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Individual Athletes' Experiences of Great Coaching

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INDIVIDUAL ATHLETES' EXPERIENCES OF GREAT COACHING

BY

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DEDICATION

To my dad, the greatest coach a son could ask for…

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ABSTRACT

The history of sport has proved the necessity for superior coaching as an essential component of excellence in sport. Coaches such as John Wooden of the UCLA Bruins, Sparky Anderson of the Cincinnati Reds and Phil Jackson of the Chicago Bulls are just a few individuals known by their peers as "great" coaches. The setting of sport lends itself to the phenomenon of coaching greatness; however very few researchers have explored this notion. Overwhelmingly, the notion of a win/loss record and visibility has been the criteria for determining which coaches are considered great. This focus allows for a gamete of characteristics exuded by the coach to go unnoticed. Until a study by Becker (2009), perspectives of athletes who had experienced great coaches hadn't been studied. Her study solely looked at the team sport athletes' experience. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study was to explore individual sport athletes' perceptions of coaching greatness. This was achieved by conducting a total of 15 in-depth phenomenological interviews with individual sport athletes. Participants were 18 – 27 years old, who have competed or are currently competing at the collegiate level. Analyses of the transcripts revealed a thematic structure that included *Credibility, Player's Coach, Personality, Goals,* and *Atmosphere* as the five determining factors of great coaching. The results provide insight into enhancing the coaching process for individual sport athletes as well as provide potential implications for coaching education.

Table of Contents

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between a coach and his or her athletes is an integral part of the

development of both the coach and athletes' performance (Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria

& Russell, 1995; Tharp & Gallimore, 1976). Coaches are constantly making evaluations

about their athletes based on a number of variables and are continually seeking ways to

improve the quality of their relationship in order to optimize the performance of their

athletes. For example, Slepicka (1975) stated that the quality of the coach-athlete

relationship has a large impact on the performance of the athlete. In a different study,

Bortoli, Robazza and Giabardo (1995) commented that a good coach-athlete interaction

tends to not only enhance motivation but also induce pleasant emotions and create a

satisfactory and positive climate.

While coaches are constantly making evaluations about their players, athletes are

also formulating assessments about their coach's personality and behavior. These

perceptions can alter the performance of the athlete and could offer insight into valuable

information needed to improve this relationship (Cratty, 1983). As players become more

experienced and participate in team competition, one of the strongest factors that impact

the relationship between the coach and the athlete is the athlete's perceptions of the head

coach (Jubenville, 1999). An increased understanding of these roles, behaviors, and

personalities could lead to a better experience and improved performance in both the

coach and the athlete.

Along with the many different roles coaches perform, these instructors are placed

under public scrutiny including being evaluated by the media, players, alumni, fans, and

the student body. These groups place an enormous amount of pressure on coaches to win

(Margolis, 1979). Furthermore, Margolis (1979) stated that:

> the values and virtues attributed to organized competitive athletics have been
>
> widely publicized in an effort to gain respect for school sports programs…
>
> unfortunately, the pressure and demands on many coaches have caused them to
>
> subvert these values and betray the virtues attributed to sports in order to achieve
>
> the bottom line - winning (p.12).

If the athlete and coach relationship is integral to determining how both perform,

the question becomes how should coaches be evaluated? Williams et al. (2003) claimed

that the coach is the most important person in determining the quality and success of an

athlete's experience. The literature suggests that athletes should play a critical role in

evaluating their coaches. For example, Myers, Wolfe, Maier, Feltz, and Reckase (2006b)

suggested that athletes' perceptions and evaluations of a coach are believed to play a

fundamental role in coaching effectiveness. Additionally, Kuga (1993) echoed this point

in saying "athletes seem to recognize the value of coaching evaluations and are capable

of identifying competencies which they perceive to be important to a coach's

performance" (p.86). With regular and direct contact, athletes have a firsthand

observation of their coach's personality and behaviors (Kuga, 1993).

Critical to the current study is having a clear definition of greatness and how the

concept applies to the idea of coaching. Dictionary definitions equate success with

visible rewards. Webster's defines success as "the accomplishment of what is desired or

aimed at, achievement." Success is something that can easily be quantified and is

outwardly visible. In sport, that definition can be as simple as winning. In contrast, the

pursuit of coaching excellence is considered the result of an intrinsic fulfillment or self-satisfaction for both the coach and the athlete (Horn, 2002). This definition is based on Aristotle's perception of excellence as the human functioning at its potential in all aspects of life. Coaches who develop athletes and people have a reputation for building strong relationships based on honesty and integrity.

The scope of great coaching is more than just purely winning games. The coaches influence their athletes' skills and performance, but also influence the lives of these athletes on and off the field. Everything a coach attempts to accomplish is through the play and performance of their athletes. As a result, we cannot simply rely on external sources such as winning or losing to define greatness, but rather should also investigate the experience of these athletes.

In order to explore this concept of greatness, the current study investigated the lived experience of 15 athletes who have participated in coaching greatness throughout their time as collegiate athletes or beyond. In recent decades, research has primarily focused on the examination of coaching from the behavioral perspective (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969; Likert; 1961; Shartle, 1956) while only a handful of studies have focused on the experiential perspective of excellence in coaching (Packer & Lazenby, 1999; Morris, 1997). Thus, the majority of coaching research has been focused on behavioral and ordinary aspects rather than on the experience of extraordinary. The purpose of this study is to expand on a previous study investigating athletes' experiences of great coaching (Becker, 2009). A major limitation in Becker's study was its singular focus on the experience of team sport athletes. Therefore, research that focuses on the

experiences of individual sport athletes should shed new light on the experience of great coaching and coaching education as a whole.

Statement of the Problem

The current research study attempted to uncover the experiences of great coaching from the perspective of individual sport athletes. This research is necessary because it added to the knowledge base of coaching greatness or excellence and also examined whether athletes reacted to their individual sport coaches in ways not found in team sport coaching. It also provided insights into the athletes' perceptions of these leadership behaviors, traits, styles, values, and attitudes. Finally, it shed light onto recommendations for coaching education processes for each sport type.

The direction provided by a coach continues to play a vital role in the refinement of an athlete's performance capabilities (De Swardt, 2008). As such, the development of a coach is an essential aspect in the chain of events that ultimately lead to a well-rounded and prepared athlete. The central question asked in this study was to determine the individual sport athletes' perceptions of great coaching and determined whether there is a profile for a great individual sport coach. Ultimately, the significance of this study was to add to the knowledge base of coaching and the interaction of instructor and athlete.

Purpose of the Study

This study was an expansion of the scope of a previous study on team sport coaching (Becker, 2009). Becker conducted 18 in-depth phenomenological interviews (9 female; 9 male) of team sports athletes (baseball, basketball, football, soccer, softball, volleyball, and water polo). The thematic structure that emerged from her examination

consisted of: coaching attributes, the environment, relationships, the system, coaching actions, and influence.

The nature of qualitative inquiry puts a major emphasis on the depth of the researcher rather than the number of the sample size (Polkinghorne, 1989). For the current study 15 athletes were interviewed. This study allowed for a further understanding of the individual sport athletes' perspective of great coaching. Thus, the primary purpose of this study was to explore the individual athletes' perception of coaching greatness. It was through the pursuit of excellence that the literature attempted to outline the extraordinary (i.e., greatness).

Definition of Terms

Excellence- very great merit, quality, or ability (Merriam-Webster, 2013).

Leadership- "leadership over human beings is exercised when persons with certain motives or purposes mobilize, in competition or conflict with others, institutional, political, psychological, and other resources so as to arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of followers" (Burns, 1978, p.18).

> *Trait approach-* this approach is centered on the idea that some individuals have traits or skills that ultimately make them leaders. It was believed that these skills thus make them more effective in a leadership position (Yukl, 1994).

> *Behavioral approach-* behavioral approach supports the belief that leaders are not born. It also can be the procedures, or behaviors, which identify a leadership style (Yukl, 2010).

> *Situational approach-* Situational leadership refers to when the leader or manager of an organization must adjust his style to fit the development level of the

followers he is trying to influence. With situational leadership, it is up to the

leader to change his style, not the follower to adapt to the leader's style. In

situational leadership, the style may change continually to meet the needs of

others in the organization based on the situation (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969).

Transformational approach- "occurring when one or more persons engage with

others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels

of motivation and morality. Their purposes, which might have started out as

separate but related, as in the case of transactional leadership become fused"

(Burns, 1978, p.20).

Multidimensional model of leadership- This model suggests that the athletes'

performance and satisfaction are attributed to the degree of congruence among the

three aspects of leader behavior. (Chelladuri & Saleh, 1980).

Cognitive-mediational model of leadership- This model highlights the relationship

between the coach's behavior, athletes' perception and thus the evaluation from

the athlete (Smoll & Smith, 1989).

Coaching- A person who trains or directs athletes or athletic teams (Merriam-Webster,

2013).

Coaching excellence- In this study, coaching excellence will be synonymous with great

coaching as they are a form of describing the extraordinary. Excellence in coaching is

more than win-loss records, more than the achievement of individual athletes' trophies

and personal records, and more than the degree of mastery observed in athletes during

training sessions. Excellence must be judged by how coaches employ their knowledge,

and demonstrate their behavioral and social competencies during their interactions with athletes in various sport contexts. (Mallett & Cote, 2006)

Coaching efficacy- Coaching efficacy is defined as the extent to which coaches believe they have the capacity to affect the learning and performance of their athletes (Meyer, Wolfe, & Feltz, 2005).

Expert coach- results suggest that there is a need to go beyond identifying a coach as an expert based on performance of his/her athletes. Some of the additional criteria suggested included: be recognized by peers as experts; be recognized by athletes as experts and have successful athletes/teams at any level of competition (Erickson, Cote, & Fraser-Thomas, 2007).

Novice coach- A novice coach is one who enters into the workforce as entry-level coaches working with primary or secondary school students. This phase will last long enough for the coach to acquire sufficient knowledge to specialize in one sport. In addition, they will gain an understanding of group supervision and administrative duties (Schinke, Bloom, & Salmela, 1995).

Coaching education- "comprehensive coach education programs have been developed in many countries around the world. These formal programs have many similarities in context and are typically structured around courses for general coaching theory, sport specific techniques and tactics, and supervised coaching practice" (Cote, 2006, p. 32-33).

Player-centered coaching- A player-centered approach (PCA) is a coaching style whereby the coach supports player autonomy by implementing various strategies. These strategies are intended to enhance each player's decision-making ability during game play, as well as outside of game play.

Perception- the act or faculty of apprehending by means of the senses or the mind; cognition; awareness (Merriam-Webster, 2013).

Assumptions

The athletes interviewed must have been of the opinion that they have experienced coaching greatness in order for their comments to have any bearing on this study. With that fundamental assumption another assumption was that each athlete being interviewed could honestly and openly recall the exact experiences that formed their view of excellence. In addition, it is assumed that the data collected on the essence of great coaching transcends sports and level of competition.

Delimitations

To be consistent with extending the results of Becker (2009), for this study, the population was delimited to individual sport athletes who have participated in the collegiate arena or beyond. Thus, the participants were required to be at least 18 years of age. Both male and female athletes were chosen to prevent a gender bias.

Limitations

For this study, the limitations of this study were threefold. First, coaching greatness was solely defined by the perceptions of the athlete, thus making it a one sided study. The second limitation was the honesty of the athletes interviewed. It is possible that these athletes weren't completely and accurately recalling their specific experience. Finally, the time lapse between their specific experiences may have impacted the recollection of the athlete.

With a background in the foundation to this study, the next chapter will lay out each critical aspect of great coaching. Within the literature review excellence, sport

coaching, leadership, the coach-athlete relationship, and Becker (2009) will help give a foundation to great coaching. Each aspect will give a context to the understanding of different ways to approach great coaching.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

Prior to examining the specific research prepared in connection with this study, much scholarly work has preceded this effort. The literature review is as follows: (a) excellence, (b) leadership, (c) coaching, (d) coach-athlete relationship, and (d) coaching excellence. The context of this study was to determine coaching greatness from the perspective of the athlete; this conceptualization stems from an extension of an examination of this phenomenon by Becker (2009). Becker described the necessity to document the experience of the extraordinary (i.e., greatness). Thus, this literature review uses excellence and greatness synonymously as they are an expression of extraordinary coaching.

Excellence. Excellence is the cornerstone to both the goal of any athlete and the desired achievement for all coaches who train athletes. In Aristotle's work, *Nichomachean Ethics*, he writes that in order to achieve happiness, people must be involved in intellectual pursuits and contemplation (Barnes, 1982). Aristotle's pursuit of happiness is defined as flourishing by doing things well or excellently, and or functioning to our full potential. A simple example could be an excellent chair is one that is stable and an excellent knife is one that cuts well. In Aristotle's writing the word excellent is one that can be interchangeable with virtue.

Aristotle further developed his sense of greatness starting with the mind. Good judgment, knowledge, and practicality are all excellences in intellect and are taught and

acquired through experience and time. These virtues of intellect allow an individual to physically or mentally do something with ease. Moral virtues or virtues of character are those that allow an individual to consistently make correct decisions. These good habits allow that individual to respond to what is really good for him or her in the long term rather than what seems to offer instantaneous pleasure. To lead a "good life" in the eyes of Aristotle, both intellectual and moral virtues are needed (Bass, 1981).

In order to seek happiness and thus excellence, the principal virtues should include temperance, courage, and justice. Each virtue is a mean as opposed to an excess of something. For example, the mean between cowardice and rashness is thus courage. To have this virtue of courage, the individual must choose to do challenging things with a good cause. To resist the temptation of overindulgence in pleasure the individual must have the virtue of temperance. Justice is also a necessary virtue in order to seek excellence because it takes into consideration all the good. Aristotle wrote that to live a life of virtue, the individual must pursue a life of happiness. That individual must fulfill his or her basic needs through the excellences of intellect and thus become a moral person through the excellences of character. Ultimately, to be excellent in the mind of Aristotle, one must practice the skills and habits that allow us to achieve our potential. According to Aristotle, while he didn't have athletics in mind, the pursuit of excellence can be found in life as well as sport (Barnes, 1982).

Excellence in sport. "What is considered excellence for one may be considered mediocrity for another" (Kowal & Ross, 1999, p.167). This suggestion illustrates the lack of agreement about what constitutes excellence in sport. The different perspectives

outlined by Kowal and Ross insists excellence as performance outcomes, excellence as process, and the mutual quest for excellence.

Performance excellence and thus the outcome is the dominant perspective in modern sport (Kowal & Ross, 1999). The athlete or coach winning a competition is considered to be excellent, while the "loser" is not. This particular perspective would simply imply that the means for achieving victory is unimportant. In other words, bending or breaking the rules to win, disrespecting opponents, and or not playing to one's potential could all be characteristics of those who have not achieved excellence. Furthermore, according to this definition, an athlete who surpasses their personal best in a competition while failing to win would be not be considered excellent.

Excellence as a process is based on the idea that the conduct of the athlete is the controlling factor for achieving excellence. While winning is still a goal, sportsmanship and respect are also considered essential. This idea is also present in the mutual quest for excellence; athletes try to reach excellence through motivating and inspiring each other. Ultimately, winning is important, but "an essential element of respect for oneself and one's opponents" (Kowal and Ross, 1999, p.170) is critical in this process. This ideal is very similar to Aristotle in that excellence is attained not only through winning, but the "being gracious in defeat is always heroic in the striving" (Gibson, 1993, p.57).

Sport Coaching

According to Williams, Jerome, Kenow, Rogers, and Sartain (2003), the coach is the most important person in determining the quality and thus the effectiveness of an athletic program. If this statement is correct then each role the coach plays significantly determines the overall success and performance of the team. Coaches are required to

play many different roles making this profession unlike any other (Paling, 2002). For example, coaches are asked to be teachers, motivators, leaders, counselors, etc. Thus, coaches must exude self-confidence, provide accurate feedback, and be able to verbally persuade their followers (Bandura, 1997).

In competitive sport, effective leadership is one of the most important variables in the success of the athlete (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003). Thus, the direction of the coach provides insight into the team dynamics, team cohesion, motivation, game strategy, and training theory (Laios, Theodorakis, & Gargalianos, 2003). While many different factors can play into the athlete's development, the coach-athlete relationship is one of the greatest influences on motivation and thus performance.

Terry and Howe (1984) demonstrated that athletes desire specific leadership styles based upon their specific type of sporting event. Specifically, athletes who perform in individual sports such as track & field, weightlifting, and kayaking prefer more democratic coaching behaviors while team sport athletes prefer more autocratic. In other words, individual athletes prefer a coach who allows them to take a role in the decision making process, while conversely a team sport athlete prefers a coach who takes full responsibility for the direction of the team. Therefore, the role of the coach must adapt to the preferred leadership style of the athletes in order to improve the probability of coach-athlete cohesion and goal attainment.

Coaching efficacy. The concept of coaching efficacy is differentiated from general self-efficacy in that it refers to a coach's belief regarding the extent to which they can influence both their athlete's performance as well as development (Meyer, Wolfe, & Feltz, 2005). Several models have explained the impact of coaching efficacy. Feltz,

Chase, Moritz, and Sullivan (1999) developed a model of coaching efficacy that explains the sources from which coaches gain their efficacy and the related outcomes, and developed an instrument by which to test levels of coaching efficacy. During a five-week seminar with 11 coaches, Feltz and colleagues (1999) developed four main factors that were considered the key dimensions in coaching efficacy: game strategy, ability to motivate athletes, ability to coach technique, and ability to build character. Feltz et al. (1999) proposed that these four efficacy dimensions in turn influence coaching behavior, player/team satisfaction, player/team performance, as well as player/team efficacy. The four constructs that contribute to coaching efficacy were confirmed via factor analysis.

In addition Horn (2002) proposed a working model of coaching effectiveness. As differentiated from coaching efficacy, coaching effectiveness refers to coaching that results in athletes having successful performance outcomes, including individual player development and success, or positive psychological development or results from the athletes. The athlete outcomes may be measured in win-loss records (team performance outcomes), success at a national or international level (individual athletes) or by psychological measures (e.g., high perceived ability by athletes, high self-esteem, or high levels of sport enjoyment). Coaching effectiveness is centered in coaching behavior, and how that behavior influences athletes. Coaching effectiveness is differentiated conceptually from coaching efficacy, which centers on coaches' confidence in their own coaching skills.

In Horn's (2002) model of coaching effectiveness, coaches and athletes have a dynamic interaction in which the expectancies, beliefs, and efficacy of each member (coach and athlete) feeds back to influence the other. This model proposes that the

influence that a coach's efficacy beliefs have on athletes is mediated by the coach's behaviors, as well as the athletes' perceptions of those behaviors. In this model the coach's expectancies, beliefs, and goals are influenced by their personal characteristics, which includes coaching efficacy. The coach's expectancies, beliefs, and goals are central to the Horn (2002) model, and influence all behavioral outcomes, both by the coach and by the athlete in response to the coach.

Both Feltz et al.'s (1999) and Horn's (2002) models discuss coaching efficacy and coaching effectiveness and include many sources that influence a coach's personal characteristics when considering influences on coaching behavior, such as sociocultural context, organizational climate, support of the community, and experience coaching. The theoretical models help to further the field in understanding coaching efficacy, as well as its influence on both coaches and athletes.

While the original model proposed by Feltz et al. (1999) significantly advanced the field of research on coaching efficacy, recently further attempts have been made to solidify and potentially expand our knowledge of coaches' sources of efficacy information. Efforts have been made toward understanding efficacy within intercollegiate coaches, as well as the effects of coaching efficacy on team variables (Myers et al., 2005). Importantly, Myers et al. (2005) examined intercollegiate coaches and their sources of efficacy information, which is proposed to corroborate the findings of high school coaches. In Myers et al.'s (2005) study, 135 head coaches of Division II and III intercollegiate sport completed a questionnaire containing the Coaching Efficacy Scale and other items. At a separate time, a subset of the original population of coaches and 1618 athletes completed secondary questionnaires including the athletes' satisfaction

with their head coach. Myers et al. found that intercollegiate coaches had similar sources of efficacy information as high school coaches, however, the strength of those sources of information were different. The most important source of coaching efficacy among intercollegiate coaches was perceived team ability. Further, for female coaches, social support was a stronger source of efficacy information than it was for male coaches.

Expert vs. novice coaching. Within the sport coaching literature, elite coach, excellent coach, high performance coach, and master coach are terms used to describe coaches at the highest level of performance. Although these titles are generally accepted, there is little agreement on how these statuses are gained. In fact, only a few studies have attempted to quantify the specific experiences of high-performance coaches despite suggestions that there are a number of experiential factors that may be consistent with these expert coaches (Erickson, Cote, & Fraser-Thomas, 2007). In an attempt to explain the development of expert coaching, Gibbons, McConnell, Forster, Riewald, and Peterson (2003) vaguely defined an excellent coach as one who provides sport expertise, skills, and motivation. Cote and Sedgewick (2003) looked at expert rowing coaches and deemed them worthy if they had a minimum of ten years coaching experience in the sport, supervised the training of athletes competing on the international stage, and were recognized as experts by their peers. Ultimately, a lack of continuity between studies plagued the study of expert coaching. Abraham, Collins, and Martindale (2006) confirmed this when they acknowledged that determining expert status was a "thorny issue" (p. 132).

In contrast to an expert, a novice is defined as a beginner who seeks all-purpose rules to guide his or her behavior (Cornford & Athanasou, 1995). These rules are logical,

fairly consistent and the beginner is one who typically is unable to deal with changes in their situation. In order to develop the necessary skills and knowledge deemed appropriate for expert status, a novice must take part in meaningful and structured practice in one's field of specialization. Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Römer (1993) deemed this as deliberate practice. Specifically,

> the training of activities designed to enhance an individual's performance, with explicitly defined parameters including (1) a well-defined task with appropriate difficulty level, (2) high effort, and (3) opportunities for repetition and error correction. Furthermore, deliberate practice is designed to optimize the performer's training regimens, and is not inherently enjoyable due to is rigorous nature (Johnson, Tenenbaum, & Edmonds, 2006, p.27).

In many fields, knowledge of effective training procedures is accumulated over many years. This finding is considered as the "10 year" or 10,000 hour rule, which was developed following the study of master chess players by researchers such as de Groot in 1946 and Simon and Chase in 1973. This rule contends that not even the most talented individual can attain expert performance without approximately 10 years or 10,000 hours of preparation (Ericsson & Lehmann, 1996). While this research wasn't directed at coaching per say, the notion that expertise takes years of preparation was expressed.

As coaches continue to mature and take part in deliberate practice in order to develop knowledge and meaning, an analysis of how expert and novice performers differ in their abilities to evaluate complex systems is thus warranted. Understanding how experts can repeatedly outperform novices can allow those involved in coaching

education curriculums to understand what should be highlighted during the stages of development.

Schinke, Bloom, and Salmela (1995) set out to identify the chronological career advancement of expert basketball coaches. From their qualitative assessment of six expert coaches aligned with the Canadian National Basketball Team, the researchers constructed a model of development encompassing chronological phases of coach development. Each stage of development can be demonstrated by a gradual increase in competition, an affinity to the sport, and an improved sense of task knowledge. Further, the first few stages include athletic participation and then transition into progression as a coach. The stages are described as follows:

1. Early Sport Participation: This category represents the first involvements in sport at the community level of competition. Here, the focus is on skill development and involvement. At this point in the development process, coaches can expect to learn how to take part in organized practice and understanding of the rules of game play. Additionally, the individual learns the meaning of hardship, teamwork, sacrifice, and how to deal with winning and losing.

2. Elite Sport Participation: Individuals in this category are competing at the university or regional level. This embodies a turning point in a person's career, as the sport becomes a passion as opposed to a recreational activity. An individual in this stage can expect to gain a deeper understanding of game plan, and the importance of commitment. The athlete may also be observing their coach as examples of how to lead in various circumstances.

3. International Elite Sport Participation: This represents the final stage of

athletic involvement and is reserved only for those who are talented enough to perform at the premier level of competition. It is not known whether or not this stage is required to coach at this level.

4. Novice Coaching: At this stage, individuals enter into the workforce as entry-level coaches. This phase will last long enough for the coach to acquire adequate knowledge to concentrate on one sport. In addition, they will gain an understanding of group guidance and executive duties.

5. Developmental Coaching: This phase is represented by the transition into a coaching position that is at the high school or small college level of competition. In this setting, a coach will begin to progress to more complex training and competition tactics. This step is typically coupled with interactions with a mentor.

6. National Elite Coaching: Coaching at this level differs from earlier stages as the individual is now working with a more successful university team. Initial appointments at this stage are often a shared responsibility, which serves to gradually introduce the coach to more accountability and advanced knowledge of game play.

7. International Elite Coaching: This stage signifies expert status, as it represents the moment in one's career when they have proven themselves worthy of serving on a national team staff. Specifically, a national team that will compete on the world stage, namely the Olympic Games.

Schinke et al.'s (1995) conceptualization of coach development is consistent with other studies outside of the sporting arena. Berliner (1988) discovered a common theme in the development of teaching professionals. The stages listed above showed a similar

path of maturation and growth through the stages of knowledge acquisition in the

classroom setting. Sufficient evidence exists that demonstrates a logical progression of

individuals who desire to become expert performers in their given performance domain.

The development for coaches is different in the first steps, that being participation in the

sport as an athlete, but this stage gives the coach a unique perspective on the coaching

process and can help guide them through their own growth in the profession.

   Coaching education. The development of a coach and their knowledge can be

attributed to many factors. Previous studies remind us that the sources of coaching

knowledge have been identified to include the coach's past experience as an athlete,

serving under a mentor, formal education, experiential learning, and taking part in a

practice known as continuing education (Gilbert & Trudel, 1999; Lynch & Mallett, 2006).

Interestingly, most of this education occurred as the person has already entered the

workforce and identified himself or herself as a coach. Accepting this fact, many

associations have adopted a coaching education program as a means to continue the

development of these individuals. As a result of the increased popularity of competitive

sport,

   comprehensive coach education programs have been developed in many

   countries around the world. These formal programs have many

   similarities in context and are typically structured around courses for

   general coaching theory, sport specific techniques and tactics, and

   supervised coaching practice (Cote, 2006, p. 32-33).

   In the US, the majority of coaching education programs are supervised by the

National Governing Body (NGB) for each sport and is ultimately under the scope of the

United States Olympic Committee (USOC). The intention of the USOC is to field a team

that is striving for success in the international field of competition. "It is at the NGB

level where the foundation of sustained competitive excellence lies and where the

creation of an athlete development system truly takes shape" (Stotlar & Wonder, 2006, p.

10). A strong segment of developing athletes is the qualified coaches who oversee their

training. Therefore, most NGB's have implemented coaching education in order to

promote a forward thinking profession that is sport coaching. Although most of the

programs provided by the NGB share commonalities, they do include specialized

material that are sport specific. For example, although USA Weightlifting and USA

Swimming may share the same educational material regarding physiology and nutrition,

the material will also focus on delivering this content to the coaches in a way that is

specific to their sport. Additionally, the coaching education programs offered by each

NGB are commonly scheduled during the off-season for each sport in order to promote

maximum attendance. Once scheduled, they usually last as a weekend to as long as a

week (Stotlar & Wonder, 2006).

More often than not, all coaching education programs adhere to a similar structure

with regards to curriculum delivery. Typically, content is provided to a group of coaches

in slide format, lectures, and video (Gilbert & Trudel, 1999). This system of education

reflects very closely to pedagogical principles, which focuses on the transmission of

information and skill. For example, Holmes and Abington-Cooper (2000) state that in a

typical pedagogic course design, the teacher decides in advance what knowledge or skill

needs to be transmitted, arranges this body of content into logical units, selects the most

efficient means for transmitting this content, and then develops a plan for presenting

these units in some sequence by using lectures, films, tapes, or lab exercises.

Regardless of design, the result of a continuing education program for the coaching discipline should allow for the following (Gilbert & Trudel, 1999; Showers, 1985):

- coaches practice new strategies more frequently, and develop greater skill in the actual moves of a new teaching strategy,

- coaches use these new techniques more appropriately in terms of their own instructional objectives,

- coaches exhibit greater long-term retention of knowledge about and skill with new strategies, and

- coaches pass on the new strategies and knowledge to understudies.

However, it is unknown whether or not these programs indeed improve a coach's ability to provide domain-specific knowledge to their athletes due to a lack of follow-up assessments. In addition, the current design of coaching education programs offered by various NGBs does not subscribe to a singular and accepted definition of elite coaching, therefore, the ultimate goal of coaching education is difficult to measure (Holmes & Abington-Cooper, 2000).

Player-centered coaching. A player-centered approach (PCA) is a coaching style whereby the coach supports player autonomy by applying various strategies. These strategies are intended to enhance each player's decision-making capability during game play, as well as outside of game play. Decision-making refers to the player's ability to solve tactical problems within the game (Mitchell, Oslin, & Griffin, 2005). Teaching players to become good decision makers involves empowering them to take ownership of

their own performance and of their team's performance. This does not mean that the coach has no control; the role of the coach is to guide the players through the process of solving problems and to establish an environment in which players share responsibility for individual and team performance. A PCA is about developing better people, not just better players (Kidman, 2001).

Recent research (Kidman, 2001, 2005; Rizola, Souza, Scaglia, & Oliveira, 2002), which includes both elite and youth sport coaches and players, reports the following benefits of a PCA:

- Increased player engagement. Since players are encouraged to participate in the decision-making process, they tend to take ownership of their own performance as well as their team's performance.

- Increased communication. Many of the strategies used in a PCA require good communication among players as well as between coaches and players. Communication off the court tends to carry onto the court.

- Increased competence. When players are given the opportunity to take control of their learning as part of an active, self-constructed, and intentional process (Lambert & McCombs, 1998), they are likely to feel and to become more competent.

- Increased motivation. Increased competence is associated with increased motivation (Black & Weiss, 1992). As players become more aware of what to do in certain game situations, they are more likely to practice the skills and movements needed to improve their performance.

The benefits of a PCA tend to increase as players are given more control and choices during practice and competition (Kidman, 2005). According to Wayne Smith, a rugby head coach interviewed by Kidman (2001), practice within game situations encourages athletes to understand and appreciate the game context: "it enables them to make informed decisions, take ownership for their learning, and exercise choice and control over how they play the game" (p. 18).

The theoretical underpinning of the coaching process has ultimately shown the need for further studies and a focus on sport coaching. While generalized coaching theory has been studied, there is a limited amount of research on elite sport coaching. For this reason, the current study attempts to determine the constructs of excellent coaching through the eyes of their followers. Although they are not coaches themselves, they have rare insight into the abilities and characteristics of their coaches who helped them get to their elite status on the collegiate stage. Recognizing that winning isn't the lone barometer for success, determining how a coach can nurture athletic development, improve the athlete's ability to self-regulate and ultimately reach their goals from the perspective of those experiencing it, can push the literature about coaching excellence forward.

A major contributor to the notion that coaching education is essential to the transformation of athletes is the Positive Coaching Alliance. The mission of this organization is "to transform youth sports so sports can transform youth." Based at Stanford University and founded by Jim Thompson, the alliance is a non-profit organization geared toward educating coaches. While it has become a cliché to encourage young athletes just "to have fun," the drive to win often takes over. The

alliance is attempting to change that mindset through its workshops and educational materials.

Leadership

Given the assumption that leadership is essential, a number of scholars have studied those in leadership positions in order to identify their core characteristics and behaviors. These studies may not have focused on athletics in particular; many researchers in the field advocate the use of other fields in order to inform their research (Kellett, 1999). Within this review, the use of theories related to human resource development and adult education will be utilized.

The theme of leadership is an essential element not only in sport but also in life. Despite its importance, defining these two themes is difficult. A working definition from Burns (1978) states, "leadership over human beings is exercised when persons with certain motives and purposes mobilize, in competition or conflict with others, institutional, political, psychological, and other resources so as to arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of followers" (p.18). Empowerment is merely just increasing task motivation by creating a positive orientation to the followers' role (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999; Posner, 1999).

Leadership occurs in almost every aspect of everyday life. The study of leadership began with the idea of the "Great Man" and focused on the leader's personal traits (Bass, 1981). From trait studies, leadership research developed into behaviors, situations, and moral leadership ideals. Ultimately, leadership has been examined in order to outline the characteristics of successful leadership, determine how individuals become leaders, and explore how leadership affects those being led. In comparison,

empowerment is a relatively new subject and is focused on the positive interaction between leader and follower.

Trait approach to leadership. The trait approach to leadership has partially been based on the "Great Man" theory, assuming that leaders are born, not made. Great men were given this title usually by inheritance or birthright. It was thus thought that those born to lead were blessed with above-average intelligence and other characteristics necessary to rule over his or her followers (Bass, 1981).

The trait approach is centered on the idea that some individuals have traits or skills that ultimately make them leaders. It was believed that these skills thus make them more effective in a leadership position (Yukl, 1994). These leaders would then allow their followers to be more successful in terms of productivity and efficiency. Ultimately, there isn't an interest in what the workers or followers gained in the process; rather the focus is on the characteristics of the leader.

This approach held much weight in studies between 1904 through 1947 ultimately culminating in an article by Stogdill in 1948. He examined prior research and various methods and approaches to find correlations between leadership and certain traits in the leaders. These traits included attributes such as age, height, weight, intelligence, grades, physique, judgment, and integrity. Stogdill concluded that, in comparison to the average members in the group, a leader possessed above-average intelligence, dependability, social participation, and socio-economic status. While these characteristics were found in the leaders of the group, he concluded these skills were a product of the situation or environment.

Behavioral approach to leadership. The behavioral approach to leadership has been highly influenced by studies done between 1946 and 1956 classified as the Ohio State Leadership Studies (Shartle, 1956). These studies were lead by Shartle (1956) in an attempt to study the behaviors of people in leadership positions. Within this study the patterns of those in upper-level positions in business, education, and government were examined. The most influential piece of information that came from the Ohio State studies was the Leadership Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ) and thus the idea that leadership behaviors can be classified into two dimensions.

The researchers in the Ohio State studies began with nine dimensions of leadership behavior: initiation, membership, representation, integration, organization, domination, communication, recognition, and production. After the analysis of the results of the questionnaire the researchers found a close correlation among the elements of leadership behavior. As a result, they narrowed down the conceptualization of leadership behavior into two categories of behaviors, namely initiating structure and consideration (Shartle, 1956). The initiating structure refers to goal-orientated behaviors of the leader and is comprised of planning, defining worker roles, and identifying how/by whom the work will be done. Consideration refers to the leader's concern for their followers. This behavior indicates a greater awareness of the relationship between the leader and their followers then on initiating structure.

Situational approach to leadership. The need for a situational or contingency approach to leadership was evident in Stogdill's (1948) review on the trait theory of leadership. Bryman (1986) stated very clearly that, "it was the apparent lack of evidence for universally superior leadership styles coupled with scattered indications of their

situational specificity which acted as an impetus for the contingency approaches" (p.127). More recent studies on leadership showed that effective leaders were those who could adapt their specific behaviors to the situation (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982). Fiedler's (1967) Contingency Model, House's (1971) Path-Goal Theory, and Hersey and Blanchard's (1982) Model of Situational Leadership Styles II are three theories that have attempted to outline the impact of the situation on leadership.

Fiedler's (1967) contingency model of leadership outlined that successful leaders exhibited both authoritarian and democratic leadership styles. Within his theory, Fiedler included the Least Preferred Co-Worker (LPC) scale. This scale is intended to ask the leader to think of the co-worker with whom he or she has the least amount of success working with and then rate his or her personal qualities. The scale, using polar opposites was comprised of items such as friendly-unfriendly, cooperative-uncooperative, and other measures of personal characteristics. Thus, a leader who scored low on the LPC was considered to be task oriented and those who scored highly were considered relationship-oriented.

This theory suggests that when a leader is task-motivated or low on the LPC, an optimal performance situation would consist of them having high control or very low control. High LPC individuals or those who are relationship oriented worked best in situations where they had moderate control. Ultimately, the major criticism was related to the uncertainty about what the LPC scale really measures and thus the lack of correspondence between the LPC and the prescribed behavior outcomes (Bryman 1986; O'Reilly, 1989).

House's (1971) Path-Goal theory of leadership states that a leader's motivational responsibilities include providing desirable payoffs to followers and clarifying the means of attaining these payoffs. Thus, if a worker sees the outcome of hard work as desirable, then they will work hard. Within this theory different types of leader behaviors were identified: instrumental (how work should be accomplished), supportive (concern for people), participative (leader consults with follower), and achievement-oriented (performance goals set and seen as attainable). These leadership styles impact the motivational process. The benefits of these types of behaviors are dependent upon the individuals in the environment, which include the task, organizational hierarchy, and the primary work group.

As with behavioral research, the situational theories acknowledge the role of the follower as being a large part of successful leadership. However, it is still a transactional process. For instance, in return for hard work, a worker would receive a monetary reward or praise. There isn't a guarantee that the worker needs to be the best in order to be the highest paid or praised individual. In contrast, excellent leadership relies much more on the give and take relationship between leader and follower (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982). The next step would ostensibly be focusing more attention on the follower and thus on personal growth as an aspect of leadership.

Fiedler's contingency theory has drawn criticism because it implies that the only alternative for an unalterable mismatch of leader orientation and an unfavorable situation is changing the leader (Ashour 1973; Vecchio 1977, 1983). The model's validity has also been disputed, despite many supportive tests (Bass 1990). The contingency model does not take into account the percentage of "intermediate favorability" situations vs.

"extremely favorable or unfavorable situations", hence, does not give a complete picture of the comparison between low-LPC leaders and high-LPC leaders

    Transformational leadership. Transformational leadership was first examined by Burns (1978) in which he described this type of leadership as,

> occurring when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders
> and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality. Their
> purposes, which might have started out as separate but related, as in the case of
> transactional leadership become fused. (p.20)

In other words, Burns (1978) compares transactional leadership to transformational leadership. In transactional leadership, the relationship between the leader and his followers doesn't go beyond the give and take process. In this leadership style, the participants exchange mutually. Each party is aware of the power of the other and exchange economic, political, or psychological goods and services. In contrast, transformational leaders are considered moral leaders in that they appeal to the ideals and values rather than relying on the followers personal needs or desires.

    While Burns (1978) viewed these forms of leadership as distinct, Bass (1985) felt that a leader could be both types of leadership styles, transactional and transformational. His original theory stated that transactional leadership consists of two behaviors and transformational leadership consists of three behaviors. Transactional leadership behaviors consist of contingent reinforcement and management by exception. Contingent reinforcement consists of praise, promotion, or other accolades for good performance. It also includes punishment or a negative reaction for subpar performance. In contrast, transformational leadership consists of charismatic and inspirational leadership,

individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation. Charismatic leadership can be described as behaviors that inspire enthusiasm, loyalty, respect, and trust from their followers. Individualized consideration involves evaluating the individual and following up with tasks that stimulate development and motivation. Finally, intellectual stimulation means that the leader appeals to the followers' creativity and finds solutions for certain problems. Burns (1978) concludes by saying that leadership is more than productivity and that stimulating growth in followers is part of the leadership process.

Transformational leadership focuses on the leader's ability to inspire and empower his/her follower, it is also important to look at the culture of the organization in this type of leadership style. Organizational culture involves shared beliefs and assumptions of the members of the organization (Yukl, 1998). Schein (1992) describe five mechanisms for affecting change in an organizational culture: attention, reactions of crisis, role modeling, allocation of rewards, and criteria for selection and dismissal. Schein (1992) observes that organizational culture and leadership are intertwined. He illustrates this inter-connection by looking at the relationship between leadership and culture in the context of the organizational life cycle. Through this dynamic ongoing process, the leader creates and is in turn shaped by the organizational culture. It is through these five mechanisms that the organization and effect change.

Tichy and Devanna (1986) conducted qualitative interviews of leaders and other members of an organization in order to identify characteristics and methods of transformational leaders. From the interviews, they suggest that transformational leaders first recognize a need for change, manage the transition period, create a new vision, and then institutionalize change. They also suggested that the leaders in their study shared a

number of traits, which included a change agent, having courage, belief in people, being value driven, being a life long learner, having the cognitive ability to deal with complexity, ambiguity and uncertainty, and being a visionary. These characteristics are also fundamental to empowerment.

     Multidimensional model of leadership. The main proposition of this model is that, to a large degree, group performance and member satisfaction are dependent upon the congruency of required, preferred, and perceived leader behaviors. In other words, group performance and member satisfaction can be enhanced when the leadership behavior required by the situation, the leadership behavior preferred by the followers, and the leadership behavior perceived by the followers are similar. In contrast, when the leadership behavior required by the situation, the leadership behavior preferred by the followers, and the leadership behavior perceived by the followers are not similar, group performance and member satisfaction are compromised.

     Chelladurai's Multidimensional Model of Leadership, which applies specifically to sport, recognizes the importance of three interacting determinants of leader behavior: actual leader behavior, leader behavior preferred by the athlete, and required leader behavior. The degree of congruence among these three factors determines athlete's satisfaction and performance. Required leader behavior is influenced by situational characteristics such as organizational goals, formal structure, group task, social norms, government regulations, technology, and the nature of the group (Chelladurai, 2006). In 1990, Chelladurai revised the antecedents of required leader behavior to also include member characteristics.

Cognitive-Mediational Model of Leadership. Leadership is "the process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Northhouse, 2001, p.3). The notion of leadership is a far more studied concept due to its universality with many different fields. A fundamental study of leadership by Smoll and Smith (1989) proposed a theory that emphasizes the relationship between situational, cognitive, behavioral and individual differences. The cognitive-mediational model of leadership is the basis for this study. This model highlights the relationship between the coach's behavior, athletes' perception, and thus the evaluation from the athlete.
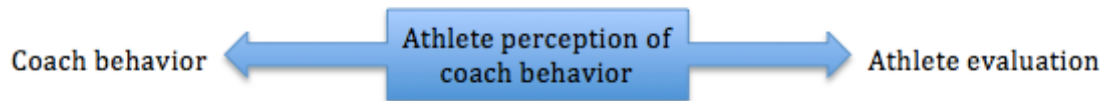
Figure 1. Cognitive-Mediational model of leadership

The researchers have incorporated a situational approach to leadership behavior, in that they argue that coaching behaviors vary as a function of the athletic context. However, the researchers ultimately argue "a truly comprehensive model of leadership requires that consideration be given not only to situational factors and overt behaviors, but also the cognitive process and individual differences which mediate relationships between antecedents, leader behaviors and outcomes" (Smoll & Smith, 1989, p. 1532).

In accordance with the cognitive-mediational model of leadership, the results from a study of Little League players show its importance. The coaches of the Little Leaguers attended a workshop designed to facilitate positive coach-athlete interaction. Those who attended the workshop experienced a dropout rate of 5%, while the control group experienced a 29% dropout rate (Barnes, 1992). Not surprisingly, facilitating positive interactions between coaches and young athletes not only ensured the athlete

enjoyment of the game, but also helped develop positive self-esteem keeping them involved in the sport. This study shows the importance of the coaches' behavior and the athletes' response playing a key role in the perception of the coach and his behaviors.

Coach-Athlete Relationship/Athlete Perceptions of Coaching

According to Bortoli, Robazza, and Giabardo (1995), a coaches' behaviors, attitudes, and communication skills strongly influence the experience of their followers They stated, "a good coach-athlete interaction tends to enhance motivation, induce pleasant emotions, and create satisfactory and positive climate" (p. 1217). At any level of competition, coaches do not have a single role or responsibility, rather most adopt multiple roles. Another fundamental aspect to this coach-athlete relationship is the acceptance of the decisions that are made by the coach. "Coaching effectiveness is largely dependent on the quality of the decisions made and the degree to which these decisions are accepted by the athletes" (Chelladuri, Haggerty, & Baxter, 1989 p. 201). In other words, the athletes' reception of the coaches' decisions and thus the quality of the decision plays a major role in coaching effectiveness.

An important element of the program that the coach must explain is the goals of the organization. An understanding of these goals by both parties will strengthen compatibility issues between the coach and athlete and ultimately impact satisfaction with the relationship. The inability to state the goals could lead to player frustration and thus loss of self-confidence (Kenow & Williams, 1999). Kenow and Williams (1999) stated,

> if the athletes' goals, personalities, and beliefs are consistent with those of
> their coach, the interaction of the individuals will likely be satisfactory to

both parties producing positive interpersonal atmosphere. Conversely, if the athlete is incompatible with the coach (i.e., the athlete's goals, personalities, and beliefs are inconsistent with those of the coach), certain psychological needs for the athlete may not be met (p.257).

Performance of the athlete is yet another area in which the coach-athlete relationship plays an essential role. Slepicka (1975) argued that the coach-athlete relationship plays a significant role in determining the success or failure of the athlete. Along those lines, Rosenfeild, Richman, and Hardy (1989) talked about how the self-esteem of the athlete was closely related to performance. When an athlete is self-assured about their coach and the decision he/she makes, their performance is affected. Nevertheless, in order to maximize the performance of that particular athlete, the coach must know what motivates his or her players, how they learn, and how each handles discipline (Rosenfeild, Richman, & Hardy, 1989).

Effective communication is extremely important in building a strong relationship between coach and player. There is nothing more important than a coach putting emotions into words and delivering them in a timely and emphatic manner (Alexander, 1985). In order for this relationship to work, both parties must work towards the same outcome. Weiss and Frederichs (1986) suggested that while the coach is essential, he or she is not the only one responsible in the communication process. The athlete must continually provide feedback to the coach concerning his or her opinions in order to build a better line of communication. Research has shown that encouraging positive self-talk, modeling confidence themselves, and using reward statements can be the most effective process in building a strong belief in the athlete (Vargas-Tonsing, Myers, & Feltz, 2004).

Communication of goals and expectations will also instill a sense of purpose in the athletes (Paling, 2002). According to Hoehn (1983), if the communication process breaks down, the athlete could lose interest and eventually cease participation in the sport.

The athletes' perception of the coach has been shown to have lasting effects on the relationship in almost every aspect of sport. Straub (1975) found the key to building team unity at any level was the positive relationship between the coach and athlete. Ultimately, the coach who genuinely knows his or her athletes can provide the appropriate feedback that leads to improved team or individual morale. Leggett (1983) found that coaches who provide feedback concerning athlete's emotional needs improves the relationship between the two parties. Ultimately, Horne and Carron (1985) found that athletes' perceptions of a coach were more important to the athlete than solely coaching behaviors.

This relationship between the coach and athlete is unquestionably one of the most important factors in a coach's ability to construct a highly successful player and team. Gabert, Hale, and Montalavo (1999) surveyed 246 freshman student-athletes in an attempt to discover patterns that exist in the decision making process for where they were to attend school. They found that five of the ten characteristics were athletic related factors. Of those five factors, the students identified the head coach relationship as one of the top three factors in their decision making process. Fielitz (2001) conducted a study of student college choice factors for student athletes and non-athletes at the United States Military Academy (USMA). The results showed that playing for a NCAA Division I school, parental influence, college coach and staff, and academic reputation were the top

factors in deciding the school of choice. This finding was also supported in many other

cited works (College Football Association, 1981; Doyle & Gaeth, 1990; Klenosky,

Templin, & Troutman, 2001; Mathes & Gurney, 1985).

Excellence in Coaching

The importance of coaching has been shown overtime to be self-evident. The

experience of great coaching is thus central to the current study. For this reason, it is

fundamental to understand the meaning of excellence in life and in coaching sport. It is

easy to measure a coach's success in his or her career through championships and or the

games won or lost. However, to measure excellence one would start by examining the

work of Aristotle, whose work continues to inspire modern work in virtue, excellence,

and ethical matters (Gomes, 2002; Stevenson 2002).

An influential study by Packer and Lasenby (1999) helped shed light into the

mind of elite coaches. This study was a series of qualitative interviews with sixteen

experienced coaches in either college or professional sports. Each coach was then asked

about their greatest satisfaction in their field. Overwhelmingly, each coach mentioned

watching his or her athletes develop and grow personally and athletically. John Wooden,

a ten-time NCAA national champion basketball coach mentioned his greatest satisfaction

was seeing each of his players graduate. He said, "I get an awful lot of satisfaction out of

looking around and seeing so many attorneys, ministers, surgeons, and those in other

professions" (p. 37). Pat Summit, the former head women's basketball coach at the

University of Tennessee claims that the consistency that her players showed in setting

high standards of academic and athletic achievement gave her more satisfaction then the

six national championships she won as their coach (Packer & Lasenby, 1999).

These highly successful coaches only add to the theory that virtue and excellence are just as important as winning and losing. Of the coaches that were interviewed, none of them indicated that winning a championship was his or her greatest satisfaction as a coach. Interestingly enough, Sparky Anderson, former manager for the World Series Cincinnati Reds and Tigers stated that he was happier finishing third than he was with his championships (Packer & Laserby, 1999). Ultimately, it comes down to a leader's ability to get his or her followers to overachieve and create excellence.

The data collected will give a coaching profile for individual sport athletes. This perspective is fundamental to the experience of great coaching of coaching excellence, as it hasn't been researched. The discussion grounded in Becker (2009) will serve as the basis for this study to build off. Within Becker's (2009) study her focus was on the team sport athletes' experience of great coaching. This study was achieved by conducting a total of 18 in-depth phenomenological interviews with elite level athletes (9 female; 9 male from both collegiate and professional levels of participation) representing a variety of sports (baseball, basketball, football, soccer, softball, volleyball, and water polo). Participants ranged in age from 22 to 42 years. Analyses of the transcripts revealed a total of 1,553 meaning units and revealed six major dimensions that characterized these athletes' experiences of great coaching: *Coach Attributes*, *The Environment, Relationships, The System, Coaching Actions,* and *Influences.*

Becker (2009) concluded that coaching actions and influences were the most prominent aspects of these athletes' experiences. The effect of each coaching action was mediated by its content, method, or quality. Furthermore, the dimensions of coach attributes, the environment, the system, and relationships served as the background for

coaching actions and influences. As such, these background dimensions had a continuous effect on athlete experiences of great coaching.

According to Becker (2009), the coaching attributes encompassed descriptions of their coaches' core qualities or internal makeup. The impact of the coach's actions were mediated by the content, method, and quality of delivery, and all other dimensions served as the background that influenced athlete experiences. The participants in this study described how playing for great coaches was about "more than just becoming a better athlete, but also becoming a better person" (Becker, 2009, p. 3). Their coaches influenced the athletes' self-perceptions, development, and performance. Most importantly, they influenced the athletes' desire and ability to become the best that they could be, not only in sport but also in life. The environment was defined as the overall context in which all actions and interactions between coach and athlete occurred. According to Becker, athlete described great coaches as fostering three types of environments: the general team environment, the one-on-one communication environment, and the practice environment. While the system, represented the framework in which coaches implement their philosophies. Finally, the relationships that athletes experienced with their coaches were professional, but also personal. But, without the perspective of the individual sport athlete, a gap in the field of coaching process and education remains.

Summary and Purpose

Leadership, coaching, and the athlete-coach relationship have continued to stir discussion of coaching greatness. Early researchers concluded that leaders are born and not made; yet they found a lack of supporting data to conclude that as the only characteristic of a great leader or coach. Until Burns' (1978) work on transformational

leadership, most research focused on the success or productivity of the leaders group as fundamental. When this form of leadership came a concern for the growth of not only the leader but also the followers. The research on leadership is central to this study in that it shows the many factors that play a role in those who lead.

While most research in the field of leadership dealt with business, administration, and management, theorists applied many of those concepts to the field of sport. With the notion that athletes need leadership, coaching then comes into the framework (Terry & Howe, 1984). Coaching style, efficacy, and education play a major role in the effectiveness and perception of their followers. The perception of the coach is fundamental this study. It is the perception of the coach from their followers that allows for further implications into coaching process and coaching education.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to investigate individual sport athletes' experiences of great coaching. This phenomenological study sought to capture the experience that the athletes were exposed to during their athletic lifetime. Within this chapter, (a) methodology, (b) participants, and (c) procedures will be discussed in further detail.

Methodology

This study used a phenomenological approach. This research study "focus[ed] on the descriptions and meaning that a person provides in relation to an experience or situation" (Nesti, 2004, p. 21). Phenomenology can be categorized as descriptive, interpretive, or social phenomenology. This examination employed, the descriptive approach. The description involves telling "what" the individual experienced and "how" they experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). Giorgi (1997) defines the aim of phenomenology as being able to describe the essential structure based on descriptions of experiences from others.

Using the phenomenological approach, the interview allowed for existential thought in order to explore and describe different human experiences (Dale, 1996). This approach sought to uncover the experience of human life as it is lived and reflected upon in a firsthand account (Dale, 1993). The themes created from the saturation of interviews looked at this distinctive sport type and formed the basis of the conclusions drawn from the data. Ultimately, being able to draw conclusions from the athletes' perspectives on this particular topic has implications for coaching across the span of athletics as well as coaching education.

Participants

The central objective of phenomenological analysis is to fully grasp "how the everyday, inter-subjective world is constituted" (Schwandt, 2000, p.29) from the standpoint of the participant. For this qualitative study, 15 individual sport athletes were recruited. In order to gather these athletes, resources available at Barry University as well as other contacts within other collegiate institutions and professional organizations will be utilized. The final number of participants was determined by saturation, which deals with getting adequate and quality data from participants throughout the interviews (Mason, 2010; Polkinghorne, 1989). In other words, when no new information emerged from the interviews, saturation of the data was complete. The participants were over 18 years of age. The attempt of this study was to have a further understanding of the experience of individual sport athletes, culminating with a profile of great coaching for this sport type. According to Creswell (2013), the culminating aspect of the phenomenological study is the "essence." Through the saturation of interviews, the essence of this specific experience will allow for furthering the understanding of the illusive idea of coaching excellence.

Procedures

Phenomenological studies are different from almost every other form of qualitative study. The procedures used in this study were based on Thomas and Pollio's (2002) recommendations for conducting existential phenomenological research. They include the following steps: *Exploring researcher bias, Selection of co-participants, Data collection, Data analysis,* and *Developing/Confirming Thematic Structure.*

Exploring researcher bias. Throughout the study, it has been recommended that bias held by the researcher in relation to the topic be identified in order to have a nonjudgmental outlook through the process of the study (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The research avoided introducing presuppositions when conducting interviews and during data analysis (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). "Phenomenological reduction does not involve an absence of presuppositions, but a consciousness of one's presuppositions" (Dale, 1996, p. 311). In order to lessen the bias that was held by the researcher, it was important that a process known as bracketing was utilized.

For this study, the researcher participated in a session of bracketing to bring about awareness that the research may have in relation to his experience with coaching excellence. This process known as bracketing allows for the appreciation and presuppositions that may have been brought into the research process. The results of the bracketing interview were utilized during the interview as well as the analysis in an attempt to avoid any bias that may have affected the validity of the process. Additionally, the use of field notes will be employed before and after conducting the interviews. These notes described the location, any unusual events that may occur, any verbal or non-verbal communication, the researcher's reactions, and any other behaviors of the participant not caught on the audio (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The combination of these two procedures, bracketing and field notes, help ensure that the researcher is "more attuned to their presuppositions about the nature and meaning of the present phenomenon and thereby sensitize them to any potential demands they may impose on their participants either during the interview or in its subsequent interpretation" (Pollio et al.,

1997). This process was to help ensure that the predispositions and biases the researcher may have did not interfere with the current study.

   Selection of co-participants. The interviewers job in this form of qualitative study was to help facilitate the reflection process of the participant and to tell the in-depth story of that participant. It was the experience of the participant that was critical. The participants are, therefore, the experts of the phenomenological experience being examined (Dale, 1996). In addition, the participants in this type of study were referred to as co-participants because they are actively involved with the researcher to ensure a complete thematic structure is developed (Creswell, 2007). Approval from the Barry University Institutional Review Board allowed collegiate and professional athletes to be recruited for participation in the study. Through snowball sampling and personal contacts, potential participants were contacted in order to request their participation in the study. Further, a flyer requesting participation (see Appendix D) was placed on collegiate campuses to invite athletes to participate in the study. Also, an email version of the flyer was sent to potential athletes requesting their participation in the study (see Appendix E). The participants were recruited from a variety of individual sports. Upon agreeing to participate in the study, the researcher conducted interviews in a face-to-face format when possible. For participants who could not participate in the study in-person, the interviews were performed via Skype (Appendix C).

   The process of experiencing coaching greatness was one that can evoke an array of emotions and the right of the co-participant to stop at any time during the interview process or choose to drop out of the study at any point was honored. In order to protect the participants involved, confidentiality was essential. The confidentiality of those

involved required the changing of any identifiable characteristics that could reveal the

identities of any co-participants. Further, each co-participant selected a pseudonym.

Only these pseudonym were linked to the interview. In addition, it was important to

select a face-to-face interview site that was suitable and free from distraction, whether it

was done in-person or via Skype. To ensure the participants ethical protection, the

participants were informed of the general purpose of the study as well as being informed

that they had the option to withdraw at any point. Those participants who meet the

requirements were scheduled for an interview.

Data collection. Once contact with the participants had been established, a time

and place was agreed upon for data collection. Before the start of the interview, potential

participants were provided with the definition of great coaching and asked if they had

experienced this during their athletic participation. Those that had experienced great

coaching were asked to participate in the study and complete a face-to-face or Skype in-

depth interview. Prior to beginning the interview, participants were required to complete

a consent form (see Appendix A). Participants who met the criteria participated in face-

to-face in depth interviews. The primary researcher began the interview with the

following open-ended question: "When you think of your experiences with great

coaching, what stands out for you?" The flow of the conversation was lead by the

participant with facilitative guidance from the researcher (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The

interviewer assisted in focusing the co-participant on themes that emerged and offered

follow-up questions to gain a more in-depth understanding of this particular experience

(Dale, 1996). The opening question focused attention on gathering data that led to a

textual and structural description of the participants' experiences, and ultimately provided

an understanding of the common experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013). As stated by Thomas and Pollio (2002) the participant were the one explaining the experience and only the use of follow-up questions were asked based off what was said to gain clarification to previous answers. At the end of the interview process, the researcher asked the participant if they had anything to add to their experience, making sure that nothing was overlooked. Ostensibly, the conclusion of every interview provided the participant time to express anything else they want to share in regards to their experience.

The interviews were ultimately conducted in locations that were convenient and comfortable for the participants. In order to ensure confidentiality of each participant, a pseudonym was used to protect any identifiable details. Any published results of the research will refer to the pseudonym and no real names will be used. Only the researcher will know the identity of the participants. Each interview was digitally recorded and later transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The audio has no identifiable information. Any other information that could possibly be used to identify the participants was changed from the transcripts. This process was done to help preserve the confidentiality of the participants and thus their responses. All interviews were stored on a password-protected computer and a hard copy will be locked in a filing cabinet and maintained for 5 years and then destroyed. The audio from the interviews was permanently deleted from the recording device once they were uploaded to the computer. The transcripts were printed for analysis with the research group but the primary researcher collected all transcripts upon completion of analysis. Any notes were typed up and hard copies were destroyed. All of the precautions were in place to ensure confidentiality and thus the validity of the study.

Data analysis. After the interviews had been transcribed verbatim, analysis took place. The researcher, thesis chair, and the interpretative research group read the transcriptions of the interviews in order to get a sense of the whole experience (Dale, 1996). Participants were provided a copy of their transcription in order to give them an opportunity to add, remove, or change the data to make it clear. This process was necessary to show validity through the entire research process. They were asked to read over the transcription to make sure they are accurate depictions of what they said during the interview (Sparkes, 1998). All the participants were invited to look over the transcripts for "clarity and accuracy and to make any necessary alterations" (Sparkes, 1998, p. 371). The interpretive research group, composed of Barry University faculty and graduate students, aided with the analysis (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). All members of the interpretive group signed a third party confidentiality form (Appendix B) prior to involvement. The researcher was ultimately the only one who knew the identity of the participants. The research group was also able to assess whether the researcher's claims were confirmed or a result of imposing biases or opinions. The next step in this process involved the researcher, thesis chair who has expertise in phenomenology, and the research group to thoroughly examined each transcript to reveal themes within the interviews (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The researcher worked with the group in order to develop a thematic structure from the data collected from the interviews. During each of those sessions, the transcripts were read aloud and discussed for possible themes that emerged.

Developing/confirming thematic structure. During the process of reading over the transcripts, key statements or keywords were circled leading to a list of significant

meaning units. These meaning units painted a picture of how the athlete experienced the topic of great coaching. A meaning unit was "a statement made by an individual which is self-defining and self-delimitating in the expression of a single, recognizable aspect of the individual's experience" (Stones, 1988, p. 153). The next set with theses meaning units was to group them together into larger or similar meaning units called subthemes. Then the next step in the process was to form major themes. Both a textual description that tells what happened during and a structural description told the researcher how the athlete experienced the phenomenon. Lastly, a final passage that incorporated the structural and textual descriptions provided the essence of experiencing coaching excellence.

The analysis utilized the development of a thematic structure that included meaning units from the transcript and connecting those meaning units to develop sub-themes and finally major themes. The final thematic structure was represented in a diagram that "depicts the themes and their relationship" (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 38). The final part of the data analysis was to receive feedback from the participants over the thematic structure and to critique whether the analysis reflected their personal experiences (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). This process was to help to validate the findings and whether or not it represents the personal experience they went through (Dale, 1996; Nesti, 2004).

Validity and reliability are always a consideration when doing a qualitative study. The use of the participants' own language to describe the dialogue and themes was beneficial in ensuring that the study performed was valid. In order to adhere to the phenomenological method, the researcher used an adequate sample of participants to gain

the knowledge, and to interview all the participants as much as needed until saturation of

data was achieved (Frankel 1999; Meadows & Morse, 2001). This process was identical

for each participant to ensure reliability between each athletes interview.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Participants

Table 1. Description of Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Sport Type	Division	Age
Mike	Male	Golf	DI	20
George	Male	Golf	DI	20
Max	Male	Golf	DI	23
Ben	Male	Golf	DI	21
Alex	Male	Golf	DI	20
Dirk	Male	Golf	DI	22
Eric	Male	Tennis	DIII	20
Alexa	Female	Golf	DI	22
Brenda	Female	Track and Field	DI	24
Lauren	Female	Golf	DI	18
Dale	Female	Golf	DI	20
Laurie	Female	Golf	DI	21
Amanda	Female	Golf	DI	20
Corey	Female	Tennis	DIII	20
Marissa	Female	Swimmer	DIII	27
	(F= 8, M= 7)		(DI: 12, DIII: 3)	(M=21.2, SD= 2.1)

The primary purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the

individual athletes' experiences of great coaching. In order to achieve this goal, 15 in-

depth interviews were conducted with current and former individual collegiate athletes of

both genders (see Table 1). The participants ranged between the ages of 18 to 27 and

included athletes from golf, tennis, swimming, and track and field. There were 15 total

participants in this study (female = 8, male = 7). An analysis of the transcripts disclosed a

total of 896 meaning units that were further grouped into sub-themes and overall themes.

This lead to the development of a thematic structure (see Figure 2) revealing five major

dimensions that these athletes characterized as their experience of great coaching:

Credibility, *Player's Coach*, *Personality*, *Goals* and *Atmosphere*.
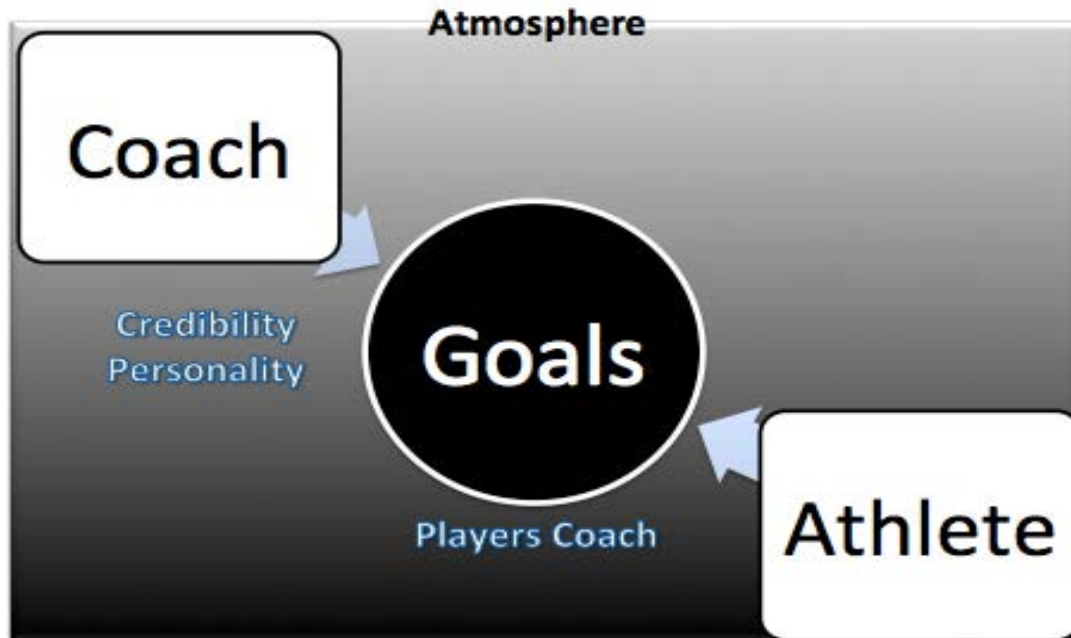
Figure 2. Major Themes of the Individual Athletes' Experiences of Great Coaching

    Credibility and being a *Player's Coach* were expressed by the athletes as the most prominent aspects of their experiences with great coaches. Ultimately, the *Atmosphere* in which these athletes experienced greatness was mediated by the *Personality* and the *Goals* of both the coach and the player. As such, these dimensions had an effect on the athletes' experience of great coaching. In the upcoming sections, these major dimensions and their respective sub-themes will be discussed in detail (see Table 1-6.). In addition, specific comments supporting each theme will be provided. The pseudonym and sport type written after each quote will indicate the participant who provided the statement from the interview transcripts.

Credibility

    Credibility emerged as one of the major dimensions that represented the individual sport athletes' experience of great coaching (see Table 2). This dimension encompassed the participant's descriptions of their coach's qualifications and ability to

give appropriate advice. The dimension of credibility is comprised of three sub-themes:

experience, *knowledge,* and *feedback*. The general theme of knowledge encompasses life

knowledge and sport knowledge while feedback also included instructional feedback and

motivational feedback.

Table 2. Sub-Themes and Meaning Units for the Major Theme of Credibility

Major Theme	Sub-Themes	Meaning Unit
Credibility	Experience	Educated
		Been through it all
		Goes about the game differently
		Is a constant professional
		Experience with playing
		Has a good reputation
		The more experience the better it makes them
		Shows you a different way to approach the game from his experience
		Thinks like a player because she was a player
		Played at the highest level
	Knowledge	I can teach you
		Knows how to think like a player
		Lives how he wants his players to live
		I can make you better
		Trust in their understanding
		Teaches you game management skills
		Knows to live a successful life
		Able to adapt in every situation
	Feedback	Positive feedback
		Complimentary
		Confidence booster
		Specific
		Instructional feedback
		Back and forth type of communication
		Great advice giver
		Works on technique
		Gives tips or critiques
		Notices the positives and acknowledges what isn't working
		I took in everything he had to tell me
		Positive reinforcement

Experience. The main theme of this study dealt with the idea of credibility. Within this theme, *experience* or the coach's background played a major role in this idea of great coaching. For the most part, athletes described their coaches as veteran or very experienced within their respective sports. These highly respected coaches established reputations and, as a result, received automatic respect from their players. When the coach has a foundation for greatness it attracts players. "His past is a main reason why I came here. He's a legend" (Mike, Golf)was the sentiment expressed by one athlete explaining his reasons for coming to that institution. One athlete listed specific past experiences such as:

> Just the level of what they've accomplished. Just playing in 6 PGA
>
> Championships and a U.S. Open. You have to respect that; he has that
>
> credibility where you can go to a recruit and tell them this is what I've
>
> done and not brag but say I have the experience (Mike, Golf).

A majority of the players interviewed talked about how the experience of the coach played a major factor in the expectation and perception of great coaching. The sense that you can "learn from their experience has taught me how to apply them to my own" (George, Golf). This allows the athletes to grasp their knowledge and transfer it to their own experiences..

Within sport experience, life experience was placed as a minor suggestion for great coaching. One athlete alluded to the idea that experience wasn't the deciding factor for how she characterized great coaching. "I think experience is important and not like coaching experience is important, which obviously it is because you deal with different people, but I think life experiences for coaches are just as important" (Brenda, Track and

Field). Her need for life experiences was further echoed by the idea that these life experiences in and out of the sport are essential for great coaching. Many of the athletes interviewed also spoke about the idea that these coaches had the experience of playing at a similar or higher level. "It's really valuable when a coach has experience playing at the same level that you are at. They're able to relate to what situation you're in and you're able to listen to their advice for your game" (Corey, Tennis). Drawing from their own playing days, great coaches appear to have an idea of what their players are experiencing, which further contributes to their level of understanding of the athletes' life in and outside of sport.

   Knowledge. Within the theme of credibility, *knowledge* of the sport played a major role in athletes' experiences of great coaching. The knowledge of the sport and life were apparent in great coaches but were discussed as one. When examining knowledge on the whole, this is the science of great coaching. The coach must impart the knowledge that they have gained over their years of competition into their athletes in order for the coach to be considered a great by the athletes interviewed. They must have the "I can teach you. I can make you better type of mentality" (Mike, Golf) in order for their athletes to whole-heartedly take in their knowledge and accept them as a great coach. Many of the athletes spoke about how "a great coach knows how to tell them how it is. He knows how to think like a player, so you listen" (Max, Golf). His or her experience and thus knowledge was something in which they felt was important to note. Other athletes spoke about how a great coach was also always trying to learn and sharpen their tools of teaching. "Coach is always learning and trying to be more of a mentor to us. Whether it is on the court or off, he is someone to look up to" (Eric, Tennis). Wealth of

knowledge is fundamental for coaches but is always in flux and thus needs to be continuously strengthened in order to be a great coach.

When considering the knowledge factor, many of the athletes mentioned that a great coach portrayed this type of experience in a fashion that was user friendly. "Without bragging, she kind of has the mentality that I can teach you. I can make you better" (Lauren, Golf). This type of mentorship can sometimes be taken as an undermining of their abilities. The ability to hand down their knowledge in a non-judgmental manner is a critical aspect of this subtheme.

Feedback. The notion of *feedback* became apparent as a critical factor in understanding great coaching. Feedback as a more general idea is the art of coaching. A great coach gives advice or dispenses his or her knowledge of the game in unique ways and how that coach reacts to the athlete provides critical feedback to the competitor. This can be through in depth analyses of a motion or skill, motivational feedback or philosophical feedback.

A majority of the athletes spoke about how great coaches spend time helping them analyze their technique. One athlete mentioned, in the context of swing analysis [golf] that "a great coach is someone who gets you to do things that you don't really want to do. By getting you to do things that you never thought would help, but somehow they always do" (Mike, Golf). The idea that a mechanical change could be accomplished that the athlete previously believed was unattainable truly changed not only his swing, but also his respect for the greatness of that coach. Similarly, other athletes spoke about how "a great coach is somebody who knows the game well enough that they can pick out what

you can do better or what you're doing poorly" (Corey, Tennis). The feedback given to the athlete was an essential aspect to great coaching.

Others interviewees, however, felt a technique change wasn't the major reason for why the coach was considered great. "He showed me a different way to approach the game instead of just working on swing mechanics. He showed me how to focus on and off the court" (Eric, Tennis). This type of philosophical life feedback was what she felt was paramount in a great coach.

Along those lines, motivational feedback was also seen as a key determiner in great coaching.

> Someone who is able to give positive feedback as well as instructional feedback because they know who you are, they know your personality. They know when to be tough on you, when to push you and when to kind of back off and give you your space (Brenda, Track and Field).

This form of motivational or positive feedback was also echoed by a majority of the athletes interviewed. For example,

> It was the encouragement on the really good ones. That was really important. I can say that for myself, wow that was really good but when you hear someone else say it at the same time it's even better (Dale, Golf).

The subtheme of feedback, whether motivational, philosophical, or analytical, was seen as a general theme purely because of its importance in which the athletes approached the game.

Overall, the credibility of the coach was seen as a critical element when asked about the experience of great coaching. Whether it is the real life experience of the

coach, the knowledge gained from those experiences, or the ability to give correct feedback, a great coach must have an extensive background in order to be considered a great coach.

Player's Coach

Player's Coach emerged as one of the major themes that represented the individual athletes experience of great coaching (see Table 3). This theme encompassed the participants' description of their coaches' style in which they taught. The theme of *Player's Coach* was comprised of two sub-themes: *individualization* and *commitment*. Under the umbrella of commitment, a family-like support was also seen as a part of the type of environment that great coaches nurture.

Table 3. Sub-Themes and Meaning Units for the Major Theme of Credibility

Major Theme	Sub-Themes	Meaning Units
Player's Coach	Individualization	Focuses on the individual
		Knew my learning style
		Never gave up on me as a player
		Focuses on your needs
		Knows my history, my childhood
		Already knows what I'm good at
		Stressed self improvement
		Believes in you
		The game is centered around you
		Stresses individual needs
		Treats each player as an individual
		Realizes the power of the individual
		Pushes you to be a better player
	Commitment	Supportive
		100% committed to you
		Cares about me as a person and committed to my success
		Always behind you
		Believes in your ability
		Has team dinners
		Deeper relationship
		Father-like
		Family atmosphere
		Parent
		Never felt closer to someone who is not my family
		Not only a parent figure but also a friend
		Second dad

Individualization. Athletes discussed the theme of *individualization* in abundance. This was by far the most repeated theme by virtually every athlete interviewed. Athletes discussed how their coaches established a culture that was conducive to a one-on-one type of mentality and treatment. Great coaches not only invest time into the individual, but also nurture the skills of the athlete. One of the athletes interviewed spoke about how a great coach "has a mindset that was like what do each of you individually need to work on this morning, this afternoon, this evening"

(Dirk, Golf). This type of mentality seemed critical to the relationship between athlete and coach in individual sports.

Another aspect of this relationship was allowing for and respecting different personalities. A great coach was shown as someone who can accommodate the different type of people who are a part of the team. One athlete stated:

> I think in terms of reacting to my needs, each person is their own
>
> individual and it makes you feel comfortable when someone kind of caters
>
> to you but is able to nurture you in the right way that is specific to your
>
> personality (Dale, Golf).

This type of catering was also seen in many other athletes interviewed. Another athlete interviewed, Mike, spoke about how a great coach motivated in a specific manner that helped individually. "Coach got to know me and how I was motivated in order to push me to your limits" (Mike, Golf). This type of individual connection was a differentiator in distinguishing a good from a great coach throughout the saturation of interviews. Along those lines, a great coach was seen as one who would spend the time and energy on that one individual. "She got to know what I needed and she made it seem like that was more important then what she had to do. Whether it was video tape or training, she was invested in me" (Amanda, Golf).

The final aspect of individuality that was found through the interviews was the notion that these great coaches knew their athlete's past.

> He knows about my history, my childhood. You know, things that not
>
> everyone else knows just because its not something I televise but it's the

fact that he's taken the time to ask the questions and find out more about

me so that he can have that relationship with me (Ben, Golf).

The athlete was portraying the individual dedication that was shown by this great coach to know him on a deeper level; a relationship beyond the sport that created their original connection. This type of individuality goes above and beyond the call of a normal coach, which is why this is essential for a great coach. In order for a coach to be considered great, they must exhibit an abundance of individual connection with the athlete.

Commitment. The second aspect of being a player's coach was the sub-theme of commitment to supporting each athlete. This commitment is essential to not only being a great coach, but its also critical to a successful relationship between coach and athlete. One athlete noted that just knowing "he'll always back you on anything. 100% committed" (Mike, Golf) was what he characterized as a great coach. Another athlete noted that a successful coach is one "who's behind me and talking me through step by step. That's how he shows he's committed to my progress" (Alex, Golf). The commitment displayed by this coach was shown by the time spent on the process of learning. Commitment to the individual was discussed as an essential aspect of great coaching.

Commitment towards the individual extends beyond the sport as well. Many of the athletes spoke about how a great coach is also committed to their success beyond their specific sport. "Coach wants to know how you're doing outside of golf. He's not just being a coach on the field but also in life" (Mike, Golf). This form of commitment was shown as a fundamental aspect of what these athletes saw as great coaching.

Within the umbrella of commitment, a family-like trait was shown throughout the saturation of interviews as a critical aspect of great coaching. Many of the athletes looked at their coaches as more then just a coach and related them to more of a parent. "A great coach is almost like a parent. They are nurturing and care about your success in and outside the sport" (Brenda, Track and Field). Another athlete spoke about how this great coach was "like my second Dad" (Laurie, Golf). This parent like figure was also looked towards for advice on non-sport related topics as well. "I know that I can always go to him for anything, golf or non-golf related. I've never felt closer to someone who's not family related than I feel with him" (George, Golf). By creating this bond with your athletes, great coaches are ultimately showing their strong commitment towards them.

Personality

The *personality* characteristics of the great coach were developed as a major theme throughout the saturation of interviews (see Table 4). This dimension encompassed the participant's descriptions of their coaches' qualities and personal skills necessary to be considered a great coach. The dimension of personality was broken down into two sub-themes to fully describe traits necessary to be considered a great coach: *leadership skills* and *people skills*.

Table 4. Sub-Themes and Meaning Units for the Major Theme of Personality

Major Theme	Sub-Theme	Meaning Units
Personality	Leadership Skills	Creative
		Able to inspire the player
		Leads by example
		Role model
		Strong minded
		Type "A" personality
		Creates structure
		Go, go
		Hard working
		Able to handle emotions
		No I in team
		Motivator
		Tough coach
		Able to put a team together
		Unity
		It kind of rubs off on you
	People Skills	Even keel
		Calm under pressure
		Trust
		Love
		Sincerity
		Humility
		Open
		Encouraging
		Gives off good energy
		Approachable
		Honesty
		Respects my time and values
		Quickly develop trust in each other
		I trust his instincts

Leadership Skills. Under the main theme of personality, *leadership skills* were

seen as the most critical to the experience of great coaching. Some athletes spoke about

how a great coach must be stern, disciplined, or inspirational. These leadership skills

were seen as fundamental. One athlete spoke about how a great coach must be "very

hard working. They kind of had a type A personality and are very much a go, go type of

person" (Mike, Golf). This participant felt that this specific personality type was critical

to the success achieved by this great coach. This type of personality was also seen in other participants. "I have found that a very hard working, type A coach makes you play harder. Makes you work harder then you ever would. It kind of just rubs off on you" (Marissa, Swimmer). Similarly, another participant felt that a great coach is "a natural leader and you can't help but follow" (Lauren, Golf). This leadership skill is fundamental to the success of a great coach according to the athletes interviewed.

Another aspect of leadership skills that was shown as essential to great coaching was creating a balance between sport and life. This form of leadership was shown as not only essential to the coach but also to the players' success. The sentiment that the athlete looks to this great coach for direction and leadership was seen throughout the interviews.

I struggled with just balancing school and golf, my grades and my social life and I was pretty much spread thin. So he just helped me, sort of sat me down, talked to me, asked me what was going through my head. From then on, I turned it around and was able to find the perfect balance for me without losing an edge on something (Ben, Golf).

This athlete looked to a great coach for leadership skills necessary not merely for the participant's sporting career, but in life. This type of leadership skill was also seen in other athletes interviewed. Another athlete spoke about how their leadership skills transferred over into their school life. "Coach had a way to telling us how what we were doing was going to help us down the line" (George, Golf). The leadership skills presented by great coaches transcend sport.

The final aspect of leadership skills that was seen throughout the interview process was the ability to unite the team. The formation of the team into a unit, even if it is an individual sport, was seen as an essential aspect of great coaching.

> A good coach knows how to take all the pieces of the team and all the different player's backgrounds and experiences and skill levels and strengths and knows how to unify them into one unit (Dirk, Golf).

> This form of leadership for this athlete was critical aspect of what should be considered a great coach. Other athletes interviewed spoke about how unifying a team around a common goal or standard of excellence was a determining factor when considering a great coach. "Another thing that makes a great coach is definitely a standard of excellence that they hold their players to whether or not the player appreciates it" (Dirk, Golf). This leadership skill was what brought the group of individuals together.

People Skills. The second part of the personality of a great coach is the soft skill also known as *people skills*. These traits are love, trust, or sincerity. One athlete talked about how,

> A great coach is personable. You don't want a coach who you cant go to talk to or you're scared to ask a question. You need someone who you can trust, feel comfortable around, so you can approach them and know that you're not going to be scared to get advice from (Ben, Golf).

This athlete felt a great coach is one that is able to make their players have a level of comfort that allows them to talk not only about the sport, but also about anything that may be affecting the athlete. "I can talk to coach about anything. I trust his instincts and he is just a caring person" (Marissa, Swimmer).

Trust was another aspect of people skills that many athletes spoke about. "With a great coach you quickly develop trust in each other" (Amanda, Golf). The level of trust was expressed as an essential ingredient of great coaching in many other athletes' interviews. With trust comes the instinct to take in everything that they tell you about your motion and also with life skills. "He was a coach on the course but also in life" (Mike, Golf).

The final aspect of people skills that a majority of the athletes talked about was respect for each other. In order for a coach to be considered a great coach, the athletes said that a level of respect between the two must be exhibited. One athlete spoke about how her great coach "obviously respects my time, my family and my values" (Alexa, Golf).

Goals

The mediating factor between the player and the coach are thus their *goals*. The major theme of goals was found through the saturation of interviews. The goals of both the coach and the athlete were seen as how the interactions were structured. The athlete's descriptions were formulated and the subthemes of both the *player's goals* and the *facilitation of those goals* were created (see Table 5).

Table 5. Sub-Themes and Meaning Units for the Major Theme of Goals

Major Theme	Sub-Themes	Meaning Units
Goals	Player's Goals	My goals became his goals
		Never questioned by goals
		Helps me reach my goals
		The coaches that make the biggest impact want me to reach my goals
		Helped me make my dream come true
		He knew exactly what I wanted to achieve
	Facilitate Goals	Very goal oriented
		Helped me make my goal something I can work towards
		Very helpful in the process of reaching goals
		Emphasized growth in the process
		Preparation
		Has a vision
		Committed to the daily grind
		Keeps you focused and on track
		Set up practices to help reach my goals

Player's Goals. "My goals became his goals" (Corey, Tennis). This reaction was seen as essential for what is considered a great coach. Within the larger theme of goals, the *player's goals* were seen as the main factor for how coaches structured their practices. One of the athletes spoke about this situation. Many athletes spoke about how reaching their personal goal was how they evaluated great coaches. "When I was able to reach my goal, even if I didn't think I could do it, my self efficacy like went sky high" (Brenda, Track and Field). When she was able to reach her goals, the belief in her own ability went up. Similarly, George spoke about how his coach would use is goals to motivate him. His great coach would "figure out my goals, how to motivate me, and use positive reinforcement. It's important to figure how out the individual athlete and the team as a whole are specifically motivated" (George, Golf). The use of motivation, in this instance, is what drives the athlete towards their goals.

Another aspect of a player's goals is a coach who knows the player's objectives in and outside the sport. "A coach who knows your goals both on and off the track… He knew exactly what I wanted to achieve" (Brenda, Track and Field). While another athlete spoke about a similar notion that his coach "never questioned my goals. That's the thing I appreciated the most and I felt made a great coach" (Eric, Tennis).

Facilitate Goals. The other sub-theme that surrounded the greater theme of goals is the facilitation of those goals. Many of the athletes spoke about how a great coach is "very goal oriented. [A great coach] would set up practices so we could reach our goals. That was really helpful in helping me progress" (Amanda, Golf). Having a goal-oriented mentality was of high importance and would ultimately help facilitate the goals of the athlete. "Making it possible to reach our goal is what makes a great coach" (Amanda, Golf). The daily grind in practice was how another athlete, Dirk, spoke about what made a great coach. "We can work on numbers, but what work are you putting in on a daily basis to reach our goals. Coach would help us get there" (Dirk, Golf). This day-to-day grind to achieve their goals is what was seen as a characteristic of a great coach.

The athletes in this study spoke about how the personal goals that they had became upmost of importance with their great coach. One participant spoke about how her great coach "would push [her] in practice by setting up drills so that we could be able to reach our goals… It made is more realistic and emphasized growth in the process" (Brenda, Track and Field). Setting up practices that would allow for each athlete to reach their goals was seen as critical for their success and would help facilitate the goals they had for themselves.

Similarly, athletes spoke about how a great coach would see the goal or potential of the athlete and fashion a way in which they could ultimately reach them. George spoke about how his great coach "saw my potential and helped set up practice to help me reach my goals. I guess the way that they helped me is that they made my dream become a goal that I can work towards" (George, Golf). Another athlete spoke about the same idea. Her great coach "would push us in practice by setting up drills so that we could be able to reach our goals… It made is more realistic and emphasized growth in the process" (Brenda, Track and Field). By combining the efforts of the coach and the drive of the athlete, both parties would be able to reach their goals. Also, by promoting a goal-oriented mentality to the athletes, great coaches would fulfill the goals for the team. "A great coach focuses on the day-to-day items. He will keep you on track with your process and goals" (Dirk, Golf). The day-to-day grind is exactly what coaches want out of their players. By prompting this type of mentality, the coach is facilitating the goals of the athlete.

Atmosphere

The environment or *atmosphere* in which the athletes participated in developed into a major theme throughout the interviews. The atmosphere was defined as the overall context in which all of the actions or interactions between the coach and athlete seemed to occur. The athletes' descriptions were based around the idea that great coaches created a *fun* and *passionate* atmosphere (see Table 6).

Table 6. Sub-Themes and Meaning Units for the Major Theme of Atmosphere

Major Theme	Sub-Themes	Meaning Units
Atmosphere	Fun	Making the sport fun
		Wants us to have fun
		Helps makes the sport more enjoyable
		Instills good work habits while making it fun
		Out there for the fun of it
		Joking around
		Makes it easy to be ourselves
		Fun, like a kid again
		Talks smack
		Keeps it fun
		Creates a light atmosphere
		Delivery
	Passion	Has passion in what they do
		They don't time their lessons
		Keeping passion for the sports
		Made me fall in love with it, which made me better
		Passionate about your success
		Passion for teaching and caring about your students
		Spends time after practice

Fun. Under atmosphere, almost every athlete spoke about how great coaches somehow create a *fun* environment. "We always worked hard, but he made it seem fun" (Amanda, Golf). This sentiment was echoed by many of the athletes interviewed. It seemed as though a few looked at this fun atmosphere as something that reminded them of their past.

Keeping the game fun is very important. We do a lot of competitions because you can't just come in and practice for five hours. That's how I grew up as well. Incorporating a lot of games keeps it fresh and fun (Mike, Golf).

The idea that when they were kids, and just enjoyed the game for the fun of it seemed to play a major role in how they viewed great coaching. "When I'm having fun, like when I'm playing competitive with my coach out there, it just makes me feel like a little kid again" (Alexa, Golf). Many of the athletes spoke about great coaching experiences they had when they were in fact kids and the coach kept things light and fun. This athlete in particular spoke about her childhood coach and said, "He joked around with me. When he joked around, it kind of just made it more fun" (Laurie, Golf). This fun environment for other athletes is imperative to their success,

> I need to have fun out there because that's why I love this game. I'm out
>
> there for the fun of it. Not for anything else other than playing a good
>
> round of golf and to have fun with my teammates (Dale, Golf).

With this type of atmosphere, it was not surprising that athletes experienced success under this kind of great coach as this environment allowed the athlete to feel comfortable as well as succeed.

Passion. The subtheme of *passion* for the individual also seemed to emerge from the interviews. Athletes spoke about how their great coaches showed a passion for not only their success but also the team as a whole. "I feel it requires skill to be a great coach but also passion for teaching and caring about your student's success" (George, Golf). Also, the idea that the coach was passionate about the teams' success was prevalent throughout the interviews. "She was a coach that would dedicate 90% of her life to this team. You know when she's putting that much effort, you feel like you should too" (Alexa, Golf). Along those lines, the passion displayed by the coach is transferred to the player. One athlete said "his passion for the sport showed in my attitude. I saw myself

becoming stronger, smart with everything that I do because he has that type of mentality" (Ben, Golf). This type of energy transference is critical for the success of the individual.

The notion that great coaches are fully dedicated to the success of the team isn't a far-fetched idea. But when it comes to lessons or individual time, many coaches aren't always so flexible. Many of the interviews referenced that great coaches are always available and aren't time sensitive. "Great coaches don't time their lessons. They stayed with me until I got what they were trying to get through to me" (George, Golf). When great coaches puts in a little extra effort into their athletes, it always seemed to pay off. "He was very demanding, but yet we all appreciated it when the season was over" (Marissa, Swimmer).

Passion is extremely important for a great coach to have for their athletes and the sport in which they teach. This type of environment is critical for the success of the athlete and the coach as a whole.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Great coaches are in the unique position to have a remarkable impact on the athletes who accept their direction. This impact is seen to not be limited to the heat of battle, but can also play a role in their daily lives. To determine what makes some coaches more effective than others, previous research examined topics such as sport coaching (expert vs. novice, coaching education, etc.) (Gilbert & Trudel, 1999; Lynch & Mallett, 2006; Schinke, Bloom, & Salmela, 1995), leadership (trait, behavioral, situational, transformational, and cognitive meditational) (Burns, 1978; House, 1971; Posner, 1999; Smoll & Smith, 1989), and the coach-athlete relationship (Chelladuri, Haggerty, & Baxter, 1989; Gilbert & Trudel, 1999; Mitchell, Oslin & Griffin, 2005). To date, most studies about coaching have relied on the notion that a win-loss record was the ultimate deciding factor in determining great coaching. In the present study, the attempt was to expand on previous research (Becker, 2009) by examining individual sport athletes' experiences of great coaching. By focusing on the individual athlete rather then a team sport athlete, this research provides a framework for great coaching that is sport specific.

Major Findings

The results of the in-depth phenomenological interviews with 15 current and former individual collegiate sport athletes revealed five major themes representing the essence of great coaching: *Credibility, Player's Coach, Personality, Goals,* and *Atmosphere*. The interaction between the themes can help explain the experience of great coaching from strictly the athletes' perspective. The athletes in this study gave their

interpretation of what factors represent a great coach and the results portray their experience.

Credibility. The athletes in this study stressed the need to have a credible coach that had both the experience and the ability to give pertinent feedback. The necessity of the great coach to have an in-depth knowledge of the sport as a player was stressed throughout the interviews. Well over three quarters of the athletes interviewed spoke about how in order for a coach to be considered great they must not only have the knowledge but also the experience to back it up. Credibility involves the coaches' past history with the sport as well as the knowledge that comes with that experience. This was stressed as being a critical aspect to a great individual sport coach.

Player's Coach. Another dimension that was critical to the greatness of the coach was their ability to be a "player's coach". This encompassed the need to be treated as an individual and having their coach committed to them and supportive of their decisions, as almost a parent would mentor a child. This differentiates itself from the notion of a system. In team sports, many of the successful coaches preach a system in which each player falls into a certain category. With individual sports, it was found that treating each player as a separate piece of the puzzle was what made a great individual sport coach.

Personality. The personality of the coach also played an important factor is how the athlete experienced great coaching. The first dimension of personality, leadership skills, plays an important role in the molding of the athlete. The creativity, motivation, and hard working characteristics that the great coach represents are then transferred into the athlete. The other aspect of personality is people skills. These are characteristics that help mold the person. The coach being even keel, trustworthy, and encouraging help

create not only the athlete, but also the person as a whole. It is the ultimate goal of the coach to ensure the athlete is well rounded and able to be a successful human being.

Goals. Another significant finding that emerged from this study was the interaction between player and coach facilitating of their goals. The athletes expressed the notion that the goals they aspired to achieve became the goals of and were shared by the coach. This finding is significant because the individual athlete has goals that they feel they can achieve and it is the job of the coach to help them reach theses goals. The interaction between the two was seen as an influential aspect of the individual athletes experience of great coaching.

Atmosphere. The final dimension of this study that was significant was the environment or atmosphere in which the great coach would teach within. The environment created by the great coach is one that was described as fun and passionate. By encouraging a fun yet passionate atmosphere, the coach is able to get the most out of their athletes.

Connections with Previous Research

The main connections from this study can be related to Becker's (2009) study on team sport athletes' experiences of great coaching. Her findings included coach attributes, the environment, relationships, the system, coaching actions, and influences. These six major dimensions of great coaching were very similar to the findings of this study. The similarities came in the categories of coach attributes (personality), the environment (atmosphere), and relationships (player's coach). These similarities were seen on a deeper level in personality characteristics (genuine, honesty, and motivational) and a fun yet structured atmosphere. While there were many similarities, the major

difference did come in the idea of the system as well as a communication factor. In her study, the primary focus was to look at team sport athletes. In this arena, a system is in integral part of how the team functions as a unit (Aghazadeh & Kyei, 2009). When looking at individual sports, it isn't as important to have a cohesive unit as much as having each player reach their full potential. As such, a majority of the athletes interviewed discussed how individualization was a critical aspect of what they considered a great coach. Another difference that was seen between studies was seen in the communication factor between coach and athlete. In Becker's (2009) study, communication was found throughout multiple subthemes. In the current study, this wasn't seen as a major theme or mentioned enough to be considered a meaning unit. The reason for the lack of communication may be seen because of the differences between individual and team sport athletes. These major differences can be a defining factor for how coaching strategies and behaviors diverge in each sporting arena.

Within the domain of sport coaching, previous research stated that coaches are required to play so many different roles making this profession unlike any other (Paling, 2002). This sentiment was noted throughout the results of this study. Great coaches were found to be motivators, leaders, teachers, and a father figure to each of the athletes interviewed. Along those lines, coaches must exude self-confidence, provide accurate feedback, and be able to verbally persuade their followers (Bandura, 1997). This also was echoed in the findings of this study. The athletes interviewed talked about how great coaches are able to give them informational and motivational feedback and exude a type A, confident personality. The results of previous studies and literature on coaching were comparable to the conclusions reached in this study.

Other studies that provide a backdrop to the results found in this study are from the development of a definition of expert coaching. Gibbons, McConnell, Forster, Riewald, and Peterson (2003) vaguely defined an excellent coach as one who provides sport expertise, skills, and motivation. Each of those aspects of expert coaches were found within the results of the current study. The athletes noted that a coach with sport expertise or knowledge, experience within the sport, and the use of positive reinforcement were all critical aspects of great coaching.

Another piece of research that helps support the current results was centered on the idea of a player-centered approach to coaching. A player-centered approach (PCA) is a coaching style whereby the coach supports player autonomy by applying various strategies. A PCA is about developing better people, not just better players (Kidman, 2001). This type of coaching was by far the most talked about idea from the current study. The athletes interviewed talked about how a great coach individualized their coaching style to match their personalities. The player-centered approach gave the player the autonomy to choose what they felt was an important aspect to work on to reach their goals, which in a sense is individualization at its core. The autonomy given to the player from the coach is how they would tailor their coaching style to match their specific needs.

Previous research that was also influential in the current study was the cognitive-mediational model of leadership (Smoll & Smith, 1989). This model stated that the athletes' perception of coaching behaviors plays a role in their evaluation of coaches. This model helps explain how athletes perceive what they believe as great coaching. Many of the athletes interviewed spoke about how great coaches gave positive reinforcement and were committed to their success. This was exactly what the model

was attempting to portray. This model of leadership attempts to combine "cognitive process and individual differences which mediate relationships between antecedents, leader behaviors and outcomes" (Smoll & Smith, 1989, p. 1532) The outcome of the current study showed that the coach must individualize their attention in order to reach the optimal result. When coaches individualize, show passion and commitment towards their athlete, the situation in which the athlete practices and competes in will be positive. This model helps explain helps explain that when an athlete interprets this type of relationship, their evaluation will be one that is cohesive. Thus, the athletes' perception of the coaching behaviors would be positive because of the attention and support that was given by the coach.

This study directly relates and supports the findings of this study with the notion that athletes' perceptions of their coach's effect their evaluation of their greatness. When athletes' perceive their coach as being one that can be effective through contextual circumstances such as being fun or passionate, their evaluation is that of greatness. When a coach incorporates environmental factors that reinforce positivity and are committed to their success, the coach would be considered great. These situational factors, as well as the athletes' evaluations, are the foundation to the cognitive mediational model.

Another approach to leadership that was influential in this study was the trait approach (Bass, 1981; Stogdill, 1948; Yukl, 1994). The trait approach is centered on the idea that some individuals have traits or skills that ultimately make them leaders. It was believed that these skills thus make them more effective in a leadership position (Yukl, 1994). Stogdill (1948) concluded that, in comparison to the average members in the group, a leader possessed above-average intelligence, dependability, social participation,

and socio-economic status. While the athletes interviewed may have not stated those specific traits, many traits such as caring, passionate, dependable, and honest were noted as ones that encompassed a great coach.

Previous research also has looked at the influence of coaching efficacy and how that influences player performance (Horn, 2002; Meyer, Wolfe, & Feltz, 2005). The results of this study generally suggest that coaches' belief in themselves didn't play a role in the experience of great coaching. But a coach's belief in their players did play a role. When a coach showed genuine interest in life and performance goals of the athlete, it did play a role in how they perceived great coaching. A review of literature from Becker (2009) revealed that only a handful of studies have addressed coach personality over the past four decades (Cheng & Wu, 1987; Frederick & Morrison, 1999; Hendry, 1969). A common personality profile does not exist for great coaching (Hendry, 1969). However, from the study, athletes perceived great coaches as having an honest, caring, and committed personality structure.

The final piece of previous research that has a connection to this study is the contingency model (Fiedler, 1967). This model is a situational model that predicts whether the leader is task or relationship oriented. Within the individual sport arena it was seen through this study that these athletes prefer people skills as well as the facilitation of their goals. Both task and relationship types of leaders were seen as critical to the success of individual sport athletes.

Practical Implications

The findings from this study have implications for coaches, sport psychology consultants (SPC), and coaching education. First, the results of this study suggest that

coaches who aspire to greatness continually improve themselves and overall knowledge of the sport that they are coaching. This idea was confirmed through this research and is an excellent standard for how a coach at any level should pursue greatness. Whether it is from their experience with the sport, research, or consulting with other coaches, it is critical for a continued education in the sport for them to be considered great.

The results also suggest that great coaches create an environment that is athlete centered and individualized. Having a coach of any sport become more individualized is a fundamental aspect of this study. While it may have primarily focused on the notion of a great individual sport coach, the idea that each player has their own personality and way of approaching the game should play a role in how they are coached. This approach to coaching is an important aspect when looking at coaching style as well. When a coach employs a player-centered approach (PCA) they allow for not only the autonomy of the player to show, but through that they are creating an individual plan for each player to succeed.

Finally, the results suggest that great coaches create a vision and corroborate with the player in order to reach the goals set by the player. This vision, while initiated by the coach, should incorporate the goals set by the player, especially in individual sports. It is critical that great coaches facilitate the goals of the athlete in order for each party to succeed. When looking at the larger picture, the goals of the athlete and the facilitation of the coach are critical to the success of the team as well as the individual. When the coach does not facilitate the goals of the athlete, the outcome will be ultimately be unsuccessful.

As a sport psychology consultant (SPC), it is important when working with coaches to emphasize the findings from this study. SPCs can use the information learned

from this study and implement it into their framework when working with coaches, especially those who work with individual sport athletes. The use of these specific findings should be emphasized when working with coaches:

- Individualization

- Player's goals

- Specific leadership skills such as hard working and unity

- Emphasizing instructional/motivational feedback

- Supporting autonomy

- Create a family-like environment

With these specific qualities that were found in this study, SPCs can formulate a game plan or training manual that can be implemented into their coaching philosophy.

Another aspect that is important to take into consideration is the amount of experience the coach has. The results from this study place a large amount of importance on the experience of the coach. Cote and Sedgewick (2003) deemed a coach worthy of the label of expert if they had a minimum of 10 years coaching experience in the sport. As an SPC, it is important to tailor the emphasis of each of these findings depending on whether or not the coach has experience or not. Often, beginner coaches work with SPCs as a way to build up their knowledge base and it is important to build a training manual that fits the needs of that coach.

Finally, the results of the study can provide useful information to enhance coaching education. Coaching education enhances teaching strategy, incorporating new techniques, as well as overall knowledge. One of the bigger elements established within this study was the notion of credibility. Coaching education not only enhances credibility,

but for novice coaches, it can start the foundation for their track to greatness. Within the literature review, a developing coach typically seeks the advice of others (Schinke, Bloom, and Salmela, 1995). This essential step in the path to elite coaching can incorporate the findings from this study.

Limitations and Future Directions

The limitations of this study include the understanding of the research question, the ability of the participant to fully verbalize their experience of great coaching, this being the first completed phenomenological study done by the primary researcher, and the makeup of the athletes interviewed (i.e., the participants consisted mostly of collegiate golfers). With regard to the first limitation, the interviewee may interpret the research question differently then as directed. In order words, their understanding of the experience of great coaching may only include what a great coach is, rather then the interactions between themselves and a great coach. The understanding of the research question could have been made clearer by rewording it to be more specific about a great coach or the great coach. A question such as "when you think about your experience with a great coach, what comes to mind." Further, participants could have been asked to direct their thinking to be more specific (i.e., focus on their current coach or one particular coach they thought was a great coach) rather than on the general topic of great coaching.

Another limitation may be the ability of the interviewee to verbalize their experience of great coaching. The ability to recall their specific experience and then have specific examples and instances where that coach exuded greatness could limit the data collected. Many of the athletes interviewed talked about a great coach they had when they were younger. The time difference from when they experienced great coaching

could have been the reason for the athletes' ability to recall specific examples with their great coach. Another important limitation was that this was the first completed phenomenological study performed by the primary researcher. Whether it is the interview or creating the thematic structure, the process of writing this form of study is extremely difficult.

Finally, the population interviewed consisted mainly of golfers in the collegiate arena. This limitation is twofold. First is the notion that golfers may have a specific culture in which great coaching is defined differently. Along those lines, a majority of the athletes interviewed came from a singular school. Thus the coaches in whom they described as great could have been the ones in which they were playing under currently. This is a limitation because the great coach in whom they highlighted were more then likely the same. Future studies can look at a broader range of individual sports as well as institutions. Second, each athlete interviewed participated in collegiate sports, thus they are still technically on a team playing in an individual sport. If professional athletes were interviewed, the results may have produced different findings. These examples could have limited the study and data collected.

The results of this study provide a foundation for additional research on coaching as a whole. The themes gathered from this study helped paint a picture; whether coaching for a team or individual sport, the differences aren't great. First, stemming from the limitation of interviewing collegiate individual sport athletes, other directions for research could be to examine the experience of great coaching from individual athletes at the professional, national, and international levels. The level and type of great coaching that they experience could help provide a more comprehensive framework for great

coaching as well as another perspective to coaching. Second, situational models of leadership suggest that the manner in which a coach leads (i.e., goal oriented versus relationship oriented) may be impacted by the situation. The athletes in the current study identified facilitation of goals and people skills as key elements of great coaching. Thus, future research could examine whether the situation impacts perceptions of great coaching and the specific elements of coaching needed in certain situations. A final future direction for research in this area would be to look at gender differences in the experience of great coaching. Though not specifically investigated in this study nor an aspect of the participants' experiences of great coaching, it was apparent from the interviews that females were more concerned with great coaches who portrayed more people skills, while males identified more leadership skills. Thus, future research can examine whether there are gender differences in athletes' perceptions of great coaching.

Conclusions

The athletes that contributed to this analysis of great coaching all participated in collegiate individual sports (golf, tennis, swimming, track). They described their experiences of great coaching from both a male and female perspective. The findings from this study support the notion that great coaching isn't based on a win loss record, but rather on the person. The results from the athletes showed that great coaching involves:

- Credibility based on experience;

- Individualization;

- A fun and passionate atmosphere in which athletes practice and hone their craft;

- A supportive and committed atmosphere;

- Lessons that transcend sport;

- A coach that is willing to continue to learn; and

- A role model.

The participants in this study helped define great coaching on the individual sports arena as one that can help maximize their potential. Ultimately, these athletes experienced coaches who were not only superior at what they did, but also great people. To the public, a great coach may only include a win loss record, but to the athletes who look up to them it is about everything else.

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Appendix A

INFORMED CONSENT

Your participation in a research project is requested. The title of the study is "Individual Sport Athletes' Experiences of Great Coaching". The research is being conducted by Andrew Solow, a student in the Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology program at Barry University, and is seeking information that will be useful in the field of Performance Psychology. The aims of the research are to attain in depth first-person accounts of the lived experience of great coaching excellence in an effort to understand the true nature of the experience.

In accordance with these aims, a detailed description of the issue will be sought through an interview, which will later be analyzed to draw meaning from your experiences. Should you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in one in depth interview at a time and location of your choice. During the interview you will be asked to describe in as much detail as possible your experiences of great coaching. I may occasionally ask follow-up questions to gain further clarification or to obtain additional details to previous comments. The interview should last approximately 30-90 minutes depending on the depth of your responses. I will digitally audio record the interview and then transcribe it (i.e., type it out on paper) for further analysis. The primary researcher will do all interviews and transcriptions. Once your interview has been transcribed, it will be returned to you either electronically or via mail as a hard copy. This will allow you to look at your transcript to be sure it accurately portrays what you were trying to say in your interview. You may choose to omit, add, or modify any part of the interview in order to provide a more accurate description of your experience. We anticipate the number of participants to be 15, depending upon data saturation.

Your consent to be a research participant is strictly voluntary and should you decline to participate, answer any questions, or should you choose to drop out at any time during the study, there will be no adverse effects to you. Also, there are no known risks to you presented through involvement in the study. Although, there are no direct benefits to you, your participation in this study may help our understanding of the experience of great coaching, as well as increase the depth of your own understanding of the issue through the exploration of your personal experiences.

As a research participant, information you provide will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Your signed consent forms will be kept in a locked filing cabinet in the primary researchers home, separate from the audio files and transcribed interviews. You will select a pseudonym (fake name) for this study, which I will substitute for your real name whenever you make comments that might identify you. Any published results of the research will refer to you by your pseudonym; no real names will be used in the study. All interview transcripts and audio files will be stored on a password-protected computer, maintained for 5 years and then destroyed. Any other information that could potentially be used to identify you or other participants will be changed or excluded from the transcripts. This is done to help preserve the confidentiality of your responses. I will only share your interview (not contact details or real name) with members of the research group assisting me in this study. Members of the research group will never have access to any materials, which might identify you. Each member of the research group will sign a third party consent form which states that they understand the obligation to maintain confidentiality and also agree to the terms listed in the third party consent form.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study or your participation in the study, you may contact me, Andrew Solow, at (847) 840-8737 or Andrew.Solow@mymail.barry.edu, my supervisor Dr. Lauren Tashman, at (305) 899-3721 or LTashman@barry.edu or the Institutional Review Board point of contact, Barbara Cook, at (305) 899-3020 or BCook@barry.edu. If you are satisfied with the information provided and are willing to participate in this research, please signify your consent by signing this consent form.

Voluntary Consent

I acknowledge that I have been informed of the nature and purposes of this experiment by Andrew Solow and that I have read and understand the information presented above, and that I have received a copy of this form for my records. I give my voluntary consent to participate in this experiment.

_____   _____   _____ _____
Signature of Participant   *Date*   *Signature of Researcher*   *Date*

Appendix B
Third Party Confidentiality Agreement

As a member of the research team investigating individual sport athletes' experiences of great coaching, I understand that I will have access to confidential information about study participants. By signing this statement, I am indicating my understanding of my obligation to maintain confidentiality and agree to the following:

- I understand that names and any other identifying information about study participants are completely confidential.

- I agree not to divulge, publish, or otherwise make known to unauthorized persons or to the public any information obtained in the course of this research project that could identify the persons who participated in the study.

- I understand that all information about study participants obtained or accessed by me in the course of my work is confidential. I agree not to divulge or otherwise make known to unauthorized persons any of this information unless specifically authorized to do so by office protocol or by a supervisor acting in response to applicable protocol or court order, or otherwise, as required by law.

- I understand that I am not to read information and records concerning study participants, or any other confidential documents, nor ask questions of study participants for my own personal information but only to the extent and for the purpose of performing my assigned duties on this research project.

- I understand that a breach of confidentiality may be grounds for disciplinary action, and may include termination of employment.

- I agree to notify my supervisor immediately should I become aware of an actual breach of confidentiality or situation, which could potentially result in a breach, whether this be on my part or on the part of another person.

_____   _____   _____
3rd Party Signature   Date   Printed Name

_____   _____   _____
Primary Researcher Signature   Date   Printed Name

Appendix C

Barry University
Informed Consent Form
For use with Skype

Your participation in a research project is requested. The title of the study is the Individual Athletes' Experience of Great Coaching. The research is being conducted by Andrew Solow, a student in the Movement Science department at Barry University, and is seeking information that will be useful in the field of Sports, Exercise, and Performance Psychology. The aims of the research are gather individual athletes perception of great coaching. In accordance with these aims, the following procedures will be used: After participant accepts the premise of the study, the research question will be asked followed by open ended questions. We anticipate the number of participants to be 15-20.

If you decide to participate in this research, you will be asked to do the following: as the participant you will answer the research question fully with open-ended follow up questions. This study should take between 30-90 minutes or until the participant has fully verbalized their experience with great coaching.

Your consent to be a research participant is strictly voluntary and should you decline to participate or should you choose to drop out at any time during the study, there will be no adverse effects on your scholarship, grades, or job status.

The risks of involvement in this study are minimal and include possible hack of internet stream, or recording other then the researcher. The following procedures will be used to minimize these risks: a quiet secluded area with a high-speed Internet access. Although there are no direct benefits to you, your participation in this study may help our understanding of coaching process and coaching education.

As a research participant, information you provide will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. As this project involves the use of Skype: to prevent others from eavesdropping on communications and to prevent impersonation or loss of personal information, Skype issues everyone a "digital certificate" which is an electronic credential that can be used to establish the identity of a Skype user, wherever that user may be located. Further, Skype uses well-known standards-based encryption algorithms to protect Skype users' communications from falling into the hands of hackers and criminals. In so doing, Skype helps ensure user's privacy as well as the integrity of the data being sent from one user to another. If you have further concerns regarding Skype privacy, please consult the Skype privacy policy. To ensure confidentiality, the researcher will establish a separate Skype account for this research project only. After each communication, the researcher will delete the conversation history. Once this is done, the conversation cannot be recovered

Any published results of the research will refer to group averages only and no names will be used in the study. Data will be kept in a locked file in the researcher's office. After audio recordings are made, the will be transferred to a hard drive for later analysis.

Your signed consent form will be kept separate from the data. All data will be destroyed after 5 years

   If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study or your participation in the study, you may contact me, Andrew Solow, at (847) 840-8737, my supervisor, Dr. Lauren Tashman, at (305) 899-3721, or the Institutional Review Board point of contact, Barbara Cook, at (305) 899-3020. If you are satisfied with the information provided and are willing to participate in this research, please signify your consent by signing this consent form.

Voluntary Consent
   I acknowledge that I have been informed of the nature and purposes of this experiment by Andrew Solow and that I have read and understand the information presented above, and that I have received a copy of this form for my records. I give my voluntary consent to participate in this experiment.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____   _____   _____
Researcher   Date   Witness   Date
(Witness signature is required only if research involves pregnant women, children, other vulnerable populations, or if more than minimal risk is present.)

Appendix D
Data Gathering Instrument

Those who meet the inclusion criteria of the study will take part in phenomenological interviews. Interviews will be conducted face to face and through Skype with individual athletes that are currently or have previously performed on the collegiate stage or above. Once the participant has agreed to be interviewed, a convenient time and place will be agreed upon for data collection. Before the start of the interview, participants will be required to complete a consent form. These interviews will be open-ended in nature and each participant will be asked to verbally respond to the following: "When you think of your experiences with great coaching, what stands out for you?" Other open-ended follow up questions will be asked to gain an in-depth understanding of the experience of great coaching with individual sport athletes. The opening question focuses attention on gathering data that will lead to a textual and structural description of the participants' experiences, and ultimately provide an understanding of the common experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013). To make certain that nothing is overlooked; the concluding question in all interviews asks if the participant has anything else they want to share in regards to their experience. The interviews will last approximately 30 to 90 minutes depending on the depth of participants' responses. All of the interviews will be audio recorded and later transcribed verbatim by the primary researcher. Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym for the purposes of keeping their identity anonymous. Once transcribed, the audio recorded interviews will be destroyed. All interview transcripts will be stored on a password-protected computer, maintained for 5 years and then destroyed.

Providing each participant with the interview transcript, giving them an opportunity to correct errors, clarify points, and/or add additional information in order to advance validity throughout the research, will generate feedback. Next, an interpretive group composed of Barry University faculty members and graduate students will listen to and read the transcribed interviews to uncover elements that appear to be significant (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). All members of the interpretive group will sign a third party confidentiality form (Appendix B) prior to involvement. Also, the group will be able to assess whether the researcher's claims were substantiated or resulting from imposing biases or presuppositions. Only the primary researcher will know the identity of the participants. After reading the complete transcripts, recurring patterns and/or significant statements will be identified as meaning units. Significant statements will include sentences or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experience the phenomenon of great coaching from the individual athletes perspective. Within each transcript, similar meaning units, described by Thomas and Pollio (2002) as "the researcher's reflection about recurring patterns in the data" will be clustered into groups to develop sub-themes. Then, once sub-themes are identified for each individual transcript, a general thematic structure will be developed. Subsequently, a draft of the preliminary results including the general thematic structure will be sent to each participant in order to afford them the opportunity to provide the researcher with feedback. Finally, participants will have an opportunity to express their satisfaction, pose questions, and offer clarifications to ensure that the transcripts provided accurate portrayals of their individual experience.

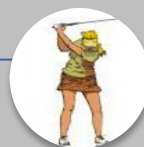**Appendix E**

Flyer of Invitation

Attention Athletes:

Are you an individual sport athlete that...

has been a member of an NCAA, international, or professional INDIVIDUAL sport

has experienced GREAT coaching at some point throughout the course of your career

is willing to do an interview about your experiences of great coaching

If so, Please Contact: Drew Solow 847-840-8737 andrew.solow@mymail.barry.edu

Appendix F

E-Mail Flyer

Dear Potential Participant,

      Are you an individual sport athlete who has competed at the collegiate or professional level? Have you experienced great coaching on your journey? If so, your participation in an influential thesis study would be greatly appreciated.

Please contact-

Andrew Solow

847-840-8737

Andrew.solow@mymail.barry.edu

Thanks For Your Consideration

Appendix G

RESEARCH ARTICLE FORMAT

ABSTRACT

The history of sport has proved the necessity for superior coaching as an essential component of excellence in sport. Coaches such as John Wooden of the UCLA Bruins, Sparky Anderson of the Cincinnati Reds and Phil Jackson of the Chicago Bulls are just a few individuals known by their peers as "great" coaches. The setting of sport lends itself to the phenomenon of coaching greatness; however very few researchers have explored this notion. Overwhelmingly, the notion of a win/loss record and visibility has been the criteria for determining which coaches are considered great. This focus allows for a gamete of characteristics exuded by the coach to go unnoticed. Until a study by Becker (2009), perspectives of athletes who had experienced great coaches hadn't been studied. Her study solely looked at the team sport athletes' experience. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study was to explore individual sport athletes' perceptions of coaching greatness. This was achieved by conducting a total of 15 in-depth phenomenological interviews with individual sport athletes. Participants were 18 – 27 years old, who have competed or are currently competing at the collegiate level. Analyses of the transcripts revealed a thematic structure that included *Credibility, Player's Coach, Personality, Goals,* and *Atmosphere* as the five determining factors of great coaching. The results provide insight into enhancing the coaching process for individual sport athletes as well as provide potential implications for coaching education.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between a coach and his or her athletes is an integral part of the development of both the coach and athletes' performance (Côté, Salmela, Trudel, Baria & Russell, 1995; Tharp & Gallimore, 1976). Coaches are constantly making evaluations about their athletes based on a number of variables and are continually seeking ways to improve the quality of their relationship in order to optimize the performance of their athletes. For example, Slepicka (1975) stated that the quality of the coach-athlete relationship has a large impact on the performance of the athlete. In a different study, Bortoli, Robazza and Giabardo (1995) commented that a good coach-athlete interaction tends to not only enhance motivation but also induce pleasant emotions and create a satisfactory and positive climate.

While coaches are constantly making evaluations about their players, athletes are also formulating assessments about their coach's personality and behavior. These perceptions can alter the performance of the athlete and could offer insight into valuable information needed to improve this relationship (Cratty, 1983). As players become more experienced and participate in team competition, one of the strongest factors that impact the relationship between the coach and the athlete is the athlete's perceptions of the head coach (Jubenville, 1999). An increased understanding of these roles, behaviors, and personalities could lead to a better experience and improved performance in both the coach and the athlete.

The scope of great coaching is more than just purely winning games. The coaches influence their athletes' skills and performance, but also influence the lives of these athletes on and off the field. Everything a coach attempts to accomplish is through the play and performance of their athletes. As a result, we cannot simply rely on external sources such as winning or losing to define greatness, but rather should also investigate the experience of these athletes.

In order to explore this concept of greatness, the current study investigated the lived experience of 15 athletes who have participated in coaching greatness throughout their time as collegiate athletes or beyond. In recent decades, research has primarily focused on the examination of coaching from the behavioral perspective (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969; Likert, 1961; Shartle, 1956) while only a handful of studies have focused on the experiential perspective of excellence in coaching (Packer & Lazenby, 1999; Morris, 1997). Thus, the majority of coaching research has been focused on behavioral and ordinary aspects rather than on the experience of extraordinary. The

purpose of this study is to expand on a previous study investigating athletes' experiences of great coaching (Becker, 2009). A major limitation in Becker's study was its singular focus on the experience of team sport athletes. Therefore, research that focuses on the experiences of individual sport athletes should shed new light on the experience of great coaching and coaching education as a whole.

Excellence in coaching. Excellence is the cornerstone to both the goal of any athlete and the desired achievement for all coaches who train athletes. In Aristotle's work, *Nichomachean Ethics*, he writes that in order to achieve happiness, people must be involved in intellectual pursuits and contemplation (Barnes, 1982). Aristotle's pursuit of happiness is defined as flourishing by doing things well or excellently, and or functioning to our full potential.

Performance excellence and thus the outcome is the dominant perspective in modern sport (Kowal & Ross, 1999). The athlete or coach winning a competition is considered to be excellent, while the "loser" is not. This particular perspective would simply imply that the means for achieving victory is unimportant. In other words, bending or breaking the rules to win, disrespecting opponents, and or not playing to one's potential could all be characteristics of those who have not achieved excellence. Furthermore, according to this definition, an athlete who surpasses their personal best in a competition while failing to win would be not be considered excellent.

Excellence as a process is based on the idea that the conduct of the athlete is the controlling factor for achieving excellence. While winning is still a goal, sportsmanship and respect are also considered essential. This idea is also present in the mutual quest for excellence; athletes try to reach excellence through motivating and inspiring each other.

Ultimately, winning is important, but "an essential element of respect for oneself and one's opponents" (Kowal and Ross, 1999, p.170) is critical in this process. This ideal is very similar to Aristotle in that excellence is attained not only through winning, but the "being gracious in defeat is always heroic in the striving" (Gibson, 1993, p.57).

 Coaching education. The development of a coach and their knowledge can be attributed to many factors. Previous studies remind us that the sources of coaching knowledge have been identified to include the coach's past experience as an athlete, serving under a mentor, formal education, experiential learning, and taking part in a practice known as continuing education (Gilbert & Trudel, 1999; Lynch & Mallett, 2006). Interestingly, most of this education occurred as the person has already entered the workforce and identified himself or herself as a coach. Accepting this fact, many associations have adopted a coaching education program as a means to continue the development of these individuals.

 More often than not, all coaching education programs adhere to a similar structure with regards to curriculum delivery. Typically, content is provided to a group of coaches in slide format, lectures, and video (Gilbert & Trudel, 1999). This system of education reflects very closely to pedagogical principles, which focuses on the transmission of information and skill. For example, Holmes and Abington-Cooper (2000) state that in a typical pedagogic course design, the teacher decides in advance what knowledge or skill needs to be transmitted, arranges this body of content into logical units, selects the most efficient means for transmitting this content, and then develops a plan for presenting these units in some sequence by using lectures, films, tapes, or lab exercises.

 Regardless of design, the result of a continuing education program for the

coaching discipline should allow for the following (Gilbert & Trudel, 1999; Showers, 1985):

- coaches practice new strategies more frequently, and develop greater skill in the actual moves of a new teaching strategy,

- coaches use these new techniques more appropriately in terms of their own instructional objectives,

- coaches exhibit greater long-term retention of knowledge about and skill with new strategies, and

- coaches pass on the new strategies and knowledge to understudies.

However, it is unknown whether or not these programs indeed improve a coach's ability to provide domain-specific knowledge to their athletes due to a lack of follow-up assessments. In addition, the current design of coaching education programs offered by various National Governing Bodies does not subscribe to a singular and accepted definition of elite coaching, therefore, the ultimate goal of coaching education is difficult to measure (Holmes & Abington-Cooper, 2000).

Leadership. Given the assumption that leadership is essential, a number of scholars have studied those in leadership positions in order to identify their core characteristics and behaviors. These studies may not have focused on athletics in particular; many researchers in the field advocate the use of other fields in order to inform their research (Kellett, 1999). Within this review, the use of theories related to human resource development and adult education will be utilized.

 . The trait approach to leadership has partially been based on the "Great Man" theory, assuming that leaders are born, not made. Great men were given this title usually

by inheritance or birthright. It was thus thought that those born to lead were blessed with above-average intelligence and other characteristics necessary to rule over his or her followers (Bass, 1981).

The trait approach is centered on the idea that some individuals have traits or skills that ultimately make them leaders. It was believed that these skills thus make them more effective in a leadership position (Yukl, 1994). These leaders would then allow their followers to be more successful in terms of productivity and efficiency. Ultimately, there isn't an interest in what the workers or followers gained in the process; rather the focus is on the characteristics of the leader.

Another approach to leadership is the situational approach. Fiedler's (1967) contingency model of leadership outlined that successful leaders exhibited both authoritarian and democratic leadership styles. Within his theory, Fiedler included the Least Preferred Co-Worker (LPC) scale. This scale is intended to ask the leader to think of the co-worker with whom he or she has the least amount of success working with and then rate his or her personal qualities. The scale, using polar opposites was comprised of items such as friendly-unfriendly, cooperative-uncooperative, and other measures of personal characteristics. Thus, a leader who scored low on the LPC was considered to be task oriented and those who scored highly were considered relationship-oriented.

Leadership is "the process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Northhouse, 2001, p.3). The notion of leadership is a far more studied concept due to its universality with many different fields. A fundamental study of leadership by Smoll and Smith (1989) proposed a theory that emphasizes the relationship between situational, cognitive, behavioral and individual

differences. The cognitive-mediational model of leadership is the basis for this study.

This model highlights the relationship between the coach's behavior, athletes' perception, and thus the evaluation from the athlete.

The researchers have incorporated a situational approach to leadership behavior, in that they argue that coaching behaviors vary as a function of the athletic context.

However, the researchers ultimately argue "a truly comprehensive model of leadership requires that consideration be given not only to situational factors and overt behaviors, but also the cognitive process and individual differences which mediate relationships between antecedents, leader behaviors and outcomes" (Smoll & Smith, 1989, p. 1532).

In accordance with the cognitive-mediational model of leadership, the results from a study of Little League players show its importance. The coaches of the Little Leaguers attended a workshop designed to facilitate positive coach-athlete interaction.

Those who attended the workshop experienced a dropout rate of 5%, while the control group experienced a 29% dropout rate (Barnes, 1992). Not surprisingly, facilitating positive interactions between coaches and young athletes not only ensured the athlete enjoyment of the game, but also helped develop positive self-esteem keeping them involved in the sport. This study shows the importance of the coaches' behavior and the athletes' response playing a key role in the perception of the coach and his behaviors.

Coach-athlete relationship. According to Bortoli, Robazza, and Giabardo (1995), a coaches' behaviors, attitudes, and communication skills strongly influence the experience of their followers They stated, "a good coach-athlete interaction tends to enhance motivation, induce pleasant emotions, and create satisfactory and positive climate" (p. 1217). At any level of competition, coaches do not have a single role or

responsibility, rather most adopt multiple roles. Another fundamental aspect to this coach-athlete relationship is the acceptance of the decisions that are made by the coach. "Coaching effectiveness is largely dependent on the quality of the decisions made and the degree to which these decisions are accepted by the athletes" (Chelladuri, Haggerty, & Baxter, 1989 p. 201). In other words, the athletes' reception of the coaches' decisions and thus the quality of the decision plays a major role in coaching effectiveness.

Effective communication is extremely important in building a strong relationship between coach and player. There is nothing more important than a coach putting emotions into words and delivering them in a timely and emphatic manner (Alexander, 1985). In order for this relationship to work, both parties must work towards the same outcome. Weiss and Frederichs (1986) suggested that while the coach is essential, he or she is not the only one responsible in the communication process. The athlete must continually provide feedback to the coach concerning his or her opinions in order to build a better line of communication. Research has shown that encouraging positive self-talk, modeling confidence themselves, and using reward statements can be the most effective process in building a strong belief in the athlete (Vargas-Tonsing, Myers, & Feltz, 2004). Communication of goals and expectations will also instill a sense of purpose in the athletes (Paling, 2002). According to Hoehn (1983), if the communication process breaks down, the athlete could lose interest and eventually cease participation in the sport.

The athletes' perception of the coach has been shown to have lasting effects on the relationship in almost every aspect of sport. Straub (1975) found the key to building team unity at any level was the positive relationship between the coach and athlete.

Ultimately, the coach who genuinely knows his or her athletes can provide the appropriate feedback that leads to improved team or individual morale. Leggett (1983) found that coaches who provide feedback concerning athlete's emotional needs improves the relationship between the two parties. Ultimately, Horne and Carron (1985) found that athletes' perceptions of a coach were more important to the athlete than solely coaching behaviors.

Becker (2009). Becker (2009) concluded that coaching actions and influences were the most prominent aspects of these athletes' experiences. The effect of each coaching action was mediated by its content, method, or quality. Furthermore, the dimensions of coach attributes, the environment, the system, and relationships served as the background for coaching actions and influences. As such, these background dimensions had a continuous effect on athlete experiences of great coaching.

According to Becker (2009), the coaching attributes encompassed descriptions of their coaches' core qualities or internal makeup. The impact of the coach's actions were mediated by the content, method, and quality of delivery, and all other dimensions served as the background that influenced athlete experiences. The participants in this study described how playing for great coaches was about "more than just becoming a better athlete, but also becoming a better person" (Becker, 2009, p. 3). Their coaches influenced the athletes' self-perceptions, development, and performance. Most importantly, they influenced the athletes' desire and ability to become the best that they could be, not only in sport but also in life. The environment was defined as the overall context in which all actions and interactions between coach and athlete occurred. According to Becker, athlete described great coaches as fostering three types of environments: the general team

environment, the one-on-one communication environment, and the practice environment. While the system, represented the framework in which coaches implement their philosophies. Finally, the relationships that athletes experienced with their coaches were professional, but also personal. But, without the perspective of the individual sport athlete, a gap in the field of coaching process and education remains.

Leadership, coaching, and the athlete-coach relationship have continued to stir discussion of coaching greatness. Early researchers concluded that leaders are born and not made; yet they found a lack of supporting data to conclude that as the only characteristic of a great leader or coach. Until Burns' (1978) work on transformational leadership, most research focused on the success or productivity of the leaders group as fundamental. When this form of leadership came a concern for the growth of not only the leader but also the followers. The research on leadership is central to this study in that it shows the many factors that play a role in those who lead.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to investigate individual sport athletes' experiences of great coaching. This phenomenological study sought to capture the experience that the athletes were exposed to during their athletic lifetime. The central objective of phenomenological analysis is to fully grasp "how the everyday, inter-subjective world is constituted" (Schwandt, 2000, p.29) from the standpoint of the participant.

Table 1. Description of Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Sport Type	Division	Age
Mike	Male	Golf	DI	20
George	Male	Golf	DI	20
Max	Male	Golf	DI	23
Ben	Male	Golf	DI	21
Alex	Male	Golf	DI	20
Dirk	Male	Golf	DI	22
Eric	Male	Tennis	DIII	20
Alexa	Female	Golf	DI	22
Brenda	Female	Track and Field	DI	24
Lauren	Female	Golf	DI	18
Dale	Female	Golf	DI	20
Laurie	Female	Golf	DI	21
Amanda	Female	Golf	DI	20
Corey	Female	Tennis	DIII	20
Marissa	Female	Swimmer	DIII	27
	(F= 8, M= 7)		(DI: 12, DIII: 3)	(M=21.2, SD= 2.1)

Participants. For this qualitative study, 15 individual sport athletes were recruited. The participants ranged between the ages of 18 to 27 and included athletes from golf, tennis, swimming, and track and field. There were 15 total participants in this study (female = 8, male = 7).

Procedures. Phenomenological studies are different from almost every other form of qualitative study. The procedures used in this study were based on Thomas and Pollio's (2002) recommendations for conducting existential phenomenological research. They include the following steps: *Exploring researcher bias, Selection of co-participants, Data collection, Data analysis,* and *Developing/Confirming Thematic Structure*

Exploring researcher bias. Throughout the study, it has been recommended that bias held by the researcher in relation to the topic be identified in order to have a nonjudgmental outlook through the process of the study (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The research avoided introducing presuppositions when conducting interviews and during data analysis (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). For this study, the researcher participated in a session of bracketing to bring about awareness that the research may have in relation to his experience with coaching excellence**.** The results of the bracketing interview were

utilized during the interview as well as the analysis in an attempt to avoid any bias that may have affected the validity of the process.

Selection of co-participants. The interviewers job in this form of qualitative study was to help facilitate the reflection process of the participant and to tell the in-depth story of that participant. It was the experience of the participant that was critical. The participants are, therefore, the experts of the phenomenological experience being examined (Dale, 1996). In addition, the participants in this type of study were referred to as co-participants because they are actively involved with the researcher to ensure a complete thematic structure is developed (Creswell, 2007). Approval from the Barry University Institutional Review Board allowed collegiate and professional athletes to be recruited for participation in the study. Through snowball sampling and personal contacts, potential participants were contacted in order to request their participation in the study.

Data collection. Once contact with the participants had been established, a time and place was agreed upon for data collection. Before the start of the interview, potential participants were provided with the definition of great coaching and asked if they had experienced this during their athletic participation. Those that had experienced great coaching were asked to participate in the study and complete a face-to-face interview. The primary researcher began the interview with the following open-ended question: "When you think of your experiences with great coaching, what stands out for you?" The flow of the conversation was lead by the participant with facilitative guidance from the researcher (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The transcripts were printed for analysis with the research group but the primary researcher collected all transcripts upon completion of

analysis. Any notes were typed up and hard copies were destroyed. All of the precautions were in place to ensure confidentiality and thus the validity of the study.

Data analysis. After the interviews had been transcribed verbatim, analysis took place. The researcher, thesis chair, and the interpretative research group read the transcriptions of the interviews in order to get a sense of the whole experience (Dale, 1996). Participants were provided a copy of their transcription in order to give them an opportunity to add, remove, or change the data to make it clear. This process was necessary to show validity through the entire research process. The research group was also able to assess whether the researcher's claims were confirmed or a result of imposing biases or opinions. The next step in this process involved the researcher, thesis chair who has expertise in phenomenology, and the research group to thoroughly examined each transcript to reveal themes within the interviews (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The researcher worked with the group in order to develop a thematic structure from the data collected from the interviews. During each of those sessions, the transcripts were read aloud and discussed for possible themes that emerged.

Developing/confirming thematic structure. During the process of reading over the transcripts, key statements or keywords were circled leading to a list of significant meaning units. These meaning units painted a picture of how the athlete experienced the topic of great coaching. The analysis utilized the development of a thematic structure that included meaning units from the transcript and connecting those meaning units to develop sub-themes and finally major themes. The final thematic structure was represented in a diagram that "depicts the themes and their relationship" (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 38). Validity and reliability are always a consideration when doing a

qualitative study. The use of the participants' own language to describe the dialogue and themes was beneficial in ensuring that the study performed was valid. This process was identical for each participant to ensure reliability between each athletes interview.

RESULTS

The primary purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the individual athletes' experiences of great coaching. In order to achieve this goal, 15 in-depth interviews were conducted with current and former individual collegiate athletes of both genders (see Table 1). An analysis of the transcripts disclosed a total of 896 meaning units that were further grouped into sub-themes and overall themes. This lead to the development of a thematic structure revealing five major dimensions that these athletes characterized as their experience of great coaching: *Credibility*, *Player's Coach*, *Personality*, *Goals* and *Atmosphere* (Figure 1).
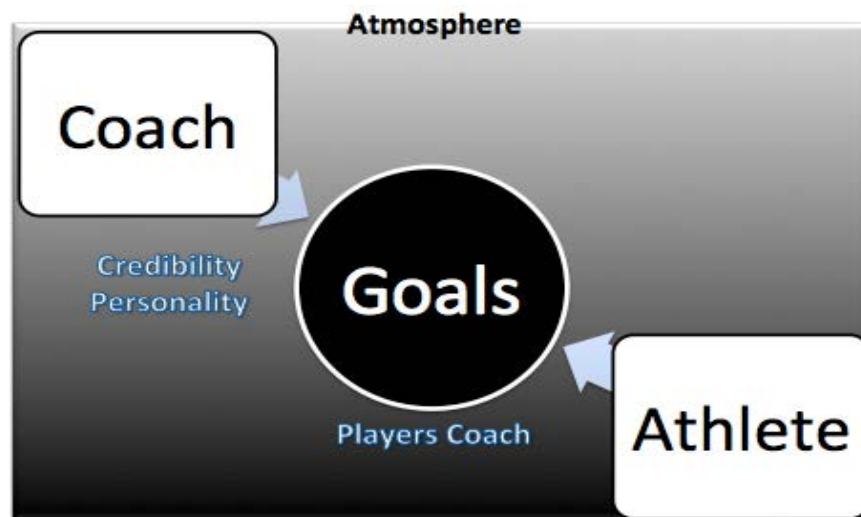

Figure 1. Major Themes of the Individual Athletes' Experiences of Great Coaching

Credibility emerged as one of the major dimensions that represented the individual sport athletes' experience of great coaching. This dimension encompassed the

participant's descriptions of their coach's qualifications and ability to give appropriate advice. The dimension of credibility is comprised of three sub-themes: *experience*, *knowledge,* and *feedback*. The general theme of knowledge encompasses life knowledge and sport knowledge while feedback also included instructional feedback and motivational feedback.

Experience. Within this theme, *experience* or the coach's background played a major role in this idea of great coaching. For the most part, athletes described their coaches as veteran or very experienced within their respective sports. The sense that you can "learn from their experience has taught me how to apply them to my own" (George, Golf). This allows the athletes to grasp their knowledge and transfer it to their own experiences.

Knowledge. Within the theme of credibility, *knowledge* of the sport played a major role in athletes' experiences of great coaching. The knowledge of the sport and life were apparent in great coaches but were discussed as one. When examining knowledge on the whole, this is the science of great coaching. They must have the "I can teach you. I can make you better type of mentality" (Mike, Golf) in order for their athletes to whole-heartedly take in their knowledge and accept them as a great coach. Many of the athletes spoke about how "a great coach knows how to tell them how it is. He knows how to think like a player, so you listen" (Max, Golf). His or her experience and thus knowledge was something in which they felt was important to note.

Feedback. The notion of *feedback* became apparent as a critical factor in understanding great coaching. Feedback as a more general idea is the art of coaching. A great coach gives advice or dispenses his or her knowledge of the game in unique ways

and how that coach reacts to the athlete provides critical feedback to the competitor. A majority of the athletes spoke about how great coaches spend time helping them analyze their technique. One athlete mentioned, in the context of swing analysis [golf] that "a great coach is someone who gets you to do things that you don't really want to do. By getting you to do things that you never thought would help, but somehow they always do" (Mike, Golf). Similarly, other athletes spoke about how "a great coach is somebody who knows the game well enough that they can pick out what you can do better or what you're doing poorly" (Corey, Tennis). The feedback given to the athlete was an essential aspect to great coaching.

Player's Coach emerged as one of the major themes that represented the individual athletes experience of great coaching. This theme encompassed the participants' description of their coaches' style in which they taught. The theme of *Player's Coach* was comprised of two sub-themes: *individualization* and *commitment*. Under the umbrella of commitment, a family-like support was also seen as a part of the type of environment that great coaches nurture.

Individualization. Athletes discussed the theme of *individualization* in abundance. This was by far the most repeated theme by virtually every athlete interviewed. Athletes discussed how their coaches established a culture that was conducive to a one-on-one type of mentality and treatment. A great coach was shown as someone who can accommodate the different type of people who are a part of the team. One athlete stated:

I think in terms of reacting to my needs, each person is their own

individual and it makes you feel comfortable when someone kind of caters

to you but is able to nurture you in the right way that is specific to your personality (Dale, Golf).

This type of catering was also seen in many other athletes interviewed. Another athlete interviewed, Mike, spoke about how a great coach motivated in a specific manner that helped individually. "Coach got to know me and how I was motivated in order to push me to your limits" (Mike, Golf). This type of individual connection was a differentiator in distinguishing a good from a great coach throughout the saturation of interviews.

Commitment. The second aspect of being a player's coach was the sub-theme of commitment to supporting each athlete. This commitment is essential to not only being a great coach, but its also critical to a successful relationship between coach and athlete. One athlete noted that just knowing "he'll always back you on anything. 100% committed" (Mike, Golf) was what he characterized as a great coach. Another athlete noted that a successful coach is one "who's behind me and talking me through step by step. That's how he shows he's committed to my progress" (Alex, Golf). The commitment displayed by this coach was shown by the time spent on the process of learning. Commitment to the individual was discussed as an essential aspect of great coaching.

Within the umbrella of commitment, a family-like trait was shown throughout the saturation of interviews as a critical aspect of great coaching. Many of the athletes looked at their coaches as more then just a coach and related them to more of a parent. "A great coach is almost like a parent. They are nurturing and care about your success in and outside the sport" (Brenda, Track and Field). Another athlete spoke about how this

great coach was "like my second Dad" (Laurie, Golf). By creating this bond with your

athletes, great coaches are ultimately showing their strong commitment towards them.

The *personality* characteristics of the great coach were developed as a major

theme throughout the saturation of interviews. This dimension encompassed the

participant's descriptions of their coaches' qualities and personal skills necessary to be

considered a great coach. The dimension of personality was broken down into two sub-

themes to fully describe traits necessary to be considered a great coach: *leadership skills*

and *people skills*.

Leadership skills. Under the main theme of personality, *leadership skills* were

seen as the most critical to the experience of great coaching. Some athletes spoke about

how a great coach must be stern, disciplined, or inspirational. These leadership skills

were seen as fundamental. One athlete spoke about how a great coach must be "very

hard working. They kind of had a type A personality and are very much a go, go type of

person" (Mike, Golf). This participant felt that this specific personality type was critical

to the success achieved by this great coach. Similarly, another participant felt that a great

coach is "a natural leader and you can't help but follow" (Lauren, Golf). This leadership

skill is fundamental to the success of a great coach according to the athletes interviewed.

Another aspect of leadership skills that was shown as essential to great coaching

was creating a balance between sport and life.

I struggled with just balancing school and golf, my grades and my social

life and I was pretty much spread thin. So he just helped me, sort of sat

me down, talked to me, asked me what was going through my head. From

then on, I turned it around and was able to find the perfect balance for me

without losing an edge on something (Ben, Golf).

This athlete looked to a great coach for leadership skills necessary not merely for

the participant's sporting career, but in life. The leadership skills presented by

great coaches transcend sport.

People skills. The second part of the personality of a great coach is the soft skill

also known as *people skills*. These traits are love, trust, or sincerity. One athlete talked

about how,

A great coach is personable. You don't want a coach who you cant go to

talk to or you're scared to ask a question. You need someone who you can

trust, feel comfortable around, so you can approach them and know that

you're not going to be scared to get advice from (Ben, Golf).

Trust was another aspect of people skills that many athletes spoke about. "With a

great coach you quickly develop trust in each other" (Amanda, Golf). The level

of trust was expressed as an essential ingredient of great coaching in many other

athletes' interviews. With trust comes the instinct to take in everything that they

tell you about your motion and also with life skills. "He was a coach on the

course but also in life" (Mike, Golf).

The final aspect of people skills that a majority of the athletes talked about

was respect for each other. In order for a coach to be considered a great coach,

the athletes said that a level of respect between the two must be exhibited. One

athlete spoke about how her great coach "obviously respects my time, my family

and my values" (Alexa, Golf).

The mediating factor between the player and the coach are thus their *goals*. The major theme of goals was found through the saturation of interviews. The goals of both the coach and the athlete were seen as how the interactions were structured. The athlete's descriptions were formulated and the subthemes of both the *player's goals* and the *facilitation of goals.*

Players goals. "My goals became his goals" (Corey, Tennis). This reaction was seen as essential for what is considered a great coach. Within the larger theme of goals, the *player's goals* were seen as the main factor for how coaches structured their practices. Many athletes spoke about how reaching their personal goal was how they evaluated great coaches. "When I was able to reach my goal, even if I didn't think I could do it, my self efficacy like went sky high" (Brenda, Track and Field). Similarly, George spoke about how his coach would use is goals to motivate him. His great coach would "figure out my goals, how to motivate me, and use positive reinforcement. It's important to figure how out the individual athlete and the team as a whole are specifically motivated" (George, Golf). The use of motivation, in this instance, is what drives the athlete towards their goals.

Another aspect of a player's goals is a coach who knows the player's objectives in and outside the sport. "A coach who knows your goals both on and off the track… He knew exactly what I wanted to achieve" (Brenda, Track and Field). While another athlete spoke about a similar notion that his coach "never questioned my goals. That's the thing I appreciated the most and I felt made a great coach" (Eric, Tennis).

Facilitate goals. The other sub-theme that surrounded the greater theme of goals is the facilitation of those goals. Many of the athletes spoke about how a great coach is "very goal oriented. [A great coach] would set up practices so we could reach our goals. That was really helpful in helping me progress" (Amanda, Golf). Having a goal-oriented mentality was of high importance and would ultimately help facilitate the goals of the athlete. "Making it possible to reach our goal is what makes a great coach" (Amanda, Golf). The daily grind in practice was how another athlete, Dirk, spoke about what made a great coach. "We can work on numbers, but what work are you putting in on a daily basis to reach our goals. Coach would help us get there" (Dirk, Golf). This day-to-day grind to achieve their goals is what was seen as a characteristic of a great coach.

Similarly, athletes spoke about how a great coach would see the goal or potential of the athlete and fashion a way in which they could ultimately reach them. George spoke about how his great coach "saw my potential and helped set up practice to help me reach my goals. I guess the way that they helped me is that they made my dream become a goal that I can work towards" (George, Golf). By prompting this type of mentality, the coach is facilitating the goals of the athlete.

The environment or *atmosphere* in which the athletes participated in developed into a major theme throughout the interviews. The atmosphere was defined as the overall context in which all of the actions or interactions between the coach and athlete seemed to occur. The athletes' descriptions were based around the idea that great coaches created a *fun* and *passionate* atmosphere.

Fun. Under atmosphere, almost every athlete spoke about how great coaches somehow create a *fun* environment. "We always worked hard, but he made it seem fun"

(Amanda, Golf). This sentiment was echoed by many of the athletes interviewed. It seemed as though a few looked at this fun atmosphere as something that reminded them of their past. The idea that when they were kids, and just enjoyed the game for the fun of it seemed to play a major role in how they viewed great coaching. "When I'm having fun, like when I'm playing competitive with my coach out there, it just makes me feel like a little kid again" (Alexa, Golf). Many of the athletes spoke about great coaching experiences they had when they were in fact kids and the coach kept things light and fun. This athlete in particular spoke about her childhood coach and said, "He joked around with me. When he joked around, it kind of just made it more fun" (Laurie, Golf).

Passion. The subtheme of *passion* for the individual also seemed to emerge from the interviews. Athletes spoke about how their great coaches showed a passion for not only their success but also the team as a whole. "I feel it requires skill to be a great coach but also passion for teaching and caring about your student's success" (George, Golf). Also, the idea that the coach was passionate about the teams' success was prevalent throughout the interviews. "She was a coach that would dedicate 90% of her life to this team. You know when she's putting that much effort, you feel like you should too" (Alexa, Golf). Along those lines, the passion displayed by the coach is transferred to the player. One athlete said "his passion for the sport showed in my attitude. I saw myself becoming stronger, smart with everything that I do because he has that type of mentality" (Ben, Golf). This type of energy transference is critical for the success of the individual. Passion is extremely important for a great coach to have for their athletes and the sport in which they teach. This type of environment is critical for the success of the athlete and the coach as a whole.

DISCUSSION

Great coaches are in the unique position to have a remarkable impact on the athletes who accept their direction. This impact is seen to not be limited to the heat of battle, but can also play a role in their daily lives. To date, most studies about coaching have relied on the notion that a win-loss record was the ultimate deciding factor in determining great coaching. In the present study, the attempt was to expand on previous research (Becker, 2009) by examining individual sport athletes' experiences of great coaching. By focusing on the individual athlete rather then a team sport athlete, this research provides a framework for great coaching that is sport specific.

Credibility. The athletes in this study stressed the need to have a credible coach that had both the experience and the ability to give pertinent feedback. The necessity of the great coach to have an in-depth knowledge of the sport as a player was stressed throughout the interviews. Well over three quarters of the athletes interviewed spoke about how in order for a coach to be considered great they must not only have the knowledge but also the experience to back it up. Credibility involves the coaches' past history with the sport as well as the knowledge that comes with that experience. This was stressed as being a critical aspect to a great individual sport coach.

Player's Coach. Another dimension that was critical to the greatness of the coach was their ability to be a "player's coach". This encompassed the need to be treated as an individual and having their coach committed to them and supportive of their decisions, as almost a parent would mentor a child. This differentiates itself from the notion of a system. In team sports, many of the successful coaches preach a system in which each

player falls into a certain category. With individual sports, it was found that treating each player as a separate piece of the puzzle was what made a great individual sport coach.

Personality. The personality of the coach also played an important factor is how the athlete experienced great coaching. The first dimension of personality, leadership skills, plays an important role in the molding of the athlete. The creativity, motivation, and hard working characteristics that the great coach represents are then transferred into the athlete. The other aspect of personality is people skills. These are characteristics that help mold the person. The coach being even keel, trustworthy, and encouraging help create not only the athlete, but also the person as a whole. It is the ultimate goal of the coach to ensure the athlete is well rounded and able to be a successful human being.

Goals. Another significant finding that emerged from this study was the interaction between player and coach facilitating of their goals. The athletes expressed the notion that the goals they aspired to achieve became the goals of and were shared by the coach. This finding is significant because the individual athlete has goals that they feel they can achieve and it is the job of the coach to help them reach theses goals. The interaction between the two was seen as an influential aspect of the individual athletes experience of great coaching.

Atmosphere. The final dimension of this study that was significant was the environment or atmosphere in which the great coach would teach within. The environment created by the great coach is one that was described as fun and passionate. By encouraging a fun yet passionate atmosphere, the coach is able to get the most out of their athletes.

The main connections from this study can be related to Becker's (2009) study on team sport athletes' experiences of great coaching. Her findings included coach attributes, the environment, relationships, the system, coaching actions, and influences. These six major dimensions of great coaching were very similar to the findings of this study. The similarities came in the categories of coach attributes (personality), the environment (atmosphere), and relationships (player's coach). These similarities were seen on a deeper level in personality characteristics (genuine, honesty, and motivational) and a fun yet structured atmosphere. While there were many similarities, the major difference did come in the idea of the system as well as a communication factor. In her study, the primary focus was to look at team sport athletes. In this arena, a system is in integral part of how the team functions as a unit (Aghazadeh & Kyei, 2009). When looking at individual sports, it isn't as important to have a cohesive unit as much as having each player reach their full potential. As such, a majority of the athletes interviewed discussed how individualization was a critical aspect of what they considered a great coach. Another difference that was seen between studies was seen in the communication factor between coach and athlete. In Becker's (2009) study, communication was found throughout multiple subthemes. In the current study, this wasn't seen as a major theme or mentioned enough to be considered a meaning unit. The reason for the lack of communication may be seen because of the differences between individual and team sport athletes. These major differences can be a defining factor for how coaching strategies and behaviors diverge in each sporting arena.

Previous research that was also influential in the current study was the cognitive-mediational model of leadership (Smoll & Smith, 1989). This model stated that the

athletes' perception of coaching behaviors plays a role in their evaluation of coaches. This model helps explain how athletes perceive what they believe as great coaching. Many of the athletes interviewed spoke about how great coaches gave positive reinforcement and were committed to their success. This was exactly what the model was attempting to portray. This model of leadership attempts to combine "cognitive process and individual differences which mediate relationships between antecedents, leader behaviors and outcomes" (Smoll & Smith, 1989, p. 1532) The outcome of the current study showed that the coach must individualize their attention in order to reach the optimal result. When coaches individualize, show passion and commitment towards their athlete, the situation in which the athlete practices and competes in will be positive. This model helps explain helps explain that when an athlete interprets this type of relationship, their evaluation will be one that is cohesive. Thus, the athletes' perception of the coaching behaviors would be positive because of the attention and support that was given by the coach.

This study directly relates and supports the findings of this study with the notion that athletes' perceptions of their coach's effect their evaluation of their greatness. When athletes' perceive their coach as being one that can be effective through contextual circumstances such as being fun or passionate, their evaluation is that of greatness. When a coach incorporates environmental factors that reinforce positivity and are committed to their success, the coach would be considered great. These situational factors, as well as the athletes' evaluations, are the foundation to the cognitive mediational model.

Another approach to leadership that was influential in this study was the trait approach (Bass, 1981; Stogdill, 1948; Yukl, 1994). The trait approach is centered on the

idea that some individuals have traits or skills that ultimately make them leaders. It was believed that these skills thus make them more effective in a leadership position (Yukl, 1994). Stogdill (1948) concluded that, in comparison to the average members in the group, a leader possessed above-average intelligence, dependability, social participation, and socio-economic status. While the athletes interviewed may have not stated those specific traits, many traits such as caring, passionate, dependable, and honest were noted as ones that encompassed a great coach.

The final piece of previous research that has a connection to this study is the contingency model (Fiedler, 1967). This model is a situational model that predicts whether the leader is task or relationship oriented. Within the individual sport arena it was seen through this study that these athletes prefer people skills as well as the facilitation of their goals. Both task and relationship types of leaders were seen as critical to the success of individual sport athletes.

LIMITATIONS/FUTURE DIRECTION

The limitations of this study include the understanding of the research question, the ability of the participant to fully verbalize their experience of great coaching, this being the first completed phenomenological study done by the primary researcher, and the makeup of the athletes interviewed (i.e., the participants consisted mostly of collegiate golfers). With regard to the first limitation, the interviewee may interpret the research question differently then as directed. In order words, their understanding of the experience of great coaching may only include what a great coach is, rather then the interactions between themselves and a great coach. The understanding of the research question could have been made clearer by rewording it to be more specific about a great

coach or the great coach. A question such as "when you think about your experience with a great coach, what comes to mind." Further, participants could have been asked to direct their thinking to be more specific (i.e., focus on their current coach or one particular coach they thought was a great coach) rather than on the general topic of great coaching.

Another limitation may be the ability of the interviewee to verbalize their experience of great coaching. The ability to recall their specific experience and then have specific examples and instances where that coach exuded greatness could limit the data collected. Many of the athletes interviewed talked about a great coach they had when they were younger. The time difference from when they experienced great coaching could have been the reason for the athletes' ability to recall specific examples with their great coach. Another important limitation was that this was the first completed phenomenological study performed by the primary researcher. Whether it is the interview or creating the thematic structure, the process of writing this form of study is extremely difficult.

Finally, the population interviewed consisted mainly of golfers in the collegiate arena. This limitation is twofold. First is the notion that golfers may have a specific culture in which great coaching is defined differently. Along those lines, a majority of the athletes interviewed came from a singular school. Thus the coaches in whom they described as great could have been the ones in which they were playing under currently. This is a limitation because the great coach in whom they highlighted were more then likely the same. Future studies can look at a broader range of individual sports as well as institutions. Second, each athlete interviewed participated in collegiate sports, thus they are still technically on a team playing in an individual sport. If professional athletes were

interviewed, the results may have produced different findings. These examples could have limited the study and data collected.

The results of this study provide a foundation for additional research on coaching as a whole. The themes gathered from this study helped paint a picture; whether coaching for a team or individual sport, the differences aren't great. First, stemming from the limitation of interviewing collegiate individual sport athletes, other directions for research could be to examine the experience of great coaching from individual athletes at the professional, national, and international levels. The level and type of great coaching that they experience could help provide a more comprehensive framework for great coaching as well as another perspective to coaching. Second, situational models of leadership suggest that the manner in which a coach leads (i.e., goal oriented versus relationship oriented) may be impacted by the situation. The athletes in the current study identified facilitation of goals and people skills as key elements of great coaching. Thus, future research could examine whether the situation impacts perceptions of great coaching and the specific elements of coaching needed in certain situations. A final future direction for research in this area would be to look at gender differences in the experience of great coaching. Though not specifically investigated in this study nor an aspect of the participants' experiences of great coaching, it was apparent from the interviews that females were more concerned with great coaches who portrayed more people skills, while males identified more leadership skills. Thus, future research can examine whether there are gender differences in athletes' perceptions of great coaching.

CONCLUSION

The athletes that contributed to this analysis of great coaching all participated in collegiate individual sports (golf, tennis, swimming, track). They described their experiences of great coaching from both a male and female perspective. The findings from this study support the notion that great coaching isn't based on a win loss record, but rather on the person. The results from the athletes showed that great coaching involves:

- Credibility based on experience;

- Individualization;

- A fun and passionate atmosphere in which athletes practice and hone their craft;

- A supportive and committed atmosphere;

- Lessons that transcend sport;

- A coach that is willing to continue to learn; and

- A role model.

The participants in this study helped define great coaching on the individual sports arena as one that can help maximize their potential. Ultimately, these athletes experienced coaches who were not only superior at what they did, but also great people. To the public, a great coach may only include a win loss record, but to the athletes who look up to them it is about everything else.

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