

'It's not about the wins': Why thousands of volunteers give 12 hours a week

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Most of us can name a coach who left a mark. The one who turned up early to set out the cones, stayed late to run drills in the rain, and helped a nervous eight-year-old believe they belonged. For many New Zealanders, that person shaped more than a game. They shaped a childhood.

Today marks Global Coaches Day, a chance to reflect on those people. Across Aotearoa, thousands of volunteer coaches quietly hold community sport together, rarely asking for thanks. This year, it's worth pausing to consider just how much they give.

The scale of their contribution is easy to overlook. However, about 265,600 volunteer coaches give an average of 12.2 hours a week. Together, that adds up to more than 3.2 million volunteer hours, a contribution that stretches well beyond the sideline.

What those hours build matters just as much. Research commissioned by Bunnings, shows that 68% of volunteer coaches say their efforts help young people develop confidence and self-belief, while 59% believe it supports children's mental wellbeing. In other words, this is community-building dressed up as sport.

"Volunteer coaches are the backbone of grassroots sport in this country," says Andy Rogers, Sport Development Lead, Coaching at Sport NZ.

"The scale of what they give is remarkable, but it's the impact on young people that really counts. Recognising them at the grassroots level isn't a nice-to-have, it's essential to keeping community sport alive."

Why they keep showing up

Ask a volunteer coach why they do it, and trophies rarely come up. The research backs this up: coaches rate fun (56%) and building confidence (44%) far more highly than winning silverware (15%). For most, the reward is watching a young player find their feet, make friends, and love the game.

Jeff Andrews, a volunteer coach at Pukekohe AFC, knows the feeling well.

"It's not about the wins, honestly," he says. "It's the kid who couldn't kick straight in March scoring their first goal in August. That's the stuff that keeps me coming back, season after season. Sure, there are tough days, but the joy far outweighs them."

Introducing Coaching Legends

Recognising the role volunteer coaches play is also the intention behind a new national initiative from Bunnings.

To celebrate and support these volunteers, Bunnings has launched Coaching Legends, a national programme recognising the people at the heart of community and club sport. Anyone can get involved; parents, players, fellow coaches, club volunteers, or supporters who've seen the difference a volunteer coach makes.

The programme is backed by some of Aotearoa's best-known sporting names, including Shaun Johnson, Portia Woodman-Wickliffe, Brook Ruscoe, Francis De Vries, and Amelia Kerr.

Here's what's on offer:

Each week: Five volunteer coaches receive a Bunnings Coaching Legends kit and gift cards for themselves and their club.

Each month: One standout volunteer coach wins an unforgettable experience, with a high-performance sporting professional

Each year: Five finalist volunteer coaches are invited to the Halberg Awards, where one will be named Bunnings Coaching Legend of the Year, and win \$25,000 in Bunnings products and materials for their club.

"Every community club has people who quietly give their time to help others succeed," says Melissa Haines, Bunnings General Manager.

"Volunteer coaches play an important role in helping people build confidence, friendships and a love of sport. Coaching Legends is about recognising those contributions and saying thank you in a meaningful way."

Chances are, you already know a volunteer coach who fits the bill. Someone whose patience, energy, and belief have made a real difference to a young person, a team, or a whole club.

Global Coaches Day is a chance to make sure their contribution doesn't go unnoticed.

Nominate a volunteer coach as a Coaching Legend at bunnings.co.nz/coachinglegends, with legendary prizes up for grabs every week for both the coach and their club. *T&Cs apply.*