danger warning; however, this independent variable could not influence other dimensions. There are different results regarding coaches' knowledge about first aid. Ransone and Dunn-Bennett (1999) assessed the first aid knowledge and decision-making of coaches. The findings revealed that only 36% of the coaches passed the first-aid assessment. Interestingly, coaches who successfully passed the test were more likely to make errors regarding decisions about returning injured athletes to play. One possible explanation is that coaches with limited medical knowledge tended to adopt a more cautious approach, preferring not to allow injured athletes to return to the field due to concerns that their condition might worsen. In contrast, coaches who perceived themselves as possessing greater medical knowledge appeared to be more confident and, consequently, more inclined to make independent decisions about an athlete's return to play. This increased confidence may have contributed to a greater likelihood of errors in return-to-play decisions. Gray and McKinstrey (1999) found a significant difference between coach's risk management behavior and the presence or absence of first aid and CPR certification. Similarly, Barron (2004) also showed that having a first aid certificate does not significantly increase the coach's knowledge about how to perform first aid. According to Barron et al.'s (2009) research, only a small number of coaches (15 out of 290) who participated in the first aid assessment managed to obtain a passing grade. The results of Castro's (2019) research on the first aid knowledge of coaches and their decision-making ability in athletes' heatstroke situations showed that less than 12% of coaches got a passing score in the first aid test. According to Faure and Pemberton's (2011) research, which investigated the general perception of Idaho high school football coaches about concussion, many coaches were not aware of the signs and symptoms of concussion.

Based on Orr et al.'s (2011) research about coaches' knowledge of the risk of knee injuries, coaches of teenage soccer players do not have much information about knee injuries. Gurchiek et al. (1998) also indicated that many coaches are not aware of their role in terms of responsibilities and limitations in injury prevention, diagnosis and recovery. Cunningham (2018) reviewed the existing research and reviewed several studies on sports injuries and showed that when a sports injury occurs, coaches are not familiar with how to apply appropriate treatment methods. The reasons for this issue may include not only conflicts with other coaching responsibilities and time constraints but also a lack of adequate first-aid knowledge. It appears that providing coaches with first-aid and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) training programs could enhance their knowledge, confidence, and ability to manage sports-related injuries effectively. Such training may better equip coaches to fulfill their duties and responsibilities toward athletes while promoting athlete safety and well-being.

Regarding the existence of a difference between the level of coaching and the dimensions of knowledge of coaches, the results showed that the level of coaching could not affect the knowledge of coaches. Although it seems that higher degrees in coaching indicate a higher knowledge level of coaches, and coaches with higher degrees are more familiar with the actions and methods of coaching in sports than others (Cunningham, 2018); however, the results of the present research contradict this assumption. This may be due to the process of obtaining a coaching degree in the country's sports. In our country, coaching courses emphasize more on the number of participants, and with the aim of generating more income and increasing the acceptance of participants, they are not really evaluated, and low-quality coaches achieve higher degrees just by attending coaching courses. As the results of the present research showed, it decreases the overall level of knowledge of coaches, decreasing the quality of training programs for athletes. The high acceptance rate of people in coaching courses in the country, which is often higher than 95%, is a proof of this claim. This is despite the fact that, according to Callary (2014), this percentage for countries with more serious criteria such as Canada, France, Switzerland and Norway were 60, 70, 73 and 80%, respectively. In the Netherlands and Switzerland, coaches must complete an internship with the approval of the course instructor to obtain a coaching qualification. In Germany, in addition to being required to pass three written, oral and practical tests, participants are also required to submit assignments. In Norway, in addition to the written and oral exam, a 200-day internship period under the supervision of a teacher is considered (Callary, 2014). On the other hand, in our country, there are no precise criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of coaching training courses, and the results of the existing survey forms are also less considered in setting up future programs.

Therefore, it is recommended that precise and scientifically grounded criteria and indicators be developed for the evaluation of coaching education programs. The results of these evaluations should be systematically incorporated into the planning, revision, and improvement of future courses. Furthermore, the final assessment required for coaching certification should accurately reflect coaches' actual performance and competencies, without grade inflation or undue leniency. Finally, the quality of coach education programs plays a crucial role in both the effectiveness of learning and the acceptance of these programs by participants. Consequently, course instructors should strive to design and deliver training in a creative, engaging, and practice-oriented manner to maximize learning outcomes and professional competence among coaches.

The results of the current research, contrary to the initial assumption of the researchers, showed that the knowledge of sports coaches about their legal duties towards athletes is lower than expected, so that factors such as coaching experience and coaching degree had no effect on the knowledge of coaches and the influence of other factors such as coaching degree. The

experience of being a champion and familiarity with first aid was also limited to one or two dimensions. Although coaches' lack of knowledge may be partly attributed to the broad scope of their responsibilities—including supervision, training, competition management, equipment recognition, nutrition, health, and travel management—the findings of this study suggest that this issue is not unique to Iran. Evidence from other countries indicates a similar pattern of insufficient coach knowledge regarding their professional and legal responsibilities.

For example, Barron et al. (2009) reported that coaches in Michigan, United States, lacked sufficient knowledge of their duties related to first aid and injury prevention. Similarly, Singh and Surujlal (2010) in South Africa and Bezdicek (2009) in Wisconsin, United States, found that many high school coaches possessed inadequate knowledge of their responsibilities, with coaches themselves acknowledging that they did not fully meet their legal obligations toward student-athletes. In Australia, Carter and Muller (2008) demonstrated that rugby coaches lacked adequate knowledge regarding medical care and injury management and concluded that reforms to the coach education system were necessary.

Given the large number of coaching education courses offered at different levels throughout the country, and considering that a substantial portion of these programs is intended to enhance coaches' understanding of their legal and professional responsibilities toward athletes, a comprehensive review of these courses appears warranted. Greater emphasis should be placed on improving coaches' knowledge of their legal duties and responsibilities to ensure the safety, welfare, and effective development of athletes.

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