The First Step: Assessing the Coaching Philosophies of Pre-service Coaches

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Abstract

Coaches are influential in creating positive and achievement-oriented sport environments and the development of a sound philosophy is the key to successful coaching (Martens, 2004). Yet, few coaches spend significant time early in their careers developing and modifying their philosophical beliefs (Wilcox & Trudel, 1998). While coaching educators have consistently recognized the importance of a well-honed coaching philosophy, little research has examined the beliefs of pre-service coaches. Therefore, this study examined written coaching philosophy statements of 35 pre-service coaches (PSCs) prior to enrollment in an intensive 15-week coaching education course. An inductive content analysis revealed several emergent dimensions and priorities: Coaching Behavior, Defining Success, Development, Expectations, Fun, Life Lessons Learned Through Sport, and Relationships. It was clear that these young coaches have strong expectations of the sport experience. What was less clear was their role in creating positive sport experiences, which highlights the importance of coaching education in transforming philosophy into action.

Key Words: coach education, novice coaches, coaching psychology

Introduction

Think of your favorite coach. What makes them great? Chances are it is their beliefs, values, and approach to their athletes and the sport that make these coaches stand out from the rest. Differences in belief systems, values, and approaches to performance and participation in sport distinguish successful coaches at all levels (i.e., youth, school, club, collegiate, national). At the heart of these differences are unique philosophies that guide their behavior and decisions. Martens (2004) indicated that a sound philosophy is the key to successful coaching and to the provision of positive sport experiences. He proposed that the three central elements of a coaching philosophy are the relative roles of winning, development, and fun. Similarly, Vealey (2005) operationalized these three elements as optimal performance, optimal development, and optimal experience, where Burton and Raedeke (2008, p.6) identified "personal excellence-the foundation for success" as a sound working philosophy. Sport psychology professionals like Martens, Vealey, Burton, and Raedeke have been at the forefront of developing and evaluating coaching education. While each of these individuals has identified the critical role of coaching philosophy, little is known about how coaching philosophies are developed.

Recognizing that coaches are the providers and interpreters of sport experience, coaches' philosophical beliefs are central to the climate they create. Building a theoretically driven and research-based coaching philosophy that can drive professional practice could be a significant factor in improving the coaching experience, and in turn, the performance and experience of athletes. The process of developing a coaching philosophy is complex and continually evolving. Young coaches need to reflect on and integrate their experience as a coach and athlete, and their knowledge of the sport and training demands of the sport, with sound research on coaching behaviors (Smoll & Smith, 2002), developmental considerations (see Weiss, 2004), participant motives (Weiss & Williams, 2004), and motivational theory (Conroy, Kaye, & Coatsworth, 2006; Fredricks & Eccles, 2004), to name a few. Recognizing this complexity within coaching philosophy, it is not surprising that few investigators have undertaken this effort.

Central to the development of a coaching philosophy is the approach to achievement. Both Martens' (2004) and Vealey's (2005) frameworks have employed constructs from achievement goal theory and subsequent research on motivational climate (See Ntoumanis & Biddle, 1999). Understanding how individuals define success and failure is at the heart of these theories. Motivational orientations are proposed to be dispositional and therefore can be affected by the environment and individuals who frame the environment. Coaches clearly craft the environment in sport settings and thus influence individuals' performance and experience. It is the motivational climate that has the potential to influence individual perceptions of their ability and subsequent motivation (Balaguer, Duda, & Crespo, 1999). While motivational climate has been extensively examined, the link between motivational climate and coaching philosophy remains unexplored.

The link between theories of achievement motivation and philosophy development appears to be contained in the key components identified by Martens (2004) as well as Burton and Raedeke (2008). These include the major objectives and the principles or beliefs that help coaches achieve those objectives (Martens, 2004). One of the few investigations examining coaching philosophy utilized interviews with youth baseball and softball coaches (McCallister, Blinde, & Weiss, 2000). The authors found that coaches' philosophies tend to focus on two key elements: learning skills and having fun. They also found that coaches did not identify key issues such as the roles of winning and competition, and the value of participation as part of their philosophies, until prompted. Many of these coaches, while able to articulate their philosophies, had difficulty describing how they teach those values and life skills within their philosophy on a day-to-day basis. They concluded, "The extent to which coaches can articulate their philosophies and the degree to which their behavior parallels those philosophies are important in determining the nature of the participant's experience" (McAllister, et al., 2000, p. 36). Furthermore, results indicate that these coaches regularly experienced inconsistencies between their beliefs and actions. Common inconsistencies occurred in dealings with inappropriate behavior, communication, playing time, and the emphasis on winning.

In reviewing the limited research relative to coaching

philosophy, an early investigation of over 500 male high school coaches of girls' and boys' basketball teams, examined gender differences in coaching philosophies (Pratt & Eitzen, 1989). While the examination of gender differences in coaching philosophies was the primary purpose of this study, their findings reinforced perceptions that principles and beliefs are altered or shaped by experience and social context. The important role of experience exposes a gap in the literature relating to novice coaches. If experience is essential to the formulation of a coaching philosophy, where and how do young coaches begin this process?

Aside from the aforementioned research, most of the coaching literature does not explicitly explore coaching philosophy. Consistent with Gilbert and Trudel's (2004a) meta-analysis of coaching research, the primary focus has been on coaching behaviors of experienced coaches and their effects on athletes (Smith & Smoll, 1997). Additionally, the development of knowledge and expertise (Abraham & Collins, 1998), mentoring of young coaches (Bloom, Durand-Bush, Schinke, & Salmela, 1998), and experience and reflection in coaching (Gilbert & Trudel, 2000; Gilbert & Trudel, 2005) were significant topics in the research literature. While coaching philosophy is not explicitly identified, the role of philosophy is implicit within many of these constructs. Issues such as coach behavior, knowledge, role framing, and mentoring, influence and are influenced by a coach's philosophical beliefs.

Philosophy is often alluded to in discussions of coaches' characteristics, role framing and behavior. For example, by investigating six case studies, Gilbert and Trudel (2004b) identified key components of a coach's personal approach to coaching, including discipline, fun, personal and athletic growth and development, positive team environment, winning, equity, and safety. These categories were described as *role frame components* and can arguably be described as priorities reflecting philosophical beliefs that impact daily action.

Similarly, Smoll and Smith's (1997) and Smith and Smoll's (2002) research examining Coach Effectiveness Training (CET) has identified principles that could be considered philosophical in nature. Specifically they argued for a positive approach to coaching and coaching education that takes into account a healthy attitude about winning and prioritizes development. Their research has demonstrated that coaches who create positive learning environments through sound instruction and feedback produce positive experiences for athletes.

Although a focus on coaching education programs has begun to impact the preparation of coaches (Gilbert & Trudel, 2005), very little research has focused on the next generation of coaches. Less than 6.1 percent of the coaching research includes prospective coaches as participants (Gilbert & Trudel, 2004a). There are no studies in the sport psychology or coaching literature that explore coaching philosophy in pre-service coaches (PSCs). However, research with veteran coaches shows that few coaches spend significant time early in their careers developing and modifying sound philosophical beliefs (Wilcox & Trudel, 1998). Since coaches learn most of their coaching knowledge through actual experience (Gilbert & Trudel, 2005), perhaps their philosophies develop over time through experience. It is imperative that applied sport psychology research examines philosophies of PSCs in order to gain a greater understanding of the extent and importance of their belief system prior to formal coach education as well as the practical application of those early beliefs. Only then, can coaching educators effectively prepare PSCs in the development of research-based coaching philosophies. Therefore, this study examined coaching philosophies of PSCs at the start of an intensive 15-week coaching education program. The purpose was to explore beliefs, values, and principles within philosophy statements of individuals prior to a coaching education program and significant coaching experience.

Method

Participants

Participants (N=35, males=19; females =16) enrolled in an intensive coaching education program at a mid-size Division I university in the U.S. wrote philosophy statements relative to their beliefs about coaching. On average, these individuals were just over 20 years of age (M=20.1) and 58% (n=20) of the participants identified themselves as student-athletes at the university. Almost half of the PSCs had no previous coaching experience (46%, n=16). The remaining 54% (n=19) had limited coaching experience averaging 2.5 seasons, predominantly as assistant coaches at the youth level. Further, less than 15% (n=5) were currently coaching or assistant coaching a team at either the youth or high school level. When asked about the extent to which they believed they would coach in the future, participants' responses ranged from 4 to 7, with a mean of 5.8, on a 7-point likert scale from unlikely to definitely. Two individuals enrolled in the program who had no plans to coach in the future completed the philosophy statements, but were removed from the analysis. Based on the limited coaching experience and the commitment of individuals to coach in the future, the remaining 35 participants were characterized as PSCs..

Procedure

Permission to conduct this study and approval for the use of human subjects was granted by the investigators' university Institutional Review Board. As members of an intensive 15-week coaching education program, these PSCs were asked to write a statement about their beliefs about coaching. Participants granted consent for the use of their statements and acknowledged that their statements would not be used as an evaluative component of the course. Prior to this in-class assignment the participants were asked to spend time reflecting on what they believed to be important about coaching and alerted that they would be writing these beliefs into a statement. Philosophy statements were written at the very beginning of the coaching education course prior to receiving materials, lectures or teaching points on coaching philosophy. PSCs were given the following directions: "In the space provided, please write a statement of your coaching philosophy. Philosophy is defined as the beliefs and principles that guide your actions. Please circle the level of sport you are referring to in your philosophy statement."

All 35 participants wrote a coaching philosophy statement. Statements ranged in length from half to one and a half pages, and all were completed within 30 to 50 minutes. After compiling the written philosophy statements, the statements were transcribed verbatim. At this point all the members of the research team read

each statement in order to develop a complete understanding of the data prior to content analysis. As recommended by Creswell (2003), the research team employed the pragmatic qualitative perspective of using multiple strategies and perspectives to understand the data. However, the primary approach utilized a thematic content analysis recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994). The research team's first step in the process of analysis was to agree on an operational definition of *coaching philosophy*. The research team mutually agreed to use Martens' (2004, p.6) definition ("beliefs or principles that help achieve your objectives") to discriminate between statements that fit or did not fit into the analysis. Each of the four members of the research team independently analyzed the data to identify quotes that clearly reflected the operational definition and which statements fell outside the definition. While the subsequent analysis only dealt with raw data associated with philosophy, other categories associated with coaching style, characteristics and level of coaching were also identified. Raw data units (N=177) (i.e., quotes representing a meaningful point or thought) associated with coaching philosophy were individually identified and consensually validated during group meetings with the four investigators. Quotes with similar meaning were merged into lower-order themes and labeled to reflect a common understanding. Lower-order themes were then analyzed for similarity and combined to reflect a common, more global understanding (i.e., higher-order theme). This process continued through to the development of final categories. At each step of this process the four person investigative team reached consensus in the merging and labeling of themes. It is important to note that while the data often coalesced cleanly from smaller lower-order themes to broader higher-order themes and general dimensions, there were cases where a particular lower-order theme carried through to a general dimension (e.g., contributors to success merged directly into the general dimension of Defining Success). In these cases, the same theme code (e.g., contributors) was carried through each level. Similarly, in one case (i.e., Development), the data was particularly complex and therefore it was necessary to include a middle-order theme between the lower-order theme and the higher-order theme.

Throughout the data analysis process, the research team aimed to retain the holistic view of the participants while maintaining the uniqueness of each individual participant. Trustworthiness of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990) was demonstrated by continually going back to the initial statements of the individuals, as well as through consensual validation of themes.

Results and Discussion

Initial results from the content analysis revealed seven general dimensions derived from a number of higher-order themes, lower-order themes, and raw data units. General dimensions included: Coaching Behavior, Defining Success, Development, Expectations, Fun, Life Lessons Learned Through Sport and Relationships. Patterns and themes emerging from each of these general dimensions and subsequent discussion are presented below.

Coaching Behavior

The general dimension of Coaching Behavior consisted of two higher-order themes: *coach creates climate* and *equitable treatment of athletes*, as well as a number of lower-order themes which merged directly into Coaching Behavior.

Coach creates climate. In this general dimension of Coaching Behavior, the higher-order theme of coach creates climate was highlighted by participants writing about the importance of 'creating a fun learning environment'. Specifically, one participant wrote "In order for your team to be successful you must combine enjoyment and fun with an atmosphere that makes players want to learn and encourage each other to learn" (PSC 9, line 256). This statement parallels findings from the work of McCallister, et al., (2000) where they identified the importance of coaching belief systems to include the philosophy of learning new skills while having fun. It is interesting to note how the participants in this investigation took ownership in creating a positive climate. This was one of the few times throughout the investigation where the participants clearly identified their role in implementing the belief systems.

Equitable treatment of athletes. PSCs also addressed the treatment of athletes and identified the next higher-order theme of equitable treatment of athletes by writing about the importance of fair and equitable treatment. One PSC highlighted this point by writing specifically about fair treatment in regards to playing time:

I believe when coaching at the high school level every player deserves the chance to prove themselves and earn playing time. This does not mean everyone plays equally, but everyone is given a chance. Earned playing time would be based on performance, work ethic, and attitude (PSC 30, line 376).

While coach creates climate and equitable treatment of athletes were identified as the higher-order themes in the general dimension of Coaching Behavior, there were a number of lower-order themes that carried directly into Coaching Behavior. Examples of such lower-order themes included using an individualized approach to coaching, maximizing team potential, strategic playing time, supportive coaching behaviors, maximizing a learning experience, using effective communication and effective coaching behaviors. More specifically, participants wrote about the importance of flexibility and individualized approaches to coaching. For instance, one PSC simply stated, "You can't approach every situation the same [,]much the way you can't coach every kid the same way" (PSC 11, line 295).

PSCs also identified the importance of supportive coaching behaviors as a lower-order theme leading directly to the general dimension of Coaching Behavior. Supportive coaching behaviors included behaviors such as encouragement and positive reinforcement. An example of such beliefs is found in the following statement. "My philosophy to coaching is structured off positive reinforcement and enthusiasm" (PSC 8, line 251). Many of these themes refer to feedback and expectancies and relate to previous research on coaching behavior (Horn, 2008; Smith & Smoll, 1997). Further, sport psychology consultants and coaching educators can benefit from the knowledge of these belief statements in their work with teams, coaches, and individuals.

Along similar lines, participants identified how knowing their players can lead to maximizing team potential, and thus highlights another lower-order theme that lead directly to Coaching Behavior. "A coach should have an understanding of his/her players as

unique individuals and be able to combine these qualities together to create a fluid team" (PSC 20, line 173). However, while some participants highlighted the importance of equitable treatment and consistent playing time for individuals, others stated the importance of a coach effectively using strategic playing time. This lower-order theme of strategic playing time can be best understood in the following quote. "I will not hold back players when it comes to winning, the correct players need to be in the game" (PSC 30, line 369).

Strategic playing time, maximizing team potential, and an individualized approach to coaching are all related to the decision making of the coach. Gilbert and Trudel (2000) examined coaches' decision making as a link to the beliefs and behaviors exhibited by a coach and the statements by these PSCs support their work. Linking decision making to beliefs and behaviors is an important content area for coaching educators and sport psychology consultants. When working with coaches it is critical to help them process the reasons behind the decisions that they make.

It is not at all surprising to read about positive reinforcement and enthusiasm as part of the coaching philosophy of PSCs. Gilbert and Trudel (2004b) highlighted how coaching behavior and coaching belief systems is often a product shaped by experience. This finding supports this notion. The PSCs in this study were young adults who had very limited experience coaching (46% had no previous coaching experience). However, the majority of the participants were either current or former student-athletes and as a whole, they had extensive playing experience. Most current and former athletes highlighted the importance of positive reinforcement because they experienced supportive behavior and positive reinforcement and they attributed their success to it, or they did not experience these behaviors and therefore had negative attributes. Recognizing the importance of personal experience, it is not surprising that these PSCs highlighted this theme.

In summarizing the Coaching Behavior general dimension, participants made statements of belief in line with current literature. Of particular interest was the coach's role in creating a positive climate. This was one of the few times throughout the results where the PSCs took ownership for their role in contributing to a positive environment.

Defining Success

The second general dimension derived from the statements of coaching philosophy was Defining Success. This dimension consisted of four unique lower-order themes that merged directly to the general dimension of Defining Success. These unique lower-order themes included: contributors to success, success as a process over product, role of winning and losing, and discipline as the foundation of success.

Contributors to success. PSCs identified a number of contributors to success including effort, attitude, creativity, hard work and commitment. Specifically, participants were able to identify the influence of important characteristics in defining success. The theme of defining success based on attitude can be seen in the following statement:

Attitude is just as important. Attitude reaches to many other aspects in sports. A positive strong attitude will guide a player and a coach to success. A good attitude will get you to practice

early, keep you awake watching film, get that loose ball, keep you out of trouble, and will keep you focused and much more (PSC 6, line 78).

Success as process over product. In addition to defining contributors to success, participants were able to articulate the difference in process and product and thus emphasized the importance of process. This is exemplified in the following statement, "Wins keep everyone coming back but it is not all about product, it is all about process. Success can come at any point [,] not just after the final buzzer rings after play is complete" (PSC 2, line 13). The coaching literature relative to goal setting often identifies process over product. That is, the process of setting small, measurable, attainable goals throughout a season is a better indicator of success and improvement than the product (i.e., outcome) goals. Process goals are prominent in sport, whether in life skill development (Danish, Fazio, Nellen, & Owens, 2002; Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2006) or in goal setting for performance (Wilson, Hardy, & Harwood, 2006). While these PSCs were able to identify the difference between process and product goals, coaching educators need to assist coaches in translating beliefs into behavior.

Discipline as the foundation of success. A number of the participants wrote extensively about discipline. Specifically, the participants were able to identify discipline as a building block for success. "It's my belief [that] discipline is the back bone of a successful team" (PSC 5, line 70). Once again, these PSCs wanted discipline on their teams but did not discuss how to create it or what discipline looks like.

Role of winning and losing. The final lower-order theme in Defining Success was the role of winning and losing. Individuals varied in their beliefs about winning and losing. For some, winning was the ultimate goal, while for others, athlete development was prioritized over winning. Differential views on the importance of winning can be seen in the following quotes. "If a coach cares about his/her players, he should thus always put their best interests first, even if this means putting winning second" (PSC18, line 150). Alternately, one PSC indicated, "I would put an emphasis on winning because I think it feels so great to achieve a win. I say that we wouldn't keep score if we weren't trying to win" (PSC13, line 95). While some of the participants had philosophical beliefs of "athletes first, winning second" (Martens, 2004, p.22), others emulated their current collegiate playing experience by focusing on the importance of winning. Coaching educators are often faced with the task of helping coaches to understand the role of winning and although these PSCs have limited experience thus far, they were able to articulate their beliefs about how they prioritized winning.

Development

The general dimension of Development was one of the richest dimensions in all the data. Because of the complexity and richness of this general dimension, the development of lower and higher-order themes was significantly more multifaceted than other dimensions. Almost all of the participants wrote about growth in some capacity as it became clear that development was a priority in their coaching. Results from content analysis revealed two higher-order themes, *athletic development* and *personal development*.

Athletic development. The higher-order theme of athletic

development consisted of a middle-order theme, as well as multiple lower-order themes. The middle-order theme of *development of an athletic mentality* as well as lower-order themes of supporting multiple sport experiences, skill development, goal setting process, development of a hard work ethic, and lessons of achievement merged to form the higher-order theme of athletic development. The middle-order theme of development of an athletic mentality reflected lower-order themes of development of a hard work ethic, goal setting process, developing confidence, and lessons of achievement. Participants described this athletic mentality in a number of ways, but in essence it could be characterized as the intangible skills athletes develop to help them succeed. For instance, one participant stated: "Encouraging the athletes to push themselves and allow them to see they are capable of much more than they ever imagined, helps build a stronger and more confident athlete" (PSC 5, line 68).

Both empirical and anecdotal evidence suggest that the development of an athletic mentality is a familiar concept in coaching (Vealey, 2005). As sport becomes inherently more specialized and competitive, the importance of mentally tough athletes is crucial. Coaches at all levels strive to recruit and maintain athletes who are confident and have this athletic mentality. What is interesting to note about the PSCs in this investigation is that while they clearly articulated the desire for their athletes to develop this mentality, they were much less clear in identifying their specific role in helping them to achieve it. This is a recurring theme with these young coaches and not surprising given the lack of coaching experience of the participants.

While development of an athletic mentality was a rich middle-order theme, two other lower-order themes contributed to athletic development. The lower-order theme of skill development was highlighted throughout the content analysis of athletic development. As an example, participants identified the development of skills as a salient piece of their coaching beliefs. For instance one PSC wrote, "Creating strong fundamental skills is a strong building block for the next level. A player can always get better, but getting better with the right skills can get you further" (PSC 6, line 76); while another added an age appropriate qualifier "When kids are just starting out it is important to attempt to develop their skills" (PSC 35, line 219). These PSCs recognized their role in physical skill development. The statements in this area reflected more concrete ideas of what they would focus on. The lower-order theme of supporting multiple sport experiences also merged into the higher-order theme of athletic development. This theme reflected a desire to minimize the specialization of young athletes and let them experience multiple sport environments. While this theme was infrequently reported, it was heavily emphasized by a few PSCs.

Personal development. Personal development was the second higher-order theme in the general dimension of Development. This theme consisted of raw data units that led directly to the higher-order theme of personal development. These data units consisted of character, personal growth, and personal development as most important in PSCs' coaching beliefs. "My coaching philosophy, along with most coaches, has many different aspects involving not just sport specific/goal coaching. Athletics is something that aids kids in their development as an overall person" (PSC 21, line 297).

Creating a framework for positive youth development through sports programs has positive outcomes (Petitpas, Cornelius, Van Raalte, & Jones, 2005) and the PSCs in this investigation have been able to articulate their beliefs about the importance of this development.

Finally, there were those participants who identified the lower-order theme combining personal and athletic development to be a critical component of their coaching philosophy. The idea of developing the person as well as athletic skill appealed to these PSCs. For instance, one participant stated, "It is your job as a youth coach to provide not only skill/ability advise [sic], but also to shape that athlete into a respectable human being" (PSC 15, line 113). These PSCs recognized that personal and athletic development were not mutually exclusive and might actually be mutually beneficial. Personal and athletic growth and development is one of the role frame components (i.e., priorities reflecting philosophical beliefs that impact daily action) as described by Gilbert and Trudel (2004b) in their investigation of coaching behavior. These components are keys to a coach's approach to coaching.

Coaching education programs throughout the United States are based on creating a philosophy relative to three main principles in coaching: winning, development, and fun. Coaching educators encourage PSCs to think about these three main objectives and prioritize them appropriately. The PSCs in this study, while not explicitly stating as such, prioritized development. We draw this conclusion based on the holistic context of the written statements, as well as the repetitive nature of development in their philosophy statements. While these coaches were not able to articulate their specific role in development, they were able to address development as a salient construct.

Expectations

The next general dimension, Expectations, consisted of only one higher-order theme, behavioral expectations, and several lower-order themes that merged directly to the general dimension of Expectations.

Behavioral expectations. In relation to the higher-order theme of behavioral expectations, participants wrote about the appropriate representation of the school and community as well as the lower-order theme of adhering to rules and regulations on and off the field. For example, one participant wrote, "I would want them to represent themselves, their family and friends, their town, their school, and their team extremely well" (PSC 13, line 93). Recently, there has been an increase in the scientific research in applied sport psychology relative to principles of life skill development in sport (Danish, et al,, 2002; Dworkin, Larson, & Hansen 2003; Gould et al., 2006; Gould, Collins, Lauer, & Chung, 2007). One of the tenets in developing positive life skills in and through sport is the ability of coaches to not only set expectations, but also to hold athletes accountable (Gould et al., 2007).

In addition to the higher-order theme of behavioral expectations, PSCs also identified lower-order themes of performance expectations and expectations of effort as critical components of their philosophy. For example, the lower-order theme of performance expectations is exemplified in the following quote: "When we hit the ice for practice, it[']s work time and I expect my players to perform as best they can daily, knowing that physical

mistakes will happen regardless but mental mistakes are not acceptable" (PSC 26, line 342). The performance expectation was reinforced with an additional lower-order theme of expectation of effort. This is evident in this statement, "If you aren't going to show up willing to give 100% and in the right mental state then think twice about even showing up" (PSC 36, line 231). Athletes interpret beliefs about their ability based on beliefs and behaviors of significant others (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). By conveying expectations about performance, coaches provide information relative to the ability of their athletes to meet such expectations. Further, by including expectations in their philosophy statements, these PSCs are laying the groundwork for the importance of effort in perceptions of ability.

While the PSCs were clear about the importance of setting expectations, a few also identified the importance of clearly communicating these expectations to their athletes. Therefore, convey clear expectations emerged as a raw data unit that carried directly to the general dimension of Expectations. For example, one participant noted: "A college level coach should have a basic philosophy of what he/she expects from his/her athletes on a day-to-day basis and they should make these foundations of their program clear" (PSC 20, line 171). Conveying clear expectations is arguably a component of effective communication. Bloom, Schinke, and Salmela (1997) investigated developmental components of communication with coaches. Their research identified the process of communication styles from the novice coach to the international elite coaches and found how communication styles are modified throughout one's coaching career. Further, when consulting with coaches and athletes, coaching educators identify enhancing communication as a common strategy for enhancing performance and team relationships. It is encouraging that the PSCs in this investigation were able to articulate the need for conveying clear expectations, as it is rare that novice coaches are cognizant of effective communication.

What was most interesting about the general dimension of Expectations was again the PSCs' lack of ownership in helping athletes to meet these expectations. For example, participants were clear in addressing the importance of conveying clear expectations; however, they did not address the coach's role in working towards meeting these expectations. This appeared to be a common theme among most of the general dimensions (with the exception of Coaching Behavior). PSCs were able to articulate their belief systems, but were unable to articulate the implementation of such beliefs. This is one of the most telling findings of this investigation and parallels research by McCallister et al., (2000) as the authors found a disconnect between stated beliefs and subsequent action. It is likely due to the fact that the participants in this investigation were either novice coaches or PSCs.

Fun

The general dimension Fun was by far the most concise of all the dimensions. Participants talked extensively about how fun was a critical component of their philosophy. There were multiple raw data units that all merged into the lower-order theme of fun. Subsequently, the lower-order theme of fun merged directly to the general dimension. This quote taken from one of the statements succinctly highlights this point, "I think most importantly behind

all the fundamentals, the patience, the motivating speeches, it's really all about having a fun time" (PSC 23, line 315).

Coaches of all levels value fun. This finding was confirmed through this investigation. In all levels of sport, coaches need to be aware of the motives of their athletes. Understanding participant motives is arguably the first step in creating a positive sport experience. Fun or enjoyment has been found as a key component in a variety of theoretical models of participant motivation in sport psychology. The Competence Motivation Model (Harter, 1978) identifies enjoyment as central; Expectancy-value (Eccles et al.,1983) posits that positive affect impacts achievement related choices. Finally the Sport Commitment Model (Scanlan, Carpenter, Schmidt, Simons, & Keeler, 1993) indicates lack of enjoyment and satisfaction as key components in the decision to withdraw from sport. Whether planning to coach youth, high school, or college, participants in this investigation consistently identified fun as an important factor in their coaching beliefs. What is interesting to decipher in this context is not only the value of fun, but more importantly, how fun is defined. It is a positive finding that these PSCs were able to identify fun as a salient component in their philosophy, without the benefit of understanding how this consistently paralleled major theoretical foundations in sport psychology. Further, this finding is also consistent with major objectives in coaching education programs about prioritizing winning, fun, and development.

Life Lessons Learned Through Sport

The general dimension Life Lessons Learned Through Sport consisted of the two higher-order themes of *intra sport values* and *specific life skills gained through sport*. The research team defined intra sport values as general values that could be learned both in and out of the sport context. Specific life skills gained through sport, on the other hand, was represented by clearly identifying a specific life skill and the relationship with sport.

Intra sport values. Content analysis of the higher-order theme of intra sport values revealed lower-order themes of such values as fairplay, importance of hard work, sportspersonship, respect, learning sport values, learning responsibilities, and lessons of team dynamics. For example, this PSC identified a list of values that should start early in sport, "The youth level is the starting point to hard work and dedication, team work, fair play, and respect" (PSC 15, line 112). The development of such traits as respect, character, and responsibility are traits that are proposed to enhance a particular experience. These intra sport values were critical components of these PSCs' beliefs.

Specific life skills gained through sport. Alternately the higher-order theme of specific life skills gained through sport highlighted similar values in a more specific context. In relation to the higher-order theme of specific life skills gained through sport, such lower-order themes of discipline, positive team dynamics, appropriate stress, and positive affect, equitable treatment of others, commitment, dedication, and work ethic emerged. For example:

> Team unity at any level is great, but a lot of high school athletes will never play college or pro so being able to relay a message of unity, respect, and compassion for their peers will teach them life lessons (PSC 19, line 156).

Finally, content analysis also revealed a unique lower-order

theme of the importance of life lessons that led directly to the general dimension of Life Lessons Learned Through Sport. The coach's role in enhancing these life lessons was a theme that participants wrote about in their philosophy statements. For example, one stated, "For these reasons, I feel it is important for the coach to realize that his/her actions contribute to the lifelong lesson that sport teaches a child" (PSC 31, line 381).

Building life skills through sport is fast becoming a trend in the sport psychology and coaching literatures (Danish et. al, 2002; Dworkin, et al., 2003; Gould et al, 2006, 2007; Mahoney, Larson, & Eccles, 2005). Recent research has demonstrated a relationship between positive life skills and sport. What is less clear, however, is the exact nature and role of the coach in this relationship. Gould et al. (2006) identified the importance of having systematic and specific strategies combined with the foundation of a workable coaching philosophy for building positive life skills through sport. The PSCs in this investigation have begun with the first piece of the puzzle, which is identifying a coaching philosophy that directs life skill development. While Gould et al.'s (2006) research focused on veteran coaches, this group of PSCs has yet to learn how to implement such belief systems. Coaching educators need to be at the forefront in providing coaches with strategies to translate belief into behavior.

Relationships

The final general dimension was Relationships. Content analysis revealed a single higher-order theme of *coach-athlete relationships*, as well as multiple lower-order themes that merged directly into the general dimension.

Coach-athlete relationship. The higher-order theme of coach-athlete relationships consisted of lower-order themes of directional relationships from the coach to the athlete as well as the directional relationship from the athlete to the coach. Additionally, participants wrote about mutual coach-athlete relationships, which emerged as the third lower-order theme.

The coach to athlete directional relationship was an important factor in many of the participants' coaching philosophy. Of particular importance was the role of the coach in creating a positive relationship with their athletes. PSC 34 highlights this in the following statement, "I think it is important for coaches to relate to their players on a personal level, as well as a professional level" (line 213). When participants wrote about the lower-order theme of athlete to coach directional relationship, trust was a common finding. One participant stated this succinctly, "Athletes must be able to trust their coaches" (PSC 4, line 58). While directional relationships revealed important constructs of philosophy statements, the lower-order theme of mutually dependent relationships between the coach and athlete were also viewed as important, "If coaches don't genuinely care about the players than the players will not learn to trust or respect the coach in return" (PSC 18, line 148).

In addition to the higher-order theme of coach-athlete relationship, content analysis indicated significant lower-order themes of team relationships, mutual respect, and coach-parent relationships that merged directly to the general dimension of Relationships. The importance of team relationships was a recurring topic in this general dimension. From the raw data units of emphasizing team unity to the importance of teamwork and social cohesion, participants consistently referred to team relationships. As one participant noted:

I want to try and get the message across to students the importance of a team, and working together as one. Many think it is about individual glory, but they need to understand that team comes before the individual, in any sport (PSC 12, line 82).

This finding is comparable to one of the key principles of Smith and Smoll's (1997) Coach Effectiveness Training. Their third principle relates to the importance of teaching coaches the benefits of enhancing cohesion and support among team members. The PSCs in this investigation were able to articulate their beliefs about the importance of team relationships. It is a positive finding that the statements of the PSCs in this study coincide with evidence in established coach training programs.

Finally, the unique lower-order theme of coach-parent relationships was important to the participants in this study. Being open to parent interaction was viewed as a critical component by one participant. PSC 24 emphasized this in the following statement, "Lastly, I would always be 100% fair with both the child and the parent and be open to new ideas and build a friendly relationship with the parents" (line, 325).

Relationships are a critical part of sport. Numerous investigations have examined the impact of coach-athlete relationships on a particular sport experience (Côté & Salmela, 1995; Gilbert & Trudel, 2004). While the participants in this investigation mirrored previous findings about building relationships, what is interesting to note is that again the PSCs, with few exceptions, were not able to articulate their role as a coach in systematically cultivating such relationships.

Conclusion

The development of a coaching philosophy has been highly touted as a key to success in coaching, yet few examinations have explored this concept. This investigation of PSCs' philosophies identified seven general dimensions including: Coaching Behavior, Defining Success, Development, Expectations, Fun, Life Lessons Learned Through Sport, and Relationships. These dimensions reflect commonly accepted constructs within coaching education and sport psychology and are regularly illustrated by highly experienced, model coaches on the sidelines. Despite their lack of coaching education and coaching experience, these PSCs were well versed in their beliefs about coaching and the positive impact that sport can have on participants. Sport psychology practitioners and coaching educators are the logical professionals to assist young coaches in creating that impact. While social desirability may have been operating to some extent, these coaches were fairly articulate in writing about their beliefs.

These results also highlighted a disconnect within their coaching philosophies. The PSCs' beliefs about coaching and their role as a coach in implementing their philosophy reflect a lack of congruence between belief and behavior. This reinforces the need for coaching education programs to provide young coaches with specific strategies for taking ownership and implementing their beliefs.

Future Directions

This investigation highlights the need for continued development of coaching education programs and coaching philosophy should be at the forefront of such programs. The present study focused on the beliefs of individuals who intend to enter the field of coaching. This group of participants draws attention to a potential limitation of the study. While a sample size of 35 participants is large for a qualitative investigation, it is hard to project how many of these participants will actually enter the field of coaching. Therefore, it will also be beneficial for future research to focus on the philosophical beliefs of early-career coaches. That is, identify coaches who are in their first or second year of coaching and discover the evolution of their coaching philosophy during these early experiences.

Further, research should aim to investigate the implementation and actions associated with a coaching philosophy. One of the significant findings of this study indicated that while these PSCs could articulate their philosophy, they were less sure of how to implement these beliefs. This finding opens the door for two areas of research. First, examining the quality of applied experiences provided in coaching education programs to identify whether PSCs are getting the opportunity to challenge their beliefs and find mechanisms for implementation. Second, tracking entry-level coaches as they develop skills to implement their philosophies would provide new insights into coaching education programs. Taking these steps will highlight which gaps in coaching education require greater exploration and development. Finally, future research on the actions associated with coaching philosophies will give coaching educators a clear indication of what is done well in coaching education, an important factor in the continued and systematic implementation of coaching education programs.

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