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## El Baloncesto es Vida: A Look into Strength and Conditioning, Physical Therapy, and Coaching During My Internship Abroad

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**El Baloncesto es Vida: A Look into Strength and Conditioning, Physical Therapy, and  
Coaching During My Internship Abroad**

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## **Abstract**

**Introduction:** An experience abroad can help a person grow in confidence and knowledge and allow them to immerse themselves in a new culture. During my time in Valencia, Spain, I was able to work at a youth basketball club, CB L'Horta Godella, alongside the club's strength and conditioning coaches and the physical therapist and be a coach for the young athletes. The fact that I lived with a Spanish family and had an open mindset towards making friends and exploring new things allowed me to grow closer to the culture in Spain. By using my knowledge and passion for sports and my desire to want to become a physical therapist I was able to grow as a person during my eight weeks abroad. **Internship:** My internship provided the main research for me as I was able to explore my job tasks deeper in order to show the importance of coaches and trainers. I ran exercise sessions for teams both by myself and with the strength and conditioning coaches. We also conducted testing on the athletes to help determine their off-season workout plans. By comparing these tests with supporting literature, I was able to see how the role of the strength and conditioning coach truly shapes the athlete. With the physical therapist, I shadowed as she assessed injuries, had some hands-on experience, and talked through treatment plans. Again, I compared my work with her with some supporting literature and back to the work done with the strength coaches to prove that the physical therapist also plays a critical role to athletes. Finally, I was the coach for the youngest athletes at the summer basketball camp. Each day, I would teach them basic skills, play games, have fun, and try to teach them of all of the positives that sports can bring. I was motivated by certain life and coaching books that helped me show a different side of coaching. In the end, it was the kids that made my whole experience.

**Conclusion:** During my time in Valencia, I grew in confidence, found new ways to communicate, and gained knowledge from my job and of a new culture. My internship was a

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perfect combination of all of my passions, and it opened my eyes to the importance of coaching.

It was truly a once in a lifetime experience and something I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

Word Count: 399

“The most important thing is to try and inspire people so that they can be great in whatever they want to do.” -Kobe Bryant

### **Introduction**

Sports are such a fundamental part of shaping a young athlete's life. Participation in sports teaches one teamwork, leadership, communication, determination, and true grit. I know this because I grew up playing sports and they have shaped me into the person I am today. These qualities will always be in me and I think will greatly help any child throughout life. According to Blom, Brok, Coakley, Lauer, and Sawyer (2013), young kids gain physical, psychological, and social benefits from playing sports. Beyond learning these life qualities, sports also help youth develop physically through coordination, endurance, flexibility, agility, speed, and strength improvements. An important person that helps instill these physical and mental qualities within the athlete is their coach. A coach is the mind, spirit, and leader of the team. “Coaches and other adults involved with youth sport should make life skills and positive development a priority and should implement strategies that effectively create such experiences” (Blom et al., 2013, p. 8). Without a passionate coach, the team will not succeed, and the kids will not develop in the sport. I had the opportunity to learn about the importance of coaching during my internship in Valencia, Spain.

Studying abroad is something that I have always wanted to do. When the opportunity came about to have an internship in Europe, I was all about it. I knew this would be a time to work in a field I was passionate about, increase my self-confidence, and grow as a person. According to Tyner (2013), studying abroad has “direct benefits of academic and personal growth [that] are coupled with indirect benefits such as ambassadorship and increased global awareness” (p. 380). I wanted to experience a new culture and challenge myself by being immersed in a language that I am not strong at. Also, Tyner (2013) expresses how studying

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abroad teaches real world applications that are invaluable and much more effective than information learned in the classroom. I believe what I learned and how I grew while living and working in Spain were far more valuable than anything I have experienced at school or home. While in Valencia, I lived with a Spanish family and experience everyday life in their home. I had three new Spanish sisters and a *madre* and *padre* who all reminded me of my family. Even though we were all living in their small condo with one shower, I realized that all they really cared about were each other. They quickly learned that I could handle being made fun of, so I constantly caught some slack for my Spanish language skills and wearing socks with sandals. Each night, we ate dinner together and the liveliness and passion around the table was proof of how strong of a family they were and helped me realize the importance of surrounding yourself with those who care about you the most. Living with a Spanish family gave me the true sense of what the Spanish lifestyle was like and helped me grow closer to the culture.

Another major part about my time in Spain were the friends I made. There was a group of eighteen of us who came to Valencia with the study abroad company International Studies Abroad (ISA). We were all from different parts of the United States and had very different interests and internships that we would be completing during our eight weeks there. One of the best pieces of advice I received before leaving was to make a friend. I knew I had to have an “open-minded and enthusiastic personality,” as this is what one of the participants in Tyner’s (2013) study expressed as being her greatest asset while abroad. I went in with that mindset and even though we all were such different people, I knew these people would make or break my time in Spain (p. 382). The first encounter with everybody was, awkward. You could tell we were all apprehensive and exhausted from our long travels. Once everyone started talking at our introduction class things got much better. By the end of that day we had exchanged numbers and

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started making plans together. It was crazy how fast we all bonded. We were all on this journey together and only had each other. Some of my favorite memories were going to the park after work or strolling around exploring Valencia together. These people quickly became some of my closest friends, it is truly astonishing how fast you get to know someone when you experience something new together. The eight weeks flew by together, but I know that these friendships will last a lifetime. I am glad I came in with that open mindset because I came out with some great friends and even better experiences.

For years, I have wanted to become a physical therapist. My love for sports and attending physical therapy myself is what drew me to it. As for my internship, I wanted to work with a physical therapist, but not necessarily in the clinical setting. Having a unique job that showed me more sides of athletics and athletic injuries is something that intrigued me. I would be able to use my knowledge from my exercise science classes at the University of Arkansas and experience playing sports to grow and expand my abilities.

The dream job that I could have been offered would have to be working around sports and children, and that is exactly what I got. CB L'Horta Godella, a youth basketball club in Valencia, Spain, wanted me to complete an internship for them. I knew this would be a great opportunity to compare sports culture in America and Spain and gain more knowledge about what I want to do as my future profession. I left the United States anxious and nervous about my job, but I was mostly excited for what was to come. Once again, I had to bring my open-mindedness, so I was able to enjoy myself, learn on the job, and improve each day. Study abroad experience are a time for personal growth, and I believe that is what I did in Valencia. From living with my Spanish family, to making new friends and exploring with them, to working a job

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and being fully immersed in the Spanish lifestyle, my experience was truly life changing and the best thing that could have happened to me.

### **Internship**

When offered the internship, I was given very basic ideas of what I would be doing for CB L'Horta Godella. I would be working alongside the strength and conditioning coaches, aiding the club's physical therapist in treating injured athletes, and coaching the youngest players at basketball camp. These tasks would provide a unifying overview of what it takes to make a strong athlete both physically and mentally.

I was excited to start my job and bring my assets to the basketball club. My boss, the owner of the club, did not speak any English, which made me concerned upon first meeting. The other people I worked with spoke some English, but communicating ideas was still difficult. I was pushed to find different ways to express myself and get my ideas across. Starting my job and only having basic ideas of what I would be doing made me interested in my day-to-day time at work. This time of the year for basketball was right at the end of their season, so teams were either preparing for the offseason or doing workouts for their one final tournament of the year. Despite our language differences, I did notice that everyone there was just like me, passionate about sports and willing to do whatever it takes to have their athletes be the best. I knew it would be a wild ride, but I was looking forward to it.

### **Strength and Conditioning**

Strength and conditioning coaches are a vital part to a team because they help the athletes gain that toughness and power to push themselves until the final buzzer. They are supposed to help the players grow in strength and functionality so they can perform at their best ability and avoid injuries. I worked with two of the strength and conditioning coaches at the club, Luis and



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Guillermo. They both have had experience either coaching or playing in America, so they were good at providing their insight and thoughts on the mindset of Spanish athletes. I would watch as they would run their sessions for the boys and girls teams who were preparing for their end of season tournaments. It was funny, even though at times I had no idea what the coaches were saying, I knew exactly what was happening because of the time I have spent playing club and team sports. I spent a few days learning from Luis and Guille and seeing the different exercises and methods of encouragement they used. Then one day, Guille told me that he was not going to be there to run the session for the 14-year-old girls team, and I was in charge. On my way to work that day I came up with a short circuit of exercises that could be done in their 30-minute workout before practice began. Because the core is the basis of every other movement pattern and strength you have, this is what I was told to focus on. The seven exercises included in my circuit were: Russian twists, plank, dumbbell swings, mountain climbers, sit-ups (with plate across chest), bicycle, and letters (holding out plate in hands and tracing letters in air). Each exercise was done for one minute then we took a short 15-30 second rest, rotated, and completed the cycle twice. The girls were just like any teenage girls team you would see in the States, chatty. They were giggling and laughing with each other, asking me about life in America and if I had a boyfriend, and just full of energy. However, when it came to doing the exercises, they worked hard and completed them. They mostly spoke minimal English, so I had to resort to demonstrating the seven components of the workout. The common ones; plank, sit-ups, dumbbell swings, and Russian twists, they were able to understand and get quickly. It was the ones like mountain climbers and bicycle that they were a little less familiar with. If they were struggling with one of those I would say “*escalar una montaña*” (“to climb the mountain”) or “*montar una bicicleta*” (“to ride a bike”). This seemed to get through to them better, or maybe

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they were just entertained by my lack of Spanish abilities. Nonetheless, I was able to complete a successful training session with these girls! It was my first true taste of coaching and I loved the rewarding feeling I got afterwards.

For the teams that were done playing for the year and transitioning into their summer offseason, we ran tests to see what the athletes needed to work on during their time off. Guillermo had explained to me that due to the multidirectional nature of basketball, it is important to train in all planes of movement especially focusing on the overall ability of the player's ankles, knees, hips, shoulders, and core. In basketball, it is important to have flexibility, range of motion, and yet, stability of these main body parts. The tests we ran focused on these areas of the player's body and we wanted to see the athlete's current strength levels and used that to develop their offseason workouts. The tests we did recorded data for the kid's sit-and-reach, dorsiflexion, and displacement of ankles, knees, hips, shoulders.

The sit-and-reach test is just like any sit-and-reach test that is completed as a part of the FitnessGram in American schools. The kids sat down, kept one leg bent and the other straight, then reached out as far forward as they could, and we measured the distance. According to Quinn (2019), the sit-and-reach test is the most common way to measure flexibility of the hamstring and lower back. This is exactly what we were testing for, as we wanted a good idea of how flexible each player was. Flexibility is a key asset to have as a basketball player as you constantly have to be cutting in different directions as well as accelerating and decelerating and reaching for the ball. Quinn (2019) argues that this test might not be a good example of real-life use of your hamstrings, but she says that in sports it is helpful to have the flexibility of your hamstrings while picking up the ball, running, or jumping. Furthermore, Quinn (2019) states that the sit-and-reach test may help in determining an athlete's risk for future injury. Which as a

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strength and conditioning coach, is useful because you are aiding the players to gain strength to avoid injury. Most of the girls were not as flexible as we would have liked, so we suggested doing simple hamstring (and other parts of body) stretches each day as part of their workout to increase their range of motion.

For our next test, we were looking at the dorsiflexion of the athletes. Dorsiflexion is the act of bringing your foot upward or pointing your foot towards your shin. This test helped us determine the mobility of each ankle, which is important for jumping and cutting, two major parts of basketball. In order to record the data, Guille had a small magnetic platform with a grid system for measuring distances. The athletes were to stand on the platform with their feet in a staggered position and a magnetic pole was placed in front of their leading leg. When they bent their leg forward, this would push the pole, and the distance covered was noted. The movement of their leading leg going forward is dorsiflexion and we were able to see the range each ankle had. Once again, we noticed that most of the athletes were not where they should be in terms of ROM of that ankle joint. I suggested working on their balance as part of their off-season workouts. Back when I played basketball, I remember my coach had without our shoes on balancing on one leg or with our eyes closed, so we could really focus on the strength in our ankles. Before I left, I spoke to the strength and conditioning coach of the University of Arkansas men's basketball team and he had given me a good idea for how to help strengthen the athlete's feet and ankles. He said he trains his players by having them run sprints or do exercises while in sand, with Valencia being a coastal city, I suggested this to Guille to make part of their summer workouts. Having this strength and mobility of the ankle is vital to the cutting and jumping a basketball player does, and testing the dorsiflexion gives us a good idea of the player's current abilities.

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Finally, in the last test we examined displacement. Once again, the athletes stood on the platform. This time, they were asked to complete a single leg squat with their arms placed across their chest and the magnetic pole centered on their single leg. When the players went down in the squat, we were able to see the displacement of their ankles, knees, hips (core), and shoulders, based on the deviation from the centered pole. Many of the girls became off balance during this task and had a great level of displacement, which was concerning as a strength and conditioning coach. These deviations are a result of a weak core and could be helped by doing simple core strengthening exercises like I had done in my circuit with the girls team. Basketball is a full body and multidirectional sport so having that strong foundation will benefit the athlete overall. As a basketball player you do want levels of flexibility and ROM in the areas of the body that we tested, but you must also have control and stability or else you are at a higher risk for injury.

All of the data were recorded in an Excel spreadsheet that Guillermo maintained. He had it color coordinated based on bad, average, and good ranges for every player at CB L'Horta Godella. These numbers were then used to determine what rigor the athletes needed to train with during the offseason and what specific areas they should work on. Like I mentioned, I helped suggest some exercises to add to these workouts to aid in the improvement of the athletes. I spent a few days at work researching new exercises and using my knowledge and experience to come up with a list of things to work on. Overall, we determined that building up core strength would be the most beneficial as a whole and wanted to make that a key proponent to each offseason workout.

### **Supporting Literature**

I was interested in some other training methods and tests done for basketball players and found some to compare to what I did in Valencia. According to Hernández and colleagues

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(2018), “Basketball is a high-intensity team sport requiring jump, sprint, and change of direction abilities, and demanding technical and tactical skills” (p. 372). Hernández et al., (2018), focuses on the importance of plyometric training which is said to create positive improvements in jumping, sprinting, change of speed, and technical abilities. Guillermo also had explained to me the importance of plyometric training for basketball players as they help with jumping, landing, shuffling, and changing directions. In this study (Hernández et al., 2018), they measured the athlete’s levels and times of vertical jumps, sprint performance (30 meter), and change of direction T-test (running in the shape of a T, works on cutting). After obtaining those baseline values, they performed plyometric jump training (PJT) on randomized groups for 7 weeks along with their typical basketball practice. Their findings concluded that by implementing PJT as an alternative for some basketball drills a few times a week during season, explosive performance was enhanced compared to when only doing basketball specific drills. When comparing this test to what I did in Spain with Guille, I believe that is what we were working toward. By focusing on strength, flexibility, ROM, and stability improvements in the offseason, the goal while in season should be centered around plyometric exercises. By setting up these athletes with a good core and base they will be able to succeed in plyometric training as it has been proven to improve both the physical and technical skills of youth basketball players (Hernández et al., 2018).

Sasaki and colleagues (2019) completed another study that focused on the importance of core stability and preventing ACL injuries. This study followed a team of female collegiate basketball players as they performed different tests to determine their core strength. As previously explained, basketball is multidirectional and played in all planes so having a strong core is important to reducing not only the chance for ACL injuries, but other leg and back injuries as well. According to Sasaki et al., (2019) “core-stability exercise is one of the most

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avored components that are frequently included in ACL injury prevention programs” (p. 960). In this study they tested for core strength by conducting the drop jump test, single leg squat test, and isokinetic strength test. This was interesting because they had performed the same test that I did at the basketball club which supports it is a key component to aiding the players. After gathering the baseline data, the female players were put through a series of core strengthening routines over the next few weeks. This study found that by completing the core strengthening training, there were noticeable improvements in neuromuscular-control changes in the athlete’s trunk and lower limbs. The results found during this study just goes to show why Guillermo wanted me to work on the core when I ran that session for the girls. It was nearing the end of their season and having that extra bit of strength and stability would help push them in their final tournament and, hopefully, avoid injury.

Luis and Guillermo both expressed that strength and conditioning is not taken as seriously in Spain as in America and it was apparent during the workout sessions. Some of the 18-year-old boys who have been playing basketball most of their lives were still not jumping/landing with proper form or putting maximal effort into their training. These boys were landing with narrow feet which means they do not have a solid base, and they were not following through on all athletic actions. I could tell that the coaches wanted their players to take this aspect more seriously so they could be that much better. Even though the training was a bit different and maybe not taken as seriously as in America, the team atmosphere was still the same. Everybody who surrounded me was passionate about basketball and wanted to get better to win games. The time I spent with Luis and Guille proved to me just how important strength and conditioning coaches are. They want their athletes to succeed and become stronger while avoiding injuries. Just as it is important for the players to have a strong core, the strength and

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conditioning coaches act as the core for the team. The data collected before the offseason to build their summer workouts is just as important as anything while in season. Having that coach there to push the players is a key component to a team and that is just what strength and conditioning coaches do.

### **Physical Therapy**

CB L'Horta Godella's physical therapist that I worked with was Andrea. She was very good at explaining what she was doing, most of the time in English, and wanted me to be hands on in assessing the injuries. Due to the time of the year, she was visited by fewer patients, but we were able to discuss the ones we saw more in depth. This was all very interesting to me because I want to become a physical therapist and I was able to experience situations that I would be facing in the future. Due to basketball's fast-pace and multidirectional nature that is played on a hard surface, we saw a multitude of foot and ankle injuries.

One of the first patients we saw was a teenage boy who had an extrusion on the outside of his foot. Andrea explained to me that 80% of the body's balance and control comes from the exterior side of the foot, so it is important that there are no abnormalities. To begin her treatment, she massaged the foot to allow for better circulation, which leads to faster healing. She also worked out the fascia on the bottom of the player's foot so he can gain better support. Andrea also expressed the importance of working out the Achilles for this injury as it attaches the calf muscle to ankle. This injury had been treated for a few weeks before this, so the player was almost ready to return to play. Andrea told him to warm up to his full potential before the upcoming game and that slight irritation was alright as long as there was no *dolor* (pain). As long as there was a lack of pain and he got his ankle wrapped before the game, the boy would be able to play.

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Another athlete we saw came in with quad pain/ tightness. The main thing we wanted to make sure was that nothing was torn in the leg. Andrea tested this through a series of manual muscle tests, having the injured player push in or out with resistance. After ruling out a tear, she began to give the patient a full tissue massage to work out any kinks. While massaging him, Andrea explained that she liked to close her eyes so she could get a heightened perception of what she was feeling in the muscles/ tendons/ ligaments. She also said that part of the massage she was giving was separating out the heads of the *gemelos* (gastrocnemius) which would help relieve some pressure building up in the quad and hamstring. A reason for this pain the player was feeling could be due to the fact that it was the end of the season and their muscles were experiencing excessive *sobreccarga* (overload). Andrea explained to the athlete to do some simple stretches at home and to make sure he gets rest and remains coming to see her if the pain persists.

Another patient we saw was a boy with an ankle sprain that was about three weeks out. Once again, Andrea tested the strength of the ankle by doing different pushing and resistance exercises and giving it a massage. She explained to him that he was almost ready to return to play but needed to work on dorsiflexion exercises to gain back stability required to play basketball. These exercises included standing up against the wall and lunging forward onto injured ankle, pumping the ankle, and stretching the lower half of the leg.

### **Supporting Literature**

Once again, I was interested in other studies that have been completed about basketball injuries and some techniques and exercises given by physical therapists and athletic trainers. According to Caparrós, Casals, Solana, and Peña (2018), “ankle [sprains are] the most common injury among professional male basketball players” (p. 289). I would say, based on the injuries I



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saw and knowing that the sport is full of cutting and movement on the hard surface, that ankle injuries are the most common injury throughout all of basketball. This study done by Caparrós et al., (2018) was examining ankle injuries in basketball due to accelerations and decelerations while playing. They stated that the main findings of this study were that a lower number of decelerations along with less distance covered were associated with injury. This makes sense because if you have a player constantly running around and never slowing down while covering large distances, it will cause wear of the muscles, tendons, and ligaments of the leg, leading to injury. Caparrós et al., (2018) states that the two defining components of basketball are acceleration and deceleration which coincides with my point that basketball is multidirectional and played in all planes. Another finding within this study proves that smaller workloads increase the risk of injury, so adequate levels of training have a protective effect on the athlete. This ties in the work I did with the strength and conditioning coaches and their importance of maintaining the health of the athletes. The overall findings of this study were interesting because I did see many ankle/ foot injuries while working with Andrea, and this could be potentially related to the lack of focus and technique during strength sessions just as Guillermo and Luis expressed to me.

Another study completed by Chen, Li, Hong, and Wang (2018) focused on plantar stress injuries due to the loads placed on the foot in basketball. Chen et al., (2018) express that “more than 60% of all injuries are to the lower extremities in male and female basketball players” (p. 1). I have mentioned many times that basketball is made up of many special patters such as jumping, sprinting, shuffling, and cutting. Throughout the game, players are performing many cutting patterns and According to Chen et al., (2018), “players spend 31% of their time performing cutting maneuvers, of which 20% are high-intensity activity” (p. 1). This study

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expresses the concern of the high shearing force put on the lower extremities during accelerations and decelerations and how it is a potential risk factor for anterior cruciate ligament injuries and ankle sprains. This proves just how much of basketball is made up of cutting and the importance of understanding the biomechanics for the physical therapists and coaches. This study had basketball players wear special insoles that tracked the stress loads on the foot during these moments of intense cutting throughout a game of basketball. The results of this study showed that the highest maximal force on the foot was found during sideward cutting. This means that cutting at 90° is more dangerous than cutting at 45° for the athlete. Chen et al., (2018) confirmed that cutting causes specific loads on the plantar surface and the repetitive nature of this in basketball is one of the potential risk factors that causes lower extremity injuries in the athletes. This study goes back to our assessment of the athlete's dorsiflexion with the strength and conditioning coaches. By having them work on their balance and strength of their feet/ankles either without shoes on or in sand will help lessen the impact of the constant cutting and reduce potential injury risk. Overall, the findings in this study further prove that the hard surface and constant cutting along with accelerating and decelerating are the main reasons why foot and ankle injuries make up most injuries seen in basketball.

I greatly enjoyed my time working with Andrea, the physical therapist at CB L'Horta Godella. I was able to have a first-hand experience of what a PT does for the injured athletes and how they are able to help them. She was very hands on and allowed me to help her in assessing the injuries. I liked how she wanted me to feel either both of their ankles, quads, or shoulders so I can determine the difference between the healthy and injured sides. Andrea was also very good at explaining, in her best English, what she was doing and why. After finding this supporting literature, it was interesting to see how my work with the strength coaches fit in to physical

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therapy. Every day I was with Andrea, I could see her passion and how she wanted to help those kids get back to playing basketball, which is why I fell in love with physical therapy years ago. I know I will be able to take this knowledge I gained and apply it in my future as a PT as it will be greatly beneficial.

### **Coaching**

The most rewarding and unexpectedly favorite part of my job was being a coach for the youngest kids at the summer basketball camp. I have always had such a passion for kids and sports but combining them and being a coach is something that never really crossed my mind. I was tasked with coaching the five to seven year-olds and the only instruction given was to teach them basic skills and to have fun. I knew it would be a tough task to coach these kids, but I wanted to be that leader and teach them not only skills about basketball, but important life skills as well.

During my time abroad, I read a book called “Burn Your Goals” (2015) by Jamie Gilbert and Joshua Medcalf. This was sent to me by my former middle school basketball coach as she thought it would help me be the best mentor I could be for these kids. A main theme of the book was that one should ‘put first things first,’ focus on what really matters in all aspects of life. By putting ‘first things first’ in coaching Gilbert and Medcalf (2015) said to “[put] the hearts of those you lead above performance, focus 100% of [your] energy on the process, and [to develop] the person first in foremost” (p. 6). As for putting ‘first things first’ sports they said to “commit to seeking wisdom every day, focus on the process rather than results, focus on progress rather than achievement, and [to] focus on using your sport to develop more true mental toughness rather than being used by your sport by focusing on results outside of your control” (p. 7). By putting ‘first things first’ in life or sport you will get the most out of it and that is something I

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wanted to convey to these kids I would be coaching. The book goes on to say, “people in coaching: love and encourage those you lead, people playing: trust your leaders and give your very best, and both: fall in love with the journey” (Gilbert & Medcalf, 2015, p. 69). I know the importance of having a strong leader for a team and that is exactly what a coach does. Not only do they teach skills, but they develop the player as a whole. I knew I would have a short time each day coaching these young kids and communication would be tough, but I wanted to share my passion for sports with them and for all of us to have fun. Gilbert and Medcalf (2015) said that while being a leader of a group of people, one of the most powerful things to do is taking responsibility. I was responsible for being one of the first basketball coach these kids have ever had and I knew I wanted to make this the best experience for them.

This was my first time being a coach, so I started my job a bit apprehensive. Rainer Martens wrote a textbook called “Successful Coaching” (2004), which lays out some fundamental ideas on how to be the best coach possible. It states that there are three major objectives of sport: “to have a winning team, to help young people have fun, and to help young people develop physically, psychologically, and socially” (Martens, 2004, p. 18). I relate to each of these three things on a personal level because I grew up playing sports and I wanted to pass that on to the kids. Each day, I would come in to work with a basic plan in my head; teach these young athletes the basic skills of basketball: dribbling, passing, and shooting all while keeping them safe and having fun. I would run simple drills so they would be able to start practicing these skills of the sport. I had to think outside of the box and break down each component to its simplest forms because if the kids did not have a good foundation, they would never be able to grow their technical ability. I had to think, what would a five-year-old be able to do and be able to stay attentive to? One of my favorite things to do was to have the kids stay within the three-

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point arch and dribble the ball. I would then go up to them individually and try to steal the ball or distract them as if I were a defender. This was a perfect activity as it was simple enough yet helped them work on their coordination and allowed me to have some one-on-one interaction with each of them. Another one of my favorites that we worked on the first week of camp was having them stand across the lane from a partner and work on passing. I had them do chest passes and bounce passes and showed them the proper form of following through with each throw, just as my basketball coaches had taught me growing up. Eventually, we worked that passing drill up to passing back and forth a few times to then stopping and taking a shot. Martens (2004, p. 195) says that there are three stages of learning: 1) mental stage- learn and understand the basics, 2) practice stage- go through the movements to improve, and 3) automatic stage- as you continue to practice you will master the act and your coach will help you refine the skill. Because the kids were so young and just starting out in basketball, we were mostly in the mental and practice stages of learning. However, in the short four weeks I spent coaching these kids, I saw them improve their skills, there were actually some pretty good little ballers in the group! As I mentioned, I wanted to focus on teaching the young athletes in my group the absolute basics of basketball. Martens (2004, p. 199) says that there are four steps to teaching technical skill: step 1- introduce the technical skill, step 2- demonstrate and explain the technical skill, step 3- have the athletes practice the technical skill, and step 4- correct the errors. I have already explained some of the drills I lead, and I feel as the coach I did well following these four steps. The most difficult part of this job was communication, which is also one of the most important aspects of being a good coach. If the coach cannot explain the drill/skill how is their team supposed to learn? Martens (2004) says as a coach you need to develop communication skills to help “develop credibility when you communicate, communicating with a positive approach, sending

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messages high in information, communicating with consistency, learning how to listen, and improving your nonverbal communication” (p. 106). For me, improving my nonverbal communication and learning how to listen was key. My Spanish speaking skills are not the best, so I had to think of other ways to express my enthusiasm and teach them the drills.

Demonstrating the certain activities, I had was easy as they were able to watch me and figure out what to do even if they did not know what I was saying. I would smile at them, give them high-fives or hugs, and clap for them in times I wanted to praise their work. I actively worked on learning a few key phrases like “¿listos?” (“ready?”), “¡salto!” (“jump”), and “cambio” (“change/switch”) to be able to get their attention or say during drills. I also had to become a better listener and really focus and be attentive to what they were saying and their emotions and reactions behind it. Throughout my time there my understanding of the Spanish language improved, which helped me greatly. Even though communication was a bit of a struggle, I know I was able to get my point across to the kids and teach them some basic skills of basketball. Most of the time they were probably making fun of my “Spanglish,” but I know they came out better at shooting, dribbling, and passing.

My coaching style at basketball camp was not all about skill, I wanted to have fun with these young kids so they could see the joy in sports! A journal by Carvalho, Leonardi, Gonçalves, and Paes (2017) says that coaches play a crucial role in successful youth sports programs because they are the ones who create enjoyable experience and positively develop young athletes. After all, I was coaching a bunch of kids, so I was more relaxed with them and let them have their fun. Sometimes, we would combine with the next oldest group of kids and play games. There were two we played many times and were favorites of the kids; *Panuelo* (handkerchief) and *Bomba* (bomb). In *Panuelo*, the kids were split up into two teams and each

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given a number. The kids would line up across from each other, with Mario (another coach) standing in the middle with a *pañuelo*. The coach would call out a number and the kid on each team who was assigned that number would run up, steal the handkerchief, and try to make it back to their team's side before being tagged by their opponent. It was so much fun to watch the kids play this and see their competitive sides out while also getting some exercise in. In *Bomba*, the kids would get in a big circle and Mario would once again stand in the middle. The kids would begin to pass the ball to the person next to them, going around the circle, as Mario counted quietly and moved his arms as if they were a timer ready to go off. His hands would get closer and closer together and once he clapped and yelled "*¡bomba!*" the person who was holding the ball was out. This game was fun because as more and more kids got eliminated, they would frantically run around the circle to the next closest person to pass the ball off to avoid getting "struck" by the bomb. One of my favorite moments playing this game was when this little girl named Carla won. She was one of the smallest and sweetest kids in my group I was coaching and the moment she beat all of those kids they lifted her up and started chanting her name. The team spirit and support amongst them were something I loved to see and, once again, this was an activity that still helped the kids speed, coordination, and skill. The kids in my group absolutely love playing small sided scrimmages, as they requested it daily. They always wanted me on their team, I guess being five feet tall is an advantage when playing against 5-year-olds! We would have fun shooting around and working on the skills I had been teaching them. For coaching little kids, it is important to have that balance between seriousness and fun. I wanted to show them just how enjoyable basketball can be and paint that positive picture of how the sport can be in their future.

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Coaching these young kids at basketball camp was the most rewarding part of my internship. My favorite moment of the whole time I was in Spain came one morning when I was arriving to work. The kids would always be playing around on the courts outside before camp started and when the ones in my group saw me walking up to the building they came joyfully screaming and yelling my name. Right in that moment, I knew I had made an impact in their lives, just as they had made an impact in mine. Any doubts or anxieties I had about my coaching techniques were gone after that because I could see what I had been teaching them was getting through. My job coaching was hard at times because of the language barrier or the fact that they were so young, but I was able to show them some skills for the game and teach them things to use in all aspects of life. This experience made me realize the importance of coaches and helped me find a new passion, as I want to be that positive influence for young athletes.

### **Conclusion**

My Spanish internship was the best experience of my life. During my time abroad, I got to experience a new culture and live just as they do in Valencia. Getting to stay with my Spanish family drew me closer to the Spanish lifestyle and allowed me to gain a full perspective of their lives. The friends I made along the way helped make my eight weeks in Spain the best they could have been. Together we grew, learned, and immersed ourselves fully into the Spanish culture. My internship at CB L'Horta Godella combined all of my passions and turned it into one job where I grew and became more confident each day. I learned so much about sport and exercise that all can be applied to my future endeavors. Helping to lead exercise sessions and tests of the athlete's abilities gave me a good insight on the importance of strength and conditioning coaches. I also got to experience what being a physical therapist is like and learn techniques of assessment and treatment for my patient. Using the knowledge, I had gained from



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the physical therapist helped me better understand the work done with the strength and conditioning coaches, and vice versa. Finally, I got to coach some wonderful young kids and teach them skill and love for the game. As much of an impact as I had on those young athletes, they had a bigger impact on me. They helped me to be more confident in myself and made me want to be a person they could look up to. My whole coaching experience can be summed up by the Kobe Bryant quote at the beginning of this, I just wanted to inspire those kids to be the best they can in every situation. The hardest part of my job and this whole experience was the language barrier. Being in a new country that spoke a language different than mine made me think more outside of the box and find new ways to communicate. I had to be more attentive in my listening and use body language and expressions to both understand and get my point across. Each day, my understanding of the language got better and better and I was able to communicate more effectively. Even though my Spanish speaking skills were a bit rocky, I tried to learn a few words each day, most of the related to sport. My favorite was *flecciones* (push-ups), and I know I will never just call them push-ups again. My eight weeks in Valencia flew by, but I know that it had a lifelong impact on how I work, communicate, interact with kids, play sports, and live overall. I absolutely loved working for CB L'Horta Godella and getting to be in Valencia during this time, it was the best experience in my life, and I cannot wait to return to Spain.

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