

# Coaching Your Team





## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Coaching *Honda Campus All-Star Challenge*. This chapter is designed to be used by those who train, chaperone, select, comfort, Coach and share the game play experience with the student members of their institution's *Honda Campus All-Star Challenge* team.

Once the campus tournament has been completed, it is time to select your eight to twelve player Varsity Squad. Eventually, after some time practicing with the Squad, you will designate which four players will represent your institution in the Nationals. With honor and grant money at stake, teams should spend significant time training for the competition ahead.

The Coach's outlook should be more long-range than just the upcoming matches. Many Coaches concentrate on building a long-term program, one which produces good players year after year and becomes an integral part of campus life.



This chapter brings together the experience of many Coaches, volunteers and players who have spent years with the *Honda Campus All-Star Challenge* program.

Certainly, all institutions and Coaches have their own goals, strategies and styles. As the opportunity arises, we encourage you to compare notes with other Coaches at tournaments.

We are very interested in your feedback about this manual. Please call or write HCASC Headquarters to share your comments, suggestions and tips with us.



# COACHES DUTIES

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The following is a sample job description. While each Coach will approach each of these responsibilities differently, we have assembled suggestions for how to be effective in each area. The following chapters cover these points in greater detail.

## **Select the Varsity Squad.**

This includes selecting a Varsity Squad of approximately eight to twelve players, then determining which players will form the line-up for a given tournament. [See *Identifying Good Players* and *Selecting the Nationals Team*, pp. 38-40]

## **Run Practice Sessions.**

The Coach will determine the frequency and structure of practice sessions. There are a number of possible drills which emphasize various areas of game play. The Coach needs to work on bolstering the team's weak areas and developing strategy which capitalizes on their strengths. [See *Practicing with Your Team*, p. 41] and *Practice Resources* on the CD-ROM]

## **Make travel arrangements.**

The details of eligibility and travel to intercollegiate tournaments and National Championship should be handled by the Coach or Campus Coordinator.

## **Stay in touch with the players.**

We cannot over emphasize the need to stay in touch with the players on your Nationals Team. Remember, once the team is named and information is provided to HCASC Headquarters tickets will be purchased. Your school is responsible for the cost of new airline tickets and a player change fee if you make a player change. The sooner you identify a potential player schedule conflict or other problem which *could* result in your needing to make a player change, the better.

## **Work with the players.**

A good Coach gets to know the players personally and helps them to get the most out of the experience. The stress of competition can be very emotional, so a Coach who is also a friend and role model is very important.

## **Attend all games during the NCT.**

Some Coaches simply chaperone the teams to the event, but a good Coach will work with the team during all phases of the tournament. [See *Coach's Role at HCASC Nationals*, pp. 46-48]

## **Develop a long-term program.**

While each team is important and deserves a Coach's best, some aspects of the HCASC program can only grow with the passage of time. This involves recruiting players as freshmen and developing them for several years. It also involves establishing a niche for the program on campus and building a base of support for it. [See *Developing a Long-Term Program*, p. 5]

## **Interact with the Campus Coordinator.**

A successful HCASC program is a team effort. A Coach should communicate often and clearly with the Campus Coordinator, in order to create the best program for the students and the school.

## **Interact with the HCASC staff.**

The staff at HCASC Headquarters are prepared to answer any questions you might have. In addition, they work with you to make sure that all tournament registration and eligibility materials are completed well in advance of each tournament.

## COACHING STYLES

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Coaching styles and philosophies are as varied as the number of Coaches in the country. From these brief descriptions it is possible to see some different approaches that a new Coach could incorporate into his/her own style.

### **The 110% Coach.**

This is the Coach that works closely with the team on all aspects of the game and the team's game play. S/he will write hundreds of questions for practice, take detailed notes at tournaments and train the players in points of strategy. Generally, this Coach would play the game if s/he could.

### **The Minimalist.**

This Coach generally leaves the team to practice alone. While s/he will work with the HCASC staff to provide all of the necessary paperwork and accompany the team to tournaments, the focus is to allow the team to excel on its own.

### **The Nurturer.**

This Coach focuses more on providing an atmosphere to allow the team and players to excel than on helping the players with every aspect of the game. This Coach is the tireless promoters of the program within the school and provides all of the logistical support for the team.

# BUILDING A VARSITY SQUAD

Your Varsity Squad is comprised of the best players on your campus. Some will not be on the winning team, but have displayed good game skills during your tournament. Since only four players will represent the school at the Nationals, it's important to practice with all your strong players to create the best team possible.

## ESSENTIAL STEPS

There are five steps to building a Varsity Squad and they can take the entire year to execute.

### 1. **Help the Campus Coordinator plan and publicize the campus tournament.**

This tournament is the key tool to building a good team. The value of a strong campus tournament cannot be overstated:

- ✓ It teaches students to assert themselves in public
- ✓ It teaches teamwork, as students learn to play together
- ✓ It teaches students to win and to lose with grace and humor

### 2. **Identify top players.**

The recruiting process begins with the campus tournament. One of the decisions which needs to be made before the campus tournament takes place is the criteria for selecting the Varsity Squad.

In most cases, the Varsity Squad is formed from the campus champion team and four to eight other players who competed in the campus tournament. This allows the Coach to work with the best players. Your Nationals team may be selected however you choose: based on intuitive judgement, statistical analysis or some combination.

At some institutions, the team that wins the campus tournament is automatically the team which travels to the intercollegiate tournaments. However, during your practice sessions, you will discover which combination is most likely to win for your campus.

### 3. **Hold Practices.**

Invite additional students with potential whom you identified during the campus tournament. At this point the group can begin to practice. [See *Practicing with Your Team*, p. 41]

As Coach, you must determine the strengths of each player and experiment with different player combinations, to make the best Nationals Team possible. [See *Developing a Long-Term Program*, p. 5]

### 4. **Select the Nationals Team.**

As part of Part 2 Qualification, you will have to designate four team members. These will be the players who have exhibited the best game traits during your weekly practice sessions. Reflexes, answer accuracy, confidence and teamwork are what you're looking for in your Nationals Team. Equally important are the dynamics among the players and each player's decorum.

### 5. **Select a Captain.**

Your Nationals Team needs a captain. You need to designate a player with special skills. The Captain must be able to speak with authority for the team during bonuses and keep the team in the game with leadership skills. Your best scorer may or may not be the ideal choice, so look for the player who has mutual respect and keeps a cool head.

## IDENTIFYING GOOD PLAYERS

Once the campus tournament is underway, the Coach should begin looking for good players. It is easy to concentrate only on the top few teams when looking; however, good players can often be found on less successful teams. Keep an open mind.

### **Keep player statistics.**

How many toss-up questions does each player answer? Can you tell who provides answers to the bonus questions? Even if a team only answers four questions in a game, if all of their points are attributable to one player, that might be a good player to invite to practice.

### **Look at all of the players on the top few teams.**

Sometimes one player will be the one leaning on the buzzer and getting the toss-up questions, while another player will be the one working the bonus questions.

### **Look for players with strengths in different subjects.**

### **Look for players willing to take a chance.**

Risk taking is an important and valuable trait in many good players.

### **Look for players who know the answers, but don't yet trust their instincts.**

They often have an "Oh darn, I knew that one" look on their faces. Often students have the answer or a good guess, but don't feel 100% confident, so they are unwilling to take risks.

### **Look for players who work well with their teammates.**

Conversely, beware of the prima donna who doesn't value the opinions of teammates and who disrupts the game with a superior attitude.

# SELECTING THE NATIONALS TEAM

One of the decisions that a Coach has to make is to determine which of a group of talented players should comprise the starting line-up at the Nationals. Making the cut from the Varsity Squad (8-12 players) to the Nationals Team (4 players) is one of the most difficult choices to make. These are some considerations for a Coach to take into account when making this decision:

## A good team is comprised of players who share:

- ✓ Enjoyment of the game
- ✓ Willingness to come to practice and commit to the team
- ✓ A good balance between depth of knowledge and speed
- ✓ High self-esteem
- ✓ Curiosity
- ✓ Ability to work cooperatively
- ✓ Knowledge in multiple interest areas
- ✓ Even temperament
- ✓ Commitment and availability

## A good team is comprised of players who have expertise in a broad range of subjects.

Some of the key areas to cover are: science, history, politics, literature, current events, geography, religion, mythology, music, sports, popular culture, multicultural and women's studies and general knowledge. Additionally, a thorough knowledge of African American history, culture and personalities is extremely important.

## Mutual respect makes a good team.

Nothing is more damaging to team morale than blaming a teammate for a loss. "If only you hadn't..." never helps bring the best out of a player.

## Good teams know each player's strengths.

Thus, a player with a good hunch might delay buzzing in on a history toss-up assuming that the history/government expert will be more apt to take it. Since players cannot communicate by glancing at each other or signalling in any way, players who know each other well are able to judge whether a teammate will be able to answer a given question.

## Good teammates talk each other up.

It is very important to concentrate on the game at hand and not fret about previous losses, earlier bad play or upcoming games.

## A good team has depth and experience.

While a team with one great player and three bad players can win a lot of games in the campus tournament, they won't likely win many at the National Championship. However, be wary of using an all upper classmen team; remember to plan for the future.

## Try different combinations of players.

Sometimes, a particular combination has great chemistry and the team as a whole is better than the four individual players.

## In advance, determine the player seating

The captain needs optimal access to all of the team members. Try putting the quietest player in the other middle seat and the loudest player on the side farthest from the captain. Please note, during the ballroom rounds of the NCT, the captain is always seated second from the center. It is to your benefit to familiarize your team with this arrangement so their play style is not adversely affected when advancing to the Playoffs.



NCT Finals staging as viewed from audience left. The Captain is in chair three. Positioning quiet players next to the captain ensures their contributions are heard.



NCT Finals staging as viewed from audience right. Notice that the captain is in chair two (second from center).

# SELECTING A CAPTAIN

Selecting a captain is an important decision. A good captain can make a difference in two areas: team morale and in the play of bonus questions. Selection of a captain should include factors like maturity, respect for the other players and emotional stability. Consider these characteristics for your captain:

## **Ability to take notes as a bonus is asked.**

As examples, jotting down the items in a list, or the year in question helps keep the players' answers focused and within the range of possible correct answers.

## **Ability to zero in on the key information sought in the bonus question.**

Rephrasing the question helps to set limits for possible answers to help the team brainstorm.

## **Ability to keep track of suggested answers from various team members.**

"Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Rita Mae Brown, Maya Angelou..." The captain should always encourage *every* team member to make a comment during *every* bonus question.



## **Ability to make firm selections from question choices.**

Captains must be able to use their best judgement and knowledge about the expertise of the team members.

## **Ability to delegate effectively or give an answer.**

Bonus questions mean big points, but the team cannot score if no one answers. Since there is no penalty for wrong bonus answers, the captain should *always* offer a bonus answer if no other player has one.

## **Ability to keep track of the remaining time.**

There are only 5 seconds for the team to collect its answer to each numbered part of a multi-part bonus or 5 seconds total for a single part bonus. It is important to have the answer ready when the moderator asks for it. In addition, the captain needs to be aware of the time left in the half or game.

## **Ability to encourage and motivate team members.**

"That's OK... It was a good guess... Don't stop now.... We can take 'em... OK, concentrate..." The other players must know that their captain trusts them and that their input is crucial.



# PRACTICING WITH YOUR TEAM

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Once the Varsity Squad has been assembled, the real work begins. Preparation helps the team get the most out of the time spent training. The Coach should have a game plan and be sure to vary the content of practice sessions to keep the group motivated.

## **PRACTICE SESSION MODELS**

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### **Open practices.**

These practices begin at the conclusion of the campus tournament and last all year. The practices are advertised and open to anyone interested, even if they didn't play in the campus tournament and aren't eligible for the Nationals.

These sessions are usually held once a week until the Varsity Squad begins its special practice sessions before Nationals and occasionally thereafter.

### **Novice practices.**

Some Coaches hold a second weekly practice open to first and second-year players who do not have the level of game experience that veterans have. This dedicated practice allows them to hone their skills without being intimidated by better or more experienced players. It is also a good time to work with the players on the game rules.

### **Focused practice.**

Some Coaches work exclusively with the Varsity Squad between the campus tournament and the Nationals. This allows the Coach to focus his/her time on the players who will likely be attending the nationals. While this is expeditious, it doesn't facilitate your long-term HCASC program.

## **STRUCTURING PRACTICE**

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In choosing particular drills or discussion points for an upcoming practice session, it is important to think about what goals you want to achieve. Does your team need to increase speed? Do players need to get to know each other? Do they need to learn the rules? Do they need to learn each others' strengths? Do they need to practice writing and reading questions to improve their speed of information absorption? The following is a list of possible components of a practice session:

### **Playing the game is the single best form of practice.**

The more time players spend with their hands on the buzzer, the better. Vary the game play and rotate the players.

**Reuse game packets from previous years.** Used games help build recall ability and help students build confidence on interrupting a question when they feel they know the answer. Games from previous Pre-NCTs are included as pdfs on the CD-ROM.

### **Spend time getting to know each other.**

A team is a support group, and the players should be relaxed together and work toward a common goal. One way to accomplish this is to get the players to socialize outside of practice; as they become better friends, they will increase their skill as a team.

### **Build files of questions from which to work.**

Have players and faculty write questions for practice. You may save HCASC campus program questions for up to five years. [See *All About the Questions*, p. 42]

### **Try some specific drills for toss-ups, bonuses and quick reflexes.**

[See *Drills*, pp. 43-44]

### **Invite faculty members to lecture the team on weak areas.**

Have these faculty supply a list of the "top 100 facts" in their field.

### **Discuss game strategy.**

Make sure the players know how to play all of the different kinds of questions.

Make sure they have a firm idea of how to make the clock work for them at the end of the half or game. Be sure that they know everything about the upcoming tournament: format, starting times, location, their opponents, etc.

### **Play similar games to work on quick recall.**

Watching game shows can be fun as well as good practice. A number of board games can be helpful too.

### **Play "Rip the Almanac:"**

Just tear up an almanac and give each team member different sections for which they will be responsible. Ask each one questions from their subject "sections."

**Utilize a variety of practice exercises until you find one to sharpen your team's strengths while eliminating its weaknesses.**

# ALL ABOUT THE QUESTIONS



## GENERAL INFORMATION

One of the most important things for the Coach and the team to understand is the questions, not just the content of a particular question, but the formats of the questions, the writing style and the range of subjects that can be covered in just one game or tournament.

The questions are written by the editorial staff of the College Bowl Company. The questions are new every year. From year to year, the same topics may well be covered and there will be several questions with the same answer; but even in those instances, the actual wording of the questions and clues will differ.

Learning about the questions can be helpful for several reasons:

### Helps determine where the team should concentrate.

The team needs to assess its strengths, weaknesses and areas of interest. While no four players can have in-depth knowledge of every subject, they can deepen their knowledge of subjects in which they're already strong and improve in subjects in which they are weak.

### Aids writing "tournament style" questions.

The better the Coach and team understand how questions and game packets are compiled, the better they will be able to simulate this in order to generate practice material.

### Learning how packets and questions are structured.

This allows players to become better attuned to listening to questions and being able to follow their logic.

## GAME PACKETS

Every game packet consists of two types of questions, toss-ups (all worth ten points apiece) and bonuses (each worth 20-30 points.) Toss-ups are printed on yellow paper and bonuses on white. In any given packet there are 28 toss-ups and 25 bonuses. This is more than enough for a regulation-length game.

Every packet contains questions in a variety of subjects. While not every area of knowledge could possibly be covered in 53 questions, there are some categories which are included in every game packet.

In addition, the level of difficulty of questions ranges from easy to challenging. Almost every toss-up should be answerable by at least one knowledgeable team member if heard in its entirety. Bonuses are more difficult and draw on more in-depth knowledge.

Finally, all of the material is not strictly "academic" in nature. Many questions challenge the general cultural knowledge of the young adult, such as popular music and sports. Overall, the packets provide an enjoyable balance between "academics," "fun" and "quiz show" style questions.

## WHAT'S IN A PACKET?

HCASC games will have questions that cover the categories below. We maintain a target distribution of questions based on this grid. Each game has its own "flavor," but these numbers should give your players an idea of where to focus their training.

<u>Question Category</u>	<u>TU</u>	<u>Bonus</u>
African American Culture & History	3-4	3-4
Sciences	3-4	3-4
Literature	2-3	2-3
History	3-4	3-4
Geography	2-3	2-3
Religion, Mythology, Ancient History	1-2	1-2
Fine Arts & Theater	1-2	1-2
Social Sciences & Business	1-2	1-2
General Knowledge	2-3	2-3
Current Events	1-2	1-2
Pop Culture	2	2
Sports	2	2

# DRILLS

In speaking to Coaches, the overwhelmingly most important tip was, "Play the game." Like any game of skill, practice makes a difference. Of course, there are traits that will make some people better players, but experience makes a huge difference.

## GENERAL DRILLS

### **Always have players practice with buzzers in their hands.**

**Require players to write questions every week for practice.** [See *All About The Questions*, p. 42] This serves several important functions:

- ✓ It provides new questions for each practice.
- ✓ It exposes players to information in the course of their research. Many times, Coaches and players have been pleased to discover that the questions they heard in competition are similar to questions they wrote for a practice session. In addition, players gather new information and retain it in the course of researching questions.
- ✓ It teaches players about the structure of questions. This is especially useful in learning to anticipate toss-ups.

Some Coaches assign players the task of All About The Questions each week: for example, six toss-ups and four bonuses or nine toss-ups and six bonuses, depending on the frequency of practice. Players write the questions (along with their names and dates) on index cards, complete with a list of research sources. These questions are filed and used for many years. Microsoft Word question-writing templates are included on the CD-ROM.

### **During practice each player should take turns reading his/her own questions as well as old question packets.**

This helps players understand how difficult it is to be a good moderator and makes them more sympathetic to the volunteer game officials.

### **Critique the questions after the practice.**

Which of the players' questions were particularly good? Why? Which were bad? Why?

### **Make sure that the players know all of the rules.**

A *Rules Quiz* is included on your CD-Rom. Play against other teams. These can be other teams of students; teams from area schools; or faculty/staff teams. One school put together a team of secretaries and let them pre-read the questions. This drilled the Varsity Squad both in speed and humility.

### **Turn players into "Information Seekers."**

Ask them to seek out and learn new facts in any conversations with family, friends and professors.

## DRILLS FOR TOSS-UPS

Most Coaches consider drilling for toss-ups to be more important than working on bonuses. Developing the knowledge base and the reflexes to play toss-ups keeps the momentum on your side and continues to lock your opponent out. There are two tricks for toss-up questions: having speedy reflexes and knowing how the questions are structured.

### **Begin practice with 25-30 Toss-Up questions.**

Every player plays for himself and the player garnering the most points is the daily winner.

Since answering toss-ups involves hearing a series of clues and zeroing in on the only possible thing that fits that description, play the identification game. Use a few adjectives to describe a person, place or thing. Can the team identify: the thirteenth president, the year Amelia Earhart disappeared, the capital of Somalia?

### **Mark and analyze when toss-ups are answered.**

When you read toss-ups, always note on the question card the point at which a player buzzed in with the correct answer. Then go back and analyze each question. Why did the player buzz then? If it was on the 10th word, could they have buzzed earlier? What are the key words and phrases that cued them to jump?

### **Train and test players' anticipation skills.**

Read the first half of a question and have the team guess what the rest of the question must be. While few players will be able to correctly anticipate the answer "Indian Ocean" from the question fragment "She sells seashells down by the seashore..."; they might be able to anticipate the remainder of the question after hearing "If she sells seashells in the *Seychelles*..." By that point, players may anticipate that the remainder of the question asks "for 10 points -- where is she?" By breaking questions into small pieces, players can learn to analyze the structure and logic of the questions, which prepares them to interrupt with more confidence and accuracy.

### **Devise short 30-second drills.**

For example, read a list of phrases, each of which refers to another phrase which has the word "red" in it. How many can they get? ("discovered flagrantly" = caught *red-handed*; U.S.S.R = the *red menace*; a distraction = *red herring*, etc.)

### **Train players not to fear the lockout.**

If players are shy, or not taking enough risks, require them to get at least one "-5" in every practice game. Force players to buzz in early so that they develop a willingness to make some errors.

## **DRILLS FOR BONUS QUESTIONS**

The essential skills to be polished for working bonus questions are: team work, mental association, brainstorming and efficient use of the time available.

### **Play a version of "Password"**

One player is given a card with a category on it, such as "Presidents," along with the name of several Presidents. A player must use a few seconds to list some facts about the first name on the list and a second player must try to come up with the name. This drill sharpens recognition and recall and should be strictly timed.

### **Play a round where there are two bonus questions given for every toss-up question.**

### **Play a few rounds in which only two players may work together on bonuses.**

**As teams develop a group dynamic, players will create effective training techniques that work well for them.**

**Encourage your team to try out any ideas that sharpen their game skills!**

**Teams are strongly encouraged to attend (or host) a Pre-NCT tournament in preparation for the Nationals. Contact HCASC Headquarters at 800-388-2272 x115 for information about Pre-NCTs.**

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