

Technology helps the value of video training

By Zach Jones

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Watching video is so 1992.

At least that's the way local athletes and coaches see it.

Not that watching footage of games, practices, or even drills, is a thing of the past. In truth, coaches and players are watching more than ever.

The difference is technology. Coaches and their assistants, from the professional ranks down to high school, have traded in VHS tape decks and shelves of backdated video for digital cameras and thumb drives.

What used to take hours of recording, splicing and re-recording has been reduced to the work of a few minutes with computerized editing equipment.

Though time and resources dictate how much local teams take advantage of burgeoning video technologies, coaches are united on one point: They want more.

“There's so much that we could do (with video), it makes my head spin,” says Palomar College men's basketball coach John O'Neill. “(With VHS), you used to have two machines, one to record and one to tape off of that one.”

Despite the efficiencies of the digital era (O'Neill says it took just 45 minutes to download all the footage of the Comets' recent win over San Diego Mesa), he says he spends more time in front of his computer than he spent with the old tape system.

“I probably spend 15 to 20 hours a week,” he said. “I never spent this much time (before) because it was so hard to do. Now it's easier to find certain things. It sucks you in.”

Palomar baseball coach Buck Taylor is another video devotee, saying his coaching staff can take clips of players during batting practice or games, make notes on their swing or pitch mechanics, and send tailored video files to each player through e-mail.

“The great part about it is that we can write all over it,” Taylor said. “We can write quotes on it, we can draw lines on it, and show them what they're doing right, what they're doing wrong.”

“Ultimately what we want, and we just haven't set it up yet, is DVR.”

One school that has made the leap to digital video recording is La Costa Canyon.

The Mavericks' baseball field is outfitted with three cameras. Each points toward home plate, one from first base, one from third and one from behind the plate.

Chris Swanner, whose Cardiff company Sports Motion installed the system, says the cameras continuously record game action but save the footage only when the video operator chooses.

If a batter gets a hit, the operator presses the record button, telling the machine to save the previous three seconds of footage. Swanner says the system allows coaches to build more efficient video libraries, comprised only of live action.

“Kids are visual now,” Swanner said. “When I was growing up playing baseball, it was always, 'Can you feel that (motion)?' What video does is it helps kids get that feel back.”

But the video revolution doesn't stop at self-scouting. La Costa Canyon boys basketball coach Dave Cassaw says his own digital video library helps him prepare for league opponents and resurrect his favorite plays from his past teams.

Most of all, it makes the Mavericks' film sessions more efficient.

“This generation of kids learns better when you can show them short, precise points,” Cassaw said. “If you show them an entire video, here's a whistle, here's a timeout, here's a free throw, they're (asleep).

“You show them five offensive possessions, you're in and out of video in 15 minutes and you're on to the next thing.

“I've really felt in the past that there have been some watershed moments with our teams, when they've seen the video and said, 'Oh, that's what coach is talking about.' ”

Escondido softball coach Cary Weiler says video helps his staffers fine tune their analysis.

“We'll make a DVD of five girls doing our different skills drills,” Weiler said. “In those five, we probably see everything, right and wrong, that needs to be looked at. It helps us as coaches identify what it should look like.”

As video analysis becomes a bigger part of high school and college instruction, coaches have just one complaint.

There aren't enough hours in the day.

“It's almost like you need somebody full time to be the video guy,” Taylor said. “I get home at night, and my wife gets mad because I get on the computer and start looking at swings.”